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A study of eleven adolescent boys who presented behavior problems to the management of the Alonzo F. Herndon Homes Housing Project in Atlanta, Georgia

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A STUDY OF ELEVEN ADOLESCENT BOYS WHO PRESENTED BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ALONZO F. HERNON HOMES HOUSING PROJECT IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

MARIAN VICTORIA SCOTT

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JUNE 1945
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From a strictly sociological standpoint, adolescence begins with the first struggle of the child to organize his life for himself, to emancipate himself from adult control, and ends when he has completed such organization and is capable of formulating and following his own program and philosophy.¹

Adolescents in our society present many behavior problems and conflicts. These difficulties are not prevalent in all societies but depend upon the mores of the social group in which the individual finds himself. In the Samoan society, the growing child is faced by a smaller dilemma than that which confronts the child in the American society.² This is because the Samoan society is not as complex as the American society.

The writer will describe, in the following chapters, some of the behavior problems which were evidenced among eleven adolescent boys in the Herndon Homes Housing Project in Atlanta, Georgia. The factors that contributed to these problems, and the possible methods of dealing with them will be discussed.

Purpose

It is hoped that the information concerning the background and difficulties of the boys studied here will help to develop a better understanding and insight into ways of working more effectively with other boys presenting similar problems. These particular boys were studied because the

²Margaret Mead, Coming of Age in Samoa (New York, 1939), p. 269
manager of the Herndon Homes felt that they were adversely influencing the behavior of other boys in the project.

Method of Collecting Data

Material for the study was secured largely through personal interviews. These interviews were held with the boys themselves, with their parents, school teachers, neighbors, other boys in the project, and with the management. School records were also examined.

The schools visited in making this study were: Washington High School, David Street School, and Gray Street School.

Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to eleven boys who were residents of the project. The boys included those between eleven and seventeen years of age who presented behavior problems which had come to the attention of the management.

The writer was aware of an antagonistic attitude of residents of the project toward anyone representing authority. It is hoped that the information gathered was valid in spite of this handicap.

Because of their attitude, many of the parents gave the information asked for, in a routine, uninterested fashion. It may be attributed to the fact that the housing authorities have continually interviewed the tenants relative to the project. Thus, the tenants have come to associate questioning with living in the project.
CHAPTER II

THE ALONZO F. HERNDON HOMES

The Alonzo F. Herndon Homes in Atlanta, Georgia were built in 1941 by the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration, and are now supervised by the Atlanta Housing Authority. This was the fifth low-cost housing project to be completed under the slum clearance program in Atlanta.

This area, replacing a slum section, includes 520 modern dwelling units and covers 22 acres. The project is located in the northwest section of the city.

The dwelling units are in fifty-four modern fireproof buildings and consist of two, three, four and a half, and five and a half room units, the size of the unit depending on the number in the family. Each unit has hot and cold running water, a gas stove, an automatic gas water heater, electric lights, an electric refrigerator, and a gas radiant circulator which furnishes heat. There are double sinks in the kitchens and built-in cubboards and cabinets. The bedrooms have large built-in closets. Most of the dwellings have a front and back yard which give residents the opportunity to raise flowers, grow vegetables or to have a lawn.

The Alonzo F. Herndon Homes were named for Mr. Alonzo Franklin Herndon who was born in Walton County, Ga. in 1858. He later came to Atlanta where he opened a barber shop which became Atlanta's and the South's finest barber shop. In 1905 he founded the Atlanta Mutual Insurance Association which has grown over the years and has developed into the present Atlanta Life Insurance Company, one of the largest and strongest insurance companies in the world today.

Mr. Herndon was a pioneer Negro business man and rebuilt one of Atlanta's worst slum areas into a business district, which is now the pride of Negro Atlanta. He was a man of great understanding and was a friend to all. It is indeed fitting that this community of 520 units equipped with all modern conveniences, should bear the name of
this man with such a great vision.1

The neighborhood in which this project is located is bound on the east by the Inman Yards which are the workshop and dumping grounds for the railroad companies. On the north, south and west this project is surrounded by delapidated houses, quite a few of which are rooming houses. Beer parlors and small grocery stores are also in this area.

The recreational and community facilities of this project include a large recreation hall, a library, a playground and seven community porches. Social activities of all clubs and organizations are held in the recreation hall and a kitchen is provided for those who wish to use it. A kindergarten is also carried on in the recreation hall. The library, which is a new addition to the project, is still in its growing stage and has many books which the tenants may read during their leisure time. For the children, there is a large playground which is furnished with swings, sliding boards and other equipment. One spray pool has been installed for the children's use during the summer months. The larger boys use this ground to play football, baseball, basketball and other games. The seven community porches are used by the tenants for resting and chatting. Children also use these porches to play under when it is raining.

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1Quoted from the Alonzo F. Herndon Homes Pamphlet which was written by the management, 1941.
CHAPTER III

PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY THE BOYS

It is hoped that the problems presented in this chapter will give a further insight as to the causes of the delinquent behavior of the boys. In order to further understand the behavior problems of these boys, it is necessary to know if they had any health difficulties, how they spent their time, whether in school, at work or at play, and what values they placed on each activity.

Ages of the Boys

The ages of the boys studied ranged from eleven to seventeen. One boy was eleven years old, two boys were twelve years old, three boys were fourteen years old, four boys were sixteen years old, and one boy was seventeen years old.

Health Problems

No physical examinations were given so the reports on health came from the boys themselves. The boys, as a whole, reported good health. None of the boys reported having had a physical examination within the last five years. However, one boy admitted having had a venereal disease for which he had received treatment. Several other boys may have had a venereal disease but did not admit it in personal interviews. In talking to the group as a "gang" on the playground, the following conversation took place:

John: "Lady, did Ed tell you about the time he had to go to 11 Hunter Street?" Ed denied this at first but then began telling about the rest of the boys.

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111 Hunter Street is the address given to the Atlanta City Health Dept. No. 1, which is the venereal disease clinic on the northwest side of the city.
"Lady, almost every boy standing here has had a V. D. They ain't going to tell you, but they had it too." This boy pointed out one boy in the group who in his opinion, hadn't had the disease and the rest of the boys agreed with him.¹

One boy reported that he had been stabbed. Another said he had been hit by a car, thrown out of a swing, and hit on the head with an axe. However, he did not feel that these accidents had affected his behavior.

Mental retardation and physical handicaps may make the child particularly susceptible to delinquency.² The child who is mentally retarded and who is unable to compete with other children of his own age, may readily yield to harmful influences. The child whose physical handicap prevents him from participating in the activities with other children or makes him conspicuous among them may find his satisfactions through undesirable behavior or delinquent acts. He seeks in these delinquent acts compensation for the unfavorable competition in which he is constantly engaged.

It has been shown that children who feel inferior are much more likely to become delinquents than those who believe they have status and prestige. A feeling of inferiority frequently results in motivations which impel the child to associate with delinquents in order to attain status.³

Psychoanalysts have found that the child passes through various stages of sex satisfaction and that the adolescent develops into a normal person only if these stages of sex satisfaction develop in a normal manner.

¹Interview with boys on the playground of Herndon Homes, March 7, 1945.
The love and sex life of man goes through a number of distinguishable phases. The earliest phase is short lived, comes in early infancy, and is characterized by pure bodily pleasure. A second phase centers around parental attachments. In later childhood the wider range of activity usually causes a weakening of parental love ties, resulting in a relatively non-sexual period. Finally, in adolescence and adulthood, sexual attachments are normally made to unrelated persons of the opposite sex. Environment and training are the most important determinants of sexual development and it is probable that the maturing of the sex glands in adolescence plays an important part in the final stage. The earlier stages are the result of growth and learning, are primarily psychological in nature, and are not a definite and predestined series of steps decreed by original nature.¹

**Education**

The Georgia law provides for compulsory attendance in school until the age of fourteen. A fourteen year old boy was the only one in the study enrolled in school. He had an average scholastic record and presented no behavior problems in school. The reports from teachers and the school records of the other boys who were not in school showed that they were average pupils scholastically and presented no behavior problems other than truancy while enrolled in school. The reason given most often by the teachers for the truancy of the boys was "we just couldn't keep them here" or "they just wouldn't come".

Two boys were in a state training school for boys for stealing, but

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were previously enrolled in elementary school. Their teachers were inter-
viewed about two weeks after the boys were in trouble. "These boys never
gave us any trouble" commented one teacher. One principal, who was
especially interested in one of the boys, an eleven year old, gave the
following report:

Alvin is a bright child in the wrong way. He came to our
school at the age of six and he was bad then. He went to the third
grade and hasn't been back since. He was nine years old when he
left. We have done everything we could to keep him in school, but
we just haven't succeeded. He has a bad family history. His mother
died when he was a baby and his father was an invalid. We tried to
get his sisters and brothers to move him away from home then, be-
cause we knew he wouldn't be taken care of, but they were not
interested and still aren't. They treated the father like a dog
and he died when Alvin was about five or six years old. Alvin now
lives with his sister who lives an immoral life. Their house is
always untidy and so is Alvin. His clothes are too big for him and
always dirty. He runs around with a boy who lives outside the
project and the two of them know more about life than any grown
person. They lie and steal anything they get their hands on and
are always in trouble. Alvin is not afraid of anyone. We have
tried to work with him and give him something to do in school, but
he just won't stay.1

The general opinion of the teachers was that there was lack of co-
operation between the parents and the school. Most of the parents were
working and did not know whether their children were in school or not.
Some would not discipline their children and would not allow the school
authorities to do so. The school was overcrowded and had an inadequate
teaching staff, in addition.

There was only one visiting teacher for the entire colored system in
Atlanta, and it was impossible for the visiting teacher to see that all
children were in school.

1This is the report of Mrs. Green, the principal at Gray Street School.
This school is located in the project and Mrs. Green has been principal for
16 years.
The parents, for the most part, reported that they just couldn't get their boys to remain in school and believed that the age limit for compulsory attendance should be raised.

One parent interviewed did not know that her child was not in school. The following report illustrates this:

Thomas has tried and tried to stay out of school but everytime I catch him, I take him back. The first of the year his teacher sent me a couple of notes, but I never received them. Then she sent me a letter through the mail that he was not in school. I took him to school and talked with his teacher, gave her some stamps and asked her to let me know if he stayed out again. She promised to do this and since then, I haven't heard from her. I know everything is all right and that he must be getting along fine.1

This mother went to work early in the morning and did not know that her boy was not in school. School reports showed that the boy had attended school only one day in 1945.

The proprietor of a grocery store in the neighborhood of the Gray Street School thought that the school was partly at fault regarding the behavior of the boys. He reported that the teachers were using the boys to do their errands during the school hours and that the boys got out in the street and had no desire to go back. Many of the teachers, he said, sent the boys out to look for meat and other scarce articles that might be sold out when school was over. They were sent out to buy drinks for the teachers' lunches.

Because it receives the child at a relatively early age, the school is in a strategic position to influence his development and adjustment for later life.2 It is the school's responsibility to pass on to the child

1Report from the parent herself.

the traditions and customs of society, to teach him to think clearly and independently and to equip him with skills by which he may later earn a living through useful work. The school plays a significant role in helping the child learn how to get along with other people and to accept obligations that come with living as a part of the group. In order to fulfill these responsibilities, the school needs to understand not only his intellectual needs, but his emotional and social needs as well, and to adjust its program to meet them. In pointing out the chief elements conducive to delinquency, A. S. Jenson says, “when the three R’s fail to interest the child, he tends to satisfy his needs elsewhere”. Therefore, the teacher should use skill in promoting the activities and program of the pupils so that they may get enjoyment out of them. The lack of adequate recreational facilities is a great problem in the school and often causes the child to play truant and seek recreation on the outside. Too much or too little discipline in the school has a bad effect on the child and usually results in rebellion. Social and racial stratifications fostered in the home may come to a head when the children meet in school.

In many ways the conventional school thwarts the pupil’s needs and is a destructive influence, whereas it should be an integrating and adjusting one. The first symptoms of a large number of maladjustments are shown in school situations. Included in these are the pupil’s failure to learn to the extent of his ability, special subject difficulties, day-dreaming, unruly behavior, refusal to cooperate, cheating and truancy. Even behavior problems such as bullying and stealing which may occur outside of the school, are often influenced by educational maladjustments. The school is seldom the sole cause of these conduct problems, but may be a contributing factor in many. Often teachers shirk their responsibility and blame other forces for the maladjustments of children.


The project has caused the community to be 100 percent better in the opinion of the Gray Street School principal. Having taught at this school for 16 years, she has seen tremendous growth in the social conditions of the community. The aim of the teaching process has been to get things done in the home through the influence of the children. Many children come to school dirty and the teachers encourage them to take baths by telling them they will both feel better and sleep well if they are clean when they go to bed. They encourage them to try this and, on the next morning, ask for a report on how they feel. The next morning the teachers compliment them and tell them how much better they look. Many times children continue to stay clean and thus set an example for the rest of the family to follow. This is one of the ways of influencing the home through the child, used by the teachers at the schools, the principal explained.

Employment

Of the eleven boys studied, only two had regular jobs and these were part time. One boy made $5.00 per week caddying at a country club. The other made $15.00 per week as a bartender at a hotel. The other nine were not employed. Included in this number were the two boys who were in the state training school. The parents of all of the boys said that they tried to make them get jobs. On the other hand, however, most of the parents gave the boys spending money. The boys, on being interviewed either singly or in a group, said that they just didn't like to work. When asked in their group, how they obtained their money, they answered that they gambled, stole, and pawned stolen goods.
Recreation

Among the most important aspects of the life of young people are their social relationships. Adolescence is the time when the urge to "belong" is often paramount.¹

The management of the project reported that the boys had been encouraged to participate in the recreational activities which the project offers.

Gangs.— Each of the boys identified himself with a gang. However not all belonged to the same gang. One boy belonged to an organized club.

The gang is an "interstitial"² group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness and attachment to a local territory.³

The gang has a profound effect on the life of the adolescent boy. Once he participates in its activities, he is almost predestined to become a member of it. Voluntarily or involuntarily, he identifies himself with its members and acquires their knowledge and techniques through participation in the gang's activities.

The gang age according to Puffer⁴ ranges from ten to sixteen, though one will find both younger and older boys in gangs. The exact functional delimitation of the gang is difficult at present, for many

¹J. H. Atwood, Thus Be Their Destiny (Washington, D. C., 1941) p. 45.

²"Interstitial" refers to the areas which intervene between the "more settled, more stable and better organized" portions of the community. They are usually along railroad tracks, canals, waterfronts and in disintegrating neighborhoods like the slums in which the gangs find their beginning.


⁴J. A. Puffer, The Boy and His Gang (Boston 1912).
gangs operate athletic clubs composed of the boys themselves, while others, in contrast, tend to criminal purposes.\footnote{Kimball Young, Social Psychology (New York, 1936), p. 277.}

In the adolescent years, the quest for new experience is potent and it is the gang that provides the desired escape from, or compensation for, monotony. The adolescent boy finds in the gang stimulating activities such as games and gambling, seeing thrillers in the movies, rough house activities, exploration, sports, imaginative play, and roaming and roving. Participation in the ordinary pleasures becomes boresome to the individual who has experienced the life of the gang for it is in the gang that his quest for new experience is answered.

The Movies and The Dime Novel.— The favorite movies of the boys in this study were cowboy, detective and comedy features. In the present era, the movies have almost completely outstepped the dime novel which was once so popular among the adolescent boys. The whole gang can see the movie together. They do not have to be bothered with reading when they can see things on the screen.

According to Thrasher, in a study made of 1,313 gangs in Chicago, the gang boy's favorite scene is the "hair-raising" scene which makes him rise out of his seat.\footnote{F. M. Thrasher, op. cit., p. 359.} Movies of the "wild west" type featuring cowboys were the second choice. Other preferences involved fighting, shooting, racing and war. Pictures of the slap-stick, pie throwing type were also preferred.

The extent to which movies and reading of comic and detective stories affect gang behavior is believed to be great. Criminologists are inclined
to regard them as possible sources of delinquent and anti-social behavior. Movies provide heroes for the gang boy. Many of the exploits of the gangs seem to be imitations of scenes in movies.

Again and again boys caught in delinquencies have made the explanation, "It looked so easy in the movies, and we thought we could get away with it, too." These stories come from such distant places and in such different connections that one is justified in believing that some of them are true. A gang of boys in Urbana, Illinois, made that explanation when finally captured after a long series of burglaries, auto thefts, holdups, and pilferings.¹

Playgrounds of the Gang.— Ball games were a favorite past-time of the boys. They reported engaging almost daily in football, baseball, softball, and basketball. None of these activities were supervised and the boys expressed their desire to have organized teams. Six boys wanted to have dances in the recreation hall but said they weren't allowed to do so.

Most of the boys reported that they spent their evenings loafing on the corner, meddling with girls, gambling and stealing. Six boys said they attended public dances. When not in the street, they declared, they either went to the home of one of the boys when his parents were out, or went home and read "funny books".

The playgrounds of the gang are areas where gang boys find unusual opportunities for amusement and adventure, not offered in their home territory.² The most popular gang playgrounds are street corners, alleys, junk yards, side streets, railroad tracks, amusement parks, and lakes.

²F. M. Thrasher, op. cit., p. 132.
These are the places where they meet to discuss new enterprises, to gamble, drink, have meetings and play games. A most important and degrading playground is the junk yard. It is here that the boys learn many of their criminal techniques. They begin by selling junk which has been thrown away. The junkmen encourage these sales and the boys continue until they find themselves actually stealing. From the alleys, they go to empty houses and railroads, begin robbing cars and engaging in holdups. Many gangs eventually acquire a special technique for securing and disposing of their loot and develop into mature criminals.¹

Not all gangs are criminal in nature. Some direct their activities to athletics and other group enterprises. Thrasher² gives us an example of a "righteous" gang. These were five boys who insisted on certain ideals of conduct. They were enthusiastic about the idea of doing right and established the rule that anyone caught using profanity would get kicked by the rest of the gang. They were interested in building their bodies so that they could live a long time and went out for everything that would improve their health. They engaged in a variety of athletics and did not smoke.

Status in the Gang.— As in other groups, there is a struggle for status in the gang. There is a striving for leadership. It is usually the leader of the gang who determines the road which the group will take. Antagonism exists toward outsiders and there is a code of honor. The gang defines the codes for its members in the initiation of newcomers and

¹Ibid., p. 149.

²Ibid., p. 359.
pledges or probationers. In some cases the gang forms about the leader while, in others, he emerges as a result of interaction. In either case, the leader plays an important role in the gang as in any other group. The gang ordinarily will get the approval of the leader before attempting a new enterprise. As long as he presents the boys with patterns of behavior agreeable to them, he is able to hold his prestige.

Besides leadership, there are struggles for status in the gang which evolve from participation in the group. Every gang usually has its "goat". He is a boy usually considered uncommonly "dumb" and he may be subnormal as measured by psychological tests. He can usually be depended upon to get caught if anybody does. Every boy has his place in the gang. A boy who does not have the qualities of geniality and physical forces to give him pre-eminence, may become the brains of the gang because he is imaginative. A very undesirable status in the gang is that of a "sissy", a rating which may carry with it a girl's nickname and may arise through effeminate traits, unwillingness to fight, or too much interest in books.

The nature, number, and variety of specialized roles, which in their inter-relationships constitute the action pattern of the gang, must depend to a large extent upon the nature and complexity of the activities and enterprises undertaken.

The Treatment of the Gang and Its Members.— The public has been called upon to recognize the need for a more systematic and fundamental attack upon the prevention of crime in the United States. In order to succeed in such a program, there needs to be a clearer understanding of the basic causes of delinquency.
There is no panacea for the prevention of gangs and the treatment of their members. Since the gang is fundamentally a symptom of community disorganization, it is to be attacked from many angles, and it is to be prevented by the improvement of the functioning of a variety of social groups and institutions as well as by a more comprehensive program of social planning.¹

Mandel Sherman has felt that the most effective method of treating delinquents would be a combination of psychiatric and social therapy.² Concurrently with psychiatric treatment parents should be advised on methods of supervision and discipline. If possible, a change of environment to one in which different social standards exist is suggested. Socially acceptable motivations should be introduced into the child's life and he should be encouraged to develop relationships and take part in activities which will give him a satisfying status and a feeling of accomplishment.

Neighborhood

Although the boys spent some of their time on the playground, they spent much of it on the street corners in the neighborhood of the project. There they were exposed to the influences of gambling, fighting, drunkenness, profanity, and the like.

The neighborhood has a strong effect on adolescents. The physically undesirable condition of an area is a potent force in producing dissatisfaction and cravings which are abnormal. In general, the deterioration of buildings and property makes for disrespect of such values as may be left. Such physical conditions as filth, ugliness and lack of harmony

¹Ibid., p. 571.
²Mandel Sherman, op. cit., p. 347.
and balance in the physical surroundings may be conducive to the craving for satisfaction from sources capable of arousing vivid emotional states.¹

In Clifford R. Shaw's report on the causes of crime, he found that it is in areas nearest business districts that delinquency rates are the highest.² These areas are usually inhabited by poor families who have rundown homes and inadequate recreational, health and school facilities. In such areas, behavior problems of adolescents are prevalent and tend toward serious delinquency problems. In these areas, where there are demoralizing influences of low grade pool halls and taverns, gambling "joints" and cheap dance halls, adolescents can succumb to the ideas of "easy money" through shady enterprises.

The economic insecurity of the families, the high rate of movement of the population, the different cultural backgrounds of the groups and the failure of the families to recognize their common interests hamper the development of the community spirit or neighborhood organization to control the children or check lawlessness. Without this control, crime and delinquency gain a foothold as a traditional part of the social life of these areas.³

¹A. S. Jensen, op. cit., p. 435.
Belinquent Behavior of the Boys

The activities discussed here were occurrences within the last year. Each boy, at one time or another, has participated in at least one of these delinquencies. It is difficult to determine, accurately, the participation of each boy.

Neighbors.--

In the months of February and March, the boys broke the windows of a neighborhood grocery store on two occasions. On one occasion, they cut the proprietor's car tires. On many occasions they gathered in front of his store and "shot crap" and engaged in other gambling games. They used profanity in the presence of his wife and, when he attempted to call the police, ran away.

One boy came into the same grocery store in February with a pistol after several of them had created a disturbance in front of the proprietor's door, and dared him to call the police. The proprietor attempted to call the police and the boy ran. The police went to the boy's home and his mother tried to shield him by saying he was out of town. The police made a search of the home and found the boy but did not find the gun. They gave this boy another chance and did not take him into custody. The boy's behavior has not improved.

Another boy included in this study was caught breaking the windows at this same grocery store. When taken into the custody of the police, he told on the rest of the boys and told so many things, that they released him for submitting evidence. This boy has committed several offenses since then.

Testimony of One of the Boys Studied.--

This boy, age 16, said that he served on the chain gang for three months on charges of lottery. During the period of this study, he was in jail for two days on charges of disorderly conduct.

Management.--

When club meetings were held in the recreation hall, in the project, the doors had to be kept locked, for these boys gathered around the door and windows and used all sorts of profanity and threw stones.

In the month of March, the boys broke into a parked truck while the juke box collector was in a store. They stole about forty pounds
of pennies and divided the money.

One of the boys studied, was recently shot in the eye by another boy in the project on a dare. The boy was taken to the hospital and his eye had to be removed. No charges were made against the boy who did the shooting and they both are still friends.

The two twelve year old boys who are now in a training school for boys, were involved in a theft of about $923.00 from a furniture store. They were picked up when the police became suspicious of a new bicycle on which one of them was riding. When questioned, it was found that several offenses had been committed. The mother of one of these boys said she didn't know anything about the theft until told by the police. The mother of the other boy admitted having known of the theft and had even spent some of the money.

(This was told to the writer by one of the mothers of the boys.)

Summary

In this chapter it was found that the ages of the boys studied ranged from eleven to seventeen years. Although none of them had had a physical examination within five years, they reported "good health". It was indicated that a few of the boys had had a venereal disease. Only one boy in the study was in school and the rest dropped out of their own accord. The parents and teachers expressed their desire for the boys to stay in school. The majority of the boys were not employed but they gambled and stole to secure their money. The boys spent much of their free time loafing on street corners in the presence of demoralizing and degrading influences. They liked sports and movies and engaged in sports regularly. The sports were unsupervised and the boys expressed their desire to have organized teams. They spent their evenings loafing, gambling and stealing. They have committed several delinquencies.
CHAPTER IV

THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF THE BOYS PRESENTING BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Since the basis of much delinquency lies in family situations, it is important to give a background of the families of the boys studied here in order to find possible clues as to the causative factors in their behavior.

Family Composition

Of the ten families studied, six had both parents in the home. One of these homes included a step-mother.

In two homes, the parents were dead, and, in each of these, the boy was living with his sister. In one of these homes the sister was single; in the other, she was married. In neither of these two homes did the sister exert any parental influence over the boy. In one home the parents were separated and the boy living with his father. In another home the unmarried mother was the only parent. In three of the ten homes, the boys studied were only children. In all cases except one the boy studied was the oldest child.

Educational Status of the Parents

The parents in these ten homes were, for the most part, poorly educated. In many instances, when asked about their education, the parents said that they had gone to a country school and didn't get any further

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Because there were two boys studied in one family, only ten families were studied.
than the fourth grade or so. In nine homes the parents had an elementary school education. In only one home did the parents have a high school education. In each home, however, the parents expressed their desire for their boys to continue their schooling although, for various reasons, they had not done so themselves.

Economic Status of Parents

In three homes both parents were working. In six homes only the father was working. In one home the mother was working. This was the home of the unmarried mother.

As this study was made in the housing project, none owned their homes. It is significant to note that only one family was looking forward to buying its own home in the future. This was the home in which the parents had a high school education.

All of the parents said that their income was adequate.

Health of the Families

The families, as a whole, reported good health. One boy studied, had bronchial pneumonia at the age of three months but his mother did not feel that it had affected his behavior. The other families reported that their children had only the common diseases of childhood. There were no serious parental illnesses reported.

Church Affiliations

None of the families studied were active members of any church. However, in four families, church was attended regularly, while in six families it was attended occasionally or not at all.
Recreational Habits

For the most part, the parents of these boys engaged in few recreational activities either inside or outside of the home. They most often explained that they were tired when they came home from work and just didn't care to do anything. None of them belonged to any clubs in the project nor did they encourage their children to do so. Newspapers and radios were found in every home except one.

The basis of much delinquency lies in family situations, for the family, as the primary social unit, is the matrix of earliest and closest relationships which set the imprint for the future.¹ The specific reactions of the individual are due, primarily, to influences arising out of formative experiences or conditionings in early life. It is in the family that the child's habits of thinking and feeling are developed. Also, it is in the family that the child first develops the notions and attitudes of becoming independent. "The attitudes which the parents take toward this process of emancipation and maturation are of profound significance for the changes which are taking place within the personality of the adolescent."² No child is so rigidly fixed at birth that it will inevitably become delinquent or lawabiding.

Obedience in the home depends largely upon the prestige of the parents, and this is affected not only by the consistency of the demands made by them upon the child but also by their status in the community. The poverty, the physical features, the competitive ability and com-

¹Healy and Bronner, New Light on Delinquency and Its Treatment (New Haven, 1937), p. 25.

²E. S. Conklin, Principles of Adolescent Psychology (New York, 1936), p. 246
parative attainments, the language, the social status of the parents in comparison with other persons with whom the child is acquainted, may destroy the prestige of the parents and give the child a conception that he is able to determine his own behavior better than the parents. Consequently, it is very difficult in modern life to secure the obedience of a child even in homes which are above the average.\footnote{Edwin H. Sutherland, \textit{Principles of Criminology} (New York, 1939), p. 154.}
CHAPTER V

ATTITUDES TOWARD BEHAVIOR OF THE BOYS

The attitudes toward and ways of dealing with the boys' behavior play a great part in determining the reactions of the boys.

Parents

For the most part, the fathers of these boys were not interviewed. Therefore, the attitudes presented here are those of the mothers.

In two families the parents did not try to control their boys at all. They assumed a "don't care" attitude. Remarks were made such as "I don't try to do nothing with him" and "he is big enough to take care of himself".

The other parents recognized the fact that their boys presented problems but were unsuccessful in coping with them. These parents reported trying all methods ranging from talking with the boys to administering corporal punishment. Most of the parents believed that their boys were being influenced by outside forces. One parent said that men living on the outside must be giving the boys their delinquent ideas because the boys could never think of such things themselves. Another believed that the other boys in the project caused her boy to be bad.

The parents believed that school attendance was the school's responsibility.

All of the parents expressed the desire for more organized recreational activities for their boys. All of them wanted their boys to obtain jobs.
In two families, the parents seemed very much interested in their boys but, as was characteristic of each home studied, the parents could not control them.

Boys

The boys themselves did not seem to recognize that their behavior was a serious problem. They were satisfied with the way in which they were living and were not concerned with what might happen to them in the future. They did not have any particular plans for the future.

Only one boy showed evidence that he was disturbed about his behavior. In an interview he stated:

I have done so many wrong things that I hardly have a place to stay. I've been on the chain gang for three months, I've been stabbed in a fight, and I'm always in trouble. My father is about to put me out. I'm going to look for a job today so that I can stay out of so much trouble.¹

All of the boys said they liked the project. A few of them disliked the manager, "because he is always calling the police to us."

Neighbors

Mr. G. at the neighborhood grocery store, who had been the focus of much delinquent behavior, said that none of the boys were really "bad" and that they could be saved if taken out of their environment now. He believed that more organized recreational activity would help them find themselves. Some of the causes of their behavior, he believed, were in their family situations. He said: "The parents are so busy running around that

¹ Interview with boy studied on March 7, 1945.
they do not have time to know what their boys are doing.¹ Many of the parents resented others interfering with their children, in his opinion. He also believed that the school in which this neighborhood is located, was at fault because it did not give the boys things to do that would keep them there. This feeling about the school's responsibility also prevailed among the manager and other neighbors.

Management

The management felt that the parents were not encouraging their boys to take part in all available recreational facilities offered by the project. The management took an optimistic attitude towards the boys and reported that it was interested in these boys. From time to time, lectures are given to the parents by the management as to how to bring up their children and all parents are encouraged to attend. Individual work is done with the parents through visits.

Many of those interviewed took an interest in the boys. None, however, have assumed the responsibility of helping to solve their problems, and each thrust the blame on the other. The boys themselves were not aware of the seriousness of their behavior and were satisfied with living as they were.

¹Interview with Mr. Green, proprietor of the neighborhood grocery store.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It may be said, on the basis of the data collected in this study, that the following factors contributed to the behavior problems of the boys studied:

1. Although there was interest and concern on the part of the parents for their boys, there was evidenced a definite lack of control in the home. This might have been due to the parents' employment, which kept them out of the home most of the day, or to their lack of education.

2. The influences of the neighborhood in which the project was located were demoralizing, and the boys spent much of their time socializing in that neighborhood.

3. While it was doing a great deal to meet the social needs of the children in the project, the management did not have sufficient organized recreational activities to meet the needs of these particular boys. This might have been due to the lack of sufficient funds to provide all of the needed recreational facilities in the project.

4. Because these boys were not sufficiently encouraged either to seek employment or to stay in school, they had more leisure time than they could use constructively and they were easily influenced to commit delinquent acts which they had seen committed outside of the project.

5. Because of the crowded school conditions and double sessions and the lack of sufficient recreational and teaching facilities, the boys left school and were in the streets unsupervised.

From these findings the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents should be educated as to ways of dealing more effectively with their children. This may be done by the management of the project
through lectures, movies and the distribution of literature.

2. Better understanding and relationships between the parents and the teachers should be promoted. This can be done through joint meetings and activities in parent-teacher groups. In these groups, consideration should be given to types of activity that meet youth's needs for adventure and dramatic action which they crave for at this age.

3. The boys should be encouraged to make the best of their educational and employment opportunities. This may be done through club and interest groups. A responsible person on the staff of the project should seek to gain the confidence of the boys, and in this way, have them form into clubs that will be both interesting and wholesome to them.
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