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## SELF-CONCEPT, ALIENATION, AND ANXIETY IN A CONTRACULTURE AND SUBCULTURE: A RESEARCH REPORT

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A questionnaire designed to measure characteristics of self-concept, alienation, and anxiety was administered to a sample of institutionalized delinquents, non-institutionalized delinquents, and non-delinquent adolescents for the purpose of testing some aspects of the Yinger-Cavan approach to delinquent behavior. The hypotheses were generally supported with the exception that the non-institutionalized delinquents were the most alienated as well as the most socially anchored of the three groups. It was suggested that the "marginal" status of the non-institutionalized delinquents offered the best explanation for this unanticipated and contradictory finding.

The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of an investigation into the relationships between characteristics of self-concept, alienation, and anxiety in three male adolescent populations: institutionalized delinquents, non-institutionalized delinquents, and non-delinquent adolescents.

Milton Yinger has suggested the use of the term contraculture

"... wherever the normative system of a group contains as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society, where personality variables are directly involved in the development and maintenance of the group's values and wherever its norms can be understood only by reference to the relationships of the group to a surrounding dominant culture."<sup>1</sup>

This statement implies that in order to be classified as a contraculture the norms of a group must contain an element of conflict with the values of the total society and that in order to understand contracultures we should investigate the personality variables, such as self-concept, anxiety, and alienation, which are intimately involved with the development and maintenance of the group's values.

The norms of a contraculture are the result of "substandard" socialization in society; they are the product of frustration and conflict on the part of individuals who share many of the values of the larger society, but who have been thwarted in

their attempts to achieve some values they deem important. These individuals have not internalized the normative system of the larger culture. On the other hand, the norms of a subculture are the result of "standard" socialization in society. The members of subcultures have internalized many values of the larger society and have not been as thwarted in their efforts to achieve important values. Yinger names delinquents as one example of a contracultural group and middle-class non-delinquent adolescents as an example of a sub-cultural group.

The norms of a contraculture are against those of the dominant society. Many contracultural values are contradictions of dominant societal values and this contradiction makes the element of conflict central to the group's structure and to the member's self-concepts. In subcultures, although some values are contradictions of societal values, the conflict is not as central to the self-concepts of those who are members. A typical example is the student subculture where often its values support and enhance those of the larger society, such as promotion of "good citizenship," education, and responsibility. Furthermore, the dominant society is more likely to tolerate values of subcultures than values of contracultures. Since contracultural norms are against societal values, they cannot be tolerated. Members of contracultures are often harassed, looked down upon, and denigrated by members of the larger society.

For these reasons and because the personalities of members of contracultures reflect the conflict which is central to the group's structure, Yinger hypothesizes that members of contracultures are

<sup>1</sup> Yinger, *Contracultures and Subcultures*, 25 AM. SOC. REV. 625, 635 (1960).

more likely to be anxious, alienated, and "disturbed" than members of subcultures, who are given a more legitimate status by the dominant society.<sup>2</sup>

#### METHOD

The following hypotheses were designed as a partial test of Yinger's views.

- #1 There will be a greater tendency for delinquents (contracultures) than for non-delinquents (subcultures) to be anxious and "disturbed."
- #2 There will be a greater tendency for non-delinquents (subcultures) than for delinquents (contracultures) to be socially anchored in the dominant society and a greater tendency for delinquents (contracultures) than for nondelinquents (subcultures) to be alienated from the dominant society.

Since contracultural (delinquent) and subcultural (non-delinquent) groups range in behavior from overconformity to underconformity, it is further hypothesized (after Cavan) that the respondent will exhibit differences along a social continuum. The Cavan approach to delinquent behavior rests on the assumption that behavior can be thought of on a continuum extending from extremes of what society labels overconformity to extremes of what it labels underconformity. The center of the continuum represents the normative expectations of middle-class society. Some deviation occurs, but only to the extent that social organization is not seriously threatened. Overconformity and underconformity, the opposite ends of the continuum, represent behavior which is perceived as a threat to the equilibrium and stability of the middle-class subculture.<sup>3</sup> In this study, the institutionalized delinquents (contraculture) represent underconformity, the non-delinquent adolescents (subculture) represent conformity, and the non-institutionalized delinquents represent a group which is in-between or marginal to conformity and underconformity.

Hence, we will expect the institutionalized delinquents to be the most anxious and alienated and make the most self-derogating statements about their self-concepts; the non-institutionalized delinquents (the marginal group) will make the next

most self-derogating statements and show the next most anxiety and alienation; and, finally, the subcultural group, the non-delinquents, will make the fewest self-derogating statements and will be the least anxious and alienated.

The sample consisted of three populations: (a) 104 delinquent males at a middle-western State Training School for Boys; (b) 52 non-institutionalized delinquent males who were reported to have been in trouble with school authorities or the police; and (c) 176 non-delinquent male adolescents from an urban, middle-western high school who were reported to have never been in trouble with school authorities or the police. All respondents were between the ages of 13 and 18, and all three populations were randomly selected.<sup>4</sup>

The Twenty-Statements-Test (TST) was used to measure the self-concept. The TST required each respondent to make twenty statements (whatever came to his mind) in answer to the question: "Who am I?" Many published and unpublished studies have used this instrument successfully.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Many studies support the idea that delinquents constitute a group which is contracultural and non-delinquents a group which is subcultural: J. COLEMAN, *THE ADOLESCENT SOCIETY* (1961); T. PARSONS, *Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States*, 7 AM. SOC. REV. 604 (1942); EISENSTADT, *FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION* (1956); K. DAVIS, *Adolescence and the Social Structure*, 236 ANNALS 9 (1944); GOODMAN, *GROWING UP ABSURD* (1956); COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS* (1955); MILLER, *Lower-Class Culture as a Generating Milieu for Gang Delinquency*, 14 J. SOCIAL ISSUES 5 (1958); Miller, *Implications of Urban Lower-Class Culture for Social Work*, 38 SOC. SERV. REV. 219 (1959); Miller, *The Impact of Community Group Work Programs on Delinquent Corner Groups*, 31 SOC. SERV. REV. 390 (1957); G. Sykes & D. Matza, *Techniques of Neutralization; A Theory of Delinquency*, 22 AM. SOC. REV. 664 (1957); Reiss, *Status Deprivation and Delinquent Behavior*, 4 SOC. Q. 135 (1963); Gordon, Short, Jr., Cartwright, & Strodtbeck, *Values and Gang Delinquency: A Study of Street-Corner Groups*, 64 AM. J. SOC. 109 (1963); Korbrin, *The Conflict of Values in Delinquency Areas*, 16 AM. SOC. REV. 653 (1951).

<sup>5</sup> McPartland and J. Cumming, *Self-Conceptions, Social Class and Mental Health*, 17 HUMAN ORGANIZATION 24 (1958); McPartland, Cumming & Garretson, *Self-Conceptions and Ward Behavior in Two Psychiatric Hospitals*, 24 SOCIOLOGY 111 (1961); Garretson, *The Consensual Definition of Social Objects*, 3 SOC. Q. 107 (1962); Couch, *Family Role Specialization and Self Attitudes in Children*, 3 SOC. Q. 115 (1962); Vernon, *Religious Self-Identification*, 5 PAC. SOC. REV. 40 (Spring, 1962); Wasianen, *Self-Attitudes and Performance Expectations*, 3 SOC. Q. 208 (1962); Mulford & Salisbury, *Self-Conceptions in a General Population*, 5 SOC. Q. 35 (1964); Couch, *Self-Attitudes and Degree of Agreement with Immediate Others*, 63 AM. J. SOC. 491 (1958); Deutsch & Solomon, *Reactions to Evaluations by Others as Influenced by Self-Evaluations*, 22 SOCIOLOGY 93 (1959); Dick, *The Office Worker: Attitudes Toward Self, Labor and Management*, 3 SOC. Q. 45 (1962); Dinitz

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cavan, *The Concepts of Tolerance and Contraculture as Applied to Delinquency*, SOC. Q. 243 (1961); R. S. CAVAN, *JUVENILE DELINQUENCY* (1962).

Each TST statement was coded to measure social anchorage and self-derogation or "disturbance." Social anchorage consisted of the number of consensual statements that the respondent made on the TST.<sup>6</sup> A respondent's TST statement was coded as self-derogated or "disturbed" when he (a) made a number of derogating statements about himself, such as "I am stupid," "I am a failure," or "I am unstable," (b) conflicting or contradictory statements, such as "I am happy," "I am unhappy," or (c) derogations of other social objects or persons, such as "My mother is mean," or "School is rotten."

The Manifest Anxiety scale constructed by Janet Taylor was used as the measure of anxiety.<sup>7</sup> This scale arranged respondents along a continuum, from those who were low in anxiety to those who were high in anxiety. The children's form of this scale was used because of the school-aged population.<sup>8</sup> Alienation was measured by a scale constructed from items by Dean, Srole, Seeman, and Nettler.<sup>9</sup> Erbe and others have pointed out that alienation represents an "extended family of variables rather than any single

Mangus, & Passamanick, *Integration and Conflict in Self-Other Conceptions as Factors in Mental Illness*, 22 *SOCIOMETRY* 44 (1959); McKee & A. Sheriffs, *Men's and Women's Beliefs, Ideals, and Self-Concepts*, 64 *AM. J. SOC.* 356 (1959); Simpson & Simpson, *The Psychiatric Attendant: Development of an Occupational Self-Image in a Low-Status Occupation*, 24 *AM. SOC. REV.* 389 (1959); Videbeck, *Self-Concept and the Reaction of Others*, 23 *SOCIOMETRY* 351 (1960); K. Omwake, *The Relation Between Acceptance of Self and Acceptance of Others Shown by Three Personality Inventories*, 18 *J. CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGY* 443 (1954).

<sup>6</sup> Consensual statements are those statements which make explicit reference to social groups, roles, statuses, role preferences and expectations—that is, to those objects that consensually anchor the respondent in social groupings. For further reference see McPartland, "A Manual for the Twenty-Statements Problem" (Unpublished manuscript, Department of Research, The Greater Kansas City Mental Health Foundation, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *A Personality Scale of Manifest Anxiety*, 48 *J. ABNORMAL & SOC. PSYCH.* 285 (1953).

<sup>8</sup> Castendada, McCandless, & Palermo, *The Children's Form of the Manifest Anxiety Scale*, 27 *CHILD DEVELOPMENT* 213 (1956).

<sup>9</sup> Nettler, *A Measure of Alienation*, 22 *AM. SOC. REV.* 670 (1957); Srole, *Social Integration and Certain Corollaries: An Exploratory Study*, 21 *AM. SOC. REV.* 709 (1956); Seeman, *Alienation and Social Learning in a Reformity*, 64 *AM. J. SOC.* 270 (1963); Dean, *Alienation and Political Apathy*, 38 *SOCIAL FORCES* 185 (1960); Dean, *Alienation: Its Meaning and Measurement*, 26 *AM. SOC. REV.* 754 (1961).

Some of the items from the scale are as follows: a. Most people today seldom feel lonely; b. There are few dependable ties between people; c. A guy can always find friends if he shows himself friendly; d. I feel that my life is worthless.

TABLE 1

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMBERSHIP IN A DELINQUENT OR NON-DELINQUENT GROUP AND "DISTURBANCE" ON THE TST  
(Reported in Percentages)

	Disturbed TST	Non-Disturbed TST
Membership Group .....	N = 93	N = 237
Institutionalized Delinquents . . . .	52	48
Non-Institutionalized Delinquents.	22	78
Non-Delinquents .....	16	84

$$\chi^2 = 42.896.*$$

\* Significant at the .05 level or beyond.

TABLE 2

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMBERSHIP IN A DELINQUENT OR NON-DELINQUENT GROUP AND ANXIETY  
(Reported in Percentages)

	Anxiety	
	Low	High
Membership Group .....	N = 163	N = 163
Institutionalized Delinquents . . . .	34	66
Non-Institutionalized Delinquents.	52	48
Non-Delinquents .....	58	42

$$\chi^2 = 15.286.*$$

\* Significant at the .05 level or beyond.

trait."<sup>10</sup> For this reason, a scale designed to tap most of the meanings of the term was thought to be more useful than any individual scale. Those respondents who scored above the median were considered alienated and those who scored below the median were considered non-alienated.

#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the findings suggests that the hypotheses can be tentatively accepted. Specifically, Table 1 supports the hypothesis that delinquents will tend to be more "disturbed" than non-delinquents, and Table 2 supports the hypothesis that delinquents will tend to be more "anxious" than non-delinquents. Table 1 shows that 52 percent of the "hard core" delinquent group made

<sup>10</sup> Erbe, *Social Involvement and Political Apathy*, 29 *AM. SOC. REV.* 198 (1964).

some contradictory or self-derogating statements on the TST and were classified as "disturbed," whereas 22 percent of the noninstitutionalized delinquents and only 16 percent of the non-delinquent group were designated as "disturbed." In other words as measured by the TST, the self-concepts of the delinquent population were significantly more self-derogating and contradictory than those of the non-delinquent population. As was expected, the "marginal respondents," the non-institutionalized delinquents, were less "disturbed" than the institutionalized delinquents and more "disturbed" than the non-delinquent adolescents.

Table 2 indicates that only 42 percent of the non-delinquents scored high in anxiety, whereas 48 percent of the non-institutionalized delinquents and 66 percent of the institutionalized delinquents scored high in anxiety. Delinquents tended to be more anxious than non-delinquents. Again, the non-institutionalized delinquents occupied the in-between or "marginal" position with respect to anxiety. In brief, Tables 1 and 2 also support one of Yinger's general views about contracultural groups: there appears to be a direct relationship between personality variables of members of contracultures and the normative commitment to the values of conflict and contradiction inherent in the group's structure.

The findings also suggest support for the hypothesis that delinquents will not be as socially anchored in the dominant society as non-delinquents. Table 3 shows that 68 percent of the

TABLE 3

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMBERSHIP IN A DELINQUENT OR NON-DELINQUENT GROUP AND SOCIAL ANCHORAGE  
(Reported in Percentages)

Membership Group .....	Social Anchorage	
	Low*	High**
	N = 174	N = 157
Institutionalized Delinquents . . . .	68	32
Non-Institutionalized Delinquents.	31	69
Non-Delinquents . . . . .	50	50

\* Few Consensual Statements.

\*\* Many Consensual Statements.

$\chi^2 = 20.76$ .\*\*\*

\*\*\* Significant at the .05 level or beyond.

TABLE 4

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMBERSHIP IN A DELINQUENT OR NON-DELINQUENT GROUP AND ALIENATION  
(Reported in Percentages)

Membership Group .....	Alienation	
	Low	High
	N = 158	N = 169
Institutionalized Delinquents . . . .	44	56
Non-Institutionalized Delinquents.	35	65
Non-Delinquents . . . . .	55	45

$\chi^2 = 7.644$ .\*

\* Significant at the .05 level or beyond.

institutionalized delinquents made few consensual statements on the TST, whereas 31 percent of the non-institutionalized delinquents and 50 percent of the non-delinquent adolescents made few consensual statements. Hence, the least socially anchored group, as measured by consensual statements, was the institutionalized delinquent contraculture. Contrary to expectations, the non-delinquent adolescents were not the most socially anchored group, since only 50 percent of them made many consensual statements. The non-institutionalized delinquents were the most socially anchored group. This was an unanticipated finding. Apparently, the non-institutionalized delinquents viewed themselves as very much involved with social groups in the community, such as the school and the family. This might not be unreasonable since the members of this group were still bound up, to some extent, with the day-to-day activities of their community, that is, they were delinquent, but had not been removed from the community by institutionalization. This could partially account for the high degree of social anchorage.

However, a more adequate explanation may be offered for this contrary finding by looking at Table 4. This Table indicates that 56 percent of the institutionalized delinquents scored high in alienation, whereas 65 percent of the non-institutionalized delinquents and only 45 percent of the non-delinquent adolescents scored high in alienation. The fact that the marginal group, the non-institutionalized delinquents, appear to be the most alienated is paradoxical, since we found in Table 3 that this group was also the most socially anchored in society. Hence, Table 4 only partially supports

the hypothesis that delinquents will tend to be more alienated from the dominant society than non-delinquents, that is, the expectation that the respondents would distribute themselves along a social continuum was not indicated on the alienation dimension.

A possible explanation for this is offered by Feuer. He states that "if there is alienation in loneliness and anomie there can be alienation in togetherness and over-identification."<sup>11</sup> It may be that the non-institutionalized delinquents are socially anchored in their community, but alienated from an over-identification with it. It is this group which is on the margins of the other two: wavering back and forth between conflicting values, the members desire anchorage in both the delinquent and non-delinquent groups, but are estranged from them because neither is completely available. The non-institutionalized delinquents spend much of their time participating in non-delinquent groups, such as the family, the school, and other community organizations. However, their delinquency may produce a feeling of alienation because it estranges them from the very groups in which they are socially anchored. They are a group without a reference point—a group which occupies a "marginal" status between underconformity and conformity. In terms of social anchorage, they are committed to conformity, that is, to membership in legitimate groups in the larger community. In terms of their delinquency, however, they are forced to vitiate this commitment, and as a result

<sup>11</sup> Feuer, *What is Alienation? The Career of a Concept*, in STEIN & VIDLICH, *SOCIOLOGY ON TRIAL* 127 (1963).

they are alienated and estranged from the very groups in which they are members and to which they identify for a "respectable" status. In this regard, they may not be unlike Park and Stonequist's "marginal man" or "racial hybrid."

#### CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study tend to support some of Yinger's hypotheses about contracultural and subcultural groups. Specifically, it was found that institutionalized delinquents (contraculture) are less likely to be socially anchored in society, more likely to be alienated and anxious, and more apt to make self-derogating statements about their self-concepts than non-delinquent adolescents (subculture). In addition, as Cavan has hypothesized, the non-institutionalized delinquents tended to be "marginal to" or in-between the institutionalized "hard-core" delinquents and the non-delinquent adolescents—that is, they were less "disturbed," less anxious, and made fewer self-derogating statements about their self-concepts than the institutionalized delinquents. However, they were more "disturbed," more anxious, and made more self-derogating statements than the non-delinquent adolescents. The only exception to this pattern was that the non-institutionalized delinquents were the most alienated as well as the most socially anchored of the three groups in the study. Several explanations for this contradictory and unanticipated finding were discussed. Obviously, more refined measures on different kinds of "marginal" groups would be necessary for any conclusive explanation.