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Symposium on the Measurement of Delinquency-- Foreword

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CRIMINOLOGY

SYMPOSIUM ON THE MEASUREMENT OF DELINQUENCY

FOREWORD

Since the publication of Sellin and Wolfgang's *The Measurement of Delinquency* in 1964, numerous articles have commented on the validity and usefulness of the authors' scale for the measurement of the seriousness of offenses. In addition, the scaling process has been replicated in a number of American cities and in many foreign countries. The purpose of this symposium is to focus on some of the more recent comments on the validity of the Sellin-Wolfgang scale, to illustrate some recent replications of the study, and to demonstrate some practical applications of the seriousness scale.

In the first article of the symposium, Charles Wellford and Michael Wiatrowski review the development of the Sellin-Wolfgang scale, consider the implications of the many replications of the scale, review data on the question of scale additivity, and comment upon the usefulness of a seriousness scale. They conclude that Sellin and Wolfgang have established a useful research model that measures offense seriousness. In their view the original seriousness scale is an important advance in the history of criminology in that it has provided the foundation for the development of a science of behavior.

Robert Figlio presents a study of the subjective severities of various criminal offenses as judged by three groups: "hard core" convicts, youth offenders and college students. Figlio notes that the three groups evidence strong agreement as to which offenses are serious, both in magnitude and sequence. He finds that the relationship between the groups is logarithmic. Figlio's study also examines the manner in which student views have changed in the ten years following the development of the original Sellin-Wolfgang scale. In this examination he discovers time trends and determines that the more recent students view offenses less seriously.

In the next article Marc Riedel studies the effect of perceptions of circumstances on judgments of the seriousness of offenses. He concludes that while respondents had little difficulty inferring intent from the perceived circumstances, there is little support for the theory that different circumstances lead to a differential willingness to attribute intent. Riedel also finds little evidence that inferences of intent alter judgments of seriousness and he concludes that perceivers assess the seriousness of criminal events in ways that make inferences about whether the offender intended the act unimportant.

In the next article, Kenneth Pease, Judith Ireson and Jennifer Thorpe examine Andre Normandeau's use of the Sellin-Wolfgang scale in Normandeau's attempt to provide an international comparison of judgments of offense seriousness. The authors conclude that Normandeau's method of comparison is misleading in two important ways. First, Normandeau incorrectly assumes that all national groups agree as to the seriousness of larceny of one dollar. Second, a direct comparison of scores of national groups is meaningless because ranges over which seriousness judgments are spread differ between national groups.

The concluding article demonstrates the similarity between magnitude and category scaling techniques in measuring the seriousness of offenses. George Bridges and Nancy Lisagor observe that the relationship between the scaling techniques is logarithmic, and consequently, similar results are generated when either scaling technique is applied. The authors note that similar distributions and estimates of seriousness magnitude are produced regardless of which technique is utilized.

As this symposium issue is the final issue to be prepared by the present Editorial Board, the Editors want to express their appreciation

to the *Journal's* Editorial Consultants for Criminology. Without the assistance of the consultants, the *Journal* would be unable to maintain its prominent position in Criminology. The Editors would also like to take this opportunity

to thank Carolyn E. Alden of Northwestern University School of Law for her assistance in the preparation of the symposium and prior issues.

THE EDITORS