The Performance—Verbal IQ Discrepancy in Differentiated Subgroups of Delinquent Adolescent Boys

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Evidence for Wechsler's Performance-Verbal IQ sign of adolescent psychopathy in the test results of undifferentiated groups of delinquents has been variable. In view of the heterogeneity of delinquency as a clinical syndrome, the validity of Wechsler's sign was reexamined for psychopathic, neurotic, and subcultural delinquent boys defined according to Quay's behavioral classification system. Only the psychopathic group scored significantly higher on the Performance Scale than on the Verbal Scale. However, the number of adolescents in each group obtaining higher Performance than Verbal IQs did not significantly differ. Additional group comparisons indicated that the psychopaths earned markedly lower scores on the Comprehension subtest that did the other groups. The findings were interpreted in light of characteristics common to most delinquents regardless of personality orientation.

INTRODUCTION

Probably the best known of Wechsler's indices of adolescent psychopathy (1958) is a substantially higher Performance IQ (PIQ) than Verbal IQ (VIQ). Investigations of the PIQ-VIQ index, however, have yielded highly inconsistent re-

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sults (e.g., Guertin et al., 1966; Matarazzo, 1972; Prentice and Kelly, 1963; Sac- 
cuzzo and Lewandowski, 1976). Matarazzo (1972) and others (e.g., McCord 
1956; Wiens et al., 1959) have observed that an obvious source of variation stems 
from imprecise methods of identifying psychopathic personality traits within an 
adolescent population. For example, many studies have simply used delinquency 
as the sole behavioral criterion of adolescent psychopathy. Yet various clinical 
(e.g., Committee on Child Psychiatry, 1966) and statistical (e.g., Quay, 1965, 
1972) approaches to classification of juvenile offenders have strongly demon-
strated that delinquency is not a homogeneous clinical syndrome. While many 
delinquents exhibit psychopathic qualities, others act out in response to neurotic 
conflicts or to a subcultural environment which fosters antisocial behavior.

Moreover, failure to distinguish personality differences within a delinquent 
sample has typically resulted in the use of normal rather than nonpsychopathic 
acting-out adolescents as comparison subjects. Consequently, the possible con-
founding effects (e.g., institutionalization, school-related difficulties, etc.) of the 
psychopath’s antisocial conduct upon his or her intellectual behavior as well as 
test-taking attitude (Manne et al., 1962) have remained uncontrolled.

The current study was conducted to reexamine assumptions prevalent in 
clinical assessment regarding the intellectual performance of psychopathic ado-
lescents. To circumvent problems in the design of previous research efforts, a 
clearly delineated and reliable criterion of adolescent psychopathy was em-
ployed. Furthermore, precisely defined control groups of neurotic and sub-
cultural delinquents were investigated concurrently.

**METHOD**

From the active files of institutionalized male delinquents, groups of psy-
chopathic, neurotic, and subcultural delinquents were identified according to 
their final composite t scores on the psychopathic, neurotic, and subcultural 
scales of the behavioral classification system developed by Quay and his col-
leagues (see Quay and Parsons, 1971). This system is based on behavioral ratings, 
life history data, and personality questionnaire responses and has been shown to 
be a reliable and valid method for identifying delinquent subclasses. The WISC or 
WAIS protocols available on file for those adolescents (10 psychopaths, 10 neu-
rotics, 14 subculturals) who received a t score on one scale which exceeded their 
scores on the other two scales by at least 3 points were the focus of study. (On 
the average, t scores of the highest scale surpassed t scores on other scales by 9 
points). The Quay instruments and Wechsler scales were administered by profes-
sional staff at a diagnostic reception center. In approximately 55% of the cases, 
the VIQs and PIQs were prorated, since Digit Span, Object Assembly, and/or 
Coding (Digit Symbol) were not given. Nevertheless, the results were considered