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SERIOUSNESS OF DELINQUENCY, THE ADJUDICATIVE DECISION AND RECIDIVISM—A LONGITUDINAL CONFIGURATION ANALYSIS

ANTHONY MEADE*

Introduction

This study presents configurational analyses of successive stages in the juvenile justice system. The data represent official delinquency records provided by a county juvenile court within a large southeastern metropolitan area. At least two recent studies have employed formal delinquency data in the investigation of the relation of selected variables, or attributes, to juvenile delinquency. A study by Chilton and Markle investigated the relative effects of family disruption, race and social class upon seriousness of delinquency.¹ Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin, in their impressive birth cohort analysis, also examined the influence of such background variables and characteristics as social class, school problems, race and age in distinguishing between serious and less serious offenders, as well as between recidivists and nonrecidivists.² Those attributes included in the present analyses represent traditionally proposed independent variables which are expected to influence the seriousness of delinquency, the extent of delinquency and the behavior of court personnel within the decision-making process.

The Sample

A random sample of 500 cases was selected from the 8,476 delinquent offenders recorded by the county juvenile court from January 1, 1968 through December 31, 1970. The court was concerned with developing a screening instrument which would serve to distinguish those first offenders having a high probability of repeating delinquent behavior from those who would not likely return to the court. Analysis was confined to basic demographic characteristics for two reasons. First, the data were readily accessible, at least in raw form, from the intake records of all offenders. Second, subsequent use of more sophisticated

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¹Chilton & Markle, *Family Disruption, Delinquent Conduct and the Effect of Subclassification*, 37 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 93 (1972).

²M. WOLFGANG, R. FIGLIO & T. SELLIN, *DELINQUENCY IN A BIRTH COHORT* (1972).

psychological tests or attitudinal data would require a greater time investment and more subjective judgment on the part of intake workers. It was precisely this matter of time at intake, as well as the steady increase in case loads among case workers during the years 1967-1971, that concerned the court.

All first offenders were monitored for at least eighteen months to determine their rate of recidivism. For example, if a juvenile became an offender on December 31, 1970, his record was followed until June 30, 1971. Fifty-four cases transferred to other juvenile court jurisdictions were lost because follow-up data were unavailable. Seven cases were excluded due to the absence of critical data. The final sample included 439 cases of which 308 involved males and 131 females. Of the total sample, 162 cases involved recidivists.

The Data

Information on race, social class, sex, age, family structure, school status, type of first offense, disposition of first offense and recidivism status was gathered for all 439 subjects. Thirty-one per cent of the offenders were black; the remainder were white. "Social class" refers to the economic status of the census block in which the juvenile resided at the time of his first offense.³ Males constituted seventy per cent of the sample. Age was divided into those who were fifteen or sixteen years old at the time of their first offense (61 per cent), and those below fifteen (39 per cent). School status distinguished between those who were either dropouts or who had failed at least one grade (48 per cent), and those who were in school and were not behind in grade placement (52 per cent). Family structure

³"Social class" refers to a combined index of mean, house-lot sale value and mean, contracted monthly-rent. These values were determined from the census block residence for each offender. The represented sale-value and monthly rent figures were dicotomized at the median. Only those offenders whose residential value fell below the sample median on both indexes simultaneously were classified as low class (37 per cent). (See U. S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, *CENSUS OF HOUSING 1970: BLOCK STATISTICS, Final Report HC(3)-56*, Atlanta, Georgia Urbanized Area (1971).

was classified as disrupted (69 per cent) or non-disrupted (31 per cent).⁴

In this study, a delinquent offense was operationalized in terms of behavior so defined by the state juvenile code and resulting in an official petition before the county juvenile court. First offenses were classified into serious and nonserious categories. Serious offenses referred only to those acts which would be classified as criminal if committed by an adult (56 per cent), while nonserious offenses referred to status offenses, *i.e.*, those applicable exclusively to juveniles (44 per cent).⁵ Disposition of first offense was dichotomized into those acts in which a formal hearing resulted (29 per cent), and those in which some less formal remedial action took place (71 per cent). If an offender's record contained more than one official petition for delinquency, he was classified as a recidivist (37 per cent). These petitions, of course, referred to separate delinquent events.

Hypotheses

Recent research presents results which emphasize relationships between race, social class and seriousness of delinquent offense.⁶ In each of these studies, either Negro status or low socioeconomic status were positively related to seriousness of offense. Similarly, studies have consistently determined that males commit more serious offenses than females.⁷ Age of onset of delinquency and problems in school also have been found to be pre-

⁴ A disrupted family refers here to any family situation other than one in which both natural parents are present in the home.

⁵ Injury to the person, robbery by force, theft by taking, burglary, motor vehicle theft, weapons offenses, narcotics offenses, criminal trespass and disorderly conduct were classified as serious offenses. Violation of beer and wine law, sex offenses, runaway, ungovernable, truancy and curfew violation were classified as nonserious offenses.

⁶ The influence of race and social class upon violence of offense is clearly brought out in Cohen, *Interneec Conflict: The Offender*, in DELINQUENCY: SELECTED STUDIES 112 (T. Sellin & M. Wolfgang eds. 1969). Similar results, at the ecological level, are observed when using the Sellin-Wolfgang measure of seriousness as the dependent variable. See Turner, *The Ecology of Delinquency*, DELINQUENCY, *supra* at _____. Self-report results are presented by M. GOLD, DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR IN THE CITY (1970). Chilton & Markle, *supra* note 1, demonstrated relationships between both race and social class, and seriousness of delinquency for a population of offenders. WOLFGANG, FIGLIO & SELLIN, *supra* note 2, present conclusive results for a population of males.

⁷ GOLD, *supra* note 6; Barker & Adams, *Comparison of Delinquencies of Boys and Girls*, 53 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 470 (1962); Chilton & Markle, *supra* note 1.

dictive of delinquency seriousness.⁸ Similarly, serious offenders are overrepresented among children from broken homes.⁹

One of the most interesting aspects of at least three of these studies is the observation and examination of interaction effects among the independent variables. Chilton and Markle, for example, obtained the following gamma values between proposed independent variables and the variable of delinquency seriousness: age, .40; race, .39; social class, .23; family disruption, .18; sex, .10.¹⁰ Through tabular analysis they also demonstrated that the effect of family disruption upon seriousness of delinquency is less for black children than for white children. Similarly, the results indicate that family disruption is less important for lower class children than is the case for those in the higher social class categories. Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin found the effect of age of onset of first offense upon seriousness of delinquency to be greater for blacks than for whites.¹¹ Gold observed a relationship between low social class and delinquency for males, but not for females.¹² Configurational analysis should therefore include tests for interaction due to the increased descriptive value that such techniques contribute.¹³

The hypotheses presented within this section conceive of seriousness of offense as a function of traditionally proposed independent variables. Blackness, low social class, educational failure, family disruption, maleness and older age are all viewed as independent variables which lead to

⁸ WOLFGANG, FIGLIO, & SELLIN, *supra* note 2; Chilton & Markle, *supra* note 1; and Cohen, *supra* note 6, all observed a positive relationship between ages through sixteen years and seriousness of delinquency. Social problems were found to be important by WOLFGANG, FIGLIO, & SELLIN *supra* note 2; and by GOLD, *supra* note 6.

⁹ GOLD, *supra* note 6; R. STERNE, DELINQUENT CONDUCT AND BROKEN HOMES (1966); Chilton & Markle, *supra* note 1; Ferninand, *The Offense Patterns and Family Structures of Urban, Village, and Rural Delinquents*, 55 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 86 (1964).

¹⁰ These values, other than the family structure-delinquency seriousness correlation value, were computed by the author from the tabular results presented in Chilton & Markle, *supra* note 1.

¹¹ WOLFGANG, FIGLIO & SELLIN, *supra* note 2, at 148.

¹² GOLD, *supra* note 6, at 73.

¹³ Sensitivity to this problem and ground-breaking methodological advances are to be found in T. HIRSCHI & H. SELVIN, DELINQUENCY RESEARCH, 99-113 (1967); J. SONQUIST & J. MORGAN, THE DETECTION OF INTERACTION EFFECTS (1964); Wilkins & MacNaughton Smith, *New Prediction and Classification Methods in Criminology*, 1 J. RES. CRIME & DELINQUENCY 19 (1964).

serious delinquency. No specific hypotheses will be advanced regarding interaction effects due to the paucity of theoretical and empirical precedent. The tests for interaction that are made in this study should be evaluated for their descriptive worth and as stimulants for more advanced exercises in model-building.

Arnold found minority-group members (Mexican-Americans and Negroes) "more likely to have their offenses brought before the juvenile court judge" for a formal hearing than was the case for majority group members.¹⁴ Similarly, family disruption exhibited a significant effect upon disposition. Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin demonstrated the influence of race, social class and seriousness of offense upon official handling of male offenders.¹⁵ Negroes, lower class youths and the more serious offenders were less likely than whites, upper class youths and nonserious offenders to receive remedial handling. Terry also observed the effect of seriousness of first offense upon official disposition (formal hearing), as well as a positive relationship between advanced age and official disposition.¹⁶ It should be apparent that interest has now been refocused from a concern with the delinquent behavior of the juvenile to the decision-making behavior of the agents of social control. The objective here is to determine the relative importance of a selected set of variables upon the disposition of delinquency cases. The present study examines the effects of offender characteristics upon the decision by court personnel to expose the juvenile to a formal hearing. In this context, blackness, low class, family disruption, school failure, maleness, older age and seriousness of offense are all hypothesized as positively (statistical direction) influencing the decision to process the offender to a more advanced social control state, *i.e.*, the formal hearing.

The phenomenon of recidivism represents another behavioral state in the study of juvenile delinquency. Concern is once more centered on offender behavior. However, questions arise

¹⁴ Arnold, *Race and Ethnicity Relative to Other Factors in Juvenile Court Disposition*, 77 AM. J. SOCIOLOGY 217 (1971). See also GOLDMAN, THE DIFFERENTIAL SELECTION OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS FOR COURT APPEARANCE 285 (1963) for evidence of a relationship between race of offender and formal hearing decision.

¹⁵ WOLFGANG, FIGLIO & SELLIN, *supra* note 2, at 218-43.

¹⁶ Terry, *The Screening of Juvenile Offenders*, 58 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 173-81 (1967). GOLDMAN, *supra* note 14, at 285, found a similar relationship between age and severity of disposition.

whether or not the original variable configuration remains the same, and what effect, if any, official intervention might have upon recidivism. The same hypotheses presented in the discussion of seriousness of first offense are restated when considering recidivism as the dependent variable. The only change is the addition of one new hypothesis. It is hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between formal hearing at time of first offense and recidivism. Kirkpatrick found juvenile court recidivism to be related to Negro status and school problems.¹⁷ Arbuckle and Litwack observed lower parole success rates for older juvenile offenders.¹⁸ Unkovic and Ducsay found maleness, seriousness of first offense and race to be the best predictors of recidivism.¹⁹ Most recently, Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin presented results which stress the influence of race, social class, school problems, seriousness of first offense and court hearing at first offense upon juvenile recidivism.²⁰

Results

In order to become familiar with the data, and to obtain a basic configuration of statistically significant independent variables, analysis by means of the Yule's Q statistic was undertaken. Q has a range between +1.00 and -1.00. The Q value of +.541 in Table 1 between sex and seriousness of offense, for example, is interpreted as saying we would do 54 percent better than chance if we always predict that the male is the more serious offender and the female the less serious offender. A Q value of .000 means that we would do no better than chance.²¹ Table 1 presents zero-order correlations between seriousness of offense and those earlier-hypothesized independent variables.

Only race, family and sex demonstrate statistically significant Q values. Both school and age are correlated with seriousness of offense in the direction opposite to that hypothesized, *i.e.*, school failures and older youths commit less serious offenses. Neither of these values, however, is statistically significant. Low social class is predictive of more serious offenses, but is not statistically sig-

¹⁷ Kirkpatrick, *Some Significant Factors in Juvenile Recidivism*, 7 AM. J. ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 349 (1937).

¹⁸ Arbuckle & Litwack, *A Study of Recidivism Among Juvenile Delinquents*, 54 FED. PROBATION 45 (1960).

¹⁹ Unkovic & Ducsay, *An Application of Configurational Analysis to the Recidivism of Juvenile Delinquent Behavior*, 60 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 340 (1969).

²⁰ WOLFGANG, FIGLIO & SELLIN, *supra* note 2.

²¹ J. DAVIS, *ELEMENTARY SURVEY ANALYSIS* 49 (1971).

TABLE 1

SERIOUSNESS OF FIRST OFFENSE AS PREDICTED BY
TRADITIONALLY-PROPOSED INDEPENDENT
VARIABLES

Variable	Q Value	Decision*	Direction
Race	+ .190	significant	correct
Class	+ .120	not significant	correct
School	- .131	not significant	wrong
Family	+ .169	significant	correct
Sex	+ .541	significant	correct
Age	- .125	not significant	wrong

* This is a one-tailed test for significance at .05 level.²²

nificant. Indeed, when statistically controlling for race, the first-order partial correlation between social class and seriousness of offense decreases to +.043. The variables of race, family, and sex consistently hold up when controlling for each of the other variables through first-order partial correlations.²³ In summary, maleness, blackness and family disruption, in order of strength of correlation, appear to be the best predictors of seriousness of offense.

The variables sex, race and family are next subjected to a test regarding their relative main effects upon the odds of being a serious offender, and as to whether any interaction effects might be detected. As can be seen from Table 2, 72 per cent of the extreme cases (1, 1, 1) are serious offenders, while the comparative value for those cases with a (0, 0, 0) configuration is only 24 per cent. Approximately two-thirds of the cases are in the (1) state of the dependent variable when any two of the independent variables are in the (1) state with the third variable being in the (0) state. Finally, Table 2 reveals that 41 per cent of those cases having only a single independent variable in the (1) state are in the (1) state of the dependent variable.

With respect to the relative interaction and main effects of the respective independent variables upon the odds of being a serious offender, Goodman's γ parameters represent a heuristic quantitative measure.²⁴ Table 3 presents γ results for the race-family-sex configuration. In Table 3, γ values refer to the relative main effects of sex, race and family upon the odds of being a serious offender while

TABLE 2

MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION CONFIGURATION WITH
SERIOUSNESS OF OFFENSE AS THE
DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Sex	Race	Family*	1 Adult	0 Status	1	0
					Proportion	
1	1	1	38	15	.72	.28
1	1	0	25	13	.66	.34
1	0	1	109	56	.66	.34
0	1	1	11	6	.65	.35
1	0	0	29	23	.56	.44
0	1	0	11	16	.41	.59
0	0	1	20	46	.30	.70
0	0	0	16	33	.24	.76

* (1) Refers to that state of the variable which is hypothesized as leading to the (1) state of the dependent variable, i.e., maleness, blackness, and family disruption, respectively.

TABLE 3

RELATIVE MAIN AND INTERACTION EFFECTS UPON
THE ODDS OF BEING A SERIOUS OFFENDER

Variable	γ Effect	β Effect	Standardized β
Sex	1.68	.52	4.13
Race	1.42	.35	2.77
Family	1.27	.24	1.91
Sex. Race	0.83	-.18	-1.46
Sex. Family	.94	-.06	-0.50
Race. Family	1.06	.06	0.49
Sex. Race. Family	.90	-.10	-0.81

simultaneously controlling for the other two independent variables. β represents a maximum likelihood estimate of γ . In testing for interaction effects, if a given β effect is "nil," the asymptotic distribution of the corresponding standardized value will be the normal distribution with zero mean and unit variance.²⁵ In this instance, $p < .05$ is again used as the critical level of significance for decision-making. None of the possible interaction effects are statistically significant.²⁶ The only interaction value which approaches significance is

²⁵ Goodman, *The Analysis of Multidimensional Contingency Tables: Stepwise Procedures and Direct Estimation Methods for Building Models for Multiple Classification*, 13 *TECHNOMETRICS* 33 (1971).

²⁶ When all possible interaction effects are included in the analysis with no assumptions regarding their values the model is referred to as "saturated." See Goodman, *supra* note 24, at 35-36.

²² *Id.* at 56-58.

²³ *Id.* at 81-106.

²⁴ Goodman, *A Modified Multiple Regression Approach to the Analysis of Dichotomous Variables*, 37 *AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV.* 28 (1972).

TABLE 4
EXTENT OF VARIATION IN THE SERIOUSNESS VARIABLE
ACCOUNTED FOR BY RESPECTIVE
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variables	"weighted" Measure of Effect	Decision ^a
Sex.....	.269	significant
Race.....	.113	significant
Family.....	.099	not significant

^a This is a one-tailed test for significance at the .05 level.

that between sex and race (-1.46). Had this value reached significance (-1.96), the result would be interpreted as saying that the effect of blackness upon the odds of being an adult offender is less for males than for females.

Another means of analyzing these data would be in terms of the relative percentage of variation in the dependent variable which can be attributed to each independent variable while simultaneously controlling for all other independent variables.²⁷ This technique "assumes" the absence of interaction effects, which have been "empirically established" in the present case. Table 4 shows results obtained when applying the Coleman technique to the data presented in Table 2. The measures of effect are to be interpreted in terms of percentage of variation in the offense dichotomy, which can be accounted for by sex, race, and family, respectively. When summed, the value refers to the total variation accounted for by the three-variable configuration. Results are consistent with those obtained when using the Q statistic and the Goodman technique. Sex has the greatest effect, accounting for 27 percent of the variation in offense seriousness. Race accounts for 11 per cent of the variation. The family variable accounted for 10 per cent of the variation in offense seriousness, but was not statistically significant. The three variables considered simultaneously account for 48 per cent of the total variation in seriousness of first offense.

Table 5 presents Q results when considering official hearing-decision as the dependent variable. While family disruption, maleness, older age and adult offense all appear to influence the decision to expose the youth to a formal hearing, none is statistically significant in its relationship to formal

²⁷ Coleman, *Multivariate Analysis for Attribute Data*, in *SOCIOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY* 217 (E. Borgatta ed. 1970).

hearing. Race, social class and school status also are not significantly related to hearing decision. Indeed, blackness, low social class and school failure are related to hearing-decision in the direction opposite to that hypothesized. Due to the absence of any statistically significant relationships, further analyses with official hearing as the dependent variable were precluded.

Results differ greatly in the case of recidivism. Table 6 presents zero-order Q values between recidivism and respective, proposed independent variables. Those four variables which are significantly related to recidivism are age (+.486), hearing (+.354), school (+.343), and type of first offense (-.285). Each of these relationships hold when controlling individually for the other three variables through partial Q analysis. Type of offense is, however, related to recidivism in the direction opposite to that predicted, *i.e.*, status offenders are more likely to be recidivists than are

TABLE 5
FORMAL HEARING AT TIME OF FIRST OFFENSE AS
PREDICTED BY PROPOSED VARIABLES

Variable	Q Value	Decision ^a	Direction
Race	-.087	not significant	wrong
Class	-.114	not significant	wrong
School	-.120	not significant	wrong
Family	+.082	not significant	correct
Sex	+.140	not significant	correct
Age	+.138	not significant	correct
Offense	+.120	not significant	correct

^a This is a one-tailed test for significance at the .05 level.

TABLE 6
RECIDIVISM AS PREDICTED BY PROPOSED
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variable	Q Value	Decision ^a	Direction
Race	-.036	not significant	wrong
Class	+.017	not significant	correct
School	+.343	significant	correct
Family	-.075	not significant	wrong
Sex	-.068	not significant	wrong
Age	+.486	significant	correct
Offense	-.285	significant	wrong
Hearing	+.354	significant	correct

^a This is a one-tailed test for significance at the .05 level.

TABLE 7
MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION CONFIGURATION WITH RECIDIVISM AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Age	Hearing	Offense	School	1 Recidivist	0 Nonrecidivist	Proportion	
						1	0
1	1	1	1	12	6	.67	.33
1	1	1	0	9	4	.69	.31
1	1	0	1	10	12	.46	.54
1	0	1	1	33	18	.65	.35
0	1	1	1	5	3	.63	.37
1	1	0	0	17	12	.59	.41
1	0	1	0	9	31	.23	.77
1	0	0	1	20	34	.37	.63
0	1	1	0	4	6	.40	.60
0	1	0	1	1	5	.17	.83
0	0	1	1	6	14	.30	.70
1	0	0	0	13	27	.33	.67
0	1	0	0	4	15	.21	.79
0	0	1	0	7	23	.23	.77
0	0	0	1	8	21	.28	.72
0	0	0	0	4	45	.08	.92

State of independent variables refer to age (15-16), formal hearing, offense (status), and school (failure), respectively.

the more serious first offenders.²³ Otherwise, older age, school failure and the experience of a formal hearing at the time of first offense are all predictive of recidivism. The variables of sex, race and family structure which were found to be most predictive of seriousness of first offense appear to have little relevance in the prediction of recidivism. As in the case of seriousness, social class is not significantly related to the dependent variable.

Analysis of the results presented in Table 7 indicates a perfect linear movement from the four-variable (0) configuration to the four-variable (1) state configuration with respect to the relative percentage in the (1) state on the dependent variable. Only 8 per cent of those cases having all independent variables in the (0) state are recidivists. When only one independent variable is in the (1) state the recidivism percentage increases to 27. The comparative figures for the two and the three variable cases are 36 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively. When all the independent variables are in the (1) state 67 per cent of the cases are recidivists. Table 8 examines the relative main and interaction effects of the independent variables upon the recidivism odds.

²³ Empirical precedent for such a finding can be found in Weeks, *Predicting Juvenile Delinquency*, 8 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 136 (1943).

TABLE 8
RELATIVE MAIN AND INTERACTION EFFECTS UPON THE ODDS OF BEING A RECIDIVIST

Variable	γ Effect	β Effect	Standard- ized β
Age	1.58	.46	3.65
Hearing	1.47	.38	3.04
Offense	1.44	.36	2.87
School	1.27	.12	0.98
Age. Hearing	1.04	.04	0.33
Age. Offense	.88	-.13	-1.02
Age. School	.93	-.07	-0.55
Hearing. Offense	1.13	.12	0.96
Hearing. School	.80	-.22	-1.76
Offense. School	1.12	.12	0.92
Age. Hearing. Offense	.96	-.04	-0.35
Age. Hearing. School	.90	-.10	-0.80
Age. Offense. School	1.15	.14	1.08
Hearing. Offense. School	1.05	.05	0.37
Age. Hearing. Offense. School	.82	-.19	-1.54

Table 8 demonstrates an absence of significant interaction effects. There appears, however, to be an interaction tendency between school failure and formal hearing (-1.76), which can be interpreted as saying that the effect of formal hearing upon the

TABLE 9
EXTENT OF VARIATION IN THE RECIDIVISM VARIABLE
ACCOUNTED FOR BY RESPECTIVE
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variables	"weighted" Measure of Effect	Decision ^a
Age.....	.197	significant
Hearing.....	.176	significant
Offense.....	.151	significant
School.....	.119	not significant

^a This is a one-tailed test for significance at the .05 level.

recidivism odds is less for school failures than for those without a record of school failure. The comparative recidivism figure when only hearing is in the (1) state is 21 per cent. When school status is in the (1) state and all three other independent variables are in the (0) state, the recidivism value is 28 per cent. However, when both hearing and school status are in the (1) state, with the remaining two variables in the (0) state, only 17 per cent of the cases are recidivists. When these data are subjected to the Coleman technique, it is found that 64 per cent of the variation in recidivism is accounted for by the four independent variables. Results are presented in Table 9. Age accounts for 20 per cent of the variation in recidivism. School status has the least effect upon recidivism, accounting for 12 percent of the variation. Hearing and type of first offense account for 18 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively. Older age, formal hearing at time of first offense, nonserious first offense and school failure, then, represent those states of the independent variables which are related to the recidivism state of the dependent variable.

Discussion

Probably the two most interesting findings of the present work are the following: First, the failure to demonstrate any systematic bias on the part of court personnel at the point of hearing decision and, second, the differential, independent variable configurations observed when considering seriousness of first offense and recidivism as dependent variables. The personnel in this specific court appear to have internalized the dictums of individualized handling and official discretion to the point where systematic bias against any racial or social class group is nonexistent. At most, there

was a slight (statistically nonsignificant) tendency for the older, more serious and male offenders to be subjected to formal hearings.

The most important predictors of seriousness of first offense were sex, race and family structure. Family disruption was equally important for both races, thereby contradicting recent findings which suggest that this phenomenon is more traumatic for white youth. The relative importance of blackness in the prediction of offense seriousness is underlined both by its independence from the influence of social class and by other independent variables, and for its consistency with the findings of related delinquency-seriousness studies. In the light of such evidence as presented here, students of crime must consider the predictive influence of race from both the point of view of prevention and understanding of delinquency. It is not, of course, the physical dimension of race which is important here, but rather the social-psychological experience of being racially defined in the contemporary United States which is critical to the understanding of the observed relationship between race and seriousness of offense.

In this context, it is significant to note that not one of those variables which were of predictive value for seriousness of first offense were significantly related to recidivism. Older age (15-16), subsection of formal hearing at first offense, nonserious first offense and school failure were the important attributes. The estimated influence of age is conservative to the extent that, overall, the older age group had less time to return to the court. Labeling theorists would, of course, emphasize the independent effect of formal hearing at the time of first offense upon recidivism. The court in this case was originally more concerned with the problem of overcrowding, the basic objective of the research contract being the identification of first-offenders least likely to return to the court. The possible negative contribution of being subjected to a formal hearing upon the recidivism probability was not considered. The significant relationship between formal hearing at time of first offense and recidivism is, however, by no means incontrovertible evidence of the manifestation of secondary deviation. It is just as likely that court personnel, on the bases of professional experience and more subjective criteria, were selecting the more chronic offenders for exposure to a formal hearing, and that the total recidivism rate (37 per cent) would be even higher without such intervention. Finally, social

class was conspicuous in its failure to demonstrate an independent predictive value at any of the three stages under examination.

The configurational approach used in this study seemed appropriate for several reasons. Generally, it represents an efficient way of simultaneously managing a large set of attributes. Secondly, valid information regarding sequential time-ordering

among the independent attributes was lacking. Third, the examination of interaction effects was wholly exploratory. Fourth, such a technique is conducive to quick comparative description and utilization by practitioners. It is such descriptive results, however, which stimulate the development and testing of more sophisticated theoretical models. Hopefully, this work will accomplish that.

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