
AUTHOR'S RESPONSE

The American Crime Factory

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I am grateful to the authors of foregoing reviews of my *The Antisocial Personalities* for their generous, interesting, and provocative **comments—comments** that suggest that at least the last of these adjectives applies also to the book. The reviews also suggest that there are several issues on which the book was not as clear as I had hoped. One of these is the vexed question of traits versus types, raised by Rowe, but fortunately Patrick has already explicated my views on this as well as I could do myself. In what follows, I first try to clarify some other matters raised in the reviews before turning to an issue discussed especially by Rowe, the relative importance of parenting and peer groups for the socialization of children. This question is at the heart of what I believe to be the most important social problem of our time, the prevention of sociopathy.

Fearfulness Versus “Anxiety”

Among the measures used in my early study of psychopathy (Lykken, 1957) were the then-popular Taylor Anxiety Scale and the Welsh Anxiety Index (an MMPI scale). But, believing that these instruments actually measured what Eysenck called *neuroticism*, I also devised a forced-choice questionnaire that I hoped would measure fearfulness, the trait in which I thought the Cleckley psychopath might be deficient. For each item of that Activity Preference Questionnaire (APQ), participants must choose between two hypothetical activities, one frightening and the second onerous for other reasons, that are matched for general unpleasantness. In my 1957 study, primary psychopaths more often said that they would prefer the dangerous to the boring or irritating alternatives than did the other participants. Prison inmates who did not meet the Cleckley criteria, on the other hand, had elevated scores on the Taylor and the Welsh. The Harmavoidance (HA) scale of Tellegen's Multidimensional Personality Inventory (MPQ) was based on my APQ and we now know that, indeed, HA loads on the Constraint superfactor rather

than on Negative Emotionality (NE) or neuroticism, as Patrick points out.

My questionnaire measure of fearfulness has not replicated as well as my other indicants in subsequent psychopathy studies. This may be due to a defect in the measure or it might also be that the Cleckley criteria (or their surrogates such as the Hare [1991] PCL-R) do not always yield homogeneous groups of relatively fearless psychopaths. As I point out in the book (p. 165), the time may be ripe for a bold, new step in psychopathy research, in which proven dependent variables such as Hare's countdown measure (Hare, Frazelle, & Cox, 1978) or one of Patrick's adaptations of Lang's **potentiated startle** paradigm (Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1990; Patrick, 1994), are used instead as independent variables. Those prison inmates who show the least electrodermal arousal or startle reflex while anticipating a painful electric shock are likely to be the people I would classify as primary psychopaths. If a group so selected failed to show reduced scores on **Harmavoidance**, then I would have to acknowledge the invalidity of my fearfulness questionnaire. More important, the family and developmental histories of these individuals would be of considerable interest, as would their psychometric profiles and their performance on some of the other laboratory tests now being explored by Hare, Newman, and others. This would be another example of the “bootstrapping” strategy advocated by Patrick and first described by Cronbach and Meehl (1955; see also Meehl & Golden, 1982), in which an initial crude method of classification is replaced by the more refined method that the original technique was used to identify.

Different “Types” of Psychopath

I was disappointed to note, in the Newman and Brinkley article, that I apparently had not been **sufficiently** clear in the book about what I was claiming for the low fear hypothesis. In my armchair taxonomy, there are listed four “species” and numerous “subspe-

cies" of psychopath, distinguished by the various temperamental or neuropsychological peculiarities that make them all difficult to socialize. I contend that good evidence has now accumulated for the belief that one of these peculiarities is nothing more exotic than a very low innate fearfulness. These people I call primary or Cleckley psychopaths because, unlike the other species, they meet the Cleckley criteria. What I should have explicitly acknowledged, perhaps, is that there may be other, less familiar neuropsychological peculiarities that might also tend to produce an **unsocialized** adult with the Cleckley combination of characteristics. The defective response modulation hypothesis of the Newman group may explain some cases of psychopathy, even of primary psychopathy, although I am as yet unpersuaded because of methodological problems that I discuss in the book. Hare's recent findings suggesting lateralization and language-processing peculiarities, also reviewed in the book, may prove to account for another species or subspecies. In the postscript to Chapter 13, however, I did say: "This chapter emphasizes once again that there is more than one kind of psychopath and more than one valid theory of psychopathy." I hope we can all agree on that.

Crime Risk if Reared Without Fathers

In 1992, of the juveniles incarcerated in the United States for serious crimes, about 70% had been reared without fathers. This 70% figure seems to be a magic number for much social pathology. Of the antisocial boys studied at the Oregon Social Learning Center, less than 30% came from intact families (Forgatch, Patterson, & Ray, 1994). Of the more than 130,000 teenagers who ran away from home in 1994, 72% were leaving single-parent homes (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). A 1992 study of "baby truants" in St. Paul, Minnesota, with elementary school pupils who had more than 22 unexcused absences in the year found that 70% were being reared by single mothers (Baca, 1993). Nationally, about 70% of teenage girls who have out-of-wedlock babies were raised without fathers (Kristol, 1994). Of the 61 children murdered in Chicago in 1993, 51 (83%) were being reared by unmarried teenage mothers (McMahon, 1994). A recent survey by the county attorney in Minneapolis of 135 children who had been referred for crimes ranging from arson, vandalism, and theft to assault, burglary, and criminal sexual conduct—youngsters 9 years old or younger—found that 70% of these children were living in single-parent (almost always single-mother) homes (Wiig, 1995). As I show in the book, if the base rate for fatherless rearing of today's teenagers is 25% (which is the best current estimate, although this rate is growing alarmingly), then

one can calculate that **the** risk for social pathologies ranging from delinquency to death is about seven times higher for youngsters raised without fathers than for those reared by both biological parents.

Rowe calls this estimate into question by recalculating **the** risk ratio for Black youngsters for whom **the** base rates for fatherless rearing are higher, getting a value of 1.6 as compared to my estimate of 7. Rowe gets his base rate from my Figure 15.1, which shows that about 60% of Black children born in 1995 will have been born to single mothers. But the proportion of Black teenagers in 1990 to 1995 who were reared by single mothers should be estimated from the Black illegitimacy rates between 1975 and 1980, which averaged about 45%, not 60% (National Center for Health Statistics, 1993). Substituting this corrected value into my formula as used by Rowe, we get:

$$(.45R_{NF}) / (.55R_F) = .70 / .30$$

$$\text{thus: } R_{NF} / R_F = .385 / .135 = 2.85$$

where R_{NF} is **the** risk for delinquency of children reared without fathers, R_F is the risk for those reared by both biological parents, and .70 is the proportion of all serious delinquents reared fatherless. But if Rowe uses on the left of my equation the estimates for Black juveniles, then he must also use, on the right, estimates of the proportion of incarcerated Black delinquents who were reared without fathers. Those data are not currently available, but we know that they will be higher **than** the rate for the general population because the Black illegitimacy rate is much higher than that for Whites. If about 85% of Black delinquents were reared in fatherless homes, a reasonable guess, then the corrected estimate for **the** increased risk of delinquency for Black children reared by single mothers will be 6.92, very close to the 7.0 that I computed for the U.S. population at large.

One Rotten Apple in the Barrel Spoils the Fruit

Rowe also questions my attribution of the rise in violent crime from 1960 to the mid-1970s to the fact that the postwar "baby-boomers" were moving into the high-crime age group at **that** same time. Quite reasonably, he asks: "How does a 30% increase in [the proportion of **the** total population aged 15 to 25] explain a 220% increase in [violent crime rate]?" I was a bit glib about this in the book and he has caught me. As Rowe suggests, I have to argue that there is a nonlinear relation between the number of age peers and the incidence of crime. Although there is no doubt **that** some children of incompetent middle-class parents are socialized instead by their socialized peers, such at-risk youngsters are

likely to be influenced by even one or two sociopathic peer role models. If there is just one teenager with incompetent parents on your block and then a second out-of-control **15-year-old** moves in, I believe that the frequency and severity of the mischief they get into as a team is likely to be more than merely double what the first one would do on his own—that a gang is **more dangerous** than the sum of its individual parts.

Suppose we have 100 local peer groups with 10 adolescents in each and only 10% of the groups are thus far infected by delinquency. Assume that 5 youngsters in each group had good parents and were thus able to resist infection. Then 50, or **5%**, of the original 1,000 are delinquents. Now we add 300 more youngsters, 5% of them already delinquent, distributed at random amongst the 100 local groups or neighborhoods. If 15 of the previously uninfected “barrels” each receive 1 of the 15 “bad apples,” then we soon have a total incidence of (at least) 140 delinquents, an increase of 180% in delinquency, although the total number of adolescents increased only by 30%. This is not exactly rocket science, of course, but sufficient perhaps to indicate that the nonlinear relation Rowe rightly requires is within the bounds of what is reasonable.

Is Crime Increasing?

I make extensive use in my book of FBI crime statistics. Although none of my three reviewers have raised the issue here, others have pointed out that the U.S. Department of Justice manages two statistical programs for measuring crime, and they paint very different pictures—one reassuring and the other, perhaps, more realistic. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), begun in 1973, interviews all persons 12 years old or over in a stratified sample of U.S. households, asking who has been a victim of various specified crimes. In 1992, for example, most teenagers and adults in 52,000 households nationwide were interviewed, in person or by phone, resulting in a total of about 108,000 people altogether. The victimization data suggest that the rate of aggravated assaults (the most common of violent crimes) increased by only 6% from 1973 to 1992. Victimization by theft actually decreased in rate by about 35%. Although most Americans believe that their homes and streets are more at risk with each passing year, the truth is otherwise—if we can believe the Department of Justice statistics.

The other federal crime-counting program, the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR), provides data on crimes actually reported to the police and then, by local and state police agencies, reported to the FBI. According to the FBI data, the rate of aggravated assaults has in-

creased substantially, more than doubling over the same 20-year period. (The UCR-reported decrease in violent crime since 1993 is most plausibly explained by the fact that an increased fraction of the potential offenders have been imprisoned in recent years; see **Dilulio**, 1995.) Most citizens are inclined to believe, with the FBI, that crime rates have gone up sharply since the 1970s. This is presumably why the U.S. Congress is appropriating still more tens of billions of dollars to combat crime. Citizens, of course, as well as politicians, can be wrong in the impressions gleaned from news reports. I think, however, that they are right in this case, and that the FBI statistics tell the truest story in this important instance.

Part of the explanation for the discrepancy between the victimization and FBI trend lines was pointed out in a recent study of violence in the United States (**Reiss & Roth**, 1993, Appendix B). The problem with victim surveys is that they undersample those people in the population who are most vulnerable to violent crime. Victims who are currently in jail or hospital, and also those who are transients or homeless, do not turn up in household surveys but, if they have been victims of serious crimes, that event is likely to be known to the police. More important, in our inner cities, where crime and violence is most rampant, there are housing projects and, indeed, whole neighborhoods where the (mostly female) survey interviewers are unlikely to venture. Most of the serious crimes tabulated by the FBI occur in urban ghettos, and this is where crime rates have been going up. These same areas are undersampled by NCVS interviewers, and this explains much of the difference between the UCR and NCVS trend lines. The NCVS data tell us about crime in the vast middle-class community where crime rates have been relatively level, whereas the NCR data—and the nightly television news reports—give us the whole picture, middle-class and also ghetto crime. In 1995, for example, Minneapolis set a new record for number of homicides, but more than two thirds of those killers (and most of their victims) were young Black males, members of the rootless underclass.

The rates of violent crime among the middle class should have decreased substantially over the past 20 years for two reasons: (a) the proportion of the population who are elderly has increased, whereas (b) the proportion of young males, the group that furnishes most criminal predators, has sharply decreased because of the aging of the baby-boomers. The people at highest risk to be victims of violent crime are the young; in the United States, those 15 to 25 years old, for example, are **10 to 15 times** more likely to be assaulted, robbed, or murdered than are persons 65 years old or older. From 1973 to 1992, the proportion of relatively protected seniors in the population increased more than 20%

whereas the proportion of young males 15 to 25 years old—the potential perpetrators—decreased nearly 30%.

If we divided the total number of joggers by the total population each year from 1973, it is likely that the jogging-rate trend might also be surprisingly flat, because there are proportionately fewer young people now than in 1973 and most of the growing proportion of seniors are at low risk for jogging. But who can doubt that there are relatively more young and middle-aged joggers out there now than **20-odd** years ago? And there are relatively more—many more—violent criminals out there now as well.

The U.S. murder rate is an especially reliable statistic, because nearly all murders are reported to the police, who report them in turn to the FBI. The trend since 1973 in murders coincides nicely with the victimization data for other violent crimes; the murder rate has increased only slightly over the past two decades. But, in 1973, the murder rate was double what it had been in 1960 (in New York City, the increase was 400%) largely, as I have already argued, because the proportion of the U.S. population who were males 15 to 25 years old (the group that commits the preponderance of murders in the United States) increased by 30% from 1960 to 1973 as the post-World War II baby-boomers passed through the ages of highest risk.

Beginning about 1980, as the fraction of the population in the high-risk age group started to return to 1960 levels and below, the murder rate should have decreased again—but it did not; the murder rate actually increased somewhat until about 1992. Although the proportion of the total population who are **15- to 25-year-old** males has decreased substantially in this period, the rate at which those in this murderous age group have been arrested for homicide increased 55% from 1973 to 1992. Meanwhile, the proportion of seniors, who are relatively protected from violent crime, has increased by 20%. Moreover, in 1960, most murders were family affairs, spouse killing spouse and the like. Since then, ominously, the number of “stranger murders” has increased apace until now, in our cities, for every victim murdered by a family member there are four persons murdered by strangers (Walinsky, 1995). The next male stranger you encounter on the street will be about 30% less likely to be 15 to 25 years old than in 1973 but, if he is in that age group, he will be 55% more likely to be—or to become—a murderer.

The juvenile crime rate, violent crimes committed by offenders under age 18, also has increased in recent years. The number of juveniles arrested for aggravated assault in the United States, per 100,000 juveniles in the surveyed population, increased more than 130% from 1973 to 1992 according to FBI age-specific arrest-rate

figures. Could this frightening trend be a statistical artifact? Perhaps, but only if we assume that the police for some reason failed to locate and arrest more than half of the juvenile perpetrators in 1973 but not in recent years. More than 200,000 boys from 12 to 17 years old were arrested in 1992 in the United States for murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault, or robbery. By now, most of them are back on the streets with long careers of active predation still ahead of them. In the year 2000, there will be 500,000 more boys in this age range than there are today, the children of the baby-boomers (Di-Iulio, 1995), and, because 83% of the juveniles now incarcerated owned one or more guns and 55% report that they usually carried one (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995), these babies are “boomers” indeed.

Incompetent Parents Versus Unsocialized Peers

The majority of these young criminals are not psychopaths, however. As Newman and Brinkley point out, psychopaths—persons with certain innate peculiarities that make them truly difficult to socialize—are relatively rare. They can be dangerous, although many are not violent, and I believe that some of them—the fearless ones, for **example—could** have been transmuted from a major liability into a useful asset to society by truly skillful parenting. Most recidivistic criminals are **sociopaths—unsocialized** persons who would likely have grown up to be noncriminal taxpayers had they been reared in a middle-class home by a competent, nurturant mother and father. Sociopaths are just as dangerous and, because of their numbers, an even greater social liability than psychopaths. They are why we lock our doors, stay off the streets at night, why we carry Mace and invest in guns and guard dogs and electronic surveillance systems. We are currently producing sociopaths with factory-like efficiency in the United States. Although we do not know how to cure sociopathy, I think we can figure out what needs to be done to prevent it.

Our species was designed by natural selection to live relatively amicably in extended-family groups. Just as we evolved an innate readiness for learning language, so we evolved a proclivity for learning and obeying basic social rules, for nurturing our children and helping our neighbors, and for pulling our own weight in the group effort for survival. But, like the ability to acquire language, our innate readiness to become socialized in these ways must be elicited, developed, and practiced during childhood. Otherwise, we should remain permanently mute and also, perhaps, permanently unsocialized.

In her novel, *Breathing Lessons*, Anne Tyler imagines the thoughts of a new mother:

Wait. Are they going to let me just walk off with him? I don't know beans about babies! I don't have a license to do this. ... I mean you're given all these lessons for the unimportant things-piano-playing, typing. You're given years and years of lessons in how to balance equations, which Lord knows you will never have to do in normal life. But what about parenthood? ... Before you can drive a car you need a state-approved course of instruction, but driving a car is nothing, nothing, compared to ... raising up a new human being.

In ancestral times, as in traditional societies that still exist today, parents had help from the extended family. With all those uncles and aunts and older children keeping an eye on them, it was hard for the youngsters to get away with much. Moreover, in those societies, this sharing of parental responsibilities provided training in parenting for children as they grew up. In what we call the developed societies of today, although parenting is widely regarded as one of the most difficult as well as the most important of adult responsibilities, it is a task we expect most young people to assume with no training whatever. If we were truly "developed," every high school would include a required course emphasizing the rigors and responsibilities of parenthood, and every community college would offer practicum courses for new parents or parents-to-be.

Traditional societies in which children are socialized communally, in the manner to which our species is evolutionarily adapted, have little intramural crime, and any persistent offender is likely to be someone whose innate temperament made him unusually difficult to socialize. These are the people I call *psychopaths*. Our modern society now entrusts this basic responsibility of socializing children either to the two biological parents collaborating as a team or, with increasing frequency, to single parents, usually single mothers, often single mothers who are immature and/or unsocialized themselves.

The feral products of indifferent, incompetent, or overburdened parents-the sociopaths-are growing rapidly in number, because the proportion of this nation's children who are being reared by (or, rather, domiciled with) such parents is increasing rapidly. Males 15 to 25 years old are responsible for 60% of all violent crime in the United States. The proportion of those in this age group who were born out of wedlock increased from 4% in 1973 to 12% in 1992; the proportion whose parents divorced prior to the boy's fifth birthday also tripled over the same period. Most of the first group and many of the second were raised without

significant participation of their biological fathers. Only 20% of those 135 child felons in Minneapolis were living with both biological parents. We have seen that about 70% of the juveniles currently incarcerated were reared without their biological fathers and that we can compute from this that fatherless young males are about seven times more likely to become delinquent and then criminal than boys reared by both biological parents. The proportion of the high-risk age group whose fathers planted their seed and then moved on has been growing exponentially since the early 1970s.

The Peer-Influence Hypothesis

As Rowe points out, such fathers, as well as the mothers left to bear their offspring, tend to be reckless, impulsive, and poorly socialized themselves, so that their children are often doubly handicapped, by inherited temperaments that make them "difficult" and by the indifferent, incompetent, or abusive parenting that is their fate. I do not, of course, contend that psychopathy is genetic whereas sociopathy is all environmental in origin. Because of certain innate characteristics, the psychopathically disposed child is difficult-but not impossible-to socialize. At the other extreme, some children-shy, fearful youngsters, for example-are likely to keep out of trouble even if their parents are unfit. But, I contend, even children with average temperaments-who, by definition, are by far the most numerous-may grow up unsocialized (i.e., sociopaths) if they have been parented incompetently. Thus, for the total group of antisocial personalities, one expects genetic factors to play a larger role as we move toward the psychopathic end of the continuum, whereas rearing and other environmental factors become increasingly important as we move toward the sociopathic end.

In an important recent paper, Harris (1995) argued that the environmental component of socialization was primarily mediated by the peer group. Her thesis depends in part on the fact that, in samples from the general population, the environmental component of the variance in most psychological traits, including socialization, is largely of the unshared variety, experiences other than those shared by siblings growing up in the same family. But, as Rowe very properly pointed out, when we talk about crime and delinquency, we are not (yet) talking about all or even most of the general population but about only a small percentage of children and of families. Suppose we could measure law-abidingness in the offspring of families in which at least one child had become a chronic delinquent and then criminal. Suppose further that we have temperament

measures on all biological parents and offspring and that our sample contains a sufficient number of twins, siblings, and half-siblings to permit a powerful genetic analysis. Then I contend that we should be likely to find both a significant genetic component and also an important proportion of variance attributable to shared family environment, that is, to parenting.

This conjecture is based on obvious, commonsense considerations. We know that there are single mothers who somehow manage to be excellent parents, who manage to be nurturant, authoritative, and vigilant. We also know that there are two-parent, upper-middle-class families in which (to take just one example) children are alternately neglected and then, out of parental guilt, overindulged. When our sons were toddlers, my wife insisted that we move away from a neighborhood of such families where the prevailing attitude seemed to be "boys will be boys." (This incident illustrates why I believe that parenting precedes peer group influence in the causal chain; more on this point later.) In our sample of pathogenic families from which criminals have sprung, there will be some good parents unfortunate enough to have produced a child with a temperament so difficult as to defeat their best efforts, and there will also be some really dreadful parents whose dwelling place is a pest-house of sociopathic contagion, Crack-addicted, demented, or criminal parents seldom are included in behavior genetic studies, and this may be why the variance attributable to shared home environment is so trivial in the studies on which Harris and Rowe both rely. That shared-environment component would, I believe, be substantial in the Gedanken experiment I outlined earlier. As a rule, parents who manage to love, nurture, monitor, and discipline one child will treat that child's sibling the same way; parents who neglect, abuse, or otherwise mishandle the rearing of one sibling are likely to treat the other one similarly.

As both Rowe and Harris demonstrate, the research literature supports another commonsense notion, namely that youngsters tend to misbehave if their same-gender, similar-aged peers misbehave, especially if those peers are their siblings. If we had truly adequate methods of assessing parental competence, I would have to predict that children with average temperaments and fully competent parents would tend to have well-socialized siblings and friends. I would also predict, for similar reasons, that such children with such parents would not possess handguns, Harley Davidsons to ride to school on, or a supply of illegal drugs. It seems plain to me that part of good parenting involves exerting adequate control over the child's access to dangerous toys, over the available peer group, and certainly over the behavior of his or her siblings. In the study by Rowe and Gulley (1992), controlling for "parenting styles"

did not reduce the similarity of same-gender, near-aged siblings, but these were middle-class families in which the low end of the distribution of parental competence is truncated. In the study by McGue, Sharma, and Bensen (1996) of foster siblings, also cited by Rowe, the similarity of near-aged siblings in antisocial behavior was modest ($R = .24$) and equal to the correlation found between these behaviors and measures of the competence of the adoptive parents. Because even fewer adoptive than middle-class parents generally are truly incompetent, this study cannot tell us what to expect from a sample of the criminogenic underclass. As Rowe suggests, there is probably a threshold effect here. With respect to the principal parental responsibility, the socialization of children, most middle-class and especially most adoptive parents are fungible; if the children that they reared had been randomly reallocated at the outset, the results might not have differed significantly. If, on the other hand, some of these children had been swapped at birth with those of the sociopathic mothers I describe in the book, then I believe that many of the lucky infants transferred to good homes would have succeeded in life, whereas most of those who replaced them in the bad homes would have lost their birthright of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It seems most plausible to assume that peer group influence varies inversely with parental competence. Effective parents develop relationships with their children that enable them to be role models, teachers, and counselors; most children of such parents are not attracted to antisocial peers. Good parents will not attempt to rear their offspring in neighborhoods where most potential peers are antisocial. The values and behavior patterns of the children of ineffective parents, on the other hand, will be determined primarily by the peer group. I believe that this is why most offspring of ineffective middle-class parents do manage to become socialized.

I once encountered a young couple I know hovering about their 2-year-old who was seated fretfully in her high chair, the father attempting to engage the child's attention with a picture book while the mother watched for chances to pop spoonfuls of baby food into the little girl's mouth. These two were both highly educated, intelligent, well-socialized, loving parents but, in spite of those credentials, they were ineffective parents to whom the most elementary principles of behavior modification were terra incognita. Between the ages of 1 and 6, their child was a small tyrant who kept them on the jump—the behavior shaping was all working in the wrong direction. Once in school, however, the youngster began, ineluctably, to behave as her little friends did, to become socialized. Surely this is a common pattern. It is also an indictment of our failure, as a

society, to appreciate the need for formal training in parenting skills.

Rowe's example of parenting in Japan is especially interesting in this connection. Not only do those fathers have little face-to-face contact with their children, but they must also be seldom available to the mothers as parenting consultants or responsibility-sharers. Although, like Rowe, I think it is important that they do provide economically for their families and serve as "disciplinarians of last resort," I would have to expect that these parent teams must be less effective on average as socializing agents than is true in the typical two-parent, one-bread-winner, middle-class American family (if any such still exist). But Japanese society is extraordinarily homogeneous, more like our original human environment of evolutionary adaptation, and the community shares and enforces a common set of rules and values. Therefore, I would have to predict that a family study of socialization in Japan would show greater shared-environmental than unshared or peer group influence than can be found among middle-class Americans, because the variation in peer group characteristics is so much less.

A Factory of Crime

If I am correct in the belief that criminality and social dependency are product-functions of innate temperament and parental incompetence, then the demographic trends documented in the book are alarming. The proportion of **15- to 25-year-olds** who were reared by single mothers has about trebled since 1970. The increase for Blacks was less than that for Whites, but the Black rate started upward 30 years earlier and is now nearly six times the White rate. Although there are fewer males in this high-risk age group now than in the **1970s**, because of the aging of the baby-boomers, that trend is about to reverse itself as the children of the "**boomers**" come on line. In the absence of the extended-family system of communal rearing, to which we are adapted by **evolution**, parenting is plainly a more demanding and difficult task. For this reason, I think it is reasonable to guess that the average single parent is only about half as competent as both biological parents working together. Most single-parent families exist near or below the poverty line. Moreover, the sexual revolution to the contrary notwithstanding, single parents-both the parent with the child and the parent on the loose-must be, on the average, less well socialized **and/or** temperamentally more "difficult" than biological parents who become and remain married to each other. I do not intend to "blame" single mothers-if blame is the issue, the absent fathers should receive the larger share. (Those

who believe that the importance of fathers-in-residence, as well as marriage itself, was a Victorian invention that we moderns can ignore should read Blankenhorn [1995] before they embarrass themselves totally.)

I do intend to argue that to deliberately bring into the world a child that will be required to develop under such difficult circumstances, to face a clouded future in which the odds of poverty, inadequate educational attainment, welfare dependency, and crime are many times higher than for most children, is wrong, wrong both for the people who do it and also for the society that permits it. John Stuart Mill (1859), who received perhaps more fathering than he really wanted, was of a similar opinion:

Causing the existence of a human being is one of the most responsible actions in the range of human life. To undertake this responsibility-to bestow a life which may be either a curse or a blessing-unless the being on whom it is to be bestowed will have at least the ordinary chances of a desirable existence, is a crime against that being.

That being so, I suggest we acknowledge that the rights of the child outweigh the procreational rights of irresponsible or incompetent parents.

Can We Close the American Crime Factory?

When parents are known to be physically or sexually abusive or when life-threatening cases of neglect are brought to the attention of the authorities, we do now remove children from the parental home. But we are reluctant to do this for two reasons. The first is a dogma known as **family preservation**, widely shared by the current generation of social workers, which is based on the myth that some mystical bond exists between the child and his or her biological parent(s) that makes even bad bio-parents preferable to licensed foster parents, group homes, or even loving adoptive parents. A recent book by a former proponent of this view (Gelles, 1996) creates hope that at least the next generation of social workers will be less gullible.

The second obstacle to our rescuing of children **from** high-risk homes is the lack of adequate placement options. If parenting is as important and as difficult as any good parent knows it to be, then we need to provide reasonable compensation to those mature, responsible couples who elect to become licensed supervised foster parents as an alternative to both working outside the home. For older, more difficult children, group homes and boarding schools need to be established. As Westman (1994) documented, each little potential sociopath

that we rescue and transmute into a law-abiding taxpayer will save us on the order of \$3 million, so the required investment can be expected to pay large dividends (it costs more to keep a youngster in my county's juvenile corrections facility than it would to send him to Groton or Philips Exeter). Statutes that now forbid transracial adoption, and which send the one-in-six of couples who are infertile to go baby-shopping in Bosnia or Korea, need to be repealed. For an enlightening discussion of adoption myths, see **Easton** (1995).

Parental Licensure

If we really want to close down the American crime factory, however, then we need to be more proactive. Midnight basketball, new school initiatives, even better foster homes and boarding schools will not suffice; in the wise words of Judge Charles D. Gill, "The place to fight crime is in the cradle" (quoted in **Westman**, 1994). Suppose we come to a river and find it full of children being swept down by the current, thrashing and struggling to keep their heads above water. We can leap in and save a few, but they keep coming and many drown in spite of our best efforts. This is Irving Harris's analogy (quoted in Shanker, 1993) for attempts to socialize children in the public schools. It is time to go upstream, Harris insists, to see what is pushing all those children into that river of no return. And what we shall find upstream, if I am right, is a lot of feckless, irresponsible, incompetent, or sociopathic parents, most of them people whom we would not dream of entrusting with an adoptive child. A proclivity for careless sex or a teenage girl's desire to have an apartment of her own paid for by AFDC would not be acceptable credentials for obtaining an adoptive child; why do they then convey a right to breed, bear, and keep a birth child? Like Francis **Galton** more than 100 years ago and like **Westman** (1994) now, I believe the time has come for serious consideration of parental licensure.

My criteria for licensure could be easily met by 90% of responsible parents. I would require a mature (over 21) man and woman, sufficiently committed to the enterprise to be legally married to each other, self-supporting, with no convictions for criminal violence and neither disabled by mental illness. Children conceived and brought to term by an unlicensed mother would be removed from her custody at birth, before bonding takes place, and placed for immediate and final adoption.

A legislator in my state has agreed to offer a bill at the next session for a modified version of this plan. Under this statute, the only penalty for having a baby without a license would be annual visits by child protection case workers, who would be required to perform

an annual audit of that child's physical, social, and educational development until the age of 18. If I am right about the primacy of parenting, the records of these audits, accumulating over the next couple of decades, will show such higher incidence of neglect, abuse, crime, and social dependency, as compared to the children of licensed parents, as to convince a majority of voters and their representatives that the next step needs to be taken.

Some Answers to Critics

Critics of such an outrageous proposal will raise various objections to it, pose questions that require answers if, indeed, reasonable answers can be found. I expect that my list of such critical questions will get longer as time goes by, but here are just a few criticisms already encountered and the responses I would make to them.

1. Would you really give some bureaucrat or some board of nosy citizens the right to decide whether I can have a baby?

Answer. Licensure should be straightforward and predictable. It would require proof of age, marital and financial status, and a check of the criminal records of both prospective parents. When practicum courses in parenting are available in community colleges nationwide, I would also ask for proof that both partners had completed such a course. The process could be as uncomplicated as applying for a driving license, and no bureaucrats or boards need be involved. In addition, there would be the option for appeal to family court for waiver of certain requirements under special circumstances. One such circumstance would be cases in which an applicant had divorced a previous spouse before children of that union had reached, say, age 12.

2. Criminalizing unlicensed conception and requiring repeat offenders to accept contraceptive implants is unconstitutional.

Answer. What is constitutional and what is not is decided by the Supreme Court, and my critic is not a member of that body. The Founding Fathers did not contemplate the possibilities of either parental licensure or the modern welfare state. The Court has previously construed the Constitution in a manner that is consonant with social reality and we can suppose that future Courts will follow this precedent.

3. What if Murphy Brown-single but mature, socialized, and self-supporting-applied for parental licensure? Because we know that many single mothers do a good job (and many married couples do a poor job), single parents who have the means to employ parental assistance might be as successful in parenting as the average married couple.

Answer. Although there are exceptions to every rule of social science, the statistics are clear and convincing: Fatherless boys are many times more likely to get in trouble with the law. Two thirds of today's teenage mothers are girls whose mothers were unmarried. Boys need and deserve a masculine role model devoted to their interests. Girls "deprived of a stable relationship with a nonexploitative adult male who loves them, . . . can remain developmentally 'stuck,' struggling with issues of security and trust that well-fathered girls have already successfully resolved" (Blankenhorn, 1995, p. 47). Whereas Murphy Brown has the right to any lifestyle she chooses, she does not, it seems to me, have the right to put a child at risk. Children need their fathers.

4. Are you really proposing a means test-a minimum income requirement for parenthood?

Answer. Certainly I am. You must pass a means test to own a car or a house, and the upkeep of a child is more costly than either, whereas the human and the social cost of poor upkeep is much greater. If you signed the same Social Contract I did, then you should be willing to assist my survival, if I am destitute, by providing me with health care and a job, but you should draw the line at providing me with a car or a house-or a baby.

5. What if a married couple who are self-supporting produce a licensed child and then the marriage fails or the parents lose their jobs?

Answer. What if I pass the eye examination for my driving test and then, after being licensed, I suffer a detached retina? We can revoke a driving license, but we cannot revoke a child, without due cause, just because the parents' circumstances change. Licensure is not a fail-safe procedure. But requiring some minimal visual ability as a condition of licensure will nonetheless keep many persons off the roads who are too visually impaired to be safe drivers. Requiring prospective parents to be married, self-supporting, mature, and reasonably socialized themselves will keep many sociopaths from growing up in our communal lifeboat.

6. The Rev. Jesse Jackson was raised by a single mom. The study of "resilient children" who overcome early disadvantages, often including inadequate parenting, is an active area of research by developmental psychologists. Of the offspring of those parents who would not have been licensable under your rules, many turn out to be law-abiding citizens, some of them gifted leaders or contributors to society in other ways. Would you sacrifice all these innocent, resilient children **solely** because some of their less fortunate siblings are likely to become sociopaths?

Answer. When a 14-year-old girl says "No" to some importunate boyfriend, we do not say that she has "sacrificed" the baby that might have resulted from her acquiescence. The successes of resilient children are achieved in spite of their early disadvantages, not because of them. We often spin romantic fancies suggesting, for example, that Abraham Lincoln became the man he was because there was no slate to write on and no lamp to read by in the log cabin of his childhood. If we truly believed such notions, we would visit real hardships on our own children for their own good-but we do not do this. No parents I know seek to benefit their children by moving to a slum area, hiring a slattern for a nursemaid, or attempting in other ways to simulate the conditions with which the children we call disadvantaged have to contend.

It would be absurd to suggest that the strength or virtue or human quality of the next generation would be somehow lessened if all of the next generation were to have licensable parents-the truth is plainly to the contrary. I am proposing that we salvage children, not sacrifice them, by improving the quality of their bringing up.

7. Surely there are other, less Draconian **alternatives** that should be tried first? You have advocated training incompetent parents to make them more effective, professionalizing foster care, providing boarding schools for truly high-risk youngsters; if you really think these measures would be helpful now-and, eventually, cost-effective-why advocate that radical step of limiting the "right" of parenthood?

Answer. **The** comprehensive measures I have advocated would, in my opinion, significantly reduce the productivity of our factory of crime, and I think we should begin taking those steps right away. If General Motors found that 10% of the cars coming off its assembly lines were defective and dangerous, they would presumably move quickly to identify those defects and spend what it took to correct them, because putting those cars on the road would be more costly still.

But I expect that the management of General Motors would also take steps to prevent the fabrication of so many defective products, perhaps by keeping incompetent fabricators away from its assembly lines. Is that not what we should do as well? Should we not go upstream to see who is casting all of those babies into the maelstrom and make them stop doing it?

Note

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