# Research in Delinquent Subcultures [1]

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This paper is a backward look upon the book *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (2), and a look ahead to the kinds of theoretical and research work which it is hoped and anticipated will soon make this book obsolete.

Without trying to summarize the argument of this book, let us indicate what it tried to do. It proceeded from the premise that much delinquency—probably the vast bulk of it—represents participation in a delinquent subculture. Much of the sociological literature on juvenile delinquency has been concerned with demonstrating that this is so, and with formulating the processes whereby this subculture is taken over by the individual. *Delinquent Boys* posed the problem: Why is the delinquent subculture there in the boys' milieu to be taken over? More specifically, why is there a subculture with this specific content, and distributed in this particular way within the social system? Secondly, it set forth a general theory of subcultures, on the methodological premise that the explanation of any phenomenon consists of a demonstration that it conforms to a general theory applicable to all phenomena of the same class. Thirdly, it formulated an explanation of the delinquent subculture. In brief, it explained the delinquent subculture as a system of beliefs and values generated in a process of communicative interaction among children similarly circumstanced by virtue of their positions in the social structure, and as constituting a solution to problems of adjustment to which the established culture provided no satisfactory solutions. These problems are largely problems of status and self-respect arising among working-class children as a result of socially structured inability to meet the standards of the established culture; the delinquent subculture, with its characteristics of non-utilitarianism, malice, and negativism, provides an alternative status system and justifies, for those who participate in it, hostility and aggression against the sources of their status frustration.

The nature of the theoretical issues raised by this book will be clearer if we pause to consider a thoughtful critique by Gresham Sykes and David Matza. These authors dispute the proposition, central to the argument of *Delinquent Boys,* that delinquency is based on a set of norms antithetical to those of the dominant culture and, indeed, deriving their content by a process of hostile and negativistic reaction against the dominant culture.

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[1] This is a revision of a paper read at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, August, 1958.

They offer, in turn, what they describe as "a possible alternative or modified explanation for a large portion of juvenile delinquency." (18, p. 664) They present impressive evidence that the delinquent is by no means immune or indifferent to the expectations of respectable society, that he has internalized the respectable value system, and that in many ways he appears to recognize its moral validity. They go on to say that "the theoretical viewpoint that sees juvenile delinquency as a form of behavior based on the values and norms of a deviant sub-culture in precisely the same way as law-abiding behavior is based on the values and norms of the larger society is open to serious doubt. Instead, the juvenile delinquent would appear to be at least partially committed to the dominant social order in that he frequently exhibits guilt or shame when he violates its proscriptions . . ." (18, p. 666). They then proceed to argue that much delinquency is based on a set of justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the delinquent but not by the legal system or society at large; that is, on a set of techniques for neutralizing the internal and external demands for conformity, deriving from values whose legitimacy is at least on some level recognized. These techniques of neutralization are then set forth in considerable and convincing detail.

With all of this we have no quarrel. The analysis of the techniques of neutralization, in fact, we would regard as an important elaboration of the argument of *Delinquent Boys.* It is not clear, however, that this analysis provides an *alternative* explanation of delinquent behavior. The notion that the delinquent boy has internalized the respectable value system, is therefore profoundly ambivalent about his own delinquent behavior, and must contend continuously with the claims of the respectable value system is one of the central propositions of *Delinquent Boys.* Although *Delinquent Boys* does not mention the techniques of neutralization enumerated by Sykes and Matza (and the failure to do so constitutes a significant omission), it strongly emphasizes the part played by the mechanism of reaction-formation, one of the most elementary techniques of neutralization. Reaction-formation is stressed because it is not only a way of coming to terms with one's delinquent impulses; it helps to account for the nature of the delinquent behavior itself. To quote *Delinquent Boys:* ". . . we would expect the delinquent boy who, after all, has been socialized in a society dominated by middle-class morality and who can never quite escape the blandishments of middle-class society, to seek to maintain his safeguards against seduction. Reaction-formation, in his case, should take the form of an 'irrational,' 'malicious,' 'unaccountable' hostility to the enemy within the gates as well as without: the norms of respectable middle-class society." (2, p. 133) As a final commentary on the paper by Sykes and Matza, we would add this: The formation of a subculture is itself probably the most universal and powerful of techniques of neutralization, for nothing is so effective in allaying doubts and providing moral reassurance against a gnawing superego as the repeated, emphatic, and articulate support and approval of other persons.

Wilensky and Lebeaux (21) are concerned with other limitations of *Delinquent Boys*. The most obvious of these limitations is the fact that there is not *one* delinquent subculture but a *variety* of delinquent subcultures. This is suggested in the book but not developed there. Although there does not as yet exist a real comparative sociology of juvenile delinquency, evidence from other countries suggests that some of the features of delinquent behavior which in this country are so pervasive that we have come to take them for granted as inherent in the very idea of delinquency may be absent elsewhere (27). It is probable that delinquent subcultures have distinct emphases in different societies and that these can be related to differences in the respective social systems of which they are the products. Comparative research in the sociology of delinquent subcultures is to be most strongly encouraged, for it is bound to highlight aspects of delinquent behavior in the American scene which we are prone to overlook, and to make them the object of theoretical concern. Furthermore, the comparative study of delinquency in different national settings will undoubtedly focus attention on hitherto neglected aspects of the relationship of delinquency to the overall structure of society and may clarify some of the present confusion regarding *individual* and *socially structured* motivations for delinquency. These questions tend to become clouded by a sort of "cultural blindness" when we restrict our observations to our own society.

However, we need not await such national culture comparative data before embarking on a comparative sociology of juvenile delinquency. There is ample variation in such behavior within the bounds of our own national society—variation which has not adequately been taken into account by existing etiological theory and research. Before we proceed to enumerate some of these delinquent subcultures and the problems they raise, let us consider what is involved in the explanation of a delinquent subculture.

The first task is descriptive; to establish the facts the theory must fit. These facts are of two orders. First, we need detailed descriptions of the content of these subcultures. American delinquency studies, particularly psychological and psychiatric, have long emphasized that delinquency may be variously motivated, that similar overt behavior may proceed from a variety of etiologies. Delinquency studies have not been so quick to appreciate the theoretical implications of the fact that delinquency does not even look the same, that the diversity of content is itself enormous and requires explanation. More than this, however, we suggest that careful attention to the diversity of content will itself provide fertile clues for theory. An apposite illustration is the work of Grosser (10), which takes as its point of departure the characteristic differences between male and female delinquency and leads to important new insights into the ways in which delinquency is determined by the role structure of society.

Another limitation of American delinquency studies has been the tendency, with some notable exceptions among the sociologists, to conceive

of variations in delinquency as variations solely in the behavior of individuals rather than variations in cultural patterns and collective behavior. This way of conceiving and describing delinquency is implicit in the dominant methodological model, which compares an experimental group of delinquents with a control group of non-delinquents, or a group of one-time offenders with a group of recidivists and attempts to relate these differences in individual behavior to differences in situational or developmental backgrounds. This model is appropriate to certain kinds of problems, but it cannot yield descriptions of delinquent subcultures, for these are social phenomena *sui generis* and must be described on their own level. Cultural patterns are inferred from the observation of groups as wholes, of the social relationships among their members, of what happens when the members of the group are together and what happens when they are apart, of the order, the sequence, the variety of the group's activities, delinquent and non-delinquent, of the interaction between the group and other groups and the larger community as well. Such patterns do not emerge from a table of individual differences.

The second order of descriptive data relates to the distribution of these patterns in the social system, that is to their distribution by age, sex, class, ethnic group, ecological area, etc. Again, on the one hand our theories must make sense of these distributions and, on the other hand, these distributions provide clues to the social structuring of the patterns, for the distributions must in some way be a function of correlates of their positional coordinates. We already have a lot of data on the social distribution of delinquency, but it is not very useful for our purposes. Most of our distributional studies treat delinquency as though it were homogeneous. With the exception of comparisons by sex, most of our distributional data consist of simple frequency distributions of delinquent acts. We have few studies mapping out the distribution of different kinds of delinquency, much less different kinds of delinquent subcultures.

These data specify what is to be explained. The explanation sets forth the manner in which the content and distribution are socially structured, that is, are functions of the structure of the larger social system. Such an explanation necessarily implies a general theory of subcultures, for explanation of any phenomenon consists in a demonstration that that phenomenon is consistent with a general theory applicable to the entire class of which the phenomenon in question is a special case. The general theory of subcultures is presently in a rather crude and undeveloped state. Parallel with our efforts to explain particular subcultures, therefore, must be continuing efforts at the further development and refinement of the general theory so that it will be adequate to all its special applications.

In the following discussion, we present a list of the principal varieties of delinquent subcultures which can be tentatively differentiated at the present time, some descriptive notes, etiological speculations, and some problems for theory and research suggested by this discussion. Certain

general observations are in order before we set forth our typology. The concrete variability of delinquent subcultures must be assumed to be almost infinite. These subcultures, therefore, will exhibit a range of variation that cannot be encompassed by any empirical typology. The subcultures listed here are those which, although they shade off into one another, stand out in the literature as conspicuously differentiated trends or, on theoretical ground, seem likely to represent etiologically differentiated entities. It would seem to be a logical goal for theory to work toward a conceptual scheme consisting of a set of variables or dimensions of variation, on both the descriptive and etiological levels, in terms of which we can state the essential features, on both these levels, of any concrete variant.

Delinquent or any other subcultures are to be defined, like clinical entities in medicine, in terms of variations in their manifest content and their etiology. The terminology of sex and social class roles, which we have found convenient in *naming* the varieties of delinquent subcultures, do not stand for these *defining attributes* but for the *positional coordinates* of these subcultures. Research will undoubtedly reveal that other positional variables such as age, ethnicity, and ecological location and combinations of these variables also correspond to differences in life conditions which give rise to distinctive subcultural variants. Some of the ways in which these other positional variables may be relevant are suggested in the pages which follow. However, it is not to be assumed *a priori* that every way of mapping social space is also a way of mapping delinquent subcultures, nor that to every social position there corresponds a distinctive variety of delinquent subculture. Positional data and data relating to content and etiology are of two different, although related, orders. Some of the variants we describe here may yet be discovered to occur in other regions of social space as well as those in which we have located them. It is a task for research to determine which variations in position are linked to variations in life conditions which make for significant differences in the defining attributes of delinquent subcultures.

**Delinquent Subcultures: Male**

1. *The parent male subculture.* This is what the book, *Delinquent Boys,* calls "the" delinquent subculture. It has been described as nonutilitarian, malicious, negativistic, versatile, and characterized by short-run hedonism and group autonomy. We refer to it as the parent subculture because it is probably the most common variety in this country—indeed, it might be called the "garden variety" of delinquent subculture—and because the characteristics listed above seem to constitute a common core shared by other important variants. However, in addition, these variants possess distinctive attributes or emphases which are not fully accounted for by the argument of *Delinquent Boys.* We believe the parent subculture is a working-class subculture. This position, however, is open to

question and we shall consider the matter further in our discussion of the middle-class subculture.

2. *The conflict-oriented subculture.* This is the subculture most prominent in the news today and is probably regarded by many laymen as the typical form which delinquency takes. In its highly developed forms it has the following characteristics. It is a culture of large gangs, whose membership numbers ordinarily in the scores and may run into the hundreds; in this respect contrasting to the parent subculture, whose members consist of small gangs or cliques. These gangs have a relatively elaborate organization, including such differentiated roles as president, vice-president, war-chief, and armorer. The gang may be subdivided into sub-gangs on an age or territorial basis and may have alliances with other gangs. These gangs have names, a strong sense of corporate identity, a public personality or "rep" in the gang world. The gang is identified with a territory or "turf" which it tries to defend or to extend. The status of the gang is largely determined by its toughness, that is, its readiness to engage in physical conflict with other gangs and its prowess in intergang "rumbles." Although fighting occupies but a small portion of the gang's time, "heart" or courage in fighting is the most highly prized virtue and the most important determinant of the position of gang members within the gang as well as that of the gang among other gangs. Fighting within the gang is regulated by a code of fairness; gang members, however, are relatively unconstrained by any concepts of chivalry or fairness in warfare with other gangs. To demonstrate "heart" it is not necessary to give the other fellow a decent chance or to show forbearance toward an outnumbered or defeated enemy. There is evident ambivalence about fighting; it is not a simple outpouring of accumulated aggression. Members are afraid of rumbles, and are frequently relieved when police intervention prevents a scheduled rumble, but the ethic of the gang requires the suppression of squeamishness, an outward demeanor of toughness, and a readiness to defend turf and rep with violence and even brutality. In their other activities, these gangs exhibit the general characteristics of the delinquent subculture. Drinking, sex, gambling, stealing, and vandalism are prominent. Such gangs include a wide age range. They are concentrated in sections of the city that are highly mobile, working-class, impoverished, and characterized by a wide variety of indices of disorganization.

This is the full-blown conflict gang. Although large conflict gangs may be found in many cities, it is doubtful that the degree of organization, including the officers and functionaries, found in the New York gangs is to be found elsewhere. Probably more common than the type of gang described here is a form intermediate between the conflict gang and the parent subculture: a loosely organized and amorphous coalition of cliques with only a vague sense of corporate identity, coalescing sporadically and frequently for displays of open violence. But the reality of gangs

in New York and in other cities, similar to those we have described, cannot be doubted.

3. *The drug addict subculture.* What we know of this subculture is derived primarily from two large-scale research projects conducted in New York and Chicago respectively. Although these studies do not agree in all respects, especially with reference to etiological questions, it is clear that the subculture which centers around the use of narcotic drugs provides a markedly distinct way of life. Both studies are agreed that drug addiction and criminality go hand-in-hand, that addiction arises in communities where delinquency is already endemic, that most juvenile addicts —although not all—were delinquent prior to their addiction. They are agreed that the addict eschews the more violent forms of delinquency —rape, assault, gang warfare, "general hell-raising"—and prefers income-producing forms of delinquency, which are essential to the support of a drug habit in a society in which drugs are obtainable only in an illegal market and at great cost. The addict subculture, therefore, in contrast to the parent and the conflict gang cultures, has a marked utilitarian quality, but this utilitarianism is in support of and a precondition of the addict way of life.

The kinship of the addict and other delinquent subcultures is brought out in the finding of the New York study that addicts are usually members of organized gangs and share the general philosophy of those gangs. After the onset of addiction, however, their participation in the more violent and disorderly activities of the gangs is reduced and they tend to cluster in cliques on the periphery of the gangs. There is little moral disapproval of drug use on the part of gang members, but it is usually discouraged and the status of the addict within the larger gang is lowered on the practical grounds that addiction lowers the value of the addict to the group. The reports of the Chicago investigators, however, suggest that they were studying a more "mature" addict subculture, one that is not peripheral to more "conventional" subcultures and in a merely tolerated status, but one that has achieved a higher degree of autonomy, with a loose and informal but independent organization, enjoying a relatively high status in the communities within which it flourishes. The Chicago addict, as described, is not a hanger-on of a conflict gang but moves proudly in the world of the "cats." The characteristics of the cat culture are suggested in the reports of the New York study, but are elaborately and richly described in the Chicago reports. Central to the cat culture is the "kick," defined by Finestone as "any act tabooed by 'squares' that heightens and intensifies the present moment of experience and differentiates it as much as possible from the humdrum routine of daily life," and the "hustle," defined as "any non-violent means of making some bread (money) which does not require work." Heroin is "the greatest kick of them all"; pimping, conning, pickpocketing, and such are approved and respectable hustles. Both the kick and the hustle, notes Finestone, are in direct antithesis to the central values of the dominant culture. The cat

cultivates an image of himself as "cool," self-possessed, assured, and quietly competent, places great value upon the esthetic amenities of clothes and music, and possesses a discriminating and critical taste.

Both studies locate the addict subculture in those areas of the city which are most deprived, of the lowest socio-economic status, most lacking in effective adult controls—characterized by extensive family disorganization, high mobility, and recently arrived populations. Addiction characteristically occurs after the age of sixteen and is most heavily concentrated among the most-discriminated-against minority groups, especially Negroes.

4. *Semi-Professional Theft.* The word "professional" is not intended to connote the "professional thief" of Sutherland's description. The latter represents the elite of the criminal underworld, skilled, sophisticated, nonviolent, specialized. It is intended to suggest, rather, a stage in a life history which has been described by Sutherland and Cressey as proceeding "from trivial to serious, from occasional to frequent, from sport to business, and from crimes committed by isolated individuals or by very loosely organized groups to crime committed by rather tightly organized groups." (17) This sequence appears to characterize especially "persons who in young adult life become robbers and burglars." The earlier stage of this sequence describes what we have called the parent subculture. Most participants in this subculture appear to drop out or to taper off after the age of sixteen or seventeen. A minority, however, begin to differentiate themselves from their fellows, at about this age, and to move in the direction of more utilitarian, systematic, and pecuniary crime—what we are calling "semi-professional theft."

Systematic research on this pattern, as a differentiated variant or offspring of the parent subculture, is scanty. However, an unpublished study on the amount of admitted delinquency among boys of juvenile court age in high delinquency areas of Chicago supports this conception of a subculture of semi-professional theft.[2] The detailed statistical findings will be presented in a later report. Preliminary analysis strongly suggests that the following characteristics, all presumptive evidence of a strong utilitarian emphasis, tend to go together with the later stages of a long history of frequent stealing which began at an early age:

*a.* the use of strong-arm methods (robbery) of obtaining money.
*b.* the *sale* of stolen articles, *versus* using for oneself, giving or throwing away, or returning stolen articles.
*c.* stating, as a reason for continued stealing, "want things" or "need money" *versus* stealing for excitement, because others do it, because they like to, or for spite.

In the areas studied, this semi-professional stealing appears to be more of a differentiation of emphasis within a more diversified climate of delinquency than an autonomous subculture independently organized.

[2] This study was conducted under the auspices of the Illinois Institute for Juvenile Research and the immediate direction of Mr. Guy Procaccio.

Boys who show the characteristics listed above commonly participate in non-utilitarian delinquency as well; *e.g.*, giving or throwing away stolen articles or indicating that they steal for excitement, because they like to, or for spite. Furthermore, they belong to gangs the majority of whose members may engage in predominantly non-utilitarian delinquency. It seems probable, although it has not been demonstrated, that the semi-professional thieves constitute cliques within the larger gangs and that they are differentiated from other delinquents in the same gangs with respect to other characteristics than patterns of stealing alone. We would surmise that, to the degree to which stealing becomes rational, systematic, deliberate, planned, and pursued as a primary source of income, it becomes incompatible with anarchic, impulsive, mischievous, and malicious characteristics of non-utilitarian delinquent subcultures and that its practitioners tend to segregate themselves into more professionally oriented and "serious-minded" groups. This, however, is speculation and is a subject for further research.

5. *The middle-class delinquent subculture.* Thus far we have distinguished subcultures primarily on empirical grounds; that is, investigators have observed the differences we have described. Middle-class delinquency commonly takes a subcultural form as well, but there is as yet no firm basis in research for ascribing to it a different content from that of the parent male subculture (13, 19). We distinguish it rather on theoretical grounds; since none of the problems of adjustment to which the working-class subcultures seem to constitute plausible and intelligible responses appear to be linked with sufficient frequency to middle-class status, we assume that middle-class subcultures arise in response to problems of adjustment which are characteristic products of middle-class socialization and middle-class life situations. The notion that different patterns of behavior may be "functionally equivalent" solutions to the same or similar problems is familiar. We are suggesting that the same or similar patterns of behavior may be "functionally versatile" solutions to different problems of adjustment. However, we are persuaded that further research will reveal subtle but important differences between working-class and middle-class patterns of delinquency. It seems probable that the qualities of malice, bellicosity, and violence will be underplayed in the middle-class subcultures and that these subcultures will emphasize more the deliberate courting of danger (suggested by the epithet "chicken") and a sophisticated, irresponsible, "playboy" approach to activities symbolic, in our culture, of adult roles and centering largely around sex, liquor, and automobiles.

## Determinants of the Male Subcultures

A fully satisfactory theory of delinquent subcultures must specify the different problems of adjustment to which each of these subcultures is a response, and the ways in which the social structure generates these problems of adjustment and determines the forms which the solutions take.

Definitive theory can grow only out of research specifically concerned with differences among these subcultures. Such research is in its infancy. For example, it is not possible to determine from the published literature what are the characteristics of the cities in which the conflict gangs appear and of those in which it does not; the specific characteristics which differentiate urban areas in which delinquency assumes this form and those in which it does not; or the specific characteristics of the children who become involved in this sort of delinquency and of those who do not. There is a literature, most of it growing out of the work of the New York City Youth Board, which is valuable and suggestive (5, 15, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28). Little of this literature, however, employs a systematic comparative perspective designed to throw light on the *differential* characteristics of this subculture and its social setting. With respect to the conditions which favor the emergence of a semi-professional subculture, the literature is practically silent. On the matter of middle-class delinquency, there is an enormous emotional to-do and vocal alarm, but little more. There is a great need of case studies of middle-class delinquent groups, including detailed descriptions of the specific quality of their delinquencies and the behavioral context and community settings of these delinquencies. It is interesting that some of our most adequate and illuminating research concerns the drug addict subculture, which is numerically perhaps the least significant delinquent subculture and is restricted to a few sections of our larger cities, although where it appears it is a grave social problem and is most ominous for the young people who are caught up in it.

To us, the subculture of the conflict gang is the most baffling. Several years ago Solomon Kobrin suggested, on the basis of his intimate knowledge of delinquency in Chicago, the differential characteristics of areas in which delinquency assumes the semi-professional form, and of those in which it assumes a violent, "hoodlum," conflict form. These differences he described as differences in the degree of integration between the conventional and criminal value systems. In areas in which adults are engaged in consistently profitable and highly organized illegal enterprises and also participate in such conventional institutions as churches, fraternal and mutual benefit societies, and political parties, criminal adult role models have an interest in helping to contain excesses of violence and destructiveness; in these areas youngsters may perceive delinquency as a means to the acquisition of skills which are useful to the achievement of conventional values and which may, as a matter of fact, lead to a career in the rackets, and to prestige in the community. Here delinquency tends to assume a relatively orderly, systematic, rational form. We suspect that this type of area is relatively rare and that the pattern of semi-professional theft is correspondingly rare, as compared with the occurrence of the parent and hoodlum-type patterns. In a contrasting type of area adults may violate the law, but this violation is not systematic and organized, and the criminal and conventional value systems do not mesh through the participation

of criminals in the conventional institutions. "As a consequence, the delinquency in areas of this type tends to be unrestrained by controls originating *at any point* in the adult social structure." (12, p. 658) Delinquency takes on a wild, untrammeled, violent character. "Here groups of delinquents may be seen as excluded, isolated conflict groups dedicated to an unending battle against all forms of restraint." (12, p. 659)

This is the kind of provocative formulation of which we stand much in need. However, Kobrin's formulations have not, to our knowledge, led to research to test their validity. Furthermore, although this formulation specifies the kind of breakdown of controls under which a conflict subculture can flourish, it does not account for the positive motivation to large-scale organized gangs, the warlike relationships between gangs, and the idealization of toughness, relatively unregulated by an intergang code of chivalry and fairness. It is a defect of many of our theories of delinquency that they try to account for delinquency by demonstrating the absence of effective restraints. Delinquency, however, and certainly this particular form of delinquency, cannot be assumed to be a potentiality of human nature which automatically erupts when the lid is off. Nor do we believe that the emphasis on conflict can be explained as a way of expressing and channelizing aggression accumulated through a variety of frustrations. We do not deny either the frustrations or the aggression of many of the youngsters in this subculture. But it is apparent from the reports of workers that the violence we see is as much a matter of conformity, sometimes in the face of great fear and reluctance, to a highly compulsive group-enforced ideal of toughness as it is a simple outburst of pent-up hostility. We will not at this point add our own speculations to those of others. It is our purpose here merely to indicate the nature of the problem.

It is a matter for further research to determine the extent to which the patterns we have described, and other patterns, are *variants* of a common subculture or subcultures, with qualitatively distinct etiologies, or *quantitative extremes* of the common subculture with the same variables accounting for their existence and their extremity. In this paper we have chosen to describe these patterns as variants. The description of these variants, and their accounting, in etiological research and theory, is the major task of the larger project of which this paper is a partial report.

With respect to the drug addict subculture, the New York and Chicago investigators present different interpretations, and it is an interesting challenge to theory to account for these differences or to reconcile them. The New York investigators state unequivocally that "All juvenile drug addicts are severely disturbed individuals," and that "adolescents who become addicts have deep-rooted, major personality disorders." (1, pp. 59–60) Specifically, they suffer from a weak ego, an inadequately functioning superego, and inadequate masculine identification. These defects, in turn, can be traced to family experiences. Up to the age of sixteen or so these boys do not behave very differently from the

ordinary gang delinquent. At about this age the emotionally healthy youngsters develop a new conception of themselves consistent with age-graded role definitions and expectations in our culture. The gang activities become kid stuff, the gang begins to break up, the boy begins to organize his life around a job, his girl, his future. "It is at this stage that those members or hangers-on who are too disturbed emotionally to face the future as adults find themselves seemingly abandoned by their old cronies and begin to feel increasingly anxious." (1, p. 62) They take to the use of drugs because drugs help to reduce anxieties resulting from personal incapacity and because they make it easy to deny and to avoid facing deep-seated personal problems (14).

The Chicago investigators, on the contrary, question the concept of the addict as a "sick person," whose addiction is a symptom of personality defects (8). They emphasize, on the one hand, the breakdown of controls which occurs in areas which "are characterized by a high density of a recently arrived and largely unsettled population" (23), and whose residents cannot mobilize effectively to secure law enforcement against even that behavior which offends their own standards. They emphasize, on the other hand, the problems of adjustment which are a function of the social position of the populations within those areas, the problems, that is, of the most depressed sectors of the most disadvantaged minority groups, who are increasingly sensitized to the value, goals, and conceptions of success of the dominant social order but who are categorically excluded from the opportunity for legitimately achieving them. Since they are denied participation, except in a servile and unrewarding capacity, in those activities which are defined by the dominant institutional order as the legitimate, "serious," and really important activities, these groups turn their back on this order and the sober virtues which it enjoins, and make a virtue and an ideal of "play," of irresponsible, autonomous, hedonically oriented activity which seeks its consummation and reward in the extraction of the maximum "kick" from the present moment. The problems of adjustment to which the cat culture is a response are not a function of a pathological character structure; they are socially structured strains endemic in the lower-class urban Negro and other minority group populations.

How are we to account for the contrast between the two interpretations? It is possible that one or the other represents faulty speculation which is not in keeping with the data and which is a product of a sociologistic or psychologistic bias. However, both grow out of responsible, systematic research and neither can be lightly dismissed as an autistic distortion of the plain facts. It is possible that the two populations studied cannot be equated, that we are dealing with two different addict subcultures. It is possible, also, that the cat culture described by the Chicago researchers is a logical extreme of the gradual isolation from the more conventional gangs which is documented by the New York studies. This still does not explain the differences noted in the two studies, however.

It is further possible that the two sets of conclusions are not mutually exclusive. With respect to the Chicago study we may make two observations: (1) it is always a minority of young people in any given area who become addicts, and therefore there must be selective processes at work in addition to those stressed by the Chicago investigators; (2) the methods of the Chicago study were not designed to reveal the kinds of data concerning personality structure to which the New York investigators attach such importance. It may well be that, without regard to individual peculiarities and abnormalities, the social setting described in the Chicago reports is one in which the addict subculture is attractive and possible, but that, within this general setting, the attractiveness of this response is further enhanced for those with the character structure described in the New York reports. Furthermore, it is possible that this kind of character structure occurs with exceptionally high frequency in lower-class Negro areas. A family constellation of floating, irresponsible males centering around a hard-working, overburdened mother is common in this segment of the Negro population, and it is the sort of constellation that might be expected to produce the weak ego, inadequately functioning superego, and inadequate masculine identification that are ascribed to the addict's personality. In short, it is possible, although it is still speculative, that the methods of the two studies illuminate different aspects of the same reality.

In *Delinquent Boys,* it was suggested that the middle-class delinquent subculture is a response to ambivalence and anxiety in the area of sex-role identification, aggravated by the prolonged dependence of the boy upon his family, and the indefinite postponement of adult self-sufficiency and self-determination. This interpretation has been questioned by Wilensky and Lebeaux (21) who argue that anxiety about male identity is greater in the *lower class.* The working-class delinquent subculture, therefore, is determined by both status anxiety and sex-role anxiety; the middle-class subculture is determined by anxiety about becoming a man, an adult. Wilensky and Lebeaux conclude that this theory would predict even sharper contrasts between working-class and middle-class delinquency than the official statistics would show.

A recent study (13) based on self-reported behavior of western and mid-western high school students does not support this prediction or suggest that there is any significant difference in middle-class and working-class delinquency rates in the several communities studied. The same findings might not obtain in large urban areas or non-caucasian populations, which were not studied, but at least in this one respect the findings are not consistent with inference from the Wilensky and Lebeaux hypothesis. This argument does not lack plausibility, however, and research is obviously necessary to decide between what are, at this point, rival speculations.

In an effort to account for the apparent increase in middle-class delinquency, Cohen (4) suggested that, as a result of changes in the structure of our economy, labor market, and school system, the traditional

deferred gratification pattern of the middle-class boy is breaking down. In an economy of scarcity this pattern of deferred gratification did, as a matter of fact, "pay off." It was a prerequisite to movement through the schools and to the economic opportunities to which the schools were an avenue. Furthermore, middle-class parents could point to the obviously greater economic affluence of themselves in contrast to the unskilled and generally unprotected mass of working class people. Thus, with support from parents, the economy, and the school, the "college boy" way of life, to use Whyte's felicitous phrase (20), was inculcated in middle-class children and in working-class children who aspired to "better themselves." This pattern was incompatible with commitment to a delinquent way of life.

What has happened to this picture? Again very briefly, we find that the labor market no longer requires large numbers of unskilled workers and that organized labor does not welcome teen-aged competitors for a limited supply of jobs. The demand is, on the contrary, that the school hold on to young people as long as possible and keep them off the labor market. The school is compelled to retain and to promote "college boy" and "corner boy" alike, to adopt a child-centered philosophy, to minimize invidious distinctions and differential rewards for working-class and middle-class ways of life. The structural supports of a pattern of deferred gratification are therefore weakened. Incentive for this pattern is further weakened by the relatively greater economic strides made by organized labor. The child can see all of this and, as a consequence, is likely to find the college-boy way of life less attractive—this, in spite of the fact that a college education can be *statistically* demonstrated to be "worth" a considerable sum!

Sociologists have pointed out that our society provides no well-defined role for adolescence (21), a period in the child's life when the problem of establishing his personal identity becomes especially crucial. With the weakening of the deferred gratification pattern, the choice among alternatives as the boy seeks to fill this status void is more likely to become a delinquent choice. When he tries to establish his identity as an adult, or as a man, he finds the "conventional," the "respectable," the "responsible" criteria of adult status denied him. Hence, he tends to symbolize his adulthood by irresponsible, hedonically oriented behavior involving the courting of danger, liquor, sex, cars, etc.

Still other changes in society and in child rearing patterns, especially among middle class parents, may have contributed to an increase in delinquency in this class of youngsters. These changes have to do with the relatively greater independence from each other of family members as a result of the economic changes we have talked about, the democratization of family relations, vacillation in child rearing philosophy as a result of increasing concern with what the "experts" in the field have to say (together with vacillation on the part of the latter), and the "cult of youth" which holds that all pain, especially psychic pain, is injurious to

children and that it is the responsibility of parents to minimize pain and frustration for their children. All of these things require documentation in the form of carefully conducted research. All, however, appear to weaken the deferred gratification pattern of socialization and the authority of parental figures, to retard the internalization of authority, to reduce the ability to tolerate frustration, and to contribute to an increase in delinquency among middle-class children.

This is, perhaps, more than enough speculation on the conditions which might facilitate the formation of middle-class delinquent subcultures. The saddest commentary, however, is that we are faced with a poverty of speculation, without which there can be no meaningful research, without which, in turn, there can be no conclusions that are more than speculation.

**Delinquent Subcultures: Female**

With a very few exceptions, (e.g. 9, 11) the professional literature on female delinquency is of little help in determining how, in what ways, and to what extent that delinquency is subculturally patterned. There is little on what this delinquency actually consists of, other than that it usually involves sexual misconduct of some kind; or on the relationships of the girls to the boys and men with whom they are involved, and how these relationships, as well as the girls' relationships to other peers of both sexes, are affected by their sexual behavior; or on the contexts of other activities; or on other characteristics of the social settings within which sexual episodes occur. It is our position that the meaning and function, for the persons concerned, of any form of delinquent behavior can only be inferred from rich and detailed descriptive data about the behavior itself, about its position in a larger context of interaction, and about how it is perceived and reacted to by the actor himself and by other participants in that interactive context. These data are largely lacking for female delinquency.

In *Delinquent Boys* Cohen suggested the socially structured motivations to participation in what might be called a female parent delinquent subculture. He argues that a girl's status depends largely upon the status of the males with whom she is identified; that, in order to achieve respectability, a girl must be able to attract the "honorable" attentions of respectable and responsible males; that many girls, especially of lower socio-economic status, have not been trained in the arts and graces and lack the material means necessary for competing successfully for such attentions; that such girls, despairing of respectable marriage and social mobility, are inclined to seek reassurance of their sense of adequacy *as girls* by abandoning their reputation for chastity, which has proven, for them, an unrewarding virtue, and by making themselves sexually available; that they gain, thereby, the assurance of male attention and male favors, albeit within transitory and unstable relationships which further lower their value on the marriage market. Like its male counterpart, this pattern

represents the rejection of conventional and respectable but unattainable status goals and the disciplines which lead to them, and the substitution therefor of the satisfactions to be obtained in the immediate present with the resources presently available. The complete mechanism whereby the social structure generates this subculture is surely much more complex than this, but the argument is intended only to suggest a common core of motivation which goes far to explain the characteristic sexual content of this subculture and, indeed, of female delinquency in general.

Not only is little known about this parent subculture. With perhaps one exception, still less is known about the numerous varieties of female delinquent subcultures, except that they exist. There are gangs of girls organized for and around sexual activities; there are mixed groups of middle- and upper-middle-class boys and girls organized as sex gangs, with an emphasis on refinement, gentility, and sophistication; and there are gangs of girls strongly resembling the male hoodlum gang. At the present time little can be said, even in a descriptive way, about any of these.

It is possible to say a little more about the female drug addict subculture, on the basis of our analysis of interview material gathered in the course of the Chicago drug use study, and of material in preparation for a Master's degree thesis at the University of Chicago (16). The observations to be set forth here are tentative and will be more fully elaborated in a later publication.

The girls whose interviews we have read are predominantly Negro, of low social status, and located in the same type of area as that from which the male addicts characteristically come. However, some of them come from relatively respectable and well-off Negro families and there are no strikingly obvious common patterns, sequences, or problems of adjustment exhibited by all the cases. However, certain features recur with impressive frequency. Almost all of these girls have had difficulty in establishing satisfactory relationships with the other sex, although for divers reasons. A theme which runs through history after history is isolation from the main stream of normal, relaxed, boy-girl relationships, loneliness, depression, and a pathetic yearning for marriage to a stable, responsible, respectable man. These girls appear to fall prey easily to exploitative and irresponsible men, who exercise extraordinary power over them apparently because of the girls' need for male companionship and love, or a simulacrum thereof. Pregnancy, desertion, and "hustling" occur with monotonous regularity. The girl may be introduced to opiate drugs by other girls, by male companions, or in mixed groups of "fast" company. The nature of these circumstances is such that the girls often find themselves isolated, depressed, and threatened. These conditions heighten their dependence on the drug and upon social contacts which assure the completion of the cycle.

After addiction, hustling on a full time basis in order to support her habit and sometimes her lover's habit is almost invariable. During the

period of addiction her range of associates is almost entirely narrowed to other addicts and prostitutes, but her relationships with even these people are likely to be tangential and incidental to the procurement of the drug, and to her profession. A vicious cycle is characteristic of all the histories we have read: addiction and prostitution lead to a further isolation from respectable society and a lowering of status; these, in turn, increase loneliness and depression and the girl's vulnerability to exploitation by men; and these, in turn, encourage continuation in or relapse into the use of drugs.

Although these girls move on the fringes of the cat culture, they do not, we think, participate fully in it. They are not "fast, noisy, aggressive cats," seeking status among other cats through their kicks and their hustle. They are not proud of their habit and their hustle is strictly business, frequently a distasteful one. Without exception, these girls express a desire for respectability, but they find it difficult to escape from the vicious circle in which they have become entrapped.

## Summary

It is apparent that we have barely stepped over the threshold of the study of delinquent subcultures. The purpose of this paper has been to enumerate some of the principal varieties of these subcultures, to describe or to suggest some of their important features, to speculate on their origins, to indicate the types of research and theoretical work which are most needed, and to provide some suggestive hypotheses to be tested or revised by later research.

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