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SELF-REPORTED DELINQUENCY: A COMPARISON OF STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND SELF-ADMINISTERED CHECKLISTS

MARVIN KROHN,* GORDON P. WALDO,** AND THEODORE G. CHIRICOS ***

A critical issue in the study of deviant behavior is the operational definition of the dependent variable. Such definitions are central not only to the process of measuring deviant phenomena, but also to the process of assigning meaning to data. The implications of this issue have been clearly drawn for the study of juvenile delinquency by Hirschi and Selvin who note that "how one defines delinquency determines in large part how one will explain delinquency."¹ While a variety of empirical referents² have been employed in operational definitions, the major source of discussion and controversy has been the distinction between official and self-report indices of delinquency.

Early studies employed operational definitions of delinquency that were coextensive with the availability of official data for arrests or court appearances among juveniles.³ These and similar studies frequently reported inverse relationships between social class and juvenile delinquency which prompted theorists to explicate the conditions of lower-class life that dispose, if not constrain, toward delinquency.⁴

The recognition that "official" rates of delinquency are as informative about the results of frequently arbitrary and inconsistent patterns of law enforcement as they are about delin-

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¹ T. HIRSCHI & H. SELVIN, *DELINQUENCY RESEARCH: AN APPRAISAL OF ANALYTIC METHODS* 185 (1969).

² For a discussion of this issue, see HIRSCHI & SELVIN, *supra* note 1, at 177-200.

³ See, e.g., R. PARK, E. BURGESS & R. MCKENZIE, *THE CITY* (1925); C. SHAW & H. MCKAY, *JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND URBAN AREAS* (1942).

⁴ See, e.g., R. CLOWARD & OHLIN, *DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY: A THEORY OF DELINQUENT GANGS* (1960); A. COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS: THE CULTURE OF THE GANG* (1955); Miller, *Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency*, 14 J. SOCIAL ISSUES 5 (1958).

quent behavior has led to the increased employment of self-report measures of delinquency such as those pioneered by Nye and Short.⁵ Studies using a self-report technique⁶ have cast doubt upon the presumption of an inverse relationship between delinquency and social class, and have sharpened the distinction between delinquent behavior and delinquent behavior that has been responded to by official agents of social control.⁷ While this distinction has increased concern for the processes of sanctioning and labelling, it has not resolved the issue of how to measure delinquency. Recent empirical research includes notable examples of both official⁸ and self-reporting⁹ measures of juvenile delinquency.

If the argument for rejecting self-report measures of delinquency is expediency or theoretical concern,¹⁰ resolution of the issue will

⁵ Nye & Short, *Scaling Delinquent Behavior*, 22 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 326 (1957); Short & Nye, *The Extent of Unrecorded Juvenile Delinquency: Tentative Conclusions*, 49 J. CRIM. L.C., & P.S. 296 (1958); Short & Nye, *Reported Behavior as a Criterion of Deviant Behavior*, 5 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 207 (1957).

⁶ See, e.g., Akers, *Socio-economic Status and Delinquent Behavior*, 1 J. RES. CRIME & DELINQUENCY 38 (1964); Clark & Wenninger, *Socio-economic Class and Areas as Correlates of Illegal Behavior Among Juveniles*, 27 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 826 (1962); Erickson & Empey, *Class Position, Peers and Delinquency*, 49 SOCIOLOGY & SOCIAL RES. 269 (1965); Gold, *Undetected Delinquent Behavior*, 3 J. RES. CRIME & DELINQUENCY 27 (1966); Vaz, *Self-Reported Juvenile Delinquency and Socio-economic Status*, 8 CAN. J. CORRECTIONS 20 (1966); Voss, *Socio-economic Status and Reported Delinquent Behavior*, 13 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 314 (1966); Williams & Gold, *From Delinquent Behavior to Official Delinquency*, 20 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 209 (1972).

⁷ Williams & Gold, *supra* note 6.

⁸ M. WOLFGANG, R. FIGLIO & T. SELLIN, *DELINQUENCY IN A BIRTH COHORT* (1972).

⁹ HIRSCHI & SELVIN, *supra* note 1; Williams & Gold, *supra* note 6.

¹⁰ Expediency in this context refers to the greater availability of official reports and the necessity for collecting self-reported data for each research project undertaken. Theoretical concerns might exist if the labeling perspective was accepted and deviance was defined as that behavior

reflect the professional perspective or bias of the individual researcher. However, if the argument is offered that variable conditions of the self-reporting process directly affect the amount and types of delinquency reported, then the issue is subject to empirical consideration. Specifically, it has been suggested that both the method of self-reporting (anonymous questionnaire versus interview) and the quality of respondent-researcher interaction can have serious consequences for the self-reporting process.¹¹ The present research offers empirical evidence bearing upon the question of whether different alternatives in the self-reporting methodology create a difference in the amount and type of delinquency reported. The context of the present findings is briefly elaborated in the following discussion of related methodological considerations.

QUESTIONNAIRE VERSUS INTERVIEW METHODS OF SELF-REPORTING

The issue of the relative merits of questionnaire and interview methods of self-reporting delinquency has been forcefully joined by Gold who argued that such distinctions in methodology have had implications for the apparent relationship between social class and delinquent behavior.¹² Gold argues that higher status respondents to a self-administered questionnaire tend to report more non-chargeable offenses, thereby negating the expected inverse relationship between social class and delinquent behavior. Gold suggests that interviewing partially mitigates this problem by assuring the interviewer that the behavior being reported is, indeed, delinquent behavior.

Voss argued that the conclusion could not be drawn that the method of self-reporting was principally responsible for findings of "no relationship" between social status and delinquency,¹³ inasmuch as Slocum and Stone had utilized interviews and had similarly discov-

ered no significant relationship.¹⁴ This argument is further supported in a more recent study by Williams and Gold which employed the interview technique on a nationwide sample and found no relationship between social class and delinquent behavior.¹⁵ Voss further suggests that while interviews may enhance validity by providing the opportunity to probe, anonymous questionnaires could afford more frank responses than could be elicited in the presence of an interviewer.¹⁶

Efforts to provide external validity checks for interview or questionnaire data are difficult and costly—a fact which probably accounts for the infrequency of such attempts. Neither Ball's interview study of narcotic addicts¹⁷ nor Hackler and Lauth's questionnaire study of juvenile delinquents¹⁸ provided definitive evidence for the invalidity of either measure. More systematic validation has proved similarly inconclusive. For example, Gold attempted to validate the responses he obtained from interviews by using informants as an external criterion.¹⁹ He did this for a small percentage of his sample and found that 72 per cent of his subjects could be considered "truth-tellers." Clark and Tiftt attempted to utilize a polygraph examination as an external validity check on questionnaire data.²⁰ The results indicated that all respondents underreported the frequency of at least one behavior, and one-half of the respondents overreported on at least one behavioral item. However, the overall proportion of correct answers was 81.5 per cent.²¹

¹⁴ Slocum & Stone, *Family Culture Patterns and Delinquent-Type Behavior*, 25 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIVING 202 (1963).

¹⁵ Williams & Gold, *supra* note 6.

¹⁶ Voss, *A Reply to Gold*, 15 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 116 (1967).

¹⁷ Ball, *The Reality and Validity of Interview Data Obtained from 59 Narcotic Drug Addicts*, 72 AM. J. SOCIOLOGY 650 (1967).

¹⁸ Hackler & Lauth, *Systematic Bias in Measuring Self-Reported Delinquency*, 6 CAN. REV. SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY 92 (1969).

¹⁹ M. Gold, *DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR IN AN AMERICAN CITY* (1970).

²⁰ Clark & Tiftt, *Polygraph and Interview Validation of Self-Reported Deviant Behavior*, 31 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 516 (1966).

²¹ It should be noted that Defleur has offered several criticisms concerning the methodology employed by Clark and Tiftt which reduce the magnitude of their findings. Defleur, *The Polygraph and Interview Validation*, 32 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 114 (1967).

so labeled by society. H. BECKER, *OUTSIDERS: STUDIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE* (1963).

¹¹ See Erickson & Empey, *supra* note 6; Gold, *Undetected Delinquent Behavior*, 3 J. RES. CRIME & DELINQUENCY 27 (1966); Williams & Gold, *supra* note 6.

¹² Gold, *On Social Status and Delinquency*, 15 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 115 (1967).

¹³ Voss, *A Reply to Gold*, 15 SOCIAL PROBLEMS 116 (1967).

A related issue in the comparison of interview and questionnaire formats of self-reporting involves the problem of assuring anonymity of responses.²² While it is generally argued that anonymity is more convincingly assured in questionnaire, as opposed to interview, settings,²³ Hyman has cautioned that "the literal fact of anonymity provides no necessary psychological anonymity."²⁴

The presumption that anonymity is desirable or essential for delinquency research²⁵ has not received a great deal of support from available empirical evidence. For example, assurances of anonymity have been shown to make no significant difference in responses to attitude questionnaires.²⁶ Similarly, some delinquency researchers have concluded that anonymity is unnecessary,²⁷ overemphasized²⁸ or of little consequence.²⁹

A recent study by Bowers provides some data on the question of anonymity.³⁰ Bowers' research design provided for three distinct levels of anonymity: (1) Guaranteed Anonymity: wherein respondents were specifically requested

not to sign their questionnaires; (2) Voluntary Identification: wherein respondents could choose to sign or not sign their questionnaires; and (3) Mandatory Identification: wherein respondents were specifically requested to sign the questionnaires. Bowers found that less serious cheating offenses were more often reported by those who received "Guaranteed Anonymity." However, more serious cheating offenses were less often reported under conditions of "Guaranteed Anonymity" than under conditions of "Voluntary Identification." The author concluded that perhaps the request of respondents not to sign their questionnaires created a sense of apprehension for serious cheaters.³¹

Unfortunately, there has been little research directed to an examination of the differences in data collected by questionnaire and interview techniques within the same research setting. A conference held at Syracuse University to discuss the methodological problems encountered in self-report techniques concluded that it was vital that systematic comparisons from interviews and questionnaires be undertaken.³² The comparisons that do exist neither involve delinquent behavior nor provide definitive results. McDonough and Rosenblum,³³ as well as Gibson and Hawkins,³⁴ suggest that little difference exists in the responses to questionnaires and interviews when the items are not "threatening" and require little in the way of "personal revelation." The data on responses to "threatening" items are less consistent. Whereas Cannell and Fowler³⁵ report that the type of data collection has no effect, both Young³⁶ and Ellis³⁷ provide evidence which

²² There is some confusion in the literature between the terms anonymity and confidentiality. There is a question in most research designs of whether true anonymity can ever be assured. In most instances it is only guaranteed that the data will be treated in a confidential manner which presumably assures the anonymity of the respondent.

²³ See C. SELLITZ, M. JAHODA, M. DEUTSCH & S. COOK, *RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIAL RELATIONS* (1965).

²⁴ R. HYMAN, *INTERVIEWING IN SOCIAL RESEARCH* (1954).

²⁵ R. HARDT & H. BODINE, *DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-REPORT INSTRUMENTS IN DELINQUENCY REPORT: A CONFERENCE REPORT, 1965* (Youth Development Center, Syracuse University); Akers, *supra* note 6.

²⁶ See, e.g., Corey, *Signed Versus Unsigned Attitude Questionnaires*, 28 *J. EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY* 144 (1937); Pearlin, *The Appeals of Anonymity in Questionnaire Response*, 25 *PUBLIC OPINION Q.* 640 (1961); Rosen, *Anonymity and Attitude Measurement*, 24 *PUBLIC OPINION Q.* 75 (1960).

²⁷ M. GOLD, *DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR IN AN AMERICAN CITY* (1970); Dentler, *Report of Participant in HARDT & BODINE, supra* note 25, at 7-8.

²⁸ Kulick, Stein & Sarbin, *Disclosure of Delinquent Behavior Under Conditions of Anonymity and Nonanonymity*, 32 *J. CONSULTING CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY* 506 (1968).

²⁹ Christie, *Report of Participant in HARDT & BODINE, supra* note 25, at 1-3.

³⁰ W. BOWERS, *QUESTION SEQUENCING EFFECTS ON RESPONSE TO SENSITIVE QUESTIONS IN THE SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE* (Russell B. Stearns Research Center, 1971).

³¹ This issue is related also to the characteristics of the researcher who is collecting the data. In the present research both "hip" and "straight" data collectors were used in an attempt to address this issue.

³² HARDT & BODINE, *supra* note 25.

³³ McDonough & Rosenblum, *A Comparison of Mailed Questionnaires and Subsequent Structured Interviews*, 29 *PUBLIC OPINION Q.* 131 (1965).

³⁴ Gibson & Hawkins, *Interviews Versus Questionnaires*, 12 *AM. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE* NS9-11 (1968).

³⁵ Cannell & Fowler, *Comparison of a Self-Enumeration Procedure and a Personal Interview: A Validity Study*, 27 *PUBLIC OPINION Q.* 250 (1963).

³⁶ P. YOUNG, *SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL SURVEYS AND RESEARCH* (1966).

³⁷ Ellis, *Questionnaires Versus Interview Meth-*

suggests that respondents more frequently provide answers to personal questions when a questionnaire is used. Ellis notes that female subjects were more explicit and self-condemnatory in questionnaires as opposed to interview responses with regard to questions about their love relationships.

In brief, existing comparisons of questionnaire and interview techniques of self-reporting are neither extensive nor conclusive. Moreover, the research providing an explicit comparison of the two techniques does not involve deviant behavior. Indeed, there appears to be no study which compares the two data gathering techniques for delinquent behavior.

INTERVIEWER INTERACTION EFFECTS

A corollary question raised in discussing the method of eliciting valid self-report information is that of the interaction between the respondent and the researcher. While it appears that such interaction effects should be greater in the interview as opposed to the questionnaire situation, Cannell and Fowler have noted that the issue is salient for both methodologies since both methods usually require some contact between the researcher and respondent.³⁸

Existing research on interviewer effects suggests that responses are in some measure effected by: the friendliness of the interviewer;³⁹ the social distance between the interviewer and respondent;⁴⁰ and the threat which the interviewer represents to the respondent.⁴¹ Of these variables Williams regards threat as the most crucial.⁴² This would seem especially true for self-reporting of potentially sensitive infor-

mation such as delinquent activities. Similarly, Hardt and Bodine have reported on a study by James Coleman wherein high school students admitted significantly higher participation rates for smoking and drinking when the questionnaires were administered by a teenage girl than when the administrator was an adult male social scientist.⁴³ These results suggest that if the interviewer is less threatening, the respondents are more likely to report deviant behavior. In general, the Syracuse Conference concluded that the entire question of interviewer interaction effects was one that required additional empirical research—a need which the present research will attempt to address.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence that is currently unavailable in discussions of self-reporting methodologies for research in deviant behavior. Specifically, a review of existing literature suggests that while there has been much debate concerning the relative merits of questionnaire versus interview formats for self-reporting, there has been no systematic comparison of findings generated by the two methods within a single research setting. The present study partially addresses this issue. That is, the study will determine whether two random samples of college students report significantly different participation in delinquent activity when responding to an interview as opposed to a self-administered checklist.

In addition, this study will consider the question of whether self-reporting of delinquent behavior is affected by the appearance of the investigator at the time of the interview or administration of the questionnaire. Specifically, there will be a comparison of delinquent admissions made in the presence of two types of investigators: straight, conservative, middle-class and "hip," "radical," "freaky."

It has been hypothesized that no significant differences will be found in the frequency of delinquent activity admitted by respondents to interview and self-administered checklists. Furthermore, no significant differences will be found in the frequency of delinquent activity

ods in the *Study of Human Love Relationships*, 12 A.M. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 541 (1947).

³⁸ Cannell & Fowler, *A Note on Interviewer Effect in Self-Enumerative Procedures*, 29 A.M. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 270 (1964).

³⁹ See Pfouts & Rader, *The Influence of Interviewer Characteristics on the Initial Interview*, 43 SOCIAL CASEWORK 548 (1962); Dohrenwood, Williams & Weiss, *Interviewer Biasing Effects Toward a Reconciliation of Findings*, 33 PUBLIC OPINION Q. 121 (1969).

⁴⁰ See Katz, *Do Interviews Bias Poll Results?*, 6 PUBLIC OPINION Q. 248 (1954); Williams, *Interviewer—Respondent Interaction: A Study of Bias in the Information Interview*, 27 SOCIOMETRY 338 (1964).

⁴¹ See A. CICOUREL, *METHOD AND MEASUREMENT IN SOCIOLOGY* (1964); Williams, *supra* note 40.

⁴² Williams, *supra* note 40.

⁴³ HARDT & BODINE, *supra* note 25.

admitted by respondents to "straight" as opposed to "hip" investigators.

METHOD

Data for the present study were generated as part of a larger study concerned with a variety of research questions dealing with respondent perceptions of the law and crime, as well as admissions of their own criminal activities.⁴⁴ The total number of respondents represent 82 per cent of an original 3 per cent random sample (stratified by school year) of the undergraduate population in a Southeastern university.⁴⁵

Potential respondents were randomly assigned to five interviewers and were also randomly assigned (for each interviewer) into either an interview or checklist format. No decisions were made by the interviewers at the time of data collection concerning which format would be used. The interviewers made the initial contact by phone. They used a carefully rehearsed procedure in requesting the student to participate in the study. The interviewer and the respondent met in a setting designed to maximize privacy and comfort. After assuring the respondent of anonymity,⁴⁶ the interviewer asked the student several demographic questions. Upon completion of these questions, one of the following procedures was followed for the purpose of securing self-reports of the respondent's delinquent or criminal activity.

In the first procedure a checklist containing eight criminal or delinquent offenses, ranging in seriousness from underage drinking to grand larceny was handed to each respondent in the "checklist group." The checklist asked the following questions for each offense: (a) How many times have you done this? (b) How old were you the first time you did this? (c) How many people were you with the first time you did this? (d) How many times have you done this in the past year? (e) How

many people are you generally with when you do this? Having completed the checklist, the respondent was allowed to inspect the questionnaire and a postage-paid envelope for any identifying characteristics. After the completion of the remainder of the interview, the respondent, at his discretion, mailed the complete interview and checklist to the researchers. Respondents were told prior to beginning the checklist that they would be permitted to do this.

In the second procedure a checklist containing the aforementioned questions was read to each respondent in an interview format, and the responses to the self-report items were recorded by the interviewer. The self-report checklist always remained in the interviewer's possession.

It should be noted that in both situations the respondent was verbally assured of the anonymity of his responses. The crucial difference lies in the fact that in the checklist format, the respondent could prevent the interviewer from seeing his responses on the checklist. Consequently, the respondent had the opportunity to anonymously mail the checklist, along with the remainder of the interview, to the researchers. In the interview format, delinquencies were reported directly to the investigator, and total anonymity may have seemed less assured to the respondents.

The interviews were conducted by five white, male undergraduate students at the university. Each had been exposed to a week-long training period devoted to the techniques of interviewing, and each had constructively participated in the development, pre-testing and revisions of the interview schedules. While the five interviewers varied somewhat in terms of academic factors and social background, it was felt that the principal and most visible differences among them were their appearance and dress. Three of the interviewers dressed conservatively and wore closely trimmed hair. This group is referred to as the "straight" or "conservative" interviewers in subsequent discussions. Two of the interviewers wore their hair at shoulder length and consistently dressed in jeans or cut-offs with sandals or sneakers. One of the two wore granny glasses, while the other had a moustache in addition to his long curly hair. This pair is referred to as

⁴⁴ Waldo & Chiricos, *Perceived Penal Sanction and Self-Reported Criminality: A Neglected Approach to Deterrence Research*, 19 *SOCIAL PROBLEMS* 522 (1972).

⁴⁵ For a further discussion of the sampling procedure, see Waldo & Chiricos, *supra* note 44.

⁴⁶ Although the instructions read to the subjects gave assurances of anonymity, it is obvious that confidentiality would have been the more accurate term to use.

the "hip" or "radical" interviewers in the following analysis.⁴⁷

It is impossible to determine which of the two types of interviewers should be regarded as "more threatening," if indeed either could be so regarded. On the one hand, one might argue that the "hip" interviewers would appear more deviant, and may be therefore less threatening in a situation wherein admissions of deviance are being made. On the other hand, for some respondents on a predominantly conservative campus, the neat, conservative interviewers may appear more compatible and less socially distant than the "hip" or "radical" interviewers.

It is recognized that in terms of the possible variation in the appearance of interviewers that a small proportion of the range is included among the five interviewers in this study. Obvious restrictions are in terms of age, race, and sex since the interviewers are very homogenous in these respects. Because of the nature of the study, we had little control over these factors. However, since it was impossible to include sub-categories from all of the relevant characteristics, it is best that these factors remain constant. With a predominantly white college population, the age and race restrictions would be those that most closely match respondents and data collectors. The fact that there were no female interviewers was accidental and perhaps unfortunate, but since the data being collected had minimal sexual overtones, this may not be a serious liability.

The data have been analyzed in contingency tables, with measures of self-reported delinquency dichotomized to reflect whether the respondent had committed the act within the past year.⁴⁸ Chi-square tests for statistical signifi-

⁴⁷ The labels of "hip" and "straight" as applied in this study might be disputed by those who have studied more extreme groups of deviants. These terms are used only in a relative sense to connote different sides of the liberal-conservative continuum among college students. The student population in this study would be considered on the conservative side of this continuum and consequently the interviewers considered "hip" on this campus might be "moderate" or "straight" in a different context.

⁴⁸ The offense variables were dichotomized due to the nature of the data. When asked for the frequency of commitment of a particular offense, a significant proportion could only provide answers such as "yes," "occasionally" or "frequently." It

TABLE 1
Percentage of Respondents Admitting Various
Criminal Offenses In the Past Year by Interview
and Checklist Formats

Criminal Offense	Percent Admitting Offense By Interview Format	Percent Admitting Offense By Checklist Format	χ^2 *	Contingency Coefficient
Alcohol				
Under Age	64.8	69.8	.6898	.05
Drunken				
Driving	32.1	37.0	.6676	.05
Marijuana				
Use	25.8	36.4	3.7491	.11
Fighting	02.5	02.5	.1097	.02
Petty Theft	11.3	16.7	1.4848	.07
Grand				
Larceny	0.0	01.9	1.3085	.06
Property				
Damage	03.1	06.2	1.0419	.06
Illegal Entry	03.8	08.0	1.8966	.08

* All χ^2 tables presented have 1 degree of freedom requiring a value of 3.84 for significance at the .05 level.

cance and contingency coefficients for a measure of association have been computed.

FINDINGS

Table 1 summarizes the results of contingency analyses involving type of checklist administration and admission of delinquent activity within the past year for eight offenses. The percentage of respondents admitting to a particular activity within the past year is shown for both interview and checklist formats of the self-reporting process along with chi-square values and contingency coefficients. It can be observed in Table 1 that for seven of the eight offenses, checklist self-reports elicited a higher rate of admitted delinquency than interview self-reports. For the remaining offense (fighting) equivalent rates of delinquency were reported in both formats. However, despite the consistent direction of findings in Table 1, there is no instance wherein the differences produced

was felt that since these responses could not be accurately translated into frequencies, and because they represented a significant proportion of respondents admitting to the behavior, it would be better to dichotomize in this fashion rather than to use frequencies.

by interview and checklist formats are statistically significant at the .05 level or greater.

It is interesting to note that the offense category which reflected the greatest difference by type of self-reporting format was marijuana use. This is not surprising, inasmuch as the remaining offense categories involve behaviors which were not, for a student population, the subject of on-going surveillance and investigation by law enforcement agencies. Indeed, in the months surrounding the data collection, drug arrests among university students were relatively frequent and highly publicized. Thus, if a respondent was apprehensive about revealing delinquent behavior, and if interview self-reports were actually more threatening, it is reasonable to expect the greatest self-reporting reluctance to be manifested for drug related offenses.

Having discovered no statistically significant differences in the rates of delinquent admissions produced by written and oral self-reports, the possibility was explored that greater differences might be elicited within categories of certain respondent characteristics. In this regard, several variables have been cited as potentially relevant. These include the respondent's level of education,⁴⁹ sex,⁵⁰ social class⁵¹ and intelligence.⁵² Each of these variables were separately controlled and the relationship between the self-reporting format and criminal offenses was examined within the sub-categories of each variable. None of these tables produced significant differences in the rates of admitted delinquency elicited by interview and checklist format.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Cannell & Fowler, *Comparison of a Self-Enumeration Procedure and a Personal Interview: A Validity Study*, 27 PUBLIC OPINION Q. 250 (1963).

⁵⁰ Cahalon, *Correlates of Respondent Accuracy in the Denver Validity Survey*, 32 PUBLIC OPINION Q. 607 (1969).

⁵¹ Social class was measured by the method developed by Nam and Powers and recorded empirically into three categories which represent lower, middle and upper classes of the present sample, not of the population. Nam & Powers, *Changes in the Relative Status Levels of Workers in the United States: 1950-1960*, 47 SOCIAL FORCES 158 (1968).

⁵² Because of the nature of the self-reporting data collection process, it was impossible to obtain a measure of intelligence such as IQ. Consequently, grade point average was used in this study.

⁵³ The tables for such computations were con-

TABLE 2
Percentage of Respondents Admitting Various Criminal Offenses In the Past Year by Interviewer Appearance

Criminal Offense	Percent Admitting Offense to "Straight" Interviewers	Percent Admitting Offense to "Hip" Interviewers	χ^2	Contingency Coefficient
Alcohol				
Under Age	62.2	88.3	13.90 ^a	.21
Drunken				
Driving	32.7	41.7	1.36	.07
Marijuana				
Use	28.7	40.0	2.40	.09
Fighting	2.4	3.3	0.002	.00
Petty Theft	10.0	28.3	12.47 ^a	.20
Grand				
Larceny	0.0	5.0	7.98 ^b	.16
Property				
Damage	3.6	8.3	1.55	.07
Illegal Entry	6.0	6.7	0.01	.01

a = $p < .001$, b = $p < .01$

The second principal question addressed by this research concerns the impact of "straight" versus "hip" interviewers on the rates of admitted delinquency. Table 2 summarizes the results of contingency analyses and explores this issue for the eight aforementioned offenses. For all eight offenses, the "hip" or "radical" interviewers received a greater percentage of delinquency admissions than the "straight" or "conservative" interviewers. Two offenses (underage drinking and petty larceny) were significant at the .001 level and grand larceny was significant at the .01 level. These data would suggest that type of interviewer may have consequences for the self-reporting process.

To further examine the possible interviewer effects on the self-reporting process, the relationship between type of interviewer and self-reported delinquent behavior was examined within the interview and checklist formats. It was surmised that if the "hip" interviewer elicited more self-reported delinquent acts, the effect would be greater in the interview adminis-

sidered too cumbersome to reproduce in this paper. They are available, on request, from the authors.

TABLE 3
 Percentage of Respondents Admitting Various Criminal Offenses in the Past Year
 By Interviewer Appearance within Interview and Checklist Formats

Criminal Offense	Interview Format				Checklist Format			
	Percent Admitting Offense to "Straight" Interviewers	Percent Admitting Offense to "Hip" Interviewers	χ^2	Contingency Coefficient	Percent Admitting Offense to "Straight" Interviewers	Percent Admitting Offense to "Hip" Interviewers	χ^2	Contingency Coefficient
Alcohol Under Age.....	59.2	84.4	5.95 ^c	.19	64.9	92.9	7.29 ^b	.21
Drunken Driving.....	31.7	31.3	0.03	.01	33.6	53.6	3.14	.14
Marijuana Use.....	23.3	31.3	0.48	.06	33.6	50.0	2.02	.11
Fighting.....	2.5	3.1	0.18	.03	2.3	3.6	0.07	.02
Petty Theft.....	10.0	12.5	0.01	.01	9.9	46.4	19.89 ^a	.33
Grand Larceny.....	0.0	0.0			0.0	10.7	9.10 ^b	.23
Property Damage.....	0.8	9.4	4.25	.16	6.1	7.1	0.50	.02
Illegal Entry.....	4.2	3.1	0.06	.02	7.6	10.7	0.026	.01

a = $p < .001$, b = $p < .01$, c = $p < .05$.

tration than in the checklist. The data exploring this question are examined in Table 3.

In comparing the relationships between the criminal offenses and interview type for both modes of checklist administration, it is observed that while none of the relationships are generally very great, the association is stronger in the checklist format than in the interview format. This is directly opposite to what had been expected.

Although there are no data which adequately explain this finding, it might be suggested that in an oral administration a skeptical respondent will not be as assured of anonymity as he might be in a written format. This might hold true no matter how non-threatening the interviewer happens to be. Given the fact that the checklist was in the interviewer's hands at all times, and that the interviewer necessarily had to know the respondent's name in order to contact him, the assurance of anonymity might lose much of its face validity. However, in the written administration, the respondent was permitted to mail in his questionnaire when he completed it. The claim of anonymity through confidentiality in the written administration was somewhat more believable than it was in the oral administration. Therefore, for the skeptical respondent, the type of interviewer might have more effect in the written adminis-

tration since the respondent has a greater opportunity for believing in the assurance of anonymity.

CONCLUSION

The present research posited two methodological question concerning the administration of delinquency self-report instruments. The first was whether there would be any difference in the number of respondents who admitted to delinquent behavior when compared by whether the data were collected by an interview or by a written checklist. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the responses to the two types of administration.⁵⁴ On the basis of these findings, it could be suggested that the issue of whether a researcher employing a self-report instrument should administer it orally or in a written manner, is not a crucial question. Unfortunately, the present research provided no external validation and, therefore, a recommendation of which method will elicit more valid responses cannot be offered. Since the two groups were

⁵⁴ However, the data did consistently indicate that respondents who were allowed to record their own answers tended to report more offenses than did those who had verbally responded to the checklist. Perhaps one might interpret this trend as indicating that there might be some difference, albeit, not a statistically significant one.

randomly selected, however, and no differences in the percentage reporting criminal acts were apparent, there is no reason to assume that one technique is any more valid than the other.

The second question addressed by this research was whether the type of interviewer would have an effect on the subject's responses. It was determined that for three offense categories, the type of interviewer did have an effect. Furthermore, the interviewer effect was greater in the checklist administration than in the interview administration. These findings might be interpreted as an indication that a non-threatening interviewer will have greater influence on the response rate when the assurance of anonymity is perceived as being valid.

There are at least four issues raised by the present study which serve as suggestions for future research. One limitation of this project was the absence of a true questionnaire group to compare with the interview group and the self-administered checklist group. A questionnaire group was considered in the design of the original project and pragmatic considerations prevented the inclusion of this category in the study. Unless considerable resources are available for a follow-up study on mailed questionnaires, there are obvious problems in the biased sample obtained by those who return questionnaires versus those who do not. In addition, most forms of follow-up studies require either open or surreptitious knowledge of who has returned a questionnaire and who has not. This creates problems relating to anonymity

and confidentiality of the data.

A second issue concerns the homogeneity represented in the typical college student sample. In order to properly address the questions being raised in this study, a random sample of a larger and more representative population would be desirable. It is unrealistic to anticipate that there could be a generalization from a student group to the larger community in regard to the questions addressed in this study.

A third issue concerns the relative homogeneity of the interviewers in the present study. As noted earlier, there are several major demographic characteristics which did not vary among the interviewers. These characteristics would include such factors as race, sex and age. Within a limited sample there are obvious advantages in having these factors constant. However, there are a multitude of research questions that could be examined if a study could be of sufficient scope to vary some of these variables and examine different combinations of characteristics.

A fourth question raised by this study is the necessity of assessing the external validity of the responses. Although such a design would be difficult, it is essential that systematic comparisons similar to the one presented in this study be combined with a method of checking the validity of the responses. It is only through such research that delinquency researchers will be able to assess the methods of collecting self-report data and increase the validity of the findings of their studies.