

SELF-PARENTAL ALIENATION AND LOCUS
OF CONTROL IN DELINQUENT GIRLS*

Emory University

MARSHALL P. DUKE AND EULALIE FENHAGEN

SUMMARY

Social maladjustment has been related to an external locus of control orientation. It was hypothesized, therefore, that delinquent females would be more external than a control sample. Further, since alienation from others is also associated with maladjustment, it was expected that the delinquents would also prefer greater distance from others. These hypotheses were confirmed with discussion being in terms of implication for rehabilitation of delinquents.

A. INTRODUCTION

Previous studies of delinquent females (e.g. 1, 2, 13, 14, 16) have shown that this population differs from nondelinquent adolescents along several dimensions. For example, the delinquent female is viewed as a deprived, lonely individual with an untrusting, hostile attitude toward adults. Konopka asserts that the delinquent female's "loneliness is based on a feeling of being unprotected, being incapable of making and finding any friends, and being surrounded by an anonymous and *powerful adult world*" (16, p. 61; italics added). This description is consonant with Rotter's original description of an external locus of control orientation:

When a reinforcement is perceived by the subject as following some action of his own but not being entirely contingent upon his action, then in our culture, it is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When the event is interpreted in this way by an individual, we have labelled this a belief in external control (22, p. 1).

If this seeming similarity is more than merely superficial, it may be that delinquent girls who have apparently been raised in what may be called an

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"external-ogenic" atmosphere will have developed a generalized expectancy of external locus of control. Supporting this, previous research has shown that maladjustment of various kinds is related to an external locus of control (3, 6, 12, 20).

Another way the delinquent's greater loneliness and mistrust of others may be reflected is in avoidance of other human beings. Duke (4) and Duke and Nowicki (7) have shown increased interpersonal distance preferences to be associated with an external locus of control; that is, the more external an individual, the greater distance he prefers from others. Given the confirmation of the locus of control expectation described above, therefore, it is expected that delinquents would prefer greater distances from others when compared to a nondelinquent control group. This demand for greater distance has been empirically demonstrated in male deviants by Newman and Pollack (18), but has yet to be confirmed in the case of delinquent females. A final prediction for distancing involves alienation from parents. Researchers have shown (10, 11, 15) that delinquent girls have poorer relationships with parents when compared with nondelinquent girls. On the basis of these results, it is expected that delinquent females will distance parent figures more than a group of nondelinquent females.

B. METHOD

1. *Subjects*

Delinquent subjects were 18 adolescent females (10 black, and eight white with mean age of 14.23 years) placed in a detention unit of a county juvenile court in a major Southern metropolitan area. The majority of the girls were there for running away from home. Twenty nondelinquent females (10 black and 10 white with mean age of 14.53 years) attending a nearby high school served as controls. Subjects ranged from 12 to 16 years of age and were predominantly members of the upper-lower and lower-middle social class. Social class was determined by occupation and educational level of parents.

2. *Measures*

Locus of control orientation was measured (21) by the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale for Children (CNSIE). The CNSIE consists of 40 questions which are answered either yes or no by placing a mark by each question. The construction of items for the CNSIE was based on Rotter's definition of the external-internal control of reinforcement. The scale has been shown to be reliable and valid in well over 2500

subjects tested. It is also, according to a recent reviewer, the best scale currently available for the measurement of locus of control in children (17).

Interpersonal distance was assessed with the Comfortable Interpersonal Distance Scale (CID), a paper and pencil measure developed by Duke and Nowicki [(7); see Evans and Howard (9)]. The figural layout is in the form of a plane with eight radii, each 80 mm in length, emanating from a common point. Each radius is associated with a randomly numbered "entrance" to what is presented as an imaginary "round room." Subjects are asked to indicate where they would prefer various stimuli to stop "walking" towards them by making a mark on the given radius. Preferred distance is determined by measuring, in millimeters, the distance from the subject's mark to the center of the "room." Correlations between real life distancing and CID responses range from .60 to .88 (5).

3. Procedure

Subjects were told that the experimenter (a 22-year-old white female) was gathering research for a project at her college and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Subjects' participation was completely voluntary. The CNSIE was presented to the subjects with no time limits. (Since the CNSIE questions are held at fifth grade reading level, no difficulty was encountered.) Next, the subjects were administered the CID. *E* asked *S* to imagine herself at the center point of the diagram and to "turn and face" each "door" as the stimulus named by *E* entered. The subject was instructed to place an X on the line between the "door" and herself to indicate where she would prefer the specific stimulus to halt (i.e., where she thought she might begin to feel uncomfortable with the stimulus' closeness). Stimuli were presented in a predetermined random order: boyfriend, mother, policeman, father, girlfriend.

C. RESULTS

The delinquent girls ($\bar{X} = 15.16$, $SD = 3.98$) scored more externally than nondelinquent controls ($\bar{X} = 13.06$, $SD = 3.49$) on the CNSIE ($t = 1.82$, $p < .05$ on a one-tailed test).

Delinquent girls also preferred greater distances from interpersonal stimuli (see Table 1). Mean total distance for all stimuli for delinquents ($\bar{X} = 36.50$, $SD = 21.64$) was significantly greater than for normals ($\bar{X} = 15.46$; $SD = 7.88$). Of particular interest was the self-parental alienation, in both instances of which delinquents preferred significantly greater distances than did nondelinquents (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
MEAN INTERPERSONAL DISTANCE (IN MM) FOR APPROACH STIMULI
IN DELINQUENT AND NONDELINQUENT GIRLS

Subject	Stimulus				
	Mother	Father	Boyfriend	Girlfriend	Policeman
Delinquent (<i>n</i> = 18)	33.80	38.67	36.24	14.60	57.06
Nondelinquent (<i>n</i> = 20)	11.64	11.78	13.62	15.14	24.05

D. DISCUSSION

As predicted on the basis of social learning theory, delinquent girls were more external and showed greater distancing of parent figures than nondelinquents. Once again, then, it has been found that belief in external locus of control is related to degree of social maladjustment. This suggests that procedures instituted to reduce the degree of maladjustment in delinquents should, if successful, make them more internal. In this vein, the alteration of locus of control has been demonstrated in a study performed by Nowicki and Barnes (19), in which inner city delinquents became more internal as a result of a structured therapeutic camp experience. Edwards (8) has reported on increases in academic achievement as a result of similar alteration of locus of control. Further, the alteration of locus of control orientation might also result in reduced distancing of others: i.e., reduce interpersonal alienation. Duke and Nowicki (7) have shown that internals tend to distance others less than externals, and it would thus be expected that programs aimed at instilling an internal locus of control orientation in delinquents might result in improved interpersonal relations, as well as overall adjustment.

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Department of Psychology
Emory University
Atlanta, Georgia 30322