

# Family Violence and Criminal Behavior

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## Introduction

In the sociology of crime and criminality, emphasis is placed on cultural and group forces that produce actors who represent forms of deviance from the dominant value, or moral demand, system. The individual offender is not ignored; he is simply clustered with other individuals alike in attributes deemed theoretically or statistically meaningful. His "uniqueness" is retained by the improbability that on several attributes or variables he will appear identical to everyone else. Hence, the researchers resort to means, medians, modes, to probability theory, inferential statistics and mathematical models for analyzing predominant patterns and regularities of behavior. Biological and psychological factors are not ignored, but when a monodisciplinary perspective is used by sociologists, the bio-psychological is suspended, postponed or dismissed after consideration. Biological needs and psychological drives may be declared uniformly distributed and hence of no utility in explaining one form of behavior relative to another. They may be seen as differential endowments of personalities that help to assign, for example, a label of mental incapacity to a group of individuals, some of whom have also violated the criminal codes. But neither the biology of many biographies nor the psychology of many personalities helps to explain the overwhelming involvement in crime of men over women, slums over suburbs, youth over age, urban over rural life. It is the latter set of macroscopic regularities to which the sociological perspective addresses itself.

## Definition and Cultural Dimensions

Defining violence is difficult; it should be distinguished from aggression in general. The 13 Task Force volumes of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence struggled with these terms in 1968 and 1969. I shall use the term "violence" to refer to the intentional use of physical force on another person, or noxious physical stimuli invoked by one person on another. The physical force may be viewed as assaultive, designed to cause pain or injury as an end in itself, sometimes referred to as "expressive violence," or as the use of pain or injury or physical restraint as a coercive threat or punishment to induce another person or persons to carry out some act, commonly called "instrumental violence." Violence may also be legitimate (a parent spanking a child, a police officer forcefully arresting a suspect, a soldier killing during war) or illegitimate (criminal homicide, forcible rape, aggravated assault). In general, I shall concentrate on illegitimate violence, but behind illegitimate violence are cultural dimensions that involve the acceptance of violence.

There is no society that does not contain in its normative system some elements of acceptable limits to violence in some form.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the use of physical force by parents to restrain and punish children is permissible, tolerated, and encouraged, and is thereby part of the normative process by which every society regulates its child rearing. There are, of

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course, varying degrees of parental force expected and used in different cultures and times, and there are upper limits vaguely defined as excessive and brutal. The battered child syndrome is an increasingly recorded phenomenon in American society.

The point is, however, that our norms approve or permit parents to apply force for their own ends against the child. The application of force is a form of violence and may be used consciously to discipline the child to the limits of permitted behavior, to reduce the domestic noise level, and to express parental disapproval, and even unconsciously, as a displacement for aggression actually meant for other targets. This model of parent-child interaction is a universal feature of all human societies. The model is one that the child himself comes to ingest; *i.e.*, that superior force is power permitting manipulation of others and can be a functional tool for securing a superordinate position over others, for obtaining desires and ends.

The violence in which the child engages is but an expressed extension of this basic model. The use of physical restraint and force is not a feature only of lower class families, although studies have shown that its persistent use, and use in greater frequency over a longer span of childhood, is more common in that social class. The substitutions, by middle class parents, of withdrawal of rights and affection, of deprivation of liberty, and of other techniques are designed to replace the need for force. And by these substitutions an effort is made to socialize the child to respect other forms of social control. They are also ways of masking the supreme means of control, namely physical force.

Violence and the threat of violence form the ultimate weapons of any society for maintaining itself against external and internal attacks. All societies finally resort to violence to solve problems that arise from such attacks. War is aggressive force between nations and is legitimized within each. The recognition of relativity in moral judgments about violence is quite clear in the case of war. When our colonies collected themselves together in the 18th century to sever ties with Great Britain, we called the action "revolution" and good, in historical retrospect, despite the violence it engendered. When some states in the 19th century sought to divide the nation, we called the action "civil war" and bad, and lamented the bloodshed. Nazi aggression lent an aura of justice to our bombs and enlisted the world's generation of youth to react violently to violence. There are other international conflicts in which nations have been involved and for which the label of legitimacy has been seriously questioned by substantial numbers within their own territories. And when this happens a society becomes more conscious of the process of socializing its own youth to accept violence as a mode of response, as a collective problem-solving mechanism. When war is glorified in a nation's history and included as part of the child's educational materials, *a moral judgment about the legitimacy of violence is firmly made.*

Socialization means changing the individual into a personality; it is the process of cultural transmission, of relaying through the social funnel of family and friends a set of beliefs, attitudes, values, speech and habits. When the front-line instruments of war become part of the physical features of a child's life space, when cannons, rifles, grenades and soldiers are moved from real battlefields to the mind of the child and the plastic world of his playroom and are among the relatively few objects touched and manipulated by the child in the process of becoming, then some set of values associated with the legitimacy and recognition of the superiority of violent activity is transmitted. What is not empirically clear is the extent to which such transmission is later translated into violence by the child, as a child, youth or adult. As a legislator, father, policeman or any other role-actor, he is still the carrier of attitudes related to that play activity, unless contrary values have intervened.

There are many areas of social life which witness the protection of order by representatives of control. In their roles and in their persons, agents corporealize the actual or potential use of legitimized violence. The police and National Guard are the most patent of these agents, but there are also the less visible and more silent cadres of

guards in prisons, mental institutions, banks, parks and museums. Even less visible and of questionable legality, but surely subjectively self-legitimized, are unofficial groups like the lynching mobs of yesteryear, the Minutemen and vigilantes of the rural South as well as the urban North, and certain black militants who have armed their members for assault.

The presence of all these groups, ranging from the culturally prescribed to the barely tolerated, has diffusive effects that are part of the socializing experience of youth into the acceptance of violence as a means of control. Each agent has his own circle of family and friends sharing his stand of legitimate availability to use violence. As these personalized radii spread and overlap throughout a society, they collectively represent another substratum of the culture which is committed by requirement, in part, to an expression that fundamentally means violence. The more these agents of real or potential aggression are used, the more impact such use has in socializing others, particularly children and youth, to the functional utility of violence. If the official legitimacy of the violence is stressed in the transfer of values, many of the young generation exposed to such values will have heightened acceptance of its use. On the other hand, many who are ethnically or otherwise aligned with the targets of officially legitimized violence will, with its more common and intensified use, respond in like manner, thereby confirming the need to use violence to combat violence. And this message is passed on to yet another group of the younger generation who learn to attack the guardian executors of the larger society with their own contrived version of legitimate violence.

Social scientists, psychologists and psychiatrists have often stressed the importance of the theme of masculinity in American culture and the effect this image of the strong masculine role has had on child rearing and the general socialization process. The middle-class child today has some difficulty if he seeks to match himself to the old masculine model, and he may become neurotic and insecure. Among the lower classes, says W. B. Miller, the continuity of the physically assertive male is still one of the "focal concerns."<sup>2</sup> The desire to prove one's masculinity, added to the desire to become a successful male adult member of the lower-class culture, requires adolescent "rehearsal" of the toughness, heavy drinking and quick aggressive response to certain stimuli that are characteristic of the lower-class adult male. Such rehearsal involves activities not necessarily delinquent but often involving participation in conduct that is defined as delinquent by the representatives of the middle-class dominant culture.

We have claimed elsewhere that the strong masculine emphasis may be starting on its way out in our culture.<sup>3</sup> What remains, however, is undeniable, and evidence of it is still available as part of the socializing experience of many males who engage in violence. The role that females have had in consciously promoting the strong male image has often been overlooked. In their own search for identity as females, they have, in the past, driven the male to notable distinctions of difference by encouraging the myth of medieval chivalry; they have sought his strong arms of security, buttressed his aggressivity against other suitors, and passed on this male model to their progeny.

A culture in which mothers direct their small boys to "act like little men" and refrain from crying when hurt may be preparing them in the customary fashion for strength against adversity and for stalwart stoicism in the face of more severe pain ahead. But it may also promote a greater desensitization to noxious assaults performed on or by him. Males commonly carry the role of committing the required deeds of assault, of investigating homicides and suicides, being morticians' assistants, handling injuries on highways; in short, men are required to assume responsibility for the physical public injuries and tragedies of humanity. Women are often protected, their faces are turned, from such displays. It is also the male who is expected to use violence in prescribed ways and at prescribed times, during which he must be sufficiently desensitized to the pain he inflicts, whether in the street or on a battlefield. It should not be unexpected, therefore, that most delinquent acts of physical injury are also committed by males.

Many other cultural items contribute to a general aura of violence. Violence in the

mass media, automobile advertising that promotes aggressive driving — like “Drive it like you hate it — it’s cheaper than psychiatry” — and the existence of 100 million guns in our population, with a higher gun-to-population ratio than anywhere else in the world, must make a difference. Research gives evidence to these claims.<sup>4</sup>

### Extent and Character of Family Criminal Violence

Child abuse and incest are important factors but will be left for others to describe. I shall concentrate on crimes of violence ordinarily found in official police statistics. Despite limitations, the *Uniform Crime Reports* offer baseline data. These are police reports from all over the country submitted to the FBI and annually reported in *Crime in the United States*, the latest edition of which is 1974.<sup>5</sup> The only family information offered concerns criminal homicide, which has an amazing stability of frequency distributions since 1930, when police statistics were first collected on a national basis. Of the 15,910 homicides in 1970, for example, 12.1 per cent were spouse killing spouse; and of the 20,600 homicides in 1974, 12.1 per cent again were in the same category. In this latter year, in addition, 2.7 per cent involved a parent killing a child, 8 per cent “other relative killings” and 6.2 “romantic triangle and lovers’ quarrels”. Murder within the family made up approximately one-fourth of all the murder offenses, and half of the family killings involved spouse killing spouse. In these murders, the wife was the victim in 52 per cent of the incidents and the husband in the remaining 48 per cent. Fifty per cent of the victims were black, 48 per cent white, and the remaining were of other races.<sup>6</sup>

In an earlier study entitled *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*, I examined 588 homicides in Philadelphia to obtain more detailed information about family criminal violence.<sup>7</sup> Of the 136 victims who had a familial relationship to their slayers, there were 100 husbands or wives, 9 sons, 8 daughters, 3 mothers, 3 brothers, 2 fathers, 1 sister, and 10 other types of associations. Of the 100 marital relationships, 53 wives were slain by their husbands and 47 husbands by their wives. Significantly, the number of wives homicidally assaulted by their husbands constituted 41 per cent of all women who were killed, whereas husbands homicidally assaulted by their wives made up only 11 per cent of all men who were killed.

When a man was killed by a woman, he was most likely to be killed by his wife. Of 75 black males slain by black females, 40, or 53 per cent, were husbands slain by their mates; and of 9 white males killed by white females, 7 were slain by their mates.

When a woman committed homicide, she was more likely than a man to kill her mate. Of 89 black female offenders (for whom a victim-offender relationship has been identified), 40, or 45 per cent, killed their husbands; and of 15 white female offenders, 7 killed their husbands. On the other hand, of 321 black male offenders, only 40, or 12 per cent, killed their wives; and of 118 white male offenders, only 13, or 11 per cent, killed their wives.

All told, when the 105 identified female offenders committed homicide, they killed their husbands in 45 per cent of the cases; but when the 445 identified male offenders committed homicide, they killed their wives in only 12 per cent of the cases.

Although among the 588 cases there is no positive association between the intimacy of interpersonal relationship and violence of the homicide in general, there is a significant association between violence and spouse slayings. Husbands killed their wives violently in significantly greater proportion than did wives who killed their husbands. Among the 53 husbands who killed their wives, 44 did so violently, but among the 47 wives who killed their husbands, only 18 did so violently.

It has been shown elsewhere that the more excessive degrees of violence during a stabbing or shooting occur in the home rather than outside the home, and that severe degrees of violence in which more than five acts are involved are most likely to have a home for the scene. The distribution of degrees of violence of husband-wife homicides is

similar to the distribution of other types of relationships, except for the fact that a larger proportion of "more than five acts" occurs among mate killings. For all victims (588), "more than five acts" ranks fourth among the violent homicide categories, preceded by "three to five acts," "severe beatings" and "two acts" respectively. Of all violent homicides, 18 per cent involve more than five acts of stabbing or shooting. Among husband-wife homicides, however, the category of "more than five acts" ranks second and constitutes 24 per cent of all the violent mate slayings. Thus, husband-wife homicides are violent to a greater degree than violent homicides in general. To this extent, violence and intimacy of personal relationship are associated.

The distribution of husband-wife homicides according to police-recorded motives shows an expectedly high proportion due to domestic quarrels. Sixty-four per cent of the slayings were the result of such quarrels. Twenty-three per cent were due to jealousy, compared to only 11 per cent of all homicides.

The single place where most husband-wife killings occurred was in the bedroom. Sex differentials are important to this generalization, however. Whereas 24 (45 per cent) of the 53 wives were killed in the bedroom, only 11 (23 per cent) of the 47 husbands were killed there. Thus, proportionately, the bedroom is a more lethal place for wives than for husbands. For the kitchen the reverse appears to be true, for only 10 wives were slain there, compared to 19 husbands. Finally, with respect to place of occurrence, 85 per cent of husband-wife slayings occurred in the home and only 15 per cent outside the home, a relative proportion that is true for both husbands and wives.

Wives usually stabbed their mates, as indicated by the fact that 30 wives used this method to kill their husbands and only 15 shot them. Husbands were less discriminating, and killed their wives in almost equal proportions of the leading methods. In 19 cases they shot their mates, in 16 they stabbed them and in 15 they beat them to death. Of the 45 wives killed in the home, 17 were shot and 15 were beaten; of the 40 husbands killed in the home, 23 were stabbed.

When a husband was killed in the kitchen, his wife usually used a kitchen instrument (a butcher knife or paring knife was most common) which was easily accessible. This fact indicates that most kitchen slayings were committed in the heat of passion, during a quarrel and on the spur of the moment. Of the husbands killed in the kitchen, 17 were stabbed with a kitchen knife and only two were shot. Of 11 husbands killed in the bedroom, 4 were stabbed with a kitchen knife, 4 were shot with a pistol, one with a shotgun, one was cut with a jagged drinking glass and one was soaked with kerosene and burned to death. Of 24 wives killed in a bedroom, 9 were beaten or strangled, 6 were stabbed with a kitchen knife, 4 were shot and one each was slain by a mop handle, an electric iron, an iron pipe, an overdose of barbituates and a push from a third-floor apartment. All told, among the wives killed in a bedroom there were 12 beatings, 6 stabbings, 4 shootings and 2 by miscellaneous methods. When a husband was killed in any place in the home other than the kitchen or bedroom, his wife used a pistol in 4 cases, a shotgun in one, a penknife in 3, a kitchen knife in 2. When a wife was slain any place in the home other than the kitchen or bedroom, her husband used a pistol in 9 cases, a shotgun in one and a penknife in one.

Brief mention might be made of the adjudication of husband-wife slayings. The following breakdown shows disposition according to marital status of offender:

	<u>Husband</u>	<u>Wife</u>	<u>Total</u>
Guilty	34	26	60
Not Guilty	2	16	18
<i>Nolle Prosequi</i>	2	2	4
Pending	3	2	5
Suicide	10	1	11
Died Before Trial	1	—	1
Fugitive	<u>1</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	53	47	100

The following table shows the court designation of the homicide according to marital status of defendant:

	<u>Husband</u>	<u>Wife</u>	<u>Total</u>
First Degree Murder	10	—	10
Second Degree Murder	10	4	14
Voluntary Manslaughter	10	15	25
Involuntary Manslaughter	4	7	11
Total	34	26	60

These court dispositions reveal that:

1. A higher proportion of husbands (64 per cent) than wives (55 per cent) were found guilty;
2. a higher proportion of wives (34 per cent) than husbands (4 per cent) were acquitted;
3. more husbands (19 per cent) than wives (2 per cent) committed suicide after having killed their mates;
4. husbands were convicted of more serious degrees of homicide than were wives. The majority of husbands were convicted of murder while five-sixths of wives were convicted of manslaughter. None of the wives, but about a third of the husbands, were convicted of first degree murder. Less than a sixth of the wives, contrasted to three-fifths of the husbands, were convicted of either of the degrees of murder. An immediate and common conclusion from these data suggests that the courts treat wives with greater leniency than they do husbands. Such an interpretation of differential treatment assumes that all other things are equal — *i.e.*, there is no major difference in the actual types of homicides committed by wives and husbands. Close examination of these mate slayings reveals, however, that it is not necessarily true that the courts treated wives with unjustifiably greater leniency than they did husbands, for in 28 cases of female defendants, the husband had strongly provoked his wife to attack; and, although she was not exonerated on grounds of self-defense, there had been sufficient provocation by the husband (as the victim) to reduce the seriousness of her offense. In contrast, provocation recognized by the courts occurred in only 5 cases in which husbands killed their wives.

More recent data were collected by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1968-1969 in a representative sampling of 17 major cities in the United States. In these cities combined, 15.8 per cent involved husband-wife slayings, 2.0 per cent children killing a parent, 3.9 per cent parent killing a child, 1.4 brother-sister slayings, and 1.6 per cent "other family" homicides.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps more so within love and intimate relationships we may say that life's dreams are filled with episodes of potential violence. Love and hate are intertwined, so that one can both love and kill the object of desire. Othello's love for Desdemona was involved in his killing her, as shown when he said:

Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee  
 And love thee after . . . I must weep,  
 But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's heavenly;  
 It strikes where it doth love.<sup>9</sup>

Aggravated assault is a *Uniform Crime Report* category that refers to physical injury of a grievous character, with a gun, knife or similar weapon, causing serious injury. In the 17-city survey,<sup>10</sup> 14 per cent of all aggravated assaults were between family members, half of which were again husband-wife assaults. Sex-race relationships similar to homicide occur in aggravated assaults. When the victim is a female, the relationship is more likely to be between husband and wife than when a male is a victim of aggravated assault. When a mate is assaulted the husband is the offender in about three-fourths of the cases. The difference between an aggravated assault and a homicide may be little more than (a) speedy communication to the police in an assault offense, (b) rapid transportation to a

hospital, (c) the degree and speed of medical technology applied to a serious injury.

Finally, from the National Commission survey, the weapons used in spouse slayings and assaults were noted. Guns were used in half the cases of homicide, but knives, blunt instruments and beatings were more common in assaults not ending in death. The weapon, rather than the intention or motive, makes more of a difference between serious injury and death. The rates and proportions of family assaults and slayings in cross-cultural studies<sup>11</sup> — from those of primitive African societies to comparisons between Jews and non-Jews in Israel, the Soviet Union, Canada, England, Denmark and Japan — reveal similar or slightly higher intrafamilial violence. In Japan infanticide rates are higher, and wherever the family is a more dominant social institution the proportion of homicides is higher within the primary group of the family.

Even so, the incidence of homicide in the family is highest in the lower socioeconomic class. And it is in this lower class structure that the use of physical assaultive behavior is a more common reaction to social interaction.

### **Subculture of Violence**

Within our broader cultural context there is what I have called elsewhere a "subculture of violence," meaning a set of values, attitudes and beliefs congealed in pockets of populations characterized by residential propinquity and shared commitment to the use of physical aggression as a major mode of personal interaction and a device for solving problems.<sup>12</sup> In this subculture, generated primarily in a lower socioeconomic class disadvantaged in all the traditionally known ways, the use of violence is either tolerated and permitted or specifically encouraged from infancy through adulthood. From child-rearing practices that commonly use physical punishment and that contain many elements of child abuse, to childhood and adolescent play and street gang and group behavior, to domestic quarrels and barroom brawls, physically assaultive conduct is condoned and even part of expected response to many interpersonal relationships. *Machismo*, but more than this, is involved in the value system that promotes the ready resort to violence upon the appearance of relatively weak provoking stimuli. The repertoire of response to frustration or to certain kinds of stimuli (including name-calling, challenges to the ego) is limited often to a physically aggressive one, and the capacity to withdraw or to articulate a verbal response only is minimal.

Within the subculture of violence, the cues and clues of this stimulus-response mechanism are well known to the culture carriers and thus promote social situations that quickly escalate arguments to altercations and apparently quick-tempered aggression in seemingly trivial encounters. This subculture of violence is culturally transmitted from generation to generation and is shared across cohorts of youth who will fight instead of flee, assault instead of articulate, and kill rather than control their aggression.

This proposition of a subculture of violence suggests that violence is learned behavior and that if violence is not a way of life it nonetheless is normal, not individual pathological behavior. And the greater the degree of commitment to the subcultural values the less freedom, the fewer the number of alternative responses the individual has to cope with social encounters. Homicide, rape, aggravated assault have historically been crimes predominantly intragroup, within the family, among friends and acquaintances, neighbors and the intimate social network. More physical mobility and intergroup interactions have increased the number of victims outside the subculture, the number of victims who are strangers to the offenders, and have consequently promoted wide public fear of random assaults and victimization.<sup>13</sup>

### **Sociopsychic Dimensions**

Other evidence about the social dynamics of family structure buttresses this

proposition of a subculture of violence where physically assaultive behavior is not uncommon. So prevalent is family violence and the literature on this topic, that in 1974 the National Institute of Mental Health found reason to publish an elaborate bibliography entitled *Violence at Home*.<sup>14</sup> In addition to homicides and aggravated assaults, O'Brien<sup>15</sup> reports, for example, spontaneous mention of overt violence in 24 of 150 interviews of divorce-prone families, and Levinger<sup>16</sup> found physical abuse a factor in divorce in 20 per cent of middle class and 40 per cent of working class families. A national survey<sup>17</sup> in 1969 revealed that one in four men and one in six women approved of slapping a wife under certain circumstances, but lower education and social class were closely correlated. Gelles's exploratory study reported<sup>18</sup> that violence was a regular and patterned occurrence in 20 per cent of families. Bronfenbrenner,<sup>19</sup> Kohn,<sup>20</sup> Steinmetz and Straus,<sup>21</sup> and Kohlberg<sup>22</sup> are only a few among many researchers in social psychology and social psychiatry who report more use of physical punishment and violence among working-class parents than among middle-class parents. This is not to say that middle-class families do not experience violence, but their violence appears to be less publicly visible, less frequent, more restrained and controlled, and less lethal. Richard Gelles does not indicate in his 1975 paper on violence and pregnancy<sup>23</sup> the social class of the 80 families interviewed, but the inference can be drawn that most were of lower socioeconomic status. Violence, he says, occurred during pregnancy in about one-quarter of the families reporting violence. Sexual frustration, a family transitional state of stress and tension, biochemical changes in the wife making her more critical of the husband, and defenselessness of the wife are among the factors he says contribute to assaults on pregnant women. As Gelles says: "... locating a family where a pregnant wife has been assaulted could serve as an indicator of this family's use of physical aggression as a response to stress and the likelihood of future occurrences of violence toward children."<sup>24</sup>

Such a commentary leads to questions about public policy concerned with family crisis intervention, which is still more often discussed than implemented and researched.

### **The Importance of Domestic Disturbance Calls**

The usual caveat about domestic homicides and the incapacity of the police to do much about them appears in almost every annual report from the FBI.

... police are powerless to prevent a large number of these crimes... The significant fact emerges that most murders are committed by relatives of the victim or persons acquainted with the victim. It follows, therefore, that criminal homicide is, to a major extent, a national social problem beyond police prevention.<sup>25</sup>

But new rationales and new empirical evidence suggest rejection of this assertion. About ten years ago I wrote about this issue as follows:

A particularly intriguing innovation suggested as a special function of community centers is the "emergency domestic quarrel team" of specialists. With a staff of sufficient size and training to provide twenty-four-hour service on call, the team is viewed as capable of offering rapid social intervention, quick decisions and accelerated resolutions to families caught in a conflict crisis. Traditionally, the police are called into service when domestic quarrels erupt into public complaints. The police are trained principally to interrupt fights in verbal or physical form. Their chief function is to prevent assault and battery at the moment of arrival, to arrest assaulters on complaint, and then to go about their business of patrolling their section. It is well known that some of the most potentially dangerous calls police officers act upon are reports of domestic quarrels. About one-fifth of all policemen killed on duty are those who responded to "disturbance" calls which include family quarrels.

The suggestion of an emergency domestic quarrel team is meant to include the

police as part of the group, primarily to protect the team itself from violent attack. After the initial danger has subsided, the police could withdraw, leaving the team of psychological and social work specialists to talk with the family, to suggest the best solution to the immediate problem, and work out a program for a more enduring resolution.

It should be kept in mind that a relatively high proportion of criminal homicides are classified as emerging from domestic quarrels. These are acts usually committed indoors, not normally subject to observation by patrolmen on the street, and therefore considered virtually unpredictable and unpreventable. An emergency domestic quarrel team might, therefore, function from a community center as an effective homicide-prevention measure. Intervening in earlier stages of physically aggressive strife in the family, the team could conceivably thwart the progression of family violence to the point of homicidal attack. The strategies for resolving domestic conflict are details too specific to pursue further here, but, clearly, experience would accumulate to provide increasing sophistication. In addition to information shared in an adequate referral system, these teams would soon develop expertise in handling many difficult family situations. It should be further noted that twice as many homicides among blacks as among whites are known to develop from quarrels within the family, usually between husbands and wives. These are almost invariably lower class, poor black families. The emergency teams to which we refer would operate out of centers often located in areas with high concentrations of the black poor.

Various indices to measure the success of these teams can easily be imagined. Keeping in mind our focus on crimes of violence, one index of the value of emergency intervention could be changing rates of domestic homicides and aggravated assaults. Perhaps even rate changes in general throughout an ecological area would be influenced. After all, an unresolved family conflict may cause some family members to displace their cumulative aggressivity on close friends, neighborhood acquaintances, or even strangers. For we do not know the number of homicides and aggravated assaults recorded by the police as due to altercations which may have had their genesis in a hostile exchange in the family.<sup>26</sup>

Stimulated by the work of Morton Bard,<sup>27</sup> a family crisis intervention unit was established in New York City some years ago, but the research design and findings were inconclusive, although Bard did report that training police officers for handling family disputes appeared to be related to the fact that no homicides occurred in any of the 962 families previously seen by the Family Crisis Intervention Unit, that family assaults were fewer, and there were no injuries to any officer in the Intervention Unit.<sup>28</sup>

New, as yet unpublished data yield empirical support for the hypothesis that family homicides might be reduced if more intensive, focal attention were given to domestic emergency disturbance police calls. Data were collected, under support from the Police Foundation, on homicides and aggravated assaults occurring in Kansas City, Missouri, during 1970 and 1971.<sup>29</sup> In one-fourth of the homicides and one-third of the aggravated assaults either the victim or the suspect had an arrest for a disturbance or assault within two years prior to the homicide or assault in question. Even more striking is the fact that about 90 per cent of the homicide victims and suspects had previous disturbance calls to their address, with about 50 per cent of them having five or more calls. The same was true for assault victims and suspects. Unfortunately, in most of these previous disturbance calls, the police did nothing more than prevent immediate physical injury, and there were few arrests or court convictions. When asked whether, if charges were not brought, the family members expected to repeat their disturbance behavior, two-thirds said yes. And apparently future disturbances often resulted in family homicide. The best set of variables to predict a future domestic killing or aggravated assault includes the presence of a gun, a history of previous disturbance calls and the presence of alcohol. Moreover, when

physical force was used in a family disturbance, known threats to do so had preceded it in 8 out of 10 cases.

The study in Kansas City is a complex and elaborate one and I hope it will soon be published. My major reason for mentioning it is to suggest that with appropriate intervening counseling, referral and treatment of family disturbance calls, there is a probability of reducing not only domestic homicide but family violence in general.

## Conclusion

Violence in the family is partly a reflection of violent expression in the culture generally. But serious crimes within the family are most commonly related to subcultural values that minimally do not much inhibit physical responses or maximally condone and encourage them.

The residential propinquity of the actors in a subculture of violence has been noted. Breaking up this propinquity, dispersing the members who share intense commitment to the violence value, could also cause a break in the intergenerational and intragenerational communication of this value system. Dispersion can be done in many ways and does not necessarily imply massive population shifts, although urban renewal, slum clearance and housing projects suggest feasible methods. Renewal programs that simply shift the location of the subculture from one part of a city to another do not destroy the subculture. In order to distribute the subculture so that it dissipates, the scattered units should be small. Housing projects and neighborhood areas should be small microcosms of the social hierarchy and value system of the central dominant culture. It is in homogeneity that the subculture has strength and durability. (Some of these same notions have been presented by Cloward and Ohlin<sup>30</sup> in their brief discussion of controlling the conflict subculture, and by Peter McHugh<sup>31</sup> in his paper on breaking up the inmate culture in prison before resocialization can begin.)

Before one set of values can replace another, before the subculture of violence can give way to the establishment of nonviolence, the former must be disrupted, dispersed, disorganized. The resocialization, relearning process best takes place when the old socialization and old learning are forgotten or denied their validity. Once the subculture is disintegrated by dispersion of its members, aggressive attitudes are not supported by likeminded companions, and violent behavior is not regularly on display to encourage imitation and repetition.

Murray Straus<sup>32</sup> has eloquently written about aggression in families, especially about the notion of "leveling" in the sense of giving free expression to one's aggressive feelings in the natural family setting, in therapy referred to as the "ventilationist" approach. He argues compellingly and convincingly against it and suggests instead that "the greater the degree of intellectualization the lesser the amount of physical aggression."<sup>33</sup> The "rationality of middle class life" and the "rules of civility" which have evolved through the ages in the name of humanism are viewed as significant elements in the reduction of family violence.

Recently, James Prescott,<sup>34</sup> in an article on "Body Pleasure and the Origins of Violence," has synthesized cultural and laboratory studies of punitiveness, repression and violence. In a compelling argument for more freedom of pleasurable physical expression and less repression of sexual behavior, Prescott links crimes of violence, physically aggressive behavior in general, child abuse and homicide, with deprivation of physical affection and repression of adolescent sex behavior. In rather strong declarative terms he asserts: "I am now convinced that the deprivation of physical sensory pleasure is the principal root cause of violence. Laboratory experiments with animals show that pleasure and violence have a reciprocal relationship. That is, the presence of one inhibits the other. A raging violent animal will abruptly calm down when electrodes stimulate the pleasure centers of its brain. Likewise, stimulating the violence centers in the brain can terminate

the animal's sensual pleasure and peaceful behavior . . . . Among human beings, a pleasure-prone personality rarely displays violence or aggressive behaviors, and a violent personality has little ability to tolerate, experience, or enjoy sensuously pleasing activities. As either violence or pleasure goes up, the other goes down."<sup>35</sup>

Sensory deprivation, lack of affection in infancy and adolescence, sexual repression and punitiveness are forms of reduced alternatives and expressions of freedom. It may be noteworthy that Eleanor and Sheldon Glueck<sup>36</sup> found a similar relation between lack of affection by the mother, erratic supervision by the father and delinquency among boys. I would add further that the psychological and sociological ingredients of the subculture of violence are characterized by physical punishments and a variety of sensory and cultural deprivations, all of which reduce alternative behaviors and pleasurable responses, promote promiscuity but not affection and bonds of intimacy, restrict the mobility of the mind, and thereby reduce individual freedom.

Sociologically, a subculture of violence thesis may be used to explain much of this violence that is generated by a value system geared to a ready response of physical assault to ritually acknowledged cues. When the repertoire of response is limited to relatively inarticulate capacities, when physical punishment of children is common practice, when the rational civility of middle class values of respect for person and property are undeveloped or missing, when parental affection for and caring supervision of children are absent, the major modal categories of violent behavior are more likely to emerge in expressions that violate both codified law and dominant communal norms.

Affection and firm supervision of children cannot be legislated. Teachers and significant others cannot, by administrative fiat, become kind and gentle. But activities can be promoted in the home and school to socialize children — even those from a subculture of violence — into nonviolence, to desensitize them to linguistic and behavioral cues that evoke violence. Pleasurable rewards and lucid, certain but not severe sanctions promote the greatest probability of nonviolent conformity to social rules of conduct. If, as Prescott claims, pleasure and violence are antitheses, the message is as old as it is clear and is buttressed by evidence from all the healing arts and behavioral sciences:

Give the infant, child, adolescent and adult family member affection, recognition and reward for being alive and unharmed to others, freedom from excessive restraints, pleasures for the body, and a broad repertoire of verbal articulating ways to respond to stimuli in all dramas of social interaction.

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