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PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CONDUCT OF INSTITUTIONALIZED DELINQUENTS

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This study attempts to determine the relationship between certain personality traits and conduct of institutionalized delinquents. The Bernreuter Personality Inventory was administered to 152 State Industrial School and 181 State Reformatory inmates in Colorado.[2] Although industrial school inmates range from 10 to 18 years of age, only those 15 years and over at the time of testing are used since these are fairly comparable with the high school population. The median for this group is 16 years and 4 months whereas reformatory inmates range from 16 to 25 years with a median of 20 years and one month.

The period of institutionalization in the industrial school is dependent upon the conduct of inmates while in the institution. A definite number of credit points must be earned before the inmate is eligible for parole. The average number of credits earned per month was not considered a satisfactory index of conduct, however, since points were awarded for duties not directly related to conduct. For example, a bonus of 25 credits per month was given for kitchen duty. Since a certain number of credits was subtracted for infraction of rules from the number allotted regularly each month— the number depending upon the seriousness of the offense—the average number of credit losses per month has been used as the index for judging misconduct while in the institution.

Throughout the study comparisons are made on the basis of the traits arbitrarily termed positive. These traits are emotional stability, extroversion, self-confidence, dominance, self-sufficiency, and sociability. An individual who largely lacks these positive traits will possess to a high degree the corresponding negative traits, namely, emotional instability, introversion, feelings of inferiority, submission, social dependence, and unsociability.

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1. *Personality Traits and Institutional Conduct of Industrial School Inmates*

The total time spent in the industrial school regardless of the number of sentences served was used as a basis for determining the average demerits per month. Individuals who had been in the institution less than one month at the time of examination were eliminated from the computations. Since the distribution was skewed markedly toward the high demerit end, those inmates having more than 200 demerits per month were eliminated from the final distribution and the total number of cases thus reduced from 161 to 152.

Table I shows that positive correlations were found between misconduct while in the institution and all positive traits except sociability, the coefficients ranging from 0.17 in extroversion to 0.21 in self-confidence.

TABLE I

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MISCONDUCT* AND PERSONALITY
TRAITS AMONG INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL INMATES

	r	P.E.	No. of Cases
Emotional stability	0.18	.05	152
Extroversion	0.17	.05	152
Self-confidence	0.21	.05	152
Dominance	0.20	.05	152
Self-sufficiency	0.18	.05	152
Sociability	—0.07	.05	152

*Misconduct means the average number of demerits per month while in the institution.

There is no significant correlation, however, between sociability and misconduct.

2. *Personality Traits and Institutional Conduct of Reformatory Inmates*

The reformatory inmates were classified into groups on the basis of demerits or no demerits. Coefficients of correlation between the average number of demerits per month and personality traits would have been highly unreliable because of the large number of inmates who had no demerits and the system used in assigning credits. The mean raw score differences and critical ratios between

demerit and nondemerit groups were calculated, however, for the purpose of determining the extent and reliability with which these traits are differentiated between them. There were 63 cases in the misconduct or demerit group and 118 in the no misconduct or nondemerit group comprising a total of 181 cases on which records were available.

Table II shows that the demerit group possesses a larger number of positive reactions in every trait although there is in no case a significant difference. The traits ranked according to the magnitude

TABLE II

COMPARISON OF CONDUCT GROUPS IN THE REFORMATORY
ON THE BASIS OF PERSONALITY TRAITS

	Diff.*. (av.)	S.D. diff.	C.R.	No. of Cases Demerit Group	Nondemerit Group
Emotional stability	14.4	10.4	1.39	63	118
Extroversion	4.4	6.8	.65	63	118
Self-confidence ...	31.7	12.3	2.67	63	118
Dominance	15.6	8.1	1.91	63	118
Self-sufficiency ...	2.1	7.4	.28	63	118
Sociability	5.5	9.0	.62	63	118

* Positive number indicates that the difference is in favor of positive traits in the demerit group.

of the critical ratios are: self-confidence, dominance, emotional stability, extroversion, sociability, and self-sufficiency. Differences in the first three traits are considerably greater than in the remaining traits.

3. Conclusions

Misbehavior in the industrial school and reformatory is positively associated with self-confidence, dominance, emotional stability, and extroversion and the degree of this association for these traits is similar for the two institutions. The correlation coefficients for the industrial school inmates range from 0.17 to 0.21 in these traits, whereas the critical ratios between groups in the reformatory range from .65 to 2.87. Self-sufficiency is correlated 0.18 with misconduct in the industrial school whereas the difference in this trait between demerit and nondemerit reformatory groups is negligible. There appears to be no relationship between sociability and misconduct in either institution.

These results indicate that the self-confident, dominant, well adjusted, "thick-skinned" individual is more likely to run counter to institutional discipline than the self-conscious, submissive, and emotionally unstable individual. His degree of sociability, however, appears to have little bearing on his ability to adapt himself to institutional procedures. It is probable that inmates possessing these trait characteristics submit less readily to rules and regulations and consequently seek whatever means there are at their disposal to assert themselves. The results further point to the possibility that institutional facilities are inadequate for providing constructive outlets for delinquents with qualities of initiative and leadership. The fact that infractions of discipline evoke attention to them, thereby enhancing their prestige with associates, may constitute a motivating force toward misconduct.