

ATTITUDES OF DELINQUENTS AS MEASURED BY THE SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL SCALES

JAMES SEDALIA PETERS II

Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Connecticut State Department of Education

The purpose of this paper is to show how the author's recent findings of differences in self-concept and social perception of delinquents and non-delinquents obtained through the Semantic Differential Scales (5) support observations by Adler regarding delinquents.

In the study referred to, the major problem was to ascertain whether delinquents differ from non-delinquents in attitudes towards themselves and objects of social perception. The delinquents were 132 boys and 35 girls, inmates of training schools in Illinois. The non-delinquents were 123 YMCA boys and 41 girls from greater Chicago and Indianapolis. The age range for both groups was 13 to 19 years. All 331 subjects were administered Semantic Differential Scales.

The Semantic Differential Scales, developed by Osgood, *et al.* (4), are a combination of word-association and scaling procedures designed to give an objective measure of the connotative meaning of concepts. The subject is presented with a word (concept) which he is asked to rate on a number of scales. Each scale is a seven-step continuum represented by a pair of polar adjectives, one at either end. The following is an example of one word and one scale:

FLOWERS soft:_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : loud

The stimulus words (concepts) used in our study were

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|-----------------|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| 1. school | 4. mother | 7. boys | 10. laws |
| 2. myself | 5. girls | 8. general things | 11. sex |
| 3. other people | 6. father | 9. work | 12. church |

Each of these words was rated on the following twelve scales, which were chosen from among Osgood's 15 evaluative scales as having the highest loading on the evaluative factor:

good—bad	clean—dirty	kind—cruel	nice—awful
beautiful—ugly	tasty—distasteful	pleasant—unpleasant	honest—dishonest
sweet—sour	valuable—worthless	happy—sad	fair—unfair

Analysis of variance showed significant differences between delinquents and non-delinquents for each of the twelve concepts. All differences lay in the direction of a more negative evaluation by the delinquents. In other words, the delinquents were more likely to rate "school," "myself," "other people," etc. bad than good, ugly than beautiful, sour than sweet, etc. than were the non-delinquents. All the differences were significant at the .01 level, with two exceptions. For the rating of "school" the difference was more significant, at the .001 level; for the rating of "myself" it was less significant, at the .05 level.

Within the two groups, there were of course individual differences. The ratings for "myself" and "other people" were correlated for the two groups separately, and it was found that for the delinquents the correlation was .5095 and for the non-delinquents .5122, meaning that in either group those who rated themselves relatively favorably would rate others relatively favorably also, and vice versa. Thus, application of the Semantic Differential Scales confirms a definite relationship between the feelings an individual expresses about himself and about others.

Whereas the results are all in the direction of what one would generally expect, they do specifically corroborate observations on the delinquent by Adler who dealt with the same concepts which the delinquents of the present study were asked to rate. In the following we shall give Adler's description of what these concepts mean to delinquents, presenting the concepts in the same order as above. In two instances further corroborative evidence from other sources has been added. The only concept not covered by Adler, either identically or approximately, is that of "church."

(1) *School*. "If you trace back the history of the great majority of criminals, you will find that at school and even before school there was a block here, a stoppage of interest" (1, p. 202). This negative attitude toward school has been confirmed by a number of research projects which have shown that the very low school performance, limited educational and vocational goals, and unsatisfactory school behavior of delinquents often result from their anti-school attitudes rather than arrested intelligence. The delinquent lives in a perpetual state of what Kvaraceus calls "educational bankruptcy" (3, p. 109).

(2) *Myself*. "We can see the criminal's inferiority complex He feels himself incapable of normal success. . . . He hides his feeling of inadequacy by developing a cheap superiority complex" (1, p. 232).

(3) *Other people*, (5) *Girls*, (7) *Boys*, (8) *General things*. The criminal has "a very bitter attitude toward mankind. He does not want mankind" (1, p. 213). "Criminals cannot make friends with society at large, with ordinary people. They treat themselves as a body of exiles and do not understand how to feel at home with their fellow men" (1, p. 202). "They are suffering from a wrong outlook upon the world" (1, p. 204).

(4) *Mother*, (6) *Father*. "If you trace back the life of a criminal, you will almost always find that the trouble began in his early family

experiences. It was not the environment itself that counted; but the child misunderstood his position and there was no one there by his side to explain it to him" (1, p. 206). Adler cites one example of a criminal as expressing low evaluation of his parents as follows: "My parents took me out of school and put me to work and took all my wages. . . . Here he is making an accusation" (1, p. 210).

(9) *Work*. "A great number of criminals . . . find work terrible; they are not inclined, as others are, to struggle with these difficulties. . . . They lack a spirit of cooperation . . . and therefore, are ill prepared to meet the problems of occupation. The great majority of criminals are untrained and unskilled workers" (1, p. 202). It may be mentioned here that the Gluecks found that more delinquents than non-delinquents (29% versus 18%) had vague, childish or superficial notions about what they wanted to do, and that fewer delinquents than non-delinquents (41% versus 58%) expressed a desire to learn a trade, either semi-skilled or skilled (2, p. 145).

(10) *Laws*. The criminal regards punishment "as a confirmation that society is hostile and impossible to cooperate with. . . . A criminal will interpret punishment only as a sign that society is against him, as he always thought" (1, p. 219).

(11) *Sex*. "Criminals regard the partner in love merely as a piece of property . . . Sex life is to such people a matter of conquest and acquisition" (1, p. 203). One may well say that this represents a devaluation of sex.

In conclusion, we should like to return to the key concept, "myself." It is here that the difference between delinquents and non-delinquents was least significant (.05 level). This may be due to the fact that an intrinsically low evaluation of the self on the part of the delinquent is partly covered over by his well-known attitude of bravado. His inferiority feelings would be partly covered over by a superiority complex.

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