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Letters

Delinquency's roots

Susan B. Yewell's perceptive letter (SN:11/16/85, p. 318) in response to the longitudinal studies reported on hyperactive children ("Hyperactivity: Will It Stay or Go?" SN:10/19/85, p. 245) asks two very important questions: (a) is there a junk food connection, and (b) do hyperactivity and child abuse go hand in hand?

My own studies confirm the latter, but I remain equivocal regarding the former. I should mention, however, that nearly all parents of delinquents who come to my office readily admit that they were a little more "physical" with their children than they should have been, but still insist that their child's delinquent behavior was clearly due to all the junk food they had been sneaking, and their "bad" friends. I think the junk food is nothing but a red herring, and the delinquents' bad friends are people like themselves with whom they feel comfortable.

Since severe parental punishment (SPP) is ubiquitous in the histories of recidivist male delinquents, I am convinced that it is the major cause of delinquent aggression. It would be logical to assume that hyperactive behavior

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Cover: Will it matter in 100 years? Niels Bohr helped to start a revolution in physics and a fundamental debate on the nature of reality. A hundred years after his birth, both still matter a great deal, and they probably will still matter 100 years from now. That may account for the amused philosophical look on his face. (Photo: AIP Niels Bohr Library)

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frequently invites retaliatory physical punishment from parents, and conversely that physical punishment could produce hyperactivity — but James H. Satterfield's findings that hyperactive delinquent repeaters are less likely to have positive EEGs than hyperactive delinquent nonrepeaters suggests that SPP does produce (as well as organic factors) hyperactive behavior. Since so many people use SPP on their children, I strongly suspect more children are made hyperactive by SPP than by defective neurology.

Ralph S. Welsh
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Linguistic logic

In "Exceptions to the Rule" (SN: 11/16/85, p. 314) the author states that Noam Chomsky's argument against the adequacy of finite-state grammars for natural language is based on the possibility of two related words being separated by an indefinitely large number of intervening words. Finite-state systems cannot be proven inadequate on these grounds, and Chomsky did not argue in this way. Rather, he claimed that it is possible to have indefinitely deep nesting of pairs of related words inside

pairs of similarly related ones. For example, in "The boy that [the girl likes] eats bananas," the subject-verb pair "the girl likes" is nested inside the pair "The boy . . . eats." It is the possibility of repeating this process an arbitrary number of times which lies at the heart of Chomsky's proof.

The article also fails to make any mention of the work of Alexis Manaster-Ramer of the University of Michigan, who with a publication priority of two years over either Christopher Culy or Stuart M. Shieber demonstrated the non-context-freeness of varieties of English which make use of "derisive voice" constructions such as "Oedipus, schmoedipus" or "phrase structure, schmase structure," which involve a total reduplication in the second part of the structure of a continuous portion of the first part. (Culy follows essentially the same logic in his treatment of Bambara.) The author does cite another of Manaster-Ramer's examples (the "X or no X" construction), but without attribution.

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