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AN INVESTIGATION OF DIFFERENCES IN VALUE JUDGMENTS BETWEEN YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS AND NON-OFFENDERS IN PUERTO RICO*

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Sellin and Wolfgang, in an effort to derive a common baseline for evaluating the extent of criminality, obtained ratings of the seriousness of 141 different criminal offenses from samples of middle class Pennsylvania raters. They suggested that their data reflected values that would be fairly general throughout Western cultures. To determine if differences in criminality, social class, educational level, language or cultural background might influence such ratings, samples of lower class Puerto Rican offenders and non-offenders were asked to rate Spanish translations of these offenses. Not only were few significant differences found, but a high degree of agreement was obtained between these two samples and also between these Puerto Rican samples and the Pennsylvania Ss studied by Wolfgang and Sellin. In addition to similarity between the means, there were no differences in variability as might be expected if one group was manifesting greater value confusion. The implications of these findings for popular theories of delinquency were discussed.

Sellin and Wolfgang[1] recently embarked upon what has been described as "the most advanced attempt yet to measure delinquency, an essentially qualitative phenomenon, in quantitative terms."[2] The investigators were concerned with the problem of trying to compare criminality rates in different regions or from one year to the next. To illustrate, assume that a community has five robberies and six larcenies one year, and the next year had no robberies or larcenies, but two murders and three rapes. Has the amount of crime increased, decreased or remained constant? To answer this question, a common baseline for comparing different offenses was needed. To provide it Sellin and Wolfgang obtained systematic judgments about the seriousness of different offenses from groups representative of middle-class American values. Their expectation was that

consensus within these groups might produce a series of weighted values of the seriousness of different offenses that could be used as a basis for evaluating the extent of delinquency or crime in an area.

Sellin and Wolfgang first devised 141 different criminal offense descriptions based on the crimes included in the Philadelphia Crime Code. Not only did the specific offense, such as theft or assault, vary, but within each category the descriptions differed along various parameters such as the amount of property lost, the degree to which force was used, the type of weapons used, the extent of injuries suffered by the victim, and whether the victim was a private citizen, an institution or the offender himself. The following represent typical offense descriptions taken from the list prepared by Sellin and Wolfgang:

> The offender stabs a person to death.
>
> The offender stabs a person with a knife. The victim does not require medical treatment.
>
> The offender steals a book worth $5 from a public library.
>
> The offender breaks into a residence, forces open a cash box, and takes $1000.

[1] T. SELLIN & M. WOLFGANG, THE MEASUREMENT OF DELINQUENCY (1964).

[2] *See* Rose, *Concerning the Measurement of Delinquency*, 6 BRITISH J. OF CRIM. 414–21 (1966).

The offender sells heroin.[3]

Sellin and Wolfgang presented these offense descriptions to groups of college students, police officers and juvenile court officials and judges, reasoning that these subjects would be representative of middle-class values. Some were asked to rate the offenses on 11-point category scales and others to make magnitude estimations of the seriousness of the offenses. On the basis of their results the investigators concluded that all groups of raters agreed on the relative seriousness of the 141 offenses regardless of whether category scale or magnitude estimations were used. They then provided mean scale values of the seriousness of each of the 141 offenses, suggesting that these values could be used in evaluating the amount of crimes in an area. Although these data were all derived from middle class Philadelphia *S*s, Sellin and Wolfgang suggested that the scale values obtained probably represented fairly universal attitudes and would be valid in most Western cultures.

This hypothesis has been partly substantiated in cross-cultural studies utilizing British-Canadian and French-Canadian subjects;[4] however, these samples, like Sellin and Wolfgang's original ones, were middle-class, North American raters. A more impressive test of the generality of Sellin and Wolfgang's scales would come from samples differing in many respects from the original raters. For example, would offenders themselves rate the offenses in the same way that nonoffenders do? Would differences be found among lower class as opposed to middle class groups? How applicable would Sellin and Wolfgang's findings be to a Latin culture?

The present study was undertaken to provide answers to these questions by repeating Sellin and Wolfgang's rating procedures using samples of lower class youthful offenders and non-offenders in San Juan, Puerto Rico. These raters thus differed from Sellin and Wolfgang's in regard to culture,[5] language,[6] educational level,[7] socio-economic status,[8] and criminality.[9]

[3] SELLIN & WOLFGANG, *supra* note 1 at 381–86.
[4] *See, e.g.,* Akman, Normandeau & Turner, *The Measurement of Delinquency in Canada,* 58 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 336–337 (1967); Normandeau, *The Measurement of Delinquency in Montreal,* 57 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 172–77 (1966).
[5] Puerto Rican as opposed to Sellin & Wolfgang's Anglo-American.
[6] Spanish instead of English.
[7] Grade school as contrasted to high school or college.
[8] Lower class as opposed to middle class.
[9] Offenders instead of non-offenders.

METHOD

The study consisted of the presentation of the list of 141 offenses derived by Sellin and Wolfgang to samples of lower-class offenders and non-offenders in Puerto Rico. The subjects were asked to rate each offense item on an 11-point category scale. Analysis of the results consisted of assessing the degree of agreement and disagreement to be found between the two samples of raters. In addition, the ratings made by these Puerto Rican samples were compared to those reported for Philadelphia subjects in the original Sellin and Wolfgang study to determine the degree of agreement between the Puerto Rican and North America raters.

Subjects

The offenders consisted of 83 inmates of the Institute For Youthful Offenders[10] in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The mean age for the inmate sample was 20.15, with a range of 18 to 24 years of age. The number of school grades completed ranged from 3 to 11 school grades, with a mean number completed of 6.93.

The nonoffender sample was selected from a vocational school located in the same area as the Institute for Youthful Offenders.[11] This was comprised of boys coming from economically deprived areas who were receiving summer vocational training under the auspices of the local "Manpower Project." They had no known delinquent records. The *n* for this sample was 92, the age range being from 17 to 21 years, with a mean age of 18.2. The nonoffenders had completed a mean of 7.4 school grades, with a range of 4 to 9. Thus, the nonoffenders were quite similar to the offenders in most characteristics except for their lack of a criminal record.

Sellin and Wolfgang recommended that no given subject be required to rate more than 51 offenses. Therefore, they divided the 141 offenses into 21 offenses spaced evenly through the scale which were administered to every subject; the remaining 120 were administered to only some of the *S*s. The same procedure was followed in the present investigation. All 175 *S*s were required to rate the 21 "standard" offenses plus 20 additional offenses. This necessitated the subdivision of the

[10] The institute was *Institución Para Aquitor Jovenes* in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
[11] The vocational school used was *Escuela Vocacional Miguel Such,* also located in the San Juan metropolitan area.

offender and nonoffender samples into six subgroups, each of which received a different set of 20 offenses to rate in addition to the 21 standard ones. The 20 additional offenses to be rated by each subgroup were chosen by random selection without replacement from the pool of 120.[12] The number of the Ss in each subgroup appear in Table 1.

All offenses were translated into Spanish by the senior author. The order of presentation of the 21 standard offenses and the 20 additional offenses was randomized for each subgroup. Thus no two subgroups within a sample received the offenses in the same order; for any given subgroup, the order of presentation was, of course, the same for the offenders and nonoffenders.

Instructions

Each rater was told that he would remain anonymous on the test and was given a small booklet (size $8\frac{1}{2} \times 6$) containing on separate pages the instructions for filling out the booklet, two examples of the 11-point category scale, and the offenses to be judged. Each offense description appeared on a separate page. At the bottom of each page appeared the following scale:

Least	Most
Serious	Serious

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

The instructions employed consisted of a Spanish translation of those used by Sellin and Wolfgang:[13]

This booklet describes a series of violations of the law; each violation is different. Your task is to show how serious you think each violation is, not what the law says or how the courts might act. You do this by circling a number from 1 to 11 on

[12] The 21 standard offenses presented to all groups included offenses Nos.: 1, 2, 3, 18, 20, 22, 28, 31, 32, 46, 52, 53, 74, 80, 82, 90, 121, 122, 123, 133, and 137.
In addition Subgroup 1 rated offenses Nos.: 6, 11, 41, 48, 49, 55, 59, 63, 65, 83, 87, 88, 97, 112, 116, 120, 125, 127, 128, and 134.
Subgroup 2 rated offenses Nos.: 4, 13, 17, 24, 57, 58, 70, 76, 77, 85, 86, 94, 96, 102, 110, 113, 119, 130, 138, and 141 in addition to the 21 standard offenses.
Subgroup 3 rated offenses Nos. 5, 12, 15, 25, 26, 40, 43, 45, 50, 60, 62, 67, 69, 73, 78, 84, 92, 93, 100, and 108 in addition to the 21 standard offenses.
Subgroup 4 rated offenses Nos. 9, 19, 29, 30, 35, 39, 44, 51, 54, 61, 64, 71, 72, 91, 95, 109, 115, 118, 129, and 135 in addition to the 21 standard offenses.
Subgroup 5 rated offenses Nos. 7, 8, 10, 14, 23, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 42, 68, 79, 81, 89, 99, 106, 107, 111, and 114 in addition to the 21 standard offenses.
Subgroup 6 rated offenses Nos. 16, 21, 27, 47, 56, 66, 75, 98, 101, 103, 104, 105, 117, 124, 126, 131, 132, 136, 139, and 140 in addition to the 21 standard offenses.
[13] SELLIN & WOLFGANG *supra* note 2 at 254.

TABLE 1
Number of Offenders and Non-Offenders In Each Subgroup

Subgroup	Offenders	Nonoffenders
1	14	16
2	15	15
3	14	16
4	13	15
5	14	16
6	13	14
Total N:	83	92

each page which shows how serious each violation seems to you. The first one describes a violation in the most serious category and 11 was circled; the second crime is the least serious category and 1 was circled. You should read each of the following violations and circle the number you think best fits it. If you think it is in the least serious category, circle 1. If you think it is in the most serious category circle 11. You may circle any number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, or 11 just so long as it shows how serious you think the violation is. Each of the eleven categories is an equal step on the scale of seriousness so that 6 is one step more serious than 5 and 10 is one step more serious than 9, and so forth.

Take your time. Every page should have one circle on it. Do not turn back once you have finished a page. Remember, this is not a test. The important thing is how *you* feel about each violation. Do not write your name on any of the sheets for you will not be identified.

In the least serious category, the example used was the following: "The offender parks his car in a no-parking zone." In the "most serious" category, the example used was, "The offender murders a person."

RESULTS

Means and standard deviations were computed for the ratings of each of the 141 offenses, and the differences between the offenders and nonoffenders were tested by two tail t tests.

Only 10 of the 141 mean differences were significant at the .05 level and only two were significant at the .01. This was not appreciably different from the chance expectation of seven significant differences at the .05 and 1.4 at the .01. On three of the 10 offenses the offenders' ratings were higher and on the other seven the nonoffenders'. The list of offenses on which significant differences were found show no particular consistency or pattern. (See Table 2.) It would seem conservative to

TABLE 2

Offenses On Which Statistically Significant Differences Were Found

Offenses		Ratings		
No.	Item	Non-Offenders	Offenders	t
5	The offender forces a female to submit to sexual intercourse. The offender inflicts physical injury by beating her with his fists.	9.19 1.97	6.36 2.98	3.02†
6	The offender forces a female to submit to sexual intercourse. No physical injury is inflicted.	5.13 3.68	7.71 2.61	2.19*
47	The offender breaks into a public recreation center, smashes open a cash box, and steals $1000.	5.00 2.15	7.23 2.80	2.31*
48	The offender breaks into a school and takes equipment worth $1000.	6.93 2.66	9.21 2.26	2.49*
50	While the owner of a small delicatessen is phoning, the offender breaks into the cash register and steals $1000.	8.56 2.19	6.07 3.02	2.55*
56	The offender steals a bicycle which is parked on the street.	4.71 2.67	2.77 1.64	2.29*
69	The offender trespasses inside a publicly owned building, rips from the wall and steals a fixture worth $5.	5.38 2.83	3.54 1.98	2.05*
89	The offender, while being searched by the police, is found in illegal possession of a gun.	7.94 2.98	5.50 3.06	2.20*
100	The offender shows pornographic movies to a minor.	7.44 2.99	4.78 2.49	2.66†
109	The offender sells heroin.	10.43 1.09	7.77 3.47	2.65*

* $p < .01$
† $p < .05$

TABLE 3

Product Moment Correlations Between the Mean Ratings of 141 Offenses by Two Lower Class Puerto Rican Samples and Two Middle Class Pennsylvanian Samples

Puerto Rican Samples	Pennsylvanian Samples	
	Students	Police Officers
Offenders	.73	.70
Nonoffenders	.74	.70

Coefficient of concordance, W = .80.

attribute the few mean differences that did occur to chance.

To better assess the degree of agreement between the ratings made by the offenders and the non-offenders, the mean ratings made by the two samples were correlated by means of the Pearson product-moment correlation (r). For the list of 21 standard offenses rated by all Ss, a correlation of .98 was obtained, while the r for the entire list of

141 offenses was .84. Both coefficients are highly significant.

Such agreement on mean ratings *between* samples could, of course, conceal noteworthy differences of opinion *within* samples. Indeed, on the basis of theories which attribute delinquency to anomie or value confusion, we might expect significantly more variability in the ratings made by the offender sample. Therefore, the differences between the variances of the two samples for each of the offense items were tested by means of the Cochran test for homogeneity of variances.[14]

In spite of a slight positive bias in favor of rejecting the hypothesis of homogeneity of variances due to unequal n's, only eight of the 141 variances were significantly different. At the .05 level, seven

[14] *See* B. WINER, STATISTICAL PRINCIPLES IN EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN (1962) where it is pointed out that this statistic was designed for samples having equal n's; however, when the n's are relatively close to being equal, the larger of the sample sizes may be used as the n in obtaining the degree of freedom required for the significance table. This procedure does lead to a slight positive bias in the test, that is, rejecting the null hypothesis more frequently than should be the case.

would have been expected to differ by chance. Furthermore, of the 8 variances showing significant differences, four showed the nonoffenders having larger variances and four showed the offenders as being more variable. Therefore, there was no evidence that the offenders were more variable in their ratings of the offenses.

The next task was to determine the degree of agreement between the two lower class Puerto Rican samples and the middle class Pennsylvanian samples tested by Sellin and Wolfgang.[15] To investigate this question, the mean ratings made by the Puerto Rican samples were correlated with the mean category scale ratings reported by Sellin and Wolfgang for Penn State Ogontz Center students and Pennsylvania police officers. In addition Kendall's coefficient of concordance, W, was computed to determine the overall agreement among the four samples.

The resulting correlations are reported in Table 3. It can be seen that despite the manifold differences between the two cultural samples, substantial positive correlations of .70 or higher were obtained. The overall agreement was high with the coefficient of concordance = .80. There was no difference between the incarcerated offenders and the nonoffenders in their degree of agreement with the middle class Pennsylvania samples.

DISCUSSION

Sellin and Wolfgang contended that their data reflected values and attitudes toward the relative seriousness of criminal offenses that were general throughout Western cultures. The results of the present study of lower class offenders and nonoffenders in Puerto Rico are consistent with their hypothesis. Differences in criminality, language, culture, social class and educational level did not result in any substantial differences in the mean ratings assigned. Further studies in other cultures

will, of course, be needed if the generality of their findings is to be fully explored. Thus far, however, the data suggest that judged seriousness of offense is a sufficiently stable unit to permit regional and cultural comparisons to be made.

The results of the present study can not be regarded as a test for any theory of delinquency. However it is worth noting that the data are not in the direction one might predict on the basis of theories attributing crime to value differences between offenders and nonoffenders. Albert K. Cohen's "delinquent subculture" theory states that the norms of such a subculture are characterized by their "negative polarity" and "negativism" to the values of the middle-class society.[16] The present study, however, found a high degree of agreement regarding values between delinquent and nondelinquent lower class and middle class raters. The agreement found between the lower-class Puerto Rican raters and the middle-class North American raters also runs counter to what one might predict from Walter B. Miller's theory which leads one to expect major shifts in values as one goes down the social class ladder.[17]

It was also found that there was no tendency for the offenders to manifest any more value confusion than the nonoffenders. In a prior cross-cultural study using a much cruder measure of the relative seriousness of various transgression, Rosenquist and Megargee found significantly more variable offense ratings among Mexican-American delinquents than in Mexican-American nondelinquents.[18] No such differences were found between delinquent and nondelinquent Anglo-Americans or Mexican nationals. The results of these two studies thus suggest that while value confusion may be a significant factor in the delinquency of groups exposed to conflicting cultural demands, this is not the case in stabler cultural milieus.

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[15] The investigators had planned to test the differences between the Puerto Rican and Pennsylvanian samples as well, but a fire in Professor Wolfgang's laboratory destroyed the records of the variances for the Pennsylvanian samples which were required for this analysis.

[16] A. K. COHEN, DELINQUENT BOYS (1955).
[17] *See* Miller, *Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency*, 14 J. SOCIAL ISSUES 5–19 (1958).
[18] C. ROSENQUIST & E. MEGARGEE, DELINQUENCY IN THREE CULTURES (1969).