

Section 3 - Criminal Behavior and the Baby Core of the Personality

General Assumptions:

- 1 – Criminal behavior is a manifestation of a primitive emotional disturbance.
- 2 – The emotional disturbance can range from neurotic to sociopathic to borderline personality organization to psychotic. The internal parental figures tend to be savage, brutal, punitive, goading, i.e. not inspiring.
- 3 – Generally speaking, criminal behavior is not a function of a “lack of conscience” or “lack of morals”. It is an externalization of primitive internal object relations. As such, the actual behavior is often suggestive of the nature of the internal object relations.
 - It is always useful to take a good history of infancy when exploring a situation of criminal behavior.
- 4 – The degree of violence in the criminal behavior is usually a function of violence experienced from the parents (i.e. caregivers) unless the infancy was experienced as violent (consider a genetic component).
- 5 – The degree of overall destructiveness in the behavior should be considered as highly likely to be a result of intense UCS envious hatred. It is often at the root of “impulsive, motiveless”, violent acts. [Note: See any family gathering for Thanksgiving or Christmas holidays for evidence of this!]
- 6 – Murderers (and victims ?) have an unmetabolized baby level preoccupation with and anxiety about death.
 - i.e. stuck in a state of mind in which murderousness predominates over depressive anxiety

Some Factors Interfering with the Predominance of the Life Instinct:

- 1 – A predominance of hatred over love
- 2 – A strong endowment of primal envy
- 3 – An inability to contain an overriding need for a containing person (i.e. good enough mother)
- 4 – An inability to grow to take on the containing function (healthy internalization of a good mom)
- 5 – A lack of good early figures or an inability to use such figures
- 6 – Early, life threatening experiences
- 7 – Prolonged painful illness
- 8 – Early and repeated witnessing of cruelty and death
- 9 – Linking of the “death constellation” to sexuality in a sexual perversion so that sexuality means destruction (i.e. death), not creation (i.e. life)
- 10 – Narcissistic personality structure and organization
- 11 – Arrogance
- 12 – Obedience to a gang leader outside the self or, in a narcissistic character, obedience to a sadistic murderous intrapsychic gang leader

Factors in the Transformation from Murderous Thought to Murderous Deed:

- 1 – A collapse of the capacity to symbolize
- 2 – A rapid shift from depressive anxiety (dep. posit.) to the paranoid-schizoid position
- 3 – The frequency and intensity of murderous phantasies and dreams
- 4 – The inability to sustain adequate mourning for the victim(s) of the murders committed in phantasy
- 5 – The pervasiveness of arrogance in the self of the potential murderer with the consequent reduction of the potential victim(s) to: (a) subhuman status or (b) a concatenation of parts (part-objects)
- 6 – The strength and pervasiveness of manic currents that sweep aside any growth of concern or guilt (states that if tolerated would be likely to enhance movement toward the depressive position)
- 7 – Factors to do with the social environment:
 - credibility of the deed of murder

- a murderous or murder tolerating super-ego figure (parent, teacher, religious leader, or political leader)
- a potentially lethal weapon that implies a readiness to use it in certain circumstances
- the witnessing of killings of humans, or sometimes animals, so indigestible psychically, causing the vulnerable individual to identify with the killer or with the killed, or to oscillate between the two

A Model for Picturing the Configuration of the Unconscious Inner World:

1 – The UCS inner world can most usefully be pictured as having an alive, active baby core. This core originates from feelings and phantasies the infant has about its experiences in infancy. Those experiences seem to be stored as paired relationships. UCS phantasies represent what is felt to be happening between a part of self and a version of mom or dad. They become the foundation for how all relationships are viewed. It is these relationships that are unconsciously externalized and recreated in many criminal acts.

2 – The degree of mental pain experienced in these internal relationships largely determines whether the individual has a belief that emotions can be faced and modified, or instead, a belief that emotions are to be evaded, usually by evacuation into someone else.

– When infancy doesn't go well, it is possible for the individual to grow up hating everything about being a baby including the smallness, helplessness, dependency, not knowing, etc. This is compounded by the universal phantasy that mom "has everything, knows everything, and can do anything". Thus the pain the infant feels is imagined to be a result of mother's purposeful, cruel withholding of the "good stuff".

3 – The key emotions that the infant has in relationship to mom are:

– separation: This is obviously an issue ushered in by the drama of birth. It is profoundly influenced both by how well mom receives the "separate" infant and how the "luck of the draw" goes.

– envy: A two party relationship, at a part object level, based fundamentally on hate, in which you compare yourself to another in terms of a quality, capacity, or a possession. The discrepancy between yourself and the object is the pain of envy. This pain leads to defenses against experiencing it that are at the reason why envy is the source of much of mankind's destructiveness. This is because it is easiest and quickest to bring the object down to your level by spoiling it compared to elevating yourself to its level which may take years, if ever. The other common defenses include denial of having the envious feeling which usually means you find someone else to contain the envious attitude permanently (chronic projection). An alternative is to co-opt the enviable state and behave in a fashion to generate the envy in someone else (acute projection). Joining up to an idealized object (e.g. God, etc.) also can be used and is often somewhat less directly destructive.

– jealousy: A three party (triangular) relationship, based on whole objects, linked fundamentally to love, in which you want the love of one person for yourself and do not want them to give it to another. It can be extraordinarily painful. The further back toward birth it is traced, the more it shades into and becomes indistinguishable from envy.

– guilt: Where there is a sufficiently loving relationship to mom, the love also generates a concern for her welfare in the middle of the first year of life that adds the feeling of guilt as a core emotion toward her. The intensity and prematurity of the guilt contribute to whether the guilt can be tolerated or must be evaded. It is useful to differentiate two types of guilt:

– depressive guilt: If the feeling of guilt is felt to be generated by the "self", under the sway of love for mother, it leads to a strong urge to make repair to any damage imagined to be done.

– persecutory guilt: It has a very different quality when the guilt is felt to be generated from the internal versions of mom or dad. It tends to feel like an unfair attack to be evaded and it is easy to lose sight of any feeling of love. Often, this type of guilt is felt to be a retaliation, and usually in triplicate, because of infantile exaggeration of what was done in phantasy to the object.

– manic denial of psychic reality: Done fundamentally to avoid the pains of depressive concern for the welfare of others and to evade guilt, need, dependence, etc. (i.e. manic defences).

Baby Attitudes and The Internal Structure and Thinking of The Criminal:

1 – Where being a baby was excessively painful, for external or internal reasons, the resorting to magical (i.e. omnipotent) thinking is inevitable. This omnipotence will develop into a complete set of characterological maneuvers whose purpose is to deny need, smallness, helplessness, dependency, etc. These usually prominently includes a projection of these hated baby states of mind into someone else.

2 – Because it is felt to be a source of pain more than pleasure to turn toward other humans for love, attention, or need, unless they are completely under your control, this type of character does not enter into proper object relations, but instead thinks of others as “things”, to be used as an extension of self when suited to one’s needs, and to be discarded and forgotten when no longer usable.

– In the unconscious inner world of such individuals, the bad part of self has hypertrophied to a point of complete, permanent dominance over the good baby parts because they have given up hope for any good parental figures to exist who would care about and meet their needs.

– The consequence of this narcissistic personality organization, where the bad part of self has gotten the good baby parts to turn away from good parental figures both externally and internally, is that the individual is no longer governed by love, concern for the other, depressive guilt, etc. In effect, they are not operating by the rules that ordinarily should govern behavior. They may not even have fear of punishment as a deterrent. This sense of self-sufficiency is commonly augmented by substance abuse and sexual perversion. I find it useful to refer to this bad self as the “envious, omnipotent, know-it-all, destructive, self-sufficient” part of self in order to keep its primary characteristics in mind.

[Herbert Rosenfeld depicts the mind being controlled by perverse thinking under the sway of the death instinct : “The destructive narcissism of these patients appears often highly organized, as if one were dealing with a powerful gang dominated by a leader, who controls all of the gang to see that they support one another in making the criminal destructive work more effective and powerful. However, the narcissistic organization not only increases the strength of destructive narcissism, but it has a defensive purpose to keep itself in power and so maintain the status quo. The main aim seems to be to prevent the weakening of the organization and to control the members of the gang so that they will not desert the destructive organization and join the positive parts of the self or betray the secrets of the gang to the police, the protecting superego, standing for the helpful analyst, who might be able to save the patient. ... The narcissistic organization is in my experience not primarily directed against guilt and anxiety, but seems to have the purpose of maintaining the idealization and superior power of destructive narcissism.”]

– This point has huge implications for treatment where such a personality organization dominates an individual sent for rehabilitation, privately or institutionally.

3 – At birth, all babies must decide whether or not they feel that being born and out in the world is “worth it”. If they feel that being outside is more pain than it is worth, then they will want to be unborn back inside mom. Alternatively, they may decide that they will attenuate how much of the experience of being a separate, living human being they will tolerate. For some, this means an instant evacuation of any mental distress through action, in effect going from impulse to action without any intervening thought. This trait is perhaps best exemplified in individuals with lower level borderline personality organization.

– The key consequence, for those who could never decide that being born and out in the world is worth it, is that at a deeply unconscious level, they remain permanently characterologically suicidal. In other words, they have never resolved the primal conflict between the Life Instinct and the Death Instinct. This has huge implications for later behavior that would ordinarily feel life endangering and therefore to be avoided. It is obvious that the death penalty is no deterrent to someone who does not care about life.

4 – All infants are predisposed phylogenetically to expect there to be a mom and a dad in the outside world after birth. Consequently, they will create internal versions of them even when such figures are absent externally (Klein's concept that the absence of a good object is experienced as the presence of a bad object). The internal versions of mom and dad, both good and bad, first as part and later whole objects, are what is referred to by the metapsychological abstraction, the super-ego. Unfortunately, where experiences with

external figures go poorly in early infancy, the internalized versions tend to be primitively dominated by negative characteristics that are suffused with the infant's own worst, cruel phantasies (= harsh super-ego).

– People most likely to perform criminal acts tend to have the poorest, least loving internal relationships with their internal figures. They usually have internal relations that are dominated by primitive concrete, harsh, cruel, even savage interactions. It is these relationships that are externalized and relived in the outside world during criminal activities.

– The hostility and violence in these internal relationships, between parts of self and the internal parental figures, and between the parental figures themselves, leads to an expectation of similar behavior in the outside world, stamping all of life's activities with a strong paranoid quality.

5 – These baby core relationships will be reactivated and come to the surface at puberty and dominate the personality for at least the next several years. In some, they dominate permanently.

The Psychopath/Sociopath:

1 – Where envy is constitutionally intense and good parental figures are inadequate or absent, and the depressive position is not adequately established, there is always a danger that a narcissistic personality organization will develop. When it is combined with higher intelligence, various talents, good looks, social status, etc., there is always a danger that the individual will develop a ruthless style of exploitation of others, without any concern for their welfare, or the consequences of the behavior. These behaviors may be tolerated by society because of the seemingly desirable qualities possessed by the individual, but the danger of the underlying ruthlessness showing up is always there.

Summary of the Unconscious Basis for Various Types of Criminal Behavior:

1 – Disturbed, violent internal object relations giving a paranoid stamp to all of life, can be victim or aggressor

2 – Unbearable primitive anxiety and guilt

3 – Overwhelming envy of the primal object, hatred of life/happiness in others, esp. women

4 – An incapacity to contain states of mind and think about them. Instead, the individual has an unconscious need to evacuate/project out states of mind/mental pains as soon as they rise to a certain level. This evacuation is usually through action.

5 – Envious competition, grandiosity, greed, and the seduction of material things, power, and success, usually bolstered by unconscious anal omnipotence, substance abuse and sexual perversion.

Criminal Behavioral Constellations:

1 – Violent, chaotic, internal object relations without a capacity to contain and think about feelings and a preponderance of the death instinct over the life instinct often leads to crimes against hated baby self.

– violent outburst or murder as an act of emotional overload in such a personality, baby battering, etc.

– habitual violence or serial killing as a chronic unburdening of the psyche of emotional pain, including guilt and paranoid anxiety, often with underlying chronic sexual perversion

2 – Seriously impoverished emotional development with deep confusional states and emotional immaturity

– sexual behavior with children, stupid acts of impulsive and unthinking nature, etc.

3 – Narcissistic personality organization with harsh internal object relations

– in more borderline individuals, an attachment to chronic destructive, ruthless, impulsive, opportunistic activities, often made worse by substance abuse e.g. rape, arson, vandalism, theft, assault, child abuse, etc.

– in more integrated personalities that nonetheless have violent, harsh internal object relations, the relative stability provided by a group of like minded individuals is often appealing, whether a criminal gang, the mafia, or law enforcement.

– in more highly functioning individuals with less chaotic baseline, can still deteriorate with external stress

4 – In narcissistic individuals, who experienced emotional deprivation in childhood, unconscious envy/greed combined with privilege, intellect, or talent, often lead to an essentially manic approach to life with:

– confusional states in which things become valued over people (i.e. anal omnipotence)

– power, prestige, material wealth, good looks, are felt to be the superior solution to smallness, need, mental pain, etc. and lead to a failure to recognize and pursue proper emotional development and growth producing potential for ruthless approaches to life e.g. rape, theft, exploitation, white collar crime

5 – The influence of societal, family, or group mores and values that support essentially destructive, selfish, or ruthless behavior, often reinforce the commonly seen split between civilized adult self and a “bad” baby part

– may lead to subjugation, emotional, physical and sexual abuse of women or children or the impoverished

– mistreatment or exploitation of foreign groups, neighboring societies, etc.

Implications for Evaluation and Treatment by the Individual Therapist or Institution:

1 – Criminal behavior needs to be evaluated as an emotional disturbance

– it is useful to distinguish a failure of the development in infancy of an adequate mental apparatus to contain states of mind from an infancy and childhood in a very violent surround

2 – Get a good baby history if possible:

– look for prematurity, adoption, early separations, sleeping in parental bedroom, premature weaning, etc.

– consider the exact sibling spacing, miscarriages, early divorce, etc.

3 – Assessments must be made of such characteristics as:

– the severity of a narcissistic personality organization and degree of unconscious envy

– evaluate the capacity to “think” e.g. mindfulness versus concreteness, mindless impulsivity and action

– does the person have any insight and frustration tolerance, or is their brain just a big muscle

– the degree of paranoia and the propensity for violent discharge of internal object relations

– severity of infantile confusional states or psychotic underpinnings

4 – Distinguishing whether resources should go more toward family therapy or the individual

5 – Where severe harm or death was the result of the individual's behavior, the capacity to tolerate the pain of acknowledging and mourning the act (i.e. guilt) are critical to any change in mental functioning that would allow a return to society (e.g. incapacity to mourn = poorer prognosis).

6 – The potential for psychosomatic illness or suicide must be assessed.

Issues for Society:

1 – The single most important change for society should be the ready availability of termination of unwanted pregnancy.

2 – Law enforcement, correctional facilities, etc. need to have an understanding of the unconscious meaning of criminal behavior. Warehousing humans in a punitive environment with little or no emotional, social, or vocational development only perpetuates criminality as a way of life.

3 – A focus on early developmental issues and intervention at that age where risk factors are observed

e.g. parental disturbance that comes to attention of prenatal providers, hospital staff and medical caregivers, social service agencies, educational personal, etc.

e.g. childhood behaviors that suggest violent, deep neglect, confusional states, extreme impulsivity, etc.

4 – Election and support of inspired leaders at all levels and walks of life

5 – An honest acknowledgment that the threat of death has no deterrent value, above life in prison, for individuals who don't care about their own life. Thus it only satisfies a primitive desire for revenge in the aggrieved, a projection of our own destructiveness in society at large, and harms the internal harmony of those who must carry out the death/murder of the criminal. It also costs more than life in prison.

6 – Kleinian Psychoanalytic Training for all mental health professionals guiding prison therapy!

Some Useful Resources:

1 – Arther Hyatt-Williams' book, "Cruelty, Violence, and Murder: Understanding the Criminal Mind", Jason Aronson Inc., 1998, is a great resource for thinking about unconscious processes as they relate to violent criminal behavior and its treatment via analytically oriented psychotherapy. Dr H-W has consulted to prisons in England for decades and directed the Adolescent Department of the Tavistock Clinic.

2 – Donald Meltzer's book, "Sexual States of Mind", Clunie Press, 1973. Arguably the most useful book to the practicing clinician in all of psychoanalysis, it is less about sex than about adolescent development and the baby core of the personality. Meltzer, a gifted Kleinian child psychoanalyst, composed this book from a series of lectures at the British Institute. It is condensed, short, and deceptively difficult to read unless you have a familiarity with Kleinian concepts.

3 – Herbert Rosenfeld wrote two great books, "Psychotic States" in the 1960's about treatment of Schizophrenia and psychosis and was one of the very clear thinking, early Kleinian expositors about destructive narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder. His second book, "Impasse and Interpretation" is very useful for the practicing mental health professional. It was first published in 1987 by Tavistock Publications, Ltd.