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FOUR RELATIONSHIP STATUS OF A GROUP OF DELINQUENT BOYS

FOWLER VINCENT HARPER** and JAMES M. REINHARDT*

There has been a no inconsiderable quantity of data collected and some very thorough studies made that are calculated to suggest relationships between juvenile delinquency and various qualities and characteristics of the individual. This material is accumulating in such quantity that it may not be too much to hope that in time after it has been repeatedly checked and rechecked with increasing scientific accuracy and been correlated with a vast amount of additional data, it may point in the direction of a solution of the problem of causes of delinquency. In this work, two rather outstanding deficiencies have seemed to occur. In the first place most of the data has been gathered from delinquents that were in institutions or from delinquents before the courts in large metropolitan centers where they had been subjected to the peculiar environment of the large city. Very little material has been collected from delinquents in the small cities which, from the point of view of numbers at least, present an equally important problem. In the next place there has been no sufficient analysis of delinquents by the statistical method with a view to determining a multiple relationship status. There are a great many correlations disclosing relationships between intelligence and delinquency, poverty and delinquency, physical defects and delinquency, and the like; but there has been a negligible amount of work designed to show the proportional extent of the concurrence of a large number of personal characteristics with delinquency.

It is with the view of attacking the problem in this way that the present study is offered. There is no claim made that anything is proved or that any particular phase of the problem is illuminated. The number of cases examined are obviously too small to give any very reliable results. The clinical resources in Grand Forks, where this data was collected, were too inadequate to provide as accurate data as could be desired. It is hoped, however, that the study may be of some value if for no other reason than because it is an attempt

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to diagnose the situation in a small city of approximately 20,000 and for the further reason that it is an attempt to present a picture which discloses in one quantitative view the concurrence of a number of factors which undoubtedly have some bearing on the nature and extent of delinquency among children.

A group of forty delinquent boys was used for obtaining various types of data. Twenty-seven of the forty were examined for the data presented here.

Table I attempts to show the relation of various sets of factors and conditions which may have a causal relation to the extent and kinds of delinquencies committed by juveniles in the small city of less than twenty thousand population. These twenty-seven boys were unselected in so far as the entire group of forty were unselected and the twenty-seven accounted for in Table I were taken in the order in which they appeared before the court during a period of two or three months, and if we exclude the extremely minor cases, such as, for example, accidental breaking of glass, thoughtless disturbances, street noises, and so forth, they represent the average run of juvenile court cases in the city of Grand Forks. There is, furthermore, enough consistency in the occurrence of certain relations in the conditions presented in the table to give the data a considerable degree of significance in spite of the small number of cases studied.

In order to simplify the interpretation of the data the Table is so arranged as to show in one space the status of the delinquent in four relationships. Three of these, the intelligence quotient, the moral and the economic conditions in the home from which the delinquent came are constant and are arranged at the top of the page. The other conditions vary and are arranged at the left.

The mentality classifications as depicted in the Table are based upon the psychiatric report of each individual case.¹ The physical conditions are based upon the report of the examining physician.² The principal charges were secured from the juvenile court records as was also the number of court appearances in each case.

The statements concerning personality traits are based upon a personal observation and examination of each delinquent. These were compared in most cases with the statement of the psychiatric examiner and the examining physician. Final classification of the delinquent according to dominant personality trait was not made, except in four

¹The Psychiatric examinations were conducted by Dr. H. J. Humpstone, Head of the Department of Psychology, University of North Dakota.

²The Examining Physician was Dr. Harry Benwell of Grand Forks.

cases, until after an interview had been held with one or both parents, and in a number of instances with neighbors or others who might give reliable facts concerning the characteristics of the delinquent. The classifications as regards economic and moral status are based upon observations of the home conditions and surroundings. These observations were supplemented by conferences with the delinquent, the parents, the Juvenile Commissioner, the police matron, and others in position to know about the economic circumstances of the family.

In attempting to determine the economic and moral standing of the delinquents no absolutely rigid measurement was used. Indeed, no such measurement exists. Such terms as "poverty" and "morality" have to be interpreted in the light of conditions prevailing at the time and place, when and where the investigation is made. In this study of the economic status of the family from which the juveniles came, the procedure usually adopted by social workers was employed. If a family had called upon any of the agencies in the city for financial help under the ordinary circumstances or had been in the habit of receiving aid from any source that could be classified as "charity"; or if the family was recognized by the neighbors and others as being in dire need even though no record of the actual assistance through a charity agency could be found; or if the clothing worn to school in so far as we could learn was below that worn by the great majority of students and the food served in the family was of poorer quality and variety than that served in the majority of families, and so forth, the home was classed as "very poor."

The family was classed as "poor" if through lack of employment, disease, or for any reason whatsoever, the family had been forced into debt for actual necessities, and if the investigation revealed that the food eaten was of insufficient variety and nutritive value to insure good health and working efficiency. Such limitations as were indicated by an absence of any luxuries such as picture shows, food delicacies, inability to pay organizational dues, such as Boy Scouts, Y. M. C. A., and so forth, were also used as determinants of economic status of the family.

The economic status was classified as "fair" if the food supply was sufficient in variety and quality to provide for efficiency and if the house furnishings were sufficient to provide decency and ordinary comfort without luxury. Economic circumstances which range clearly above those just described were classed as "good."

In arriving at the general standard for economic status, we relied somewhat upon the results of a study made by a class in sociology of

the University of the incomes of a variety of wage earners and salaried men in the city of Grand Forks. On the basis of that study and following somewhat the methods employed by social workers in other communities we concluded that an income of eighteen hundred dollars was necessary to maintain a family of five in working efficiency in the city of Grand Forks. If the income of the families from which the delinquent came met this standard and there was no evidence of an unusual circumstance due to sickness or other causes, we were inclined to rate the economic conditions as "fair" or "good."

As to the measurement of the moral condition the interpretation of facts in the situation was even more elastic. Moral, as used in this study, does not imply simply immorality in the sense in which the term is ordinarily used, but includes parental conduct, or behavior on the part of the elders clearly below the standards set by the community when considered from the point of view of "child welfare." For example, if the investigation showed no violation of the mores as regards sex relations on the part of members of the family, but if it developed that there was little interest in the school and social conduct of the children or little or no interest on the part of the parents in the successful behavior of the child in or out of school the situation was classed as below "fair" morally. The same was true also if it was found that the parents were too ignorant or too superstitious to assist the child in making proper adjustments to his social world regardless of how much his failures grieved the parents. In this classification we came to no final conclusion without a consultation with the Juvenile Commissioner and in most cases with the parents and others as well.

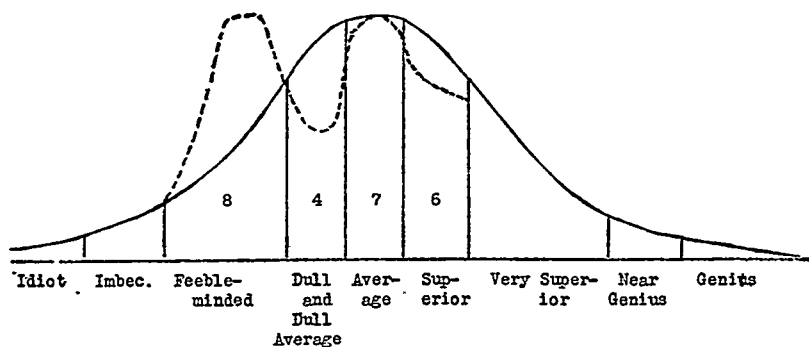
Perhaps the most significant fact depicted in Table I is the surprisingly large proportion of individuals classed as feeble-minded. Out of a total of twenty-seven juvenile delinquents included in this Table, eight, or almost 30 per cent were diagnosed as feeble-minded. As against seven, or 30 per cent, of feeble-minded delinquents in this group, one was classed as a border-line case, and three as dull or dull-normal. Eight, or slightly less than 30 per cent of the twenty-seven cases, were diagnosed as normal or average, and six, or slightly more than 22 per cent, as superior or bright in mental capacity. One was not classified according to a level of intelligence, but was described as an "introvert reserved and rather sullen." The significance of these results can be visualized by a comparison with the normal distribution curve in Chart A. The results are startling when compared with Dr. Healey's recent study of one thousand delinquents in large cities.³

³"The Individual Delinquent," pp. 30 and 139.

Three hundred and twenty-six, or 32.6 per cent of this group of one thousand delinquents, were classed as dull or below dull in intelligence. If we include the two classes listed as poor in native ability, it brings the proportion up to one hundred and ninety, or almost 42 per cent who are below fair in mental ability. However, only ninety-seven, or less than 10 per cent of the total, were definitely feeble-minded.⁴ Dr. Healey's low correlations between a fixed level of intelligence and delinquency is supported by a large number of investigations both of juvenile delinquents and adult criminals.⁵ If any inferences are permissible, the most cautious one would seem to be the suggestion that delinquency in Grand Forks affords a somewhat different problem, as to treatment, than that occurring in the large cities where most studies have been made.

CHART A

CHART A COMPARES THE DISTRIBUTION OF INTELLIGENCE IN THE GROUP OF TWENTY-SEVEN DELINQUENTS WITH THE NORMAL DISTRIBUTION CURVE. (...THE TWENTY-SEVEN DELINQUENTS.)



One delinquent was not classified according to a level of intelligence.

The high frequency of unfavorable economic and moral conditions among the Grand Forks' delinquents while not so significant, is

⁴Excluding 69 cases classified under psychosis.

⁵See investigations made of 350 children selected from the Philadelphia and Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinics, Phyllis Blanchard, "The Child and Society," pp. 275-276.

W. I. Thomas, "The Unadjusted Girl," p. 244.

Dr. Wm. Healey, "The Individual Delinquent," pp. 282, 53-63.

H. M. Adler, "A Psychiatric Contribution to the Study of Delinquency," Journal of Criminal Law, May, 1917, p. 66.

J. Bert Miner, "Deficiency and Delinquency" (1918).

Other studies by Healey and Bronner cited by Thomas and Thomas, "The Child in America," p. 451-542. In this study Healey and Bronner bring out clearly the fact that the mental charts of two groups of delinquents, one in

hardly less interesting than the results of the examinations for mental capacity. According to the methods used for determining economic status not a single one of these juvenile delinquents came from a home that could be classed as economically good. The homes of seven, or about 26 per cent of the cases, were listed as "fair," while sixteen, or 59.4 per cent of the cases, were classified as "poor," and four, or 11.9 per cent were listed as "very poor."

The situation morally, according to our approach, is hardly better than the economic standing of the homes from which these delinquents came. While only three, or slightly less than 12 per cent, were classified as "very bad"; eleven, or about 40 per cent, were classed as "bad." The homes of about 51.8 per cent of the delinquent cases presented in this Table were classed below "fair" morally, and only one was classed as "good."

When we come to examine the Table for physical defects we find some overlapping due to the fact that in some instances the same individual had several physical irregularities. The most surprising thing about the data concerning the physical welfare of these delinquents is the small number of outstanding physical disturbances. The physician's examination covered sixteen possible conditions. Twelve, or slightly more than 44 per cent, of the twenty-seven delinquents had some physical disturbance, though none of these, except possibly the condition of under-nourishment and one case of "bad hearing" could be considered as very serious. The examining physician thought the group well up to average as a whole physically. Nine, or 33.3 per cent of the group, were undersized, and six of these, or almost 26 per cent of the whole were diagnosed as "undernourished," though in most instances the physician modified the character of the condition by adding "slightly" or "rather" or some similar term. Four, or 14.8 per cent, were suffering from some abnormal eye condition. In three of these cases glasses were recommended, though in two the difficulty was so slight as to make glasses hardly necessary. The fourth was a case of eye infection which demanded medical attention. In five cases there was evidence of nose or throat trouble, though in no case was the difficulty such that it could not be overcome by the removal of tonsils and nasal obstructions—adenoids, etc. The hearing was decidedly deficient in one case and one boy had a slight speech impediment.

Chicago and one in Boston, are surprisingly similar. However, the outcomes of these cases differ widely. (See Healy and Bronner, "Criminals and Delinquents—Their Making and Unmaking.")

Turning our attention now to the charges against these twenty-seven delinquents we find that sixteen, or almost 60 per cent of the group, were charged with stealing; two, or slightly less than 8 per cent, appeared in the court for disorderly conduct and disturbance; two others for burglary; one was a "runaway"; and nine, or 33.3 per cent, were up for general incorrigibility. There is, of course, some overlapping in the charges against these boys, as for instance, the "runaway" had been in other difficulties, and some of the steadling cases had also committed other minor offenses. In this classification we have attempted to keep in mind the principal charge.

Twelve, or 44.4 per cent of the group of forty delinquents were recidivists. Fifteen, or 55.6 per cent, were non-recidivists. In other words, this group of twenty-seven delinquents comprising 67.5 per cent of the total group involved in the entire study, furnished less than 50 per cent of the delinquents. Healy thinks that while low mentality is not a significant cause of delinquency, it does seem to have a significant correlation with recidivism. Of course, there is no way of knowing what proportion of the remaining thirteen of the forty delinquents was below the normal level of intelligence. However, one can hardly imagine the percentages running higher than in this sample group tested.

As to personality traits, according to our methods, six, or 22.2 per cent were classed as "highly suggestible." Three, or 11.3 per cent, are described as "aggressive or confident." Four, or 18.8 per cent, as "timid or retiring"; and an equal number as cautious. Three, or 11.3 per cent, were designated as "dreamy"; and an equal number as "indifferent"; and four, or 14.8 per cent, as "inattentive."

Without trying to prove or disprove anything, after exercising every possible caution there seems to be considerable justification for concluding that there are, in the case of this group of delinquents, a number of converging factors which may be related to the delinquent conduct in such a way as to make it worthwhile, at least, to consider them together in attempting to understand the total situation.

As already noted, eight of the twenty-seven delinquents in this group were diagnosed as feeble-minded. The homes of three of these were classified as "very bad" morally and three others as "bad." Only two out of the eight were from homes that measured up to standards that could be adjudged "fair." The economic situation does not show up any better than the moral conditions so far as these eight feeble-minded delinquents are concerned. All but one came from homes classified as "poor" economically, while one was from a "very poor"

home. A review of the Table shows that one of the two feeble-minded delinquents whose home situation was listed as "fair," also scored between seventy and seventy-nine in the intelligence test. All three of the eight feeble-minded delinquents whose home surroundings were classified under "very bad" scored below seventy in the intelligence test. So far, there appears to be a fairly close causal connection between the factors of feeble-mindedness, low intelligence test, and bad moral home conditions. Two of this group, however, whose home surroundings were classed under "bad" morally, scored between seventy and seventy-nine on the intelligence test, though as we have seen, not a single one of this group came from a home which could be rated higher than "poor" according to our economic rating scale. In the total number of twenty-seven, however, seven or almost 21 per cent, were above "poor" economically, and 48 per cent of the total group were above "bad" morally. Stating the situation in a slightly different way, only 25 per cent of the feeble-minded were above "bad" morally as compared to 48 per cent of the total group of twenty-seven. Furthermore, there was no individual in the feeble-minded group whose home condition could be classed above "poor" economically, as against seven, or almost 26 per cent of the total group, who came from homes that were rated above "poor." Thus there is clearly a high rate of concurrence of the three factors, *bad economic conditions*, *bad moral surroundings*, and *feeble-mindedness* as these are interpreted in this study.

Interpreting the situation depicted in Table I still further, five, or about 18.5 per cent of the total twenty-seven delinquents, scored below seventy on the Binet scale. All of these were from poor economic circumstances, and only one was from a home that could be classed above "bad" morally, while three of the homes were listed under "very bad." All were diagnosed as below "normal" by the psychologist. Three of the five had one or more physical defects, and two were normally developed. It is of interest, further, that the three delinquents who were found to be suffering with physical defects, together had a total of ten such disturbances. The principal charge in two of the five cases was stealing; in two others, incorrigibility; and in one case, incorrigibility and stealing was named without distinction. Three were non-recidivists, leaving two repeaters among the five delinquents scoring below seventy according to the intelligence test. In the personality traits no one of these five boys was classed in the first four traits, and three of the five were in the last trait. Thus the outstanding characteristics in this group of five

delinquent boys scoring below seventy on the Binet scale are: (1) below normal in intelligence; (2) poor economic conditions and very bad moral conditions; (3) high percentage of physical defects—particularly undernourishment and bad eyes; (4) incorrigibility and stealing; (5) inattentive, indifferent, and dreamy attitudes.

Recidivism in this group of five delinquents is slightly lower than the average of the total group of forty delinquents (40 per cent as against 50 per cent).

Examining the next intelligence level group we find that two, or forty per cent were from "very poor" economic circumstances. Three were from "poor" homes, economically. Three were from homes of "bad" moral conditions; and two from "fair" moral home surroundings. All were classed below normal by the psychiatrist. Four, or 60 per cent, had small physical defects, though there were only five defects as compared to ten for the three individuals scoring below seventy. If we eliminate undersize, which the physician did not class as a physical defect, only four remain with organic disturbances. In this group, three, or 60 per cent, were up for stealing, one of these was charged with incorrigibility also, and four, or 80 per cent of the five were recidivists. When we come to personality traits we find considerable variation. One was rated as "highly suggestible"; one as "cautious"; another as "indifferent"; and one "inattentive."⁶

Summarizing the situation as regards the group of boys who scored between seventy and seventy-nine on the Binet test the outstanding facts appear to be: (1) poor economic home surroundings; (2) bad moral circumstances, but averaging considerably better than those below seventy; (3) some physical handicaps existed though fewer than in the next lower group; (4) stealing and burglary were the outstanding charges; and (5) perhaps the most noteworthy fact in connection with this group is the high rate of recidivism. Four out of five had been before this or some other court previously, whereas, as we have noted, only two of the five delinquents in the group scoring below seventy, had committed other crimes of sufficient seriousness to get them into the courts.

Looking at the next group, those in the intelligence level between eighty and eighty-nine, of the eight in this class, five were from homes that were classed as "poor" economically. The other three came from "fair" economic circumstances. Only three were from homes below "fair" morally and none of the homes was below "bad." Six of the eight were diagnosed by the psychiatrist as normal or above.

⁶We were unable to make a "personality trait" rating of one of these.

Two were diagnosed as below normal, though none as feeble-minded (both were dull or dull normal). Five of the eight delinquents in this intelligence group had some physical defect though the exclusion of undersize again brings the number with physical defects down to four, or exactly 50 per cent. These four had one defect each as compared to an average of more than three in the lowest intelligence group, and one and sixty-six-one-hundredths in the next highest intelligence group. The speech defect was so slight as not to be considered a handicap except under very extreme circumstances. The other physical handicaps, as we have already indicated, except possibly undernourishment, were slight and not difficult to remove.

Coming now to the charges against this group of delinquents. Two were sent to the court for disorderly conduct; two others for incorrigibility; three for stealing; and one was a "run-away" case. The outstanding facts in the situation as regards this group of boys who scored high average on the Binet scale were: (1) a wide range of offenses, from the mildest to running away, which was considered by the juvenile commissioner as among the more serious offenses. (Two types of offenses—taking money by false pretense and burglary—are usually considered by the court as more serious than running away. This, of course, as the juvenile commissioner explained, depends upon the individual and the circumstances.) (2) A large proportion of repeated offenders. There were in this group five recidivists as against three non-recidivists, a rate considerably higher than the average of the whole group, but not so high as the rate for the group in the intelligence level, seventy to seventy-nine. (3) A wide range of personality traits. As to personality traits, three were classified as "highly suggestible"; one as "aggressive"; two as "timid," one in each of the following classifications: "cautious," "dreamy," and "indifferent." The wide range of dominant traits which the individuals in this group assumed according to our method of interpretation was an outstanding finding.

Coming now to the highest intelligence level group, those whose scores ranged from ninety to one hundred and nine. Out of a total of nine falling in this range, only one was from home surroundings which could be classified as very poor. Four were from "poor" economic circumstances, and an equal number from home surroundings that were rated as "fair" economically. As to the moral situation in the homes from which these delinquents came, four were rated as "bad," four others as "fair," and one as "good." All were classed by the psychiatrist as above normal. Seven, or more than 88 per

cent, were normally developed. One was undersized and had some eye difficulty, while another was undernourished and had a slight reflex abnormality.

Three of this group were charged with incorrigibility; seven for stealing (one of these was also charged with incorrigibility though stealing appeared to be the most important complaint). Only one of this group had ever been before a juvenile court for another offense, and eight of this group, as we have seen, were clearly non-recidivists. All of the personality traits listed in the Table, except "inattention" were represented by this group, though six, or 66.6 per cent were rated under the first three personality traits.

Table II depicts the situation among these twenty-seven juvenile delinquents a little more clearly than it can be seen in Table I. Some interesting facts stand out in this Table. In the first place, recidivism appears lowest at the two extremes in intelligence, that is, those who scored lowest and those who scored highest in this group appeared least likely to repeat offenses and of these two groups those of the highest intelligence had the lowest rate of recidivism.

It is possible that the people of low intelligence in this particular community and in the environment from which they come, drift along; are apparently not ambitious to acquire status and approval and are therefore more easily handled than those coming within the middle ranges of intelligence.⁷ The group with the highest intelligence rating may have sense enough to take the hint from the first court hearing that it is either time to drop the delinquent career or else to exercise sufficient caution in the commission of future delinquency to keep them clear of the courts. There is a noticeable tendency on the part of the delinquents from the lowest intelligence rating to the highest to move toward the left in the Table under personality traits. Beginning with "inattention" and ending with "highly suggestible," there is no constancy in these variations according to personality trait rating. As we have noted already three of the five in the first group were rated as inattentive, one as indifferent, and one as cautious (a personality

⁷Healy and Bronner found feeble-mindedness appearing much more frequently among serious delinquents than the general population, but even so they found only 13.5 per cent of feeble-minded in a group of 4,000 studied. ("Delinquents and criminals: Their Making and Unmaking.") These same investigators have also found that often it is very difficult, even under the most favorable circumstances to adequately diagnose a case. Due to unusual distribution of abilities, short memory span or strange mental twists growing out of experience a child may continue for some time to be regarded as feeble-minded when finally it may be discovered that the first diagnosis was incorrect. As Thomas has so aptly pointed out, there are two facts in every behavior irregularity, an individual and a value.

rating was not made on one of these cases). In the third group three were rated as highly suggestible, one as aggressive, two as timid or retiring, two as cautious, one as dreamy. None of these was listed under the last two classifications. The highest intelligence group was represented in all of the personality trait classifications except inattention, though two were in each of the first three beginning with highly suggestive and ending with timid or retiring.

According to the report of the psychologist, all of the individuals in the two lower levels of intelligence were rated as below normal, while nine in the two higher levels of intelligence were rated as below normal. There was also a tendency from the lowest to the highest intelligence level to show fewer physical defects per individual as well as fewer defects in proportion to the number in the group. In-corrigibility and stealing were the two offenses most common among this group of twenty-seven delinquents, though these types of offenses were slightly more concentrated in the upper and lower limits. In other words, there was a greater variety of offenses committed by those occupying the two center groups. On the other hand, recidivism was concentrated in the two middle groups.

Summarizing the situation as regards the home conditions from which these twenty-seven delinquents came, twenty of the twenty-seven were from home surroundings which were clearly below fair from an economic point of view. Four of these twenty, or 20 per cent, were from very poor homes; seven were from homes classed as fair; while not a single one of these juvenile delinquents came from a home that could be rated as good economically. Fourteen, or 51.8 per cent, of this group came from homes rated as below "fair" morally; three of these were from very "bad" homes; twelve were from homes that were classed as morally "fair"; and one was from a home classed "good."

There were no significant changes in the economic situation with changes in intelligence in the three higher intelligence groups. The classifications of the homes from which these delinquents came according to the moral standing appears to vary somewhat with changes in intelligence. None of the homes from which the individuals came who occupied the three higher levels of intelligence was classed as "very bad" morally. However, in the second group from the bottom more than half were from homes rated "bad" morally; while less than half of the individuals in the two upper intelligence groups were from homes that could be rated as morally "bad."

Fifteen, or 55 per cent, of this group were rated by the psychiatrist as being normal and above, while twelve, or 45 per cent were classed as below normal mentally. Fourteen, or 51.8 per cent, had one or more physical defects, and there were twenty-seven physical defects (including undersized) in this group of fourteen delinquents. If we exclude "undersized" as a physical defect we have remaining fourteen delinquents with eighteen different organic disturbances, or an average of 1.28 per individual.

Sixteen, or almost 60 per cent, of the twenty-seven delinquents in this group were charged with stealing; nine were up on complaints of incorrigibility; only two for disorderly conduct and disturbance; two for burglary; and one on a charge of running-away. Twelve, or 45 per cent, were recidivists; and fifteen, or 55 per cent, were non-recidivists.

It is submitted that this investigation is suggestive in the two directions already mentioned. It indicates that the differences between the juvenile problem in the large urban centers and in the hundreds of small cities scattered in every state may be so great that special studies in the latter may be necessary to a proper and accurate diagnosis of delinquency there. Again, there is enough indication of what may be revealed by the multiple relationship study, to warrant extensive investigations of this nature. It is believed that the various factors which doubtless have a large bearing upon delinquency cannot be revealed in their true and total significance except when presented in direct relationship with all other factors that may have influenced the individual delinquent.