Abstract of the Thesis

The problem of delinquency has been around long enough to generate sizeable body of research, but the concept and etiology of delinquency still remain as obscure and confusing as ever. Researchers have noted, therefore, that the term delinquency has been so abused that it has practically no meaning. The term delinquency means different things to different people. Some say it is an artificial concept, while others are inclined to believe that delinquency is a mental illness just as psychosis and neurosis are. In the present study delinquency was also viewed as being largely a matter of social and cultural values, standards, and practices. For instance, a specific behavior in a society may be accepted or tolerated, while in another society the same behavior may be punished. Thus the same behavior in two different societies with two different social norms may bring about two different consequences.

Contrary to the widely held belief that delinquency is a product of a particular subculture, neighborhood, or community, it was argued that delinquents come from all segments of our society. Environmental conditions, however, may make some sections of our society more susceptible than others. Nevertheless, "majority of research on delinquency has involved lower class population; middle class and upper class delinquents pose an uninvestigated problem for current theorists," (Miller, 1970, p. 121).

Insofar as classification of pathological behavior, there is growing empirical evidence to indicate that psychiatric diagnosis is impractical and the system itself is premature. An alternative method of personality assessment—functional analysis of behavior—was considered because of the questionable validity of diagnostic system, inappropriateness of disease (medical) analogy to social behavior, and the fact that there appears no relationship between diagnosis and the response to psychiatric treatment.

Some basic differences between psychodynamic and behavioral approaches to personality assessment were observed. For example, clinical psychologists argue that individuals have stable response dispositions (traits) and, as a result, they (individuals) do not have an effective control over them. While behaviorists intend to prove that all behaviors are learned, and that a behavior is a function of environmental conditions (reinforcers). Thus, clinical psychologists emphasize on what the individual "has" and behaviorists emphasize on what the individual "does".
The present study, being exploratory in nature, was intended to explore two aspects of delinquency: (1) etiology of delinquency with reference to psycho-social (environmental) conditions, and (2) personality characteristics of delinquents that would supposedly differentiate them from nondelinquents. In order to investigate these aspects of delinquency, it was decided not to follow any particular theoretical model of personality or to formulate any hypotheses or hypothetical guidelines.

The study was confined to male delinquents and male nondelinquents. The two groups were thoroughly matched on the following variables: age, IQ, education, family income, religion, and area of residence. A total of one hundred delinquents and one hundred nondelinquents was selected for the study.

Both experimental and control group subjects were individually administered the following tests: Case History Proforma, Bhatia's Battery of Performance Tests of Intelligence, and the Rorschach test. Interview and test procedures, including the examiner, were the same for both groups.

The results of the case history questionnaire clearly indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups, insofar as their environmental conditions. Some of the major differences could be summarized as follows. Compared with non-delinquents, delinquents' family and home conditions, their parents' attitudes, practices, and their own (parents) history of physical and emotional problems and relationship between parents were found to be inadequate, unwholesome, and extremely poor. Disciplinary measures taken by delinquents' parents were harsher, more drastic and less reasonable. More delinquents than non-delinquents disliked their schools, and the incidence of misbehavior in schools among delinquents was much higher than their counterparts. Community was another situation where sharp differences were noted between the two groups. Interestingly enough, there were situations, places, and people in the community that were found to provide the kind of environment where undesirable behavior in children could be both produced and maintained.

As to the personality characteristics of delinquents and nondelinquents, no significant differences were found between the two groups' Rorschach records.

Results of the case history questionnaire and the Rorschach test seem to indicate two things. First, environmental conditions play a dominant role in shaping the behavior (prosocial or asocial) of the individual. And functional analysis of behavior can help
professionals explain why, how, where, and when a behavior occurs and how a behavior can be maintained or eliminated. Secondly, clinical and empirical usefulness of personality tests should be carefully scrutinized and evaluated. Because these tests are based on hypothetical propositions and not on any proven principles of personality theory. And the hypothesis that personality characteristics are stable regardless of situational variables has been found unsupported. The results of the Rorschach test in the present study also lend support to previous research findings that personality characteristics of one specific group can be found in other diagnostic groups as well. In conclusion, it was suggested that a search for personality dynamics that supposedly control individual's behavior is perhaps a futile pursuit. Instead, a much more fruitful approach would be to investigate the learning contingencies associated with specific behavior and the reinforcement mechanisms maintaining that behavior.