

Differentiation of Delinquent and Non-Delinquent Boys¹).

By
Pauline V. Young

The causes of crime have long engaged the attention of professional groups. Many psychologists maintain that criminals suffer from some mental abnormality ; many psychiatrists maintain that criminals are often psychopathic ; social economists believe that poverty is one of the greatest contributing factors to criminality, and many physicians are convinced that physical defects are the underlying causes to criminal careers. Naturally, all are correct, at least to some extent. Examination shows, however, that these points of view are largely opinions, based not on factual and concrete extensive studies carried on under scientific conditions and checked by „control groups“, but founded for the most part on impressions gained in daily contact with criminality and delinquency. Some further light may be thrown on these theories by the following study.

Five hundred case records (of boys), selected at random from the files of the Juvenile Court of a large city in the U. S. A., were carefully studied with the intention of discovering what specific conditions are common to delinquent careers of juveniles. (All traffic violations were omitted.) Only the following information was available in all the cases selected : (1) age of offender, (2) address, (3) nationality, (4) occupation of father, (5) family income. (6) status of family life, (7) type of offense committed, (8) institutions to which committed, (9) religious affiliation. The following information was available in varying degrees in less than half of the records studied, (10) number of associates in offense committed, (11) mentality of delinquent, (12) health, (13) club membership, and, in some instances, (14) psychiatric findings, (15) educational record, and (16) work record of the offender.

When the information on the above points was carefully classified and tabulated it was revealed that (1) most of the delinquents were between 16 and 18 years of age, and appeared for the first time in juvenile court at the age of 14 or 15 years²).

(2) A map spotting the addresses of the delinquents' homes shows that they reside in all sections of the city, but the largest percentage are concen-

¹) Mit diesem Beitrag beginnen wir eine Reihe von kurzen Berichten über bemerkenswerte Enqu ten, ihre Methoden und ihre Ergebnisse.

Die Schriftleitung.

²) Many of the boys admitted in personal interview that they had committed offenses long before they were brought to court.

trated in overcrowded areas, in the slums, where rents are low and property values high-sections designated by the human ecologist as transitional areas¹).

(3) Most of the offenders have American born parents; the number of offenders of second generation immigrants is greater than among the first generation.

(4) The occupations of fathers were highly diversified, including professional men, artisans and unskilled workers. Occupational group was not as significant as place of residence.

(5) Family income varied widely, but a large portion of families living in congested areas live near the poverty level of subsisting from hand-to-mouth.

(6) A large percentage of families came from broken homes, but this condition of itself was not the chief contributing factor to the delinquency career; unsuitable companions and unsupervised street contacts also enter into the situation.

(7) The types of offenses committed varied, but nearly 80 per cent were committed against property, 75 per cent of which represented theft of automobiles or of their accessories. About 4 per cent of the offenses are charges of drunkenness, and about 4 per cent were sex offenses.

(8) From 20 to 25 per cent of the delinquents are „habitual“, the remainder are „first offenders“ or „occasional offenders“.

(9) The delinquent boy rarely plays a „lone hand“. Generally, groups of two or three or four are associated in the offense, but the association is often merely accidental, as learned in personal interview.

(10) The mental ability of the delinquent, assuming that such ability can be measured, ranges from „superior“ to „moron“, but the majority is designated as possessing „normal intelligence“. At this point the question was raised as to significant differences between delinquent and non-delinquent boys. A control group of 500 school boys, selected at random, were interviewed and tested, but no significant differences were discovered in the mental and emotional make-ups of the two groups. On the contrary, there were more outstanding differences from class to class within the same group than from the delinquent to the non-delinquent groups.

(11) Similar results were obtained with respect to the health of the two groups. Practically as many delinquents were in „good health“ as in „very poor health“, though the majority was designated as being in „fair physical condition“. The health records of the 500 school boys of the control group gave the same results.

(12) Psychiatric reports, available on less than one fourth of the delinquents studied, show that from 2 to 3 per cent are thought to be suffering from some mild form of psychosis.

(13) The educational accomplishments of the delinquents do not com-

¹) American sociologists have devoted considerable study to social phenomena occurring in these areas and have formulated the theory that the behavior pattern once set gains rapid momentum and becomes „contagious“, so to speak. See Clifford Shaw, *Delinquency Areas*, Chicago, 1929.

pare favorably with those of the control group. Since the school attendance of the former is irregular this result is quite understandable.

(14) Practically as large a proportion of the delinquents as of the non-delinquents are members of some club or organization. (This is not true of the Boy Scouts which draws its membership more frequently from less congested areas of the city.) Generally, clubs attended by boys in the delinquent group are organized and supervised by schools or religious missions, while the clubs attended by the non-delinquents are frequently supervised by paid trained recreational directors.

(15) The majority of the delinquents were Protestants (proportional to their number in the general population), and only a small number belonged to the Catholic or Jewish faiths.

The above findings are contrary at many points to the impressions received in the daily work even of professional workers. Such facts can be secured only by careful prolonged study of the accumulated records in the files of the various social agencies. Pressure of current work usually prevents study of old files by the organization, yet without such study social work lacks perspective, has no means for determining the factors contributing to misbehavior and must necessarily be guided too much by guess work and chance impressions.

It is to be regretted that the records were not sufficiently complete to allow study of the effects of social treatment : probation, institutional care, fine, change of environment, and so on. Personal interviews held with the recidivists in the group revealed that rarely are the offenses committed carefully planned or previously contemplated, rather they occur on the „spur of the moment“. Such statements as „It's easy to steal“, „everything is open, just help yourself“, are often made by the delinquents in an attempt to analyze their own acts. The most important problem confronted by boys from immigrant homes, and who, therefore, are living in two cultural worlds, is lack of adjustment to either world. Their own „primary groups“ and institutions lose control over them before the „secondary“ institutions of the city gain influence over them. Delinquency appears to be essentially a conflict between traditional modes of behavior and the uncharted life of the city. The delinquent boy by chance, circumstance, or design makes numerous contacts with city life, he is the city gypsy and is soon inducted into the types of behavior which ultimately bring him in conflict with the law. There appears to be a direct correlation between the extent and variety of contacts with city life and the extent and variety of juvenile delinquency.