

robbery, once for malicious mischief (this was his first offense, at age thirteen), three times for grand theft, auto, twice for drug charges, once for truancy, and once for rape. His mother died when he was six, and he lived after that, variously, with his seven older sisters. His father, a construction worker, didn't want him. The father never used physical punishment, Howard emphasized: only profanity. His sisters whipped him regularly, but Howard said, "They didn't whip me hard enough, 'cause I'd turn right around and do it again." There was one sister who "never gave me rules or whipped me, and so I didn't do nothing wrong when I lived with her, 'cause it would've hurt her."

Ricardo, a fifteen year old Chicano boy, has seven offenses on his record: out of control, escape (from Juvenile Hall), curfew violation, robbery, petty theft, and rape. He was adjudged mentally retarded by the school because he came from a Spanish-speaking home and is illiterate. I think he is at least average in intelligence. He is the second of ten children, all beaten regularly, as was their mother, by their disabled and alcoholic father. Ricardo's was one of the few intact families, in that his natural mother and father were still living together at the time of the study. The robbery count against Ricardo, by the way, involved the home of the director of the Youth Center. Ricardo's father told the probation officer that he never felt he was beating his children and his wife: he was "disciplining" them. The distinction seemed clear to him and to many other child-beating parents. Ricardo's older brother is in the California Youth Authority for armed robbery and assault.

Jim, a white fifteen-year-old with only two offenses, both grand thefts, comes from a large, Roman Catholic family, also intact. His father, currently in jail for petty theft, said about Jim, "We communicate only when I discipline him." His discipline, too, consisted mostly of swearing and yelling at the boy. It was Jim's mother who spanked him and spanked him and spanked him all his life.

Cabe is only twelve, but he has about the most impressive record of all: 24 offenses beginning, when he was eight, with burglary. He was jailed at nine for strong arm robbery. His father's whereabouts have been unknown since Cabe was two. He has one full sib, a sister, also in Juvenile Hall, and eight half-sibs, each by a different father. His home is characterized by "yelling, cursing and turmoil," and the court has officially noted in his record, "There is no hope for this young man." Cabe's "discipline" can only be described as torture. His mother burned him frequently with cigarettes from his infancy onwards, and he has the scars to prove it, all over his small body.

The tragic threnody could continue endlessly. The themes that emerged from our bitter acquaintance with these boys were these: family situations almost universally characterized by lack of control. Too many children; much use of drugs and alcohol by the parents; constant, excessive, cruel and unthinking punitive practices; frequent antisocial behavior by persons other than the delinquent boy being studied, usually the father and older brothers. The boys tended to defend their parents, and they virtually always indicated that they had deserved the punishment they received. Punishment tended to be both

"irrational," that is, almost completely physical, without non-physical techniques such as isolation, deprivation, etc., and protracted. Rare were the cases when punishment was quickly administered, gotten over with, and forgotten. Supported in this study were the results of my earlier, smaller study reported in Portland: the delinquents' interpersonal relationship patterns were characterized by hostility, alienation, mistrust, rivalry, and fierce competitiveness. Practically none of this group reported good relationships with parents even though they defended the parents' disciplinary practices, and literally none had even a tolerable relationship with both parents. They were even mistrustful of the concept of trust, seeming to think of it as the ultimate in being a sucker and laying oneself wide open for pain, manipulation, and, worst of all, public humiliation. The alleged cohesive effect of a common sharing of experience did not seem to operate, either. Unlike the friendship that is said to develop among persons who have shared traumatic experiences, the experimental group had as a rule little good to say about fellow inmates. They are impoverished kids. Many parents—and virtually all judges and probation officers—consider the bad influence of other delinquents a paramount factor in continued delinquency, and they always take strong, often quite unrealistic, steps to try to prohibit partners in crime from re-contacting each other. This, too, seems to be a value the youngsters "buy" and accept—if not pertaining to their special friends (who are often their only friends), at least to friendships in general. "I don't trust nobody." "You can't rely on anyone but yourself." They seem, then, to a much higher degree than better-functioning adolescents, to be as impoverished in their friendships as they are in their roles as sons.

Finally, there is clinical confirmation of a previously experimentally confirmed hypothesis, that delinquents will exceed non-delinquents in attitudes towards others characterized by vengeance, callousness and punitiveness—an unholy triad of traits or attitudes that I see as stemming specifically from cruel and irrational punitive practices inflicted upon children. The most implacably cold-blooded, when it comes to voicing attitudes about what should be done to various miscreants and law-breakers, are the law-breakers themselves. It is they, punished and brutalized often to the point of torture in their own childhoods, who plan to be the most punitive with their own children. There are those, to be sure, who deny this. Many of the young delinquents state that they will never treat their children the way they were treated. But in their next words they reveal so bloodthirsty an attitude toward criminals, communists, drug pushers, homosexuals, draft-dodgers, etc., as to raise serious doubts about their future tenderness with a naughty child.

Some Antecedents of Felony and Delinquent Behavior

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Throughout 1972, four students—Morton Katz, Bill Kung, Alan Simpson and Dick Figuaroa—and I have been working on a research project investigating racial and social class variables in delinquent and non-delinquent boys. We have been particularly interested in studying the role of punishment—its kind, degree, frequency, and perceived effects at three stages in the boys’ lives: birth to six years, six to thirteen years, and thirteen years to the present; the boys in the sample range in age from 13 to 17 years. We have a sample of some 180 boys, fairly evenly divided between delinquents and non-delinquents, each group, in turn, divided into middle- and lower-class subjects. (One of our first findings was that class differences in the sample we studied were non-significant among the white subjects.) These groups were then subdivided into white, brown and black subjects, about fifteen boys to a cell. We are short on non-delinquent Chicano subjects, both middle and lower classes, because at the last minute plans fell through to use boys in an upward bound program called Project Adelante for non-achieving Chicano youngsters, and we have yet to replace them.

Our research is a combined experimental-clinical approach to the enormous methodological and human problems represented by these boys. We obtained our experimental group, the delinquents, from Juvenile Hall and the Youth Center in Fresno, and the California Youth Authority in Stockton. We defined delinquents as those boys in custody for felonies except that boys in custody for marijuana-connected offenses were excluded. The control subjects came from schools, churches and summer camps. In addition to the exploration of punitive practices used on the boys, we investigated by two psychological tests, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and the Roe-Siegelman Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire, the boys’ self-images and their perceptions of their relationships with their fathers and with their mothers. From the study has come a paper I presented at the Western Psychological Association convention in Portland, Oregon, in April, 1972 (“Set Free the Offspring Appointed to Death”) and Morton Katz’ Master’s thesis (“Perceived Parental Behavior and Delinquency”). The clinical part of the research was largely my responsibility. Originally, we planned to include interviews with the boys’ parents to balance the interviews with the subjects conducted by the students as they tested them. Parental resistance proved to be such that the experimental data, difficult as they were to get, provided us with much more than did the interviews.

The present paper offers a theoretical basis for our work with a few clinical examples. The empirical data, results and conclusions will be presented in a succeeding paper.

It is the thesis of our work that violence begets violence. Hardly, it would seem, a startling, even a controversial, statement. Indeed, so obvious that attempts to document it seem superfluous. But the thesis apparently is not obvious. One of J. Edgar Hoover’s last statements before his death was to the effect that had most criminals been soundly “blistered on their bottoms” during childhood, their lives would have taken a less anti-social direction. This from a man who had spent fifty years working with—or against—criminals, and who could not have

escaped exposure to the pathetic, brutal, violent and punishment-ridden background histories of the men and women he prosecuted.

In the background of all perpetrators of violent crimes, the infamous and notorious as well as those whose crimes reach only the back pages of newspapers, is a history of cruel, excessive, brutalizing and dehumanizing punitive practices brought against them. Arthur Bremer, Governor George Wallace’s would-be assassin, entered a poignant note in his diary: “My mother must have thought I was a canoe, she paddled me so much.” Oswald, Sirhan, Charles Manson, the restless inhabitants of death rows and prisons everywhere have this in common: they have killed, and they experienced, as babies, children and adolescents, pain. They were punished harshly, arbitrarily, systematically, unjustly, and excessively. Their punishment was unsoftened by compensatory loving and supportive practices by their parents. They were punished because they were unloved, because their parents were unloving people. They were punished because of edicts of that most bloodthirsty of institutions, the church, whose ultimate justification, “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” has been mindlessly repeated, to the accompaniment of crying children for centuries. (There is linguistic evidence, incidentally, that the Hebrew in which this exhortation was originally written can just as likely be translated, “Spare the rod and spoil the slave.” If our goal is to raise slaves, docile and fearful instruments of our own policies, then we would do well to follow the ancient advice, for it can create a cringing obedience in some of our slave-children—those who don’t rise up in rebellion against us, that is.) They were chiefly punished, though, out of the twisted malevolence of immature, ignorant and neurotic parents, venting their rages, their frustrations, their conflicts against those all too handy scapegoats, their children.

A causal relationship—violence breeds violence—is not so obvious in the heat of passion. Nor does it seem to make sense in the face of long-held prejudices. Currently, in California there is a drive—and at this writing, an apparently successful one—to reinstate the ultimate punishment, execution, recently declared unconstitutional by the state supreme court and more recently upheld by the supreme court of the land. This drive is spearheaded by the California Association of Probation Officers, a group of professionals who, even more than J. Edgar Hoover, have been confronted time and again with the bitter results of punishment, the tragic futility of punitive practices in accomplishing anything positive in the angry, violent people who endure them. (This situation is not unlike the one Adah Maurer and I, in our attempts in the EVAN-G campaign to have corporal punishment banned in California schools, have come up against; the most vocal and effective opponents of abolishing physical punishment are school administrators and teachers themselves, people who presumably once were pupils.) We may call ourselves a peace-loving nation, but we are not. More than half of all American men and women, black and white, old and young, do believe in the effectiveness of punishment, threats and violence in combating personal and social outbreaks of frustration, and the percentage of believers is considerably higher, up to 93%, among people lower in social, educational and intelligence levels. (Kelman and Lawrence, *Psychology Today*, June, 1972.)

One of the many unfortunate affects of poverty—financial, educational, experiential—is the psychological restriction it imposes upon the poor. A narrowness of perception seems to develop such that the world is seen simply and starkly; there is a consequent, strong limitation to choices that can be made by people without the broadening experience of experience. You beat up a child or you don’t, and that’s about it as far as raising him is concerned. And after a while—when the child is thirteen, say, or ten, or six, and has proven unresponsive to the beatings, still continuing his “bad” behavior—then you give up altogether, wash your hands of the brat, begin calling him names, and resign your responsibility for him.

We are beginning to learn that name-calling at whatever level—the shrill taunts of children or the pompous nosologies of psychiatrists—is not only useless and misleading; it is also dangerous and destructive. A recent program of the National Strategy for Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention of HEW is finding, with respect to juvenile delinquency, that the unconstructive interaction between a boy and his labeling, name-calling home and school environments, in which he feels increasingly alienated and rejected because he is called “lazy,” “underachieving,” “incorrigible,” “pre-delinquent,” “hostile,” etc., etc.—is responsible to a large extent for his later delinquency. This is an important finding, for it takes the onus off the child, who was previously called psychopathic and sociopathic as well as the above epithets, and places blame where it belongs: upon those unthinking and inauthentic institutions, most notably the family and the school, which respond not to his humanity and to his developing identity, but to his behavior and inappropriately so at that!

Name-calling sets up the conditions for a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many writers have pointed out to us how failure can stem from feeling a failure, how delinquency itself can be set in motion by an accumulation of well-chosen pejoratives hurled at a child. In our research, we are learning about another and quite insidious power of the self-fulfilling prophecy from battered children and delinquents who do not, almost to a boy, resent the barbaric punishments inflicted upon them from their infancies onwards. Along with the blows, they absorbed the shouted and unspoken messages that went along with the beatings: you are bad, you are worthless, you are hateful, you deserve this beating. Now, in their teens, they agree. “I am bad. I deserved the beatings I got. My parents were justified in knocking hell out of me. If I have any children, that’s the way I’ll treat them, too.”

It is difficult to criticize one’s own parents. The power of parenthood is immense, which most parents deem not to realize, and most offspring engage in the most strenuous mental acrobatics of rationalization, repression and excuse-finding (which their parents never did for them) to justify the parents’ behavior, no matter how inhuman or irrational it may have been. Now let me try to support some of these ideas with some clinical examples from our subjects.

Howard, a black seventeen year old, has been in Juvenile Hall nineteen times: four for petty theft, six for burglary, once for strong arm