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ALIENATION, HEDONISM, AND LIFE-VISION OF DELINQUENTS

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H. S. Sandhu, University of Guelph, was an Indian exchange professor to the United States, and had been Superintendent of a Special Prison and Principal Prison Officers' Training School in India. Prior thereto he was Deputy Superintendent of Prisons in Punjab, India. From 1957 to 1959 he was a Fulbright Scholar at Ohio State University, from which he received a Master's degree in social work. He holds a B. A., an M. A., and a Ph.D. from Punjab University. He has published a number of articles in professional journals, both in India and in the United States.

The authors had hypothesized that delinquents as compared to non-delinquents are higher in alienation, more impulsively hedonistic, and poorer in vision of goals. Delinquent youths, 16 to 18 years old, from different correctional institutions in Florida were administered questionnaires and compared with high school boys. The hypothesis was confirmed. The intra-group comparison further revealed that the more experienced delinquents possessed better vision of their life goals. The institutionalized delinquents are more mother-centered; the non-delinquents are more father centered. The delinquents' weak affectional ties are related with alienation and non-delinquents' identification with their father is associated with better vision of life goals.

THE PROBLEM

Alienation appears as a component in several theories of causation in criminology. Gough and Peterson reckoned the delinquent an alienated person, among other things.¹ *Impulsive hedonism* is also considered to be a major theme of delinquency. Parsons termed this one of the dominant notes of youth culture.² Cohen considered this as a characteristic of the delinquent gang.³ Matza and Sykes consider the delinquent as lacking occupational goals, either drifting aimlessly or having grandiose dreams of quick success.⁴ This study is an attempt to provide an empirical test for these themes.

It is hypothesized that delinquents as compared to non-delinquents are (1) more alienated, (2) more hedonistic, and (3) possess a poorer vision of the future (life's track). It is further intended to relate these characteristics with certain background factors such as the parental affect pattern.

¹ Gough & Peterson, *The Identification and Measurement of Predispositional Factors in Crime and Delinquency*, J. CONSULT. PSYCHOL. 207 (1952).

² Parsons, *Age and Sex in the Social Structure in the United States*, AM. SOC. REV. 604 (Oct. 1942).

³ COHEN, DELINQUENT BOYS (1960).

⁴ Sykes & Matza, *Juvenile Delinquency and Subterranean Values*, 26 AM. SOC. REV. 712 (1961).

Alienation has been attracting increasing attention in the past decade. Seeman and Evans showed that the more alienated patients score lower on an objective test of knowledge about tuberculosis.⁵ Pearlin, in his study of nursing personnel, measured the nurses' alienation from work on three aspects of the organization of a mental hospital: its authority structure, opportunity structure, and work groups.⁶ Dean found a low but statistically significant negative correlation between alienation and occupational prestige, education, income, and rural background. There was a small positive correlation between alienation and advancing age.⁷ Seeman found that inmates in a reformatory scoring low in powerlessness showed superior retention of parole material.⁸ The present study seeks to determine the relation of alienation to delinquency, and to test the hypothesis that the institutionalized delinquents are significantly more alienated than the controls.

⁵ Seeman & Evans, *Alienation and Learning in a Hospital Setting*, 27 AM. SOC. REV. 772 (1962).

⁶ Pearlin, *Alienation From Work: A Study of Nursing Personnel*, 27 AM. SOC. REV. 314 (1962).

⁷ Dean, *Alienation: Its Meaning and Measurement*, 26 AM. SOC. REV. 753-758 (1961).

⁸ Seeman, *Alienation and Social Learning in a Reformatory*, 69 AM. J. SOC. 270 (1963).

The second variable is *hedonism*. Several criminologists have described the delinquent youth as impulsively hedonistic. Talking of their short-run hedonism, Cohen says:

They "hang around", "rough housing", "chewing the fat", and "waiting for something to turn up". They may respond impulsively to somebody's suggestion to play ball, go swimming, engage in some sort of mischief, or do something else that offers excitement. They do not take kindly to organized and supervised recreation, which subjects them to a regime of schedules and impersonal rules. They are impatient, impetuous and out for "fun" with little heed to the remoter gains and costs.⁹

The third variable is the *vision of life's track*. It is commonly assumed that delinquents have very poor planning of their lives. Adequate facilities do not seem to exist for counselling them. They have either not been able to cultivate healthy and realistic ambitions or if they have some aims, ambitions, they have no planning for the realization of their ambitions. It is observed that most institutionalized delinquent boys have no long-range planning in their lives; and if they pretend to entertain some life goals, they are ill prepared to achieve them. They are somewhat unrealistic about them. Reckless remarks: "It is as if adolescent life was played without script, without definite parts and directions. It is like a jam session in which the musicians play without written parts of the total score."¹⁰

METHOD

The foregoing hypothesis was tested in two groups: (1) a delinquent group (test group) N:179, and (2) a non-delinquent group (controls) N:198. The two groups were controlled in respect of sex, age (16 to 18 years), family income, and race. The delinquents' sample was comprised of 179 convicted and institutionalized boys. The majority (98 boys) were confined in Florida State School for Boys, Marianna, Florida; 56 in State Correctional Institution, Chattahoochee; and 25 in the three Road Prisons. All boys between the ages of 16 to 18 years and confined in these institutions on the day of the test were included in this study. There were 140 white delinquents and 39 Negro delinquents. Their mean age was 17.8

years. Religious orientation included: Protestant 104, Catholics 26, Jewish 6, and non-participant 40; and 3 did not respond to this question. The control group was made up of 198 high school boys from three high schools situated in Tampa, Florida. There were two white high schools and one Negro high school. The control sample included 147 white and 31 Negro boys. Their mean age was 17.7 years. Religious orientations included: Protestant 105, Catholic 42, Jewish 6, non-participant 37, and 8 did not give their religion.

The authors framed their own questionnaires for this study, and based the questionnaire on Seeman's five-element definition of alienation. Seeman treats alienation from the personal standpoint of the actor—from his social psychological point of view. He wants to focus chiefly upon the ideas of "expectation" and "value reward". His five components of alienation are powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement.¹¹ The present authors incorporated Seeman's five components of alienation in 38 questionnaire items. These items were pre-tested on a group of 16 to 18 year-old high school boys, 39 of whom, according to their teachers, were least alienated and in a group of 44 inmates of the white and Negro juvenile homes who according to institutional staff were most alienated. These items differentiated the two groups in alienation at the .01 level and the reliability coefficient was .89. To shorten the test, 14 items were retained as the best differentiators, and the remainder were eliminated. Following Seeman's proposal, items were developed which were neither global in character, nor merely indicative of personality adjustment.¹² The respondents were asked to place an x with (1) Agree, or (2) Don't Agree. The following statements illustrate the components of alienation:

1. Finding a job is difficult. (Normlessness, Powerlessness)
2. There is always someone else deciding what I am going to do. (Powerlessness)
3. When you get right down to it, no one really cares what happens to you. (Meaninglessness, Isolation)
4. I cannot do what I want to do in life. (Powerlessness, Self estrangement)
5. When you get a job, the boss expects too much from you. (Alienated on expectation--reward basis)

⁹ Cohen, *op. cit.* *supra* note 3, at p. 30.

¹⁰ RECKLESS, *THE CRIME PROBLEM* 4 (3rd ed. 1961).

¹¹ Seeman, *On the Meaning of Alienation*, 24 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 784 (Dec. 1959).

¹² *Ibid* 783.

The fourteen items on alienation were distributed among other items on hedonism and vision of life's track. The six hedonism items are illustrated by the following:

1. I like daring thrills in life more than anything else. (Yes or No)
2. Most of the time all my friends and I want to do is to have fun; we hardly think of serious things. (Yes or No)

There were 13 items related to vision of life's track. These were pretested and validated with a reliability coefficient of .89.

The following illustrate these items.

1. I think switching jobs is better than having a regular job. (1) Yes, (2) No
2. About my future job, I am
 - (1) very sure about what I plan to do.
 - (2) have a vague idea about what I plan to do.
 - (3) not at all sure of what I am going to do.
3. It is better to live each day as it comes and not try to look far into the future. (1) Yes, (2) No

Delinquency Scale

Items 1, 2, 6, 10, 16, and 19 of Nye's Delinquency Scale were used to measure the delinquency of the controls.¹³ This scale was weighted with a score range of 0 to 18. The delinquent group was not administered this scale, but were asked to give information on the type of present and past offenses, number of previous offenses, plans after release and their sense of responsibility for their offenses. These responses were also scaled to range from 0 to 18.

RESULTS

1. Alienation, Hedonism and Vision of Life's Track

The hypotheses that the delinquents as a group are more alienated, more hedonistic and with poorer vision of life's track were confirmed. These differences as given in the following table are significant well below the one percent level of confidence.

To determine the extent of contribution made by the three attributes of alienation, hedonism and vision of life's goals to high delinquency, dichotomous multivariate analysis was applied to two groups of delinquents and controls separated.

Each of the two groups was dichotomized for

¹³ NYE, FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR 13-14 (1958).

TABLE 1
MEAN SCORES OF ALIENATION, HEDONISM AND VISION OF LIFE'S GOALS

(N: Delinquents 179, Non-Delinquents 198)

Attribute	Delinquents		Non-Delinquents		Significance Level		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	S _{md}	CR	p
Alienation	6.92	2.68	4.92	2.32	.26	7.69	.0001
Hedonism	2.87	1.55	2.27	1.62	.16	3.75	.0002
Vision of Life's Track	5.04	2.38	3.80	2.08	.23	5.39	.0001

TABLE 2*
EFFECTS TOWARD HIGH DELINQUENCY INDEX

	Delinquents		Non-Delinquents	
Alienation	High	.089	High	.023
Hedonism	High	.100	High	.440
Vision	High	.188	Low	.075
Random Shocks	High	.270	High	.159
Reverse Shocks353		.303
Total Effects		1.000		1.000

* See COLEMAN, INTRODUCTION TO MATHEMATICAL SOCIOLOGY, 192-198 (1964).

high and low delinquency on its own 18 point scale. The high delinquency of institutionalized delinquents was determined on the basis of the number of their offenses, gravity of present and previous offenses, and their plans after release. The control group was measured on 6 items of Nye's De scale. The cutting point for high and low delinquency was the median point on each scale: 10 for the delinquents and 9 for the control group.

High alienation and high hedonism manifest the predicted relation for institutionalized delinquents with the higher delinquency scores. High vision, however, accounting for .188 of the higher delinquency effect, modifies the hypothesis to the extent that while institutionalized delinquents possess a poorer vision of life goals as compared to controls, the more experienced delinquents need and develop a clearer vision of their life goals.

In the control group, low vision of life's goals does operate in the predicted direction relative to the higher delinquency scores among high school boys. By far the most powerful factor is hedonism (.440 out of 1.000), which suggests that delinquent

TABLE 3

ETA CORRELATIONS OF EXPRESSED AND ATTRIBUTED AFFECT OF RESPONDENT, MOTHER, AND FATHER

Affective Links*	Delinquents		Non-Delinquents	
	White	Negro	White	Negro
MO-RE:RE-MO	.870	.963	.670	.322
FA-RE:RE-FA	.710	.767	.819	.859
MO-RE:FA-RE	.549	.444	.485	.481
RE-MO:RE-FA	.427	.361	.457	.371

* MO—Mother; FA—Father; RE—Respondent.

tendencies among non-delinquent boys may be primarily a matter of thrill-seeking, combined with poor orientation.

2. Parental Affect

Parental affect is scaled on five levels according to the boy's evaluation of his love for each parent, and his evaluation of each parent's love for him.

a) *Response*. Of the entire sample of 377 boys, 375 (99.5%) responded to the maternal affect items, and 357 (94.7%) responded to the paternal affect items. This suggests that the affectional relation to both parents is highly relevant for all boys, whether delinquent or non-delinquent. The distribution of responses for both parents is strongly skewed to the positive end of the continuum, although there are significant differences between the delinquent and control groups.

b) *From Mother to Respondent (MO-RE) and Respondent to Mother (RE-MO)*. Significantly more delinquent boys rated their mother's affection for them either as very strong or as weak compared to the non-delinquent high school boys. A relatively small minority of delinquents considered their mother's affection as moderate and tended to rate their mother's love for them in the extremes, constituting a bi-modal distribution. Very similar characteristics are apparent when delinquents expressed their affection for their mother. About 80.2 percent of the delinquent boys express very strong affection and 9.6 percent have little or no love at all for their mother.

c) *From Father to Respondent (FA-RE) and Respondent to Father (RE-FA)*. Fathers are not perceived as affectionate to as many boys as their mothers are. Of the delinquents, 54.7 percent rated their father's affection "very strong" as compared to 75.4 percent who rated their mother's

love "very strong". There was a large difference between delinquents and non-delinquents who rated their father's affection as "strong" (24 as against 48). More delinquents thought of their father's affection as "weak" or "none" at all (delinquents 17.1 percent; non-delinquents 8.5 percent). A larger percentage of delinquents (59.6 percent) than the non-delinquents (51 percent) loved their fathers "very strongly", and similarly a larger percentage had "weak" or "no love" at all (delinquents 19.3 percent, non-delinquents 8.6 percent). There is a persistent tendency for the delinquents to fall on two extremes of the affectional scale, with a majority larger than expected.

The extremists on the affectional scale, the loved and unloved, loving and unloving, seem to fall in two groups. It is to be noted that these are responses of institutionalized delinquents who have been away from their homes for some time. There is a possibility that these delinquents might present a somewhat different picture of their affectional pattern outside the institution.

The non-delinquent boys were given a De scale. They show a smoother relationship between the degree of affection and index of delinquency; the greater the affection, the lower the delinquency index. This holds true in all the affectional relationships.

Reciprocity of Affection

To determine the reciprocity of affection the correlation ratio Eta (η) between certain affectional links was computed. The Eta statistic was preferred to the Pearson product-moment correlation ratio because the distributions were curvilinear rather than rectilinear. From Table 3 it is evident that the delinquents as a group show the largest reciprocity to their mothers in returning their love and in this group, the Negro boys show near-perfect correlation (.963). Father's love is reciprocated more by the non-delinquent group, somewhat more by Negro non-delinquents, (.859), and to a lesser degree by white non-delinquent (.819). Next in order on father affect come the Negro delinquents (.767), and the white delinquents (.710). There is a much higher reciprocity in two-person affect relationship (upper two rows) and lower reciprocity in three-person, or triangular relationship (lower two rows). These figures suggest (1) that the delinquents show a greater mother-centered infantilism than the non-delin-

quents. (2) Negro delinquents are more mother-centered than the white delinquents and far more so than their non-delinquent Negro counterparts who are father-centered. (3) The non-delinquents are more father-centered than the delinquents.

3. Alienation and Parental Affection

The delinquents were low in alienation if they rated their parent's affection as "very strong" and returned their love "very strongly". Conversely, if they did not express mutual love with their parents they were highly alienated. This relationship is only partly true in case of non-delinquents. This may be due to the fact that the non-delinquent as a group are less alienated, and of all others, the non-delinquent Negro boy is the least alienated. He appears to be well accepted in his minority subculture. Also, weak affectional ties which alienate the institutionalized delinquent are much less alienating to the non-delinquent.

Vision of Life's Track Related With Parental Affection:

The delinquents have been shown to possess significantly poorer vision of their life goals, as compared to the non-delinquent boys. But their poor vision bears no relationship with the strength of their parent's affection to them, or their affection to parents. (The good or poor vision of life goals does relate to certain other factors such as guidance, employment and income, which will be discussed elsewhere.)

In the case of non-delinquents, there is only one relationship which stands out significantly with vision of their life's goals and that is their affectional ties with father. The stronger their affection for father, the better the vision they showed of planning their future lives. The father tie may be the key indicator for successful transfer from mother dependency to the father model and to male identification. This may parallel maturation and a realistic orientation to the future.

SUMMARY

The delinquents are more alienated, more hedonistic, and possess a poorer vision of life's goals as compared to non-delinquents. The same result is true if the control group is dichotomized in respect of higher or lower delinquency. If the institutionalized delinquents are similarly dichotomized, high alienation and high hedonism play the same role as above, but life vision reverses its effect. The more sophisticated institutionalized delinquents possess a better vision of their life's goals. Delinquents with the higher delinquency rating know their goals, while those with the lower delinquency rating have a hazy view of the future.

The delinquents' affectional pattern differed in form from the controls in that it tended to fall in extremes. A majority of delinquents rated their mother's affection for them as very strong and similarly asserted their own love for mother as very strong (mother fixated); while a few others completely rejected their mother. Both the mother fixated and the rejectionists, the extreme groups, were larger among delinquents than among the controls who showed a smoother distribution. Considering the affectional links it was found that the delinquents as a group show the largest reciprocity to their mothers in returning their love and in this group, the Negroes are far higher. The non-delinquents are more father centered.

The delinquents as a group are more alienated and their alienation is high if their affectional ties are weak. This alienation-affectional relation is only partial in the control group.

The affectional ties with the mother do not seem to affect the vision of life goals; but in case of non-delinquent boys, the stronger their affection for father, the better their vision of life goals. Their identification with the father model helps them in better planning of their lives. The delinquents' high alienation is related with their weak family ties.