

Psychopaths



by Armando Simón

“‘Poverty causes crime.’ What crap! If that was true, we would have been drowning in crime throughout history!” –Eric Hoffer

It is always gratifying to be proven right.

Way, way back in the early 1970s, in the heyday of the behavior modification movement, a school of thought took hold in intellectual circles. The idea was that crime was caused by poverty and a toxic environment, and that crime was subsequently maintained by other, punitive, factors. This conclusion was an extrapolation of various experiments and field studies which, although not based on criminology, their applications could reasonably be extended into the field. Besides, it dovetailed nicely with the touchy-feely aspect of the prevalent hippie atmosphere.

Consequently, through the courts, the old dungeon-like jails and prisons made way for spacious, well-lit edifices (which were jokingly referred to as “resorts” by skeptics). Additionally, several, short-lived, experimental programs took

place, wherein the inmates had a say in the running of some penal institutions, much to the horror and scorn of reactionary officers.

These programs turned out to be a "failure" (I put failure in " " because we did learn something, namely, that such programs do not work).

Parallel to this reworking of prisons and jails, slums were razed and new housing projects built in their stead.

At first, fresh out of graduate school, bright eyed and bushy tailed, I supported this school of thought, but decades of experience being in the field of forensic psychology made me, among many others, abandon the concept. Additionally, I very slowly began to be aware of certain facts which gradually led me to a theory, which I kept private since it was so heretical.

Now, all defense lawyers will privately admit that the majority of their clients are guilty of the offense for which they have been charged, that is, they knowingly committed a crime which the offenders knew was illegal. A smaller group of the accused consists of the truly innocent, wrongly accused, persons, as well as those individuals who broke the law in what we might call "by accident" (involuntary manslaughter, or breaking a vague, not well known law, etc.). But let us leave those aside.

Offenders are classified in a varied number of ways, but a handy, valid, classification is between "habitual criminals" and "first time offenders."

Working extensively in the criminal justice system, I realized that the habitual criminals had several behavioral markers, which led me to the heretical conclusion that *habitual criminals are genetically defective human beings*.

Blasphemy! Right?

Yet, the undeniable facts were that they were a failure at *everything* in society: they were a failure at school, they were a failure at marriage, they were a failure as fathers, they were a failure as friends, they were a failure as sons, and they were a failure as workers (not being able to hold a job longer than two years, at most).

On top of that, it has been a consistent, verifiable finding (for over century) that habitual criminals have lower abstract intelligence than the general population, i.e., they have [a lower IQ](#). Criminologists have also noted that criminals tend to lack [empathy](#) and tend to have [poor impulse control](#), especially if they get emotionally aroused). So that when I stated that criminals are defective human beings, I meant just that, literally: *they are genetically defective*.

Something in their DNA is defective in comparison to the general population. After all, some persons have a congenital physical abnormality. Which meant that, according to my theory, attempting to rehabilitate the *habitual* criminal was a waste of time, effort and money.

This also meant that the cart had been put before the horse. Criminality was not caused by a toxic environment, rather, the criminals *created* the [toxic](#) environment, where they thrived. And we saw this in the newly built housing projects: the criminals trashed those housing projects.

Habitual criminals commit crimes because they *enjoy* doing so. They *enjoy* victimizing others. Whether it is defrauding someone, beating someone unconscious, robbing a person or a business, or raping a woman, the habitual criminal *enjoys* doing it. These crimes are not committed because of poverty, or because of racism, or because there is a full moon, but because criminals *enjoy* victimizing people (although, in all fairness, I must mention that recently a black man raped and killed his daughter and then actually blamed his actions on [racism](#)).

Ultimately, I came across several studies in scientific journals that surprised me because they corroborated my intuitive, secret and heretical, supposition.

[Kent Kiehl](#) and his associates at the University of British Columbia, using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of the brain, found that criminal psychopaths have *physical* abnormalities in the limbic system when it comes to processing emotions. In several studies, [Abigail Marsh](#) and her associates of Georgetown University, also using fMRI, likewise found *anatomical* abnormalities for the processing of empathy, moral judgment, with the more psychopathic the individual the more abnormal the response. Equally important is a reduction in experiencing [anxiety](#) and [fearfulness](#), which explains the colloquial judgment in the criminal justice system that habitual criminals do not learn from their past mistakes. He has also found that murderers' brains exhibited reduced [gray](#) matter density.

Another [study](#), published just last week, also found anatomical differences in the brains of psychopaths and non-psychopaths, with the former having a larger striatum region in the brain. "A larger striatum to an increased need for stimulation, through thrills and excitement, and a higher likelihood of impulsive behaviours."

Mind you, it was always known that criminality had a strong genetic component, although the sociologists always maintained—with, as usual, almost no facts whatsoever, just ideology—that it was entirely due to the environment, but the importance of the above studies is that there is proof that anatomical abnormalities in the brain have been proven to be present in [psychopaths](#).

So I was right after all!

And when one takes into consideration that further studies have shown that psychopathy runs in families, i.e., that it is

inherited, the outlook is pretty dismal.

Actually, it was to be expected. After all, with the recent advances in genetics, scientists found that there is a genetic basis for several [mental illnesses](#).

Taking the above as consideration, I would love to see legislation passed wherein a convicted felon is given the choice (not forced to, but given a choice) to submit to sterilization in return for a substantial reduction in sentence. Such a proposal would be opposed by those individuals who have politicized crime and believe that criminals, particularly black criminals, should not be held personally responsible for any of their actions but, rather, society; yes, it is Society that should be blamed, not the criminal.

However, if the policy is adopted it would have substantial long term benefits for everyone. Unfortunately, politicians are not known for creativity or courage, especially if the journalists take an adversarial stance, so that we are probably condemned to a perpetuation of the status quo.

Not too long ago, White County, Tennessee, was spotlighted because that is where a local judge gave inmates a choice: they could get reduced jail time in exchange for [a vasectomy](#). Knee-jerk condemnations followed, with cries of "eugenics" (which is supposed to be bad, although the concept has been caricatured). One of the most evil organizations in America, the ACLU, also opposed it, even though inmates voluntarily joined the [program](#).

It is unfortunate that some people simply cannot mind their own business.

Perhaps attitudes will change in the future.

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