An analytical study of the relationship between substance abuse, delinquent behavior and the mediating effect of self-esteem among African-American male adolescents

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AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
SUBSTANCE ABUSE, DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR AND THE
MEDIATING EFFECT OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG
AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE ADOLESCENTS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
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ABSTRACT

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AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBSTANCE ABUSE, DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR AND THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE ADOLESCENTS

Advisor: Dr. Jerome Schiele
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This research study examined (1) the relationship between substance abuse and delinquency among African-American male adolescents and (2) self-esteem as a mediator of the relationship between substance abuse and delinquency among African-American male adolescents. Data from 30 African-American, state committed male adolescents were used in the study. A two part questionnaire was administered to examine the aforementioned variables by utilizing a cross-sectional survey design. The theoretical orientation used in this study was based on the cognitive-ecological theory. Results indicated no relationship between substance abuse and delinquency among African-American male adolescents. Importantly, the positive, moderate relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse suggests that greater attention to this relationship is needed. Implications of social work practice, at the micro and macro levels, were discussed.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Historically, the study of adolescent problems and disorders has
involved independent questions into specific problems such as delinquent
behavior, substance use and abuse.\footnote{Robert Winslow, \textit{The Emergence of Deviant Minorities} (Consensus
Publishers, Inc., 1972), 203.} Prior research indicates that many
variables correlate with delinquency, and that many factors tend to
increase the risk of subsequent delinquent behavior. In fact,
researchers have not yet been able to discriminate well between causal
and other factors. Nor have they been able to delineate which
constellations of causes are most crucial in explaining delinquency.
Indeed, it is not easy to determine causality for most human behavior,
especially in the natural environment where, in contrast to the
laboratory, controls are not easy to achieve.\footnote{David Huizinga, Rolf Loeber and Terence Thornberry,
"Longitudinal Study of Delinquency, Drug Use, Sexual Activity, and
Pregnancy Among Children and Youth in Three Cities." \textit{Public Health
Reports}, 90.}

Although there is not a necessary relationship (by definition)
between the delinquency typology and use of alcohol, marijuana, or other
illicit drugs, there is a clear, monotonic relationship between
delinquency type and use rates of alcohol, marijuana, and multiple
illicit drugs.\footnote{D.S. Elliot, D. Huizinga and S. Menard, \textit{Multiple Problem Youth: Delinquency, Substance Use and Mental Health Problems} (Springer-Verlag, New York, Inc., 1989), 56.} Questions about the relationship between drug use and
other criminal activity have stimulated considerable research.\footnote{D. Huizinga, R. Loeber and T. Thornberry, "Longitudinal Study of
Delinquency, Drug Use, Sexual Activity, and Pregnancy Among Children and
Youth in Three Cities," 93.} The
involvement with illegal drugs is most prominent among disadvantaged
Inner-city youths, in particular young males. Inner cities have little to offer in terms of economic opportunities for young people. Illegal drug use may be a way to escape the strains of the severe urban conditions and dealing illegal drugs may be one of the few, if not the only way to provide for material needs. Among contemporary explanations of crime and delinquency, few have been more enduring than those which propose a relationship between substance abuse and crime. Another possibility is that drug abuse and delinquency reflect common social developmental processes or a more general deviant lifestyle.

Self-esteem could be one component of the prevailing problem of substance use and delinquent behavior. Self-esteem has not been given enough attention in the literature on the relationship between substance use and delinquent behavior. Self-esteem may have a mediating effect on the relationship between substance use and delinquent behavior and thus may provide needed data to help better understand this relationship. Because of this, a study is needed to examine the relationship between substance abuse and delinquent behavior with self-esteem controlled.

**PURPOSE AND RATIONALE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between substance abuse and criminal behavior and to also take a look at the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between substance abuse and criminal behavior among African-American male youth. This study will explore the scope and magnitude of the problem. It is

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anticipated that the information presented will broaden the analytical views of helping professionals that have frequent contact with our delinquent youth. Substance abuse among African-American male youth has a detrimental effect on themselves, as well as society. In order to be successful as a Social Worker, one needs to show compassion, sensitivity, empathy, and awareness of the underlying cause of this social problem. With this in mind, it is important for Social Workers to be aware of the prevalence of substance abuse among these youths, and what factors facilitate this existing problem.

This research study will not only attempt to make social workers become better aware of the aforementioned social problem, it will empower social workers to sensitively understand the different causes that may be displayed in this delinquent behavior. It is anticipated that the information presented will broaden the analytical views of helping professionals that have frequent contact with our delinquent youth. With this knowledge, appropriate interventions can be implemented with this population.

Social workers can skillfully implement programs that will not only provide services to individual youth, but will provide services to an entire community. These types of services will give family members empowerment to participate and hopefully make a positive, controlled change that will be beneficial to African-American male adolescents. These implications can be utilized by parents, youth, educators and social workers. This will grant the aforementioned people, the ability to plan, facilitate and provide education and interactions for African-American male adolescents.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

The empirical research on the connection between drug use and delinquency is surprisingly devoid of studies that examine possible common antecedents of drug use and delinquency. According to the common cause model, both drug use and delinquency may be the effect of an underlying condition(s). Some factor, whether biological, personal, or social, may lead an adolescent to use drugs and to engage in delinquent acts. Illustrative of this is aggressiveness that reflects both anger and impulsivity—components that can be implicated in acting-out behaviors. As noted by Robins and Wish (1977), drug use and delinquency may be part of a single syndrome that reflects a clinical condition that, in turn, is evidence of an underlying conduct disorder, presumably one that began before the delinquency or the drug use did (Robins, 1966, 1978).

Another possibility is that drug use and delinquency reflect common social developmental processes or a more general deviant lifestyle. Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that aggression is a significant factor for later drug use. Two possibilities are (a) that aggressiveness is a common cause of drug use and delinquency and has a direct impact on both, and (b) that aggressiveness is an underlying cause either of delinquency (through the intermediary of drug use) or of drug use (through the intermediary of delinquency). Therefore, in the present study, the authors examined the hypothesis that aggression contributes to the development of drug use and

delinquency in one of these two ways. This hypothesis was derived mainly from the work of Robins (1978).2

Drug use and general delinquency are relatively persistent behaviors, once initiated, with an average of more than 4 years of activity after initiation. With the exception of alcohol use, a substantial proportion (25%-95%) of those who initiate delinquent behavior apparently terminate that behavior (or at least suspend it for some time) prior to the end of adolescence. For the delinquency, drug use, the most likely transitions from one year to another are those in which individuals in a given category will either remain in that category or move to an adjacent category. In the latter case, movement to an adjacent category, the more frequent a pattern is to move toward less involvement in delinquency rather than more. In general these results suggest the existence of a developmental progression in which less serious involvement in delinquency and drug use is usually prerequisite to more serious involvement. In other words, changes in behavior appear to be gradual, rather than abrupt.3

One of the most replicated findings in the longitudinal delinquency and drug literature is that early aggressive behavior predicts later delinquency and drug use. In the Woodlawn study, males who were rated aggressive in first grade by their teachers were more likely to use substances and be delinquent as adolescents; those who were rated as shy were less likely to use substances and to be delinquent.4


It is not uncommon that the rate of delinquent activities increases when serious addiction takes place. Studies of drug addiction in adults have demonstrated that narcotic addicts experienced sharp increases in their criminal behavior during periods of active addiction compared to periods of nonaddiction (Nurco et. al. 1985). Nurco and his co-workers (1988) also showed that the sharp increases in delinquency, during periods of addiction, were mostly observed in individuals previously involved in a low-crime lifestyle, but were not as apparent in addicts who already had a history of serious crimes.5

It is important to recognize that in the present study the initiation of drug-related behaviors did not always result in the persistence of these behaviors. The findings showed that boys' illegal drug use were relatively transient behaviors with more than half of the boys discontinuing, at least temporarily, these behaviors in the period following initiation of the behavior. Similar trends were found by Kandel and Faust (1975) who found that regression from higher to lower levels of illegal drug use over short periods of time were quite common in their sample of high school students and high school graduates. If we could know why some youngsters only briefly get involved in serious types of problem behaviors for longer periods of time, intervention and prevention programs would be able to focus on the high-risk youth.6

Research examining the relationship between the lifestyle and substance abuse among African-American adolescents is lacking. Crawford, Washington, and Senay (1980) examined the relationship between substance abuse and life-styles among African-American adults. They found heavy users and addicts were more involved in deviant life-styles such as criminal behavior. These results are somewhat limited as their


6 Ibid.
sample consisted of adults only, grouped respondents based on their heroin use, and examined only one life-style behavior.7

In summary, the research literature suggests that adolescent life-style behaviors are associated with alcohol and substance abuse. School attendance and church involvement have been found to be negatively associated with alcohol and substance use. Delinquent behaviors are associated with more alcohol and substance abuse among adolescents. Work status has been found to be related to marijuana use but not to alcohol consumption. These studies, however, have examined life-style variables in isolation. Univariate approaches may not fully capture the complex nature of life-style patterns. An alternative, more integrative approach is to examine several behaviors simultaneously which together constitute an individual's overall life-style. In addition, previous studies have typically explored life-style variables among predominantly white samples. Multivariate approaches and research on African-American youth are lacking.8

Recent studies continue to find an association between delinquency and substance use, though the strength and symmetry of the relationship vary according to sampling and measurement strategies. The behaviors often occur jointly, but there is little consensus on whether they are explained by unique factors or are the result of common correlates and social processes. General adolescent samples yield too few serious juvenile offenders for valid assessment of the drug-crime relationship. Moreover, these youths often are concentrated in urban social areas, possibly confounding influences from urbanism and urban socialization.9


8 Ibid.

Recent epidemiological studies show that the majority of adolescents experiment with alcohol and marijuana by the time they graduate from high school, and nearly one-third experiment with cocaine (Johnston et. al. 1987). Similarly, most adolescents engage in some type of minor delinquent behavior other than drug use, such as petty larceny, theft of services, or minor assaults (fights). For example, Elliott and Huizinga (1984) report that 47.8% of youths ages fifteen to twenty-one were involved in delinquent behaviors in 1980, while Fagan, Piper and Moore (1986) found that 58.6% on inner-city males ages thirteen to eighteen were similarly involved.10

Drug use is related to other criminal activities; the type of drug involvement was related to the type of crimes reported. The heaviest users were significantly more likely than nonusers to commit property crimes. Adolescents who used drugs were the most likely to commit crimes against persons and property, and at the greatest rate. Still, for every type of crime reported in the past year, only a minority of offenders reported ever using drugs while committing the crime or said that they committed any type of crime in order to obtain drugs or money to obtain drugs. Most youths appear to commit crime for reasons completely independent of drugs."11

Overall, research findings support the conclusion that no single cause accounts for all episodes of delinquency, and no single pathway or set of life experiences leads to a life of crime. To date, however, different developmental pathways that lead to delinquency nor the factors that start or maintain someone on one of these paths have not been clearly identified. It appears that at these adolescent ages, most


drug users are delinquent, but there are many delinquents who are not using drugs.12

There is no firm evidence of a causal relationship between drug use and crime. The general conclusion reached by a number of researchers is that deviant behaviors such as drug use and criminal offenses occur within the context of a general deviance syndrome (Osgood, Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman 1988; Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985; Jessor, Chase, and Donovan 1980; Kaplan, Martin, Johnston, and Robbins 1986; Akers 1984). Those likely to engage in one form of deviant behavior (i.e. crime) are also likely to engage in other forms of deviant behavior (i.e., drug use).13

Another explanation for the correlation between drug use and crime, particularly property crime, is the economic motivation due to the high cost of illicit drugs. The relationship must also be considered in the context of the pharmacological properties of the drug. For example, there is virtually no research indicating that cannabis use leads to crime for economic gain. Likewise alcohol, because of its legality and low cost, also does not lead to crime for economic gain. But there is evidence that opiate use leads to crime for economic gain. (There is also some evidence that cocaine use leads to crime for economic gain.) Research shows that narcotic addicts greatly increase their level of criminal offending during periods of elevated narcotic use (Nurco et. al. 1988; Anglin and Speckart 1988). McGlothlin (1978) has shown that income from property crime escalates with increasing narcotic use. Research further indicates that nonproperty crime does


not vary with levels of narcotic use, suggesting that the relationship between narcotic use and crime is attributable to economic motivations."

The rate of delinquency among Black youth has increased from 19.6% of all juvenile arrests in 1960 to 21.4% in 1979; thus 456,638 or approximately 15% of all Black adolescents in the 15-19 age group were arrested in 1979 (Uniform Crime Reports, 1981). Another perspective on Black youth crime rates is provided by the National Youth Survey, a longitudinal study of self-reported delinquency and substance abuse among a probability sample of 11-17 year olds in the United States. Data collected from 1976-1983 indicates that Black youth reported a slightly higher rate of general delinquency, index offenses and felony offenses than White youth, but few of these offense differences were consistent or statistically significant across age sub-groups and over the seven-year period. Despite official statistics which indicate that Black youth are disproportionately represented among violent and high frequency offenders. Huizinga and Elliott (1985) analyzed the N.Y.S. data for 1976-1980 and found no statistically significant racial differences in high rate offenders except for one year (1976). These researchers conclude:

Overall, these findings suggest that there are few if any substantial and consistent differences between the delinquency involvement of different racial groups. This finding is not unique. Other large scale self-report studies of delinquency have reached similar conclusions (Gold & Reimer, 1975; Elliot & Voss, 1974; Williams & Gold, 1972; Bachman et. al., 1971, 1978). As a result, it does not appear that differences in delinquent behavior can provide an explanation for the observed race differential in incarceration rates."

Official arrest data, which show the number of arrests in a given year, provide one measure, albeit imprecise, of the size of the


"Reginald Jones, Black Adolescents (Berkeley, California: Cobb and Henry Publishers, 1989), 5-6."
"criminal population" (Tillman, 1987; Visher & Roth, 1986). In 1989, for example, there were more than 1.8 million felony and misdemeanor adult arrests reported in California (Criminal Justice Profile, 1989). These arrest data, however, do not indicate how many different individuals may have been arrested more than once. Moreover, because official arrest records merely correspond to specific arrest events, they do not indicate the number of times that any single member of the population was arrested within a given year. In other words, the arrest data upon which law enforcement authorities, researchers, and the public generally rely on to understand the extent of crime does not directly provide information on the prevalence of arrest, that is, how many people are arrested at least once in a given time period; and the rate of arrest, that is, how often any single individual is arrested (Tillman, 1987).15

Furthermore, arrests cannot be used as a single, direct measure reflecting the size of criminal populations. The failure of victims to report crimes, the failure of the police to apprehend a suspect for a reported crime, and the multiple charges often specified at arrest prevent a simple interpretation of arrest data. Because the probability of an arrest is predicated not only on the commission of a crime but also on other factors, such as the likelihood of reporting, police policy, and so on, the criminal justice system captures only a segment of the criminal population in any given time period (Blumstein, Sagasi, & Wolfgang, 1973; Greene & Stollmack, 1981). Being able to estimate the size of the total, including the "hidden," criminal population is important for policy planning and for designing more effective interventions (Hser, Anglin, Wickens, Brecht, & Homer, 1991).17


17 Ibid.
SELF-ESTEEM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO SUBSTANCE
ABUSE AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

Self-esteem refers to how one evaluates the self. An individual's self-esteem refers to the numerous judgements he/she makes regarding the degree to which his/her perceived attributes, behavior predispositions, and specific behaviors approximate desirable qualities or values such as beauty, utility, goodness, industriousness, and altruism. The qualities or values are "desirable" in the sense that approximation to the value tends to evoke positive sanctions (rewards) and deviation from the value tends to evoke negative sanctions (punishment). Thus an individual who is judged to be honest, industrious, efficient, or good looking compared to a person who is judged to be dishonest, less than industrious, inefficient, or not as good looking is more likely to receive expressions of approval, less likely to be shunned, more likely to be offered positions of responsibility, more likely to be invited into the company of others, and, in general, more likely to evoke behaviors defined as rewarding by his social group. To the extent that the individual accepts as his own the group's values, he will tend to apply positive and negative sanctions to himself depending upon the degree to which he perceives himself as approximating the desirable and deviating from the undesirable qualities. Generally, these sanctioning behaviors will take the form of self-approving and disapproving responses."

Core self-esteem of minority adolescents generally is about as high as that of whites. Rationale: Primary group relations support the notion of an "intact, and worthwhile self." Among ethnic minorities, core selves are "insulated" from the effects of institutional racism. Public self-esteem generally is lower for racial minority adolescents.


"Howard Kaplan, Self-Attitudes and Deviant Behavior (Goodyear Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), 28."
than for whites. Rationale: Since self-confidence and efficacy are farther from the core, insulation is more difficult, and the negative effect of institutional racism is greater.

Much research has demonstrated that personal self-esteem among African-Americans is not lower than it is among whites. Middle-class African-Americans have higher personal self-esteem than lower income groups. The Social Evaluation Paradigm of Personal Self-Esteem theory maintains that human beings learn about themselves by comparing themselves to others. A consonant racial context will cause African-Americans to utilize their own community for social comparisons and is protective of personal self-esteem. Alternatively, a dissonant racial context will cause poor personal self image.

The lower class black community has been characterized by social and family disorganization with consequent negative effects on self-image, however, a contrasting paradigm views the black community not as a deficient or pathological environment but as an alternative culture, containing its own distinctive institutions and family forms. It suggests that individuals in this culture are actively socialized into a positive, supportive tradition. Although this model also exists in the sociological literature, the major proponents of this paradigm of personal self-esteem have been African-American psychologists, who have criticized white psychologists for ignoring the black experience and interpreting it in the context of white norms and culture (Porter & Washington 1979, 1989).

Relative to persons with more positive self-attitudes, persons with negative self-attitudes are more likely to be predisposed to adopt

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22 Ibid.
drug-abuse patterns, particularly under conditions where they become aware of the opportunity to adopt the patterns and anticipate self-enhancing consequences of adopting the patterns. It should be emphasized, however, that this expectation is predicated upon the assumption that the drug-abuse patterns are defined as deviant by the persons' membership group(s). If the drug-abuse patterns of behavior are not defined as deviant, quite a different relationship between self-attitudes and the adoption of drug-abuse response patterns is to be expected. In order to highlight this difference, drug-abuse patterns as deviant responses and as normatively appropriate responses to self-attitudes will be considered in turn.  

Self-concept and self-esteem measures have consistently been associated with adolescent use and abuse of substances. The popularity of these variables in empirical studies and their routine inclusion in drug education and treatment programs leads one to assume that the parameters of this construct are well understood. Theories of individual development assume that identity formation involves creation and maintenance of self-esteem. The hypothesis that people seek out experiences that sustain this self-identity and reject experiences that create cognitive dissonance is known as consistency theory (Lecky 1969). The belief that experiences are interpreted in a fixed direction, according to the ingrained attitudes that shape self-esteem, led theorists to assert that changes in self-esteem are difficult to achieve (Combs and Snygg 1959; and Sullivan 1953). In contrast, Samuels (1977) stated that the human organism naturally strives for self-esteem or a sense of pride in oneself. Samuels advised that the major task of teachers, therapists, and others who work with low-esteem adolescents is

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to help them to overcome the negative self-labeling habits and provide for the substitution of positive, self-enhancing messages.24

The self-referenced level of esteem has been related to degree of involvement in adolescent drug use. Bentler (1987) found that a high level of self-esteem was associated with inhibited use of cannabis in early and late adolescence. The results of other studies support the relationship between high self-esteem and lower levels of drug and alcohol use. A similar study examined the psychological dimensions of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem and found that higher levels of depression and anxiety and lower self-esteem related to positive attitudes toward drugs and increased willingness to take drugs.25

A persistent theory is that youth take drugs because they feel bad, and keep taking drugs because drugs mitigate those negative feelings -- various personality traits are, therefore, seen as the primary cause of drug use -- most often low self-esteem, depression or anxiety. Drug using youth seem to corroborate part of this theory. We find that at least one third of young drug users say they may take a drug when they are depressed, when they are anxious, or when they are uncomfortable in a social situation.26

Bell (1981) and Hill (1972) have noted that low self-esteem, social anxiety, and diminished sense of social efficacy are especially likely to characterize blacks in our society. Among black delinquents who use drugs, these characteristics are perhaps even more pronounced. Therefore, drug treatment programs, if they are to serve the black drug user's needs appropriately and effectively, must address these issues.


25 Ibid.

Unfortunately, past programs have tended to import aspects of alcoholics anonymous programs, some of which may be counterproductive for black adolescents. For example, the black delinquent who is likely to be involved in a struggle against low self-esteem and the stereotype of incompetence and inefficacy as ascribed to him in our society, may find it especially objectionable to admit to powerlessness as the AA program prescribes.27

One of the more popular and enduring beliefs in the health behavior literature is that self-esteem (SE) is causally linked to drug use. Poor SE has become an accepted explanation for the use of illicit drugs, and as a result, increasing SE has become an important goal of many drug education programs and curricula. Despite widespread acceptance of SE as a cause of drug use, the research literature does not support such a claim.28

Although a causal connection between SE and drug use might make intuitive sense, a critical review of the many methodologically and statistically flawed studies, as well as a number of properly-conducted ones, calls this causal relationship into question. First, researchers in the area do not share common constitutive or operational definitions of either SE or drug abuse. Without intersubjective agreement about definitions, it is very difficult to compare the results across studies. Even if researchers could agree upon common definitions of SE and drug abuse, research designs used to investigate the relationship necessarily would be correlational in nature, given the practical and ethical

27 Mary Jackson, "Drug Use Patterns Among Black Male Juvenile Delinquents." (Department of Social Work, Cleveland State University, 1988): 69.

difficulties associated with manipulating SE, making any inferences about causality questionable."^9

Studies of deviance traditionally have placed an emphasis on the deviant person and the deviant act (Liazos, 1972). However, social scientists have become increasingly interested in the process by which an individual is labeled deviant. This labeling process is the result of a transaction between a social group and an individual viewed by this group as a rule breaker. Acts do not become deviant until reacted to by agents of social control. Agents such as the police or the courts central concern within the structure of the juvenile court are the decisions made by the juvenile probation officers and the juvenile court judges. Therefore, this study is designed to further understanding of the behavior of the juvenile probation officer.\(^{10}\)

If such agent of social control will be making decisions regarding the future of youth, it is necessary to study this person for several reasons. When individuals or institutions in the community respond negatively to a youth's behavior, the youth may come to define his or her behavior and then himself or herself negatively. Tradition defines a youth in terms of his or her acts. Thus, a juvenile who is found to have committed delinquent acts is declared by the court to be a juvenile delinquent. As the youth's present behavior is labeled negatively, his or her previous behavior is reviewed and may be redefined negatively too. Through this process, the youth may accept the delinquent label and adopt a delinquent career.\(^{11}\)

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^11 Ibid.
Say It Straight (SIS) training is a school-based program which has been used since 1982 to give students the opportunity to learn straightforward communication skills and achieve positive peer support, thereby enhancing their self-esteem. The effectiveness of this training in reducing substance abuse has already been reported. In these studies, significantly fewer alcohol/drug-related school suspensions and/or referrals (not including self-referrals) were found among trained as compared to untrained 6th-8th graders. Strikingly, there was not a single alcohol/drug-related school suspension during an entire school year in one middle school where an almost totally trained milieu was attained in the first month of the 1983-84 school year. These studies also reported that trained 5th-8th graders showed a significant shift in behavioral intentions that reflected a greater willingness to make constructive decisions in difficult situations, and feel comfortable doing so. Such a shift was not observed in a control school where students received standard information-centered substance abuse prevention curriculum. This study demonstrated the long-range effectiveness of SAY IT STRAIGHT training as a school-based prevention program, applicable to a wide variety of destructive behaviors outside the school environment.32

Research has shown that global self-esteem is correlated with juvenile delinquency, academic performance, and psychological depression. In summarizing the research on the relationship between self-esteem and delinquency, Wells and Rankin (1983, p.13) concluded that these studies "demonstrate a consistent association between evaluative social experiences, self-evaluation, and a variety of delinquent behaviors." Kaplan’s literature review (Kaplan 1975, pp.79-

1983) also identified and described studies that showed an inverse relationship between self-esteem and delinquency. 89

Jessor and Jessor (1977) have suggested that drug and alcohol use and delinquent behavior constitute a "problem behavior syndrome" in adolescence. They maintain that these adolescent behaviors are preceded by a concurrence of psychological, environmental, and behavioral factors that facilitate and predispose the individual toward these behaviors. One explanation for why problem behaviors co-occur is that one behavior may be a stepping stone to another, and that participation in these behaviors follow a sequential pattern. 4

Disorganized or age stratified communities, along with school, seem to act as arenas where children are sifted and sorted into different groups -- some delinquent and some conformist. Consequently, this sorting process eventually accumulates in the creation of a delinquent subculture. Delinquent groups tend to be loosely structured, characterized more by the pursuit of immature, transient and vaguely formulated values than by subcultural traditions that make delinquent behavior inevitable, specialized and mandatory. The greater the identification with delinquent peers, the greater the delinquent behavior. 89

In assessing the psychological effects of drugs on adolescent developmental progression, it is clear that cognition is extremely vulnerable. The attainment of skills and the mastery of new material, so important to the individual's self-esteem and academic progress, will be frustrated by the use of drugs. Moreover, a drug that impairs


thought processes, integrating ability, and judgment and discrimination will compromise the critical transition from concrete to formal operations. A falling off in academic performance is an objective measure of the drug's effect. The acquisition of new information is impaired, as is the type of learning that requires abstract reasoning. Thus, academic achievement that requires anything beyond rote learning is hindered. Academic incapacity, in turn, leads to lowered self-esteem.36

Abstract reasoning is enabling one to weigh alternatives, to think in reversible terms, and to make judgments. This plays an essential role in the restructuring of the superego and the generating of an independently determined value system. Failure to develop a workable value system can lead to serious social conflicts and dislocations.37

The process of separation from parents, with development of a new ego ideal and a new sense of identity, necessitates substitution of other attachments and affiliations. The youngster whose drug use leads to socially inappropriate behaviors has difficulty in developing and maintaining friendships. This inability to form meaningful new attachments may result in self-absorption and isolation, and may delay or altogether restrict the development of a stable sense of identity.38

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research literature suggests that delinquent behavior is associated with substance abuse. This study supports the belief that drug use and delinquency may be part of a single syndrome that reflects a clinical condition, that, in turn, is evidence of an underlying

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
conduct disorder, presumable one that began before the delinquency or the drug use did. In stating this, more than one theory may exist.

The theoretical perspective that will be the root of this study is grounded in the cognitive learning theory by Albert Bandura. He believed that children mentally encode a model’s behavior as they watch it, but they will not imitate behavior they have observed unless they believe that it will have a positive outcome for them. He says that children discern which behaviors are appropriate for each sex by watching the behavior of many male and female models. They notice which kinds of behavior of many male and female models. They notice which kinds of behavior are performed by which sex in which kinds of situations. In turn, they employ these abstractions of sex-appropriate behavior as "models" for their own imitative actions. But not everything learned is performed. For example, although boys may know how to wear a dress and apply makeup, few boys actually choose to perform those behaviors. Rather, they are most likely to perform those behaviors that they have coded as appropriate to their own gender. Consequently, the responses children select from their behavioral repertoires depend chiefly on the consequences they anticipate will follow from the behaviors (Perry & Bussey, 1979).

Bower and Nurius look at the cognitive learning theory from the cognitive-ecological model. This model views individuals as active construers of meaning: we pick and choose the cues in our environment, we put these cues together to make sense of situations, and then we respond to situations based on our understanding of them. Individuals extract and retain information because it is useful. We store this knowledge in the form of schemas, which are cognitive representations of events, objects, and concepts. Schemas allow us to interpret events, and respond to them based on past experiences. We take these

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experiences and obtain psychological and emotional meaning from them, that is sometimes accurate and sometimes inaccurate.40

In recognizing the dependent variable (delinquent behavior), one must remember that the cognitive learning theory includes the belief that, before ever engaging in behaviors, an individual first must develop an understanding of who they are and what their world-environment is like. According to the hypothesis that is guiding this study, delinquent adolescents have constructed a negative view of themselves and view their environment as one that is difficult to cope with. The adolescent environment includes institutions such as schools, churches, family units, and other social arenas. It is being proposed that adolescent delinquency is being caused by a lack of appreciation and/or understanding of individual self worth. It is presumed that delinquent adolescents base their actions among one or both of the following beliefs:

1. They believe that they can exhibit delinquent behavior and not have to suffer negative consequences.
2. They know what they are doing is wrong yet they portray a noncaring attitude because they do not value themselves or hold an accurate portrayal of their environment.

Knowing that substance abuse (I.V.), begins in the adolescent years, it is likely to have a strong relationship to delinquency among African-American male adolescents. Based on the previously mentioned theory, the hypothesis of this study proposes that African-American adolescent males exhibit delinquent behavior while under the influence of some illegal substance. In looking at how the independent variable (substance abuse) is related to the dependent variable (delinquency), one must again consider the cognitive learning theory. This theory believes that, once an adolescent engulfs a negative view of themself, 

they are more at risk of being substance abusers. These adolescents may take this corrupting path in order to cope with home/environmental problems. These adolescents view their partaking in substance abuse as the most appropriate outlet to use. This outlet may be viewed as appropriate due to what they see emulated in the home or in the environment. In other words, an individual's behavior can be explained by the meaning and the existing belief system derived from their experiences.

The control variable being used to mediate between the dependent variable (delinquency) and independent variable (substance abuse) is self-esteem. When trying to understand substance abuse and delinquent behavior among African-American male adolescents, it is important that self-esteem is included as a factor because, according to the cognitive learning theory, many times the way one feels or views themself can be manifested in their behavior. The cognitive learning theory’s based explanation used to understand why self-esteem may have a mediating effect among substance abuse and delinquent behavior, is the presumption that different levels of self-esteem may bring about various behaviors. For instance, it can be presumed that those individuals who exhibit adequate levels of self-esteem are less likely to engage in substance abuse which may then decrease their chances of resorting to delinquency. The presumption that individual involvement in substance abuse/use has an influence on delinquent behavior, is compatible with the cognitive learning theory by believing that self-esteem will then decrease. To better examine the relationship between substance abuse and delinquent behavior, self-esteem will be used.

Based on the previous literature review, conceptual framework, and general purpose of this study, the research hypotheses are presented below.
STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

1. There will be a significant relationship between substance abuse and delinquent behavior among African-American male adolescents.

2. Self-esteem will significantly mediate the relationship between substance abuse and delinquent behavior among African-American male adolescents.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODODOLOGY

This study examines the relationship between substance abuse, delinquent behavior, and the mediating effect of self-esteem among African-American male adolescents.

DESIGN AND SAMPLE

In this study, two modes of observation were used to collect data. Survey research was the group interview format used to measure the independent variable (substance abuse) and the control variable (self-esteem). According to Grinnell, survey research is a systematic way of collecting data by obtaining opinions or answers from selected respondents who represent the population of interest. Document analysis, from case records, was used to measure the dependent variable (delinquent behavior).

The instruments in the questionnaire packet were administered by the researcher. Prior to administering the questionnaire, the researcher introduced him/herself and informed the potential participants that the purpose of the research was to obtain information on adolescent drug use and the role self-esteem may play in their behavior. It was also announced that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw their consent any time throughout the interview. Additionally, they were informed that all information obtained will be kept confidential and will be destroyed three months after the termination of the study.

The researcher read the questionnaires aloud to the participants; and recorded their responses. In some cases, participants felt comfortable in completing the questionnaire independently. 

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researcher was available to clarify any questions or concerns the participants may have had.

Most of the interviews took approximately 20 minutes to complete, depending upon the respondents level of understanding. The interviews were divided into six groups of five which were administered in the conference room at The Fulton Multi-Service Center in East Point, Georgia. During the interviews, there were few interruptions.

The population was a convenient sample taken from a setting that provides services to delinquent adolescents. The setting included, but was not limited to, several classrooms, a recreational room, a cafeteria, and a conference room. All of the participants were committed to the state and were required to report to the aforementioned center daily. The goals of the program were to provide an alternative educational plan, group counseling and structure to these adolescents.

Eligible participants were African-American male adolescents who have had a history of theft by taking offenses. These adolescents were between the ages of 13 and 18.

MEASUREMENTS

The instruments used in this study were (1) a standardized, close-ended questionnaire and (2) client case records. The questionnaire was used to measure the variables substance abuse and self-esteem. The client case records were used to unobtrusively measure the frequency of the delinquent act - theft by receiving.

The questionnaire packet consisted of two parts: Part one consisted of the Juvenile Automated Substance Abuse Evaluation Scale (JASAE). This is a standardized rating scale which consisted of 10 short true/false statements to be completed by the eligible youth in order to assess their involvement with illegal controlled substances. This scale operationally defines substance abuse by the extent to which a youth's thoughts and/or behaviors are affected by the number of times
and past history of the ingestion and/or injection of a controlled substance. The scores ranged between 10 and 20, with the high scores suggesting a relatively greater need for more intense interventions to bring about required behavior change. The reliability coefficient for the scale with the sample was .90.

Part two consisted of the Hudson’s Index of Self-Esteem Scale. This is an ordinal summated scale which consisted of 10 short statements to also be completed by eligible youth to assess the degree to which a youth feels good about theirself by measuring the magnitude of their self confidence. The scores ranged between 29 and 70, with high scores reflecting high self-esteem. The reliability coefficient for the scale with the sample was .82.

Due to the fact that all of the eligible youths are delinquent, the researcher chose to measure the delinquency dimension theft by receiving (TBR). Theft by receiving was operationalized as anytime a youth receives, disposes of, or retains stolen property which the youth knows or should know was stolen unless the property is received, disposed of, or retained with the intent to restore it to the owner. The researcher measured TBR by counting the number of times a youth was picked up, by the police, for committing the offense TBR.

For both scales, empirical evidence was not found for construct validity. Construct validity for the substance abuse and self-esteem sales was determined by examining the direction of the zero-order correlation coefficients between the 2 variables and delinquency. It was hypothesized that the directions of the relationship would be positive, but the results showed a negative relationship.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this research study, descriptive statistics, Pearson’s r and partial correlation were used to analyze the study variables.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>DELINQUENCY</td>
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<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELINQUENCY</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF-ESTEEM</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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</table>

* = 1 missing person
Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

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<th></th>
<th>Substance Abuse</th>
<th>Self Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Correlation</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 depicts descriptive statistics to demonstrate the scores, frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations of the study variables. Substance abuse had a mean score of 16.8 and a standard deviation of 3.3. Delinquency - theft by receiving offenses - had a mean score of 2.4 and a standard deviation of 1.6. Self-esteem had a mean score of 56.8 and a standard deviation of 10.5.

For substance abuse, out of the 30 youths, 10% had a score of 10, 10% had a score of 19, 3.3% had scores ranging between 11 and 13, 6.7% had scores ranging between 14 and 16, 26.7% had a score of 18 and 26.7% had a score of 20. The higher scores indicated less substance abuse involvement. For delinquency - theft by receiving offense - scores, out of the 30 youths, 40% committed the offense once, 20% committed the offense 2 and 3 times, and 6.7% committed the offense 4 to 6 times.

Self-esteem scores were categorized into low, moderate and high levels, indicating the higher the score the higher the self-esteem. For low levels of self-esteem, 23.9% had scores ranging between 29 and 50. For moderate levels of self-esteem, 37.7% had scores ranging between 52 and 59. For high levels of self-esteem, 37.7% had scores ranging
between 61 and 70. Thus, out of the 29 youths, 75% of the respondents had moderate to high levels of self-esteem.

Table 2 depicts bivariate statistics to demonstrate correlations among the study variables. The alpha level used to reject or accept the study hypotheses was .05. The research hypotheses presumed that: (1) there will be a significant relationship between substance abuse and delinquent behavior among African-American male adolescents; and (2) self-esteem will significantly mediate the relationship between substance abuse and delinquent behavior among African-American male adolescents. Based on the bivariate analysis between substance abuse and delinquency, hypothesis 1 was rejected. The results indicated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between the two variables; in fact, the relationship was very weak, if any relationship at all.

Due to the low negligible relationship between substance abuse and delinquency, the partial correlation between delinquency and substance abuse with self-esteem controlled was also weak. Self-esteem could not have had a mediating effect on delinquency and substance abuse due to the low correlation between delinquency and substance abuse. The weak relationship among the three variables indicated that there was no statistical significance. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was rejected.

The findings also indicated that there was a moderate, positive and statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and substance abuse. This positive relationship indicated that the higher the self-esteem scores, the higher the substance abuse scores. Yet, because of the way the researcher scored substance abuse, the higher the score, in essence, did not mean that there was an increase in substance abuse. In other words, as the researcher anticipated, but was not hypothesized, the way one feels about themself has a significant influence on their involvement with illegal controlled substances. Boys with higher self-esteem, tend to be enticed with illegal substances
less. In conclusion, the outcome of the research study was not statistically significant leaving the researcher to reject both of the study hypotheses.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POTENTIAL FINDINGS

The rate of delinquency and substance abuse among African-American male adolescents has been increasing dramatically. There are serious concerns about the impact substance abuse may have on youths' behavior. The research study revealed 3 major findings: 1) The delinquency of African-American male adolescents had no relationship with substance abuse; 2) The self-esteem level of African-American male adolescents did not mediate the relationship between substance abuse and delinquency; and 3) The higher the self-esteem of African-American male adolescents, the less likely they will be involved with illegal controlled substances. These findings must be considered within the context of this study's limitations; the primary one being that the study utilized a small nonprobability sample.

Partly, the finding regarding the relationship between substance abuse and delinquency (finding 1) can be explained by the finding indicating that almost 63.4% of respondents stated that they were not substance abusers. This means that there was a lack of variance on substance abuse which could have affected the low and non significant relationship between substance abuse and delinquency. Since substance abuse was a poor predictor for delinquency, more attention may have needed to be given to the type of drugs used and/or the circumstances that may play a role in promoting such delinquent behavior. The researcher's scales may have also altered these results. The scales may have needed to be more culturally sensitive to the population. Social desirability and biased responses among the respondents may have had an influence on the non significant relationship between substance abuse and delinquency. Social desirability may have been a factor simply because so many of the respondents stated, in their questionnaire, that they were not substance abusers. Also, the respondents appeared
paranoid and non trusting of the anonymity that was clearly stated by the researcher and the cover letter.

Finding 1 was inconsistent with most other investigators. Past literature continues to find an association between delinquency and substance abuse, though the strength and symmetry of the relationship vary according to sampling and measurement strategies. Recent studies have reported that drug users were significantly more likely to commit delinquent acts than non-drug users. According to the literature review, substance abuse among African-American adolescents is useful in determining delinquency.

As it relates to practice, with this in mind, social workers should develop culturally sensitive scales that will focus on or better reflect the African-American culture. Yet, often in practice, kids exhibit dishonesty about their substance abuse and delinquency due to unconformity and/or non-trust issues. Social work practitioners need to further address the connection emphasized between delinquency and substance abuse, especially as they bear on both risk and avoidance of adolescent male delinquency in disadvantaged African-American communities.

As the research study concerns finding 2, the main reasoning for the non-mediating effect of self-esteem was due to the fact that substance abuse and delinquency had no relationship; therefore, self-esteem could not have been a mediating factor. In fact, no factor in this study would have mediated the relationship between delinquency and substance abuse. The finding was inconsistent with other investigators. Contradictory to the study's findings, past research has noted that self-esteem significantly mediates substance abuse and delinquency among African-American male adolescents.

Future research on delinquency and substance abuse needs to clearly address self-esteem by developing adequate measures of this construct which are culturally appropriate. It is important for social
workers and other practitioners to be concerned with developing research and program initiatives that address all African-American youth in the black community, especially the male population. In saying this, more survey data are needed for planning more preventive programs because data on delinquency, substance abuse and the mediating effect of self-esteem have many limitations. Also, future research should address the type of sample. For example, if the sample is a convenient sample, the researcher is unable to ensure that each element in the population has an equal chance of being selected.

Due to the finding indicating that self-esteem was not a mediator between substance abuse and delinquency, social work practitioners will need to begin looking beyond self-esteem. This means that this factor (self-esteem) may not be a mediator between those two particular variables (substance abuse and delinquency). Therefore, further social work research must view other factors or variables that may have a mediating effect. This other factor or variable may be more likely to fit into a strategy for improving delinquency and substance abuse among African-American male adolescents.

Research finding 3 indicated that self-esteem had a positive, statistically significant relationship with substance abuse. The results and the direction of the relationship coincided with the researcher’s expectations. These data suggested that the researcher could have had another statistically significant relationship if the independent variable would have been self-esteem and the dependent variable would have been substance abuse. Although the relationship between substance abuse and self-esteem was significant, one must again remember that social desirability may have skewed or altered the results.

Finding 3 was found to be consistent with other investigators. Research results have indicated consistently strong associations between self-esteem and substance abuse. Self-esteem has been viewed as a
causal factor in the occurrence of substance abuse. Research has indicated that if one views themselves in a negative light, they are more apt to seek compensatory means such as illegal controlled substance abuse.

In regards to finding 3, a few past researchers have noted that African-American male adolescents have low self-esteem and high substance abuse. However, the results of this research study showed otherwise; self-esteem was high and substance abuse was low. With this in mind, this study may help challenge stereotypes, and dispute the notion about young African-American male adolescents having low self esteem associated with substance abuse as either a cause or consequence. In knowing that there is a strong association between substance abuse and self-esteem, social work practitioners must begin examining the African American male adolescents' self concept. Self-esteem needs to be emphasized and understood by practitioners as being an important factor in an adolescents behavioral and physical make-up.
Dear Participants:

My name is Marla Sallier, I am currently a Master in Social Work candidate at Clark Atlanta University. In addition, I am also an intern at the Fulton Multi-Service Center. In pursuit of my degree, I am conducting a survey designed to assess your involvement with substance abuse and the way you see yourself. Please assist me by completing the attached questionnaire. By choosing to participate, you are assisting me in evaluating your involvement in delinquent behavior as it is associated with substance abuse and self-esteem.

Some of the questions may appear personal in nature and may bring about discomfort or embarrassment. You will be assured that your answers will be completely anonymous. At no point will your name be associated with your completed questionnaire. Please answer each item as carefully as possible.

I am hoping that this research will contribute to an increased understanding of substance abuse, delinquent behavior and the mediating effects of self-esteem. Your time and effort in completing this questionnaire is greatly appreciated. If you would like to find out about the results of the study, please contact me through the Fulton Multi-Service Center or the School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Marla Sallier
APPENDIX B

JUVENILE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND SELF-ESTEEM ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

PART ONE

READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY. FOR EACH STATEMENT, DECIDE WHETHER IT IS TRUE AS APPLIED TO YOU OR FALSE AS APPLIED TO YOU BY PLACING AN (X) IN THE BRACKETS THAT ARE RELATED TO YOUR RESPONSE.

1. ( ) ( ) I have tried social drugs - "Pot, cocaine, etc.," or street drugs.
2. ( ) ( ) I have thought about getting high.
3. ( ) ( ) People think of me as a person who can drink a lot without getting drunk.
4. ( ) ( ) I usually have a drink or two before going out with my friends so I can get in the mood to have a good time.
5. ( ) ( ) I have at least one drink, or some type of social or street drug at least five days out of seven.
6. ( ) ( ) I believe my use of drugs keeps or has kept me from being the person I would like to be.
7. ( ) ( ) I have drunk three bottles of wine, or twenty bottles of beer or a fifth of whiskey in one day.
8. ( ) ( ) I will usually have a drink or two whenever I'm depressed.
9. ( ) ( ) I can't stop drinking after two drinks.
10. ( ) ( ) I drink or use drugs to begin my day.
PART TWO

PLEASE ANSWER EACH ITEM AS CAREFULLY AS YOU CAN BY PLACING A NUMBER BESIDE EACH ITEM AS IT RELATES TO YOUR RESPONSE.

1 - None of the time
2 - Very rarely
3 - A little of the time
4 - Some of the time
5 - A good part of the time
6 - Most of the time
7 - All of the time

11. ____ When I am with others I feel they are glad I am with them.
12. ____ I feel that people really like to talk to me.
13. ____ I feel that I am a very smart person.
14. ____ I think my friends find me interesting.
15. ____ I think that people find me funny.
16. ____ I feel that people have a good time when they are with me.
17. ____ I think I am a nice person.
18. ____ I feel that people really like me very much.
19. ____ I feel that I am a likable person.
20. ____ My friends think very highly of me.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

_____ NUMBER OF THEFT BY RECEIVING OFFENSES
BIBLIOGRAPHY


