

... Letters

antisocial juvenile conduct is ignored by society it (the anti-social behavior) would become extinguished. Skinner, and others, maintain that behavior which is positively reinforced is likely to be repeated. Skinner would also agree that ignoring behavior tends to extinguish it.

If Shannon is implying that society should ignore juvenile misconduct, I would argue he may be scientifically and psychologically naive. My prisoner-students' perception was that they were obtaining sex, through intimidation or rape, money and property through strong arm robbery, burglary or theft, and the "payoff" was very desirable. They experienced only good consequences, not bad, and, therefore, positive reinforcement for behavior.

In the past years I have evaluated about 75 persons for the Florida courts. They were male and female, black and white, sane and insane and all were charged with serious felonies. I do not recall a single one where somebody suddenly "went bad" at 20, 25, or 30 years of age. On the contrary, they all showed early and serious signs of being "different" from the general population.

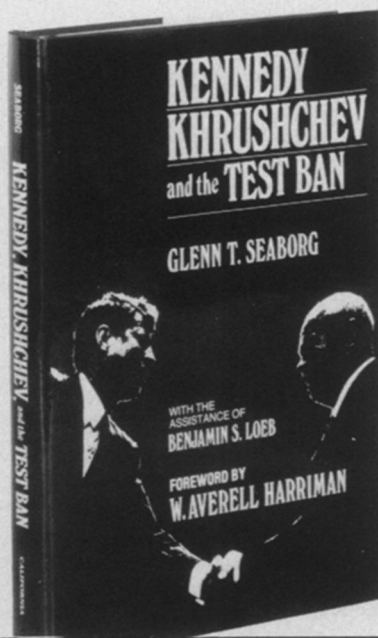
I would like to know more about the design, sample and statistics in Shannon's study. Has Shannon proposed to study adults convicted of serious crimes in Wisconsin on a retrospective basis? More than mere "common sense" is at stake here!

James R. Fisher, Ed.D.
Eustis, Fla.

Correction: Li-Tsun Chen ("Petri dish' mouse embryos go halfway through normal gestation" SN: 10/2/82, p. 213) is an associate professor of anatomy at the University of South Florida College of Medicine in Tampa.

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