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DELINQUENCY RESEARCH AND THE SELF-CONCEPT VARIABLE

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The present paper considers the self-concept variable in delinquency research. The seminal work with this variable, done by Reckless and his colleagues, is the subject of analysis. The various papers published by the Reckless group are viewed as a series of interim reports of an on-going research process. The authors note that while the research has been of crucial importance to the delinquency literature, there are problems of sampling, measurement, and interpretation as well as a lack of theoretical orientation which place very severe restrictions on the predictive utility of the self-concept variable. They observe that although there is a high probability of the utility of the variable, more refined and sophisticated studies are necessary.

A wide variety of variables have been related to delinquency rates. These include demographic variables,¹ social structural variables,² variables having to do with perception of the social structures,³ and occasionally personality variables.⁴ In a recent paper by Himelhoch,⁵ the point is made, without much elaboration, that personality variables may indeed be necessary for an adequate prediction scheme in delinquency research. He makes a plea in his paper for multi-level analyses which ought to include at one time variables of structure, perception of structure, and personality.

A case can be made for engaging in such research on a number of counts. In the first place, while structural variables seem to be the primary focus in delinquency research carried on by sociologists, the results of their studies can by no means be taken as heartening. For example, in a recent paper by Westie and Turk, in which they examine the question of the relationship of social class to delinquency, they point out that it is quite possible to support findings which indicate more delinquency in the lower class than the middle class, more delinquency in the middle class than the lower class, or no differences by class, on the basis

of both current research and theory.⁶ Similarly, those studies which relate demographic variables to delinquency rates do not by any means achieve the same results.

While some students of delinquency have been able to find that delinquents and non-delinquents have differing perceptions of the structure which they confront, in no case has it been determined that those perceptions precede delinquency or non-delinquency or are a consequence of delinquency or non-delinquency. That very criticism can be made of studies which claim to discriminate between delinquents and non-delinquents on the basis of personality measures, although studies of personality variables and delinquency are most uncommon in the sociological literature.

Apparently the major point, which is not made with the strength necessary in Himelhoch's paper, is that delinquency research has reached a stage where study designs ought to include variables at all of the levels we have mentioned, and that designs aimed at discriminating between groups are, at this stage, less important than are designs aimed at determining the amount of variance which can be accounted for in delinquency and non-delinquency by variables at a number of levels of analysis. In other words, we are now due for designs in delinquency research which are analysis of variance designs.

If the ambiguity and contradictions in our univariate forms of analysis are ever to be understood, then it seems that the analysis of variance design is one which ought to be employed. It does

¹ See especially Chilton, *Continuity in Delinquency Area Research: A Comparison of Studies for Baltimore, Detroit, and Indianapolis*, 29 AM. SOC. REV., 71-83 (1964).

² For example, see CLOWARD & OHLIN, *DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY* (1960).

³ See Short, Jr., Rivera & Tennyson, *Perceived Opportunities, Gang Membership and Delinquency*, 30 AM. SOC. REV., 56-67 (1965).

⁴ Reckless, Dinitz & Murray, *SELF-CONCEPT AND AN INSULATOR AGAINST DELINQUENCY*, 21 AM. SOC. REV. 744-746 (1956).

⁵ Himelhoch, *DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY: AN END AND A BEGINNING OF THEORY*, GOULDNER & MILLER, Eds., *APPLIED SOCIOLOGY*, 189-206 (1965).

⁶ Westie & Turk, *A Strategy for Research on Social Class and Delinquency*, 56 J. CRIM. L., C. & P. S. 454-462 (1965).

have the virtue of giving the researcher an indication of the ways in which the interactions of variables from different levels of analysis combine to account for delinquency, and it seems that there is every indication that an understanding of the interaction effects of these variables may prove to be vastly more fruitful than a continued pursuit of univariate studies.

As Himelhoch has argued, however, sociologists concerned with delinquency research seem either to ignore variables at the level of personality, or to take them as given. Variables of personality seem to be in the domain of the psychologists and therefore out of the realm of the sociologist's competence or research concern. Perhaps that is a great error. There is available in our discipline a tradition of thought in the realm of personality and socialization which is not only respectable but also growing in measurement sophistication and applicability in empirical research. That is, of course, the tradition of symbolic interactionism.

Some sociologists have, in the past, investigated personality or self variables, keeping constant the social structural variables. Most important and impressive among these studies are the ones conducted by Professor Reckless and his associates, in which self-concept is viewed as a variable which seems effective in insulating boys against delinquency or in making them more vulnerable. Because this research has been so widely quoted and reprinted, and because it is practically the only research by sociologists in the area of delinquency which claims to handle variables of personality and self, it is wise, we believe, to undertake a thoroughgoing analysis of those researches, their designs, and the findings in order to determine what sociologists have been able to learn about delinquency and personality, as well as to determine what remains to be done in that area.

The behavior of the non-delinquent in a high delinquency area has occasioned a good deal of interest because of its possible implications for policies of social control. None of the studies by the Reckless group, however, draw such implications although they all claim to have discovered a crucial variable which differentiates delinquents and non-delinquents, and delinquents who have and have not been in contact with legal authorities as offenders. They do suggest that "self theory seems . . . to be the best operational basis for designing effective prevention and treatment

measures".⁷ This proposal is elaborated no further. As they state, the crucial variable is self-concept or "self-evaluation":

It is proposed that a socially appropriate or inappropriate concept of self and other is the basic component that steers the youthful person away from or toward delinquency and that those appropriate or inappropriate concepts represent differential response to various environments and confrontations of delinquent patterns.⁸

In this discussion we shall review the methodology and detailed results of several studies, and attempt to evaluate the extent to which these impose certain restrictions on the broad interpretation quoted above.

THE ORIGINAL STUDY: SELF CONCEPT AS AN INSULATOR AGAINST DELINQUENCY⁹

This was the first of the series of articles on the problem and deals exclusively with the boys whom we shall refer to as "good boys".

For this study, all thirty sixth-grade teachers in schools located in the highest white delinquency areas of Columbus, Ohio, were asked to nominate those white boys who would not, in their opinion, ever experience police or juvenile court contact; and the teachers were asked to give their reasons. Half of those eligible were nominated (i.e., 192). Of those, 51 students (27.3%) could not be located because of summer vacation. Of the remaining 141 boys, sixteen (11.3%) already had records and were eliminated from the sample. This left 125 "good boys"—and their mothers—who were interviewed. Each boy was administered the delinquency proneness (DE) and social responsibility (RE) scales of Gough's California Personality Inventory (CPI); a questionnaire on his occupational preference (the data from which do not appear among the results); and each was asked questions about his concept of himself, his family, and his interpersonal relations.

The results obtained for the "good boys" were: (1) Low scores on the DE scale and high scores on the RE scale; (2) "self-evaluations" which were law-abiding and obedient; and (3) very favorable perceptions of family interaction, and lack of

⁷ Reckless, Dinitz & Kay, *The Self Component in Potential Delinquency and Non-Delinquency*, 22 AM. SOC. REV., 570 (1957).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 569.

⁹ Reckless, Dinitz & Murray, *op cit supra* note 4.

resentment of close family (mother) supervision; (4) these families were maritally, residentially, and economically stable. The authors concluded: "Insulation against delinquency is an ongoing process reflecting internalization of non-delinquent values and conformity to the expectations of significant others".

Critique

1. The first and obvious problem is that, without knowing parallel results on a control group of so-called "bad boys", we cannot conclude that these results actually differentiate the two populations. Since this comparison is subsequently made at the time of a later study, we shall postpone further discussion of this issue.

2. Insofar as the term "insulation" implies present and/or future predictiveness as to actual delinquent behavior, the following difficulties arise:

(a) It is perhaps a truism to point out that court records do not contain evidence of all law-violating behavior, and particularly in the case of minors. Therefore, it is probably safe to guess that the previous offenders constituting 11.3% of the "good boys" is an underestimate. It is about half the proportion of previous offenders later found among the "bad boys".

(b) Since these boys were only 12 years old at this time, it would be more reasonable to look for a correlation between present "self-concept" and future "delinquency". Most of these boys (99 out of 125) were relocated in school four years later (at age 16), and four of them had been in "contact" with the police or juvenile court or both, one time each during the intervening years. Even this interval might be questioned as to whether it provides an adequate time span in which to validate actual "insulation". Together with the 16 "good boys" who were eliminated for this reason from the original sample, this makes 20 boys, or 14.4% of the 141 nominated "good boys" who were originally located.

(c) What is required is a comparison of the proportion of "contacts" among those scoring like "good boys" and those scoring like "bad boys" on the DE and RE scales from both actual groups of "good boys" and "bad boys" as nominated by the teachers. The analysis is not made anywhere, and is precluded by the exclusion of the 16 "contact" cases from the study of "good boys".

3. There is some clarification needed as to the use of teacher's nominations in this design. We have already seen that there is not a perfect

correlation between the teacher's evaluations of the boys and their actual (non-) delinquency, as operationally defined in this study.

(a) If the authors wanted to investigate that relationship, they would not have eliminated 11.3% of the "good boys" who had already experienced "contact" with juvenile court or police. Such an investigation would have shed an interesting sidelight on why, in spite of being capable of making a good impression, these boys also had police or court records. What if they had turned out to have relatively positive self-concepts instead of relatively negative ones—contrary to the author's later assumption? We would be in a much better position to evaluate the author's conclusion if they had elected to gather these data. On the other hand, it must be pointed out that the authors were presumably not interested in investigating this relationship. From their point of view, it could be argued that there is no need for a perfect correlation. The assumption is only that you have a little better chance of getting a pure non-delinquent sample if you have two criteria; that the delinquent who can slip by one of them is less likely to slip by both.

(b) Nevertheless, the margin of uncertainty about the meaning of the teachers' nominations is magnified by the fact that only one-half of the eligible students were nominated. Who are the remaining boys? We wonder how many of those not nominated as "good boys" and with no "contact" experience would have been found to have poor self-concepts? And how many of these would have had "contact" with the police or juvenile court? Conversely, we wonder how many of those not nominated but with no "contact" would have been found to have poor self-concepts. The magnitudes involved are certainly great enough to reverse or eliminate the reported relationships.

The fact remains, however, that if we are really interested in determining the effect of the self-concept upon delinquency vulnerability, then we ought not look for delinquent and non-delinquent groups, but rather for groups with clearly good and clearly bad self-concepts. How those would be distributed between later delinquent and non-delinquent groups would better determine the effect of self-concept as independent variable, upon delinquency as the dependent one. Clearly, a major issue in much of this research has to do with the delineation of the experimental variables. If self-concept is an "insulator against delinquency", this

implies that self-concept is an independent variable. But the research causes confusion because self-concept is treated as the dependent variable.

(c) There is some reason to feel uneasy also about the fairly high percentage (27.3%) of "good boys" who could not be located (i.e., 51 out of 192). This is particularly so when we compare the similar percentage for the "bad boys" nominated in the later study: 6.5% (or 7 out of 108). Thus, the original population of "good boys" (192) has been reduced by 34.9% ($51 + 16 = 67$), whereas no comparable shrinkage occurred in the "bad boy" population.

4. Our most serious concern, however, is with the instruments used to evaluate self-concept.

(a) In terms of the most elementary Meadian psychology, the relationship between frame of reference and self-evaluation, i.e., the correlation between teachers' nominations and the boys' responses to CPI items is not surprising. The CPI items obviously are drawn from a middle-class frame of reference, as are the teachers' impressions. They do not sample from an alternative frame of reference, in which positive instead of negative values might be placed on the same response. But we do not know whether a revised scoring procedure in itself could be sensibly interpreted. Therefore, we would prefer to substitute a less culture-bound measure such as the semantic differential, in which the individual is free to operate in terms of any (unspecified) frame of reference. (We will have more to say about this problem presently, in some general comments.)

(b) Viewed in this light, one might hypothesize that because of this frame of reference, boys who are nominated as "good" will continue to test positive on the CPI, until they are caught in a delinquent act, at which time—and not until—the middle-class frame of reference would operate to devalue their behavior, and supposedly that part of their self-concept. Unfortunately, no such separate analysis was made.

THE "GOOD BOYS" FOUR YEARS LATER¹⁰

Some of the questions raised in the previous section about the interpretation of the "insulation" of the "good boys" in these studies may now be answered. Of the original 125 on whom data had been collected, only 103 boys (82.4%) were re-

located, now age 16, but only 99 of them were still in school. The others were not retested. These boys' homeroom teachers were again requested to nominate the boys as (a) ones who would not experience difficulty with the law, (b) ones who would get into trouble, or (c) ones about whom the teacher was unsure, and why. Each of the boys was again checked through police and juvenile court files "for official or unofficial violation behavior in the intervening years", and their school records were checked. Their mothers or mother-surrogates were again interviewed.

The results were as follows: Ninety-five of the boys were again nominated by their teachers as unlikely to get into trouble with the law. The reasons indicated "quietness", "good family", and "good student". Four of these boys had become known to the police or juvenile court, or both—one time each during the intervening years. Ninety-six boys were enrolled in the academic program, although they showed a more or less normal distribution scholastically and in attendance (in which respect there had been no significant change over time). Ninety-eight expected to finish high school. Ninety-one remained aloof from boys in trouble with the law. The families of these boys, who were found in the original study to be typical of the families in the school areas in terms of father's occupation, were not nearly as residentially mobile as anticipated. (A separate analysis comparing the respondents who remained in the high delinquency areas with those who had achieved upward mobility revealed no significant difference on any of the indices included.) The boys' responses on the tests "and, apparently, in behavior as well", were consistent with their earlier performances.

On an additional measure, the Short-Nye seven-item scale of admitted delinquent behavior, "The good boys appear almost angelic". The authors question, however, the reliability of this result because they were unable to replicate the Short-Nye scale in any of their own more recent studies and because of the lack of anonymity of the boys, ". . . and their younger age". The boys' reports on their families were again favorable, somewhat more so than previously.

Critique

1. Now it is somewhat more clear that self-concept is the independent variable and that delinquency is the dependent one. At least it is clear if one keeps the first paper in mind. Of greatest interest is the finding that most of the "good

¹⁰ Scarpitti, Murray, Dinitz & Reckless, *The "Good" Boy in a High Delinquency Area: Four Years Later*, 25 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 555-558 (1960).

boys" located again are still in school (99/103 = 96.1%), and all but three are in the academic program. We wonder if this might not imply that the factor differentiating good from bad boys is ability to perform adequately in school. Glueck's findings on comparative intelligence between the normal and reformatory population would tend to support this interpretation: "It will be seen that the reformatory population contains a considerable excess of dull, borderline, and feebleminded groups."¹¹

2. There are, however, several reasons why this interpretation may be unwarranted:

(a) The later studies do not give information on how many of the "bad boys" similarly remained in school (and in an academic program).

(b) Even if we found the proportion to be radically different, it would be quite reasonable to argue that this was because of their delinquency, lack of motivation, rejection by their teachers, or any one of a number of other factors than intelligence *per se*. However, it might have been helpful for narrowing the possible interpretations to have such a measure, providing it too wasn't class-biased.

(c) Of the boys still in school, half were still in the compulsory attendance age bracket.

3. In the relocation of the "good boys", 22 of the original sample were lost. Although this is three times as many as were lost from the "bad boy" sample, because of the fact that the original nominees from the population were almost 50% more for the "good boys" than for the "bad boys", it means in effect that the retested samples were approximately in the same proportions to the original populations for both groups: 99/141 = 70.2% of the "good boys" and 70/101 = 69.3% of the "bad boys."

4. We are also faced again with the questionable interpretation of the teachers' nominations. Why were they again asked to nominate each boy as a likely or unlikely candidate for trouble?

(a) In this case they were not choosing the boys out of the total class; if they had, perhaps fewer would have been nominated as "good boys".

(b) We do not know whether the four "good boys" still in school but not renominated were nominated as likely to get into trouble, or whether in their case the teacher was "unsure" (an additional category not previously used).

(c) It is interesting to point out that the four boys who had police or court contact in the intervening years are not these four (who were *not* renominated), but are among those the teachers again nominated as unlikely to get into trouble.

(d) It is not clear whether these are the only boys out of those relocated who had been "in trouble", or whether they are the only ones out of those still in school. If the latter is the case, and it appears to be, then there remains some question about the "insulation" of the four boys *not* in school.

(e) We are left with 95 "good boys" (67.4%) out of the original 141 nominated and tested about whom we can say with some (but not absolute) confidence that they have not been delinquent. Because of the unfortunate reporting of data, we cannot determine the comparable figure for the "bad boys." We know there were 20 offenders among the original "good boys" at the end of the study, but we don't know how many there were among the "bad boys" (because some of the earlier and later offenders may be the same boys).

THE SELF COMPONENT IN POTENTIAL DELINQUENCY AND NON-DELINQUENCY;¹² A SELF-GRADIENT AMONG POTENTIAL DELINQUENTS¹³

The sample of potential delinquents were nominated a year after the "good boy" study by 37 sixth-grade teachers in the same 20 schools in a white high delinquency area in Columbus, Ohio. Approximately one-fourth (108) of those eligible were nominated as "headed for police and juvenile court contact". Apparently population growth in the area had increased the white sixth-grade population by about 13% (from ca. 384 to ca. 432) and the number of sixth-grade teachers by 23% (from 30 to 37) (There may have been a greater increase in the area's Negro population than in its white population). Only seven of these boys could not be located; the remaining 101, and their mothers, were interviewed. A check of the police and juvenile court files revealed that 24 of these twelve-year-old boys (23%) were already on record for previous offenses which ranged from charges of incorrigibility to theft.

The results, when compared with the first study, were as follows: The "bad boy" scores

¹² Reckless, Dinitz & Kay, *op cit supra* note 7.

¹³ Dinitz, Reckless & Kay, *A Self-Gradient Among Potential Delinquents*, 49 J. CRIM. L., C. & P. S. 230-233 (1958).

¹¹ GLUECK, S. & E., FIVE HUNDRED CRIMINAL CAREERS, 156 (1939).

. . . were significantly higher on the DE and lower on the RE scales than those made by the 'good boys' of the first study. Indeed, this mean delinquency vulnerability score was higher than that achieved by any of the non-delinquents and non-disciplinary sample subjects treated in other studies. Similarly, the mean social responsibility score was lower than those recorded in other studies for all but prisoners, delinquents, and school disciplinary cases. These scores seem to validate the judgments of the teachers in selecting these boys as ones who would get into future difficulties with the law.

Not only do these scales appear to differentiate between the potentially delinquent and non-delinquent, but even more importantly they were found to discriminate within the sample of nominated delinquents between those boys who had and those who had not experienced previous court contact. . . . These differences between the contact and non-contact groups on both sides were statistically significant.¹⁴

Critique

(We shall not repeat the points already discussed as parts of the preceding sections.)

1. Adding to the confusion of possible interpretations already mentioned is the fact that the samples were not "designed" in a parallel manner. It will be recalled that in order to isolate "a truly non-delinquent group" for the first study, the investigators discarded sixteen cases (11.3%) of the "good boys" who could be located. This procedure would lead one to think that the interest was in fact correlating certain psychological patterns with behavioral patterns. However, we find that in the second study no such "purity" is attempted, and the 77 boys (76.8% of the 101 "bad boys" located) who did *not* have records for previous offenses were retained in the sample. Had the parallel operation been carried out, the "truly delinquent" group would have been considerably smaller, thus altering the statistical results of the measure. However, it should be pointed out that this type of attrition would have led to more, rather than less, significant results. The problem, therefore, is not the validity of the statistics, but rather the *interpretation* in comparing two non-parallel groups.

2. The second most critical point to make is that there is further contamination of variables due

to the fact that the teachers' knowledge of the boys' involvement with the law "undoubtedly influenced" their nominations. Therefore, we have neither an independent "nomination variable" nor independent behavior variable. (We shall subsequently discuss the possible contamination of the third and critical variable, the test and interview responses.)

3. Although it is not possible to infer *a priori* whether any bias in sampling occurred because of the increase in number of teachers participating (37 as against 30 in the first study), it should be noted that there were large teacher differences in the number of "bad boys" nominated. In some classrooms 60% of the eligible boys were nominated, whereas nine teachers nominated no one. (There was an average of 11.7 white boys per class, out of whom an average of 2.9 were nominated as headed for trouble.) These differences may reflect school policy to segregate potential disrupters, but we do not know.

We should point out that the statement that "these scores seem to validate the judgment of the teachers in selecting these boys as ones who would get into future difficulties with the law" implies some "validation" of the teachers' nominations against the nominees' later (future) actual behavior. This interpretation clearly may be unwarranted insofar as the only relationship being described is that teachers' nominations succeeded in creating two groups (at two different times) whose average scores on the DE and RE scales were significantly different. Moreover, we do not know how many of the same teachers were involved in both tests.

5. With respect to the comparisons of the "contact cases" and "non-contact cases", the conclusion that "it is apparent that the contact cases in many respects seem to be confirmed in their delinquent self-concepts to a greater extent than are the others" is justified in light of the results. What is not warranted, however, is the investigators' projected *evaluation* of his self-concept as a negative one to the boys being studied. A delinquent self-concept is not necessarily a negative concept.

DELINQUENCY VULNERABILITY¹⁵

The follow-up study four years later of the "bad boys" succeeded in relocating 70 boys, now 16 years

¹⁵ Dinitz, Scarpitti & Reckless, *Delinquency Vulnerability: A Cross-Group and Longitudinal Analysis*, 27 AM. SOC. REV. 515-517 (1962).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

old. We know nothing of how many were in school or in an academic program, and there is no report of second set of teachers' nominations. Twenty-seven (38.6%) of these seventy boys "had had serious and frequent contact with the court during the four-year interlude. These 27 boys averaged slightly more than three contacts with the court, involving separate complaints for delinquency". However, we do not know how many (if any) of these 27 are the same boys (24 of them) who had already had records at the time of the first testing, or whether they are different boys from the original population. As was mentioned earlier, both the "good" and "bad" follow-up samples are approximately the same proportion of the originally located, but untested, nominee groups. The "good" group lost 11.3% of its boys before testing began because of their delinquency records, whereas none of the located "bad boys" was dropped. The "bad" group, on the other hand, diminished proportionately more in size between the first and second testing, which may be considered more serious because it was an *uncontrolled* shrinkage of the *tested* population. The result is that the "good" follow-ups constitute 82.4% of their originally tested group and the "bad" follow-up constitute only 69.3% of theirs. Results of the second follow-up indicated that the "bad boys" mean score on the DE scale had not changed (it was 23.6 and at second testing was 23.4), and was still significantly "worse" than the "good boys" (whose mean score was 14.2, and at the second testing 13.6). The authors also note that "whereas the individual scores of the 70 'bad' boys on the DE scale at age 16 correlated with their scores at 12 years of age to the extent of $r = .78$ ", the "coefficient of correlation (r) of the DE scores for the boys in the 'good' cohort at 16 and at 12 years of age was only .15". They do not attempt to give any explanation for this difference in the groups' longitudinal stability. Certainly this is a most important finding and requires further understanding.

GENERAL COMMENTS

There are criticisms which pertain to the series of studies as a whole, and which are so important as to restrict severely the authors' interpretations given, even if all the foregoing is deemed irrelevant or incorrect. Of major concern to us are the measures which were used to define operationally the boys' self-concepts. In the first place, it is not made quite clear in the original studies whether

the conclusions with regard to self-concept are based on the Gough (DE and RE) CPI Scales, or whether the conclusion is based on the boys' answers to questions about their expectations of getting into trouble, or whether it was based on attitude items such as whether "any real trouble persons have with the law can be 'fixed' if they know the right people", whether it had to do with their descriptions of their home life or the degree to which they and their mothers (or mother-surrogates) seemed to agree.

It would be helpful in deciding which items are appropriate to a self-concept measure to differentiate between questions of *fact* and questions of *evaluation*. It is our opinion that only the latter is relevant to self-concept. Therefore, insofar as the boy states facts as he perceives them about his present behavior, the age and delinquency of his companions, "activity level" (whatever that is), whether he relies more on his friends or his parents for advice, etc., he tells us nothing about whether he thinks these are good or bad things, i.e., how these reflect on him personally and in his own judgment. Even in his judgment about the likelihood of his getting into trouble in the future, we do not know whether 1) this is self-criticism, 2) a badge of bravado, or 3) whether the prediction is accurate.

If we look at the operational definitions which are more ambiguously stated in the later studies, we see that they consist primarily of these kinds of statements:

On a nine-item quasi-scale or inventory, which measures the boys' favorable or unfavorable *projections of self in reference to getting into trouble with the law*, the cohort of 103 sixteen-year-old insulated slum boys showed an average score of 15.8. In this instance, the inventory was scored from 10 for the most favorable answers to 19 for the most unfavorable answers on all nine items. The 70 vulnerable 16-year-old slum boys scored an average of 18.9 on this quasi-scale.¹⁶

Could not these results be regarded as a statistically reasonable prediction by the boys of future events based on their respective past histories? Could it not be possible that the "bad boys" take some pride in their "record" and consider it a necessary adjunct to their self-image to be "tough" and "in trouble"?

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 516. (Emphasis added.)

Later in the same article quoted above, the following operational definition is given:

Regarding favorable or unfavorable concepts of self as measured by responses to questions such as "up to now, do you think things have gone your way?" or "do you feel that grown ups are usually against you?" or "do you expect to get an even break from people in the future?" there was no major change in the percentage distribution of the responses of the two cohorts at age 12 and at age 16. The good cohort had a very high percentage of favorable responses and the bad cohort a low percentage favorable responses. On all three questions listed above, the percentage of favorable responses for the 103 good boys at age 16 was 90. For the 70 bad boys at 16 the percentage of favorable responses on the first of the above listed questions was 50; on the second, 29; on the third, 30.¹⁷

It is reasonable again to ask whether the "bad boys" responses are not simply realistic reflections of the fact that these same boys "... who had already been in trouble with the law defined themselves significantly more often than the others as likely candidates for getting into future difficulties with the police and the courts".¹⁸

Does it not reflect the fact that their mothers think so too; and that their teachers think so? Is it not just another way of saying that their "family affectional relationships" are not satisfactory? But, does it also necessarily mean that these boys have no recourse but to accept these negative evaluations of *these others as their own evaluations of themselves*? We would argue that this is not the case, but that these boys look elsewhere for positive self-reflection, and that they may find it in their friends, which is the meaning of their seeking advice from friends more than from parents. A major problem appears to be that the authors may have selected sets of others for the boys, i.e., mother and teacher, both of whom are not significant "others" from the boys' own points of view.¹⁹

In summary, we would say that these studies have demonstrated:

1. That there is a certain amount of agreement between teachers and parents on the likelihood of certain boys getting into trouble; it has not demonstrated that this consensus agrees with either present or future actual experience.

2. That boys are aware of the judgments their elders make of them; it has not demonstrated the boys' acceptances of these evaluations of them as their own.

3. That this is true for the so-called "good boys" as well as the "bad boys"; and we still do not know whether the former think well of themselves and the latter do not.

The primary problem that is raised by Reckless' treatment of self is this: from any collection of questionnaire or interview responses, what kinds of conclusions can we draw about the self? It is not enough to say that these responses represent the subject's self. Since almost anything one can say may have some bearing on the self, we must have rules for extracting that aspect or implication of the statement relevant to self; otherwise we have no basis for distinguishing self from non-self, for everything is self. And that is the trouble with these studies. If everything is self, then self becomes another word for everything and its value is destroyed! A general hodgepodge of items from the CPI, questions asked of mother, son and teacher all thrown into the pot of self seems to destroy the meaning of self for research usage.

Vastly improved measurement in all of sociology is necessary. But adequate self-concept measurement is a dire necessity. We do not wish, however, to belabor the point. This research represents an important contribution to delinquency theory as well as to general social psychology. The papers have been reprinted in numbers of books of readings. It has been our experience that teachers, school administrators, public officials concerned with youth problems and others are very much aware of the Reckless *et al.* studies and in some cases try to operate in terms of these findings. But it would seem that there are some problems with this work which require adequate investigation. Nevertheless, Professor Reckless has opened an important door.

Our second comment in general has to do with the interpretation of the correspondence between the two studies. It will be remembered that the two cohorts were examined a year apart and taken from the same schools. They were not done con-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

¹⁸ Dinitz, Reckless & Kay, *op cit supra* note 7, at p. 232.

¹⁹ Schwartz & Tangri, *A Note on Self-Concept As An Insulator Against Delinquency*, 30 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 922-926 (1965).

temporarily. This may have had the advantage of avoiding invidious comparisons between the two groups of boys. However, in order to have confidence in the lack of bias on the part of the *investigators who administered the tests and interviewed the parents*, we would have to know whether or not they knew which cohort they were interviewing. In light of the fact that the data on the students in the good cohort were published soon after the data on the bad cohort were collected, (which means, in effect, that the results were known sometime earlier), and considering the fact that all these studies have been done by substantially the same group of investigators, we are inclined to believe that the investigators' own interviewers knew which cohort was which *while they were collecting data*.

Finally, we would point out that a theoretical link is missing from this research. Why should poor self-concept leave the individual vulnerable to delinquency? It might be argued, for example, that a poor self-concept ought to produce behavior more in conformity with the demands of significant others like mother or teacher. Or does

poor self-concept lead to rejecting the rejectors and subsequent attributions of significance to those others who prove rewarding to the self (say, delinquent peers)?

Is it enough to indicate that more nominated "bad boys" than "good boys" become delinquent, even though the number of "bad boys" who become delinquent is less than 50% of the total nominated. In short, we are not yet convinced that "self-concept" is a major contributor to the variance in delinquent behavior. No small part of our skepticism arises from the atheoretical orientation of the Reckless work.

Even if all the foregoing criticism of this research were to be determined to be incorrect, the fact of the matter is that until this same form of research is undertaken in a somewhat more sophisticated way and a design is formed which includes not only self variables but also structural and cognitive (such as perception of structure) variables, and until the interaction effects from all of these levels as well as the main effects of each are understood, then it will continue to be impossible to develop predictive accuracy with reference to juvenile delinquency.