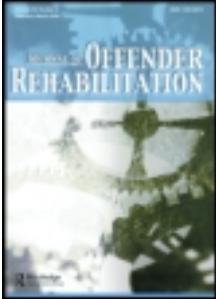


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## Journal of Offender Rehabilitation

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wjor20>

### A Neo-Cognitive Model of Crime

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Published online: 18 Oct 2008.

To cite this article: Thomas M. Kelley (1990): A Neo-Cognitive Model of Crime, Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 16:1-2, 1-26

To link to this article: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J076v16n01\\_01](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J076v16n01_01)

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## A Neo-Cognitive Model of Crime

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper presents a new paradigm for criminological inquiry that transcends the field's present base of assumptions and theories. Herein, the principles of the Psychology of Mind, POM, (Suarez and Mills, 1982; Suarez, Mills and Stewart, 1987) have been translated into a neo-cognitive model of crime. The four main principles of POM are: (1) The Principle of Thought; (2) The Principle of Separate Realities; (3) The Principle of Levels of Consciousness; and (4) The Principle of Feelings and Emotions. These four principles or constants are shown to connect in an exact manner the variables of thought, perception, motivation, emotion, and behavior of *all* delinquent and criminal offenders. Furthermore, these principles clearly reveal ways to prevent and reverse the process that results in crime. Finally, evidence in support of this new perspective is reviewed, implications for crime prevention and control are discussed, programming models presented, and the possibility of a major breakthrough in criminological thinking, research and policy is discussed.

Our current thinking about the causes of crime and delinquency lacks precision, and thus, our solutions have been well off the mark. A more accurate understanding of the causes of crime appears to be lost in an entanglement of criminological theories and concepts which, while often clever and intellectually sophisticated, are more often misleading or incorrect (Cressy, 1979; Gibbons,

1977; Williams, 1984; Gibbs, 1987; Gibbons, 1989). Over the past century, the field of criminology has produced divergent theories of crime and delinquency with often inconsistent and contradictory implications for the prevention of crime and the treatment of criminal offenders. The field's frustration in trying to develop powerful solutions to the problem of crime is symbolized by the dysfunctional and fragmented alliances among our criminal justice agencies, the swinging pendulum from liberal to conservative crime control models, the impulsive shifts from one treatment fad to the next, and perhaps most poignantly by the trends toward the increasing complexity of our theoretical formulations and the diversification of our professional pursuits. In the words of Gibbons (1989:165):

In the first half of this century, criminologists voiced a good deal of optimism regarding the search for the causes of crime and delinquency. Further, they exhibited a good deal of enthusiasm for correctional intervention based upon scientific knowledge. However, although criminological knowledge has grown impressively in the past two or three decades, criminologists have produced many scientific findings and conditional propositions but few unequivocal scientific generalizations. In addition, pessimism about treatment has replaced optimism, following the discovery that "nothing works."

For every theory of crime or delinquency that exists in our field today, there are conspicuous exceptions to the established rules and predicted outcomes derived from those theories. For every theoretical explanation of crime, there are probably many more individuals touched by the conditions or circumstances proposed by these theories as causes who are *not* criminals or delinquents. In our attempts to explain or justify these exceptions and contradictions, we have either designed forced and intricate explanations or we have ignored or twisted these irregularities to fit our established theoretical models. A prime example of the first response has been the proliferation of so-called integrated theories of crime (Knudten, 1970; Weis, 1981; Wilson, 1985; Elliott et al., 1985; Pearson & Weiner, 1985).

Thus, the variation that exists both within and among our theories appears to have become as great as the variety of factors those theories are attempting to explain. Instead of seeking some common factors that would break down the variation into some comprehensible design, it has become commonplace for the field to focus on the variation itself. Instead of connecting the diverse variables of our field into a unifying framework of understanding, our current formulations break up or fragment the concepts they are studying to such an overwhelming degree that they are confusing rather than illuminating.

### ***THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MIND***

Therefore, what the field appears to need are principles that apply to *all* criminal and delinquent behavior which can provide a basic or common sense understanding of that behavior in all its forms and reveal clearly how to prevent and reverse the process that results in crime. The purpose of this paper is to offer the field such a group of principles, which can become the basis of a new paradigm for criminological inquiry which might be called *Breakthrough Criminology*.

The pioneering work on these principles was done in the field of psychology by Suarez (1985a; 1985b), Suarez and Mills (1982), and Suarez, Mills and Stewart (1987). These researchers formulated a set of four psychological principles or constants which they called the *Psychology of Mind* (POM). Subsequently, these same researchers used the principles of POM to develop a new approach to treating and preventing mental illness which they called *Neo-Cognitive Psychotherapy* (NCP). In the present paper, these principles will be explained and then applied to the field of criminology. Contemporary research evidence which supports these principles will be reviewed. Finally, programming models for crime prevention and control will be presented.

To begin, the four major neo-cognitive principles, applied to the criminological context, are summarized below:

1. *The Principle of Thought*: The ability of each offender to think, and, through this thinking function, to generate and organize thought content (often with limited or no awareness).
2. *The Principle of Separate Realities*: The ability of each offender, through his thinking function and resultant thought system, to generate a separate individual reality which exists as a continuous product of thought.
3. *The Principle of Levels of Consciousness*: The capacity of each offender to become conscious of how he functions psychologically and to understand that his level of consciousness forms the context within which the function of thought produces or reproduces (recalls) cognitions.
4. *The Principle of Feelings and Emotions*: The capacity of each offender to understand how feelings and emotions exist as continuous, moment-by-moment indicators of the quality and direction of his psychological functioning.

It is proposed that these four principles explain and connect in a clear and exact manner the variables of thought, perception, motivation, emotion and behavior of *all* criminal and delinquent offenders, as well as those of basically law-abiding individuals. Furthermore, these four principles can provide the field with a simple, common sense, yet exact understanding of all forms of delinquency and criminality and shed light on how to reverse the process that leads to these conditions. Finally, it is asserted that these neo-cognitive principles offer a new paradigm for criminological thinking that incorporates, yet transcends much of the field's contemporary base of assumptions and theories.

### ***1: The Function of Thought in Creating an Offender's Experience of Reality***

The ability to think is the first common factor or constant that does not waiver from offender to offender. Each offender can think and, thereby, has the capacity through thinking to generate thought content (ideas, interpretations, beliefs, etc.). While the exact content of thinking will vary infinitely among offenders, the ability to think is a constant factor and the source of all variation in thought content.

Each offender uses his capacity to think to formulate and record in memory his own idiosyncratic thought system which, with time, becomes a sophisticated, interwoven pattern of thoughts. Thoughts related to a particular content area are called beliefs. In every offender's thought system, there is a unique interdependence and logical connection among the thoughts and beliefs within that system. An analogy from the physical sciences would be a magnetic force field which, when engaged and impacting on mental shavings, will predictably organize these particles into a specific physical pattern. An offender's thought system operates much like a psychological force field which consistently and predictably organizes external events and circumstances into specific perceptual patterns.

In this way, an offender's thought system becomes the filter through which all incoming data is sorted and interpreted. Most offenders, however, have little if any awareness that they are continually engaged in this attributive process. As Suarez (1987:5-6) points out:

One basic premise of this principle is that people create their own thoughts and thought systems but are, to varying degrees, not aware of doing so. Thus, it is possible for people to experience reality, to varying degrees, only in terms of the end products of their thinking (images, beliefs, interpretations, expectations, etc.) and their associated perceptions, feelings and behaviors. In other words, people can experience reality as being relatively independent of their functioning.

When an offender is unaware of his thought system and its screening and translating function, he will naively believe that his thoughts, beliefs, etc., are accurate and true representations of reality rather than his personally generated interpretation or appearance. Thus, the offender's thought system produces a reality that *becomes* his experience. The offender (innocently) thinks that this experience is the truth and that he has genuine contact with his environment. What he doesn't realize is that his actual contact is exclusively with his personal thoughts and beliefs *about* his surroundings. In this way, an offender's thought system dependably maintains its own internal consistency and becomes a continuous

feedback mechanism. Any event or circumstance which enters into this existing mechanism will automatically be transformed (distorted, affected, interpreted, etc.) in a manner dictated by the rules derived from existing beliefs and points of view. Through his activated thought system or structure of interpretation, the offender transforms each experience into what he thinks it to be.

Thus, according to this first principle, every offender's perceptions, feelings, and behaviors have their origin in thought. The content of the offender's thoughts and the feelings, perceptions, and behaviors related to that thought content are a function of his personal thought system which, in turn, is a product of his ability to think. Therefore, every offender's feelings and behavior patterns are maintained, moment to moment, through thought. Finally, and of prime significance, most offenders have limited or no awareness of this process.

## ***2: The Existence of Separate Realities for Criminal Offenders***

Each offender's thought system is unique because it is based on his personal (remembered) version of past experiences. For this reason, it is virtually impossible for two offenders, even from the same family or cultural system, to have identical thought systems. Thus, each offender lives in a separate reality and sees things in his own idiosyncratic way. To him, his thought system appears to reveal an accurate and absolute picture of himself, his family, his community, the world. Most offenders are not cognizant of the fact that their thought system determines their experience of life, or that their experience is only one of an infinite number of "apparencies" or variations available to them. Most are not aware that reality is a relative thing and that there are many levels of reality implicit in any observation. Most do not know that their reality is a self-centered world of thought, and, because thinking is a voluntary function, that they can choose at any time to stop, interrupt, or discontinue the thought patterns which support and sustain their criminal orientation. Thus, reality as experienced by an offender is a function of his or her thinking and, more importantly, the degree to which he or she is aware that thinking is the agency of all cognition.

In this context, individual differences among offenders is viewed as a *principle* rather than a source of error variation.

By not realizing that he generates his view of reality and then lives in a world of its effects, the offender sacrifices his free will. He has no genuine ability to be responsible for his feelings, choices, or behavior because he does not experience himself (i.e., his thinking function) "as cause" in these matters. Rather, his experience is that his feelings and behavioral reactions are *imposed* upon him from some outside source. His experience is that other people and things, not he, are responsible for how he acts, his well-being, and for what happens in his life; that he is at the mercy, or at the effect of circumstances—past, present, and future. Caught up in this experience, the offender has little or no sense of responsibility for his life, attributes the source of what he does, how he feels, and the events he confronts to outside circumstances, and generally feels victimized and helpless, persecuted, entitled, superior, etc.

Thus, without first making the offender conscious of the fact that his reality is self-created through thought, any approach to changing him which focuses on altering some external condition (e.g., poverty, parenting, learning disability, punishment, etc.) will have limited power. For all such efforts will be filtered through the offender's rigid thought system and automatically manipulated and altered to support and maintain his personal pattern of self-righteous beliefs, insecure feelings, and deviant behavior. Thus, trying to prevent or control crime by tinkering with external conditions alone is like trying to steer an automobile by turning the rear view mirror.

### **3: Levels of Consciousness:**

#### ***The Criminal Ego and Insecurity***

A brief description of this principle by Suarez (1987:6-7) will be helpful:

The psychological state of functioning is not stable; it fluctuates. Each level is a qualitatively separate state of consciousness. So while an individual (offender) may possess a relatively fixed fund of stored information from past experiences (i.e., a thought system), this information will be recalled, utilized, and experienced differently according to the state. It is

the "state of consciousness" that is the context within which the function of thought produces or reproduces (recalls) cognition.

Within the present context, level of consciousness is the amount of awareness held by the offender that his ability to think is creating his experience in life. It is the level of understanding held by the offender of what thought systems are and of their function in molding feelings and behavior. When an offender does not know that his realities are thought-created, he will be at the effect of his conditioned thinking or learned insecurity. In lower levels of consciousness, it will appear rational for the offender to sacrifice good will for ill will, conformity for deviancy, peace of mind for violence.

Within this framework, the offender's ego is simply a system of beliefs that he has formed concerning his personal identity and the things he has to do to prove himself (i.e., his beliefs) to the world. Through his thinking ability, the offender generates measures of performance and personal expectations which he believes must be attained in order to feel adequate. Because he functions at a low level of consciousness, he must, at all costs, defend and maintain his thought-created ego. Thus, an offender will go to any length for the survival of his ego, his thought-created standards and beliefs that he thinks himself to be.

Anything perceived by the offender to invalidate, differ with, or contradict his ego produces a feeling of insecurity. The other side of ego is always some feeling of insecurity.

Ultimately, it is through the relationship of ego and insecurity that all forms of criminality are fostered and maintained. The process goes like this. Something happens which the offender interprets as challenging his rigid, highly personalized ego state of mind. Insecure feelings are automatically triggered. The offender then searches his thought system for a solution or reaction to these insecure feelings, not knowing that his thought system created them in the first place. Often, as a remedy for insecure feelings, the offender will select some form of criminal or deviant behavior which may work, at least in the short run, because it either appears to validate his ego beliefs or it temporarily diminishes his insecure feelings (e.g., drug use).

In every case, ego and its counterpart, insecurity, are the forces behind criminality in its many destructive varieties. When he is feeling insecure, with ego in full throttle, an offender will do whatever it takes to argue, justify, and otherwise validate his thought system. Being locked into this vicious circle, the offender will feel compelled to fight, steal, hurt people, set fires; to do whatever is necessary to e right. In so doing, the offender feels that he has dealt a blow for his idiosyncratic perspective of justice and truth.

This egoistic experience, which is the source of all forms of delinquent and criminal behavior, exists only because of the offender's ability to think and believe insecure thoughts while not being aware of their agency. The offender's ego exists because of his ability to think (and believe) that he is unworthy, unlovable, incomplete, superior, entitled, etc. Unknowingly, that same offender brings these thoughts to fruition by that very capacity to think.

Another obvious implication of this principle is that ego, particularly the criminal ego, and its counterpart, insecurity, demand conflict and turmoil for their survival. In fact, the offender's ego is threatened by the *absence* of tension and conflict. With no antagonism, there is no fertile soil for the offender's ego to blossom. With no conflict, there is no medium for ego validation; nothing to prove, nothing to fight for. Because the offender's ego is an illusion based in thought, it must continually be *recreated* in thinking in order to survive. This understanding sheds new light on the source of perpetual conflict that permeates the lives of many offenders.

Finally, it is important to note that each offender (often unknowingly) experiences many different levels of consciousness, even during the course of one day. Since each level of consciousness represents a different reality, the offender experiences many different realities. This fact explains why even the most insecure offender is not involved in committing crimes during each waking hour and why he may go for long periods of time not engaging in any criminal behavior. However, when his ego is threatened or thwarted, the offender moves into a lower level of awareness (i.e., an insecure mood), in which his ego-based automatic thoughts and conditioned negative beliefs are activated. This in turn gives a realistic form to his low level of functioning. Only then is the offender at the effect of a self-generated negative reality with no or little awareness of

what has happened or how to stop it. It is under this condition that the likelihood of some form of criminal or self-destructive behavior increases markedly.

#### ***4: Feelings and Emotions as Indicators of Levels of Consciousness***

To recognize when an offender is operating at a low level of consciousness or psychological functioning, it is essential to understand the role of feelings and emotions. Within the scope of these principles, feelings and emotions take on new meaning and significance. Here, insecure feelings (anger, superiority, pride, anxiety, depression, etc.) are not seen as something to dwell on, figure out, work through, examine, or explore. Also, these potentially destructive emotions are not viewed as being contained in offenders' bodies like cells or organs. They are not additive, aggregate, or cumulative in nature. Nor do they fester, simmer, or boil. Furthermore, they are not suppressed, bottled up, or housed in tempers, spleens, or broken hearts. Within the present formulation, every negative feeling experienced by an offender emerges as a result of his thinking and indicates that he has forgotten that he *is* thinking.

Thus, feelings and emotions are simply signs of an offender's state of mind or level of consciousness at that moment in time. Positive feelings (e.g., joy, love, compassion, etc.) result from and signal higher, natural, unconditioned, and more mentally healthy states of mind and are associated with less crime. Negative feelings are reliable guides indicating that the offender's level of understanding has dropped and that he has begun to turn that level into a negative, often criminal, reality through his conditioned thinking. The offender, however, does not know that the role of negative feelings is to alert him that he has dropped into a lower level of psychological functioning. Offenders believe that negative feelings deserve contemplation or should be acted upon, often in some criminal fashion.

To summarize: These four neo-cognitive principles of the Psychology Of Mind, when applied to the field of criminology, connect in an exact manner the variables of thought, perception, motivation, emotion, and behavior of all delinquent and criminal offenders.

These simple, objective principles explain how separate criminal realities are formed and maintained by every offender.

First, they reveal that all offenders possess the ability to think and, through this basic capacity, are able to generate an unlimited variety of beliefs, values, etc. Following this, offenders can choose to equate themselves to, or identify with, the content of their thinking. Once believed, this thought system or structure of interpretation determines the offender's personal version of reality, which he then experiences as true and absolute. Following this, anytime the offender's image, belief system, or ego appears to be threatened, he will automatically feel insecure. The more intense the feelings of insecurity, the more the offender must defend or prove his personal image, a process which, in turn, solidifies the thought system which created this image in the first place.

Furthermore, these principles reveal that offenders can become conscious of their thinking function, thought system, and the principle of separate realities. Through this heightened awareness, offenders can learn to see beyond the personal reality of their own thinking. Finally, these principles demonstrate the role of feelings in revealing levels of consciousness and in maintaining more unconditioned, functional, non-criminal states of mind.

### ***SUPPORTIVE EVIDENCE FROM CONTEMPORARY CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND THEORY***

There is considerable evidence from contemporary criminological research and theory which appears to support this neo-cognitive perspective of crime.

Much of this evidence relates to delinquency and is summarized in a recent article by Mills et al. (1988) which reviews several relevant etiological studies, cross-sectional research programs, and youth panel surveys. According to Mills, this research indicates clearly that delinquency, drug use, school failure, etc., appear to be related to a common set of social-psychological variables. The first group of common factors is well documented and revolves around the family environment. At-risk youth tend to come from families experiencing high levels of stress. Parent-child interaction involves excessive nagging and fault-finding. Discipline is characterized by

inconsistency and lacks fairness and empathy. In these families, there is little verbal or non-verbal caring and support or sustained interest in the child's activities or interests (Patterson, 1982; Loeber & Dishion, 1984; Tittle, 1980; Jenson & Eve, 1976; Smith & Walters, 1978; Robinson, 1978; Hanson, Henggeler, Haeefe, & Rodick, 1984; Hershorn & Rosenbaum, 1985; Biron & LeBlanc, 1977; Block, Keyes & Block, 1986).

The bulk of contemporary longitudinal research concludes that, as a consequence of these dysfunctional patterns of familial interaction, these youth tend to develop behavioral, emotional, and learning problems at an early age. These problems usually worsen as the child enters the school environment. Research on early school experiences of these youth indicates that the process of acquiring an insecure belief system, which begins in the homes of these youth, tends to be reinforced or reconfirmed by the types of interactions these youth, tends to be reinforced or reconfirmed by the types of interactions these youth have with school personnel and other students. According to Mills et al. (1988:648):

. . . In the absence of understanding that these qualities of interactional patterns are a consequence of their parents' habitual states of mind, they will interpret them to mean that there is something wrong or inadequate about themselves, programming these biased attributions into their cognitive structure at a very fundamental level. This cognitive programming begins to obscure children's natural common sense, ability to learn by insight, and natural feelings of well-being. As a result, they develop an insecure belief system. They then enter school with poor self-concept, insecurity about learning and performance, and mistrust of others, particularly adults, in terms of perceiving genuine caring and interest. (Suarez, Mills, & Stewart, 1987; Mills, 1986, 1987; Peck, Law & Mills, 1987)

Thus, these early negative childhood experiences appear to combine with later school and community experiences, with greater amounts of alienation the result. Mills refers to research findings from several independent sources which reveal that youth at risk develop a cognitive style or structure of interpretation that results in

negative school attitudes and negative self-cognitions relating to school and learning. Dissatisfaction with the entire school experience appears to be one of the strongest factors leading to school misbehavior. High risk youth are in general more alienated from school and from nondeviant lifestyles (Dunham & Alpert, 1987; Cippolone, 1986; Stern & Catterall, 1985; Howell & Frege, 1982; Coombs & Cooley, 1986; Glaser, 1969; Gold, 1978; Kelly & Block, 1971; Liazos, 1978; Hirschi, 1969; Polk & Schafer, 1972). Mills points out that these findings are consistent with contemporary social process theories (Hirschi, 1969; Reckless, 1967), sociological theories of alienation (Kaplan et al., 1986), and the symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969), all of which predict that youth develop more and more aversive points of view about school and pro-social peers due to this repetitive pattern of perceived failure in family, school, and community settings.

Mills further states that recent studies of high risk youth grounded in contemporary cognitive learning theory support the notion of a cumulative learning process which leads to stronger levels of alienation and predicts many forms of deviant, often criminal, behavior (Block, Keyes, & Block, 1986; Baumrind, 1985; Elliot & Huizinga, 1984; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Elliot & Voss, 1974; West & Farrington, 1977; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Furthermore, many cognitive learning theorists now support a model of the brain similar to a biological computer with comparable information processing, representational and retrieval characteristics, etc. (Penfield, 1975; Haugeland, 1985; Dodge, 1986; Lochman, Lampron, Burch, & Curry, 1985; Chandler, 1973; Selman, 1976; Shantz, 1983; Cermak & Craik, 1979; Dodge, Murphy, & Buschbaum, 1984). The findings of these cognitive researchers would appear to support the conclusion that offenders translate present circumstances through an already existing thought system mechanically programmed in memory as a result of their idiosyncratic interpretations of past experience. These pre-programmed sets, expectations, or attributions have been confirmed and validated by much empirical research (Blumer, 1969; Burger & Luckman, 1966; Polk & Kobrin, 1972; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). For example, Dodge et al. (1986) and Lochman et al. (1985) have

found that aggressive delinquents are more likely to misperceive the intentions of others as hostile, are significantly poorer in recognizing neutral or passive intentions, and more apt to be biased in assuming continued hostility. Mills points out that these flaws in attribution are not a function of general intelligence but instead are related to youths' assessment of the meaning of an event rather than the real properties of the event or circumstance. Mills et al. (1988:649) summarize their findings as follows:

. . . The etiological data show that youth at risk with regard to the major types of problems of concern to our educators, juvenile justice programs, and the mental health system show similar early childhood experiences; they exhibit a package of attitudes, affect, and behavior in their early school years that, if not reversed, develops into a cumulative, self-fulfilling cycle leading to multiple problems which can include school failure, delinquency, drug use, and other health-damaging behaviors. (Mills, 1986; 1987; Peck, Law, & Mills, 1987; Elliot & Huizinga, 1984; Block, Keyes, & Block, 1986)

### ***IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIME PREVENTION AND CONTROL***

Contemporary approaches to crime prevention and control have focused almost exclusively on the necessity of supplying offenders with some missing factor (e.g., values, discipline, punishment, jobs, self-esteem, limits, etc.), the presence of which would supposedly reduce the inclination to engage in deviant behavior. Thus, traditional learning theory approaches (Patterson et al., 1982; Skinner, 1977; Rutherford, 1975; Klein, 1977; Bandura, 1969; Phillips, 1968) assume certain external reinforcement schedules are missing and therefore attempt to supply them with behavior modification programs, such as token economies, behavior contracting, "scared straight" type programs, etc. Social process theories (Agnew, 1985; Hirschi, 1969; Reckless, 1967; Sutherland, 1939; Sykes & Matza, 1957) assume certain external constraints or limits on the behavior of offenders, who need more non-criminal beliefs and pro-social attitudes about school, community, religion, etc. First gener-

ation cognitive theories (Ellis, 1962; Samenow, 1984; Burns, 1980; Walters & White, 1989) utilize a variety of techniques, rituals, and rigorous discussions in which the offender's criminal beliefs are monitored, analyzed, disputed, condemned, and judged so they can learn to identify and abandon thinking patterns that have misguided their behavior. As the field is painfully aware, programs based on this "something is missing" paradigm have had very limited success.

The neo-cognitive approach to crime prevention and treatment is based on a wellness model and incorporates the assumption, supported by much contemporary research, that most offenders have an inherent and natural capacity to function in a mature, common sense, and non-criminal fashion (Stewart, 1985; Dodge & Frame, 1982; Patterson et al., 1982; Suarez, Mills, & Stewart, 1987; Mills, 1986, 1987). A related assumption is that this natural ability is severely blocked because offenders function at more insecure levels than non-offenders due to the kinds of early negative programming discussed earlier. According to Mills et al. (1988:651):

*This model assumes the youth offenders are capable of functioning at two distinct levels of understanding relative to their prior learning. In more insecure or negative states of mind, their perceptions are determined by conditioned associations. This more negative level of functioning is perpetrated in the absence of an understanding on the part of the youth themselves about how their own thinking process works. As a result, they mistakenly conclude that the meaning they attribute to events is not biased, but is an accurate picture of what is going on. (Suarez, Mills, & Stewart, 1987; Mills, 1986, 1987)*

Thus, according to the neo-cognitive framework, the primary focus of crime prevention and control efforts must be on modifying (i.e., raising) both the offender's and treatment agent's level of awareness and understanding of the active function of thinking itself as being the agent through which the state of consciousness operates. Both players must be guided to recognize that there are different states of consciousness where they can either recognize or be oblivious to the function of thought. Thus, the central factor in

the process of correcting the criminal or delinquent offender involves producing a profound shift in his level of understanding from which to see the function of thought, thought systems, separate realities, and the role of insecure feelings in producing and maintaining his criminal orientation. The major steps in transforming the willing offender involve making him aware of these principles; having him recognize what his ignorance of these distinctions costs him in lost mental health (e.g., love, productivity, loss of freedom, integrity, etc.); and, finally, showing him how to disengage from his rigid adherence to, and personal identification with, fixed thought and absolute views of his world, and, ultimately, how to identify instead with his thinking function.

Creating the possibility for offenders to change further requires that they become aware of the major psychological barrier to change. The major factor that keeps the offender's thought system in a fixed configuration is the insecure feelings that are generated by that same structure. Once an offender feels insecure, he enters a mind set in which it is difficult to change because any change appears to be dangerous or uncomfortable. Thus, understanding how insecure thought creates the feeling of insecurity is another important factor on the road to altering criminal behavior. The path to less crime and delinquency involves helping offenders realize what insecurity is, how to recognize it, and how to decisively avoid being at its effect. The key to transforming an offender's reaction to insecure feelings is for the offender to genuinely realize the non-utility of these feelings and to understand that they are simply products of conditioned habitual thought patterns which he accepts and maintains through his thinking and attributing functions. With a higher level of understanding of these neo-cognitive principles, the offender can begin to free himself from negative thinking patterns which lead to feelings of insecurity and disturbed behaviors like crime.

While learning, social process, and first generation cognitive theories of crime may be on the right track, what they all lack is the understanding that replacing bad thoughts with good thoughts, altering the frequency, intensity, or duration of pro-criminal relationships, or strengthening positive beliefs with regard to primary socializing institutions (i.e., bonding) all miss the point. Such con-

version processes do not result in any transformation in level of understanding; offenders just move in and out of belief systems while staying at exactly the same level of consciousness concerning their thinking function. This missing understanding may help explain such recent events as the field's skepticism about the causal significance of bonding theory (Agnew, 1985; Liska & Reed, 1985) and the conclusion by Gibbons (1985) that the weight of the evidence is clearly inconsistent with Samenow's beliefs about the "criminal personality."

The point is that criminal beliefs, and all beliefs for that matter, are only important when the offender's level of consciousness is deficient in an understanding of the contextual function of thought. Only a change in level of consciousness can generate the possibility of significantly altering one's criminal orientation, and this is exactly what an understanding of these neo-cognitive principles of thought and crime represents.

Therefore, effective programs of prevention and rehabilitation must always focus on the realization of principles rather than the introduction of techniques, rituals, punishments, or therapies that direct the offender's (or the public's) attention to externals as solutions to his problems. Focusing on changing externals to eliminate crime and delinquency serves only to reinforce and perpetuate the structures of interpretation which create crime and delinquency in the first place. The offender has more reason to take seriously the idea that his behavior is caused by external conditions such as bad parenting, unemployment, uncertainty of sanctions, etc., when he hears representatives of "the system" say so. Jobs for offenders, while a fine idea, do nothing to help them realize and perhaps take responsibility for the actual source of their criminal behavior. They will go out into the world with the same level of understanding that got them into trouble in the first place . . . and they will have jobs! Manipulation of external conditions does nothing to help offenders realize the power of their thinking function in shaping criminal realities.

Furthermore, there is no value in focusing on the details of the offender's behavior, his family relationships, early traumas, past and present failures, etc. First of all, these details are irrelevant because they are only thought. Secondly, when we give credence to

such details, we only reinforce the level of understanding that creates the problem of crime in the first place. When we take these details seriously, we validate the offender's thought system. Avoiding this costly mistake will help offenders realize that they are at the effect of their pasts, their personalities, their negative conditioning, and learned insecurity only when they are not conscious that these things are all connected to and derived from their own thinking function.

### ***Programming Models***

There appears to be no fixed method or special ritual to help offenders understand these neo-cognitive principles of psychological functioning. At the level of prevention, these distinctions could be taught to our public school teachers, who could then develop creative methods to teach them to their students, preferably at the elementary level. There is evidence in both clinical and educational settings that youth can be taught to understand the process by which they move from unconditioned to conditioned levels of psychological functioning (Stewart, 1985; Krot, 1983; Suarez, 1985; Shufford, 1986). Even high risk youth are capable of seeing the distortions built into an alienated frame of reference from a more common sense/objective, mature viewpoint.

There is also increasing evidence that parents of high risk youth can be taught to change the typical dysfunctional patterns of interaction in the home in ways that can assist these youth in improving their self-esteem, learning ability, and mental health. Shure and Spivack (1984) found that they could train low income, inner city parents with low educational levels to teach their children improved inter-personal problem solving skills. Mills (1989) found that parents of high risk youth could be taught to monitor their own mood levels and significantly change their most frequent patterns of interaction with their children in a positive direction.

Furthermore, several clinical and naturalistic observations have concluded that, when offenders feel that they do not have to prove themselves or when their self-image is not at stake, they learn more quickly and with enthusiasm, have better inter-personal relationships, higher frustration tolerance, and are more successful at solv-

ing problems and handling conflict. Thus, it would appear that schools (and prisons) should focus on creating a climate which minimizes the triggering of insecure attributions and which emphasizes the conditions which bring out innately healthier levels of functioning. Mills et al. (1988) discuss in detail the role of the school in reversing the cumulative, self-fulfilling process leading to youthful deviance.

At the level of corrections, we could teach these principles to our probation and corrections officers. The more corrections personnel understand the source and nature of learned insecurity, the less they will react personally to insecure behavior and the more they will be able to intervene with common sense positive approaches. In this way, the vicious circle of surviving egos could be avoided and workers could maintain respect for clients and work to have them see that they are creating a biased picture of their circumstances.

The author is familiar with two offender treatment programs grounded in these principles. Both of these programs have been rigorously evaluated and found to be highly effective in improving self-esteem, inter-personal skills, internal locus of responsibility, and in reducing recidivism and deviant lifestyles for both juvenile and adult offenders.

In the first program, sponsored by Prison Possibilities, Inc., inmates at Michigan's Jackson Prison and in the Colorado prison system have been introduced to these principles through an intensive two weekend, sixty hour course called "The Prison Forum." After completing this initial training program, prisoners can attend follow-up seminars at which these distinctions of thought and crime are deepened.

The second program called Youth At Risk, is sponsored by the Breakthrough Foundation. Youth at Risk is a transformational intervention (based on these principles) into the problem of juvenile delinquency. A Youth At Risk Program extends over two years and includes three components: A Youth At Risk Workshop, during which volunteers are trained to organize, fund, and produce the program; a 10-day course in which delinquent youth and staff from community youth agencies gain insight into these principles of thought; and a one year Follow Through Program. Since 1982, the

Youth At Risk Program has been completed by over 1000 delinquent youth in several major cities.

Data from these programs indicates clearly that these simple neo-cognitive principles can be used successfully to reverse the cumulative process of increasing alienation by drawing out the more healthy, positive, and common sense levels of functioning of which offenders are capable when they are not operating from an insecure frame of reference. More such innovative and effective programs are likely to emerge as more of us become conscious of the validity and power of these simple principles of thought and crime.

### ***BREAKTHROUGH CRIMINOLOGY***

Throughout the field of criminology, we have developed theoretical formulations which relate crime and delinquency to perhaps arbitrary variables that we have come to think as significant. Following this, we have spent our lives and careers concentrating on these same variables in our research, teaching, policies, and programming. Unfortunately, this process, while often dedicated and intellectually satisfying, has not produced the results or breakthroughs we have sought. Even though we continue daily to add to the mountain of studies and descriptive details of every possible kind and type of crime and criminal that exists, the answers and results we seek don't seem to come.

We must begin to comprehend that all of our present theories, information, concepts, and assumptions have been derived from our personal structures of interpretation. We must see that every existing theory of crime and delinquency is already flawed and significantly biased because it flows directly from the conditioned separate reality of its formulator. Without this awareness, we will continue to add more and more confusion, complexity, and diversity to the field because we will continue, unknowingly, to be at the mercy of our conditioned separate realities. In the words of Suarez (1987:17-18):

It is often said that one of the things we have learned from history is that we have not learned from history. One of the things that the history of science is replete with is that the most difficult thing to recognize is new knowledge (Mahoney, 1976). There exists the tendency of any organized body of knowledge to keep going over old ground and accept only that which can be *re-cognized* within the limits of those definitions, concepts, interpretations, and expectations. Thus the search for new or unknown knowledge often becomes research at a previously established level of understanding.

On the other hand, to the degree that we have the common sense to step back from our self-righteous adherence to our points of view, we will see a larger picture and begin to gain insight into the power and validity of the neo-cognitive principles of thought and crime presented here. We will see how these principles connect in an exact manner the variables of thought, perception, motivation, emotion, and behavior of all criminal and delinquent offenders. We will see that the simplicity of these principles gives us the means to finally generate a powerful, consistent, common sense approach to altering a social condition which heretofore has been considered unsolvable. At the point in time when enough of us become conscious of the utility of these simple ideas, the field of criminology will break through to a scientific discipline capable of producing unequivocal generalizations, generating consistent policies that make sense, and implementing programs with the power to make reducing crime and delinquency an idea whose time has come.

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