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ABSTRACT

The research reported is predicated on the establishment of an empirically derived psychological typology of male delinquents. The schema for the classification of delinquents is based on those ego and super ego functions which have been shown most frequently to be of importance in understanding the dynamics of various delinquent types. This schema led to a differentiation of delinquents based on: 1) their attitudes toward conventional moral prohibitions; 2) the extent to which they are capable of controlling their impulses and of acting in accordance with their moral standards; and 3) their affective response to their delinquent behavior. The classification includes: 1) situational delinquents; 2) neurotic delinquents; 3) pseudo-socialized delinquents; and 4) psychopathic delinquents. The assessment procedures for determining type are based on three tests which are briefly discussed. This report concludes with short sections on the treatment for each type of delinquent. (KJ)

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With compliments  
S. Felix Polk

**TOWARD A PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPOLOGY OF  
DELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS**

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Recently I attended the meeting of a research group consisting of several senior probation officers who were employees of a large county in California. The assigned task of this group was to recommend to the county juvenile probation department and to its juvenile court a pragmatic way of classifying male juvenile delinquents. It was hoped that such a classification scheme would serve as a guide to juvenile court judges for the appropriate disposition of juvenile cases and to probation officers to aid them in goal setting and to help them determine preferred methods of approach with their juvenile probationers. This group of able and interested probation officers had been meeting on a weekly basis for well over one year. They had studied psychological, sociological and social psychological theories of delinquency. They had examined thoroughly the vast literature on delinquency which has been reported in increasing quantities since the end of World War II. Yet, when they had completed their efforts, they were unable to express economically, systematically and in pragmatic terms the observation made so frequently by probation officers, institutional workers and clinicians alike; namely that there exist identifiable delinquent types and that for these types, different corrective experiences are indicated.

The research to be reported here is predicated on the establishment of an empirically derived psychological typology of male delinquents. It has been undertaken in the hope that such a typology will provide the framework both for viewing the delinquent in his many varieties and for the development

and application of differential treatment methods, each geared to be of maximal benefit for the relevant type.

From a review of the psychological literature on delinquency (Polk, 1965), it seemed reasonable to base a schema for the classification of delinquents on those ego and superego functions which have been shown most frequently to be of importance in understanding the dynamics of various delinquent types. This led to a differentiation of delinquents based on: 1) their attitudes toward conventional moral prohibitions (superego values); 2) the extent to which they are capable of controlling their impulses and of acting in accordance with their moral standards (ego strength); and 3) their affective response to their delinquent behavior. Although a variety of other psychological, behavioral, and sociological variables have been used as the basis for other classification schemes (ref. Jenkins, Reiss, Petersen & Quay), each of these other typologies have dealt essentially with the same concepts. Thus, the present model may be seen as providing the most parsimonious basis for assessment of those variables which most observers have, at least implicitly, considered.

TYPE I or SITUATIONAL DELINQUENTS are defined as those adolescents who have adequately internalized societal moral standards and who ordinarily adhere to these. They become delinquent as a result of situational factors such as, for example, medical problems or some kind of stress experience. Such adolescents would be expected to come to the attention of

the police or courts on only one or a few occasions as contrasted to other types who are much more likely to be repeated offenders.

TYPE II or NEUROTIC DELINQUENTS are defined as those whose moral attitudes are similar to those of non-delinquents in that they are in line with societal expectations. However, these moral standards are violated in the commission of the delinquent act. Thus, there exists for these individuals a disparity between their ideals of behavior and actions relevant to these ideals. The inability to act in accordance with their standards reflects their poor behavioral controls and should give rise to subjective feelings of guilt and discomfort. Such delinquents are typically frustrated, unhappy and discontented with themselves and this is manifested in their generally low self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness.

TYPE III or PSEUDO-SOCIALIZED DELINQUENTS are defined as those whose moral values are patterned in accordance with a deviant set of standards in relation to the conventional moral code accepted by society at large. They are similar to those in Type I in that they do not show a disparity between their values and behavior in the commission of the delinquent act. Thus they should not experience guilt feelings about the violation of conventional moral prohibitions since these are not part of their own value system. However, this type of delinquent does have a well-developed moral code and should experience guilt and feelings of low self-esteem in connection with the violation of his own deviant set standards and those



societal standards which he has accepted. He might thus experience guilt feelings when he has informed on a friend and for not participating in some delinquent behavior engaged in by his comrades, or from acting in opposition to established gang or subcultural values. Although the behavioral controls of such delinquents gives the appearance of being weak, as indicated by their delinquent acting out, there is no reason to assume that this is the result of poorly developed ego functions. In fact, there is considerable evidence that some delinquents have adequate, if not exemplary, ability to act in accordance with their own standards of behavior. Such delinquents do not have a poor ability to control impulses but merely the absense of a desire to do so where society expects they should.

TYPE IV or PSYCHOPATHIC DELINQUENTS are defined as those who do not have the moral attitudes characteristic of normal adolescents and who have not developed any strongly deviant set of values. These individuals are primarily expedient in their moral orientation. Type IV delinquents show equally poor behavioral controls. However, they would not be expected to experience either subjective guilt or a lowered self-esteem since there is little, if any, disparity between personal values and behavior. Such delinquents are neither ashamed of their behavior nor are they particularly desirous of altering it, except to the extent that it might prove expedient for them to do so.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Three test instruments were used to implement an analysis of delinquent types based on the preceding conceptual scheme. The first measures the breadth and intensity of evaluative (or moral) attitudes towards a wide range of violations of conventional prohibitions. This instrument, named What Teenagers Think (WTAT for short) consists of 50 items to be rated on a five point scale in terms of the degree of rightness or wrongness of the behavior of a fictitious character named Larry who is placed in a variety of specific situations. Each situation describes an act, frequently delinquent in nature, performed by Larry and provides information about his motives and the context in which the act occurs, rather than only supplying a classification of the moral or ethical abstraction underlying the behavior (e.g. stealing). Included in this instrument are items relating to sexual behavior, aggression, personal dishonesty, relationships to parents, school officials and legal authorities.

The second instrument measures the intensity of the subjective feelings of guilt and personal unworthiness. It consists of 38 true-false self-descriptive items dealing with guilt feelings, ways of reducing these feelings through punishment or other expiation, hypothesized childhood antecedents of guilt and a variety of conceptually related items. These items were adapted from a subjective Guilt Scale (Pittel, 1964), which has been validated in similar research.

These 38 items were randomly interspersed amongst the 68 items of the Barron Ego Strength Scale of the MMPI which,

in this research, serves as the measure of ego control functions. This scale, like the Guilt Scale, calls for true-false self-descriptive responses.

A test battery comprised of these three instruments was administered to 224 non-delinquent male adolescents drawn from high school populations. Their test scores were then compared to those of 422 incarcerated and non-incarcerated delinquents. For the purpose of this research, a delinquent was defined in the legal sense as an adolescent who had been convicted by the juvenile court on at least one occasion for anti-social behavior.

The hypotheses of this research are presented in terms of the four cells represented in Table 1. These cells relate the strength of conventional moral values to ego strength. Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be proportionately fewer delinquents than normals in the Strong Values-Strong Ego Cell since it is unlikely that adherence to conventional moral values, coupled with adequate controls, would lead to delinquent behavior. Hypothesis 2 predicted that there would be a higher proportion of delinquents in the Strong Values-Weak Ego Cell than normals. They fall in the "neurotic" classification and are characterized by an inability to act in accordance with their values. Hypothesis 3 predicted that there would be a greater proportion of delinquents in the Weak Values-Strong Ego Cell than normals. These delinquents fall into the category of "pseudo-socialized" and are characterized by adequately functioning egos and adherence to a deviant set of norms. Hypothesis 4 predicted



that there would be a larger proportion of delinquents in the Weak Values-Weak Ego Cell than there would be normals. This delinquent, according to the proposed typology, is the psychopath who has inadequate controls and has not introjected either society's or a deviant set of values.

In order to test these hypotheses, the data of the delinquent and non-delinquent groups were combined and frequency distributions were constructed for the two independent variables (i.e. for moral values and ego strength). A median cut was then made with those scoring above it being designated as "Strong" and those scoring below "Weak". Table 1 summarizes the frequencies of cell placements for delinquents and non-delinquents. The chi square of 49.81 for these data is significant beyond the .001 level. Clearly delinquents and non-delinquents differ in their cell placements. In order to determine the relative contribution of each independent variable, two chi squares were calculated, one comparing delinquents to non-delinquents on Strength of Moral Values and the other comparing these groups on Ego Strength. The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3, and clearly demonstrate that the difference in cell placement between delinquents and non-delinquents is due entirely to the operation of Ego Strength. Moral attitudes play virtually no role, at least when the total group of delinquents is compared to normals.

Two years following testing, records of probation departments were examined in order to ascertain which of the delinquents had appeared before the courts following

their release from custody. Those who had made such court appearances as repeated offenders were designated as recidivists while those who had not were labelled non-recidivists. These two groups were then compared in terms of their cell placement. Since a large proportion of testing was conducted under conditions of anonymity, the recidivism data is available for a limited group of 118 delinquents. As Table 4 shows, there is a significant difference in the pattern of cell placement for the two groups. Again this result is attributable almost entirely to the operation of Ego Strength as indicated in Table 5.

Mean guilt scores by cell placement were also examined. The results show that delinquents as a group scored higher on the Guilt Scale than did normals. As anticipated, the highest guilt score for delinquents was recorded by the "neurotic" group. For both normals and delinquents strong moral values and weak ego were related to strong or high guilt whereas weak moral values and strong ego were related to weak or low guilt.

In summary, the results suggest that when delinquents are evaluated on relevant psychological variables, they will be found to be psychologically heterogenous. While it may be appropriate to describe some delinquents as being deficient in their incorporation of moral attitudes or in their ability to control their behavior, it would be erroneous to characterize the delinquent population as a whole in these terms.

The greatest proportion of delinquents scored in the Strong Values-Weak Ego "neurotic" cell. Thus the evidence

of this research is that a large proportion of delinquents do suffer from a psychological deficit. This finding seriously questions the adequacy of any theory of delinquency which asserts that the delinquent is psychologically normal and which ascribes the development of delinquent behavior exclusively to the operation of social variables such as, for example, lower-class membership or subcultural affiliation.

At the same time, the placement of a considerable proportion of delinquents in the Weak Values-Strong Ego "pseudo-socialized" cell provides evidence which also denies the validity of any theory which views delinquent behavior as being exclusively the expression of neurotic personality mechanisms. It also lends support to the proposal that at least some delinquents are psychologically well-adjusted and in their anti-social behavior adhere to a deviant (subcultural) moral code. The placement of relatively few delinquents in the Weak Values-Weak Ego "psychopathic" cell also points to the fallacy of applying the psychopathic hypothesis of delinquent behavior to all delinquents. Finally, it was of considerable interest to note that a small proportion of delinquents scored in the Strong Values-Strong Ego "situational" cell. It will be recalled that these are adolescents who are thought to have become delinquent because of medical reasons or as a response to a precipitating stress situation.

A highly significant relationship was found between recidivism and cell placement. A great majority of delinquents scoring in the Weak Values-Weak Ego "psychopathic"

cell (67%) became recidivists while an even higher proportion of delinquents scoring in the Strong Values-Strong Ego "situational" cell (76%) did not. This is consistent with the understanding of the psychopath as being the most handicapped psychologically and of the situational delinquent as being essentially healthy. There was also a tendency for a greater proportion of neurotic delinquents to become repeaters (65%). Scores on the Ego Strength Scale proved to be a highly significant index of whether a delinquent would again be apprehended following his discharge from incarceration. The prediction of recidivism on the basis of Ego Strength scores significantly improved upon base rate predictions.

These findings suggest that the classification of delinquents on the variables which define the proposed typology (especially on ego strength) can be used by probation departments and correctional facilities in assessing the likelihood that a delinquent will become a repeated offender. For correctional officers and other professional personnel, who must carefully apportion their time, the variables of this research provide a potentially important tool for selecting those delinquents who require the most intensive service. The following differential treatment approaches are suggested by the findings of this research:

#### The Differential Treatment of Delinquent Types

It has frequently been argued in the literature that a variety of corrective methods must be applied to the

delinquent population commensurate with the variety of forms which the delinquent personality assumes (Lippman, 1945, Alt and Grossbard, 1949, Eissler, 1950, Chwast, 1957, Laulight, 1963). It is apparent from this research and from some previous findings that the same anti-social behavior may represent a variety of possible meanings reflecting several identifiable personality patterns. It is also evident that successful treatment of the delinquent depends heavily on the accuracy with which the diagnosis of types is made and on the adaptation of appropriate treatment methods for each type (Schmidl, 1947). It is proposed that the components of superego (moral attitudes, ego strength and guilt), which in this research provide the basis for differentiation among types of delinquents, also form the framework for formulating a strategy of differential treatment. It is by no means evident that psychotherapy provides the most appropriate corrective method for all delinquents but it is quite apparent that unless delinquent behavior is the result of psychological stresses, psychiatric treatment is hardly likely to cause its disappearance. It has been cautioned that the application of psychotherapy to some delinquents may result in a deterioration of personality rather than in its improvement (Erikson, 1956, Robison, 1960). Certainly this research has suggested that a substantial proportion of delinquents (the pseudo-socialized) are psychologically healthy and it is questionable whether they would benefit from a program of psychotherapy.



The psychological differential treatment of delinquency as defined in this research suggests the following differential treatment approaches.

#### The Treatment of Type I (HWTAT-HES) Delinquents

It will be recalled that the Type I (situational) delinquent is defined as one who is characterized psychologically by adequate adherence to generally held moral values and by a system of controls which ordinarily permit him to behave in socially acceptable ways. In contrast to other delinquent types, he is likely to have come to the attention of the courts or police on only one or a few occasions. It may be that such an adolescent engages in anti-social behavior either as a response to an immediate stress situation (such as a family crisis) or because of some physiological deficit (such as brain damage or physical deformity). The rehabilitative approach to this type of delinquent should be based on an accurate appraisal of the factors which have led him to act in a deviant way and should be oriented toward the prevention of the recurrence of such factors or toward strengthening the adolescent against their impact. Since the situational delinquent has not in our formulation developed a delinquent identity, care should be taken not to expose him to the more committed delinquents found in corrective institutions and not to label him as an "official" delinquent since this may propel him into a more extensive delinquent role.

#### The Treatment of Type II (HWTAT-IES) Delinquents

The Type II (neurotic) delinquent is one who has

incorporated the dominant system of moral values but who is unable to regulate his behavior accordingly. The primary therapeutic task with this type of delinquent is to institute controls where they are inadequate and to reduce the intensity of inner conflict and guilt. This can probably best be accomplished by the application of intensive individual or group psychotherapy. Preferably such therapeutic services should be conducted in a non-institutional setting to prevent the development of a more extensive delinquent identity. The exposure of the neurotic delinquent to psychopaths or pseudo-socialized delinquents runs the risk of providing him with stimuli which would further encourage him to resolve his neurotic conflicts by acting out. While it is recognized that the control of impulses for some neurotic delinquents is so poor that placement in a restricted setting is required, every effort should be made in such cases to isolate them from other delinquent types.

#### The Treatment of Type III (LWTAT-HES) Delinquents

In accordance with the proposed typology, the adolescent who scores low on moral attitudes and high on ego strength does not become delinquent because of any psychological malaise but because he has internalized a deviant set of moral values to which he adheres when he acts in an anti-social manner. The rehabilitative task with such an adolescent is the alteration of his system of values so that they fall in line with those of the larger society. Since delinquency for the pseudo-socialized delinquent is

the product of the values, beliefs, and behavior of the subcultural group to which he belongs, the preferred therapeutic strategy is to attempt to alter his values through the medium of his peer group. While the severity of acting out of some pseudo-socialized delinquents requires their institutionalization, a community based program such as the Provo Experiment is preferable since it avoids the possible negative effects resulting from incarceration.

#### The Treatment of Type IV (LWTAT-LES) Delinquents

In our formulation, the Type IV (psychopathic) delinquent suffers from the most severe psychological deficit. He has neither incorporated adequately a system of moral values nor has he developed sufficient controls for the regulation of his behavior. As the results of this research have shown, the psychopathic delinquent is more likely than any other delinquent type to become a recidivist. For such an adolescent, the attempt to inculcate a system of moral values must follow the establishment of a modicum of self-control. For this reason, it seems mandatory that the psychopathic delinquent be placed in a closed institutional setting where, initially, controls would be provided by the application of external sanctions. When such a delinquent demonstrates that he is capable of some self-regulation, it may be fruitful to engage him either in psychotherapy or in a work program where he would have the opportunity to relate closely to a strong male figure who would constitute a model for identification with acceptable standards of behavior. It may also be quite

useful to use a behavior modification approach with such an adolescent which would stress the expediency of engaging in socially appropriate behavior. Especially in the early stages of institutionalization, the psychopathic delinquent should be isolated from other delinquent types since his uncontrolled behavior might stimulate others to aggravated anti-social conduct.

THANK YOU!

TABLE I

STRENGTH OF CONVENTIONAL VALUES AND EGO STRENGTH  
 COMPARED FOR DELINQUENTS AND NON-DELINQUENTS

STRENGTH OF CONVENTIONAL VALUES

		STRONG		WEAK	
		DELINQUENTS	NON-DELINQUENTS	DELINQUENTS	NON-DELINQUENTS
EGO STRENGTH	STRONG	66 (.156)		101 (.239)	
		70 (.313)		83 (.371)	
	WEAK	142 (.336)		113 (.268)	
		41 (.183)		30 (.134)	

Chi Square 49.81 (df=3),  $p < .001$

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TABLE II  
DELINQUENTS AND NON-DELINQUENTS  
COMPARED ON STRENGTH OF CONVENTIONAL VALUES

	DELINQUENTS	NON-DELINQUENTS
STRONG VALUES	208 (.493)	111 (.496)
WEAK VALUES	214 (.507)	113 (.504)
N	422	224

Chi Square .06 (df=1), NS

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TABLE III  
DELINQUENTS AND NON-DELINQUENTS  
COMPARED ON EGO STRENGTH

	DELINQUENTS	NON-DELINQUENTS
STRONG EGO	167(.396)	153(.683)
WEAK EGO	255(.064)	71(.307)
N	422	224

Chi Square 48.22, (df=1,  $p < .001$ )

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TABLE IV  
 STRENGTH OF VALUES AND EGO STRENGTH  
 CELL PLACEMENT RELATED TO RECIDIVISM

	RECIDIVISTS	NON-RECIDIVISTS
STRONG VALUES STRONG EGO	4 (.24)	13 (.76)
STRONG VALUES WEAK EGO	31 (.65)	17 (.35)
WEAK VALUES STRONG EGO	9 (.45)	11 (.55)
WEAK VALUES WEAK EGO	22 (.67)	11 (.33)
TOTAL	66 (.56)	52 (.44)

Chi Square 9.67, (df=3),  $p < .05$

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TABLE V  
THE RELATIONSHIP OF EGO STRENGTH TO RECIDIVISM

	Recidivists	Non-Recidivists
Strong Ego	13	24
Weak Ego	53	28
Total	66	52

Chi Square 7.84 (df=1),  $p < .01$

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