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THE AGGRESSIVE MIDDLE-CLASS DELINQUENT

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In this article, the authors contrast official police records of a group of middle and upper-class "aggressive" delinquents with the records of four lower class delinquent groups. They found the law violation patterns of these groups to be generally comparable, both in terms of frequency of contact and seriousness of offense. In the context of these findings, the need for an expansion of research regarding middle and upper-class delinquency is suggested and comments are made by the authors regarding the types of research questions they consider worthy of investigation.

The larger study from which this article's data were obtained was made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation.—EDITOR.

Social scientists have devoted relatively little attention to the study of middle-class delinquency. This relative disinterest may be associated with a collective judgment regarding the limited significance of middle-class delinquency as a social problem. For example, Kvaraceus and Miller comment that "Much [middle-class] norm violating behavior is more easily handled and concealed than in the lower class, since it tends to be more sporadic and less patterned."¹ Ohlin states that the forms of delinquent activity of lower-class delinquent subculture members are more costly and difficult to control because they are rooted in the role requirements of that subculture. Although he recognizes the existence of delinquent subcultures in the middle-class environment, he claims that "this behavior seems to threaten less immediate and long-run social costs, to occur less frequently, to be more responsive to control and change, and to show less likelihood of continuation in the form of adult criminal careers."²

In subsequent pages, data will be reported regarding a sample of middle and upper-class

aggressive delinquents whose police record was found to be generally comparable to the records of four lower-class delinquent groups. In the context of these findings, the need for an expansion of research regarding middle and upper-class delinquency will be considered and suggestions made regarding research questions that should be investigated in this content area.

THE DELINQUENT SAMPLE

This sample of delinquents was identified in connection with a study of the secondary school experiences of male adolescents in a Los Angeles suburban school district.³ Three student groups were identified: (a) *Aggressive* students selected because of their chronically disruptive, challenging behavior in school, (b) *Nonaggressive Underachievers* selected because of their academic underachieving behavior, and (c) a control group of *Well-adjusted* students who were neither aggressive socially nor underachieving academically.⁴

³ SHANLEY, ALZOBAIE & LEFEVER, *Comparative Analysis of School Record and Behavioral Data for Aggressive, Well-adjusted and Underachieving Students* (mimeo. Youth Studies Center, University of Southern California, 1964). See report for a more detailed description of project objectives.

⁴ A sample of 319 male students was selected, with approximately 100 students in each of the above men-

¹ KVARACEUS & MILLER, *DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR: CULTURE AND THE INDIVIDUAL* 1 (1959).

² OHLIN, *The Development of Opportunities for Youth* 9 (mimeo. Youth Development Center, Syracuse University, 1960).

TABLE 1

PER CENT OF POLICE CONTACTS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC
SUBCLASSES OF AGGRESSIVE GROUP*

Social Class	Per Cent of Persons with Number of Contacts								
	N	0	1	2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10+	%
Upper...	34	26	18	18	18	14	3	3	100
Middle...	39	23	18	18	18	7	8	8	100
Lower...	27	33	15	8	26	7	4	7	100

* Chi Square was used to test the significance of difference of the police contact distributions for the three groups. In order to meet the requirement of a lower limit of theoretical frequencies (5) in cells of Table 1, it was necessary to combine certain "police contact" categories. Chi Square was computed for the combined police contact categories of 0, 1-2, 3-4, 5 and above. The X^2 value = 2.29, d.f. = 6, ns.

The broader range of categories shown in Table 1 has been maintained for *descriptive* purposes only. The tabled data have also been reported in *percentage* form to facilitate interpretation, although frequencies were used for Chi Square computation.

Comparative analyses of the characteristics of these groups revealed a most striking difference in number of police contacts.⁵ Seventy-three per cent of the Aggressive students had police records, while only twenty-six per cent of the Nonaggressive Underachievers and twelve per cent of the Well-adjusted students had such records.⁶

tioned behavioral groups. The procedure used to select the student groups was as follows: (a) *Aggressive students*—Aggressive behavior was defined in terms of 14 specific, deviant school behaviors, e.g., "Defies authority", "Aggressor in fight". The vice-principal in charge of school discipline nominated boys whose deviant behavior in these areas was judged to be chronic. (b) *Nonaggressive Underachievers*—A scatter plot of grade point averages (two semesters) and IQ for all male students in grades 8-10 was prepared. The students whose grades fell into the lowest decile for their IQ group and who had not previously been selected for the Aggressive group were identified as Underachievers. (c) *Well-adjusted students*—From the remaining pool of male students not selected above, pupils were selected whose academic grades were at the C level or better, who received "high" teacher ratings on three classroom behavioral characteristics and who displayed favorable peer relationships as reflected in sociometric nominations.

⁵ A "police contact", as defined in this paper, involves a police arrest of an individual for an offense and preparation of a written record of the arrest by the police.

⁶ These marked differences in police contact rates cannot be explained in terms of sample selection procedures, since school performance data provided the only basis for the selection of the three student groups.

Given the relatively high rate of police contact for the Aggressive group, the relationship between police contact rate and socio-economic status was studied. This analysis revealed an unexpectedly high incidence of police contact for all three social classes within the Aggressive group.⁷ Sixty-seven per cent of the lower class, seventy-seven per cent of the middle class, and seventy-four per cent of the upper-class Aggressives had at least *one* police contact.

The same Aggressive subgroups also had a surprisingly high *number* of police contacts, as revealed by the distributions of Table 1. (In examining Table 1 and the other tables, it should be kept in mind that the police statistics do not include *traffic* offenses, save for hit-and-run and drunk driving offenses.)

The statistics provide initial evidence regarding the seriousness of the Aggressive group's police record. They also reveal that the great majority of the group's members (73%) came from middle and upper-class homes.⁸

It was this general pattern of police contact that provided the original stimulus for the development of the position taken in this article. In subsequent pages, the police record of the delinquent members of this middle and upper-class aggressive group (MCAD) (N = 55) will be compared with the records of lower-class delinquent groups in order to document more systematically the seriousness of the group's record and to provide additional evidence regarding the need for further research in this subject matter area.

⁷ One hundred and one Aggressive students were selected for study. That number represents *all* students in grades 8-10 of the school who met the selection criteria and also represents about seven per cent of the male population of the school in those grades.

⁸ Fathers' occupation data were used to determine the students' socioeconomic status. An occupational classification system developed by Thomas W. Smith, representing a modification of U.S. Census Bureau classifications, was applied to data secured from the students, descriptive of their parents' occupation. See Smith, *Auditing and Reading Skills as a Source of Cultural Bias*, (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1956).

The classification system assigned: (a) *unskilled* and *semi-skilled* occupations (gardener, janitor, plant guard, service station attendant, fruit packer, etc.) to the lower class category, (b) *sales, clerical, and skilled* occupations (salesman, office worker, electrician, factory foreman, printer, etc.) to the middle-class category, and (c) *professional, managerial, and entrepreneurial* occupations (chemist, engineer, accountant, sales manager, park superintendent, contractor, department store owner, etc.) to the upper class category.

TABLE 2

PER CENT OF POLICE CONTACTS FOR NEGRO, MEXICAN-AMERICAN, MCAD MALE DELINQUENT GROUPS*

Delinquent Group	Per Cent of Persons with Number of Contacts							Mean Number of Contacts	
	N	1	2	3	4-5	6-9	10+		
Negro.....	47	36	13	15	13	19	4	100	3.5
Mex. Amer...	40	25	28	5	23	17	2	100	3.5
MCAD.....	55	24	23	11	20	15	7	100	3.8

* Chi Square was computed for the following police contact categories: 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6 and above for the MCAD—Negro distributions; 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6 and above for the MCAD—Mexican American distributions.

FREQUENCY OF POLICE CONTACT

1. *Kobrin* provides the first source of comparative data in his review of police statistics for the ten highest delinquency areas in Chicago over a seven year period. He states: "Thus it is evident that when the most inclusive measure based on official records is used, not one-fifth but almost two-thirds of the boys in delinquency areas may be regarded as official delinquents."⁹ In comparison, seventy-five per cent of the middle and upper-class aggressive adolescents of this article had at least one recorded police contact for a comparable time interval.¹⁰

2. In a recently published article, *Gordon*, et al, reports statistics descriptive of the police record of boys from nine Negro and six white gangs in Metropolitan Chicago. *Gordon* indicates: "For the total (gang) membership, the number of offenses known to the police per boy averaged 3.17 for Negroes and 2.91 for whites¹¹ . . . If newspaper headlines are any criterion, these gangs include all but one of the most notorious in Chicago during 1960-61."¹² In comparison, the average number of police contacts for the MCAD group was 3.8, as shown in Table 2.

3. In order to provide a *more detailed* comparison of the MCAD group's police record with the records

⁹ *Kobrin, The Conflict of Values in Delinquency Areas*, 16 AM. SOCIO. REV. 654 (1951).

¹⁰ The police contact record of the MCAD group includes all recorded police contacts through age 17.

¹¹ *Gordon* indicates that the police contact record for each boy consisted of the total number of contacts recorded during the boy's lifetime up to the point at which the record search was made. See *Gordon, Short, Cartwright & Strodbeck, Values and Gang Delinquency: A Study of Street Corner Gangs*, 69 AM. J. SOCIO. 109 (1963).

¹² *Ibid*, p 110.

TABLE 3

PER CENT OF POLICE CONTACTS FOR SUBURBAN COMMUNITY DELINQUENTS AND MCAD GROUP*

Delinquent Group	Per Cent of Persons with Number of Contacts							Mean Number of Contacts	
	N	1	2	3	4-5	6-9	10+		
Suburban Delin....	4792	82	11	3.7	2.5	.7	.1	100	1.3
MCAD.....	55	24	23	11	20	15	7	100	3.8

* Chi Square was computed for the following police contact categories: 1, 2 and above.

of less privileged delinquent groups, the "number of police contacts" distribution for the MCAD group is compared with the distributions of two Negro and Mexican-American samples from the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area in Table 2.¹³

These distributions are highly comparable, as illustrated by the proportions of the groups with two or more contacts (Negro 64%, Mexican 75%, MCAD 76%) and six or more contacts (Negro 23%, Mexican 19%, MCAD 22%). Chi Square was used to separately test the significance of differences between the MCAD-Negro and the MCAD-Mexican American distributions. The distributions were not significantly different, i.e., MCAD-Negro comparison, $\chi^2 = 4.14$, d.f. = 3, NS; MCAD-Mexican American comparison, $\chi^2 = 0.15$, d.f. = 3, NS.

4. In order to illustrate the seriousness of the MCAD group's record in another context, that record is compared in Table 3 with the police record of the delinquent *population*¹⁴ of the "middle-class" suburban community¹⁵ in which the MCAD group

¹³ Alex McEachern utilized the Central Juvenile Index record of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department for the development of these statistics. The index provides a list of all recorded police contacts (bookings) with juveniles. McEachern utilized a random sampling procedure to draw his sample of juvenile records. See McEachern & Bauzer, *Factors Related to Disposition in Juvenile Police Contacts*, JUVENILE GANGS IN CONTEXT: THEORY, RESEARCH AND ACTION 192-196 (mimeo. Youth Studies Center, University of Southern California, 1964).

¹⁴ Van Arsdol developed the police record statistics, tabulating *all* recorded police contacts with male juveniles in that suburban community for the years 1940 to 1960.

¹⁵ Van Arsdol and Lourie described the community's twelve census tracts as follows: 3 very high social-rank tracts (based on an education, occupation, and median rent index), 2 high social-rank tracts, 3 medium social-rank tracts, 4 low social-rank tracts. See Van Arsdol & Lourie, *Social Characteristic with Special Reference to*

TABLE 4

PER CENT OF PETITIONS REQUESTED FOR NEGRO, MEXICAN-AMERICAN, MCAD MALE DELINQUENT GROUPS*

Delinquent Group	Per Cent of Persons with Number of Petitions								Mean Number of Petitions
	N	0	1	2	3	4-5	6+	%	
Negro.....	47	49	28	11	6	6		100	.98
Mex. Amer....	40	50	23	18	5	4		100	.95
MCAD.....	55	44	29	14	4	5	4	100	1.20

* Chi Square was computed for the following petition categories: 0, 1, 2, 3 and above.

live. Police files of the community do not report father's occupation or other types of information that would provide a direct basis for determining the social status of the delinquent population. However, because of the community's general status classification, it has been assumed that the great majority of the "Suburban Delinquents" of Table 3 are of middle or upper socio-economic status.

Even though the MCAD group members come from middle or upper-class families, their police records stand in sharp contrast to the records of the male, delinquent population of their own community. For example, 76% of the MCAD group have two or more police contacts while only 18% of the Suburban Delinquent group have a comparable record. Chi Square was used to test group distribution differences, and the distributions were found to be significantly different from one another.¹⁶

SERIOUSNESS OF OFFENSE

Having compared "number of police contact" statistics for the MCAD group and certain lower and middle-class groups, an interpretation of the seriousness of their police records is described below, using the number of "juvenile court petitions requested"¹⁷ as the measure of police record seriousness.¹⁸

Youth 65 (mimeo. Youth Studies Center, University of Southern California, 1961).

¹⁶ The police contact frequencies of the Suburban Delinquents were expressed as proportions. These population proportions provided the basis for the computation of a set of expected frequencies for the MCAD group. Then Chi Square was used to test the "goodness of fit" of the observed and expected police contact frequencies for the MCAD group. The $\chi^2 = 121.27$ d.f. = 1 $p < .001$.

¹⁷ In the State of California, three alternative courses of action can be used by the police to deal with a juvenile offender. The police may warn the youth not to repeat the act and make no formal record of that con-

TABLE 5

PER CENT OF PETITIONS REQUESTED FOR MCAD GROUP AND FOR SUBURBAN COMMUNITY DELINQUENTS*

Delinquent Group	Per Cent of Persons with Number of Petitions							Mean Number of Petitions
	N	0	1	2	3	4+	%	
Suburban Delin.....	4792	69	26	3	1	1	100	.38
MCAD.....	55	44	29	14	4	9	100	1.21

* Chi Square was computed for the following petition categories: 0, 1 and above.

1. Table 4 compares the petition record of the MCAD group with the records of the Negro and Mexican-American samples whose police contact experience has already been described.

The MCAD group's petition record is again found to be highly comparable to that of the other two groups, with group distributions not significantly different from one another, i.e., MCAD-Negro distribution, $\chi^2 = .48$, d.f. = 3, NS; MCAD-Mexican American distribution, $\chi^2 = .86$, d.f. = 3, NS.

2. As a second comparative check of the seriousness of offense patterns, the "petition requested" record of the MCAD group is compared with the record of the previously mentioned delinquent population of the suburban community from which the MCAD group was drawn.

These data indicate again the atypical character of the general police record of the MCAD group in their own community, as illustrated by the larger percentages of persons with "two or more petitions" (MCAD 27%, Suburban Delinquents 5%) and the smaller percentages of persons with "no petitions" (MCAD group 44%, Suburban Delinquents 69%).¹⁹

tact. They may contact the youth regarding the act, record the offense on police records, and then release the youth without formal punishment. Finally, they may request that the probation department file a petition to the juvenile court. As McEachern, *op. cit. supra* note 13, at p 193, points out, "such a request is the only formal (and legal) alternative to counseling and releasing available to law enforcement agencies in handling juveniles."

¹⁸ The act of filing a petition may be influenced by many factors other than the nature of the offense. McEachern's study, *op. cit. supra* note 13, at p 195, indicates that "petitions are requested in part as a function of the characteristics of the individual and in part as a function of the incident itself (the offense, the year, and the jurisdiction)". However, the number of petitions filed for an individual does provide one important basis for judging seriousness of the law violating behavior of groups.

¹⁹ As was the case in Table 3, the Suburban Sample

INTERPRETATION OF MCAD RECORD

Though evidence has been provided regarding the seriousness of the MCAD group's delinquent behavior, an assessment of the severity of the social problem represented by their behavior should involve consideration of the extent to which the group represents a *numerically* significant part of the middle and upper-class, adolescent population in the United States. Statistics from the school-based study, referred to in this article provide a partial answer to the question.²⁰

There were 73 Aggressive students of middle or upper-social class in the study. Fifty-five of these students had a police record (See Table 1).²¹ This student subgroup represents about 5% of the middle and upper-class male student body (grades 8-10, age range 13-17) of the secondary school in question.

If this proportion (5%) is roughly representative of other suburban school district proportions, then it would follow that the total number of delinquents classifiable as MCAD in the United States would be substantial.²² If one also recalls that the MCAD group committed, on the average, about three times as many recorded offenses as did the total population of suburban delinquents from that same community (Table 3 above), then one can assume that the MCAD group might not only represent a numerically significant *number of adolescents* in America, but they might also be contributing disproportionately to the *number of offenses committed*.²³

proportions were used to compute a set of expected values and the MCAD group observed frequencies were tested for "goodness of fit", using X^2 . The X^2 value = 15.51, d.f. = 1, $p < .001$.

²⁰ A fully adequate answer to this question can't be presented because of the lack of delinquency statistics reported by social class for individual states or for the nation.

²¹ As previously indicated, these 73 students represent *all* aggressive students meeting the selection criteria in grades 8-10 of the school who were classified as middle or upper-class. The 73 students do not represent a sampling of students in those grades but rather the population of students in those grades for the year of selection, 1960.

²² The need for replication of this study in other suburban communities follows necessarily from the question raised above, and from the incomplete statistical answer which is provided here.

²³ There is another aspect of the findings that needs to be considered. The police statistics reported in the article were secured from two different sources. Variations in police reporting practices undoubtedly have influenced these statistics. Further, there is no way to determine the degree of distortion of findings associated with these reporting practice variations. However, even if one assumed that the police contact data had been

In evaluating the delinquency record of the MCAD group, it should also be kept in mind that delinquents with more serious police records tend to commit *substantially* more *unrecorded* law violations than do delinquents with less serious records. (Studies by Empey and Murphy provide evidence regarding this point.)²⁴ It is quite possible, therefore, that the *total* number of law violations (recorded and unrecorded) for the MCAD group is much larger than the number reflected in the official police records of Tables 1-5, though data descriptive of the unrecorded law violations of this group are not available to directly document this possibility.

Finally, any evaluation of the seriousness of the social problem represented by the behavior of the MCAD group in their own community should consider the incidence of *other* behaviors that were maladaptive and deviant, though not formally delinquent. A summary review of the *secondary school* experience of the MCAD members provides partial documentation regarding this point.

In secondary school, the *peer relationships* of MCAD group members were found to be rather unfavorable, with these students being significantly²⁵ more often nominated as "difficult to get along

seriously distorted by varying reporting practices, the existing evidence regarding the seriousness of the delinquent behavior of the MCAD group suggests the need for research which would attempt to adjust relevant police record data for such reporting variations and then conduct comparative analyses designed to verify or reject the findings reported here.

²⁴ For a sample of middle-class boys, Empey indicated that a group of "non offenders" and "one time offenders" reported having committed 173 "serious offenses" (recorded and unrecorded) while a "persistent offender" group of the same size reported committing 1628 serious offenses (recorded and unrecorded). These respondent groups also indicated that eight out of ten of their serious violations went *undetected*. See Empey, *Hidden Delinquency and Social Status* (paper read at Pacific Sociological Association meetings, 1965). Murphy reported similar statistics regarding the relationship between recorded and unrecorded law violations for groups of lower-class "official delinquents" and "unofficial delinquents". See Murphy et al, *The Incidence of Hidden Delinquency*, 16 AM. J. ORTHOPSYCHIATRY (1946).

²⁵ Medians were calculated to describe student group behavior in this section because extreme values in the distributions distorted the values of computed means. . . Because of skewed distributions, Chi Square was used to test the significance of difference among group distributions. All reported comparisons between the MCAD group and the other two student groups (for the school year 1960-61) were found to be significant at the .05 level or higher, with the exception of the MCAD-UN academic grade comparison. In these comparisons, the MCAD group members ($N = 55$) are compared with the middle and upper-class delinquents of the Underachiever group ($N = 17$) and the total middle and upper-class membership of the Well-adjusted group ($N = 107$).

with" than the members of two other student groups in a schoolwide sociometric administration (3.6 average nominations for the MCAD; .9 for the Underachiever and .8 for the Well-adjusted). They also received significantly more student sociometric nominations as persons who "really dislike school" (MCAD 5.6; UN 2.0; WA .7).²⁶

Their *academic performance*, as reflected in academic grade point averages, was as unsatisfactory as the performance of the Underachievers (between C- and D), even though the MCAD group had been selected originally without consideration of grade performance. As expected, their grade point average was significantly lower than that of the Well-adjusted group (MCAD 8.5; UN 7.9; WA 5.3).

The MCAD students' *attendance* patterns also reflected the deviance of their school behavior. For example, they had significantly more class period "cuts" than the other two student groups (MCAD 6.3; UN 2.5; WA .8). Perhaps, the best summary index of school adjustment difficulties for these students is reflected in their school *dropout* rate (MCAD 75%; UN 47%; WA 7%).

Overall, these findings indicate the deviant nature of the MCAD group's school activities in a number of important behavioral categories. A *joint* consideration of school data and police contact data further suggests that deviant activity may be characteristic of this group over a broad range of their adolescent life experience.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The above findings have been presented to provide evidence regarding the seriousness of the delinquent behavior of a particular subgroup of middle and upper-class adolescents. The reported statistics indicate that the MCAD group commit delinquent acts with a frequency comparable to those committed by delinquents from less privileged economic groups. Their detected acts may represent but a small part of the total number of law violations committed, and the group's deviant behavior patterns, both in school and in the community, give evidence of being difficult to modify or to control. The stability of the group's aggressive, disruptive behavior patterns in adolescence also suggests the likelihood of their continuation in young adult experience.²⁷

²⁶ See page two for a description of the characteristics of the three student groups.

²⁷ Robins reported that a sample of child guidance clinic patients with severe "anti-social" behavior problems (police record, etc.) tended to have a more un-

In interpreting the findings presented above, it is recognized that the reporting of the police records of a single group of middle and upper class youth does not provide adequate support for the contention that middle-class delinquency represents a social problem of significance in our society. However, the findings do appear to properly support the general position of this article—namely, that it would be useful to conduct studies to determine the extent to which these results are generalizable to other middle and upper-class populations, and also useful to investigate further the etiology of delinquent behavior in such populations. With reference to these two points, a review of literature has indicated a number of more specific research objectives that appear to warrant attention.

1. Relatively few theoretical formulations have been *directly* concerned with middle-class delinquency. The writings of Cohen,²⁸ Cohen and Short,²⁹ Gold,³⁰ Bohlke,³¹ Parsons,³² England,³³ Kvaraceus and Miller,³⁴ represent some of the most important works in the field. These writings present a varied set of speculative explanations for middle-class delinquency.³⁵ Yet the number of such studies is limited and they do not adequately emphasize certain aspects of the delinquent's social environment that probably contribute significantly to the development of delinquent behavior patterns. In this regard, there is a definite need for additional theory descriptive of the influence of

favorable occupational status 30 years later than a control group of normal children. Members of the same clinical sample with neurotic or other behavior problems (not "anti-social") were as likely as the control group to have a favorable occupational mobility. See Robins, Gyman & O'Neal, *The Interaction of Social Class and Deviant Behavior* 27 AM. SOCIO. REV. (1962).

²⁸ Cohen, *Middle Class Delinquency and the Social Structure* (paper read at the American Sociological Association Meeting, 1957).

²⁹ Cohen & Short, *Research in Delinquent Subcultures*, 14 J. SOCIAL ISSUES 20-37 (1958).

³⁰ GOLD, STATUS FORCES IN DELINQUENT BOYS (1963).

³¹ Bohlke, *Social Mobility, Stratification Inconsistency and Middle-Class Delinquency*, 8 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 351 (1961).

³² Parsons, *Certain Primary Sources and Patterns of Aggression in the Social Structure of the Western World*, 10 PSYCHIATRY 167 (1947).

³³ England, *A Theory of Middle-Class Juvenile Delinquency*, 50 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 535 (1960).

³⁴ Kvaraceus & Miller, *supra* note 1.

³⁵ The writings account for delinquent behavior in terms of such factors as weakening of deferred gratification pattern, school failure, anticipation of adult occupational failure, social stratification inconsistency, sex role anxiety, upward diffusion of lower class values, etc.

family and school in the generation and reinforcement of delinquent behavior.

2. The great bulk of delinquency theory has focused on lower-class delinquent behavior. This behavior has been accounted for in terms of "status deprivation,"³⁶ "limitations on legitimate avenues to goal achievement,"³⁷ and "interclass conflict."³⁸ Also emphasized is the influence of deprived community settings which support a "criminal tradition"³⁹ and provide the "opportunity to learn and perform illegitimate behavior."⁴⁰ Upon initial examination these theories seem quite inappropriate to explain the delinquent behavior of the MCAD group, whose members come from middle-or upper-class families residing in a suburban community without a criminal tradition or delinquent gangs.⁴¹

Yet certain of the basic concepts, such as "status deprivation" and "interclass conflict," may have a general explanatory relevance to middle-class delinquent behavior that is not readily apparent from the specific content of the theories. For example, middle-class youth may perceive themselves blocked from achievement of traditional societal goals for reasons *other than* those associated with lower-class membership. Consequently, it would seem important to review these concepts *systematically* to assess their relevance for the development or refinement of middle-class delinquency theory.

3. The limited number of theoretical works in this area is paralleled by the almost complete absence of *delinquency rate* data subclassified by socioeconomic status. The authors found it difficult to locate *any* published (or unpublished) statistics of this type for evaluation of the MCAD group's⁴² police records.

³⁶ COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS* (1955).

³⁷ CLOWARD & OHLIN, *DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY* (1961).

³⁸ Miller, *Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency*, 14 *J. SOCIAL ISSUES* 5 (1958).

³⁹ SHAW & MCKAY, *JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND URBAN AREAS* (1942).

⁴⁰ SUTHERLAND, *PRINCIPLES OF CRIMINOLOGY* (1947).

⁴¹ Myerhoff and Myerhoff's participant observation study concluded that there were no delinquent gangs in the community from which the school sample was drawn, that is, gangs characterized as highly structured, relatively permanent, and reflecting a well developed delinquent subculture. See Myerhoff and Myerhoff, *Field Observations of Middle Class 'Groups'*, 42 *SOCIAL FORCES* 328 (1964).

⁴² Willie and Gershenovita reported the delinquency rates for a sample of Washington, D.C. delinquents, subclassified by socio-economic status and race. See Willie and Gershenovita, *Juvenile Delinquency in Racially Mixed Areas* (paper read at the Eastern Sociological Society meeting 1964). Also Goldman analyzed

The development of *official* statistics of this kind would provide a comprehensive data base for assessing the seriousness of the social problem represented by middle-class delinquency. Because of the difficulties associated with their development on a statewide or national level, however, the need for such data may have to be met less systematically through the collection and reporting of statistics by individual research projects.

4. There is a need for studies descriptive of the personal and environmental characteristics of *sub-classes* of the middle and upper-class delinquent population. In discussing the problem of delinquent subculture research, Cohen and Short speak to this point: "There is a great need of case studies of middle-class delinquent groups, including detailed descriptions of the specific quality of their delinquencies and the behavioral context and community settings of these delinquencies."⁴³

Several studies of this general type have been completed, particularly in the last five years.⁴⁴

the delinquency statistics of a "middle-class municipality" and an "upper-class residential area". See Goldman, *The Differential Selection of Juvenile Offenders for Court Appearances* (mimeo, National Research and Information Center, Syracuse, 1963). With these exceptions, the authors found no *published* delinquency rate data descriptive of middle or upper-class adolescent samples.

Because the statistics of the two studies were not reported for the entire childhood and adolescence of their sample members (as was the case for the MCAD group), they were not used for comparative purposes in this paper.

⁴³ Cohen & Short, *supra* note 29, at 29.

⁴⁴ These studies account for delinquent behavior in terms of such factors as dependency frustration (Bandura and Walters), unfavorable parent-adolescent relationships (Herskovitz), lack of attraction to family and school (Gold), upward mobile families in "socially disorganized" new suburbs (Greeley), capricious experimentation with subterranean values (Myerhoff and Myerhoff), etc.

Numerous other projects have studied the relationship between socioeconomic classification and delinquent behavior (Reiss, Nye). In such investigations, however, the social class variable is treated as one of a number of *independent* variables associated with the dependent variable, undifferentiated delinquent behavior. Relatively few studies have selected a *middle-class* delinquent sample and then investigated the social and psychological correlates of the behaviors.

The complete references for the studies referred to above are: BANDURA & WALTERS, *ADOLESCENT AGGRESSION* (1959); HERSKOVITZ, LEVENE & SPIVACK, *Anti-Social Behavior of Adolescents from Higher Socio-Economic Groups*, 125 *J. NERVOUS & MENTAL DISEASE* 1 (1959); GOLD, *STATUS FORCES IN DELINQUENT BOYS* (1963); GREELEY & CASEY, *An Upper Middle-Class Deviant Gang*, 24 *AM. CATHOLIC SOCIO. REV.* 33 (1963); MYERHOFF & MYERHOFF, *Field Observations of Middle-Class 'Groups'*, 42 *SOCIAL FORCES* 328 (1964); REISS, *The Distribution of Juvenile Delinquency in the Social*

However, their total number is again small when contrasted with the body of research focusing upon lower-class delinquency. Consequently, there appears to be a continuing need for additional studies descriptive of varied patterns of middle-class delinquent behavior and of the social settings in which these delinquent acts occur.

One such study is suggested by the findings of this article—a comparative examination of the characteristics of “aggressive” vs. “passive” subgroups of the middle-class delinquent population. As previously indicated, the MCAD group was originally identified in connection with a study of secondary school students, *i.e.*, Aggressives, Non-aggressive Underachievers, and Well-adjusted students. The police record of the middle and upper-class *Aggressive* student group was definitely more serious than that of the other two groups.⁴⁵ Further, the average number of police contacts for the *delinquent* subgroups of those student types was again significantly different, *i.e.*, Aggressives 3.8, Underachievers 2.2, and Well-adjusted 1.6. These

Class Structure, 26 AM. SOCIO. REV. 720 (1961); NYE, *FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR* (1958).

⁴⁵ Seventy-two per cent of the *middle-class* Aggressives, 24% of the Underachievers, and 12% of the Well-adjusted students had one or more contacts.

statistics, linked with other relevant literature, suggested the utility of an “aggressive” vs. “passive” subclassification.

It is possible that the delinquent behavior of *nonaggressive*, middle-class adolescents has the capricious, manipulative character described by Myerhoff and Myerhoff⁴⁶ and represents only a temporary deviation from conventional behavior rather than a general incapacity to assimilate the traditional norms of the society. The converse may be true for a significant proportion of *aggressive* middle-class delinquents.

CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed data descriptive of the delinquent experience of a group of middle and upper-class aggressive male adolescents. Existing theoretical and empirical literature relating to this general topic has also been examined. The results of these actions suggest that the deviant behavior of this group is of sufficient social significance and the existing body of relevant etiological literature limited enough to warrant the allocation of increased research resources to the study of delinquent behavior in the middle and upper-social class setting.

⁴⁶ Myerhoff & Myerhoff, *supra* note 41.