

"If we are not prepared to wait patiently for the Age of Aquarius then we must devote our energies now to designing the means by which each of us can become effective in reducing the total amount of readiness for violence that each new generation carries into adulthood."

Violence Today

THOMAS ROSE may have said it all when he made the observation about violence that the American "people and institutions are committed to it as a logical and useful style of life. American culture . . . tolerates, approves, propagates, and rewards violence. The glamour of violent acts and the glorification of violent men create an idealization of violence in America" (Rose, 1969; p. ix).

Thus, birth control may ultimately prove to be the single trustworthy way to limit violence on this planet. It is not that we haven't tried other alternatives. Throughout history we have endeavored to reduce the human potential for violence by killing as many of our fellow men as we could. But, we have fallen behind in the task because we seem to have a limited capacity to enjoy killing people. The human condition is this: we can control violence in some of the people all of the time; we can control violence in all of the people some of the time; and we have failed throughout history to control violence in all of the people all of the time. Even if fewer are born and we kill off most of the others, we would probably be unable to manage the aggression of those remaining. We need, thus, other

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explanations of man's inhumanity to his fellow man.

There is another way out of this dilemma, of course. The American, tribal, love-rock musical, "Hair," has provided us with an innovative solution to the problem of man's hand turned, throughout history, against his fellow man. In song, the cast of "Hair" promises that

When the moon is in the seventh house,
And Jupiter aligns with Mars,
Then Peace will guide the planets,
And Love will steer the stars.

And, they have assured us that in the 'Age of Aquarius' we will be visited by

Harmony and understanding,
Sympathy and trust abounding.

All we need, then, is an exceptional amount of cosmic patience.

Like Shakespeare, in *Julius Caesar*, I believe that

The fault . . . is not in our stars,
But in ourselves . . .

If we are not prepared to wait patiently for the Age of Aquarius, then we

must devote our energies now to designing the means by which each of us can become effective in reducing the total amount of readiness for violence that each new generation carries into adulthood.

Man and Beast

There has been, recently, an exceptionally attractive intellectual cop-out provided Americans who can't believe the fate of violence rests with the stars. A rash of popular, semi-scientific books has taken the following position. They state, in essence, that man is an animal and animals are inherently aggressive. Man, thus, is aggressive because of the instincts he inherits as a member of his species—instincts that are similar to those of fish, chimpanzees, and other predators. These theorists conclude that man is blamelessly violent—it's in his genes. They suggest there is little we can do to change the state of planetary affairs, and even less we can accomplish by training new generations of children to a peaceful way of life.

Thus no one of us in our society needs to feel responsible since human aggression is a fixed, immutable quality that is somehow, mysteriously, built into the species. This is comfortable and also convenient, but it is, in the opinion of the most respected theorists of our time, a totally inaccurate view of man despite its satisfying emotional appeal. In moments of despair about human violence we wistfully search the animal kingdom for moral and ethical guidance. And, ever since Rousseau, we have suspected that the human condition is one deprived by the influence of a high-rise crowding megalopolis, breakneck speed, and the unremitting clamor of a polluting industrial society. We have sought in species less complex than our own a sign that there is hope for mankind.

In simplicity there may indeed be truth, but it is wildly improbable that the ant, bee, or monkey colonies have much to teach modern, interplanetary, atomic man straining to burst the bonds of time, place, and person.

We may study ants, ducks, fish, and chimps forever but we will learn little about the human condition. Studies of animals are relevant only as they apply to that very brief period in human existence when each of us is an infant without access to language. Once we learn to speak we swiftly become free of our animal cousins and enter a universe of human interaction that even the smartest chimpanzee cannot begin to comprehend. As we learn to think and speak, we truly become a distinct species; the only one in history to understand the meaning of abstractions such as liberty, freedom, equality, brotherhood, love, or democracy.

It is impossibly pessimistic to talk of aggressive "instincts" and expect that man's inhumanity to his fellow man will evaporate or fade away. Man is more than a vicious, snarling animal. The observation of Lukas (1969) is appropriate here:

This country is threatened by savagery, not violence: and this is not a play on words. The peoples of this world are governed by their characters rather than by their institutions; and there is a streak of savagery rather than violence in the American character. (p. 352)

But there is no reliable evidence that the character of our people is formed of instinctual traits passed down to us intact from our forebears.

The Aggressive Personality

It is most probable that mankind will never eliminate aggression as a fundamental aspect of the human existence. Aggression will always be with us, since

it is a form of behavior that may be satisfying, thrilling, rewarding, meaningful, and irresistible. And, the difficulty is—and always has been—that crime pays. Push and shove wins the prize, a punch in the mouth breeds respect, a karate black-belt means “be very polite,” and aggression is one clear-cut way to leadership. Thus, aggression is practical even when there is another choice since it is a generous contributor to your sense of personal competence and well-being. It is an ego-builder because successful aggression convinces you that you can tackle anything and makes you feel an admired, respected, person-to-be-reckoned-with. To understand this (if you are male) all you need do is compare the sense of satisfaction at having whipped the biggest, meanest bully in town with the satisfaction garnered from lavish praise for following an exquisitely delicate and sensitive interpretation of Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The male of the species becomes war-mongering, ready to fight, and aggressive because he learns to gain pleasure and status from this social role. The female, as our society decrees, must find more subtle outlets for exactly the same feelings and impulses. It is clear that in a thousand ways we encourage aggression and reward its appearance in males, and that the process begins in early childhood.

One explanation of the psychological structure of the aggressive personality is that provided by Leonard Berkowitz (1962). He assumes that aggressiveness is learned directly by experiences with the rewards and punishments of life. The aggressive person thus learns to have a “predisposition to be readily aroused” to anger and rage and becomes remarkably quick to respond to signals in the environment that trigger

this anger. Given the ‘habit’ of anger and an appropriate ‘stimulus,’ the aggressive personality will blow up frequently and violently.

When the cues or signals to aggression are not present, however, the aggressive personality is very much like the rest of us; complaining and crabby, perhaps, but rational about non-provocative, non-controversial daily events. Since he isn’t exploding *all* the time, he sees himself as a calm, rational, reasonable person except on those few occasions when he is provoked beyond all sensible human tolerance. If you ask him about his explosiveness, the aggressive person will report that most of the people in this world are too passive, spineless, and tolerant of injustice, incompetence, and insults from others. He might suggest that most of us *invite* mistreatment from others by compromising every confrontation and never standing up on our hind legs to resist or protest.

Since the aggressive person sees frustration in almost every event in life he will continuously be distressed, feel threatened, and anticipate that the future will be no different than the past. His daily brittle encounter with his fellow man will only underscore the need to be aggressive if one is to survive. When the expectation that things will always go wrong is coupled with low toleration of frustrating events and an exceptional readiness to respond to frustration with anger and violence, the aggressive personality expects trouble, searches for it, discovers it everywhere, and reacts in a predictably violent manner. Sensitized to frustration, ever ready to respond aggressively, and with few other available forms of response, he becomes the prototype of an aggressive personality and finds life a continuing hostile confrontation with others.

Growing Up Violent

How does our society fashion an aggressive, hating, social monster? It is not easily achieved since our growing youngsters rebound from even the most painful of child-rearing circumstances. Yet, if an aggressive personality is the goal, the steps that must be taken are quite straightforward.

There is one helpful preliminary condition. If you can arrange for the child to be born poor, to be one of a great number of other children, to be crowded into too little space, to be exposed to lying, cheating, stealing, and violent examples during most of his waking hours, it helps. It helps too if the child is allowed to run the streets unsupervised to acquire his primary values from peers who find themselves similarly trapped in the same hopeless, unrewarding life. In short, if the child's *real* world is a monstrous tangle of evil, injury, insecurity, and ignorance, then it will be easier to execute the few steps I am about to describe. Having such ready-made environment saves the time and trouble parents would otherwise have to spend beating, threatening, scolding, and abusing the child.

By the time the developing aggressive personality is ready for school, the additional punishments he will most certainly get from his teachers are really unnecessary and will have little impact on him. The teachers will simply confirm a bitter conclusion learned earlier in life. These "children who hate" learn only that they must wait until they are big enough, strong enough, or clever enough to fight society on more even terms. But, if you can't provide such an environment for aggressive development, all is not lost. If you are dedicated and diligent there are steps you can take that will overcome the handicap of an otherwise benign environment.

STEP 1: *Have no love for the child.**

Love is a mercurial element that can destroy the best of malicious intentions since love topples what hate constructs. Love undermines rejection, softens the sting of anger, and dulls the edge of rage. Love forms a protective psychological cocoon to shelter each of us from the full impact of the blows of fate, and the workings of love are invisible to the eye. Without love, the child is an object that can be used or misused as whim and anger dictate. The child not given love must go out in life and twist everyone's arm until he gets it.

STEP 2: *Shape the child's view of the world and people.* The selective reinforcement of some responses, and the punishment of others, can establish particular dimensions of personality while it eliminates others. If a combined system of deliberate and accidental reward and punishment is established early enough, continued long enough, and matched by clear examples of aggressive response to the world, the child will mature with a stable but warped view of the necessity for aggression. The helpless, dependent, uncomprehending child learns what he is taught and he learns to do as people do, not as people say ought to be done.

STEP 3: *Convince the child aggression is the only way.* The child must be taught that his hostile reactions to people and the aggressive fashion in which he treats them are necessary, natural, reasonable, correct, and not monstrous. Violence must lose its menacing aspect and be viewed as a preferred and desirable means to an essential and profitable end. The child must learn that in a jungle only savages survive, and his developing addiction to violence must

*Adapted from McNeil (1966).

be rewarded more often than it is punished. In those rare instances when punishment does occur, it must be inappropriately administered and appear to be undeserved. Once the child is convinced that violence has a rational base and is admired and rewarded, he will, in times of high anxiety, regularly become violent as a means of solving problems.

STEP 4: *Defend the child against the coercion of education, for it may produce a docile, non-aggressive, non-violent adult.* As we know, education takes advantage of the dependent nature of the growing child. It tries to inculcate peaceful values by showing him how to become an acceptable, cooperative member of the society and it praises and rewards reasonable behavior. If not thwarted by vigilant parents it can even produce the psychological reactions of guilt, fear, anxiety, a sense of loss and alienation from others, and feelings of rejection. It is from these internal emotional experiences that the child's self-image and self-esteem is formed, so he must be armored against the corrective influences that would make a decent citizen of him. This is easily done if he learns early that education is a worthless pursuit in which he will be treated unfairly.

While these steps in child-rearing are vital contributors to the final shape of adult behavior, they cannot be considered in isolation from some measure of the society to which the individual must adjust. In an organized, highly structured, stable society the "social animal" is peaceful and cooperative; in a society that is disorganized and in transition, he is capable of incredibly destructive and violent behavior. The seemingly senseless violence of humans may be one of the costs of urban living. In the neglected center of our crowded

cities the young, unmarried, unemployed male product of a broken home tends to be a prime source of the purposeless assault of one human on another.

Personal Violence

While it may not be perfectly accurate to say that we always kill the one we love, it is true that most of us have less to fear from crime in the streets than murder in the home. This is why it is a common observation among policemen that responding to a call of "family trouble" is an exceptionally dangerous assignment. We know that most victims have a close relationship to those who kill them and death most often occurs on home ground. Murder rarely fits the stereotype of an unsuspecting, helpless, passive victim stalked by a cold, calculating killer. Most homicides are preceded by angry quarrels in which the victim plays an active part in bringing about his own death.

In 1969, Wolfgang studied 588 homicides in Philadelphia and he concluded that:

- if you are under 16 years of age, your murderer will most likely be a parent or relative.
- if you are a woman over 16, your murderer will most likely be a husband, lover, or relative.
- women are more likely than men to kill their mates.
- when a man is killed, the killer is most likely to be his wife.
- spouse slayings are more violent than the average homicide.
- the bedroom is the most murderous room in the house.
- proportionately, more women are killed in bedrooms.
- men are in greater danger of being killed in the kitchen.

We do not really kill the ones we

love. Rather, we kill those emotionally closest to us; those close enough to destroy our self-esteem. Insult, humiliation, or coercion are powerful elicitors of hostility and probably the most important source of anger and aggressive drive in humans. Laboratory studies of aggression (Berkowitz, 1962; Buss, 1961) and clinical studies of violent men (Toch, 1969) consistently point to implicit threats to self-esteem that render us impotent and diminish our status in our own eyes and in the eyes of others. Sometimes the only way to restore our personal status and demonstrate power is to injure the provoking agent (Feshbach, 1971). The relationship between personal status and violence is especially exaggerated for males weaned on a warrior definition of the male image.

The ultimate forms of aggression are perpetrated by the male of the species. Males assault their fellow humans eight times more often than do females, and murder is seven times more often a masculine act. Negroes commit a higher absolute and disproportionately higher relative rate of fatal crimes. Southern violence—Black or white—is greater than in the North, and the rate of violence in the “inner city” of large metropolitan areas is uniformly high. Killing others is most frequent among members of lower socioeconomic classes, particularly the young—the years twenty to thirty-nine being the most dangerous ages. This list of “facts” of fatal encounter tells us very little since “any act, whether it is murder or abstaining from murder, is multiply determined and can be understood only as a resolution of forces both without and within the individual—a resolution of forces that produces a single act which, in the case of murder, is so dramatic that it obscures the very

forces that led to it” (McNeil, 1959, p. 236).

Murderers, contrary to popular belief, may be the most docile, trustworthy, and least violent members of prison populations. Megargee (1965) examined a criminal population by dividing them into two groups, those rated *Extremely Assaultive* (manslaughter, murder, mayhem, assault with a deadly weapon, etc.) and those described as *Moderately Assaultive* (beatings). In two other categories he placed those designated *Non-Violent* (thieves, homosexuals) and *Non-Criminals* (ordinary men).

Most of us would guess that the greatest degree of violence would issue from those most hostile and least self-controlled. Yet, Megargee concluded that assaultive criminals were less aggressive and more controlled than either the non-violent criminals or the non-criminal population. Megargee suggested that assaultive persons come in two types—undercontrolled and chronically overcontrolled. Undercontrolled aggressive persons are those who are openly aggressive and possess relatively little self-control but most often express their hostility in mild or moderate fashion. In contrast, chronically overcontrolled human beings are those who have such strict control over their aggressive urges that they seldom explode. The explosion, when it comes, is fatally violent.

Thus, marriage to an undercontrolled person might mean continuous strife and turmoil but the amount of aggression released in any one of the frequent outbursts would not be excessive. Life with the chronically overcontrolled person would be peaceful and tranquil for many years, but the history of man is bloodstained by the quiet, uncomplaining husband who suddenly slaughters his wife in an unbelievably brutal fashion.

ion. These findings suggest that while murder is a highly visible measure of the violent individual, it need not reflect a lifelong pattern of assaultive behavior. Murder is often the desperate response of a normally unaggressive person who can no longer tolerate the pressures of life.

Violence and Social Pathology

The sociologist, Lewis Coser (1966) observed that:

While to the European thinker the fragility of the social fabric and the brittleness of social bonds seemed self-evident experiences, American social science proceeded from a world view in which social violence was at best seen as a pathological phenomenon. (p. 9)

Perhaps our history of only one massive internal conflict—the Civil War—has twisted our historical perspective until violence has come to be perceived as incidental rather than fundamental to the nature of society.

In Coser's analysis of social violence he indicates that violence is likely to be the outcome of any social structure that bars certain of its citizens from legitimate access to the ladder of personal achievement. When all such access is barred, violence may become the only reasonable alternate path. Also,:

In the world of violence, such attributes as race, socioeconomic position, age, and the like are irrelevant; personal worth is judged on the basis of qualities that are available to all who would cultivate them. (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960, p. 175)

In this instance, the crucial factor may be the willingness to risk injury or death in moving up the ladder of life to a position of greater status. In this way, high rates of aggression among lower-class families may be a futile attempt to control the smaller world of

the family when faced with failure in the larger, working world.

An important function of violence is that it is a signal of severe social dysfunction—a visible symptom of disorder in the body politic. The problem is that the American insistence on social harmony at any price leads us to deny the importance of such symptoms and to attribute them a more benign valuation. Violence is also a catalyst. Counter-aggression (e.g., of police officers in suppressing social movements) catalyzes public opinion and for all its cost in human suffering it eventually produces corrective social change. With the growth of public communications media, our citizenry can no longer remain unaware of social conditions and their 'unjustified' nature.

The effect of upheaval in our society is most likely to appear in the form of a massive shaping of the life view of a multitude of individual members of our society. And a case can be made for the conclusion that we all have become more paranoid and are, thus, more ready for violent solutions to life's problems. There is validity in the assertion that an unhealthy number of us are suffering from the suspiciousness, hypersensitivity to criticism, hostility, or feelings of persecution typical of hospitalized paranoid persons. The critical issue is that for every hospitalized paranoid person there must be hundreds or thousands of us whose degree of mistrust of their fellow man is severe enough to be a constant source of painful disruption to personal, family, and community life.

Paranoia is a delusional way of thinking, a view of life that allows us to deny the existence of intolerable or unacceptable impulses by unconsciously attributing them to other persons rather than admit they are a part of the self. Many of us, of course, will react inappro-

priately to severe tension or personal catastrophe and become suspicious, misinterpret the motives and intentions of others, become hostile, and react aggressively or violently. Serious threats to our security or self-esteem will make us volatile, unpredictable, and ready for violence.

When paranoid thinking occurs, we not only mistrust the motives of others, but actively probe for confirmation of what we are convinced is true. We turn all our attention to gathering credible proof of the suspected plot launched against us. That so many others would devote so much of their time and energy to making life difficult for us suggests that we must be very special persons. This delusion that we are the star of some mysterious melodrama reassures us of our importance, and this grandiose estimate of the self sows the seeds for the conclusion that these less talented but powerful and dangerous enemies are jealous and envious. Why else would they punish us, thwart us, and try to eliminate us from competition?

The person with a paranoid view of life may find others who share his elaborate delusional system (especially if it concerns loose national targets such as government, the American Medical Association, religion, race, etc.) and some paranoids may even be elevated to positions of leadership in which they can have an immeasurable impact on the course of human affairs. Or, some paranoid personalities take individual action and seek to assassinate a prominent political leader.

When we speak of the aggressive personality quick to perceive threat in an unthreatening environment and quick to respond with anger, rage, and punitive action directed against others, we are really describing a paranoid personality who is too disturbed emotion-

ally to relate successfully to others, yet too acutely perceptive of reality to be dismissed as a 'mental case.' Paranoid personalities indeed have 'enemies' and really are 'persecuted;' it is just that they have confused cause and effect in human relationships and cannot realize that their unresolved internal fears, tensions, and low self-esteem, are producing the behavior that others view as disturbed.

If we are to control human aggression and make this a peaceful planet, it is obvious that we must find some way to correct the distorted perceptions of the many paranoid personalities that populate the ranks of each new generation.

The Way It Is

Much of contemporary violence is accomplished without anger or fear. This kind of violence is sometimes called 'instrumental aggression' since it is in the service of following orders or doing a job, e.g., much of modern warfare involves dropping of bombs or napalm on faceless, distant, dehumanized dots, or firing of shells at invisible enemies far beyond the visible horizon.

As Marmor (1969) noted, in horror:

We rely on the sane people of the world to preserve it from barbarism, madness, destruction. And now it begins to dawn on us that it is precisely the *sane* ones who are the most dangerous . . . who can without qualm and without nausea aim the missiles and press the buttons that will initiate the great festival of destruction that they, the *sane ones*, have prepared. (p. 340)

The most negative aspects of violence are easily obvious. It is the constructive features of violent behavior that are likely to be ignored. Riots or acts of violence are reprehensible but they unquestionably open channels of communication between the ghettos and the

power structure. As costly as riotous behavior may be, it provides a release mechanism which gives a sense of power and status to people or groups who have long felt inadequate or humiliated by the existing power structure.

It is depressing but realistic to conclude with the words of Bloomberg (1969):

. . . we mislead ourselves into a fool's errand if we ask how to eliminate violence from human affairs; we can only attempt to minimize the frequency, the duration, and the intensity of its manifestations, seeking constructive expression of our capacities for aggression. But if

we try solely to suppress violence once it emerges, then we can be sure that it will appear frequently, be persistent, and reach great heights of destruction. (p. 360-61)

We have for many millenia believed that men of good will would finally prevail and excise this cancerous behavior from the body of mankind and we have failed consistently to achieve so lofty a goal. Perhaps we are better advised to look at the many ways in which we reward violence, to cease wondering why it continues unchecked, and devote our energies to realistic attempts to tame the Medusa which has for so long plagued us.

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