

# *IATROGENESIS IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM*

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**The juvenile justice system** seems to be ineffective. It is assumed that a primary purpose of the system is to prevent the further occurrence of delinquent behavior in apprehended youth. Several studies, however (Gold, 1970; Gold and Williams, 1969; West and Farrington, 1977), have demonstrated that it does not; on the contrary, youths' penetration into the juvenile justice system seems to be associated with increasing delinquency. These findings might be interpreted as lending support to some version of labeling theory (Erikson and Erikson, 1957; Hirschi, 1980; Lemert, 1971; Schur, 1973; Tannenbaum, 1938), confirming that public and/or personal identification of youths as delinquent encourages them to behave that way. These findings may also be marshaled in favor of diversion programs that would minimize youths' involvement with the juvenile justice system. (See Klein, 1981, for a recent review and discussion of relevant literature.)

So far no study has been published that closely examines the process by which the juvenile justice system seems to have an

iatrogenic effect, worsening the problem it intends to cure. A multitude of studies have focused on treatment effects, but few have examined the typical experience of a first-time youthful offender: arrest, adjudication, and probation. No research has addressed such questions as these: "Where in the course of increasing penetration into the system does the negative effect occur?" "What processes—social, psychological, labeling or some other—are set in motion by the juvenile justice system that have this negative effect?" This article reports such a study.

### **LEGAL PROCESSING OF JUVENILES: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND A PRIORI THEORIES**

Belief that the behavior of youth remains unchanged or even deteriorates when youth are processed through the juvenile justice system is neither a new nor a radical thought (Task Force on Juvenile Delinquency, 1967). Theoretical explanations of the iatrogenic effect have developed in a relative vacuum; only a few empirical studies have followed a random selection of youth through unadorned juvenile justice processing.

Gold and Williams (1969) selected 35 pairs of youths from a representative sample of 847 American teenagers. The pairs were opposites, in that one of the pair had committed an offense and been apprehended whereas the other had not been caught for a similar offense committed at about the same time; subjects were also matched on age, gender, race, and number of prior offenses. The number of offenses occurring after the criterion offense was compared for each pair. The results indicated that the apprehended group had committed significantly more delinquent acts following detection ( $p = .10$ ). This finding replicated an earlier, similar analysis by Gold (1970) using a smaller sample, representative of adolescents residing in a Midwest city. West and Farrington (1977) used longitudinal data from a study of 411 male working-class British

youth to examine the effects of being found guilty in court. They also utilized a matching procedure in an ex post facto manner. West and Farrington found that convicted youth had higher self-reported delinquency scores than similar youth whose delinquency went undetected.

It is important to note that in these studies subjects were selected through matching procedures and then differences in behavior measured in interviews taken months or years after the criterion event were compared.

Hirschi (1980) questioned the interpretations of the data in the Gold (1970) and Gold and Williams (1969) studies on the grounds that they might be explained as regression effects, although Gold explicitly assured his readers that supplemental analyses indicated otherwise. Apparently, however, the assurance was not documented well enough for Hirschi. Hirschi also neglected to take the similar results of West and Farrington (1977) into account; several different kinds of analyses of their data also indicate that regression effect was an unlikely explanation (pp. 128-131). In any case, the different design of this research should help to resolve this issue.

Furthermore, the previous studies did not examine the differential influence of various stages and processes within the system, such as arrest, referral to court, and being placed on probation. Thus theorizing concerning causal processes resulting in greater delinquent behavior following contact with the juvenile justice system has no empirical basis; we simply do not know where or how the apprehension and adjudication process exerts a criminogenic influence.

Most theories concerning deleterious effects of the juvenile justice system assign much importance to the fact that other individuals are made aware of the youths' delinquency. The formal process of arrest and adjudication is usually decried, although a critical eye has been cast even on informal proceedings such as diversion programs (Klein, 1976). Theorists differ in the reasons why being labeled a delinquent is harmful, according to their basic notions of what causes

delinquent behavior in the first place. Tannenbaum (1938), for instance, generally discounts psychopathological factors in the genesis of delinquency but views incipient delinquent behavior as a form of play and adventure. He proposes that adult overreactions to these incidents provoke an angry acceptance and continuation of the very traits that originally elicited complaints. Schur (1973) offers an updated version of this argument in a treatise that advises against any adult response, if at all possible. Erikson and Erikson (1957) also deplore punitive reactions by the authorities; they stress the danger of foisting a delinquent self-concept on a young person. The important distinction between the Eriksons' thesis and those of others is that it posits the prior existence of pathology that is subsequently exacerbated, as opposed to the playful or rational development of a deviant lifestyle. Of course, many points are held in common by the differing theorists. A lack of operational concepts makes it difficult to evaluate them empirically.

### THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Our orientation to the iatrogenic problem is based on a psychosocial explanation of delinquency that focuses on the individual's response to certain realities. Specifically, it is posited that the purpose for much delinquent behavior is to defend against a derogated self-image. (See Gold and Mann, 1972, and Mann, 1981, for detailed descriptions and empirical support for the hypothesis, and Gold, 1978, for an example of a specific application.) Further, delinquency is also viewed as a consequence of weak social controls, particularly poor parent-child relationships. If these etiological variables are exacerbated once a youth has entered the system, then delinquent behavior will increase.

## **STUDY DESIGN: RATIONALE, DETAILS, AND MODIFICATIONS**

We wished to determine again but in a different setting from other studies if legal processing altered subsequent delinquent behavior. If it did, then we wanted to find out where in the process this occurred. A self-report instrument administered in a timely manner was the central requisite for that determination. Another goal involved the simultaneous collection of psychological data in order to test various explanations for any behavioral changes. A theory that posited that patterns of provocations and controls resulted in delinquent behavior guided the research effort, along with labeling theory.

## **SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS**

The data for this study were drawn from a larger survey of youth in a semirural county that has undergone tremendous changes in the past decade. Formerly its primary business was agriculture, but in the 1960s and 1970s large numbers of people moved in from metropolitan areas, and most still work in those industrialized areas. The population doubled from 1965 to 1978 and, at the time of this study, was estimated at 94,000. There are two towns and four villages in the county, all with populations under 10,000; thus over half the population resides in unincorporated rural settings, quite different from the urban settings of the previous local studies and from the modal population of the national study. Minorities account for less than 2% of the population.

The procedure for selecting subjects was the most critical and problematic element in the research design because the legal process, which constituted the independent variable, could not be manipulated by the researchers. Instead, we utilized naturally occurring variations in the field. We were

interested in comparing the effects of arrest by police with the effects of adjudication by a juvenile court. We also wished to incorporate a control group of youth who had no contact with the juvenile justice system yet were recently involved in delinquent behavior that would have resulted in arrest had they been caught. Subjects also had to be comparable; they had to be equally appropriate for adjudication and be similar in other respects as well.

The juvenile court provided the names of all youth ( $N = 116$ ) who had been arrested and were to be prosecuted for the first time on a nonviolent felony charge. These youth were randomly assigned to be interviewed either after their arrest or after their adjudication as delinquents. (All these youth were ultimately adjudicated.) Of the 116 judicially referred youths, 55 were interviewed. Youth not interviewed fell into two groups: (1) refused by respondent or parent ( $N = 41$ ) and (2) unable to contact youth ( $N = 20$ ).

But we did not have a truly bona fide control group. Originally, we intended also to assign randomly a group of offenders from the same pool to prearrest as well as postarrest and postadjudication interviews. This was to be done with the assistance of the local police departments, which would provide the names of youths against whom they had secure, independent evidence implicating them in offenses that in all likelihood would result in adjudication; almost all of the cases would involve property-related felonies. Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain more than a couple of acceptable police referrals. This occurred primarily because we worked with very few police to ensure that we could rely on their pledges of confidentiality and cooperation. So a quasi-control group was constructed by selecting 27 youth from a larger survey group who had reported committing a felony in the previous 45 days (the average length of time between the offense and interview for the other subjects) but had not been caught. The youth from this group were solicited from the friends of subjects who had

been interviewed and participants in activities listed in school yearbooks.

We were especially concerned that the subjects had penetrated the juvenile justice system no more or less than their group status indicated, since the possibility of "hidden" contact with the police or prosecutor would cast serious doubt on comparability between the groups. We first determined that there were no formal or informal methods of police referral away from the juvenile court. This was assured due to the close working relationships among the court, the prosecutor, and the police, resulting in a uniform policy toward juvenile offenders: "Station-house" adjustments were used only for minor offenses, if at all; most youthful misdemeanants and virtually all felons were reported directly to the juvenile court in a delinquency petition. If appropriate, the juvenile court used informal adjustment procedures. This policy allowed us to check arrest and court records for the previous years to ensure that every respondent in Group I had no arrest record or court contact, every respondent in Group II had been arrested only once and had never appeared in court, and every respondent in Group III had exactly one arrest and one court adjudication. More important, as will be shown later, the three groups did not vary in the frequency or seriousness of their delinquent behavior prior to their penetration into the juvenile justice system.

### **DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS**

The final subject group on which these analyses are based consisted of 83 youth; 28 youth were in the quasi-control group (Group I); 30 were interviewed after their arrest but prior to their first court hearing (Group II); and 25 were interviewed shortly after their dispositional court hearing (Group III).

The respondents ranged in age from 12 to 17 years. The mean age for all the subjects was 15.2; Group I = 15.8; Groups II & III = 14.9. The age difference between Groups I and II/III is significant, although the actual difference is only nine months ( $F_{2,79} = 5.8; p = .005$ ). The age differential is important, in that normative self-report and official data show a peak in delinquent behavior at age 16 (Gold and Petronio, 1980). On this basis alone Group I respondents have a higher predicted rate of delinquent behavior.

The majority of the youth resided with their parents, although those in Groups II and III were more likely to come from homes lacking both natural parents ( $X^2_{(4)} = 11.9; p = .02$ ). Although the respondents were equally likely to have brothers and sisters, the youth in Groups II and III had more brothers. Only five females participated in the study, all of them in Groups II and III.

### THE INTERVIEW

Each youth was mailed a letter requesting his or her participation in the study. The letter explained that the study concerned feelings and opinions about groups and adults that affect adolescents. Specific hypotheses relating to the juvenile justice system were not announced, although the referral sources, including the police and court, were given.

Several days later the youth was contacted by the interviewer, a 19-year-old female college student, to arrange a time and place for the interview. She also spoke with a parent at this time to answer any questions and obtain verbal consent (written consent from both the subject and a parent was required and obtained later). The interviews were conducted in private rooms in schools, community centers, and churches.

The interview schedule was structured and included measures from previous studies of youth at the Institute for Social Research; the complete interview schedule can be found in



Miller (1980). The interview was composed of open and closed questions, card sort tasks, and paper-and-pencil items. It covered a broad range of topics, many of which are not addressed in this particular study. The subjects were assured of complete confidentiality.

## MEASURES

### DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

The indices of delinquent behavior were constructed from the reports by participants. The methods used were similar to those used in the National Surveys of Youth (Williams and Gold, 1972; Gold and Reimer, 1975). Toward the end of the interview the respondents were reminded that people their age sometimes engage in behavior that could get them in trouble if it were known, but that this behavior was also an important part of growing up in their community. A brief description of several terms was given, and they were asked if they were willing to talk about their delinquent behavior. Along with assurances of confidentiality, respondents were also asked not to complete the section if they did not feel that they could respond honestly; one subject in Group II demurred. The respondents were then presented with a packet of 19 pre-punched Hollerith cards on which were printed brief descriptions of delinquent acts (see Table 1 for a list). They were asked to sort each of the cards into one of five piles indicating how many times they had committed the act in the past year. When respondents had completed the card sort, they were questioned on some of the details of each admitted offense—where it happened, when, if they had been caught and by whom, and so on. No more than the three most recent of each of the more serious offenses were subjected to this probing; only one of the less serious offenses was probed.

TABLE 1  
Delinquency Items

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Ran away from home  
Hit one of your parents  
Skipped a day of school without a real excuse  
Purposefully damaged or messed up something not belonging to you  
Tried to get something by lying about who you were or how old you were  
Tried to get something by lying to a person about what you would do for him  
Took something not belonging to you even if returned  
Hurt or injured someone on purpose  
Threatened to hurt or injure someone  
Went onto someone's property when you knew you were not supposed to  
Went into a house or building when you knew you were not supposed to  
Drank beer, wine or liquor without your parents' permission  
Smoked marijuana  
Used any drugs for kicks or to get high, except marijuana  
Took part in a fight where a bunch of your friends were against another bunch  
Carried a gun or knife besides an ordinary pocket knife  
Took a car without permission of the owner (even if the car was returned)  
Sold marijuana or any other kind of illegal substance  
Bought or sold something you were pretty certain was stolen

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Two measures of delinquency were constructed from the respondents' reports of their delinquent behavior: seriousness and frequency. The seriousness index was derived by assigning weights to each event according to a modified Sellin and Wolfgang (1964) system. The offenses and their weights are described in Table 2. It should be noted that only high misdemeanors and felonies are included in this list. The frequency index was the total number of offenses that could have brought a youth to the attention of the police; it included status offenses. Two independent raters agreed in 90% of their judgments that an incident could have elicited police attention. Although highly correlated, the seriousness and frequency indices resulted in differential findings, as will be seen later.

Recall that we asked each respondent to discuss his or her delinquent behavior that occurred in the past year. It was then necessary to distinguish acts that took place before a particular participant's criterion event (i.e., arrest or adjudication) from those occurring after; the latter acts constituted the primary dependent variable. Frequency and seriousness indices were computed for each of the two periods. However, since the interviews took place at various times after the criterion events, within a range of 7 to 40 days (mean = 27), the indices were divided by the number of days in the period. Because the control group did not have an obvious criterion event, we randomly designated one felonious act within 45 days of the interview as the criterion event for the purpose of calculating their delinquency scores (45 days was the average period between commission of the prosecuted felony and the interview for respondents in Groups II and III).

The formula for the postpenetration indices is the sum of a respondent's frequency or seriousness scores divided by the number of days in the period between his or her particular criterion event and the interview. Offenses occurring prior to the criterion event were divided by 365-criterion period to calculate the prepenetration indices. Thus four delinquency

TABLE 2  
Weights for Delinquency Items

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Offense	Weight
<b>Assault</b>	
Left mark/no weapon	1
Required medical care	4
Used a weapon	4
<b>Property Destruction</b>	
Estimated damage less than \$5.00	1
Estimated damage more than \$5.00	2
<b>Fraud/Misrepresentation</b>	
Alerted police attention	1
<b>Theft</b>	
Amount less than \$5.00/no force	1
Amount more than \$5.00/no force	2
Amount less than \$5.00/some force	3
Amount more than \$5.00/some force	4
Amount less than \$5.00/weapon used	5
Amount more than \$5.00/weapon used	6
<b>Trespassing</b>	1
<b>Breaking and entry</b>	1
<b>Carrying a concealed weapon</b>	1
<b>Auto theft</b>	1
<b>Receiving and concealing stolen property</b>	
Amount less than \$5.00	1
Amount more than \$5.00	2
<b>Sale of Drugs</b>	1

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indices are utilized in this report: frequency and seriousness occurring before and after penetration.

#### **PSYCHOSOCIAL VARIABLES**

We chose three broad areas in which associations have been found with delinquent behavior: scholastic attitude/experience, parent-child relationships, and self-esteem. Nine measures were used to distinguish between the various components and perspectives of each of these categories. Our list is by no means exhaustive and, as will be shown later, did not entirely predict differences in delinquent behavior following arrest and adjudication.

#### **ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL**

The respondents' attitudes toward school were solicited via 25 true-false statements printed on Hollerith cards (e.g., "I can learn things at school"; "Teachers don't hassle me"; "I can't be successful at school"). The measure and its relationship to delinquent behavior is reported in Mann (1981).

#### **PERCEPTION OF POSITIVE TEACHER DESCRIPTIONS**

This measure was built for this study. We asked respondents to estimate how often (on a four-point scale from "always" to "never") they felt their teachers would describe them in the following terms: a growing boy/girl, best in the family, lazy, good-looking, a juvenile delinquent, a hard worker, a bad kid getting worse, and basically a good kid.

#### **SENSE OF WELL-BEING**

This measure was constructed from 23 statements on Hollerith cards that solicited feelings about competence and self-worth. They included "I feel my life has been a failure"; "I

enjoy life"; and "I take a positive attitude toward myself" (Mann, 1981).

#### **FATHER AND MOTHER INDICES**

We solicited adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their fathers and mothers by having them respond to an identical series of statements for each parent. They included, "My father/mother gives me the right amount of affection"; "My father/mother accepts me and understands me as a person" (Gold and Mann, 1972).

#### **PERCEPTION OF POSITIVE PARENTAL DESCRIPTIONS**

This measure is identical to the one described above, except that "parents" was substituted for "teachers."

#### **CONSCIOUS SELF-ESTEEM**

Respondents were asked to describe "myself" and "myself as I'd like to be now" by checking 14 items on a semantic differential form. Items included were, for example, "strong-weak" and "slow-quick." The measure was derived by summing over the item-by-item discrepancies between their ratings of themselves and as they would like to be (Gold and Reimer, 1975).

#### **UNCONSCIOUS SELF-ESTEEM**

The Social Self-Esteem Test (Ziller and Grossman, 1967) was used to measure the respondents' projected, unconscious self-esteem. They were presented a vertical and a horizontal array of circles and instructed to write "ME" in the circles in which they felt they belonged. Respondents' scores were

determined by measuring the distance from the top and left circles; the highest self-esteem was represented in those circles (Gold and Mann, 1972). Despite the odd nature of this instrument, there is extensive work supporting its construct validity in various settings (Ziller et al., 1969); its use in delinquency studies is also well supported (Mann, 1981).

#### **PERCEPTION OF DELINQUENT LABEL**

To test whether youth felt they were labeled by the events of arrest and adjudication, we utilized two items each from the teacher/parent descriptors: "a juvenile delinquent" and "a bad kid getting worse." The four items were positively intercorrelated in the range  $r = .34 - .64$  ( $n = 82$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Cronbach's alpha, which reflects the internal validity of the index, equals .79. One indication of the validity of the labeling index is its correlations with respondents' reports of their pre- and post-penetration delinquency scores,  $.23$  ( $p = .04$ ) and  $.31$  ( $p = .01$ ), respectively. Youth who report more delinquent behavior also tend to report that they have delinquent reputations with their parents and teachers.

All of the items in the above measures (except conscious and unconscious self-esteem) were corrected for direction and then scored on a scale from 1 to 5. The items were averaged if a respondent gave a response of 75% of the items for a particular measure; otherwise the measure was listed as missing data. All of the measures except relationship with father had complete data for at least 98% of the sample.

### **RESULTS**

First it was necessary to determine whether the three groups varied in their delinquent behavior prior to the criterion event, especially since Group I had not been randomly assigned. Although the delinquency scores were not normally distributed,

the remaining assumptions for parametric one-way analysis of variance were met (Hays, 1973). We found that the mean delinquency of the three groups did not vary in its frequency or seriousness prior to the criterion event ( $p = .84$  and  $.53$ , respectively; see Table 3).

Analyses of variance of postpenetration delinquent behavior (Table 4) revealed that the three groups were significantly different on the seriousness index ( $p = .04$ ) but not the frequency index ( $p = .20$ ). Post hoc pairwise comparison of the measures of the three groups showed that the reliable difference in the seriousness index was between the control group and the other two. Since the means of prepenetration delinquency for the three groups, although not significantly different from one another, followed a similar pattern, we checked the postpenetration differences in seriousness between Group I and Groups II and III while controlling for prepenetration differences by using the prepenetration seriousness index as the covariate. As Table 5 shows, the difference held up ( $p = .03$ ). Repeating the analyses with the pre- and postpenetration frequency indices yielded a similar result (see Table 5). However, it appears that the findings with the frequency indices were strengthened as much by combining Groups II and III as by using a covariate.

So these data duplicate previous findings. Youth who are apprehended and become involved with the juvenile justice system went on to commit more serious offenses than did comparable youth who were not apprehended.

### **WHY DID THE APPREHENDED YOUTH BECOME MORE DELINQUENT?**

We explored two explanations for the increased delinquent behavior of the apprehended delinquents. One concerned whether youths' beliefs that they were negatively labeled by parents and teachers as a consequence of their apprehension



TABLE 3  
Analyses of Variance of Prepenetration Delinquency Indices by Penetration

	I: Control	II: Pre-Court	III: Post-Court	Total
<u>Pre-Penetration Seriousness Index</u>				
*				
Mean	1.01	1.27	1.28	1.18
S.D.	.89	1.09	1.03	1.00
N	28	29	25	82
	F (2,79) = .619			p = .54
<u>Pre-Penetration Frequency Index</u>				
*				
Mean	1.06	.97	1.08	1.03
S.D.	.67	.72	.86	.74
N	28	29	25	82
	F (2,79) = .176			p = .84

\*These measures are the daily seriousness and frequency multiplied by 100 to aid in computation.

TABLE 4  
Analyses of Variance of Postpenetration Delinquency Indices by Penetration

Analyses of Variance of Post-Penetration Delinquency Indices by Penetration				
	I: Control	II: Pre-Court	III: Post-Court	Total
<u>Post-Penetration Seriousness Index</u>				
*				
Mean	2.87	6.76	9.30	6.21
S.D.	5.31	7.73	13.15	9.39
N	28	29	25	82
	F (2,79) = 3.36		p = .04	
<u>Post-Penetration Frequency Index</u>				
*				
Mean	8.54	11.24	15.07	11.48
S.D.	10.65	9.65	18.09	13.20
N	28	29	25	82
	F (2,79) = 1.65		p = .20	

\*These measures are the daily seriousness and frequency multiplied by 100 to aid in computation.

TABLE 5  
 Analyses of Covariance of Postpenetration Delinquency by Penetration (Groups II and III Combined) Covariate:  
 Prepenetration Delinquency Indices

	I: Control (N=28)	II & III: Pre-Court & Post-Court (N=54)	p diff.
Seriousness Index			
Unadjusted mean	2.87	7.94	
Adjusted mean	3.20	7.77	.03
Frequency Index			
Unadjusted mean	8.54	13.01	
Adjusted mean	8.32	13.12	.06

contributed to their delinquent behavior. The other concerned whether provocations to be delinquent had been adversely affected by the apprehension, particularly scholastic attitude/experience, parental relationships, and self-esteem.

To test whether youth felt labeled by the events of arrest and adjudication, we compared their mean scores on our measure of their perception of having been labeled delinquent/bad-getting-worse. Table 6 shows that youngsters at various depths of penetration into the juvenile justice system did not differ in their perceptions of having been so labeled. Most important, perhaps, is that youth who were never caught did not feel less frequently labeled by their parents and teachers than youth who were officially identified as delinquent by the police and court. Of course, our measure did not directly tap the labeling process and thus does not address whether labeling affects subsequent delinquent behavior independent of the youths' perceptions. That is, labeling, if it exists, may be an unconscious process whereby youth are exposed to negative reactions, respond in a self-fulfilling manner, but do not consciously perceive the negative label.

We also compared across groups the means on the other measures reflecting provocations or controls relevant to delinquency. Three variables differentiated the groups at  $p < .10$ : attitude toward school, sense of well-being, and relationship with father; none of the other variables even suggested a positive trend (see Table 7). These data offer support for the hypothesis that penetration into the juvenile justice system results in a worsening of relationships that previously have been found to be provocative or controlling of delinquent behavior.

Our next step was to determine whether these variables were predictive of posttreatment delinquency; stepwise multiple regression was used to examine this part of the model. Table 8 presents the results of two regression analyses of the psychological variables against the seriousness and frequency indices. In both analyses the pretreatment delinquency indices were inserted first to control on that factor. The results identify those psychological variables that are predictive of delinquent

TABLE 6  
 Analysis of Variance of Labeling Index by Penetration

	I: Control	II: Pre-Court	III: Post-Court	Total
Mean	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.3
S.D.	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
N	28	30	25	83
$F(2,80) = 1.09$				
$p = .34$				

TABLE 7  
Analyses of Variance of Psychosocial Variables by Penetration (means/standard deviations)\*

	I: Control	II: Pre-Court	III: Post-Court	Sig.
Attitude toward School	4.0/.58	3.5/.75	3.7/.72	.03
Teacher Description	3.7/.67	3.4/.73	3.5/.67	.19
Sense of Well-Being	4.0/.56	3.7/.37	3.9/.45	.09
Relationship with Father	3.4/.76	2.7/1.2	3.1/1.0	.05
Relationship with Mother	2.9/.65	2.8/.89	2.8/.89	.86
Parent Description	3.8/.83	3.6/.62	3.9/.63	.23
Conscious Self-Esteem	67/5.5	64/7.0	66/7.3	.32
Unconscious Self-Esteem	5.3/2.7	5.0/2.7	4.7/2.4	.70

\*All N's are 81-83, except father index (N = 69)

TABLE 8  
 Stepwise Multiple Regression of Postpenetration Delinquency Indices  
 on the Psychosocial Indices

Variables	Beta	P
<u>Post-Penetration Seriousness Index</u>		
Pre-Penetration Seriousness Index	.22	.04
Attitude toward School	-5.21	.002
Teacher Description	-3.68	.09
Sense of Well-Being	7.31	.04
Relationship with Father	-.73	.48
Relationship with Mother	-1.71	.17
Parent Description	1.01	.66
Conscious Self-Esteem	.08	.57
Unconscious Self-Esteem	-.25	.54
R-Squared = .40	P = .001	
<u>Post-Penetration Frequency Index</u>		
Pre-Penetration Frequency Index	.92	.001
Attitude toward School	-6.27	.004
Teacher Description	-1.00	.71
Sense of Well-Being	2.24	.60
Relationship with Father	.00	.98
Relationship with Mother	-4.29	.008
Parent Description	-.65	.82
Conscious Self-Esteem	.21	.26
Unconscious Self-Esteem	-.26	.62
R-Squared = .57	P = .001	

**TABLE 9**  
**Partial Correlation Coefficients Between Penetration and Postpenetration Delinquent Behavior While Controlling for Significant Psychosocial Indices**

Variable Added	Partial R	P
<u>Penetration and Seriousness</u>		
Zero-order	.28	.006
Pre-Penetration Delinquency	.26	.009
Attitude toward School	.22	.02
Sense of Well-Being	.22	.03
<u>Penetration and Frequency</u>		
Zero-order	.20	.03
Pre-Penetration Delinquency	.23	.02
Attitude toward School	.17	.07

behavior occurring subsequent to penetration into the juvenile justice system. These findings, together with the previous ones, suggested that attitudes toward school mediate between the event of apprehension and penetration into the justice system and the frequency and seriousness of delinquent behavior. Youths' sense of well-being seemed to link penetration only to the seriousness of subsequent delinquency.

Finally, in order to determine whether worsening attitudes toward school and a poorer sense of well-being account for the effect of penetration on delinquent behavior, partial correlations were calculated between penetration and postpenetration delinquent behavior while controlling for the two psychological variables. Table 9 presents the results of this analysis. Obviously the relationship between penetration and delinquency is only slightly affected by the other two variables; the correlation, after partialing out youths' attitudes toward school, is only a bit lower and declines no further when youths' sense of well-being is entered into the equation. The results



indicate that although school attitudes and sense of well-being worsened with penetration into the system, and that these variables were predictive of postpenetration delinquent behavior, they were not the links between the juvenile justice system and its criminogenic effect. It appears that the effect of arrest and adjudication affects delinquent behavior through processes not directly captured in this study.

## DISCUSSION

We have presented the results of a study that examined the impact of the juvenile justice processing on the subsequent delinquent behavior of youth under its jurisdiction compared to a group of youth who could have been prosecuted had their recent delinquent behavior been detected. The results indicate that those youth who were arrested and adjudicated became more seriously delinquent than their peers who had committed a recent felonious act but were not caught. Certainly the increase did not constitute a crime wave; rather, juvenile justice processing accounted for approximately 7% of the variance, which is similar to the findings in other studies (Gold and Williams, 1969; Gold, 1970; West and Farrington, 1977). The important point seems to be that arresting and prosecuting a youth does not help him or her—or the community—either in preventing future delinquency or in the psychological and interpersonal spheres. It is important to note that these data speak to a relatively short period of time, which is both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, the potency of arrest and adjudication is clear: An iatrogenic effect appears almost immediately. But we do not know if these negative consequences will hold over the long term.

Insofar as we have captured one aspect of labeling—a belief held at one point in time that one is regarded as delinquent by important others—it does not account for the effects. Young felons who were apprehended reported perceiving no worse reputation with their parents and teachers than those who were not apprehended. But believing that one is known to be a “juvenile delinquent” and “a bad kid getting worse” is related to youths’ reports of their own delinquency. It appears that, at

least in the youngsters' perceptions, their reputations were established by their behavior irrespective of official notice. This result is consistent with a study conducted by Foster et al. (1972) in which boys were interviewed after recent police and court contacts; the authors found little evidence indicating that perception of negative effects attributed to stigma.

These data indicate that the iatrogenic effect of official action is most telling at the point of arrest; the arrested youth reported about as much delinquent behavior in the period prior to their adjudication as did the adjudicated group. Both, however, reported more than the unapprehended youth. This finding raises the question of the likely benefit of diversion programs. Obviously an offender has to be apprehended before he or she is diverted away from the juvenile justice system. But if that initial brush with the system is sufficient to generate as much delinquency as further penetration will, then diversion is irrelevant. We should point out that we come to this conclusion with one reservation: It is conceivable that the arrested youth in this study psychologically were already beyond adjudication, for it was probably clear to most of them at the time of their arrest that they would be referred to the court and undergo adjudication. The iatrogenic aftermath of their arrest might have been different had they been told then that they would not have to go to court. Here the data on diversion projects are relevant, and a recent report on such efforts (Dunford et al., 1981) concludes that there is no firm evidence that diversion as practiced currently is effective.

Unfortunately, this study has not revealed what it is about penetration into the juvenile justice system that exacerbates delinquent behavior. The study has shown, once again and in a very different kind of environment from previous studies, that delinquent behavior increases with penetration. It advances our knowledge of this phenomenon somewhat by indicating that, at least in this community, the effect of penetration occurs at the earliest step, with police arrest. And these data suggest that feeling labeled is not the mediating process.

While we have been able only to identify psychosocial variables that concurrently worsened as delinquent behavior

increased, special care should be taken in the apprehension process as it pertains to the relationships between the youths and their parents and the school. While apprehended youths may not have perceived a negative label, their attitude toward school and the learning process is affected by apprehension and is in some way linked to subsequent delinquent behavior. At minimum we suggest that researchers and practitioners carefully examine any interactions between official agents, such as the police and probation officers, and school officials. The product of any such interaction must not be a worsening of school attitudes. (For a detailed description of the interaction between school processes and delinquent behavior, see Gold and Mann, in press.)

We cannot ignore the possibility that the youth who were caught were different from those who were not, in some unmeasured way that has produced these findings independent of apprehension itself. The apprehended youth may have somehow arranged to be caught; and they may have been more delinquent than the others, caught or not. This is a possibility that can be tested with a different research design: our original plan to select the unapprehended group randomly from the same pool as the others. In the course of replication and refinement, it would also be useful to measure the effect of a youngster's arrest and adjudication on significant others in the youth's environment. This would address the issue of whether youth receive a negative label they do not themselves perceive.

Since several studies have now shown that contact with the juvenile justice system does tend to increase the delinquent behavior of apprehended youth, we should turn our attention to the reasons for this. The question is theoretically important for several disciplines, including criminology and social psychology, and it has practical urgency.

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