

COMMENTS ON PERSONALITY AND DELINQUENCY

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The paper by Forrest (1977), on which this brief note is a comment, is of such high quality that I would not wish any of my remarks to be taken as criticisms of the design, execution or analysis of the study. My comments reflect rather a puzzlement over certain facts which have become apparent in the course of the many studies carried out in the attempt to find personality correlates of delinquency. The most apparent of these is the notable difference in outcome between studies otherwise largely comparable. Thus Forrest fails to find evidence of implication for E and N in most of his comparisons; yet, in a very similar sample, Foggitt (1974) found loadings of 0.44 for E and 0.42 for N on a general delinquency factor embracing all the major criminal activities of the sample! Of the two, E was particularly related to "destructiveness and violence", "frequency of violence", and group delinquency, while N was particularly closely related to attempted suicide and vagrancy.

It is of course true that results always seem somewhat clearer with children or with adults; adolescents seem to give less clear-cut results, perhaps because of the differential effects of sexual maturation. Thus concordance studies in identical and fraternal twins show much greater differentiation with adult criminals than with adolescent ones (Eysenck, 1977.) However, Foggitt's study was also done on adolescents, and this does not therefore provide a reason for the observed difference in outcome. Foggitt established particularly good relations with his subjects, including during interviews; possibly this made them more truthful in their replies. This possibility should not be disregarded, and Foggitt emphasizes the importance of personal contact. Questionnaires routinely administered, particularly in the context of punitive state intervention, cannot always be considered as valid as questionnaires administered in experimental situations to freely cooperating individuals. Forrest does not tell us anything about the conditions of administrations, and this may be a powerful source of error.

Feldman (1977) reviews the literature on the relationship between personality and crime and comes to the conclusion, well supported by the evidence, that my theoretical predictions are much better supported by self-report studies of criminality than by studies using institutionalized samples, or samples otherwise under police control. These self-report studies have usually given pretty equal weight to P, E and N; they offer the strongest evidence for personality determinants in antisocial behavior, even in adolescents. It would have been valuable had Forrest added some self-report forms on criminality to his investigation. This might have been particularly valuable in his non-delinquent group - which presumably contained many successful and undetected delinquents! Such group contamination must inevitably make comparisons difficult.

It is a little hard to follow Forrest's arguments about psychoticism; much of what he says in criticism should be checked against the large body of factual material published since his article was written in Eysenck and Eysenck's (1976) book. Forrest suggests that P is merely a symptomatological variant of E, on the

basis of a correlation between the two factors in his sample of -0.19! This does not seem likely, particularly as in other samples the two factors have emerged as independent. Occasional departures from strict orthogonality, in either direction, are of course always found, particularly in non-representative samples, like Forrest's delinquent sample. None of these remarks cast doubt on the value of the Forrest study; they may serve as reminders that much remains to be learned in this particularly complex and difficult field.

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