



Development of a prediction model for identifying potential juvenile delinquents in the primary grades
by Theresa Cassidy Pavlonnis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University

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Abstract:

The problem of this study was twofold. First it was to determine if a group of adjudicated youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old and a matched sample of nonadjudicated youth differed on seven selected characteristics that existed in their early school years. Second it was to determine if selected characteristics occurring during those school years could predict a potential juvenile delinquent to school officials.

The problem was investigated by: a.) a review of the literature related to juvenile delinquency; b.) an investigation of court and school records; c.) a matching of juvenile and nonjuvenile delinquent youth by intelligence and achievement scores; and d.) the tabulation, analysis, and comparison of the data collected.

The hypotheses tested in this study were concerned with the relationship among juvenile delinquents and the characteristics of sex, race, socioeconomic status, history of family crime, marital status of parents, academic achievement in kindergarten through grades four, and special services received in the primary years. The hypotheses were tested with a two-way analysis of variance, a chi-square test of independence, and a multiple regression analysis at the .10 level of significance.

The major findings of the study were: a.) race, socioeconomic status, academic achievement, and special services provided in the primary years were significant for the means of intelligence when juvenile delinquents were compared to nonjuvenile delinquents; b.) delinquency status was dependent either on race, socioeconomic status, history of family crime, marital status of parents, or academic achievement; and c.) when all seven characteristics were taken as a whole there was a significant relationship found in the characteristics of sex, race, marital status of parents, history of family crime, and academic achievement.

The major recommendations of the study were: a.) to replicate in a rural area; b.) to conduct the study utilizing different variables; c.) to evaluate teacher predictions of early school characteristics that lead to delinquency; d.) to train personnel in juvenile delinquency; e.) to investigate the impact of broken homes in today's society and f.) to research students with similar profiles who received counseling in the early school years and study results.

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by

Theresa Cassidy Pavlonnis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Theresa Cassidy Pavlonnis

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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ABSTRACT

The problem of this study was twofold. First it was to determine if a group of adjudicated youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old and a matched sample of nonadjudicated youth differed on seven selected characteristics that existed in their early school years. Second it was to determine if selected characteristics occurring during those school years could predict a potential juvenile delinquent to school officials.

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The major recommendations of the study were: a.) to replicate in a rural area; b.) to conduct the study utilizing different variables; c.) to evaluate teacher predictions of early school characteristics that lead to delinquency; d.) to train personnel in juvenile delinquency; e.) to investigate the impact of broken homes in today's society and f.) to research students with similar profiles who received counseling in the early school years and study results.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Delinquency is a dynamic and complex social problem. It has no single cause or simple cure. Each case is a unique experience. . . . Delinquency evolves as a result of specific life experiences. It also devolves because of past, present, or ongoing experiences that somehow affect a socially approved change of behavior (Brown, 1981:436).

This dynamic and complex social problem of delinquency has become a major concern of the schools over the past twenty years. School officials are no longer able to ignore the problem of juvenile delinquency by expelling and suspending unruly students. Administrators are being sought out by law enforcement agencies, the court system and the public to help alleviate the increasing numbers of juvenile delinquents (Scott, 1982).

The President's Commission on Law Enforcement has found that approximately ninety percent of all juveniles commit at least one act for which they could be arrested and arraigned before the courts (Nigem, LaGrange, and King, 1981). If this is accurate, a major portion of a school's population could become involved with the law before graduation. Recently, the judicial system and probation agencies have begun to refer these troubled youth back to the local school districts (Montana, 1983b). This creates a

different set of problems for the administrator in today's schools.

The advent of the Education of the Handicapped Children's Act; PL 94:142 caused the sudden shift from the courts being responsible for the incorrigible youth to the schools (Post, 1981). Signed in 1975 by President Gerald R. Ford, to have been implemented by September, 1978, this piece of legislation guaranteed all handicapped children the right to a free and appropriate public education. Under the protection of this law came not only the physically handicapped and mentally retarded but the learning disabled and behaviorally maladjusted as well. It was with this piece of legislation that strict guidelines were placed on public schools, legislating their responsibility in educating all handicapped youth. The law also implied that any student being considered for expulsion or suspension should be considered a special learning problem; the rationale being that the school was not supplying an appropriate education if the student could not succeed in the system and might well have an emotional/learning problem (Montana, 1983b).

Implementing the idea that schools should provide specialized education for all handicapped youth, the courts began sending juvenile delinquents back to school rather than to jail (Montana, 1983). Many juvenile delinquents coming before the courts were found to be learning disabled or emotionally disturbed in the judicial system's

psychological assessment battery. These youth were then referred back to the local school district to be placed in special education programs. Section 5.1 of the Special Education Reference Manual, Montana Laws and Rules (1983b) states that:

1. All handicapped children in Montana are entitled to a free appropriate public education provided in the least restrictive alternative setting. To the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, shall be educated with children who are not handicapped. Separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment may occur only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

2. After September 1, 1977, the board of trustees in every school district must provide or establish and maintain a special education program for every handicapped person between the ages of six and eighteen, inclusive.

This requirement produced numerous problems for school administrators that continue today. The school administrator responsible for controlling and disciplining within the schools became responsible for controlling and/or correcting additional delinquent behavior by adjudicated youth, that is, one who has appeared before the courts. This occurred while the public pointed to the lack of discipline as the number one problem in America's schools (Elam, 1983). McDermott (1980) felt that the placement of these youth back into the local school program usually led to more occurrences of violence in school and greater dangers to the other staff and students. McDermott continued

to say that the school administrator had a responsibility to reduce fear elements and feelings of anxiety and apprehension among students and faculty. Additionally, she claimed that the apprehension of fear was a detriment to the learning climate of an entire building and caused decline of morale, poor standards and ineffective learning.

This responsibility for supplying an appropriate education for all labelled youth meant that a complete psychological and educational assessment of the youth for placement in a special education class had to be conducted involving a number of agencies, meetings, and documentation (Montana, 1983b). The agencies and persons which had to spend their time and efforts in such a process included, at the minimum, probation officers, social rehabilitative service workers, special education personnel, school officials, and parents. The inordinate amount of time necessary to initiate the placement was necessary according to Feldhusen (1978). He felt that if the youth was placed back into the school setting without appropriate support services, it was questionable that the youth would succeed or that the school administrator would be able to control the subsequent problems that arose from the situation.

Finally, the failure of the student in the special class placement in the local school program placed greater financial stress on the school district to provide an appropriate placement outside the district. The Education of

the Handicapped Children's Act was quite explicit in defining the school's responsibility for providing an education that was appropriate and equal for the handicapped student (Montana, 1983b). The students referred by the courts who were labelled learning disabled or behaviorally maladjusted were afforded all rights of the legislation because of their handicapping condition (Montana, 1983b).

In many cases it was too late for the schools to try to correct or modify the behavior when special programming was attempted for the first time at ages fifteen or sixteen (Miller, 1971 and Mulligan, 1969). At times the program failed, the school failed and the student failed, yet the student was now protected because he had been labelled handicapped. The law provided that the school district must provide an appropriate education. If it could not it must find a program somewhere that could educate the student and pay the full expense of that program (Montana, 1983b). The school district was now caught in a real paradox. While it could not refuse to accept the court order once the student had been labelled handicapped, it could not abdicate its responsibility even if it did not have sufficient programming. This has resulted in school districts having to spend an average cost of thirty thousand dollars per student each year in residential treatment centers for maladjusted problem youth (Great Falls Special Education Department, 1984).

Cellini, (1982); Margolin and others, (1955); Podby and Mallory, (1978); Swanstrom and others, (1981); and Zimmerman, (1981) have conducted extensive research attributing juvenile delinquency to learning disabilities. Balow, (1961) Bell, (1975); Ducey, (1980); Feldhusen, (1978); Lunden, (1964); Robinson, (1960); and Wertlieb, (1982) attempted to associate public schools and the roles they assumed with juvenile delinquency. But most research that was done concentrated on the problems that existed at the time the youth became involved in juvenile delinquency, such as sociological status, learning problems or familial related factors.

Little has been done to ascertain if school officials can attempt to prevent the delinquency from occurring at an early school age through an understanding of the primary school year characteristics. If there is a means of preventing youth from gravitating towards crime and if there is a means of predicting behavior in the early school years then it is an obligation of each school official to find that link and direct students into meaningful, productive lives.

Statement of the Problem

The concept of a free and equal education for all has created schools which have become the place where youth congregate and spend the major portion of their time.

Schooling for all has turned juvenile delinquency into a school problem as well as a societal problem (Doyle, 1978). The results of education for all youth have not matched the results anticipated by our democratic society. Gallup Polls (Gallup, 1977; Elam, 1982, Gallup, 1984), school officials, legislators, and even the President of the United States (U.S. President, Reagan, Ronald) have expressed that criminal activity and discipline problems in the schools are of major consideration.

Because juvenile delinquents' behavior in the schools and on the streets is a major societal concern, a need existed to determine if there was a means of predicting the potential for juvenile delinquent behavior during the child's early school years in order to prevent the youth from entering into a delinquent adolescence. Therefore, the problem of this study was twofold. First, it was to determine if a group of adjudicated youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years committing juvenile delinquent acts between June, 1982 and December, 1983 and a matched sample of nonadjudicated youth currently enrolled in the Great Falls Public Schools differed on seven selected characteristics that existed in their early school years of kindergarten through grade four. Second, it was to determine if selected characteristics occurring during those early school years could discriminate between a potential juvenile delinquent and a nonjuvenile delinquent. ✓

Need for the Study

School administrators are responsible for administering schools that produce productive, civic minded citizens who will contribute to society in a positive way (Feldhusen, 1978). If school administrators could begin to understand some of the factors that discriminate between non-juvenile delinquent youth and juvenile delinquent youth, Feldhusen believed that perhaps they could begin to address the school factors that would direct the child into more productive channels of maturation and citizenship. With the concern of the public's attitude towards discipline

the challenge for concerned parents and professionals alike is to establish a concerted program of education, bringing together the resources of numerous disciplines, motivating research, sponsoring appropriate legislation, pooling existing knowledge, and building upward... (Keldgord, 1969:99)

to enhance not only the juvenile delinquent's chances but to better the community as well.

Justification for this researcher's study focused on a number of reasons. First, the study provided a rationale and justification for funding special programs that were assigned students predicted to be potential juvenile delinquents (Mayer and Butterworth, 1981; Post, 1981; and Zoet, 1978). These special programs could include counseling, values clarification, psychological intervention, family therapy, individual remediation, and/or special class placement. All of these programs are expensive because of

the low staff/student ratio and the amount of time needed for each case. Without reliable data to support such programs, school districts would find it more and more difficult to secure funding.

Second, this study could create a better coordination of services between school and community agencies to apply preventative measures rather than crisis intervention techniques (Bell, 1975; Cellini and Snowman, 1982; and Scott, 1982). One of the widely voiced concerns among professionals is that the many agencies do not work together (Keldgord, 1969) and that too often students are involved in mental health counseling or in trouble with the law or under a protective agency and the school officials are completely unaware of it. Our system could work more efficiently if the agencies involved with the student worked together as a team striving to help the total individual rather than working with him in separate pieces (Jacobsen, 1974).

Third, this investigation developed a rationale for producing independent, civic minded citizens rather than juveniles that become tax burdens to the state in the form of criminals and welfare recipients. Perhaps if money were allocated to special programs during the primary school years, the cost effectiveness would be readily apparent when compared to the residential treatment costs now being spent on these youth (Ball, Parker and Saunders, 1983). A cost in excess of thirty thousand dollars per year for residential

treatment centers within the state of Montana is playing havoc with school district budgets and is on the rise each year (Cellini and Snowman, 1982; Great Falls Special Education Department, 1984). Such large expenditures of money on so few could more efficiently be used if treatment took place before the youth found himself in trouble with the courts and the schools (Miller, 1971).

Finally, this study could assist school administrators in better evaluating each child's individual needs and in attempting to meet each child's needs in his individual environment. By nurturing staff attitudes that would enhance each child's development in the primary years, school administrators could be assisting in helping these children to lead productive lives.

General Questions to be Answered

The following questions were investigated and answered in this study.

1. Are there a common set of characteristics that emerge in the early school years of kindergarten through grades four that can alert school officials to a potential pattern of juvenile delinquency ?
2. Does the level of intelligence of an individual predispose that youth to an adolescent life of delinquency ?
3. Are there any special services provided in the primary school years that might prevent a potential juvenile

delinquent from becoming involved in delinquency in his adolescent years?

4. Are there certain sociological or academic factors that have a greater influence on the development of a juvenile delinquent youth?

5. Are there any differences in intelligence levels of delinquent youth with regards to specific characteristics existing in the early school years?

General Procedures

This study began with an extensive review of the literature related to juvenile delinquency dating back to 1940. The topics reviewed in the literature included current attitudes toward juvenile delinquency, sociological and familial related causes, school related factors, labelling theory and self-esteem, and causation and predictive models. The authorities reviewed had not been able to define any definitive research on the causation of delinquency but many found substantial links between certain characteristics and juvenile delinquency.

The study investigated a group of thirteen to eighteen year old youth arraigned for juvenile delinquent acts before the Cascade County Court System from June, 1982 to December, 1983 and a group of 13 to 18 year old youth that had no previous involvement with the Court System and were currently enrolled in the Great Falls Public School

System. The two groups of youth were compared on sex, race, history of family crime, socioeconomic status, marital status of parents, academic achievement in kindergarten through grade four and placement in special services provided by the school district in kindergarten through grade four.

For the purpose of this study the juvenile delinquent group was matched to the nonjuvenile delinquents by achievement test scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test (Thorndike and others, 1968) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Hieronymus and others, 1979) in grades two and four, respectively. The groups were divided into below average, low average, average, high average and superior intelligence scores. The statistical procedures of two-way analysis of variance, chi-square test of independence, and multiple regression analysis were applied to the hypotheses to determine if there was any predictive behavior for the juvenile delinquents as opposed to the nonjuvenile delinquents and if the early school years could discriminate between an individual predisposed to juvenile delinquency and one not so predisposed.

Limitations

Only juvenile delinquents that attended the Great Falls Public Schools in kindergarten through grades four were included in the study. This was intended to eliminate

introducing another variable of changing residence during the primary school years.

Delimitations

1. The study was conducted on Cascade County Youth attending Great Falls Public Schools.

2. The study covered the period of June, 1982 through December, 1983.

3. The Cognitive Abilities Test (Thorndike and others, 1968) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Hieronymus and others, 1979) were used.

4. The study was limited to using data of students in kindergarten through grade four. Since the study was intended to be predictive utilizing higher grade levels would have no bearing on the predictor variables (Loeber, and Dishion, 1983).

Definition of Terms

Academic achievement - measurement of the basic skill areas achieved by an individual in a school setting (Buros, 1978).

Achievement test - (ITBS) a test designed to measure the pupil's development in the basic skill areas of reading, spelling, and math and to determine the developmental level of each pupil for instructional purposes (Hieronymus, 1979).

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Adjudicated - appearance before the courts for a judicial decision (Montana, 1983).

Appropriate public education - provision of regular or special education and related aids and services that are designed to meet individual needs of handicapped persons as adequately as the needs of nonhandicapped are met; 20-1-4016 (PL 94:142, 1975).

Behaviorally maladjusted/emotionally disturbed - one who demonstrates an observable, generalized behavioral pattern which markedly interferes with the normal educational processes to such a degree that standard alternatives in the regular program have shown to be ineffective (Great Falls, 1981).

Handicapped - a child evaluated as being mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually impaired, emotionally disturbed, orthopedically handicapped, other health impaired, or as having a specific learning disability, who, because of those impairments, needs special education and related services (Montana, 1983b).

Intelligence - mental ability or capacity to learn often interpreted as an intelligence quotient (I.Q.). IQ scores grouped into below average, average, and above average from the Cognitive Abilities Test were utilized to match students in the sample. (Buros, 1978).

Intelligence Test - (CAT) a test designed to assess the development of cognitive abilities from kindergarten

through the first year of college (Thorndike, 1968).

Juvenile Delinquent - a youth who has committed an offense, which if committed by an adult, would constitute a criminal offense (Montana, 1983).

Learning Disability - a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes which produces a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability; 20-7-401 (PL 94: 142, 1975).

PL 94: 142 - Public Law signed into effect in 1975 by President Gerald R. Ford. This law known as the Education of the Handicapped Children's Act provided for a free and appropriate education for all the handicapped, ages six to eighteen (PL 94:142, 1975).

Socioeconomic Status - relating to the social and economic factors of a person's lifestyle including the educational status, income level, and occupation of the parents and their family (Reiss, 1961).

Special Education - specially designed instruction, given at no cost to the parents or guardians, to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child, including but not limited to, classroom instruction, instruction in physical education, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions; 20-7-401 (PL 94: 142, 1975).

Vandalism - willful or malicious defacement or destruction of private or public property (Steen, 1966).

Violence - physical injury or abuse (Steen, 1966).

Summary

The problem of juvenile delinquency and adolescent crime has moved from the streets to the school halls because of the "education for all children" concept. School officials are faced daily with the problem of meeting the demands of school discipline and maintaining an environment conducive to learning.

This study looked at the problem of juvenile delinquency and the relationship, if any, that the early school years of kindergarten through grade four had on predisposing a youngster to adolescent crime. The study hypothesized that a prediction model could be drawn by studying a set of variables between juvenile delinquent youth and nonjuvenile delinquent youth. This prediction model was to have the potential of helping school administrators prevent delinquency by working more intensely with the individual and attempting to change some of the characteristics that might lead to criminal behavior.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter contains a review of the literature on juvenile delinquency. The method of organization is as follows:

1. General Findings and Current Attitudes Toward Juvenile Delinquency
2. Sociological and Familial Related Causes
3. School Related Factors
4. Labelling Theory and Self-esteem
5. Causation and Predictive Models

The first topic serves to introduce current themes that are apparent in the field of juvenile delinquency today. The topic of sociological and familial related causes includes literature on the socioeconomic status of juvenile offenders as well as family crime, parental value systems and child rearing practices. Levels of learning disabilities, intelligence, and reading abilities are reviewed in the school related literature. The latter two topics are developed by reviewing studies that have researched probable causes for juveniles becoming involved in delinquency and the predictive abilities of teachers.

In reviewing the literature this researcher found that the noted authorities agreed that:

Delinquency is not a unitary phenomenon. It takes many forms and arises out of varied causes. No one emphasis or theory can provide adequate explanations and programs. It may have its roots in psychopathology, neighborhood mores, youth behavioral styles, blocked economic opportunities and the like. ... Some manage to 'make it', to get on the educational and economic escalators, and to join the community; many do not (Bernstein, 1969:3).

General Findings and Current Attitudes Toward Juvenile Delinquency

While juvenile delinquency is a problem that has been with American society since the inception of our country (Newman, 1980), the agedness of the problem does not make it any the less important or less devastating to society. Duke (1980:24) has stated that:

historically, the standard societal response to increases in problematic behavior has been to increase the number of [administrative] roles circumscribing conduct or to make the punishment for misconduct more severe. Evidence exists that these options are still preferred by many educators.

Evidence also exists that this is not the most desirable recourse to solving the problem (Burgan and Rubel, 1980). Looking historically at the problem, LeJins (1961) explained how juvenile delinquency began to take a different course at the turn of the century. It was at this time that society began to look at juveniles differently from adults in the criminal acts they had committed. The court system became primarily concerned with the welfare of the

child rather than his punishment. LeJins further stated that the courts felt the emphasis of responsibility could not fairly be placed on the child because there were too many overwhelming possibilities that may have caused the misbehavior, including his parents and the community.

Halatyn (1980), though, has been extremely critical of this political process that established new ideas and legislation by listening to those involved in the court systems without any consultation of researchers in the area. He found that as a result, very few problem solving processes had ever been legislated for issues such as juvenile delinquency and he issued the challenge to researchers to lobby for effective legislation in the areas of social programming.

Martin Gold (1975) found that the frequency and seriousness of delinquent behavior among boys thirteen to sixteen years old in 1972 was lower than the delinquent behavior of a similar group in 1967. Surprisingly, he found the delinquent behavior of girls was more frequent in 1972. He attributed this delinquency increase in girls to the more casual use of marijuana and alcohol. If the use of drugs and alcohol were eliminated from the results of the study, the girls' delinquent behavior had actually not increased and the boys' delinquent behavior had in fact declined. Gold concluded that it was not surprising to find a greater increase in drug and alcohol usage among the teens in 1972

compared to 1967 but what was surprising was to find that the overall rate of delinquency had not increased.

Gold attributed the differences in his findings from those reported in the current journals to different sources of data used by himself and the researchers. These investigators received their information from FBI records and local metropolitan police records while Gold's source of data was the self-report method by juvenile delinquents. Gold believed that changes in record keeping procedures, definitions and/or policies relating to juvenile offenders may have contributed to a distorted system of record keeping indicating an increase in juvenile crime. While he admitted the self-report method was not perfect, he kept the samples and measuring procedures nearly identical to keep all of the sources of error constant.

Walter Doyle (1978) concurred with Gold's findings that the behavior of youth was no worse than it ever was but his conclusions were different from Gold's. Doyle proposed that as society had placed legislation on youth for mandatory school attendance, the shift of crime had changed its focus from the streets to the school corridors. Doyle concluded that the schools were enrolling more students for a longer period of time than ever before and continued to work with the incorrigible students that formerly had been dismissed from school for such behaviors. He further emphasized his conclusions by stating that as the school had

become the place where youth congregated, the juvenile misbehaviors had become a "school reality rather than a social reality" (Doyle, 1978:8).

Sociological and Familial Related Causes

The idea of social class being a determining factor in a juvenile's behavior has been extensively researched.

Marvin D. Krohn and others (1980:303) stated:

From the earliest days of sociological interest in delinquency in this country social class has occupied a central position of attention both as an indication of whose children would be 'saved' by the juvenile court and other reformist movements and as an explanation of why some of the theoretical debate and empirical research on the etiology of delinquency has continued to center on the direction and magnitude of the relationship of delinquency to social class.

Numerous studies have been conducted trying to prove or disprove the theory that socioeconomic status causes delinquency or at the very least, predisposes a youngster of low socioeconomic status to more delinquent behavior (Cohen, 1955; Harry, 1974; Krohn and others, 1980; and Reiss and Rhodes, 1963).

Albert Cohen (1955), one of the most widely recognized authorities in the field of juvenile delinquency, hypothesized that lower socioeconomic class boys would be more prone to delinquent behavior because they became more and more frustrated when they tried to achieve middle class status. This frustration, he said, would then be channeled into delinquent acts and gang behavior.

Reiss and Rhodes (1963) tried to further support this theory by conducting a study with lower socioeconomic class juveniles in a community of socially heterogeneous youth; that is, youth that did not belong to the same socioeconomic class but lived in the same community. Their hypothesis was that the frustration of being unable to achieve social status would be greater in socioeconomic heterogeneous areas than socioeconomic homogeneous areas and would lead to greater incidences of juvenile delinquency.

Reiss and Rhodes found that they were not able to support Cohen's theory and they found no evidence to support the idea that lower class youth in a heterogeneous community committed more delinquent acts. Nor did they find any relationship between social status, status deprivation and delinquent behavior within the different status areas.

Harry (1974) began with the same premise of homogeneous/heterogeneous class values and tried to determine the extent of influence they had on juvenile delinquent behavior. But rather than taking the position that heterogeneous class structure would lead to delinquent misbehavior Harry argued that the homogeneous or similar status class structure would be more apt to produce the maladaptive behavior. Harry posited that while lower class schools would try to foster middle class values the student culture would not. His hypothesis was that there would be an inverse relationship between social class and crime. Harry

