

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA 19104

Center for Studies in
Criminology and Criminal Law
3718 Locust Walk CR

MARVIN E. WOLFGANG
Director

Dr. Hans Toch
School of Criminal Justice
S.U.N.Y. at Albany
135 West 9th Avenue
Albany, NY 12222

26 February 1980

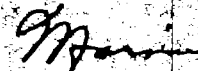
Dear Hans:

You are incorrigible. You know I cannot refuse you, ever. And you are thinking, thinking all the time!

Enclosed is my edited version of your paper. You have good thoughts and I agree with most of what you have to say. Most of my markings are copy editing rather than substantive, except for the suicide references.

Be well. Eat and drink well. Believe it or not, I miss the Albany experience. Love to Lisa.

Yours,



Marvin E. Wolfgang
Professor of Sociology
and Law

MEW:hjg
Enclosure

EVOLVING A "SCIENCE OF VIOLENCE": A PROPAEDEUTIC COMMENT.

Hans Toch

Rules about dictionary usage are critical when scientific language deploys terms that are in the public domain. We can adapt definitions selectively, as long as we do so reliably. The qualification is important, because it permits us to sparkle at parties by indulging in glittering generalities, and to stress exactitude and precision in the classroom and laboratory.

The word "violence" is a case-in-point. The dictionary is almost intemperate when it defines this term: it talks about "exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse," "profanation", "outrage", "vehement feeling or expression" and "discordance". In referring to "violent", the dictionary adds "excited or disordered to the point of losing control," and stresses the "extreme" character of the "intense activity" it refers to. Such definitions reflect the social disapproval of "violence" in the abstract and the extremes of behavior people have in mind when they characterize others as "violent".

This fact matters to scientists because we must decide, when we use the word "violence", either to buy into conventional usage or to circumscribe our own definition to make it more dispassionate.¹ This dilemma may be one reason why the term "aggression" is favored by psychologists. According to the dictionary, though, this concept has problems of its own.

Different nuances attach to aggression when it appears as a noun or verb, or as an adjective. According to Webster, an act of aggression is "a forceful action or procedure, . . . especially when intended to dominate or master"; it is an "attack" or "encroachment"; it is "hostile, injurious, or destructive behavior or outlook, especially when caused by frustration." The word "aggressive" describes a personality trait or stance: to be "aggressive" is to "tend

toward" aggression, to be "marked by driving forceful energy or initiative" or "obtrusive energy"; synonyms of "aggressive" are "militant, assertive, self-assertive, pushing."

One obvious point is that "aggression" is a less pejorative label than "violence"; this distinction was very neat among early dictionary definitions, according to which "aggression" referred to the initiation of interpersonal conflict; to be aggressive meant "making the first attack." This early definition was strictly behavioral, but more contemporary nuances carry psychoanalytic freight. The word "aggression" describes an interpersonal strategy in which the actor's motives are prejudged (as hostile or power-seeking) and his dynamics are suspect (as frustration-induced and/or drive-reducing).

Two elements subsumed in the definitions of aggression are (1) that of energy, drive or force, and (2) a process of displacement onto the interpersonal stage of frustration-induced boorishness. Though the dictionary in defining the adjective allows for "aggressive" salesmanship, driving behavior or career advancement, it does not subsume such behavior under "aggression". (If a noun is applicable, it would be "aggressivity.") A science of aggression compatible with the dictionary would not (as some have suggested)² be sidetracked by the phenomenon of assertiveness. It would, however, inherit a conception of the dynamics and mechanics of aggression, and a judgmental assumption about the behavior's incompatibility with civilized norms of gentlemanly (or gentlewomanly) fair play. Such connotations carry over in science, though it is not my task to belabor the point. I shall limit myself to proposing that where one's paradigm accommodates the dictionary's portrait (as among laboratory experimenters who annoy people so as to make them irritably cantankerous, or in ethological surveys that tell us how a male animal becomes top dog or top chicken, a senior chimpanzee or ruler of the fish tank) the phenomena being studied should be

subsumed under "aggression". I also suggest that such studies should not be confused by invoking the concept of "violence." If the latter term is to acquire scientific integrity, it must imply its own concerns, and evolve an appropriate methodology to address them.

Violence: Process or Product:

Definitions that are favored by students of violence often focus on the inflicting of physical harm. The presumption of such definitions is that "violence is as violence does", and we can thus speak of these definitions as "product centered". The advantage of the product-centered approach is clear: what is highlighted is criterion-behavior which circumscribes a universe we are entitled to study. Sticks that break bones are in, words (no matter how noxious) are out.

The disadvantage of the approach is that unless we presuppose homogeneity of process, a product-centered science of violence could encroach on diverse domains involving wildly disparate expertise. The problem is equivalent to that of building a science around physical harm done by nature, encompassing such phenomena as earthquakes, storm damage, combustion, famines, and plagues. If different processes produce a generic product, it follows that they should each be allocated to the most relevant body of inquiry, unless we want amateurs dabbling where experts fear to tread.

Process-centered inquiries are common in science, but the promiscuity of process restricts the applicability of scientific thinking to the "real world"; for this reason, when there are shifts from "pure" to "applied" science, these often feature shifts from process orientation to product-centeredness, as when we moved from the science of the atom to fission, radiation, mushroom clouds and leaks in power plants. Process-centeredness that also aspires to relevance

often risks reification, as in debates about whether restricting access to economic opportunities or restricting freedom are "violence". Such arguments imply that "violence does as violence is" in the sense that any criterion behavior (e.g., limited job opportunities) becomes "violence" if we define the process as violence. The reason for doing so, of course, has to do with applied concerns -- or rather, with values. Because any dictionary highlights the badness (destructiveness) of violence, it follows that if a process is defined as "violence" it becomes ipso facto evil.

But the dictionary really does more than vent its spleen. It includes process connotations in its definitions, such as (1) purposefulness ("exert physical force. . . to injure"), (2) strong feelings ("outrage", "excited", "vehement feeling"), (3) loss of self-control, and (4) personal conflict ("discordance"). If we restrict the product-centered definitions of our incipient inquiry to those that in addition to those focusing on people physically harming others also include criteria for the process of violence as described by the dictionary, some acts and actors are clearly excluded, and others are not. A careless engineer or airplane inspector, a wartime general, an improvident tire manufacturer, or a shortsighted storer of chemicals can be responsible for monstrous calamities, but in process terms such a person fits more appropriately under headings such as social conformity, obedience, problem solving, impact of organizational membership, and value and attitude formation, than he does under "the applied science of violence".³ By contrast, an exploding parent or barroom brawler may do little damage, but he may tell us much about the relationship between personal inadequacies and impulse-control, or about the effects of drugs on the release of inhibitions.

You Can't Study Them If You Can't Find Them:

A phenomenon may be definitionally relevant but very resistant to inquiry. It may also be definitionally relevant on one count but dubious on another. In the case of violence, we may see "organically produced conditions" in which neat indicators point to persons whose violence is confined to tantrums, while mass murderers have all sorts of problems (notably, messed up home lives) in addition to tumors. The choice may be between making a good process case for inconsequential products and drawing over-simple inferences about legitimate phenomena.

A more frequent problem in the violence area is that sources of data do not coincide with desired targets of inquiry. For example, one much-deplored type of violent offender is the so-called "violent delinquent". This term represents a seemingly tangible category that has come to the forefront in the public mind, in the media, and in laws that are passed to combat it. Ostensibly, the facts are clear: Statistics show disproportionate increases in violence rates for the 12-14 age group.⁴ The portrait evoked to account for these numbers features groups of callous youths who spend their evenings pummeling and stomping old ladies, somehow spurred on by their victims' suffering and pleas for mercy. Such youths exist, and require study and treatment, but (1) the delinquents available to us are NOT the youngsters we have described, and (2) the real "violent delinquents" are almost never available to us. Why is this the case?

For one, hardened delinquents have checkered careers, and intersperse occasional violence among other illegal pursuits. When they commit violent offenses these are seldom the sadistic grandmother-stomping orgies that get attention. Moreover, most youths arrested for violent acts have no previous record of violence.

A second fly in the ointment is that only a fraction of the youths arrested for violent acts are available for study and treatment. Most are never tried: the more intimidating youths are less likely to be convicted because victims are more reluctant to testify against them. Of the few youths that are tried, a small number are incarcerated, and this fate bears little relationship to their tendency to violence. A reformatory sentence is a "hit" in a fateful game of Russian roulette which leaves delinquents justifiably embittered.⁵

What makes this doubly farcical is the fact that in New York and Philadelphia, studies have pinpointed a small group of young men who account for most youthful violent crime in these cities. These youths are chronically violent. After three violence-related contacts with the police, they are likely to commit more violence; after four violence-related arrests, a fifth is virtually certain.⁶

The studies I refer to are sound and if they are viewed from a product perspective, they tell us a great deal. What they do is define a problem and "map" it by telling us who the violent offenders are (disproportionately male, young black), and what sorts of criminal careers they embark on (checkered). This is certainly "science", and it is solid science, but is not all of science. It is strong on "who" and "what", but is short on "how" and "why". The last two questions are process questions, and can be answered by close scrutiny of offenders, by reviewing their outlook, behavior, and development. Product questions are questions that spell out dependent variables, and relate them (statistically) to independent variables. Process questions are those that focus on intervening variables. Product questions find correlates for events; process questions seek understanding of links.

A "compleat" science, I have suggested, would combine product and process

exploration, moving from the former to the latter. This presupposes that we get close to significant products (violent persons and their violence) and pose answerable questions about meaning and purpose. In the absence of this possibility, we risk disjunctures of inquiry, or pseudo-solutions.

Schizoscience:

"Disjunctures" involve independently evolving knowledge of process and product, where the twain meet only (awkwardly) in strained expositions of textbook writers. As examples, consider process data garnered in

- (1) clinical case studies involving wildly unrepresentative patients;
- (2) neurological research that is focused on rare and exotic conditions;
- (3) observed animal violence that misses essential attributes (situational, cultural-socializing, cognitive processing) of human violence.
- (4) laboratory studies that constrict sequences, feature penny ante aggression and are suffused with artificiality.

There are also product studies in which the process is slipped in through the back door. We invoke findings about impaired problem solving performance of intoxicated laboratory subjects to explain well-established alcohol involvement in violence. The role of real-life whiskey in the context of real-life homicide is not studied, because conducting debriefing interviews of drunk offenders who have just knifed someone is not part of our repertoire. In considering television impact on violent crime, we invoke laboratory studies that show the effects of suggestive film clips on modelled doll abuse and we gather views about hypothetical violence from heavy television viewers (Chapter). Direct links between television impact and real-life violence remain unexplored. There are well-established relationships between inconsistent punishment in

childhood or emotionally charged early home environments and subsequent patterned violence of adults. Such relationships, however, are traced in the sandbox and invoked in the battlefield.

The most honored and most prevalent perspective on violence is that of the subculture of violence.⁷ It rests entirely on product data, ie., on the finding that violence occurs disproportionately in certain neighborhoods and among defined subgroups of the larger community. The process assumption (the premise that practitioners of violence have adopted values that are prevalent in their subculture and have translated these into violent conduct) is valid, in the sense that cultural facilitation plays some (unknown) part in the genesis of violence in different ways and to differing degrees. The challenge is that of exploring a composite process and teasing out the contribution of hypothesized processes to the in vivo variance. A narrow definition of "science" makes such exploration hard.

Science as Synthesis: The Case of Family Violence.

A report on spouse violence appears elsewhere in this volume, and I shall not preempt the subject, except to suggest that a science of family violence provides a model paradigm for the rest of us to emulate. In relation to spouse violence,

- (1) A distinction is suggested between normative violence ("normal" wife beating) and more extreme violence, which calls for inquiry into personal dispositions and developmental experiences of the perpetrator-spouse. Such typologies (subdivisions of product that correspond to variations in process) are essential to a science of violence.
- (2) Family violence is a self-contained scenario of aggressor-victim-situation-context-antecedents. It permits a "closed system" view of process, such as in tracing the developing transaction (escalation toward violence) between spouses, and an "open systems" view, encompass-

ing the larger context and antecedents.

- (3) A key variable (stressors impinging on the family) is known, and its contribution to the genesis of violence can be explored. Similar "open systems" variables are available in the history of the aggressor and victim.
- (4) The contribution of precipitants of the immediate situation (genesis of disputes, drinking) can be described, and placed in contexts, such as stress-leading-to-drinking-leading-to-violence or drinking-affecting-volatile-personality-to-escalate-dispute.

The methodology deployed ^{in the study of family violence} must be multi-faceted, and must handle all sorts of data in varying combinations. Such is the sine qua non of a "complete" science of violence, in which representative phenomena can be meaningfully subdivided, explored in depth and breadth, described and traced.

Other "Success Stories":

Lest I imply that family violence is unique, I must highlight the suicide problem, which has the most distinguished history of problems in social science, involving the very birth of sociology.

Suicide is a product that was "mapped" by Durkheim, who related it to its societal antecedents.⁸ Durkheim was not interested in violence, but was concerned with social disorganization, of which he saw suicide as a symptom. Durkheim hypothesized that a paucity of norms (rather than the violence-related norms blamed by subcultural theory) inspire suicide, and he documented this relationship by correlating patterns of marital status, etc., with suicide rates.

Translated into process terms, Durkheim drew attention to the loss of personal support systems, or to their absence, in motivating personal despair and self-inflicted violence. This relationship has the status of a well-researched field, illuminating suicide among certain groups of people, (e.g., the old, and most recently, disaffected teenagers). Suicide today is traced in depth for such self-destructive individuals through clinical inquiry, psychological autopsies,

the study of suicide notes, and other clinical procedures. The multidisciplinary field of suicidology (the maiden name of the multidisciplinary field of thanatology) is a process science that grew out of Durkheim's product "mapping". Suicidology is scientifically an omnivorous enterprise, and it also combines "pure" and "applied" concerns. The pure concerns include efforts to differentiate types of suicides that involve different motives or dynamics; the applied concerns include establishing crisis centers, in which one can interrupt causal sequences that terminate in suicide.

Typologies that divide violence phenomena (products) into homogeneous syndromes with similar dynamics (process) facilitate efforts at prevention and re-socialization. Several years ago, a group of us subcategorized a universe of chronically violent persons, arriving at "types" such as "reputation defenders," "self-image defenders," "self-image promoters," "pressure removers," "exploiters," "self-defenders," and "bullies".⁹ This typology subsequently helped a group of police officers gain insight into patterns of police-citizen violence, and permitted policemen to assist fellow-officers who had difficulties on the street.¹⁰ Insight, ("understanding people" in the dictionary sense) is product-process oriented. Closure of this kind is consumable by the man in the streets, to whom a correlation matrix means next to nothing.

Avoiding premature Closure:

Mostly we can understand a person's violent behavior better when we know the context in which it occurred and the stimuli that precipitated it. Different processes relate to different products. Where an offender has a scandalously low boiling point, we must worry about his personality and how it got that way. Where a gang member is elected platoon leader by his friends, we must be concerned with social context.

Real understanding, however, is more than a matter of distributing process to various products. The most interesting questions have to do with how forces converge within the person and in the world to produce a given pattern of violent behavior. Whence does a preadolescent derive the assumption that he cannot let insults go unavenged or is entitled to other children's lunch money? Why does he value the esteem of bloodthirsty peers? Why does he feel in danger, or belittled, or hateful? Such questions have both longterm and shortterm answers, which must be combined to "make sense" of the person. This is particularly true with patterned violence, which implies a longlived motive or disposition plus recurrent circumstances that provoke, inspire or seduce the person to ~~commit~~ violence.¹¹

Different scientists, unfortunately, focus on different processes or "dynamics" of violence, teach their students to favor one type of explanation and to malign others. The advantage of doing this is that it tells students what to look for; the disadvantage is that it produces "flat" portraits of what they see.

We shortchange violent individuals when we focus on their childhood experiences and neglect contemporary learning, or vice versa; we distort violence by highlighting drive or prizing affect at the expense of purposefulness, or by contrariwise assuming that anger and hostility are irrelevant and uninteresting. Violent persons have impulses, they learn, perceive, react, belong, strive; they feel compelled, confused, cornered, tempted. They are con-
joint products of social learning, ego formation, group norms, frustrations, traumas, and hormones. They can also make choices. It is the process mix that goes into violence that varies. Some explanations turn out more illuminating or helpful in relation to some individuals; others apply better elsewhere. Scientific skill consists of knowing where to look and how far to dig to answer

the question "why?"

Involving the Object of Science

Most people know much more about themselves than they know they know, and more than we give them credit for. The subjects of violence research can seldom "explain" their own violence, but can supply much process data relating to their motives, perceptions, values, feelings, experiences and reactions to other people and situations. The only way to obtain such information is to demonstrate genuine interest, and this means suspending product concerns in exploring process. Little communication takes place when people sense that we fear them or hold them in contempt, a stance that is prevalent (and understandable) when we interview explosive psychotics or child molesters.

Studies of human behavior cannot mimic physical science or research on animal behavior, in which products are the "objects" of study. We forget that the reason we fail to interview a test tube or a frog^{is} not because the method is "sloppy" but because it is unproductive. We forget that we avoid violent or violence-prone persons in our research, / not because involving them would be unproductive or sloppy, but because it is uninviting. It is easier to generalize from aggression studies or brain implantations or surveys of television audiences or observations of fish tanks than it is to enter prison cells to commune with those who have recently spilled blood. I think our reluctance to explore violence process directly is unfortunate, because I suspect we shall not treat, prevent, or predict violence until we have talked and truly listened to persons who are intimate with violence, who can tell us about the "how", and illuminate the "why". In the absence of this strategy, our science of violence seems fated to be strong on facts that are weakly buttressed by remote inferences.

Footnotes

1. The first of these two strategies is recommended by Sandra Ball-Rokeach; see "The legitimization of violence," in Short, J.F. and M.E. Wolfgang, eds., Collective Violence. Chicago: Aldine, 1972, pp. 100 - 111.
2. This point is made by Seymour Feshbach in "Dynamics and Morality of Violence and Aggression: Some Psychological Considerations." American Psychologist, 1971, 26, 281-291. I have also made this point in Violent Men: Revised Edition, Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, in press.
3. This consideration is generally ignored in social problems texts, which strive after "relevance" and emphasize descriptive material highlighting social harm to illustrate the applicability of social science to the understanding of major social problems.
4. For dated but impeccable statistics, see National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Staff Report, Crimes of Violence: I, Vol. 11 Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969.
5. Strasburg, P.A., Violent Delinquents: A Report to the Ford Foundation from the Vera Institute of Justice, New York: Monareh, 1978.
6. Wolfgang, M.E., Figlio, R. and Sellin, T. Delinquency in a Birth Cohort, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
7. This view has been endorsed by the President's Commission on Causes and Prevention of Violence. The perspective is systematically developed in M.E. Wolfgang and F. Ferracuti, The Subculture of Violence: Towards an Integrated Theory of Criminology, London: Tavistock, 1967.
8. Durkheim, E. Suicide: A Study in Sociology. New York: Free Press, 1951.
9. Toch, H. Violent Men: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Violence. Chicago: Aldine, 1969.
10. Toch, H., Grant J.D. and R.T. Galvin, Agents of Change: A Study in Police Reform. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman (New York: Halsted), 1975.
11. Toch, H. "Social Climate and Prison Violence," Federal Probation, 1978, 42, 21-25.

I N S E R T for "Evolving a Science of Violence..."

page 10

Insert between Paragraphs 1 and 2:

Because suicide is self-directed violence, it is especially difficult to understand until we break down the perpetrator's motives into types. We can only then distinguish suicide as ^{an effort to} escape from despair under conditions experienced as intolerable; as communication -- usually "aggression" -- aimed at significant others who hurt -- as an "oblative" sacrifice for a cause, or as "ludic" -- ceremonial self-cleansing.⁹ Subcategorizing motives of suicide attemptors -- who are disproportionately suicide prone -- makes it possible to address their concerns before they become extreme and irreversible. Goals ~~of~~ of intervention vary from helping the person sort through his problems, providing social support or ameliorative settings, helping the individual process his guilt and shame, and mobilizing external support networks through rebuilding brittle defenses in therapy. The nature of the goal (and the personnel that must be invoked to address it) varies with the nature of the crisis experienced by the individual, and with dominant features of his personality.¹⁰

New footnotes (Renumber subsequent ones)

⁹Baechler, J. Suicides. New York: Basic Books, 1979.

¹⁰Toch, H. Men in Crisis: Human Breakdowns in Prison, Chicago: Aldine, 1975.