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Do Criminals Fail at School or do Schools Fail the Potential Criminal?

Growing up in a Class System

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One of the situations in which children of all social levels come together and compete for status in terms of the same set of middle-class criteria and in which working-class children are most likely to be found wanting is in the school. American educators are enamored of the idea of "democracy" as a goal of the schools. An examination of their writings reveals that "democracy" signifies "the fullest realization of the individual's potentialities," "the development of skills to an optimal level," "the development of character and abilities which can be admired by others," "preparation for effective participation in the adult vocational world." Despite reservations such as "with due regard to individual differences," this conception of "democratic" education implies that a major function of the schools is to "promote," "encourage," "motivate," "stimulate," in brief, *reward* middle-class ambition and conformity to middle-class expectations. However sincerely one may desire to avoid odious comparisons and to avoid, thereby, injury to the self-esteem of those who do not conform to one's expectations, it is extremely difficult to reward, however, subtly, successful conformity without at the same time, by implication, condemning and punishing the non-conformist. That same teacher who prides himself on his recognition and encouragement of deserving working-class children dramatizes, by that very show of pride, the superior merit of the "college-boy" working-class child to his less gifted or "corner-boy" working-class classmates.

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There are three good reasons why status in the school, insofar as it depends upon recognition by the teacher, should be measured by middle-class standards.

First, the teacher is *hired* to foster the development of middle-class personalities. The middle-class board of education, the middle-class parents whom they represent and, it is to be presumed, many of the working-class parents as well expect the teacher to define his job as the indoctrination of middle-class aspirations, character, skills and manners.

Second, the teacher himself is almost certain to be a middle-class person, who personally values ambition and achievement and spontaneously recognizes and rewards these virtues in others.

The third relates to the school itself as a social system with certain "structural imperatives" of its own. The teacher's textbooks in education and his own supervisors may stress "individualization" and "consideration for the needs limitations and special problems of each student." Nonetheless, the teacher actually handles 20, 30 or 40 students at a time. Regardless of what he conceives his proper function to be, he necessarily looks with favor on the quiet, cooperative, "well-behaved" pupils who make his job easier and with disapproval and vexation on the lusty, irrepressible, boisterous youngsters who are destructive of order, routine and predictability in the classroom. Furthermore, the teacher himself is likely to be upwardly mobile or at least anxious about the security of his tenure in his present job. He is motivated, therefore, to conform to the criteria in term of which *his* superiors evaluate *him*. Those superiors may themselves be "progressive"

and in teacher meetings preach "democracy in the classroom" and "individualization" and indeed genuinely believe in those goals. However, the degree to which a teacher tries to achieve these goals or succeeds in doing so is not highly visible and readily determined. On the other hand, grades, performance on standardized examinations, the cleanliness and orderliness of the classroom and the frequency with which children are sent to the "front office" are among the most easily determined and "objective" bases for the evaluation of teacher performance. A good "rating," then, by his supervisors is possible only if the teacher sacrifices to some degree the very "individualization" and "tolerance" which those same supervisors may urge upon him.

Research on the kinds of behavior which teachers regard as the most problematic among their pupils gives results consistent with our expectations. The most serious problems, from the standpoint of the teacher, are those children who are restless and unruly, who fidget and squirm, who annoy and distract, who create "discipline" problems. The "good" children are the studious, the obedient, the docile. It is precisely the working-class children who are most likely to be "problems" because of their relative lack of training in order and discipline, their lack of interest in intellectual achievement and their lack of reinforcement by the home in conformity to the requirements of the school. Both in terms of "conduct" and in terms of academic achievement, the failures in the classroom are drawn disproportionately from the lower social class levels. The child has little or no choice in selecting the group within which he shall compete for status and, in the words of Troyer, he is "evaluated

Schools Shortchange Girls: Gender Bias in the Classroom

This fall, millions of American schoolgirls hit their heads on a glass ceiling on the first day of school. Well before females reach the workplace, their achievement and aspirations are restricted by the glass ceiling in the classroom even as early as kindergarten.

The 1992 back-to-school season is the first since the release of the landmark "AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls," published by the AAUW Educational Foundation, which documented that girls are receiving an unequal education in America's public schools. This study of all the research on girls in schools found pervasive sex discrimination in teaching, textbooks and testing.

Gender bias in school undermines adolescent girls' self-esteem, which plummets at twice the rate of boys. Sexual harassment of girls by boys is on the rise in junior and senior high schools. And as girls' confidence falters they turn away from challenging courses of study, such as math and science, that lead to the high-skill, higher-paying jobs of the future.

Girls and boys enter school roughly equal in measured ability. Twelve years later, girls have fallen behind in key areas. One factor is teacher interaction: Boys demand more teacher attention, and they get it. Studies consistently show teachers call on boys more often and give them better feedback on their work.

"The Report" found that science teachers choose boys to assist with demonstrations before the class 80 percent of the time, and that girls are far less likely than boys to have actually handled microscopes or electricity meters. Girls who learn to watch, rather than do soon lose confidence and interest, and the gender gap in science achievement continues to grow."

Curriculum was also found wanting. Despite controversy over new, multicultural curricula most schools still use dated textbooks that stereotype or ignore women. American schoolgirls may know that Betsy Ross sewed the flag but few can name a prominent American woman scientist.

This lack of role models can narrowly define at an early age what a girl dreams she can be when she grows up. Many standardized tests are still considered biased against girls. Recent figures found girls still scoring an average of 50 points below boys on the SATs which often determine college admission and scholarships. Under such a system girls lose out to boys with equal or lesser grades.

The good news is that millions of American teachers, principals and parents are more aware of the need to create a gender-fair school environment where all our children can succeed. Many educators and parents are seeking to turn their newfound awareness into specific strategies to combat gender bias in schools.

For example, 44 exceptional teachers have been selected by the AAUW Educational Foundation to create replicable teaching materials and methods to better reach and teach girls, especially in the often troublesome subjects of math and science. But any teacher or parent can start the journey toward a gender-fair classroom:

Step One: Get educated. Learn about the impact and incidence of gender bias, the subtle ways teachers, textbooks and testing can deplete a girl's self-esteem and undermine her achievement. Videotape or observe classrooms to learn to identify gender-biased behavior or stereotyping.

Count how often teachers call on boys and girls. Listen for gender differences in the feedback students get on their work.

Step Two: Find allies. Parent-teacher partnerships are girls' best allies in the battle against gender bias. Parents and teachers should meet to discuss the challenge of gender bias, and parents should volunteer to help the teacher improve the classroom climate. Contact AAUW, the PTA, school boards, and local or state education officials for support.

Step Three: Review the curriculum. Assess the content of textbooks and other materials to be used in the class. Look for equitable representation of women and men in stories and visuals, as well as for demeaning stereotypes. Enhance all students' exposure through trips to the library for supplemental reading that shows women in leadership or non-traditional roles. Form a task force to select updated textbooks that provide a more multicultural, gender-fair perspective.

Step Four: Request enrollment figures. Look for gender disparities in the school's higher-level math and science courses like calculus, physics or chemistry, as well as traditional electives like shop or home economics. Look at participation in sports and extracurricular programs, and at gender breakdowns in scholarship awards.

Share your findings with school officials and discuss a strategy to close the gender gaps.

Step Five: Find mentors. Recruit women in interesting jobs to speak to the class, sponsor field trips, and mentor individual girls.

Look for role models in nontraditional fields to help counter sexist stereotypes that limit girls' career aspirations and shape boys' attitudes. Make the link between excelling in school subject like math, and the career option that girls desire.

Step Six: Build self-esteem. Parents can utilize their tremendous influence to fortify their daughters' self-confidence. Take every opportunity to encourage her to take risks, prove her abilities and earn recognition for her talents, not her appearance.

Encourage math puzzles instead of TV, and dinner-table discussions, management of her own bank account and participation in after-school sports and all-girl activities.

Finally, discuss sexual harassment with both boys and girls, and be clear on each individual's rights and responsibilities. With this foundation, parents and teachers can take the lead in improving education for both boys and girls. Each effort makes a tiny crack in the glass ceiling, and every crack is one step closer to shattering it forever. Common sense and commitment can make America's classrooms more equitable, and free our girls to soar.

against the total range of the ability distribution."

It is here that, day after day, most of the children in the lower fourth of the distribution have their sense of worth destroyed, develop feelings of insecurity, become frustrated and lose confidence in their ability to learn even that which they are capable of learning.*

In settlement houses and other adult-sponsored and managed recreational agencies similar conflicts may often be seen between the middle-class values of the adults in charge and the working-class values of the children for whose benefit the institutions ostensibly exist. Such organizations smile upon neat, orderly, polite, personable, mannerly children who "want to make something of themselves." The sponsors, directors and group work leaders find it a pleasure to work with such children, whose values are so like their own, and make them feel welcome and respected. They do indeed feel a special responsibility toward the boy whose family and neighborhood culture have not equipped him with those values, the "rough" boy, the "dirty" boy, the "bum" who just "hangs around" with the gang on the corner, in the pool hall or in the candy store. But the responsibility they feel toward him is to encourage him to engage in more "worthwhile" activities, to join and to be a "responsible" member of some "wholesome" adult-supervised club or other group, to expurgate his language and, in general, to participate in the "constructive" program of the institution. Indeed, like the school, it functions to select potentially upwardly mobile working-class children and to help and encourage them in the upward

climb. It is a common experience of such organizations that they "are very successful and do a lot of good but don't seem to get the children who need them most." The reason is that here, as in the school, it is almost impossible to reward one kind of behavior without at the same time, by implication or quite openly, punishing its absence or its opposite. The corner boy, as Whyte has shown vividly and in detail, quickly senses that he is under the critical or at best condescending surveillance of people who are "foreigners" to his community and who appraise him in terms of values which he does not share. He is aware that he is being invidiously compared to others; he is uncomfortable; he finds it hard to accommodate himself to the rules of the organization. To win the favor of the people in charge he must change his habits, his values, his ambitions, his speech and his associates. Even were these things possible, the game might not be worth the candle. So, having sampled what they have to offer, he returns to the street or to his "clubhouse" in a cellar where "facilities" are meager but human relations are more satisfying.

Not only in terms of standards of middle-class adults but in terms of their children's standards as well, the working-class boy of working-class culture is likely to be a "failure." Despite the existence among middle-class children of a "youth culture" which may differ in significant ways from the culture of their parents, the standards these children apply are likely to relegate to an inferior status their working-class peers. Coyle quotes from a fieldworker's report:

Gradually the group became more critical of prospective members. A process somewhat evident from the beginning became more obvious. In general only boys who measured up to the group's unwritten, unspoken and largely unconscious standards were ever considered. These standards, characteristics of their middle-class homes, required the suppression of impulsive disorderly behavior and put a high value on controlled cooperative attitudes. Hence even these normally healthy and boisterous boys were capable of rejecting schoolmates they considered too wild and boisterous. Coincident with this was an emphasis on intellectual capacity and achievement. They preferred "smart" as contrasted with "dumb" prospects. The boys seemed to use their club unconsciously to express and reinforce the standards learned in their homes and the community.*

Havighurst and Taba point out that not only teachers but schoolmates, in evaluating the character of other children, tend to give the highest ratings to the children of the higher social levels, although the correlation between social class and character reputation is far from perfect.† Positive correlations between various indices of social class status of the home and social status in the school as measured by pupils' choices have been found by Bonney and others.‡ Hollingshead has shown how social class and the behavior and personality associated with social class membership operate to determine prestige and clique and date patterns among high school boys and girls. "This process operates in all classes, but it is es-

*Maurice E. Troyer, "Squaring Evaluation Processes with Democratic Values," *American Council of Education Studies*, Series I, No. 34 (January, 1949), 42.

*Grace L. Coyle, *Group Work with American Youth, A Guide to the Practice of Leadership* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p. 49.

†Robert J. Havighurst and Hilda Taba, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-55.

‡Merl E. Bonney, "A Study of Social Status on the Second Grade Level," *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, LX (June, 1942), 271-305. See also Henry P. Smith, "A Study in the Selective Character of American Secondary Education: Participation in School Activities as Conditioned by Socio-Economic Status and Other Factors," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, XXXVI (April, 1945), 229-246 and August B. Hollingshead, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-203.

pecially noticeable in contacts with class V [lower-lower]. This class is so repugnant socially that adolescents in the higher classes avoid clique and dating ties with its members."* Furthermore, working-class children are less likely to participate, and if they participate are less likely to achieve prominence, in extra-curricular activities, which are an important arena for the competition for status in the eyes of the students themselves. In the area of organized athletics the working-class boy is perhaps least unfitted for successful competition. Even here, however, he is likely to be at a disadvantage. Adherence to a training regimen and a schedule does not come to him as easily as to the middle-class boy and, unless he chooses to loosen his ties to his working-class friends, he is likely to find some conflict between the claims of the gang and those of his athletic career. Finally, although we must not minimize the importance of athletic achievement as a status-ladder, it is, after all, granted to relatively few, of whatever social class background, to achieve conspicuously in this area.

In summary, it may confidently be said that the working-class boy, particularly if his training and values by those we have here defined as working-class, is more likely than his middle-class peers to find himself at the bottom of the status hierarchy whenever he moves in a middle-class world, whether it be of adults or of children. To the degree to which he values middle-class status, either because he values the good opinion of middle-class persons or because he has to some degree internalized middle-class standards himself, he faces a problem of adjustment and is in the market for a "solution."

A Delinquent Solution

What the Delinquent Subculture has to Offer

The delinquent subculture, we suggest, is a way of dealing with the problems of adjustment we have described. These problems are chiefly status problems: certain children are denied status in the respectable society because they cannot meet the criteria of the respectable status system. The delinquent subculture deals with these problems by providing criteria of status which these children *can* meet.

This statement is highly elliptical and is based upon a number of assumptions whose truth is by no means self-evident. It is not, for example, self-evident that people whose status positions are low must necessarily feel deprived, injured or ego-involved in that low status. Whether they will or not depends upon several considerations.

We remarked earlier that our ego-involvement in a given comparison with others depends upon our "status universe." "Whom do we measure ourselves against?" is the crucial question. In some other societies virtue may consist in willing acceptance of the role of peasant, low-born commoner or member of an inferior caste and in conformity to the expectations of that role. If others are richer, more nobly-born or more able than oneself, it is by the will of an inscrutable Providence and not to be imputed to one's own moral defect. The sting of status inferiority is thereby removed or mitigated; one measures himself only against those of like social position. We have suggested, however, that an important feature of American "democracy," perhaps of the Western European tradition in general, is the tendency to measure oneself against "all comers." This means that, for children as for adults, one's sense of personal worth is at stake in status

comparisons with all other persons, at least of one's own age and sex, whatever their family background or material circumstances. It means that, in the lower levels of our status hierarchies, whether adult or juvenile, there is a chronic fund of motivation, conscious or repressed, to elevate one's status position, either by striving to climb within the established status system or by redefining the criteria of status so that one's present attributes become status-giving assets. It has been suggested, for example, that such typically working-class forms of Protestantism as the Holiness sects owe their appeal to the fact that they reverse the respectable status system; it is the humble, the simple and the dispossessed who sit at the right hand of God, whereas worldly goods, power and knowledge are as nothing in His eyes. In like manner, we offer the view that the delinquent subculture is one solution to a kindred problem on the juvenile level.

Another consideration affecting the degree of privation experienced in a given status position is the "status source." A person's status, after all, is how he stands in somebody's eyes. Status, then, is not a fixed property of the person but varies with the point of view of whoever is doing the judging. I may be revered by some and despised by others. A crucial question then becomes: "Whose respect or admiration do I value?" That *you* think well or ill of me may or may not *matter* to me.

It may be argued that the working-class boy does not *care* what middle-class people think of him, that he is ego-involved only in the opinions of his family, his friends, his working-class neighbors. A definitive answer to this argument can come only from research designed to get at the facts. This research, in our opinion, is yet to be done. There is, however, reason to believe that most children are sensitive to *some degree* about the attitudes of *any persons* with

*August B. Hollingshead, op. cit., p. 241.

whom they are thrown into more than the most superficial kind of contact. The contempt or indifference of others, particularly of those like schoolmates and teachers, with whom we are constrained to associate for long hours every day, is difficult, we suggest, to shrug off. It poses a problem with which one may conceivably attempt to cope in a variety of ways. One may make an active effort to change himself in conformity with the expectations of others; one may attempt to justify or explain away his inferiority in terms which will exculpate him; one may tell oneself that he really doesn't care what these people think; one may react with anger and aggression. But the least probable response is simple, uncomplicated, honest indifference. If we grant the probable truth of the claim that most American working-class children are most sensitive to status sources on their own level, it does not follow that they take lightly rejection, disparagement and censure from other status sources.

Even on their "own" social level, the situation is far from simple. The "working class," we have repeatedly emphasized, is not culturally homogeneous. Not only is there much diversity in the cultural standards applied by one's own working-class neighbors and kin so that it is difficult to find a "working-class" milieu in which "middle-class" standards are not important. In addition, the "working-class" culture we have described is, after all, an ideal type; most working-class *people* are culturally ambivalent. Due to lack of capacity, of the requisite "character structure" or of "luck," that may be working-class in terms of job and income; they may have accepted this status with resignation and rationalized it to their satisfaction; and by example, by class-linked techniques of child training and by failure to support the middle-class agencies of socialization they may have produced children deficient in the attributes that make for status in middle-class terms. Nevertheless, all their lives, through all the

major media of mass indoctrination—the schools, the movies, the radio, the newspapers and the magazines—the middle-class powers-that-be that manipulate these media have been trying to "sell" them on middle-class values and the middle-class standard of living. Then there is the "propaganda of the deed," the fact that they have seen with their own eyes working-class contemporaries "get ahead" and "make the grade" in a middle-class world. In consequence of all this, we suspect that few working-class parents unequivocally repudiate as intrinsically worthless middle-class objectives. There is good reason to believe that the modesty of working-class aspirations is partly a matter of trimming one's sails to the available opportunities and resources and partly a matter of unwillingness to accept the discipline which upward striving entails.

However complete and successful one's accommodation to an humble status, the vitality of middle-class goals, of the "American dream," is nonetheless likely to manifest itself in his aspirations for his children. His expectations may not be grandiose, but he will want his children to be "better off" than he. Whatever his own work history and social reputation may be, he will want his children to be "steady" and "respectable." He may exert few positive pressures to "succeed" and the experiences he provides his children may even incapacitate them for success; he may be puzzled at the way they "turn out." But whatever the measure of his own responsibility in accounting for the product, he is not likely to judge that product by unadulterated "corner-boy" standards. Even "corner-boy" parents, although they may value in their children such corner-boy virtues as generosity to friends, personal loyalty and physical process, are likely also to be gratified by recognition by middle-class representatives and by the kinds of achievement for which the college-boy way of life is a prerequisite. Even in the work-

ing-class milieu from which he acquired his incapacity for middle class achievement, the working-class corner-boy may find himself at a status disadvantage as against his more upwardly mobile peers.

Lastly, of course, is that most ubiquitous and inescapable of status sources, oneself. Technically, we do not call the person's attitudes towards himself "status" but rather "self-esteem," or, when the quality of the self-attitude is specifically moral, "conscience" or "super-ego." The important question for us is this: To what extent, if at all, do boys who are typically "working-class" and "corner-boy" in their overt behavior evaluate themselves by "middle-class," "college-boy" standards? For our overt behavior, however closely it conforms to one set of norms, need not argue against the existence or effectiveness of alternative and conflicting norms. The failure of our own behavior to conform to our own expectations is an elementary and commonplace fact which gives rise to the tremendously important consequences of guilt, self-recrimination, anxiety and self-hatred. The reasons for the failure of self-expectations and overt conduct to agree are complex. One reason is that we often internalize more than one set of norms, each of which would dictate a different course of action in a given life-situation; since we can only *do* one thing at a time, however, we are forced to choose between them or somehow to compromise. In either case, we fall short of the full realization of our own expectations and must somehow cope with the residual discrepancy between those expectations and our overt behavior.

We have suggested that corner-boy children (like their working-class parents) internalize middle-class standards to a sufficient degree to create a fundamental ambivalence towards their own corner-boy behavior. Again, we are on somewhat speculative ground where fundamental research remains to be done. The coexistence within the same personality of a corner-boy and a col-

lege-boy morality may appear more plausible, however, if we recognize that they are not simple antitheses of one another and that parents and others may in all sincerity attempt to indoctrinate both. For example, the goals upon which the college-boy places such great value, such as intellectual and occupational achievement, and the college-boy virtues of ambitiousness and pride in self-sufficiency are not as such disparaged by the corner-boy culture. The meritoriousness of standing by one's friends and the desire to have a good time here and now do not by definition preclude the desire to help oneself and to provide for the future. It is no doubt the rule, rather than the exception, that most children, college-boy and corner-boy alike, would like to enjoy the best of both worlds. In *practice*, however, the substance that is consumed in the pursuit of one set of values is not available for the pursuit of the other. The sharpness of the dilemma and the degree of the residual discontent depend upon a number of things, notably, the intensity with which both sets of norms have been internalized, the extent to which the life-situations which one encounters compel a choice between them, and the abundance and appropriateness of the skills and resources at one's disposal. The child of superior intelligence, for example, may find it easier than his less gifted peers to meet the demands of the college-boy standards without failing his obligations to his corner-boy associates.

It is a plausible assumption, then, that the working-class boy whose status is low in middle-class terms *cares* about that status, that this status confronts him with a genuine problem of adjustment. To this problem of adjustment there are a variety of conceivable responses, of which participation in the creation and the maintenance of the delinquent subculture is one. Each mode of response entails costs and yields gratifications of its own. The circumstances which tip the balance in favor of the one or the

other are obscure. One mode of response is to desert the corner-boy for the college-boy way of life. To the reader of Whyte's *Street Corner Society* the costs are manifest. It is hard, at best, to be a college-boy and to run with the corner-boys. It entails great effort and sacrifice to the degree that one has been indoctrinated in what we have described as the working-class socialization process; its rewards are frequently long-deferred; and for many working-class boys it makes demands which they are, in consequence of their inferior linguistic, academic and "social" skills, not likely ever to meet. Nevertheless, a certain proportion of working-class boys accept the challenge of the middle-class status system and play the status game by the middle-class rules.

Another response, perhaps the most common, is what we may call the "stable corner-boy response." It represents an acceptance of the corner-boy way of life and an effort to make the best of a situation. If our reasoning is correct, it does not resolve the dilemmas we have described as inherent in the corner-boy position in a largely middle-class world, although these dilemmas may be mitigated by an effort to disengage oneself from dependence upon middle-class status-sources and by withdrawing, as far as possible, into a sheltering community of like-minded working-class children. Unlike the delinquent response, it avoids the radical rupture of good relations with even working-class adults and does not represent as irretrievable a renunciation of upward mobility. It does not incur the active hostility of middle-class persons and therefore leaves the way open to the pursuit of some values, such as jobs, which these people control. It represents a preference for the familiar, with its known satisfactions and its known imperfections, over the risks and the uncertainties as well as the moral costs of the college-boy response, on the one hand, and the delinquent response on the other.

What does the delinquent response have to offer? Let us be clear, first, about what this response is and how it differs from the stable corner-boy response. The hallmark of the delinquent subculture is the explicit and wholesale repudiation of middle-class standards and the adoption of their very antithesis. *The corner-boy culture is not specifically delinquent.* Where it leads to behavior which may be defined as delinquent, e.g., truancy, it does so not because non-conformity to middle-class norms *defines* conformity to corner-boy norms but because conformity to middle-class norms *interferes with* conformity to corner-boy norms. The corner-boy plays truant because he does not like school, because he wishes to escape from a dull and unrewarding and perhaps humiliating situation. But truancy is not defined as intrinsically valuable and status-giving. The member of the delinquent subculture plays truant because "good" middle-class (and working-class) children do not play truant. Corner-boy resistance to being herded and marshalled by middle-class figures is not the same as the delinquent's flouting and jeering of those middle-class figures and active ridicule of those who submit. The corner-boy's ethic of reciprocity, his quasi-communal attitude toward the property of in-group members, is shared by the delinquent. But this ethic of reciprocity does not sanction the deliberate and "malicious" violation of the property rights of persons outside the in-group. We have observed that the differences between the corner-boy and the college-boy or middle-class culture are profound but that in many ways they are profound differences in emphasis. We have remarked that the corner-boy culture does not so much repudiate the value of many middle-class achievements as it emphasizes certain other values which make such achievements improbable. In short, the corner-boy culture temporizes with middle-class morality; the full-fledged delinquent subculture does not.

It is precisely here, we suggest, in the refusal to temporize, that the appeal of the delinquent subculture lies. Let us recall that it is characteristically American, not specifically working-class or middle-class, to measure oneself against the widest possible status universe, to seek status against "all comers," to be "as good as" or "better than" anybody-anybody, that is, within one's own age and sex category. As long as the working-class corner-boy clings to a version, however attenuated and adulterated, of the middle-class culture, he must recognize his inferiority to working-class and middle-class college-boys. The delinquent subculture, on the other hand, permits no ambiguity of the status of the delinquent relative to that of anybody else. In terms of the norms of the delinquent subculture, defined by its negative polarity to the respectable status system, the delinquent's very non-conformity to middle-class standards sets him above the most exemplary college-boy.

Another important function of the delinquent subculture is the legitimation of aggression. We surmise that a certain amount of hostility is generated among working-class children against middle-class persons, with their airs of superiority, disdain or condescension and against middle-class norms, which are, in a sense, the cause of their status-frustration. To infer inclinations to aggression from the existence of frustration is hazardous; we know that aggression is not an inevitable and not the only consequence of frustration. So here too we must feel our way with caution. Ideally, we should like to see systematic research, probably employing "depth interview" and "productive" techniques, to get at the relationship between status position and aggressive dispositions toward the rules which determine status and toward persons variously distributed in the status hierarchy. Nevertheless, despite our imperfect knowledge of these things, we would be blind if we failed to recognize that bitterness, hostility and jealousy and all sorts of

retributive fantasies are among the most common and typically human responses to public humiliation. However, for the child who temporizes with middle-class morality, overt aggression and even the conscious recognition of his own hostile impulses are inhibited, for he acknowledges the legitimacy of the rules in terms of which he is stigmatized. For the child who breaks clean with middle-class morality, on the other hand, there are no moral inhibitions on the free expression of aggression against the sources of his frustration. Moreover, the connection we suggest between status-frustration and the aggressiveness of the delinquent subculture seems to us more plausible than many frustration-aggression hypotheses because it involves no assumptions about obscure and dubious "displacement" of aggression against "substitute" targets. The target in this case is the manifest cause of the status problem.

It seems to us that the mechanism of "reaction-formation" should also play a part here. We have made much of the corner-boy's basic ambivalence, his uneasy acknowledgement, while he lives by the standards of his corner-boy culture, of the legitimacy of college-boy standards. May we assume that when the delinquent seeks to obtain unequivocal status by repudiating, once and for all, the norms of the college-boy culture, these norms really under-go total extinction? Or do they, perhaps, linger on, under-ground, as it were, repressed, unacknowledged but an ever-present threat to the adjustment which has been achieved at no small cost? There is much evidence from clinical psychology that moral norms, once effectively internalized, are not lightly thrust aside or extinguished. If a new moral order is evolved which offers a more satisfactory solution to one's life problems, the old order usually continues to press for recognition, but if this recognition is granted, the appercart is upset. The symptom of this obscurely felt, ever-present threat is clinically known as "anxiety," and the literature of psychia-

try is rich with devices for combatting this anxiety, this threat to a hard-won victory. One such device is reaction-formation. Its hallmark is an "exaggerated," "disproportionate," "abnormal" intensity of response, "inappropriate" to the stimulus which seems to elicit it. The unintelligibility of the response, the "over-reaction," becomes intelligible when we see that it has the function of reassuring the actor against an inner threat to his defenses as well as the function of meeting an external situation on its own terms. Thus we have the mother who "compulsively" showers "inordinate" affection upon a child to reassure herself against her latent hostility and we have the male adolescent whose awkward and immoderate masculinity reflects a basic insecurity about his own sex-role. In like manner, we would expect the delinquent boy who, after all, has been socialized in a society dominated by a 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 the respectable middle-class society.

If our reasoning is correct, it should throw some light upon the peculiar quality of "property delinquency" in the delinquent subculture. We have already seen how the rewardingness of a college-boy and middle-class way of life depends, to a great extent, upon general respect for property rights. In an urban society, in particular, the possession and display of property are the most ready and public badges of reputable social class status and are, for that reason, extraordinarily ego-involved. That property actually is a reward for middle-class morality is in part only a plausible fiction, but in general there is certainly a relationship between the practice of that morality and the possession of property. The middle-classes have, then, a strong interest in scrupulous regard for

property rights, not only because property is "intrinsically" valuable but because the full enjoyment of their status requires that that status be readily recognizable and therefore that property adhere to those who earn it. The cavalier misappropriation or destruction of property, therefore, is not only a diversion or diminution of wealth; it is an attack on the middle-class where their egos are most vulnerable. Group stealing, institutionalized in the delinquent subculture, is not just a way of *getting* something. It is a means that is the antithesis of sober and diligent "labour in a calling." It expresses contempt for a way of life by making its opposite a criterion of status. Money and other valuables are not, as such, despised by the delinquent. For the delinquent and the non-delinquent alike, money is a most glamorous and efficient means to a variety of ends and one cannot have too much of it. But, in the delinquent subculture, the stolen dollar has an odor of sanctity that does not attach to the dollar saved or the dollar earned.

This delinquent system of values and way of life does its job of problem-solving most effectively when it is adopted as a group solution. We have stressed in our chapter on the general theory of subcultures that the efficacy of a given change in values as a solution and therefore the motivation to such a change depends heavily upon the availability of "reference groups" within which the "deviant values" are already institutionalized, or whose members would stand to profit from such a system of deviant values if each were assured of the support and concurrence of the others. So it is with delinquency. We do not suggest that joining in the creation or perpetuation of a delinquent subculture is the only road to delinquency. We do believe, however, that for most delinquents delinquency would not be available as a response were it not socially legitimized and given a kind of respectability, albeit by a restricted community of fellow-adventurers. In this respect,

the adoption of delinquency is like the adoption of the practice of appearing at the office in open-collar and shirt sleeves. Is it much more comfortable, is it more sensible than the full regalia? Is it neat? Is it dignified? The arguments in the affirmative will appear much more forceful if the practice is already established in one's milieu or if one senses that others are prepared to go along if someone makes the first tentative gestures. Indeed, to many of those who sweat and chafe in ties and jackets, the possibility of an alternative may not even occur until they discover that it has been adopted by their colleagues.

This way of looking at delinquency suggests an answer to a certain paradox. Countless mothers have protested that their "Johnny" was a good boy until he fell in with a certain bunch. But the mothers of each of Johnny's companions hold the same view with respect to their own off-spring. It is conceivable and even probable that some of these mothers are naive, that one or more of these youngsters are "rotten apples" who infected the others. We suggest, however, that all of the mothers may be right, that there is a certain chemistry in the group situation itself which engenders that which was not there before, that group interaction is a sort of catalyst which releases potentialities not otherwise visible. This is especially true when we are dealing with a problem of status-frustration. Status, by definition, is a grant of respect from others. A new system of norms, which measures status by criteria which one can meet, is of no value unless others are prepared to apply those criteria, and others are not likely to do so unless one is prepared to reciprocate.

We have referred to a lingering ambivalence in the delinquent's own value system, an ambivalence which threatens the adjustment he has achieved and which is met through the mechanism of reaction-formation. The delinquent may have to contend with another ambivalence, in the area of his status

sources. The delinquent subculture offers him status *as against* other children of whatever social level, but it offers him this status *in the eyes* of his fellow delinquents only. To the extent that there remains a desire for recognition from groups whose respect has been forfeited by commitment to a new subculture, his satisfaction in his solution is imperfect and adulterated. He can perfect his solution only by rejecting as status sources those who reject him. This too may require a certain measure of reaction-formation, going beyond indifference to active hostility and contempt for all those who do not share his subculture. He becomes all the more dependent upon his delinquent gang. Outside that gang his status position is now weaker than ever. The gang itself tends toward a kind of sectarian solidarity, because the benefits of membership can only be realized in active face-to-face relationships with group members.

This interpretation of the delinquent subculture has important implications for the "sociology of social problems." People are prone to assume that those things which we define as evil and those which we define as good have their origins in separate and distinct features of our society. Evil flows from poisoned wells; good flows from pure and crystal fountains. The same source cannot feed both. Our view is different. It holds that those values which are at the core of "the American way of life," which help to motivate the behavior which we most esteem as "typically American," are among the major determinants of that which we stigmatize as "pathological." More specifically, it holds that the problems of adjustment to which the delinquent subculture is a response are determined, in part, by those very values which respectable society holds most sacred. The same value system, impinging upon children differently equipped to meet it, is instrumental in generating both delinquency and respectability.