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TOWARD AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO CRIMINAL VIOLENCE*

HANS TOCH**

In explaining the title of this paper, I must qualify its ecumenical theme by noting that my perspective is conditioned by membership in the Subculture of the Clinician, though I am not a core member. I agree with Sholom Aleichem, who compared the mission of psychology to that of parsley. "To look at it's not bad," he said, "it smells nice, tastes good when you flavor food with it. But you try chewing parsley by itself!"¹ In Aleichem's terms, the goal of this paper is to discuss violence menus that are flavored with parsley; to discuss the impact of clinical thinking on the study of violence. The assets of this approach, and its liabilities, are relative (just as some spices can make unusual chicken soup). Problems arise where disciplines are stretched to apply to the domains of other disciplines.

We must start by recognizing that disciplinary parochialism in our perspectives on crime and violence is inevitable. Linkages between our perspectives are made more difficult by a tendency to gravitate toward core assumptions in our own fields, as opposed to areas of potential interface between fields. This point was well put by Robert Merton in a conference on delinquency in 1955. Merton said:

In this bridge-building game . . . it is important to keep in mind that the work of the sociologist tends to concentrate on observing repetitive behaviors involving large numbers of people. Consequently, he is apt to be less sensitive to the highly individualized, idiosyncratic aspects of what he has observed. Correlatively, the occupational task of most clinicians is to be extremely concerned with the idiosyncratic.

In consequence, by virtue of their occupations and

ways of life, each of these two guilds (sociologists and clinicians), which may share the same mode of thought and the same objective, is none the less cumulatively building up its own peculiar kind of sensitivity. The result is a series of lopsided developments. Nevertheless, it is not wise to wait for a scientist of man, his behavior and his works, one who can adequately incorporate these varied sensitivities and, with boundless time and energy, can move on these fronts at once. The tactic that could be most helpful, it seems to me, would be for us to join together and fuse our respective sensitivities from time to time, but, in the main, to continue to develop the conceptions most pertinent to each field.²

I presume that a search for interfaces subserves Merton's goal of "fusing our respective sensitivities from time to time." With this in mind, I shall discuss three violence-related problem areas in which interdisciplinary fusion seems possible to me. These areas are (1) the intersection of psychodynamics and social norms, (2) the prediction of violence-chronicity, and (3) the design of violence-promotive (counter-therapeutic) and violence-reducing (therapeutic) settings.

PERSONAL MOTIVES AND SOCIAL NORMS

Macro-theorists map the prevalence of violence. Their views are based on data about the distribution of violence over space and time among different groups of people. The clinician interacts with individuals, and generally disregards their location in statistical distributions. He tends to ignore the question of whether his patient is idiosyncratic. Herein lies a problem for both the clinician and the macro-theorist. The clinician suffers because he understates the contextual pressures bearing on non-idiosyncratic offenders; the sociologist tends to discount the role of psychodynamics by assuming that clinicians examine only offenders occupying the tail end of distributions or residual categories. As a result, it becomes hard to fill the blanks in violence theories that relate to the motives of violent offenders, and sociologists often attribute in-

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¹ Aleichem, *Preamble*, ALEICHEM, *THE THREE WIDOWS*, reprinted in H. TOCH, *LEGAL AND CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY* vii (1961).

² Merton, in *NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR RESEARCH IN JUVENILE DELINQUENCY* 79 (H. Witmer & R. Kotinsky eds. Children's Bureau, U.S. Dept. HEW, 1955).

dividual behavior to generic stimuli (prevalent conditions in the outside world). To escape from this emphasis on stimuli, it is helpful to examine two of Wolfgang's propositions. The first is that violence-permissive and violence-promotive norms are prevalent in neighborhoods from which concentrations of violent offenders emanate, and second, that many offenders have internalized such norms, and are affected by them.³

This syllogism leaves two problems which may ultimately be related. First, where emphasis is put on the existence of social norms, in order to explain behavior consonant with such norms, one cannot accommodate the distinction between sets of "norm-exposed" individuals who behave according to prevailing norms, and those who do not. Unless the normative conduct is universal (or unless it follows F. H. Allport's J curve for conforming behavior), there are differences between individuals who have internalized norms—or at least, translated norms into conduct—and those who have not. Most explanations of the differences (except differential association or exposure views) must include assumptions about the psychic makeup of the norm adopter.

The second problem involves types and degrees of norm adoption. Macro-theorists locate subcultures where extreme statistical distributions exist. This usually means that norm-relevant behavior is not only prevalent, but also extreme enough to be recorded. For example, we locate violence subcultures on the basis of homicide statistics.⁴ But murderers, robbers, predatory delinquents, and other statistically prominent individuals are not model denizens of their neighborhoods. If the norms examined are cultural, they must prescribe behavior that makes sense to members of the culture, and have group approval. A cultural violence norm plausibly tells the individual that he can react to affronts or defend his manly honor; it cannot carry the same point to extremes, and tell the person that he must rape, rob, or kill. Such occurs only among small, evanescent, and self-destructive subcultures, such as the thugges of British India, or the flagellants of the Middle Ages.⁵

³ M. WOLFGANG & F. FERRACUTI, *THE SUBCULTURE OF VIOLENCE: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED THEORY IN CRIMINOLOGY* 105 (1967).

⁴ M. WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* (1958).

⁵ Mark Twain, a self-appointed expert on thugges, also locates homicidal subcultures in the American hinterland. In the process of describing mining communities in early Nevada, Twain tells us:

If an unknown individual arrived, they did not

My premise is that the murderers used to locate violent subcultures are atypical of it because they exceed its norms. Such persons both literally and figuratively engage in cultural over-kill. The more representative violence-norm carriers are lower-key aggressors, whom we rarely meet in police lineups and crime statistics. This presumptive qualitative difference is addressed by Straus in relation to marital violence. Straus refers to a social norm—a "hitting license"—which does support the punching-pummeling-slapping spouse, but does not support the abuser who inflicts serious injury.⁶

inquire if he was capable, honest, industrious, but—had he killed his man? If he had not, he gravitated to his natural and proper position, that of a man of small consequence; if he had, the cordiality of his reception was graduated according to the number of his dead. It was tedious work struggling up to a position of influence with bloodless hands; but when a man came with the blood of half a dozen men in his soul, his worth was recognized at once and his acquaintance sought. . . . To be a saloon-keeper and kill a man was to be illustrious. Hence the reader will not be surprised to learn that more than one man was killed in Nevada under hardly the pretext of provocation, so impatient was the slayer to achieve reputation and throw off the galling sense of being held in indifferent repute by his associates. I knew two youths who tried to "kill their man" for no other reason—and got killed themselves for their pains. . . . The desperado stalked the streets with a swagger graded according to the number of his homicides, and a nod of recognition from him was sufficient to make a humble admirer happy for the rest of the day. The deference that was paid to a desperado of wide reputation, and who "kept his private graveyard," as the phrase went, was marked, and cheerfully accorded. . . . The best known names in the Territory of Nevada were those belonging to these long-tailed heroes of the revolver. . . . There was a long list of them. They were brave, reckless men, and traveled with their lives in their hands. To give them their due, they did their killing mainly among themselves, and seldom molested peaceable citizens, for they considered it small credit to add to their trophies so cheap a bauble as the death of a man who was "not on the shoot," as they phrased it. They killed each other on slight provocation, and hoped and expected to be killed themselves—for they held it almost shame to die otherwise than "with their boots on," as they expressed it.

M. TWAIN, *ROUGHING IT* 339, 340-41, 343, 344-45 (1872).

Though the phenomenon described in this quote is clearly subcultural, even Twain (who is given to hyperboles) does not assert that "long-tailed heroes of the revolver" were representative of early Nevada citizenry. The difference between a frontier mining town and a modern slum is that in the former, extreme violence practitioners were admired, whereas in the latter, their deviance is merely considered less extreme than in middle class circles.

⁶ M. STRAUS, R. GELLES & S. STEINMETZ, *BEHIND*

Extreme violent offenders are both cultural products and legitimate subjects of clinical inquiry. In tracing extreme violent behavior, clinicians are extra-sensitive to unrepresentative early socialization experiences which created personal dispositions fatefully congruent with violence-permissive prescriptions. The link between early personal experience and subsequent norm-adoption can be visualized in various ways. One way is to see over-determined norm-adopters eagerly grasping for violence-norms while those with representative early social experiences respond to such norms more casually. Another image is that of the brain as a prism of varying complexity, which can transmit or project norms in larger-than-life fashion. The more facets the prism contains, the more we expect it to distort. Its complexity is influenced by personal alienation, trauma-induced cumulated rage, a need to compensate for low self-esteem, suspicion, fear, egocentricity, insensitivity, limited verbal skill, or structural neurological factors, such as those that transmute implanted rabbits into tigers.⁷ The diagnosis of such ingredients is a clinical task, but it can assist the subculture theorist. Among other things, it is easier to validate subcultural theory if we deploy in depth tests (such as projective instruments) with people who we suspect are violence-predisposed norm adopters, while we poll more routine clients of the subculture with situationally-related attitude measures.

Returning to the issue of what is representative versus idiosyncratic, the topographic high points of our violence charts can be seen as both typical and atypical. On one hand, concentrations of extreme violence-practitioners are indicators of subcultures because they are made up of persons who dramatically translate norms into conduct. On the other hand, such peaks are populated by persons whose clinical syndromes reflect anomie and who are subcultural mutations. Such syndromes are also less idiosyncratic than those of the typical patient in therapy and are therefore theoretically more relevant, because they permit interfacing between clinically-oriented and societally-oriented scientists.

So far, I have implied that the interface between personality and culture in the genesis of violence

has been short-changed by the culturists. I now turn to some core assumptions of clinical science which culturists legitimately criticize as gratuitously polarizing. Two such assumptions are (1) the formula of "violent impulsivity," and (2) the diagnosis of pathology among violent offenders.

AGGRESSIVE DRIVE AS AN EXPLANATORY CONCEPT

Kenneth Moyer states that "drive is frequently given the status of an intervening variable which is essentially an expression of ignorance or lack of concern with what is going on inside the organism."⁸ The extreme embodiment of this process is the psychiatrist in one of Steadman's examples who argued that a man was dangerous because of "his obvious" difficulties in controlling his aggressive impulses.⁹ If an x-ray machine has been invented that makes such statements defensible, it is a well-kept technological secret.

From a contextual perspective, the concept of drive seems to start nowhere and to end diffusely. Animal analogues are inappropriate. Zoologist S. A. Barnett, decries this practice: "We can find at least superficial counterparts of almost any human conduct if we rummage around the animal kingdom with enough persistence."¹⁰ Barnett also deplores fashionable anthropological similes. He notes that "most of the evidence points to primitive man as rather peaceful. There have been a few strenuous efforts to make [him] out to be violent."¹¹ The ethological assumption that Barnett proposes—which has the virtue of being both sound psychology and ecumenical—is that "human conduct is adapted (sometimes maladapted) to different environments; this adaptation takes place during individual development from birth onward. People who would be pacifists in the Kalahari desert might behave quite differently in Calcutta or Canberra."¹²

It is possible to explain aggressive impulsivity in social learning terms. For example, Feshbach suggests that "aggressive drive arises from the pairing of the infliction of injury with counter-aggression . . . reinforced by cultural norms which state that retaliation is the appropriate response for

⁸ Moyer, *Internal Impulses to Aggression*, 31 N.Y. ACAD. SCI. TRANSACTIONS 104 (1969).

⁹ Steadman, *Psychiatric and Judicial Determinations of Dangerousness* (August, 1972) (paper presented to Society for the Study of Social Problems).

¹⁰ Barnett, *Ethology and Man: Science or Myth?*, 19 DEV. MED. & CHILD NEUROLOGY 252, 256 (1977).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 257.

CLOSED DOORS: VIOLENCE IN THE AMERICAN FAMILY (1980).

⁷ The last item is mentioned as a possible physiological determinant of instrumental aggression in Moyer, *Kinds of Aggression and their Physiological Basis*, 2 COM. BEHAVIORAL BIOLOGY 65, 79 (1968).

an injured party." He also suggests that "violations to self-esteem through insult, humiliation, or coercion are powerful elicitors of hostility, probably the most important source of anger and aggressive drive in humans."¹³ This theory of drive has important payoffs. Instead of plugging socialization into the equation as a unidirectional drive-suppressing or drive-modulating enterprise, it gives culture a more generic function, one that enhances as well as reduces violence-potential. In this way, learning models and drive-control models can be conceptually combined, though drive is demoted from an independent variable to a dependent one.

A second issue relates to drive-products—the presumed indiscriminateness of drive-mediated violence—which are hard to reconcile with the situation-specific patterning of human predations. There may be episodic psychotic explosions in which cognition is virtually shut off, but intelligence is certainly a shaping force in most human violence.

Whatever merit there may be in thinking about impulsivity and control, such concepts are not self-sufficient. They no more explain violence than does the labelling of sex offenders as over-sexed or over-eaters as hunger-driven. It may be that such thinking is helpful in relation to the mechanics of violence but not with respect to violence-dynamics, which implies origins, functions, and context.

THE ISSUE OF PATHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Offender subpopulations contain an unknown number of individuals who can be diagnosed as psychologically disturbed. However, even where such diagnoses are defensible, this does not mean that we have either explained violence or understood it. A schizophrenic who assaults people is a psychotic and is violence-prone. Both facts may diminish the person's popularity, but the combination does not make him a violent psychotic. If the patient obeys voices that tell him to kill, our understanding increases by considering this fact, but in most cases the link between behavior and emotional or cognitive problems is remote.

Kozol, Bucher and Garofalo, who have seen more than their share of disturbed offenders, write that "the terms used in standard psychiatric diagnosis are almost totally irrelevant to the determination of dangerousness."¹⁴ They recall that "our

most serious errors in diagnosis have been made when we ignored the details in the description of the assault. How was the victim chosen? Was the choice specific and meaningful or was it random and incidental? What was the victim in the aggressor's eyes?"¹⁵

Where alienists proceed as Kozol and his colleagues suggest, centering on violence-relevant data as well as on pathology-relevant data, conversations with representatives of other disciplines are facilitated immeasurably. Personality themes that derive from analyses of violent incidents and from an understanding of encounters between the offender and his victims provide a reliable data base. This data base permits experts to sum themes across scenarios and people, while they can study incidents in depth over the careers of individual violent actors. The intersection of such researches enriches understanding of the occasions for violence, and illuminates the contexts in which violence-prone personalities exhibit their propensities.

PREDICTING VIOLENCE CHRONICITY

The fact that violence-repeaters exist raises the issue of violence-predictability. "Dangerousness," we are assured, "is in the eyes of the beholder." "Clinicians," we are told, "selfservingly overpredict."¹⁶ Statistics provide no help, because low criterion base rates invite an outrageous number of false positives.¹⁷

Prediction and chronicity would be separable if we assumed that violent acts could be accurately predicted where none had occurred previously, but no responsible expert claims to be able to identify high risk groups from among those with no previous history of violence. By the same token, an established pattern of repeat violence provides assurance of further violence virtually regardless of other characteristics of the offender. In the first situation, the chances are that few will act violently, and in the second, that almost everyone will. Given the state of the prediction art, one-time offenders (for whom prediction is conventionally deployed) join the low-risk population.

ment of Dangerousness, 18 CRIME & DELINQUENCY 371, 383 (1972).

¹⁵ *Id.* at 384.

¹⁶ See Steadman, *supra* note 9; see also H. STEADMAN & J. COCOZZA, CAREERS OF THE CRIMINALLY INSANE: EXCESSIVE SOCIAL CONTROL OF DEVIANCE (1974).

¹⁷ Wenk & Emrich, *Assaultive Youth: An Exploratory Study of the Assaultive Experience and Assaultive Potential of California Youth Authority Wards*, 9 J. RESEARCH CRIME & DELINQUENCY 171 (1972); Wenk, Robison & Smith, *Can Violence Be Predicted?*, 18 CRIME & DELINQUENCY 393 (1972).

¹³ Feshbach, *Dynamics and Morality of Violence and Aggression: Some Psychological Considerations*, 26 AM. PSYCH. 281, 285 (1971).

¹⁴ Kozol, Boucher & Garofalo, *The Diagnosis and Treat-*

Saleem Shah has noted that a strangely unexplored prediction arena is that which starts with the violent offender whom cohort analysts (such as Wolfgang and his colleagues) have characterized as "recidivists"—youths who have committed two predatory offenses, and who may or may not have engrained personal dispositions toward chronicity. Such individuals lie midway between the heterogeneous melange of one-time exploders and the unfortunate chronics for whom prediction comes too late.¹⁸ The behavior base rate in this group (violent recidivists who become violent chronics) is .50 among Wolfgang's thirty-year-olds, which is encouraging, because we know that "the closer (a base rate) is to .50 the more useful it will be as a measure that will predict the behavior."¹⁹

My ecumenical theme calls for inclusion of Gottfredson's recommendation for combining prediction methods that are framed differently. Such a task can be accomplished in various ways, including the deployment of an actuarial method that confines its assumption of additivity to variables that are clinically relatable.²⁰

As a clinician, I take one of my cues from the process-reactive dimension in schizophrenia, which employs an actuarial method to distinguish more serious conditions from less serious ones.²¹ The analogue may not be perfect, but it holds on several counts: (1) no one raises the process-reactive issue unless concrete behavior justifies a plausible diagnosis—there is no such thing as a "process pre-schizophrenic"; (2) the less chronic of the two schizophrenic syndromes, as the term "reactive" implies, points to precipitating conditions, to stressful environmental impingements—by contrast, the more serious and patterned syndrome features a history of adversity, of environmental discontinuity, and maladaptation; (3) the social history variables used to diagnose process schizophrenia cumulate, and the configuration makes sense. Similarly, causal explanations are not preordained: pro-

cess schizophrenia is associated with industrialization, but it is also related to chaotic family life, soft neurological indicators, and vulnerable coping styles.

We can expect research outcomes that may make the parallel even closer, because the configuration of disorganization variables that relates to process schizophrenia may also predict a prevalent pattern of violence chronicity. The syndrome would indicate an "anomic violent offender" or an "explosive drifter." Also, predictors such as truancy, school failure and gang membership would describe a "reactive violent youth."²² Neighborhood crime rates, crime-involved siblings, and punitive parents could characterize a "subcultural violent offender." Race can be a relevant predictor if it translates into ghetto subculture; if it does, it should of course be appropriately labelled.

Thus far, I have used the term "clinical" to denote "conceptually relatable," as opposed to "blindly empirical." This inexact word usage is dictated by the observation that few of the reliable data recorded in the folders of offenders are clinical in the sense that they describe an offender's personality. Worse, most violence-related personality variables are not additive. Kozol and his colleagues make this point, citing Halleck as authority. They write:

Prediction of dangerousness must ultimately be based upon an overall subjective impression which is based upon an understanding of the interrelatedness of many factors. . . . They do not constitute a check list, and they are not complete or final. They are suggestions and reminders to us—not a questionnaire put to the patient.²³

Despite the difficulty posed by contrasting assumptions of statistical additivity and "meaningful clinical configurations," a formula for combining prediction technologies can and should be evolved. Ernst Wenk has written that:

Much prior research has shown that actuarial predictions are more accurate than unaided clinical judgment. For this reason it would seem a derelict-

¹⁸ Shaw, *Dangerousness and Mental Illness: Some Conceptual Prediction and Policy Dilemmas*, in *DAUGHTER BEHAVIOR: A PROBLEM IN LAW AND MENTAL HEALTH* 168 (C. Frederick ed. 1978).

¹⁹ Hanley, *The Gauging of Delinquency Potential*, in *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE* 237, 240 (H. Toch ed. 1979) (Base rate information from the Philadelphia cohort was supplied by M. Wolfgang through personal communication).

²⁰ Gottfredson, *Assessment and Prediction Methods in Crime and Delinquency*, in *TASK FORCE REPORT: JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND YOUTH CRIME* (1967).

²¹ Zigler & Phillips, *Social Effectiveness and Symptomatic Behaviors*, 61 *J. ABNORMAL & SOC. PSYCH.* 231 (1960).

²² The most powerful prediction of delinquency chronicity from recidivism in the Philadelphia cohort includes the variables "age of first offense" (which may be an artifact), "highest grade completed," and "number of different schools." M. Wolfgang, personal communication. With all else constant, such data increase the plausibility of the explanation for violence in A. COHEN, *DELINQUENT BOYS: THE SUBCULTURE OF THE GANG* (1955).

²³ See Kozol, Boucher & Garofalo, *supra* note 14, at 384.

tion to omit actuarial input. It is equally clear that the clinical role is also needed because the human decision-maker contributes the ability to respond to unique situations, an appreciation of multiple criteria, the possibility of therapeutic input and a humanizing influence on decisions.²⁴

Wenk now favors—as do I—the combined procedure Sawyer calls “clinical synthesis,” which Wenk summarizes as “taking a prediction produced mechanically and treating it as a datum to be combined clinically with other data.”²⁵ Clinical assessment may be appended to actuarial procedures, subdividing or refining high-risk groups that surface in statistics, adding meaning and increasing predictive power. “Adding meaning” is the key phrase to consider, because clinical assessment reduces the ambiguity of predictors, which is conventionally ignored. For instance, “early separation from school” does not tell us whether school was unbearable to the student, the student was unbearable to the school, both, neither, or whether it “depends on which delinquent we talk about.” Alcohol often contributes to violence in offenders who drink to excess. If alcohol is a factor, questions arise as to how and why the variable enters the equation. Correlations between predictors and criterion behavior do not illuminate the dynamics of alcoholism among offenders. They don’t tell us whether stress is an antecedent to drinking, nor do they describe the role of alcohol in the genesis of violence, which probably varies from offender to offender.

One final caution: prediction research must first be *pure* research. Until clinicians know they can really predict violence, they cannot let practitioners base decisions on their findings.

THE IMPACT OF SETTINGS ON THE VIOLENT OFFENDER

Clinical and sociological perspectives have applied concerns in common. One such concern is for the impact of settings in which violent or violence-prone offenders are placed. Ignoring setting-impact can result in serious miscalculations, a fact illustrated by Strasburg’s review of how the juvenile justice enterprise in New York subjects violent offenders to a revolving door terminating in punitive incarceration. Strasburg views the system as

experienced by the serious offender, and concludes that:

[The] cycle of neglect, rejection, transfer, and failure reinforces [the delinquent’s] sense that he belongs nowhere and fans the alienation that contributes to violent behavior. The seemingly endless chain of policemen, probation officers, judges, social workers, doctors, and correction officers who pass through his life, rarely to reappear, conditions the child to expect little from relationships with adults except professional curiosity, indifference, or interference. He also learns that he can survive this process without his worst fears of annihilation being realized, which merely emboldens him. And he may well have picked up more sophisticated techniques along the way. . . . [C]urrent intervention practices seem to encourage and enhance the [delinquent] group’s destructive potential.²⁶

Strasburg believes that settings designed to control violence somehow contain features that reinforce propensities to violence. Such features include messages of indifference and rejection, unpredictable and arbitrary response to behavior, ammunition for cynical world views, and happenstance exercises of authority. Such themes are familiar to psychologists because they are characteristic of the home-lives or (non-home-lives) of children who later manifest aggressivity and other dysfunctional conduct. These features create a world and emotional climate that, in Strasburg’s terms, “alienates.” The potency of the alienating features of the immediate world—as opposed to the larger world in which many sociologists work—is not only manifest in the home, but also in the schools. Studies of school disruption have highlighted the positive role of the “firm, fair, and consistent” principal, as opposed to the administrator who sets up a miniature criminal justice system, and achieves anarchy instead.²⁷ In such contexts, “firm, fair, and consistent” describes a climate which is non-violence-promotive—a “bottom line” environment that does not aggravate the violence problem. Such a paradigm is harder to design than one might think, because (as we have discovered with sentencing reforms) achieving consistency along one variable often creates inconsistency in another, an effect which the single-variable expert—such as the lawyer—fails to consider.

²⁴ Wenk, *The Diagnostic Parole Prediction Index* 108 (1979) (mimeographed by Responsible Action, Inc., Davis, Cal.).

²⁵ *Id.* at 39; Sawyer, *Measurement and Prediction, Clinical and Statistical*, 66 *PSYCH. BULL.* 178, 184 (1966).

²⁶ P. STRASBURG, *VIOLENT DELINQUENTS: A REPORT TO THE FORD FOUNDATION FROM THE VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE* 125 (1978).

²⁷ NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, *VIOLENT SCHOOLS—SAFE SCHOOLS: THE SAFE SCHOOL STUDY REPORT TO CONGRESS* (1978)

VIOLENCE-REDUCING SETTINGS

A violence-reducing climate is more than a non-alienating environment or a sharp departure from a violence-promotive setting. For the most alienated offenders, who are products of cumulative antisocial reinforcements, it is clear that a regenerative environment would almost have to be a total environment which could exert systematic influences that delinquent egos could not discount, sabotage, ignore, or evade. Such an environment must also be nonpunitive, because it must be socially reintegrative, meaning that it must be a community or *gemeinschaft* milieu. The realm at issue is social therapy.

We have long known that the design of resocializing milieus is a multidisciplinary task. Freud saw this mission as best accomplished by sophisticated educators. He trained one such man (August Aichhorn) who revolutionized the field. Aichhorn in turn, trained another young educator (Fritz Redl) who not only did a superb job of resocializing violent delinquents in Detroit and Washington, but also contributed significantly to our understanding of violence.²⁸

A violence-reducing environment would be an environment that reduces violence-levels of persons who have already behaved violently. The criterion of impact is the discrepancy between expected and actual violence.

We can explore environmental impact whenever violence-prone groups suffer contrasting fates. Ethical problems are minimized to the degree to which contextual differences occur naturally or with a minimum of help. An illustration would be the school situation mentioned earlier, or changes in the marital status of violent delinquents, or demographic variations in neighborhoods to which offenders are returned.

Several categories of violence-reducing options derive from sociological theories. One is Wolfgang's suggestion that violence subcultures be partially dispersed.²⁹ The most obvious result of such an event would be that the dispersed offender would no longer be subjected to people urging him to conform to violence-promotive norms. We may assume that there are sharp differences in the degree to which internalized norms can survive in settings in which they are no longer admired and

reinforced; the recalcitrance of surviving premises can be studied over personality types.

Another issue posed by Wolfgang's paradigm concerns the competitive potential of adoptable norms in the setting to which the offender is exported. One set of questions relates to the psychological equivalence of norms. We know, for instance, that for some people conformity is relatively important, while for others the congruence of norms with pre-existing dispositions is critical. We also deduce from planned-change theory that the shock of contrasting norms can be unfreezing while a gradual bridging along content dimensions (such as different ways of solving questions of honor) can promote a sense of safety.³⁰

A second sociological theory with contextual implications is Hirschi's control theory.³¹ This view suggests that alienated offenders can be reintegrated if they become emotionally attached to law-abiding persons, or if they become involved in engrossing pursuits that yield meaningful and satisfying rewards. A violence-reducing milieu would be one that creates and cements personal bonds between the offender and representatives of non-violent society, or that gives the offender a stake in the prosocial world.

The above view is compatible with clinical assumptions, though Redl cautions that seduction is a two-way street. Reintegration is problematic where mismatched relationships are change vehicles or where rehabilitative outposts are logistically vulnerable. A resourceless spouse can be a spectator or even an accessory to crime; well-conceived therapeutic communities can become swamped or co-opted.³² An offender who operates in two worlds can evolve a dual lifestyle with crime or reintegration as the sideline.

These ruminations outline ways in which psychological variations can attach to sociological themes. My last example suggests the possibility of a converse model, based on a concern of psychologists. This concern focuses on the self-cycling consequences of violence, the ways in which violent careers can cement and perpetuate themselves.

³⁰ Schein, *The Mechanisms of Change*, in W. BENNIS, K. BENNE & R. CHIN, *THE PLANNING OF CHANGE* (2d ed. 1969).

³¹ T. HIRSCHI, *CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY* (1969).

³² C. GEIS, *THE EAST LOS ANGELES HALFWAY HOUSE FOR NARCOTIC ADDICTS* (1966); E. STUDD, S. MESSINGER & T. WILSON, *C-UNIT: SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY IN PRISON* (1968); *THE THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY IN CORRECTIONS* (H. Toch ed. 1980).

²⁸ A. AICHORN, *WAYWARD YOUTH* (1935); F. REDL, *WHEN WE DEAL WITH CHILDREN* (1966); F. REDL & D. WINEMAN, *CHILDREN WHO HATE* (1951).

²⁹ See WOLFGANG & FERRACUTI, *supra* note 3, at 310.

Bandura calls such processes "maintaining" mechanisms and he includes among them "self-regulatory" mechanisms. Examples of these mechanisms are positive valuations and self-rewards for violence.³³

Self-regulatory mechanisms can be attacked by environments that raise questions about the offender's standards and values and their relationship to behavior. One suggestive example is a project in Oakland in which violence-prone police officers were enlisted in an anti-violence campaign in their department. Police-citizen conflict declined as a result.³⁴ The goal of this enterprise was to reverse the polarities of self-reward both for the individual (who can come to see success in peaceful resolutions rather than in physical control) and for the organization (which can supplement cops-and-robbers goals with more positive definitions of its mission).

Sociological critiques can define this sort of approach out of existence by stressing the structural determinants of violence, and by characterizing

people-changing as cosmetic reform.³⁵ No ecumenical thrust is evident in such views, though one is implicit. Macro-theorists and micro-theorists can raise joint questions about congruence or incongruence of microsettings and macrosettings. Where normative conflict between the people-changing milieu and its context exists, it need not be accepted as inevitable. Reward systems for nonviolent (or anti-violence) resolutions can be created in organizations as self-reward systems are generated in groups. More to the point, converts can impact structure as they become (in Hirschi's terms) committed and involved.³⁶

My pessimistic point about violence-reduction is that although it would be an easier task if we could somehow affect the situations in which offenders offend, we cannot, except in a negative way through imprisonment or banishment. Our remaining strategy involves changing the offender's reaction to the temptations, pressures, and challenges that we know he will inevitably encounter, and this enterprise is one that links social and clinical theory, knowledge and skills.

³³ Bandura, *The Social Learning Perspective: Mechanisms of Aggression*, in *PSYCHOLOGY OF CRIME & CRIMINAL JUSTICE* 198, 224-30 (H. Toch ed. 1979).

³⁴ H. TOCH, J. GRANT & R. GALVIN, *AGENTS OF CHANGE: A STUDY IN POLICY REFORM* (1975).

³⁵ Johnson, Book Review, 5 *CONTEMP. SOC.* 429-30 (1976); Schafer, Book Review, 1975 *ANNALS* 196-97.

³⁶ Toch, *Alienation as a Vehicle of Change*, 7 *J. COMMUNITY PSYCH.* 3-11 (1979).