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# SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS<sup>1</sup>

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The scientific study of the individual delinquent and of juvenile delinquents as a class has revealed a number of conclusions, some of which may be noted as follows: the delinquent typically comes from an underprivileged environment; he is of dull-normal intelligence, bordering on high-grade mental deficiency; his intelligence and his educational attainments show relatively greater retardation in verbal facility than in non-verbal aptitudes; he is typically untrustworthy; and he is in need of sympathetic social control, especially during his adolescent years.

These observations may be summed up in the general conclusion that the typical delinquent is a socially inadequate as well as irresponsible person. But heretofore it has not been possible to express this inadequacy in standard measures of social competence. A direct measurement of the social maturity of the individual delinquent and of delinquents as a group should shed important light on the understanding of delinquency and on the treatment of juvenile offenders.

The Vineland Social Maturity Scale makes possible the direct measurement of social competence in terms of individual maturation. This instrument provides a description of individual responsibility and social independence in terms of age standards of development with reference to performances which normally appear at specific age levels. In this scale the individual's social capabilities are expressed in terms of self-help, self-direction, locomotion, communication, occupation, and socialization. The sum of these activities is reported as a social age score, which may in turn be expressed as a social quotient.

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## VINELAND SOCIAL MATURITY SCALE\*

Name ..... Age..... M.A..... Date.....  
 Descent ..... Sex..... Grade..... I.Q..... Born.....  
 Occupation ..... Yrs. exp..... Class..... Res. ....  
 Father's occupation..... Class..... Schooling .....  
 Mother's occupation..... Class..... Schooling .....  
 Informant ..... Relationship..... Recorder.....

Remarks: Basal score .....

Basal score..... Additional pts..... Total Score.....  
 Age equivalent..... Social quotient..... Informant's est. ....

## O - I

## Categories† Items

- |     |                                       |
|-----|---------------------------------------|
| C   | 1. "Crows"; laughs                    |
| SHG | 2. Balances head                      |
| SHG | 3. Grasps objects within reach        |
| S   | 4. Reaches for familiar persons       |
| SHG | 5. Rolls over                         |
| SHG | 6. Reaches for nearby objects         |
| O   | 7. Occupies self unattended           |
| SHG | 8. Sits unsupported                   |
| SHG | 9. Pulls self upright                 |
| C   | 10. "Talks"; imitates sounds          |
| SHE | 11. Drinks from cup or glass assisted |
| L   | 12. Moves about on floor              |
| SHG | 13. Grasps with thumb and finger      |
| S   | 14. Demands personal attention        |
| SHG | 15. Stands alone                      |
| SHE | 16. Does not drool                    |
| C   | 17. Follows simple instructions       |

\* Copyrighted. Record blanks and condensed Manual of Directions are on sale by the Extension Department of the Training School, Vineland, N. J., at \$3.00 per 100 copies for the blank and \$0.25 per copy for the Manual.

† Key to categorical arrangement of items:

SHG—Self-help general  
 SHD—Self-help dressing  
 SHE—Self-help eating

SD—Self-direction  
 C—Communication  
 S—Socialization

L—Locomotion  
 O—Occupation

## I - II

- L 18. Walks about room unattended
- O 19. Marks with pencil or crayon
- SHE 20. Masticates food
- SHD 21. Pulls off socks
- O 22. Transfers objects
- SHG 23. Overcomes simple obstacles
- O 24. Fetches or carries familiar objects
- SHE 25. Drinks from cup or glass unassisted
- SHG 26. Gives up baby carriage
- S 27. Plays with other children
- SHE 28. Eats with spoon
- L 29. Goes about house or yard
- SHE 30. Discriminates edible substances
- C 31. Uses names of familiar objects
- L 32. Walks upstairs unassisted
- SHE 33. Unwraps candy
- C 34. Talks in short sentences

## II - III

- SHG 35. Asks to go to toilet
- O 36. Initiates own play activities
- SHD 37. Removes coat or dress
- SHE 38. Eats with fork
- SHE 39. Gets drink unassisted
- SHD 40. Dries own hands
- SHG 41. Avoids simple hazards
- SHD 42. Puts on coat or dress unassisted
- O 43. Cuts with scissors
- C 44. Relates experiences

## III - IV

- L 45. Walks downstairs one step per tread
- S 46. Plays cooperatively at kindergarten level
- SHD 47. Buttons coat or dress
- O 48. Helps at little household tasks
- S 49. "Performs" for others
- SHD 50. Washes hands unaided

## IV - V

- SHG 51. Cares for self at toilet
- SHD 52. Washes face unassisted
- L 53. Goes about neighborhood unattended
- SHD 54. Dresses self except tying
- O 55. Uses pencil or crayon for drawing
- S 56. Plays competitive exercise games

## V - VI

- O 57. Uses skates, sled, wagon
- C 58. Prints simple words
- S 59. Plays simple table games
- SD 60. Is trusted with money
- L 61. Goes to school unattended

## VI - VII

- SHE 62. Uses table knife for spreading
- C 63. Uses pencil for writing
- SHD 64. Bathes self assisted
- SHD 65. Goes to bed unassisted

## VII - VIII

- SHG 66. Tells time to quarter hour
- SHE 67. Uses table knife for cutting
- S 68. Disavows literal Santa Claus
- S 69. Participates in pre-adolescent play
- SHD 70. Combs or brushes hair

## VIII - IX

- O 71. Uses tools or utensils
- O 72. Does routine household tasks
- C 73. Reads on own initiative
- SHD 74. Bathes self unaided

## IX - X

- SHE 75. Cares for self at table
- SD 76. Makes minor purchases
- L 77. Goes about home town freely

## X - XI

- C 78. Writes occasional short letters
- C 79. Makes telephone calls
- O 80. Does small remunerative work
- C 81. Answers ads; purchases by mail

## XI - XII

- O 82. Does simple creative work
- SD 83. Is left to care for self or others
- C 84. Enjoys books, newspapers, magazines

## XII - XV

- S 85. Plays difficult games
- SHD 86. Exercises complete care of dress
- SD 87. Buys own clothing accessories
- S 88. Engages in adolescent group activities
- O 89. Performs responsible routine chores

## XV - XVIII

- C 90. Communicates by letter
- C 91. Follows current events
- L 92. Goes to nearby places alone
- SD 93. Goes out unsupervised daytime
- SD 94. Has own spending money
- SD 95. Buys all own clothing

## XVIII - XX

- L 96. Goes to distant points alone
- SD 97. Looks after own health
- O 98. Has a job or continues schooling
- SD 99. Goes out nights unrestricted
- SD 100. Controls own major expenditures
- SD 101. Assumes personal responsibility

## XX - XXV

- SD 102. Uses money providently
- S 103. Assumes responsibilities beyond own needs
- S 104. Contributes to social welfare
- SD 105. Provides for future

## XXV +

- O 106. Performs skilled work
- O 107. Engages in beneficial recreation
- O 108. Systematizes own work
- S 109. Inspires confidence
- S 110. Promotes civic progress
- O 111. Supervises occupational pursuits
- SD 112. Purchases for others
- O 113. Directs or manages affairs of others
- O 114. Performs expert or professional work
- S 115. Shares community responsibility
- O 116. Creates own opportunities
- S 117. Advances general welfare

This social scale structurally resembles the Binet intelligence scale. But instead of direct "testing" of the subject a standard

interview report of representative habitual performances is obtained from an informant who is intimately acquainted with him. Also, the scale items reflect attainment rather than innate capacity. This scale has been standardized on normal subjects from birth to maturity and has been experimentally validated with various types of handicapped subjects such as the feeble-minded, the deaf, the blind, and the crippled. It has also been employed in the study of individual differences in public-school children, the classification of special class children, the inheritance of social competence, and the comparative ability of negroes. It is being used in growth studies of normal and feeble-minded subjects.

The present study reports an application of this scale to 91 juvenile delinquent boys at the State Home for Boys at Jamesburg, New Jersey. The study was undertaken to test the practicability of the method with delinquents in an institutional environment, where disciplinary control might be expected to influence the expression of social competence. It was anticipated that the untrustworthiness so frequently encountered among delinquents might be reflected as a special handicap to the expression of social competence analogous in its effects to those of blindness or deafness or crippling. It was further assumed that in such an environment the total aptitudes of the individual might not be known with sufficient thoroughness to permit their satisfactory appraisal by this method.

However, at this institution all boys are studied individually in accordance with the New Jersey Classification program which has been in use there for the past eighteen years. The case histories consequently provide a substantial background of information regarding the boys' mental, physical, and social capabilities.

The method proving practicable under the above circumstances (see below), the results of application are themselves of some value as a first study of the social competence of delinquents in quantitative terms. These results are only suggestive of those that might be obtained from a larger or more representative group of subjects.

In employing the social scale it was first necessary to determine whether sufficiently detailed information could be obtained from individual informants to permit adequate use of the method. Preliminary considerations indicated that the cottage "parents" were the most satisfactory persons to employ as informants. In this sample, the cottage mothers proved to be better informants than

the cottage fathers or the cottage attendants. The scope of an informant's knowledge was revealed early in the course of the examination. If the necessary questions were not satisfactorily answered, the interviewing was discontinued until a capable informant was found available. It should be emphasized that in each examination the examiner must satisfy himself that the information obtained is both adequate and dependable. This is analogous to the direct mental test situation in which the examiner must always satisfy himself that the conditions of the examination actually reveal satisfactory test reactions.

The subjects (see Table 1) were selected on a representative apportionment according to age, color, and mental diagnosis as obtained from the distributions in these respects from the population statistics of the institution. Fifty-eight subjects were white and 33 colored. (A comprehensive analysis of the data showed no important differences for white and colored subjects except as

TABLE 1

DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS ACCORDING TO AGE, COLOR, AND MENTAL CLASS

W = Whites

N = Negroes

Life Age

Mental Class	10		11		12		13		14		15		16		17		T
	W	N	W	N	W	N	W	N	W	N	W	N	W	N	W	N	
Average	2	1	3	1	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	1	3	1	0	0	30
Inferior	0	0	1	2	3	2	3	2	3	1	3	2	3	2	3	0	30
Borderline	1	0	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	0	0	31
T	4		12		15		15		14		14		14		3		91

hereinafter noted. For purposes of simplicity, therefore, the results are presented for the 91 subjects as a whole.) The subjects were about equally distributed according to mental class as recorded in the mental diagnoses of the resident psychologist. The median LA (life age) for all subjects was 14.0 years, with an extreme range from 10 to 17, and a mid-range between 12 and 15.

Since the recorded data on mental age in the local records were based on various tests at different dates, group test mental ages were obtained for 72 subjects corresponding to the dates of the social scale study.<sup>4</sup> The median literate MA (mental age) on

<sup>4</sup> These group-test examinations and all social scale examinations, as well as all computation of data, were made by F under D's general supervision.



the Morgan Mental Test was 9.3 years; the median non-literate MA on the Myers Mental Measure was 10.5 years. MA's for both mental tests were one year higher for the whites than for the colored. Comprehensive study of the results was made with reference to these literate and non-literate MA's in relation to SA (social age) and color without revealing significant results. Consequently the two MA's were averaged, or pooled, for each subject by taking the mean of each pair. The median of these pooled MA's (see Table 2) was 9.6 years, with an extreme range from 4 to 15, and a mid-range between 7 and 12. The correlation between LA and pooled MA was  $r = .44$ .

TABLE 2  
LIFE AGE VS. POOLED MA's  
(Morgan and Myers)

Pooled MA's													
Life Age	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	T
10		1		2			1						4
11	1	4		1	1	1			1				9
12		4	1		3			1	1				10
13		2	2		1	3	2	2	1	1			14
14		1			1		5	3	1			1	12
15				1	1	1	2	1		1	1	1	9
16		1			2	4		1		2	1		11
17						1	1	1					3
T	1	13	3	4	9	10	11	9	4	4	2	2	72
Median LA = 13.9				Median MA = 9.6				$r = .44$					

The median SA for all subjects (see Table 3) was found to be 10.0 years with an extreme range from 6 to 16, and a mid-range between 8 and 11. The median difference in SA according to color was .2 years in favor of the negroes (median MA being one year higher for the whites). The correlation between SA and LA was  $r = .41$  which coefficient is reduced to about .25 when corrected for the influence of MA.

TABLE 3  
LIFE AGE VS. SOCIAL AGE

Life Age	Social Age											T
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
10		2		2	1							5
11	1	1	5	5								12
12	1	1	2	5	4	1						14
13		5	2		4	1		1	1			14
14		1	3		5	1	1	4				15
15			2		8	2				1	1	14
16	1		2	3	1	3	1	2			1	14
17			1		1		1					3
T	3	10	17	15	24	8	3	7	1	1	2	91
Median LA = 14.0      Median SA = 10.0 $r = .41$												

The difference between median SA and median pooled MA's (see Table 4) was .4 years in favor of SA. The correlation between SA and pooled MA's was .50. This coefficient is reduced to about .40 when corrected for the influence of LA.

TABLE 4  
SOCIAL AGE VS. POOLED MA's  
(Morgan and Myers)

Pooled MA's													
Social Age	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	T
6		3											3
7		4			2	1	1	2					10
8		2	1	1	1	2	1	3	1				12
9	1	2	1	2	3			1	1				11
10		2		1	2	4	3	1	1	3	1		18
11						2	1	2					5
12						1	2						3
13			1		1		2		1	1		1	7
14							1						1
15												1	1
16											1		1
T	1	13	3	4	9	10	11	9	4	4	2	2	72
Median MA = 9.6                  Median SA = 10.0 $r = .50$													

Following each examination, and before totalling the result, each informant was asked to estimate the SA of that subject in

terms of normal child development. The median of these estimated SA's (see Table 5) was 11.8 years. This was 1.8 years higher than the median of the measured SA's. These estimates were one year higher for the colored than for the whites. The correlation between estimated SA and measured SA was  $r = .80$ .

TABLE 5  
MEASURED SOCIAL AGE VS. ESTIMATED SOCIAL AGE  
Estimated Social Age

Measured Social Age	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	T
6			2	1										3
7		1	2	5	1	1								10
8			1	3	3	5	1	4						17
9	1				3	3	6	2						15
10					1	3	3	8	4	2	2		1	24
11						1	1	2	1	2	1			8
12								1	1				1	3
13								2	1	2	1	1		7
14										1				1
15											1			1
16												2		2
T	1	1	5	9	8	13	11	19	7	7	5	3	2	91
Median Measured SA = 10.0      Median Estimated SA = 11.8 $r = .80$														

The median SQ (social quotient) (see Table 6) was 73, with an extreme range from 40 to 110, and a mid-range between 60 and 90. There was no difference in SQ according to color. The correlation between LA and SQ was  $r = -.21$ . (Other results have showed a tendency for SQ's of subnormal subjects to decrease in the second decade of LA.)

The median of mental ratios obtained by dividing pooled MA by LA (table omitted) was 70. This median mental ratio was 3 points below the median SQ. The correlation between LA and mental ratio was  $r = .05$ .

TABLE 6  
LIFE AGE VS. SOCIAL QUOTIENT  
Social Quotient

Life Age	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-99	100-109	110-119	T
10			1	1	2		1		5
11		1	1	8	2				12
12	1		3	5	5				14
13		5	2	2	3		2		14
14		3	2	4	3	3			15
15		2	6	4		1		1	14
16	1	5	3	2	2	1			14
17	1		1	1					3
T	3	16	19	27	17	5	3	1	91
	Median LA = 14.0			Median SQ = 72.5			$r = -.21$		

These results with delinquents in relation to those obtained from other applications of the social scale to normal and exceptional groups show the central tendencies of this group at the borderline between feeble-mindedness and dull-normality. How much of this retardation is attributable to the untrustworthiness of these delinquents as a handicap to social competence and how much is due to their mental retardation is not determined in this study. Forty-two per cent of the group fell below SQ 70, which may ordinarily be taken as suggestive of mental deficiency except for allowances in interpretation due to special handicaps.<sup>5</sup> Ten per cent of the group scored SQ 90 and above, which is the lower quartile in the normal standardization. Forty-eight per cent scored between SQ 70 and 90, which is the tentative borderline for dull-normal performance on this scale. These results are in general accord with the results obtained from the mental tests employed in this study.

<sup>5</sup> General and specific handicaps such as crippling, deafness, blindness, untrustworthiness, and the life, affect the expression of social competence and these effects are deliberately recorded by this social scale. The measurement of such influences is, indeed, a major necessity and such results are to be *interpreted* rather than *depreciated*.

TABLE 7  
SOCIAL CLASS VS. MENTAL CLASS

Social Class	Mental Class			Total
	Average	Inferior	Borderline	
Average	8	0	1	9
Inferior	19	14	11	44
Borderline	5	15	18	38
T	32	29	30	91

$C = .44$

These social scores show a positive but not very close agreement with the clinical psychological diagnoses available on these subjects.<sup>6</sup> The mental diagnoses of these subjects are of record in terms of average, inferior, and borderline, with approximately 30 subjects in each group. For the average mental class the median SQ is 79, for the inferior group it is 70, and for the borderline group it is 66. In Table 7 the social quotients have been grouped in social classes by considering SQ's below 70 as borderline,\*\* SQ's from 70 to 89 as inferior,<sup>7</sup> and SQ's of 90 and above as average to compare with the mental classes of the institutional diagnoses. In the average mental class 15 per cent of the subjects are below SQ 70, whereas in the borderline mental class 60 per cent are below SQ 70. Similarly, in the average group 25 per cent of the subjects are above SQ 90, whereas in the borderline group 3 per cent of the subjects are above this limit. The mathematical statement of relationship is expressed in the coefficient of contingency,  $C = .44$ .

In general the results of this study are in accord with expectation from various considerations except that the correlations are generally lower than those found in other studies. This is probably attributable in part to the numerous selective influences operative in this group, and in part to the influence of untrustworthiness as a handicap to social competence.

The practicability of the scale with delinquents in an institutional environment is revealed by an analysis showing the relative difficulty of the scale items with these subjects as compared with the normal standardization. A sample of the comparison of the

<sup>6</sup> As noted above, the results are influenced by the specific effect of untrustworthiness as well as by mental competence.

<sup>7</sup> For this purpose the SQ limits suggested for mental deficiency in the preceding paragraph are here termed "borderline," and the limits for borderline dull-normal are here termed "inferior" to conform to the mental classification practice in use at Jamesburg.

SA values obtained by this group for scale items from Year IV to Year VIII with those obtained by the normal standardization group is shown in Table 8. The displacements and their degrees, for delinquents compared with non-delinquents, and for white compared with colored delinquents, are readily obvious in the table and may be referred to the scale blank for item performance. Displacements of less than 2 years are not to be regarded as statistically significant. These displacements do not invalidate the total scores because those displaced in the direction of difficulty are compensated for by those displaced in the direction of ease.

These data are based on too few subjects to yield more than suggestive conclusions. For what they are worth they show more items displaced, and by larger amounts, for white than for colored delinquents. Taken in consideration of other evidence this suggests

TABLE 8  
SOCIAL AGE VALUES\*  
(Thomson Method)

Year	Item	Normal	Del. White	Del. Negro
IV	51	4.2	5.4	4.2
	52	4.3	4.8	4.3
to	53	4.5	8.4*	4.5
	54	4.7	3.9	5.2
V	55	4.8	7.1*	6.1
	56	5.0	6.0	5.2
V	57	5.2	7.8*	6.9
	58	5.4	5.4	7.8*
to	59	5.6	8.0*	8.5*
	60	5.8	10.0*	8.3*
VI	61	6.0	9.3*	8.0*
VI	62	6.3	5.4	5.2
to	63	6.5	7.4	7.4
	64	6.8	4.4*	5.2
VII	65	7.0	6.3	5.2
VII	66	7.2	7.6	8.9
	67	7.4	3.9*	5.2*
to	68	7.6	5.4*	6.5
	69	7.8	6.6	6.9
VIII	70	8.0	6.6	7.6

\* Starred items show displacement which may be regarded as statistically significant, but data in this table are too meager for positive conclusions.

that the white delinquent departs more from the non-delinquent norm than does the colored delinquent, an influence which is generally supported by experience and observation. Four of the 5 items which show retarded achievement for these whites reflect untrustworthiness, while 2 of the 3 items which show early achievement reveal self-help.

The untrustworthiness of delinquents operates as a special handicap to social competence and this is reflected in the more or less necessary disciplinary control of the institutional environment. These restrictions to behavior are to some extent offset by the provision in the scale for scoring certain items on the basis of pre-institutional performance and also on the basis of presumptive performance assuming that the environmental restrictions were removed.

The influence of environmental restraint on social behavior is directly expressed in items scored +NO (plus no opportunity). These items are those which presumably would be passed if the environmental restrictions were removed. The method of scoring (see Manual) makes it possible to obtain credit on these items according to the range of the scale in which they are located. For these delinquent subjects (see Table 9) these items are principally self-direction items, i. e., "is trusted with money," "makes minor purchases," "is left to care for self or others," and "buys own clothing accessories." The others are items in the locomotion, communication, and occupation categories which involve self-direction and the ability to conduct one's self properly, such as "goes to school unattended," "goes about home town freely," and "makes telephone calls." Relatively few subjects are seriously penalized in their total scores by these environmental restrictions.

In general the item analysis reveals the practicability of using this scale in the correctional environment and reveals the informants as sufficiently well informed not to invalidate seriously the method. This analysis also brings out certain limitations of environmental opportunity not apparently related to untrustworthiness.

The reliability of the scale as found in other studies has been found to be uniformly high. In the present study only casual data were obtained from re-examining 7 subjects with alternative informants, and 5 subjects acting as their own informants. These results are in general accord with similar measures of reliability in other experimental groups, and reveal the subjects as not deviating by more than approximately one year from one examination

TABLE 9  
NUMBER OF +NO ITEMS AT EACH SA LEVEL

Cate- gory	+NO Items	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
S	56		1									1
S	59		1									1
SD	60	2	3	8	10	7	3	7		1	1	42
L	61	2			3	2						7
S	69		1									1
SD	76		3	6	11	8	3	5	1			37
L	77	1	2	1	8	3	2	7	1	1	1	27
C	79	1	2	7	17	5	3		1	1	1	38
C	81	1		1	6	1		2				11
SD	83			4	8	4	2	7		1		26
SD	87				4	1	2	6	1			14
C	90					1						1
C	91				1							1
L	92					1	1	2	1		1	6
SD	93				1	1	1	2		1	1	7
SD	94				1		1	4	1	1	2	10
SD	95					1		1				2
L	96								1		1	2
T		7	13	27	70	35	18	43	7	6	8	234

to another, provided that the examination itself is satisfactory on the basis of the adequacy of the informant. It is important in this connection to note that the inadequacy of an examination is readily revealed by the information which the informant is unable to supply under the standard method of interview. It is essential to the successful use of the scale that the examiner be skilled in the method and capable of determining by interview whether the informant is both informed and reliable.

We conclude from this study that the Vineland Social Maturity Scale is applicable to delinquents in a correctional environment provided that suitable information can be obtained and provided that the examiner is sufficiently skilled in the method to guarantee the adequacy of the examinations. We conclude further that the results from this scale are in accord with those obtained from mental examinations on the same subjects and afford reliable measures of the social competence of delinquents. In this sample no significant differences in social competence were found between white and colored subjects in spite of a 10 per cent advantage in



mental scores on the part of the whites. If this group may be taken as representative, the social competence of delinquents is strikingly below that of normal non-delinquents, being principally in the feeble-minded and borderline ranges of social competence. This conclusion is supported by general experience and observations with delinquents and by inference from investigations using other methods of approach.

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