

1967

Screening of Juvenile Offenders

Robert M. Terry

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

Robert M. Terry, Screening of Juvenile Offenders, 58 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 173 (1967)

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.

THE SCREENING OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS*

ROBERT M. TERRY

The author is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Iowa. He received all three of his degrees from the University of Wisconsin—a B.A. in 1960, an M.A. in 1962, and a Ph.D. in 1965. His present paper is based upon his unpublished Ph.D. thesis.

From 1963 to 1965, Dr. Terry was an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Oregon State University. After receiving his Ph.D. from Wisconsin, and prior to joining the Iowa faculty, he served for one year as Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of California (Santa Barbara).

Within the context of current social-psychological thinking concerning variations in the societal reaction to deviant behavior, this article is an attempt to specify the criteria utilized by control agencies in the sanctioning of juvenile offenders. A series of hypotheses are tested at each of three stages at which sanctions are accorded: the police, the probation department, and the juvenile court. Generally, legalistic types of variables were found to be most significant while such variables as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and area of residence were relatively unimportant. These findings have relevance for clarifying some of the problems of measuring delinquent behavior, assessing the functioning of control agencies, and developing more effective bases for making dispositions of juvenile offenders.

Students of deviant behavior are increasingly coming to recognize that deviance is not a quality that inheres in either the person who engages in the behavior or in the behavior itself. Instead, deviance resides in the definitions that are imposed on the behavior and the deviant is a person who has been so labeled.¹ This "interactionist" conceptualization has important implications for the study of crime and delinquency in that actions taken by members of the social audience constitute phenomena to be explained rather than simply to be taken for granted.²

The theoretical significance of interactionism is exemplified by Lemert's theory of deviance, wherein emphasis is placed upon accounting for the processes which lead to systematic deviant

* The original aspects of the research upon which this paper is based were supported by a University Fellowship at the University of Wisconsin. The author is grateful for the assistance he received from David Mechanic, who supervised the thesis, and Thomas J. Scheff, Paul L. Wuebben, and Donald R. Cressey, who read an earlier draft of this manuscript and made a number of suggestions.

¹ A number of recent sociological works have emphasized this approach and its significance. See, e.g., BECKER, *OUTSIDERS* (1963); BECKER, ed., *THE OTHER SIDE* (1964); GOFFMAN, *ASYLUMS* (1961); Kitsuse, *Societal Reactions to Deviant Behavior: Problems of Theory and Method*, 9 *SOCIAL PROBLEMS* 247-256 (1962); Mechanic, *Some Factors in Identifying and Defining Mental Illness*, 46 *MENTAL HYGIENE* 66-74 (1962); Scheff, *The Role of the Mentally Ill and the Dynamics of Mental Disorder: A Research Framework*, 26 *SOCIOMETRY* 436-453 (1963).

² See, especially, Wheeler, *Criminal Statistics: A Reformulation of the Problem*, unpublished paper read at the meetings of the American Statistical Association, Philadelphia, September, 1965.

behavior as a function of adopting a deviant role.³ Briefly, the development of career deviance is regarded as being dependent upon the societal reactions to one's deviant behavior. By reacting to a person's deviant behavior, the social audience accords deviant statuses and thereby structures the internal and external limits upon the individual's choice of roles in such a way that few alternatives to the deviant role exist for the "deviant." Where deviant statuses are accorded, the deviant role simply becomes the subjective aspect of the societal reaction.⁴ Thus, the understanding of career deviance is dependent upon an understanding of the reasons for and variations in the societal reactions to deviant behavior on the part of social audiences.

Agencies that are designed to deal with problems of deviance are especially relevant members of the social audience. This is most obviously the case with respect to what may be called "primary" agencies of social control, or those agencies which have as the primary basis for their existence the functions of identifying, defining, and sanctioning deviant behavior. The police, probation departments, parole departments, courts, and correctional institutions are examples of such agencies with respect to violations of legal norms. Acting as the community's official representatives they

³ Lemert, *Some Aspects of a General Theory of Sociopathic Behavior*, 16 *PROCEEDINGS OF MEETINGS OF PACIFIC SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY, STATE COLLEGE OF WASH.* 1-28 (1948).

⁴ LEMERT, *SOCIAL PATHOLOGY* 76 (1951).

not only determine, to a large extent, the broader reactions to legal deviations, but also act to change the individual's status by means of applying deviant definitions. Thus, their identification, definition, and sanctioning of an individual as deviant provides a basis upon which family members, peers, employers, neighbors, and others may rely in according status to the individual. Since this is the case, the actions taken by these agencies are of significance in that the individual may be defined and reacted to primarily with respect to his deviant status, and his behavior will be expected to coincide with this status.

PROBLEM

As part of the broader study of societal reactions to deviance, this research focuses primarily upon the bases for according sanctions of varying severity to juveniles whose behavior has been identified and defined as delinquent. Specifically, we will be concerned with the severity of sanctions accorded juveniles who become involved in the legal-judicial process designed to deal with juvenile offenders by three relevant kinds of social audiences: (1) the police; (2) the probation department; (3) the juvenile court.⁵ Each of these agencies accord sanctions, which take the form of dispositions, to offenders for having engaged in delinquent behavior.

The sanctioning of juvenile offenders appears to be a most appropriate area for this type of research in that the identification and definition of juveniles as delinquents is not strictly limited by legal definitions or statutory considerations, but is at the relative discretion of those who, as members of the social audience, find themselves disposed to identify and define juvenile behavior as such. In addition, no penal sanctions are attached to juvenile offenses. In fact, *theoretically*, juvenile offenders are not sanctioned for their deviant behavior, but are "helped" or "treated" by having certain kinds of dispositions accorded them. The selection of dispositions in any particular case is, legally speaking, to be guided only by the "best interests of the child." Therefore, discretion is built into juvenile codes in such a way as to allow relatively complete freedom of action (with respect to dispositions) by the primary agencies of social control.⁶

⁵ This is generally referred to as the screening process.

⁶ In other words, lay-social as well as technical-impersonal criteria are legitimate.

The specific problem, then, with which we will be concerned in this research may be stated as follows in the form of a question: *What are the criteria utilized by the police, the probation department, and the juvenile court in the sanctioning of juvenile offenders?*

Numerous suggestions as to the criteria utilized exist in the theoretical and research literature on crime and delinquency although sound empirical research is sparse.⁷ Generally, these hypothesized relationships maintain that the severity of the societal reaction varies significantly with such things as the nature of the behavior engaged in, the offender's past record of misbehavior, salient personal and social characteristics such as how old the offender is, where he lives, his race, etc., and the situational circumstances in which offenses are committed.⁸ Taking these suggestions as the basis for departures, we have formulated a series of major hypotheses concerning variations in the societal reaction to deviant behavior and have formulated relevant sub-hypotheses which will provide an indication not only of the adequacy of the major hypotheses but will also enable specification of some of the criteria utilized by control agencies in sanctioning juvenile offenders.

1: The severity of the societal reaction is positively related to the degree of the deviance.

1.1: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the seriousness of the offense committed.⁹

⁷ While most of these studies lack a theoretical framework, they provide useful perspectives on the problem at hand. See GREEN, *JUDICIAL ATTITUDES IN SENTENCING* (1961); Foote, *Vagrancy-Type Law and Its Administration*, 104 U. PA. L. REV. 603-650 (1956); LaFave, *The Police and Nonenforcement of the Law—Part II*, 1962 U. WIS. L. REV. 188-238 (1962); Mannheim, Spencer, and Lynch, *Magisterial Policy in the London Juvenile Courts*, 8 BRIT. J. CRIM. 13-33, 119-138 (1957); Piliavin and Briar, *Police Encounters with Juveniles*, 70 AM. J. SOCIOLOGY 206-214 (1964); Shannon, *Types and Patterns of Delinquency Referral in a Middle-sized City*, 4 BRIT. J. CRIM. 24-36 (1963); GOLDMAN, *THE DIFFERENTIAL SELECTION OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS FOR COURT APPEARANCE* (1963); Kinney, Klem, and Myers, *Selective Factors Involved in Differential Treatment of Youthful Offenders at the Juvenile Court of Cook County* (unpublished thesis, University of Chicago, 1951).

⁸ See, especially, Lemert, *supra* note 4 at 51-53, 55-68; Scheff, *supra* note 1 at 452; Mechanic, *supra* note 1 at 66-74; Erikson, *Notes on the Sociology of Deviance*, 9 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 308 (1962).

⁹ Delinquent offenses are classified as being one of nine types. Questionnaires were submitted to personnel of the police Juvenile Bureau and the County Probation Department in order to ascertain the serious-

2: The severity of the societal reaction is positively related to the amount of deviance engaged in by the individual.

2.1: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the number of previous offenses committed.¹⁰

3: The severity of the societal reaction is negatively related to the power of the deviant.

3.1: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is negatively related to the socio-economic status of the offender.¹¹

4: The severity of the societal reaction is positively related to the social distance between the deviant and agents of social control.

4.1: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the degree of minority status of the offender.¹²

5: The severity of the societal reaction is positively related to the "unfavorability" of the situation in which the offense is committed.

5.1: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is negatively related to the number of individuals involved in an offense.¹³

ness with which they regarded each of these types of offenses. The result was the following ranking of offenses from least serious to most serious: (1) disorderly conduct; (2) liquor offenses; (3) incorrigibility; (4) theft excluding auto theft; (5) sex offenses; (6) assault and violent property damage; (7) burglary; (8) auto theft; (9) homicide and robbery.

¹⁰The number of previous offenses committed was ranked in five categories: (1) no previous offenses; (2) 1-2 previous offenses; (3) 3-4 previous offenses; (4) 5-6 previous offenses; (5) 7 or more previous offenses.

¹¹Socio-economic status was measured by the use of the Minnesota Scale for Paternal Occupations and yielded the following ranks: (1) lower status; (2) middle status; (3) upper status. Lower status consists of classes V, VI, and VII of the Minnesota Scale, middle status consists of classes III and IV, and upper status consists of classes I and II. See *The Minnesota Scale for Paternal Occupations* (undated pamphlet).

¹²The following ranks of ethnic groupings are used as measures of the degree of minority status: (1) Anglos; (2) Mexican-Americans; (3) Negroes. Anglo-include all caucasians with the exception of Mexicans Americans. Being a Mexican-American is regarded as less of a minority status than being a Negro on the basis of several things: (1) We are measuring social distance between deviants and agents of social control. Several Mexican-Americans are members of the community's agencies of social control, while no Negroes are so employed. (2) There is less discrimination in the community under study against Mexican-Americans than against Negroes. Negroes were not, during the period under study, permitted to stay in the community's major hotels, to eat in a number of establishments, and were more segregated in terms of housing.

¹³The following categories were used: (1) one offender; (2) 2-3 offenders; (3) 4-5 offenders; (4) 6 or more offenders.

5.2: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the degree of involvement with offenders of the opposite sex.¹⁴

5.3: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the degree of involvement with adult offenders.¹⁵

5.4: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the formality of the social control function of the complainant.¹⁶

6: The severity of the societal reaction is positively related to the "unfavorability" of the place in which the deviance is committed.

6.1: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the degree of commercial/industrial development of the area in which the offense is committed.¹⁷

7: The severity of the societal reaction is positively related to the "unfavorability" of the deviant's personal and social biography.¹⁸

¹⁴The following ranks were used as measures of the degree of involvement with the opposite sex: (1) offense committed alone or with companions of the same sex; (2) offense committed with companions of the opposite sex.

¹⁵The degree of involvement with adult offenders is measured by the following ranks: (1) offense committed-alone or with juvenile companions; (2) offense committed with adult companions.

¹⁶The formality of the social control function of the complainant in an offense was measured by the following ranks: (1) family member or relative of the offender; (2) neighbor of the offender; (3) other citizen; (4) business or employee of a business; (5) employee of a public agency (e.g., teacher, principal, recreation department playground leader, mayor, etc.); (6) police.

¹⁷School districts constitute the basis for establishing areas. The degree of commercial/industrial development within these school districts was ascertained by dividing the total amount of land utilized for public buildings, businesses, light and heavy industry, and railroads by the total amount of land within the school districts. Due to changes in school district boundaries, several of these districts were combined. The school districts in which offenses occurred were recorded. The final result is a ranking of nine areas in terms of the degree of their commercial/industrial development.

¹⁸Goffman argues that the individual's biography is composed of both past and present events and characteristics which function so as to establish the individual's identity. Of special relevance here is what he calls "social identity," or those attributes which are observable by others and which thereby provide a basis for categorization of the individual as a particular "kind" of person. Certainly one's age, sex, and place of residence are of primary importance in making such categorizations. Although none of these variables is inherently linked to the unfavorability dimension of our major hypothesis, the theoretical literature in deviant behavior rather clearly indicates that being a male, an older juvenile, and residing in high-delinquency areas tend to be viewed as unfavorable "attributes" by agents of social control. See GOFFMAN, STIGMA 1-104 (1963).

7.1: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the "maleness" of the offender.¹⁹

7.2: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the age of the offender.²⁰

7.3: The severity of dispositions accorded juvenile offenders is positively related to the delinquency rate of the area in which the offender resides.²¹

The dependent variables, designed to provide indications of the severity of the societal reaction to deviant behavior on the part of primary agencies of social control, consist of the dispositions accorded juvenile offenders by each of the agencies.²² In order of increasing severity, police dispositions consist of: (1) release; (2) referral to a social or welfare agency; (3) referral to the County Probation Department; (4) referral to the State Department of Public Welfare. Probation department sanctions consist of: (1) release; (2) placement under informal supervision; (3) referral to the juvenile court; (4) waiver to the criminal court. Although a number of dispositions are possible by juvenile court judges, only two are utilized by the juvenile court judge in the community under study in this research: (1) formal supervision; (2) commitment to an institution.

DATA AND PROCEDURES

The site of this research is a heavily-industrialized Midwestern city of slightly less than 100,000. The primary agencies of social control are probably typical of those in other cities of this size. The police Juvenile Bureau utilizes full-time officers in the handling of juvenile offenders. A three person probation department, one of whom is a female, carries out both intake and supervisory functions as an arm of the juvenile court.

¹⁹ The "maleness" of the offender was obtained by ranking the nominal variable sex as follows: (1) female; (2) male.

²⁰ Age was measured by ascertaining the offender's age at the time of the offense. Since relatively few young juveniles engage in delinquent behavior, some of the younger ages were combined. This resulted in the following ranking: (1) 6-8; (2) 9-10; (3) 11-12; (4) 13; (5) 14; (6) 15; (7) 16; (8) 17.

²¹ Utilizing school districts as the basis for establishing areas, the delinquency rates of the areas were computed and ranked from lowest to highest. Several school districts were combined due to boundary changes during the period under study, the result being a ranking of nine areas.

²² See the excellent discussion of dispositions accorded juveniles by control agencies in *Wisconsin handbook for juvenile court services* (1959).

Finally, the juvenile court judge is also a judge of the Municipal Court and devotes two half-days a week to juvenile matters.

The principal sources of data utilized consist of police records on file in the Juvenile Bureau covering the period from January 1, 1958, through December 31, 1962. These records provided information with respect to most of the variables utilized, but the records of the County Probation Department were used for information concerning the dispositions accorded by the probation department and the juvenile court. In addition, city directories provided the chief source for obtaining parental occupations, and information provided by the Board of Education and City Planning Department was used in delineating and characterizing areas within the community.²³

Since the screening process operates in such a way as to eliminate the vast majority of juvenile offenders from the legal-judicial process before reaching the juvenile court stage, a universe of offenses was utilized in preference to a sample. This insured that enough cases would be included at later stages in the process in order to permit adequate statistical manipulation.²⁴

The result is a "universe" of 9,023 juvenile offenses at the police level. Of these offenses, 775 were referred to the County Probation Department and 246 of these were eventually referred to the juvenile court. The necessity for utilizing a universe rather than a sample should be obvious.

Since much of our data is ordinal, the principal statistical measure used is Kendall's rank correlation coefficient, tau.²⁵ This measure permits more extensive statistical analyses than other rank order

²³ For extensive discussions of the adequacy of the data see Terry, "The Screening of Juvenile Offenders: A Study in the Societal Reaction of Deviant Behavior" (unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1965).

²⁴ A number of types of offenders and/or offenses were eliminated from the universe. These include: (1) non-residents of the city, since the police lacked jurisdiction over these individuals; (2) traffic offenses, which were subjected to procedural handling which differed from that governing the handling of other offenses; (3) "offenders" under the age of six, since these children are regarded as being too young to engage in what could be considered delinquent behavior; (4) information types of offenses which, although recorded by the police, consisted of contacts with the police as a result of being a victim, providing information concerning offenses and/or offenders, being wrongly accused of delinquent behavior, or being suspected of having committed delinquent acts.

²⁵ See KENDALL, RANK CORRELATION METHODS (1948); SIEGELL, NONPARAMETRIC STATISTICS 213-229 (1956).

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF DISPOSITIONS

	N	%
Police Department		
Released.....	8,014	88.8
Referred to Social or Welfare Agency.....	180	2.0
Referred to County Probation Department.....	775	8.6
Referred to State Department of Public Welfare.....	54	0.6
Total.....	9,023	100.0
Probation Department		
Released.....	229	29.5
Informal Supervision.....	243	31.4
Referred to Juvenile Court.....	246	31.7
Waiver to Criminal Court.....	57	7.4
Total.....	775	100.0
Juvenile Court		
Formal Supervision.....	94	38.2
Institutionalized.....	152	61.8
Total.....	246	100.0

correlation coefficients in that it is generalizable to a partial coefficient ($\tau_{xy.z}$).²⁶

Since we are not, strictly speaking, utilizing a sample, however, the problem of the significance of relationships we may find becomes important. Since we are not generalizing from a sample to a universe, the usual testing of hypotheses as being "statistically significant" does not apply. Therefore, some arbitrary criterion must be selected in order that unimportant findings may be dealt with accordingly.

Previous research into the study of the societal reactions to deviant behavior indicates that the relationships that may be found to exist are frequently of relatively small magnitude. This may be due to the fact that a large number of independent variables may be of importance. In view of this, *we will reject all hypotheses when $-1.0 < \tau < +1.0$, except when the matrix indicates that the direction of the relationship is consistent for each*

²⁶ We will use partialling techniques only when two independent variables are significantly related to each other and when at least one is significantly related to the dependent variable. See ZETTERBERG, ON THEORY AND VERIFICATION IN SOCIOLOGY 61-66 (1963).

category of the independent variable despite the introduction of control variables. This criterion does not appear to be overly stringent.

RESULTS

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the vast majority of offenses committed do not result in formal action by control agents. In fact, a significant majority of offenses result in the release of the offender by the police and thereby never eventuate in juvenile court hearings, intake procedures on the part of the probation department, or action by any other agencies.

The relationships between our independent variables and the severity of dispositions at each of the levels of the screening process are summarized in Table 2. It is readily apparent that most of the sub-hypotheses must be rejected in that the relevant correlation coefficients do not meet our criteria for significance. Furthermore, some variation is evident among those hypotheses that are not rejected when agencies are compared with one another.

At the police level of screening, significant relationships in the hypothesized direction are evident between the seriousness of the offense committed, the number of previous offenses committed, and the age of the offender and the severity of sanctions. These relationships are generally independent from the influence of the remaining variables. The degree of involvement with adults approaches significance and retains a consistency of direction although reduced in magnitude when age is controlled (Table 3). The related sub-hypothesis is therefore not rejected. Each of the remaining sub-hypotheses is rejected at the police level.

At the probation department level of screening the findings are similar, although only three of the sub-hypotheses are supported and, where support exists, it is less significant than the support evident at the police level. Only the seriousness of the offense committed, the number of previous offenses committed, and the age of the offender are significantly related to the severity of sanctions accorded by the probation department. Again, these relationships are not substantially affected when the remaining independent variables are controlled. All of the remaining sub-hypotheses must be rejected.

At the juvenile court, a wider variety of criteria appear to be utilized and several variables that appear to be unimportant at earlier stages in

TABLE 2
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND THE SEVERITY OF SANCTIONS
ACCORDED JUVENILE OFFENDERS

Hypothesis Number	Independent Variable	Police	Probation	Juvenile Court
1.1	Seriousness of Offense Committed	.35	.18	-.12*
2.1	Number of Previous Offenses Committed	.25	.16	.28
3.1	Socio-Economic Status	-.04*	-.02*	-.09*
4.1	Degree of Minority Status	.02*	.01*	.04*
5.1	Number of Individuals Involved	-.06*	-.01*	-.17
5.2	Degree of Involvement with Offenders of the Opposite Sex	.04*	-.04*	.06*
5.3	Degree of Involvement with Adults	.09	.07*	.15
5.4	Formality of the Social Control Function of the Complainant	.01*	.03*	.08*
6.1	Degree of Commercial/Industrial Development of Area in which Offense Occurs	.05*	.06*	.10
7.1	"Maleness"	-.05*	.07*	-.11†
7.2	Age	.18	.18	.11
7.3	Delinquency Rate of Area of Residence	.01*	.04*	.03*

* Hypothesis rejected.

† Hypothesis rejected and alternate hypothesis substituted.

the screening process become significant at the juvenile court stage. Significant relationships in the hypothesized direction are evident between the number of previous offenses committed, the number of individuals involved in an offense, the degree of involvement with adults, the age of the offender, and the degree of commercial/industrial development in the area in which the offense occurs and the severity of dispositions accorded. Although several of these relationships are affected when control variables are introduced (Table 3), the status of the related hypotheses remains unaltered.

Finally, a significant *negative* relationship exists between the "maleness" of the offender and the severity of juvenile court dispositions ($\tau = -.11$). Three of our independent variables affect this relationship when used as controls (Table 3). These reflect the tendency for females to be over-represented in terms of involvement with both the opposite sex and adults and, at the same time, to have less serious records of previous delinquent behavior than males. The first two detract from the importance of the variable as a possible criterion while the latter indicated that the "maleness" of the offender is of even greater importance than is superficially apparent.²⁷ The sub-hypothesis

²⁷ Our data do not permit us to account for this negative finding. Speculatively, however, the harsher handling of females might indicate that appearance in the

is rejected and replaced by an alternate hypothesis which posits a negative relationship between the "maleness" of the offender and the severity of juvenile court sanctions.

Each of the remaining sub-hypotheses is rejected. Especially noteworthy is the negative relationship between seriousness of offense committed and the severity of juvenile court dispositions. Although this negative relationship is substantial, the positing of the alternate hypothesis does not seem plausible. Rather, the relationship that exists appears to be a function of the broad categories used in measuring the seriousness of offense committed. Also, since the independent variable in question has been utilized as a criterion by both the police and the probation department, it is probable that the types of offenses which reach the juvenile court tend to be similar in seriousness.²⁸ This similarity does not become evident in terms of the broad categories used. It should also

the socio-economic status of the offender and the juvenile court by females is regarded with more disdain since such appearances tend to be incompatible with common conceptions of the female role.

²⁸ While the three least serious offenses comprise 65% and the three most serious offenses comprise 6% of all offenses appearing in the police records, the three least serious offenses comprise only 9% of the offenses that appear in the juvenile court and the three most serious offenses comprise over 66% of the offenses appearing in the juvenile court records.

TABLE 3
SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OF CONTROL VARIABLES*

	Police	Juvenile Court
Number of Previous Offenses		
"Maleness" controlled22	.31
Age controlled22	—
Involvement with Adults		
Age controlled05	.13
"Maleness" controlled	—	.12
Age		
Number of previous offenses controlled12	—
Involvement with adults controlled16	.09
Involvement with opp. sex controlled	—	.09
"Maleness"		
Involvement with adults controlled	—	-.07
Involvement with opp. sex controlled	—	-.08
Number of previous offenses controlled	—	-.18

* Significant independent variables at the probation department level are unaffected by the introduction of control variables.

be pointed out that while the relationship between severity of juvenile court disposition approaches significance ($\tau = -.09$), this relationship appears to be a function of differences in prior records of delinquent behavior on the part of offenders of varying statuses. When the number of previous offenses committed is controlled, for example, the relationship in question becomes negligible ($\tau_{xy.z} = -.02$).

CONCLUSIONS

The status of the major hypotheses is summarized in Table 4. Consistently negative evidence leads to the rejection of two of our major hypotheses at each of the levels of the screening process. The severity of the societal reaction does not appear to be a function of either the power of the deviant or the social distance that exists between the deviant and agents of social control. These findings are significant in and of themselves in view of the vast amount of criminological literature that has taken the hypothesized relationships for granted.²⁹

Only one of the major hypotheses is completely and consistently supported at the three stages of

²⁹ Nearly any criminology, delinquency, or social problems text may serve as a reference to the fact that lower-status offenders, Negroes and Mexican-Americans, and males are thought to be discriminated against by agents of social control.

the legal-judicial process. This would seem to indicate that the severity of the societal reaction is a function, at least in part, of the amount of deviance engaged in by the offender. Also relevant, but less clearly so, are the degree of the deviation, the unfavorability of the personal and social biography of the deviant, the place in which the deviance is committed, and the unfavorability of the situation in which the deviance is committed. Each of these was supported to some extent at one or more of the stages of the screening process. At the same time, however, they are subject to qualification in that they were not consistently supported by: (1) each of the sub-hypotheses utilized as indicators of the major hypothesis and/or (2) tests of the sub-hypotheses at each of the three stages of the screening process. As they are stated, some of them appear to be too vague to be of much use in the study of the societal reaction.

Generally speaking, the severity of sanctions accorded juvenile offenders varies considerably from agency to agency. The police appear to utilize basically legalistic criteria in making disposition decisions. The variables that are regarded as criteria are the same as those which could be expected to guide their handling of adult offenders as well. In other words, the police appear to interpret the "best interests of the child" in terms of criteria also used when dealing with adult offenders.

While similar variables were found to be significant at the probation department level, they apparently do not possess the same degree of explanatory power. That is, those relationships which were found to be significant were of relatively small magnitude. While these variables may

TABLE 4
STATUS OF MAJOR HYPOTHESES

Status	Police	Probation	Juvenile Court
Supported	Amount Degree	Amount Degree	Amount Place
Partially Supported	Biography Situation	Biography	Biography Situation
Not Supported	Power Distance Place	Power Distance Place Situation	Power Distance Degree

be regarded as legalistic in orientation, it seems reasonable to assume that other variables, untapped in this research, are of greater significance. Given the emphasis in contemporary social work upon family-related variables as being of crucial importance in delinquency causation and treatment, the use of these variables might provide a useful manner of approaching the screening process as carried out at the probation department level.³⁰

The juvenile court judge utilizes a broader range of criteria than do either the police or the probation department. The criteria used tend to be partially legally based, but they are also significantly dependent upon the situation in which the offense is committed and the unfavorability of the personal and social biography of the offender. This seems to indicate an attempt at the "individualization" of sanctions by the juvenile court and, at the same time, an attempt to find criteria that are relevant given the previous decisions made in terms of legalistic criteria by the police and the probation department. Given that the number of previous offenses committed, age, degree of involvement with adult offenders, and number of individuals involved in an offense constitute some of the criteria utilized, the juvenile court's sanctioning of delinquent behavior may be indicative of a concern with the *extensiveness* of the individual's involvement in delinquent activities.

The variations that exist between agencies may be a function of the differences in orientation which characterize the agents of social control. If the police, probation officers, and juvenile court judges vary in terms of their conceptions of delinquency causation, delinquency prevention, and the rehabilitation of delinquents, we may expect corresponding variations in their reactions to delinquent behavior. On the other hand, variations may be due in large part to the characteristics of the offenders who appear before each of the agencies. Thus, the populations that are screened at each of the stages vary in terms of a number of important respects and the criteria utilized in according sanctions may derive from this rather than from preconceived notions concerning what is in the child's best interests. Probably, these are mutually reinforcing dimensions of the same problem.³¹

Clearly, further research which takes into account greater variety of independent variables, the orientation of agents of social control, other

possibly relevant social audiences, and a number of communities is called for. Beyond this, however, greater attention must also be given to theoretical formulations with respect to what the societal reaction consists of and how and why it varies. This research has certainly indicated that present theoretical formulations along these lines are far from being adequate.

DISCUSSION

In terms of the theoretical orientation utilized in this research, the development of career deviance concomitant with the adoption of a deviant role is a function of the societal reaction to behavior that has been identified and defined as deviant. Career deviance is thus closely linked to the severity of the reactions that take place in that as the reactions become more severe, the greater is the likelihood that the offender will be accorded a deviant status, and subsequently, develop a deviant role.

The screening process is of crucial significance for discovering the processes by which juveniles come to acquire the legal status of delinquent, i.e., adjudication as a delinquent by the juvenile court.³² The acquisition of this status has been shown to be dependent upon much more than simply committing a delinquent act or even a delinquent act of considerable severity. A constellation of other factors seem to be operating so as to prevent even the majority of those offenders committing the most serious types of acts from acquiring this status. As we have indicated, these factors include not only the degree of the deviation, but also the amount of deviance engaged in, the situations in which the deviance is committed, the place where the deviance occurs, and the unfavorability of the personal and social biography of the deviant. This leads to the implication that many juveniles who have acquired the legal status of "delinquent" differ from many juveniles who have not acquired this status in terms of a number of characteristics, but *not necessarily* in terms of having engaged in different types of delinquent behavior.

The legal status of delinquent does not seem to be easily attainable, however. While a chief function of primary agencies of social control is to identify, define, and sanction juvenile offenders (i.e., to accord deviant statuses), our evidence indicates that these agencies give the offender ample opportunity to avoid the status. This is

³⁰ See, e.g., Kinney, Klem, and Myers, *supra* note 7.

³¹ See BECKER, *OUTSIDERS*, *supra* note 1 at 161.

³² See Turk, *Prospects for Theories of Criminal Behavior*, 55 J. CRIM. L., C. & P. S. 457-458 (1964).

indicated by the fact that the number of previous offenses is consistently significant as a criterion in the screening process. It is usually only after failure (and, generally, repeated failure) to discontinue the commission of delinquent acts that juveniles find themselves appearing in the juvenile court for adjudication as a juvenile delinquent.³³ The key here does not seem to be "normalization" of the delinquent behavior, but instead the withholding of the more severe sanctions available to each agency of social control until the offender demonstrates by further misbehavior that the use of these sanctions is warranted. While sheer chance might result in the identification of the offender as one who has engaged in delinquent behavior, the acquisition of the status of a delinquent appears to involve considerably more than chance. In general, it involves especially the commission of the more serious types of delinquent acts, persistence in the commission of these acts, and commission by juveniles who are approaching the age of legal responsibility for their actions.

If this is the case, there are interesting theoretical and methodological implications for the study of delinquent behavior. The data available from primary agencies of social control may provide a more adequate indication of career delinquents rather than of delinquent behavior as such. If systematic deviant behavior characterizes the career deviant, then many juveniles who eventually appear in the juvenile court and who are institutionalized must be so classified since they have progressed to these stages in the legal-judicial process by virtue of relatively persistent delinquent behavior. A more adequate understanding of the functioning of the screening process may lead to a more accurate delineation of the processes involved

in career deviance as well as a more accurate assessment of the meaning of official statistics on crime and delinquency.

But there are practical implications involved as well. While our research has focused on only some of the many variables that may be relevant in screening, it seems to be a safe conclusion that legalistic variables play a significant role in the process at all of the stages considered. The use of full-time juvenile specialists in police and probation departments has not apparently produced drastic shifts in the bases for handling juvenile offenders. Instead, the seriousness of the offense committed, the offender's previous record, his age, and other variables that may be readily correlated with how control agents are thought to handle adults assume the greatest overall importance of all the variables used in this research. Presumably, they would remain important even if other variables had been introduced.

If the more severe dispositions (referrals supervision, institutionalization, etc.) are designed to prevent further misbehavior on the part of offenders so disposed of, then control agents utilize these dispositions on the basis of criteria which may not necessarily be most appropriate. That is, before counselling services, probation supervision, institutional correctional programs, and other facilities are implemented the offender must generally have committed serious offenses, committed a number of previous offenses, and be relatively old. Offenders who may warrant and, perhaps, profit by these programs and services are generally denied access to them if they do not meet these criteria.

It appears to be necessary, then, to involve control agents in training programs in which they are informed that a variety of characteristics and/or situations other than simple legalistic variables may be used to predict the future behavior of offenders and that the utilization of such might be a more adequate means of selecting dispositions that will eventuate in the prevention of further delinquent behavior. As the situation exists at present, it is apparent that delinquent careers may be fairly well underway before formal rehabilitative measures are implemented.

³³ First offenses constitute 38.2% of the offenses occurring at the police level of analysis, but only 7.3% of those at the juvenile court level and 4.0% of the offenses that result in institutionalization. On the other hand, offenses involving offenders who have committed five or more previous offenses constitute 20.4% of the offenses occurring at the police level of analysis, but 58.1% of those at the juvenile court level and 70.4% of the offenses that result in institutionalization.