

Winter 1965

## A Strategy for Research on Social Class and Delinquency

Frank R. Westie

Austin T. Turk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Frank R. Westie, Austin T. Turk, A Strategy for Research on Social Class and Delinquency, 56 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 454 (1965)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

## A STRATEGY FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL CLASS AND DELINQUENCY

FRANK R. WESTIE AND AUSTIN T. TURK

Dr. Westie, who received his Ph.D. from Ohio State University in 1951, is Professor of Sociology at Indiana University.

Dr. Turk is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Indiana University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1962.

The imprecision of theoretical discussions of delinquency and the lack of established empirical relationships relevant to these discussions is noted in this article. Reasons for the disjunction of theory and research are indicated, and a procedure for resolving the difficulties is described. This procedure, "the strategy of unlimited presupposition", is applied to the question of class variations in the frequency of delinquent behavior. One major implication of the procedure is that coordinated research on a large scale is a necessary condition for substantially increasing theoretical knowledge regarding class and delinquent behavior.—EDITOR.

During the past decades substantial sums of money have been spent on research into the etiology of juvenile delinquency. Yet, one may still ask, "Do we know much more about the 'whys' of delinquency now than we did some ten years and a good many tens of thousands of dollars ago?". Certainly, the sheer volume of empirical knowledge of rates and correlates of delinquency has increased. But to what extent has the determination of such rates and correlates fulfilled the *raison d'être* of such investigation: the development of scientific, or theoretical knowledge? Informally, by "theoretical knowledge" we mean answers to general and abstract questions about an aspect of social reality, in this case delinquency.

A qualified answer to the question of whether research has resulted in a proportionate development of theory must recognize that the body of theoretical propositions has indeed increased; certain new, exciting propositions have been developed. However, more often than not the new theories have not systematically eliminated or qualified the old. The perpetrators of new theories have tended to ignore or else to dismiss on other than empirical grounds alternative and often contradictory explanations. New theoretical statements are added to the old, and we find ourselves more and more like the graduate student at the end of a superficial "survey of social theories", with more "knowledge" but a feeling of dissatisfaction with his ability to grapple with basic questions about the nature of social systems and processes. While this may be a necessary and desirable phase in the disenchantment of graduate students, perhaps many areas of social science have

reached a point where one can expect a cumulation of explanatory power rather than progressive theoretical disenchantment.

It seems that the field of juvenile delinquency has reached this point in its development. The purpose of this paper is to suggest a procedure whereby the process of random theoretical accretion may give way to systematic theory construction, and to report the first step toward a program of research on class and delinquency.

Among the many reasons for the failure of theoretical development to keep pace with research in the area of delinquency as well as in other areas of behavioral science, the following are conspicuous:

1. *Failure of the proponents of particular theories to subject their theories to empirical test.* The remedy for this situation is obvious.
2. *Confusion of theoretical interpretations with empirical generalizations.* Frequently researchers, in presenting the results of their investigations, fail to distinguish between (a) the raw empirical relationships on the lowest level of abstraction and which are derivable directly from their research (e.g., "Delinquency rates are higher in the lower class than in the middle class population of X community.") and (b) abstract interpretations of the raw empirical findings, that is, interpretations by which the researcher seeks to bring meaning to the findings by relating them to some more general body of abstract knowledge in the area into which the research falls (e.g., "Lower class youth is socialized to middle class goals but equipped

with lower class means, which results in frustration expressed in delinquent behavior.”). While competent researchers are not likely to be confused about what the data say and what they say about the data, they do not typically label their findings and their interpretations as such, with the result that, after being passed along in the communication process, what was originally one man’s interpretation of a particular finding comes to assume a factual status comparable to that of the empirical finding itself. The remedy for this is, of course, rigid separation, in presentation, of empirical relationships from interpretations and the explicit labelling of each. (This is a basic necessity in the procedure proposed and applied to delinquency research in the present paper.)

3. *The selection of particular theoretical interpretations from the array of possible interpretations without systematic consideration of alternative, and frequently contradictory, interpretations.* Of all the obstacles to a happy marriage between theory and research, this one is the most frequently encountered and the most difficult to remedy. The discussion below offers essentially a procedure for the *systematization* of the selection of theoretical interpretations from the typically vast array of such possible interpretations.

Theoretical arbitrariness is most conspicuous when the investigator indulges in what may be called “naked post factum theorizing”, i.e., where no semblance of a theory is presented before the fact of investigation. Here the hypotheses are not dictated by theory. Rather, the researcher, by not stating any theory in any systematic way before the fact of investigation, frees himself from the requirement that the empirical relationships established by the investigation be interpreted in terms of the theory that originally guided the hypotheses. In this case, the investigator simply selects one or a few of the more obvious items of general knowledge in the area as explanations of his findings, again neglecting the range of theoretical alternatives.

While the sophisticated researcher is not prone to the post-factum foible, there is another type of orientation to which even the greatest social thinkers have been susceptible, i.e., the “pet theory” approach. In fact, not all scholars regard a pledge of allegiance to a particular theory as

undesirable. Hall and Lindsey go so far as to suggest that, after the student has acquainted himself with the field of personality, he then

“...immerse himself in one theory of personality. Wallow in it, revel in it, absorb it, learn it thoroughly, and think that it is the best possible way to conceive of behavior. Only reserve in one small corner of his mind the reservation that the final crucible for any theory is the world of reality studied under controlled conditions. After the romance is over and the student is seduced by the theory, he may set about the cold hard business of investigation in order to find out whether his theoretical marriage will withstand the ravages of reality.”<sup>1</sup>

Such a procedure may well be a cure for the student who becomes so critical as to become immobilized by his own power of negative thinking. However, such marriages, to use the Hall-Lindsey metaphor, all too frequently *fail* to end in divorce. They often survive even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the marriage was ill conceived and that some sort of theoretical polygamy is more appropriate. To belabor the metaphor even further, the romantic love affair of graduate student days becomes a life sentence, until “death do they part”. This kind of allegiance, by blinding the advocate to theoretical alternatives, has hindered theoretical development in the behavioral sciences.

Even where the investigator adheres scrupulously to the model of scientific procedure, the trap remains. Ideally, according to the grammar of science, the investigator begins his research by presenting a theory from which he draws specific hypotheses. Following systematic and controlled observations and classification of these observations, he establishes the relevant relationships between the variables under investigation and then, where the findings merit, re-states the hypotheses as empirical relationships. These in turn are interpreted in terms of the original theory from which they were derived. *There is, however, nothing built into this model procedure which guarantees that alternative interpretations derivable from other theories have been adequately considered.* The applicability of the ideal-typical model of scientific procedure varies among the scientific disciplines and among the special fields within those disciplines, depending on the degree of theoretical precision already achieved. When a highly precise, tested theory has been developed and where a

<sup>1</sup> HALL & LINDSEY, THEORIES OF PERSONALITY 557 (1957).

highly specific prediction (regarding phenomena to which the theory has not been previously applied) derived from the theory is precisely confirmed by a specific research project, it makes little sense to argue that alternative theories have not been considered. In such cases the evidence for the predictive power of the theory is overwhelming. However, in many areas of the behavioral sciences the theory (and theories) in the area are so incoherent and contradictory that clear cut, directional hypotheses cannot be derived. The procedure proposed here permits the pursuit of empirical investigations with some degree of theoretical relevance even where the area is characterized by a high degree of theoretical incoherence.

#### THE PROCEDURE

In describing the procedure, we quote from the original article in which the procedure was presented:

"The procedure proposed in this paper permits the utilization of all the theoretical propositions in any area *as they exist*, this is, with all their contradictions and inadequacies. This procedure involves (a) explicitly listing a comprehensive range of *presupposed empirical relationships*, many of them diametrically opposed to one another, *which might possibly turn up in the research at hand*, and (b) explicitly listing a range of interpretations, many of them diametrically opposed to one another, for each possible empirical finding. Then, through empirical investigation the relationships that actually obtain are selected from the morass of 'presupposed empirical relationships' initially listed. All of the other initially proposed empirical relationships are discarded. The array of alternative interpretations attached to them in the original presentation are also eliminated from consideration as interpretations of the findings.

"The final step in this phase of the research cycle involves the selection of the correct theoretical interpretations from the array of contradictory though 'plausible' interpretations attached to the empirical relationships that have survived the research test. This last task, though difficult, is perhaps less difficult as well as more accurate than where the usual procedure is followed. Because the contradictory interpretations are listed before the fact of the empirical investigation, the likelihood is increased that the investigator will have included in his research plan provisions (e.g., questions, items, and other observational devices) explicitly designed to enable him after the fact to make selection from among the contradictory interpretations originally listed. Moreover, where a particular set of interpretations does not emerge as being more plausible than

others in its list, the present procedure, by having made contradictions explicit, encourages the investigator to set up new research phases to help him in his selection of interpretations."<sup>2</sup>

It may be that many researchers actually follow a process something like the one outlined above: ". . . they imagine all kinds of possible empirical relationships and they imagine all kinds of possible interpretations of these relationships".<sup>3</sup> While this may be true, the primary feature of the proposed procedure is *making the process explicit*. The difference between the process of imagining possible empirical relationships and interpretations and the strategy of presupposition proposed here is analogous to the difference between the intelligent layman's process of solving his particular problems and the scientist's method of solving his research problems. Frequently the difference lies entirely in the degree to which the process is made explicit and the degree of rigor with which it is followed. In any event, as regards the presupposition strategy, we know of no research project or program where the investigator has explicitly followed the procedure which we have suggested.

#### APPLICATION OF THE PROCEDURE TO RESEARCH ON DELINQUENCY AND SOCIAL CLASS

Perhaps the single most important contribution of sociologists to the study of human behavior has been their demonstration that the significance of whatever variable is used in research depends upon the location of persons in social structures and the interaction among persons at the various levels of power and prestige characterizing such structures. The value of social class variables in behavioral research is by now taken for granted by virtually all scholars working in the field. Criminologists alone have produced hundreds of studies attempting to determine and to explain the relations between social stratification and the phenomenon of crime. Some of the most advanced thinking and research have dealt with relations between juvenile delinquency and social class. Nevertheless, these relations have not yet been established with precision, and explanatory propositions are found in the literature without adequate empirical data by which to evaluate them.

Correlations between delinquency rates based

<sup>2</sup> Westie, *Toward Closer Relations between Theory and Research: A Procedure and an Example*, 22 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 149-154 (1957); quote from pp. 149-150.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 150.

upon court hearings, police records of juveniles, and other official sources, on the one hand, and varied measures of social status, on the other, have in virtually all instances encouraged the view that delinquency is a lower class phenomenon. Theories of delinquency have been more or less explicitly limited to explaining lower class delinquency. One of the rare efforts to account for middle class delinquency has, in fact, redefined the problem by attributing presumably increasing delinquency rates among middle class juveniles primarily to the "stratification inconsistency" of culturally lower class people having higher class incomes; the thesis is that most middle class delinquents are actually lower class children of economically mobile lower class adults.<sup>4</sup> Recent findings from research using self-reported behavior as the criterion indicate that class differentials in delinquent behavior are, to say the least, distorted by rates derived from official records.<sup>5</sup> As the degree of distortion is unknown, a research program to define the empirical relationships to be explained is clearly needed.

One major difficulty in research has been the tendency to confuse the study of deviant behavior with the study of the processes by which an individual is defined as a deviant. Observations of deviance are extremely hard to obtain systematically and reliably, while certain *post factum* information about reported deviations and persons already categorized is easily acquired. Every criminologist is well aware of the deficiencies of official bookkeeping from the standpoint of scientific data collection, but we generally persist in the apologetic use of official records to estimate the incidence and prevalence of deviant forms of behavior. Alternatives such as self-reporting, participant observation, and utilization of psychiatric rather than legal definitions of delinquency are impractical on a routine basis and raise even more questions of reliability and validity.<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> Bohlke, *Social Mobility, Stratification Inconsistency and Middle Class Delinquency*, 8 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 351-363 (1961).

<sup>5</sup> Clark & Weninger, *Socio-economic Class and Area as Correlates of Illegal Behavior Among Juveniles*, 21 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 826-834 (1962); Reiss & Rhodes, *The Distribution of Juvenile Delinquency in the Social Class Structure*, 26 *Ibid.* 720-732 (1961); Dentler & Monroe, *Social Correlates of Early Adolescent Theft*, *Ibid.* 733-743; Nye, Short & Olson, *Socio-economic Status and Delinquent Behavior*, in NYE, *FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR* 23-33 (1958).

<sup>6</sup> Short & Nye, *Reported Behavior as a Criterion of Deviant Behavior*, 5 *Social Problems* 207-213 (1957); SUTHERLAND & CRESSEY, *PRINCIPLES OF CRIMINOLOGY*

problems of data collection in this field are well known, and will remain to test the patience and ingenuity of those who study delinquency from any perspective. In whatever fashion the investigator tries to solve them, he must maintain the distinction between (a) data directly pertaining to the behavior of persons socially defined as deviant, and (b) data pertaining to the behavior of the persons who do the defining. Obviously, rates of "illegitimation" should not be misinterpreted as rates of delinquent behavior: police and court records do not provide scientific observations and classifications of deviant behavior. The assumption that they do continues to produce theoretical confusion and ambiguous research in criminology.

Applying the strategy described above, the authors posited relations between a three-class structure and delinquency. Since almost all research and theory is directed to explanation of delinquent behavior rather than explanation of the processes by which behavior is defined as delinquent, the labelling process is of interest here only as various writers have referred to it as somehow involved in the etiology of juvenile misbehavior. The question is, "Assuming that measures of behavior can be obtained, what are the relations between class membership and the frequency of delinquent behavior? Then, if a relation should be found, how might it be interpreted?" Detailed consideration of class variation in types of delinquent behavior was contemplated, but seemed to be premature in view of the lack of direct empirical evidence, i.e., data collected and classified by behavior scientists instead of legal agents, to support the highly plausible variations in type suggested by discussions of delinquent subcultures and behavior systems.<sup>8</sup>

Interpretations were limited to the range between, but not including, general societal-historical explanations and general psychological theories concerning cognitive and affective proc-

69-70 (6th ed. 1960); Hakeem, *A Critique of the Psychiatric Approach to Crime and Correction*, 23 *Law & Contemp. Prob.* 650-682 (1958).

<sup>7</sup> The term refers to the process by which an individual comes to be defined as a deviant. To paraphrase, "to be a deviant is to enjoy a certain status conferred by others." KORN & MCCORKLE, *CRIMINOLOGY AND PENOLOGY* 45 (1959).

<sup>8</sup> CLOWARD & OHLEN, *DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY* (1960); Cohen & Short, *Research in Delinquent Subcultures*, 14 *Jour. Soc. Issues* 20-37 (1958); COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS* (1955); SUTHERLAND & CRESSEY, *op. cit. supra* note 6, at 237-250.

esses. While such general sociological and psychological orientations are involved, they typically are not directly relevant to the immediate task of specifying and explaining the relation between delinquent behavior and class. Relevant explanations (interpretations) include those dealing with class variation in socialization, family relations, norms, values, opportunities, skills, and power. In working out the strings of interpretations found in or suggested by the literature in connection with each of the logically possible relations between class and delinquency, the authors were made even more aware of the many empirical issues to be resolved and of the shifting sand upon which theorizing regarding delinquent behavior rests. Apart from the need to establish facts in respect to class variation in rates of delinquent behavior, each of the interpretations attached to each possibility itself suggests a concurrent research program to substantiate the empirical assumption and to determine, in turn, why the interpretive statement is or is not true. For instance, if it should be found that the middle class does have the lowest rates of delinquent behavior, then it is necessary to determine the validity of each of the suggested interpretations. Thus, in the process of determining the relative validity of the various interpretations attached to a particular surviving presupposed empirical relationship, we must eventually learn whether the police do or do not discriminate in favor of the middle class, and whether middle class persons do or do not have significantly more political power than those of other classes. Then, various alternative explanations of the eventual facts may be explored in research on police behavior in relation to political power. It should be clear that the kind of research framework proposed here does not rest upon a simple faith in little drops of findings that ultimately add up to an ocean of scientific knowledge. Not more and more research, but an interlinked series of studies directly related to behavioral theory is the objective.

Following are the lists developed for each of four logically and empirically possible relationships between class and delinquency,<sup>9</sup> along with selected

<sup>9</sup> Assuming a three-class stratification, we found virtually no material relevant to a consideration of upper-class delinquency, so have ignored it for present purposes. Once more it is demonstrated that systematic research into the deviant behavior of really high-status people is badly needed. Besides the limitations imposed by the lack of information on upper-class delinquency and by space, our presentation is limited by

informal references to guide the reader in relating the interpretations as we have stated them to the literature. Reference to a particular writer does *not* necessarily imply that he made the statement in question or that his contributions to scientific thought regarding delinquency are fully or fairly indicated by the appearance of his name after one or more of the listed interpretations. Rather, *any reference means only that aspects of the indicated work are regarded by us as relevant to the interpretation*, and serves merely as a signpost pointing to the relevant literature. The length of the list of interpretations attached to each class-delinquency relationship will vary with the availability of interpretations. Where an investigator lacks familiarity with the relevant literature the list may be unduly shortened; where he has a fertile imagination the list may be too long due to extremely refined theorizing and the inclusion of highly improbable and abstruse interpretations. If the former is the case, others will be quick to note the omissions. To avoid the latter problem of unwieldy lists an effort has been made to restrict interpretations "to those that exist as propositions in the scientific and academic literature or that follow as logical consequences of extant theoretical formulations".<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that we have not in each instance spelled out in detail the logical connection between a particular interpretation and the empirical relationship it purports to explain, since this would make the propositions extremely unwieldy and since the linkages will be obvious to most readers. However, it should also be noted that occasionally the same interpretation could be used to explain diametrically opposite empirical relationships. Thus, for example, we use interpretation No. 3L (below), *viz*, "middle class people are residentially mobile . . ." to "explain" *higher* rates of delinquency in the middle class. The linking idea here is that high residential mobility results in weakening of social control. This interpretation, however, can also be used to explain *lower* rates of middle class delinquency. Here the idea is that high rates of residential mobility make it more difficult for youths to become involved in delinquent gangs and subcultures.

---

our decision not to include the intriguing possibility that there are no class variations in the frequency of delinquent behavior.

<sup>10</sup> Westie, *supra* note 2 at p. 153.

PRE-SUPPOSED EMPIRICAL RELATIONSHIPS AND  
THEIR INTERPRETATIONS: SOCIAL CLASS  
AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

*Presupposed Empirical Relationship #1: Among the three social class levels, the middle class has the lowest rates of delinquent behavior.*

Interpretation 1A: Strict middle class socialization inhibits overt aggression. (Shulman, *The Family and Juvenile Delinquency*, ANNALS, 1949)

Interpretation 1B: Middle class parents supervise the activities of their children, who do not have the freedom to explore deviant behavior patterns. (S. & E. GLUECK, FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND DELINQUENCY, 1962)

Interpretation 1C: The love-withdrawal socialization techniques of the middle class inhibit overt aggression. (HENRY & SHORT, SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE, 1954)

Interpretation 1D: Parent-child interaction in the middle class is egalitarian and affectionate, resulting in the ability to develop and maintain affectional bonds with others. (W. & J. McCORD, PSYCHOPATHY AND DELINQUENCY, 1956)

Interpretation 1E: Middle class values exclude overt aggression, thrills, destructiveness, and other focal concerns that promote illegal behavior. (COHEN, DELINQUENT BOYS, 1955)

Interpretation 1F: Children in organized middle class neighborhoods have neither the incentives nor the opportunities for play groups to become gangs. (THRASHER, THE GANG, 1927)

Interpretation 1G: Middle class children have access to subcultures of religious, learned, and professional people, whose values and behavior reflect wholesome, creative expression within rules. (CLOWARD & OHLIN, DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY, 1961)

Interpretation 1H: Since educational institutions are founded on middle class values and assumptions, middle class children are least likely to be frustrated by an inability to meet institutionalized expectations. (COHEN, DELINQUENT BOYS, 1955)

Interpretation 1I: Middle class children are most likely to obtain legitimately the material goods valued in the general culture. (SHAW & MCKAY, JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND URBAN AREAS, 1942)

Interpretation 1J: Delinquency statutes reflect middle class perspectives, and therefore tend to penalize behavior different from the charac-

teristic patterns of the middle class. (Jeffery, *Criminal Justice and Social Change*, in DAVIS, FOSTER, JEFFERY, & DAVIS, SOCIETY AND THE LAW, 1962)

Interpretation 1K: The police discriminate in favor of the politically dominant middle class. (Critical discussion in R. Terry, *Criteria Utilized by the Police in the Screening of Juvenile Offenders*, MA thesis, Wisconsin, 1962)

Interpretation 1L: Delinquent acts of middle class children are less likely to become a matter of official record, since their families are better able to deal with behavior problems. (Hollingshead, *Class Differences in Family Stability*, ANNALS, 1950; note also MYREN & SWANSON, POLICE WORK WITH CHILDREN, 1962, e.g., page 30)

*Presupposed Empirical Relationship #2: Among the three social class levels, the lower class has the highest rates of delinquent behavior.*

Interpretation 2A: Erratic and punitive lower class socialization results in lack of internal controls. (McCORDS, 1956; HENRY & SHORT, 1954)

Interpretation 2B: Lower class parents exercise little or no supervision over their children, who are free to explore deviant behavior patterns. (GLUECKS, 1962)

Interpretation 2C: Parent-child interaction in the lower class is characterized by authoritarianism and a lack of affectional identification, resulting in an inability to develop and maintain affectional bonds with others. (McCords, 1956; Zucker, *Affectional Identification and Delinquency*, ARCHIVES OF PSYCHOLOGY, 1943)

Interpretation 2D: The focal concerns of lower class culture include thrills, toughness, exploitiveness, and the like that lead to trouble. (COHEN, 1955; Miller, *Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency*, J. Soc. ISSUES, 1958)

Interpretation 2E: Children in disorganized areas lacking both social and material assets have both the incentives and the opportunities for play groups to become gangs. (THRASHER, 1927; SHAW & MCKAY, 1942)

Interpretation 2F: Unsettled neighborhoods lacking a sense of community and continuity are more characteristic of lower than of higher class living areas; the children in such areas are less easily controlled. (LANDER, TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, 1954)

Interpretation 2G: Lower class children have access to subcultures of criminals, perverts, and non-conformists, whose values and behavior con-

tradict and subvert conventional legal and other norms. (CLOWARD & OHLIN, 1961; Cohen & Short, *Research in Delinquent Subcultures*, J. Soc. ISSUES, 1958)

Interpretation 2H: Lower class children are least likely to obtain legitimately the material goods valued in the general culture. (Merton, *Social Structure and Anomie*, chapters in SOCIAL THEORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE, 1957)

Interpretation 2I: Since educational institutions are founded on middle class values and assumptions, lower class children are unable to meet institutionalized expectations: they resolve their consequent status anxiety by turning middle class values upside down, making middle class wrongs their rights. (COHEN, 1955; but also Sykes & Matza, *Techniques of Neutralization*, AMER. SOC. REV., 1957)

Interpretation 2J: Lower class people are transient and therefore do not develop adequate community organization. (Olson & Nye, *Spatial Mobility and Delinquent Behavior*, in NYE, FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR, 1958)

Interpretation 2K: Lower class people lack social responsibility. (MAYS, GROWING UP IN THE CITY, 1954; MORRIS, THE CRIMINAL AREA, 1957)

Interpretation 2L: Delinquency statutes tend to penalize behavior different from the characteristic patterns of the middle class. (JEFFERY, 1962)

Interpretation 2M: The police discriminate, with or without justification, against the politically subordinate lower class. (TERRY, 1962; MYREN & SWANSON, 1962)

*Presupposed Empirical Relationship #3: Among the three social class levels, the middle class has the highest rates of delinquent behavior.*

Interpretation 3A: Permissive middle class socialization encourages overt aggression. (SEARS, MACCOBY, & LEVIN, PATTERNS OF CHILD REARING, 1957, Ch. 7; GLUECKS, 1962)

Interpretation 3B: Middle class parents are child-dominated. (WOODS, THE AMERICAN FAMILY SYSTEM, 1959, pp. 296-300)

Interpretation 3C: Middle class individualism results in a failure by parents to structure the child's environment; the lack of discipline results in a sense of insecurity and difficulty in achieving a personal identity. (SEARS, *et al.*, 1957; WOODS, 1959)

Interpretation 3D: Middle class parents are most

tolerant of aggressive behavior in children. (SEARS, *et al.*, 1957; Bronfenbrenner, *Socialization and Social Class Through Time and Space*, in MACCOBY *et al.*, READINGS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, 1958)

Interpretation 3E: The middle class pattern of catering to children produces a feeling of omnipotence that makes more difficult the anticipation and acceptance of restraints, including laws. (GLUECKS, 1962; NYE, 1958)

Interpretation 3F: Middle class culture places enormous stress upon unlimited mobility and success. (MERTON, 1957; Hyman, *The Value Systems of Different Classes*, in BENDIX & LIPSET, CLASS, STATUS AND POWER, 1953)

Interpretation 3G: "Teenage culture" is predominantly middle class in terms of participation and leadership. (COLEMAN, THE ADOLESCENT SOCIETY, 1961; BLOCH & NIEDERHOFFER, THE GANG, 1958)

Interpretation 3H: Middle class children are led to assume they will always have a comfortable place in society, and are not motivated to do more than the minimum required to satisfy institutionalized expectations. (Cohen, *Middle-class Delinquency and the Social Structure*, paper read before American Sociological Society, 1957)

Interpretation 3I: Middle class children perceive that the deferred gratification pattern is no longer valid. (COHEN, 1957; Bohlke, *Social Mobility, Stratification Inconsistency and Middle Class Delinquency*, SOC. PROBS., 1961)

Interpretation 3J: Middle class children are free to explore their environment, as they travel more and farther than lower class youth, and have the financial resources, knowledge, and manners needed to gain access to such sophisticated recreational settings as exclusive gambling resorts and cocktail lounges: higher-status youth are much more aware than lower of the possibilities and alternatives presented in modern social environments. (Krupfer, *Portrait of the Underdog*, PUBL. OPIN. QUART., 1947; Bernard, *Teen-Age Culture: An Overview*, ANNALS, 1961)

Interpretation 3K: Middle class children have relatively easy access to money, cars, and places catering to youth. (COLEMAN, 1961; BERNARD, 1961)

Interpretation 3L: Middle class people are residentially mobile and oriented primarily to their own advancement, tend to be more cosmopolitan and less local in their interests than the

lower class. (Hyman, 1953; Merton, *Patterns of Influence: Local and Cosmopolitan Influentials*, in MERTON, 1957)

Interpretation 3M: Middle class lack of respect for law enforcement is reflected in attitudes and behavior of middle class children toward policemen. (SUTHERLAND & CRESSEY, *PRINCIPLES OF CRIMINOLOGY*, 1960, 38-47, *passim*.)

*Presupposed Empirical Relationship #4: Among the three social class levels, the lower class has the lowest rates of delinquent behavior.*

Interpretation 4A: Lax lower class socialization allows the child to develop with a minimum of frustrations. (HEALY & BRONNER, *NEW LIGHT ON DELINQUENCY AND ITS TREATMENT*, 1936)

Interpretation 4B: Parent-child interaction in the lower class is in terms of clearly defined roles of dominance and subordination, resulting in a sense of *place* and an awareness of personal identity in a structured environment. (WOODS, 1959)

Interpretation 4C: Lower class socialization produces children who are more readily intimidated by institutionalized demands. (KNUPFER, 1947)

Interpretation 4D: Lower class people are particularistic rather than universalistic, spontaneous rather than rigid, informal, and interested in people rather than abstractions. (FRIEDENBERG, *THE VANISHING ADOLESCENT*, 1959)

Interpretation 4E: Lower class people avoid involving the police in their problems, preferring to settle them privately. (MAYS, 1954; MILLER, 1958)

Interpretation 4F: Religion is more personal and intense in the lives of lower class persons, thus serving a more effective social control function. (HERBERG, *PROTESTANT—CATHOLIC—JEW*, 1956)

Interpretation 4G: The resources and opportunities for participating in "teenage culture" (the "fun, no work, irresponsible" configuration) are not available to lower class children. (BERNARD, 1961; COLEMAN, 1961)

Interpretation 4H: Lower class people are less mobile than higher-status people, and mobility is conducive to delinquency. (KNUPFER, 1947)

A number of possible interpretations can be derived by simply stating the logical opposite of an interpretation already listed. For example, there is the idea that policemen, who are generally drawn from the lower class, may tend to discriminate *in favor of* lower class children, since the be-

havior patterns and problems of the lower class will be more easily understood by the police than those of the middle class. We tried, however, to remain reasonably close to what is actually found or suggested in the literature.

#### CONCLUSIONS

One may not agree that the strategy of presupposition is the most effective approach to the development of scientific knowledge of delinquent behavior. Nevertheless, the lengthy lists of interpretations presented above, all of them derived from the literature, do document the degree of theoretical ambiguity and contradiction which has been achieved in the area through the employment of traditional procedures.

The research task implied by the proposed strategy is indeed formidable. While a dedicated effort might establish in detail the empirical relationships between class and juvenile delinquency, no one investigator could expect to pursue, in one lifetime, all of the theoretical and research leads contained in the many interpretations attached to these relationships. Thus, the task is of necessity a group one. If the strategy is to bear fruit, atomistic, individualistic research must be de-emphasized in favor of large-scale coordinated research programs involving many researchers with varied skills and interests. The contemplated research program on delinquency in relation to social class would involve the use of specialized teams operating at successive cycles in the implementation of the strategy. Team A would be concerned with the first cycle of the program: establishing precise relations between class and delinquent behavior. Upon completion of their work, which would be expected to have at the same time provided some indication of which explanatory propositions might later prove most useful, other teams—B, C, and so on—would concentrate upon each of the interpretations in the surviving lists, i.e., those attached to the established empirical relationships.<sup>11</sup> In most cases the various surviving inter-

<sup>11</sup> Obviously, teams investigating the surviving interpretations would not be limited to testing *single* interpretations but would deal with groups of interpretations that focus upon a common conceptual theme, e.g., social mobility. "In actually employing this procedure it is most efficient to indicate which interpretations are related to which other interpretations in our system of lists and, moreover, to indicate the nature of the relationship. This system of inter-relationships becomes extremely complex. For example, virtually all propositions that pertain to status are related to one another

pretations imply empirical knowledge, often knowledge we do not have. Accordingly, these can be formulated as new presupposed empirical relationships, along with others then logically implied, to which strings of possible interpretations would be attached. On the basis of such cycles of coordinated research, students of delinquent behavior will be in a position to develop theories that link

---

(if only as implying empirical contradictions) and these in turn are related to propositions regarding mobility, and these in turn to those regarding 'inner' and 'other' directedness, and these relate to most methodological propositions regarding differences between classes in frankness and honesty..." Westie, *supra* note 2 at 153.

specific, empirically supported propositions which have been found to hold under certain determinate conditions. Provocative theoretical discussions and insights can then be superseded by the logical construction of propositional systems grounded in interlocked research findings.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Development of criminology as a scientific discipline implies the progressive formalization of explanatory statements as well as the shift toward research programs from small, uncoordinated studies. Gross' attempt to formalize Sutherland's discussion of white collar crime is a step in the journey from *theorizing* toward *theory*. GROSS, SYMPOSIUM ON SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY 531-564, and especially 545-559 (1959).