

CRIMINAL MATURITY, PRISON ROLES AND NORMATIVE ALIENATION

Werner Gruninger, Oklahoma State University

INTRODUCTION

Research on the prisoner community suggests two sets of variables to account for the prison inmate contra-culture: 1) the social and criminal *background* an offender brings to the prison; 2) the *situation of prison life* to which the inmate must adapt from the day of admission. Inmate contra-culture is defined in terms of inmate association patterns, their professed values and attitudes, the collective resistance shown to staff-imposed treatment and training programs, and the corruption of custodial authority and control. The result of membership in the contra-culture is *prisonization, which involves increasing hostility to the goals of the institution, a crystalization of criminal values and identity, and alienation from values of law-abiding society.*

The *situation response model* of prisonization asserts that the inmate group serves as a *buffer against the pains of imprisonment*, such as material impoverishment, stigmatization, involuntary celibacy, loss of personal autonomy, and other deprivations of prison life (Clemmer 1959; Sykes 1948; Schrag 1949; Adamek 1968; Giallombardo 1966; Ward, Kassebaum 1965). It appears that variations in prison situations generate variations of inmate orientations to staff goals and patterns of association (Street et al 1966). Others report that the *life history of the offender and his personal characteristics* are the more crucial determinants of inmate orientation (Garabedian 1959; Garrity 1956; Wheeler 1961; Irwin 1970). The importation model is based on the premise that the organization patterns and content of prisoner subculture are a continuation of values and attitudes learned prior to prison, and become more pronounced under conditions of confinement with others of similar social and criminal experience.

Attempts to find the relative magnitude of effects of either of the two sets of variables generally fail, since most studies were based on analysis of a single prison, which does not permit statistical controls for levels of deprivation by type institution. Offender characteristics and situationally determined variables have been confounded in previous studies. It is quite possible that the more

sophisticated offenders may have been sent to harsher and more depriving institutions, while more lenient correctional facilities may have contained more naive first offenders, especially in jurisdictions where a variety of prisons were available for correctional treatment. Two studies analyzing a variety of prisons with adequate controls for levels of deprivation came to opposite conclusions. A study of 15 Scandinavian prisons showed that inmate responses were a function of social relations which prisoners retained with members of the outside community, and the pains of imprisonment had only transitory effects, varying, however, with levels of deprivation (Wheeler 1961). Research on four juvenile institutions showed that levels of deprivation accounted for inmate responses, but the relation between inmate cohesion and antisocial responses were quite different from those found in adult prisons (Street et al 1966). Perhaps the juveniles have not yet developed self-images as criminal offenders and lack the crystalized antisocial attitudes of more sophisticated adult law-breakers.

A study of argot role types showed that inmate role adaptations were based both on the social and criminal history of the offender, and on the expectations of other inmates, based on the offender's prior characteristics (Schrag 1949). Prisoners had license to engage in certain patterns of action, and differences in orientation and attachment were expected. Inmate attitudes were shown to vary both with the individual's social background and degrees of deprivation by security section.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

I will assess the relative importance of the importation model as against the situation-response model of prisonization, based on a sample of 25 prisons in the United States, Mexico, Spain, Germany, and Great Britain. These prisons represent a wide range of custody and treatment prisons with varying levels of deprivation in architecture, administrative goals, classification and diagnostic procedures, inmate employment, education and training programs, security and custody practices, personnel qualification, and permitted

degree of contact with outsiders (Akers et al 1974). Are these relations similar between cultures? Questionnaire data were obtained from 1310 male prisoners, representing a total prison population of 17,114.

HYPOTHETICAL MODEL

Prisonization literature supports the importation model, though the pains of prison may aggravate the antisocial orientation of inmates. The causal model assumes linkages between criminal background and prisoner role adaptations. The role adaptation which a prisoner makes on admission are hypothesized to determine professed attitudes, the imputation of attitudes to other inmates, the observed prison climate, the ways in which the individual is structured into the inmate group, and participation in staff-initiated programs.

This model rests on the assumption of a developmental sequence. An individual is conditioned by life experiences to assume a given role and self conception, and the acting out of that role sets the pattern for prison adaptation. One should expect linkages between background and roles, and between roles and behavior. Various measures of deprivation were expected to modify relations, such that the prisoner's normative alienation becomes more severe under harsh conditions of confinement. If it is true that the prisoner uses the group as a buffer against deprivation, one should find a more cohesive group structure and more resistance to prison programs in custodial prisons. Time factors may also affect these relations. The multiple indicator model shown in Figure 1 contains the hypothesized relations among concepts, indicators, and control variables.

CRIMINAL MATURITY AND INMATE ROLE ADAPTATIONS

The independent conceptual variable, *criminal maturity* was measured in terms of age at first arrest, number of sentences served as a juvenile and as an adult, type of offense, and the minimum sentence handed down by the court. Gamma correlations among these variables are shown in Table 1.

Individuals who had been arrested early in life, before age 18 have a strong chance of being incarcerated many times thereafter, due to longer exposure to incarceration risk,

and because some genuine criminalization seems to occur from association with others in prison which has consequences for post-release adjustment. The released offender immediately joins the pool of police suspects.

There are two offense patterns apparent from the tabulations for basing the gamma correlation values. The probability that the offense is committed against a person or is a sex offense increases with increased age at first arrest, and varies negatively with the number of prior juvenile and adult prison commitments. The reverse is true for property offenders. Career criminals are chiefly engaged in the illegal acquisition of property or money. They were typically arrested for the first time before age 18, and 75 percent indicate having been in juvenile prisons two or more times. A similar proportion indicate having served three or more adult prison terms. These findings are similar to those which have been reported by other criminologists (Schrag 1949; Garabedian 1959; Garrity 1956; Irwin 1970).

Age at first arrest and the number of juvenile and adult sentences served were selected to form an index of criminal maturity types: *professional*, *habitual*, *occasional*, and *novice first offender*. At one extreme, a professional offender is an individual whose crime career started at an early age, with many previous prison terms. At the other extreme is the offender with no previous contact with law-enforcement agencies, and his first arrest leading to the present conviction came relatively late in life. Two intermediate categories were formed. Of the 1310 prisoner respondents, 6 percent were defined as *professionals*, 17 percent were *habitual offenders*, 31 percent were defined as *occasional criminals*, and 46 percent were *naive first offenders*.

The utility of prisoner role types for the study of prison adjustment, parole prediction, and recidivism had been shown in previous research. Here, inmate argot roles were again used as a major variable. With minor modification, the measurement of role type is that used by Garabedian (1959). The method of assigning an image to a role category is markedly different, however, and it yields a greater proportion of inmates who could be typed. Inmates responded to Likert value statements

FIGURE 1: HYPOTHESIZED RELATION OF CONCEPTS, INDICATORS AND CONTROL VARIABLES

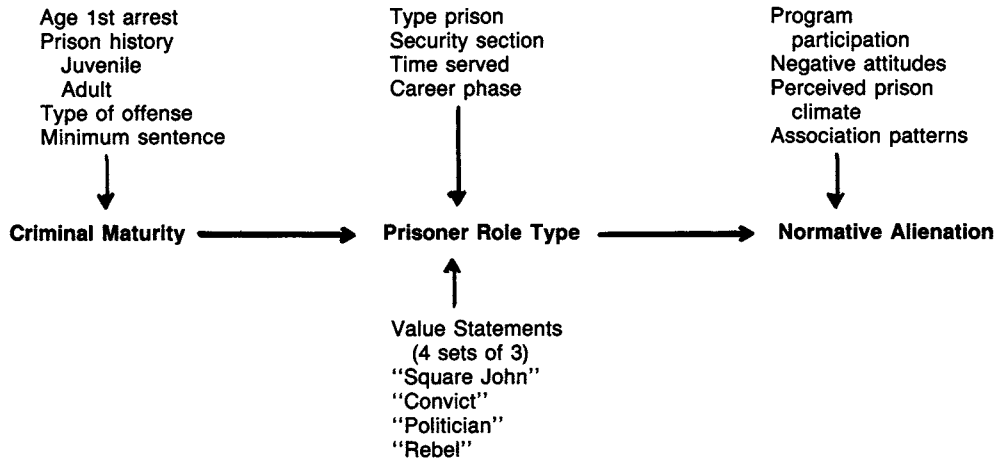


TABLE 1: ASSOCIATION AMONG CRIMINAL MATURITY INDICATORS (Gamma .05 values)

	1	2	3	4
Age 1st arrest	1			
Juvenile sentences	2	.83		
Adult sentences	3	.46	.61	
Type offense	4	-.44	-.38	-.32
Minimum sentence	5	.28		.65

TABLE 2: ANTISOCIAL ROLE ADAPTATION BY CRIMINAL MATURITY LEVEL

Level	Inmates playing antisocial roles			
	Treatment Prisons		Custody Prisons	
	n	%	n	%
Professional	23	91	55	95
Habitual	47	94	96	92
Occasional	93	86	243	86
Novice	96	87	220	76
Total	259	88	614	84
Gamma .05			-.40	

and three measured a different Schrag role type. The set for which the respondent got the highest summed Likert score determined the assigned inmate Schrag role type. In a tie the respondent was defined *pro-social* when at least one of the sets referred to *pro-social* or "Square John" orientations. If both tied sets were antisocial, the prisoner was classed as antisocial. Social role identities were

antisocial. Social role identities were unavailable for Mexican prisoners.

The Schrag role type sequence was not significantly associated with the criminal maturity level sequence. There is no interent order in the Schrag argot role types. There was a significant association between proportion of antisocial role types in the tougher custody prisons, and the criminal maturity levels, as shown in Table 2. There was no significant association in the more lenient treatment prisons. Professional and habitual criminals measured more antisocial than occasional and novice criminals.

The suspected interaction between criminal maturity and the possibility of confinement in differing types of prison is not apparent in this data. Custody and treatment prisons do not differ significantly in the type of inmates they receive. When internal prison security sections are held constant, it is found that various criminal maturity groups are not segregated from each other in the prison. Administrators fail to segregate sophisticated from naive offenders, fostering criminal contamination.

When the amount of time served and the amount of time left to serve are held constant, the relations between criminal maturity and social role adaptations are not significantly changed. Inmates play the same social roles at various time periods of their sentence, lending support, based on cross-sectional data, to the hypothesis that the social role adopted

originates in conditions prior to confinement.

INMATE ROLES & NORMATIVE ALIENATION

The dependent conceptual variable, *normative alienation*, was measured in terms of an *attitude index* where prisoners were asked to give their solution to various hypothetical prison situations, and in terms of a *climate index* that measured the inmate's assessment of the solutions which he expected other prisoners to give in the same situations (Gruninger 1974). In addition, the extent of contact among inmates and inmate-staff contact, leisure time association, leadership patterns and participation in staff-initiated activities were used as indicators of normative alienation from prison administration goals. The rather weak association pattern is indicated by the significant gamma correlations in Table 3. About 40 percent of the prisoners would have solved the hypothetical prison situations in the attitude index in an anti-staff, prisonized manner. At the same time, 75 percent of the inmates held that their fellow inmates would be antistaff in their orientations, as measured by the climate index. This tends to affirm Garabedian's (1959) assertion that collective ignorance attributes more anti-staff climate to the prison than actually exists. While the inmate's own attitudes are independent of the amount of contact with other inmates and prison staff personnel, the inmate's perception is significantly related to the frequency of contact maintained with fellow prisoners. The questions measuring extent of contact with various groups of the prison community show two patterns of inmate association. Most prisoners have high contact with inmates, treatment and custody personnel, while a minority shun all association and remain social isolates. Assessment of association patterns against measures of normative alienation disclosed no significant relations.

There was no significant relation between normative indicators and the four Schrag role types. Collapsed categories of social and antisocial role types yielded one significant association: inmates who play antisocial roles in prison are more likely to solve given prison situations in a prisonized manner. Levels of deprivation do not affect the relations.

TABLE 3: ASSOCIATION OF NORMATIVE ALIENATION INDICATORS

(Gamma .05 values; decimals omitted)

	1	2	3	4	5
Attitude index	1				
Climate index	2	58			
Inmate-guard contact	3				
Treatment contact	4		39		
Inmates contact	5	24	58		
Inmates, leisure	6		-28	-33	

TABLE 4: CRIMINAL MATURITY AND ANTI-STAFF ATTITUDES BY AGE LEVEL

Criminal Maturity Level	Under 25 years		25+ years	
	n	%	n	%
4.1 Hold anti-staff attitude:				
Professional	22	59	58	64
Habitual	72	51	34	49
Occasional	193	53	215	47
Novice	170	29	485	29
Total	457	44	853	38
Gamma .05	.29		.37	

4.2 Perceived anti-staff attitude:				
Professional	22	86	59	85
Habitual	72	76	94	75
Occasional	193	82	215	80
Novice	170	69	485	64
Total	475	76	853	71
Gamma .05	.31			

TABLE 5: PERCEIVED CLIMATE FOR BI-LEVEL MATURITY AND PRISON TYPE

Prison Type	Perceiving anti-staff climate:			
	Professional & Habitual		Occasional & Novice	
	n	%	n	%
Treatment	70	89	274	69
Custody	177	75	789	72
Total	247	79	1063	71
Gamma .05	.47			

Since the attitude index and the climate index are positively related, the presence of an association between social role types and the attitude index, along with a lack of significant association between social role types and the climate index, suggests that the lack of

TABLE 6: CRIMINAL MATURITY AND ATTITUDES HELD & PERCEIVED BY CONFINEMENT TYPE

6.1 Anti-staff Attitude Held

Criminal Maturity Index	Treatment Prisons		Custody Prisons		Minimum Security Sections		Maximum Security Sections	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Professional	23	74	58	59	39	62	42	64
Habitual	47	40	119	54	92	45	74	57
Occasional	102	47	306	51	209	52	199	48
Novice	172	31	483	28	333	35	322	22
Total	344	41	966	40	673	43	637	37
Gamma .05	.34		.35		.20		.48	

6.2 Perceived Anti-Staff Climate

Professional	23	91	58	83	39	85	42	86
Habitual	47	87	119	71	92	74	74	77
Occasional	102	84	306	80	209	79	199	83
Novice	172	60	483	67	333	69	322	62
Total	344	73	966	73	673	74	637	72
Gamma .05	.57		.20		.21		.37	

association may be spurious. There appears a similar inconsistency, assessing relations between criminal maturity and the attitude climate indexes, refuting the hypothesis that greater criminal maturity should mean more prisonized attitudes and perception of greater prisonization of fellow inmates.

When the respondent's present age was held constant, however, the relation of criminal maturity to the attitude and climate indexes are consistent, significant, and in the predicted direction. These relations are weaker for young offenders, and attitude differences are greater than differences among criminal maturity categories in respondents' assessment of prison climate, as shown in Table 4.

EFFECTS OF DEPRIVATION

When the type of prison on the custody-treatment continuum was related to inmate role adaptations, it was found that they do not differ significantly in distribution of social role types nor in criminal maturity levels of the inmates. The impact of levels of deprivation is not confounded with the impact of the offender's criminal history. However, the finding that more than 50 percent of the respondents had served sentence in adult prisons, and 33 percent had served sentence in juvenile institutions still raises the possibility that

prison experience contributes to the role identity and attitudes of the prisoner. Recidivist offenders play a more antisocial role and hold more anti-staff attitudes. Considering type of prison and criminal background jointly demonstrates that the effects of levels of deprivation are insignificant by category of criminal maturity.

Measuring type of prison against attitude index and climate index shows that neither index is related to levels of deprivation. When criminal maturity is controlled, the relations between deprivation levels and attitude indexes remains constant in the partial tables. Table 5 shows that differences occur as a result of criminal background by type of prison.

While levels of deprivation, used as an independent variable, do not affect measures of normative alienation, the type of prison does produce some interaction effects. Deprivation levels, when controlled, create conditional relations and joint effects are apparent. In the more repressive custody prison, criminally mature offenders are more likely to make an antisocial role identification. In contrast, the treatment prison reduces the impact of criminal maturity on role identity. But the least sophisticated offender remains more

pro-social in orientation when housed under harsh conditions. Bettelheim (1943) noted the same effect in Nazi concentration camps. The pains of prison have varied effects on different offender categories.

Maximum security prisons may contain medium and minimum security sections, sometimes outside the main prison walls, while treatment prisons may contain tight security tiers and wings. When the level of security is used as an index of deprivation, the effects are shown in Table 6.

The greatest degree of anti-staff orientation is seen in mature criminals held under repressive custody, while the least anti-staff orientation is seen in first offenders who are also held in the maximum security section of a prison. This finding conflicts with Garabedian, who found that prisoners in custodial wings were more anti-staff in orientation. From the tables, it is evident that lenient situations of imprisonment create slightly more normative alienation than do repressive situations. But the percentage differences are larger between criminal maturity categories than the differences between deprivation levels.

Somewhat different effects are shown for the climate index. Controlling type of prison, the relation between criminal maturity and the climate index becomes stronger in lenient prisons. Controlling the deprivation measure, the relation between criminal background and perceived climate becomes weaker in lenient situations. Theoretically, it should become weaker in the lenient condition of deprivation, since the attitude index and the climate index are positively related ($\Gamma_{.05} = .58$). Hence the changes in relationship introduced by an added variable should be similar in direction. In Table 6, both parts, show that the effect of deprivation is to create a polarization of sophisticated and naive offenders under conditions of increased pains of imprisonment. This polarization is less severe in lenient prison situations. The finding is consistent with other information suggesting that the pains of prison create changes in role identity in naive offenders, who are more often classed as "convicts" in the treatment prison, with more integration into the contraculture while they would have played the "square-John" role more often in the tough prison situation.

DISCUSSION

Inmate adjustment for naive offenders is opposite to that hypothesized in the situation-response model of prisonization, while it holds true for mature offenders. For both, prior life experiences are more important determinants of role adaptation and normative alienation than are levels of deprivation.

There is a selective factor that recidivates offenders. Among first offenders, 29 percent are anti-staff, which increases to 50 percent by third return to prison, and 63 percent by fifth return. When time served or time left to serve is held constant, the relations are stable, indicating that the present imprisonment has no immediate effect on alienation. There is a similar trend regarding prison climate.

The pains of prison have varied effects on inmate groups. Normative alienation rises with increased deprivation for mature offenders, but decreases for naive offenders. On the whole, importation factors appear more crucial in creating role identity and normative alienation than do deprivation levels.

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