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PSYCHOANALYSING DELINQUENCY: OBJECT RELATIONS, AGGRESSION AND THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND

Ishaan Deepak Joshi¹

Abstract

This article examines the concept of delinquency within the framework of a species' adaptability to the natural environment. The article examined the phenomenon of delinquent conduct within the framework of an individual's adaptation to society. During the pre-cultural phase of human evolutionary adaptation, the aggressive urge of individuals was mostly oriented towards external targets. The delinquent is situated within a pre-cultural stratum of society. During the cultural age, it is seen that animosity tends to be directed against oneself and subsequently mitigated. It is apparent that not all instances of aggressiveness result in this particular effect. A certain percentage of the drive stays available for externalisation through various means. Initially, our study focuses on examining the initial stages of ego development in infants, as well as the subsequent implications for the integration and elimination of aggressive tendencies. The failure of developmental processes can result in various issues, including but not limited to juvenile criminality. The subsequent sections of this article examine the potential role of both parents in influencing the disruption of growth mechanisms in children, which can subsequently contribute to the manifestation of delinquent conduct. In conclusion, we examine the issue of unrestricted aggressiveness within society and its implications for the family unit, particularly in terms of its ability to foster the development of well-adjusted children.

Keywords: Ego, Id, Scapegoating, Psychoanalysis, Aggression, Frustration, Delinquency, Familial Relations, Object Relations, Sexual

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Instinct, Familial Orientations, Compassion, Deviance

I. INTRODUCTION

In the domain of early observations of infants, researchers have embraced the study of Rene Spitz as a means of investigation. This research has selected Spitz based on his association with the traditional analytic tradition, which we have thoroughly examined in our thesis. The author's thorough examination of the contextual factors that influence the interaction and integration of hostile and libidinal drives renders his work a valuable subject for investigating the mechanisms behind drive integration and the mitigation of aggressiveness.² The works of Anna Freud, Hartmann along with Kris & Loewenstein provide a comprehensive analysis of Freud's drive theory in relation to violence. They adhered to Freud's conceptualization of the mind throughout infancy as an undifferentiated amalgamation of the ego and id.^{3,4,5}

II. TURBULENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EGO STRUCTURES

The first intrapsychic economic condition at birth is characterised by narcissism. According to Spitz, the urges also exist in a condition of non-differentiation throughout the primordial phase of psychological construction. The distinction of drives is contingent upon two primary factors: the initial identification of part-objects and subsequently, the categorization of these part-objects into entities that are either deemed good or harmful. This mechanism facilitates the redirection of violent impulses towards negative items, while directing desire towards positive objects. Therefore, positive items are internalised within the ego, whereas negative ones are externalised as non-ego. During the developmental stage

² Rene Spitz; *The First Year of Life: A Psychoanalytic Study of Normal and Deviant Development of Object Relations*

³ Ernst Kris, Rudolph M. Loewenstein; *Scritti di psicologia psicoanalitica*

⁴ Heinz Hartmann; *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation (1939)*

⁵ Rose Edgcombe; *Anna Freud: A View of Development, Disturbance and Therapeutic Techniques*

spanning around six to eight months, infants begin to form genuine object relations.⁶

The fragmented components coalesce and are acknowledged as the maternal figure. The subsequent stage involves ambiguous object relations, which afterwards enables the potential for the formation of a feeling of reality and the emergence of secondary mental processes. Hartmann's findings suggest that the arrangement of the ego's motor system enables infants to effectively express aggressiveness through their muscles. During the initial stage of object relations theory, there is a shift in attention towards the convergence of the confrontational id and the libidinal id onto a singular object. Enhancing mastery of the musculature facilitates the use of the aggressive drive by actions like as tugging, striking, biting, and similar behaviours.⁷

A compassionate mother may tolerate a certain level of violence directed at her. The importance of expressing hostility in this manner has been acknowledged as crucial for the development of distinction between the self and the environment. This process marks the move from egocentric object relationships to authentic object relationships. A significant disruption of object interactions throughout this timeframe is linked to antisocial conduct, namely the expression of unrestrained hostility via indiscriminate acts of damage in adulthood.⁸ Therefore, an interruption in the unrestricted expression of hostility during the early stages of development has the potential to result in psychological delinquency. According to Spitz's research, when the mother is absent for an extended amount of time during the latter part of the newborn's first year, it can result in the infant experiencing a decrease in motivation and a condition

⁶ Sigmund Freud; *Zur Einführung des Narzißmus* (1914)

⁷ Melanie Klein; *The Collected Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume 2 - The Psychoanalysis of Children*, London: Hogarth Press.

⁸ Melanie Klein; *The Collected Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume 1 - Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921–1945*, London: Hogarth Press.

of depression known as anaclitic depression.

If the quality of the mother-infant relationship has been good before to the separation, it is possible to address the problem by having the mother return within a period of two to three months. Following her reintegration, it is probable that the youngster may exhibit atypical degrees of hostility and sexual desire towards both herself and various items within her surroundings. However, if let to follow its natural course, this obstructed drive tension might be released, allowing the typical procedure of id fusion to resume.⁹ Nevertheless, in several instances, the extended separation experienced during this crucial phase hindered the establishment of an anaclitic attachment with the mother, resulting in a lasting diffusion of drives. In certain cases, newborns had a physical conversion of psychological discomfort. In several instances, this has resulted in mortality. In certain instances, where inadequate maternal care has been present from the child's birth, the manifestation of symptoms continually resulted in less severe, yet more persistent psychotoxic responses in the body, such as dermatological conditions or respiratory disorders like asthma.¹⁰

III. ID, EGO, SUPEREGO AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

According to Spitz, it was anticipated that infants who had received adequate maternal care until experiencing a period of separation during the latter part of their first year, would likely exhibit signs of delinquency. The primary causative factor was the suppression of the manifestation of the hostile emotion. One may posit that there exists a fundamental feeling that is intricately linked to the experience of losing the mother figure throughout the child's narcissistic period. It is important to differentiate between structural depression and the situational development of the superego within the mother-infant bond, which might occur as a result of

⁹ Edward Glover; *The Birth of the Ego: A Nuclear Hypothesis* (1968)

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud; *The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis* (1924)

the mother's prolonged absence or her unwillingness to accept it.¹¹ Aggression, as noted by Spitz, would be directed against the external environment, resulting in a widespread and predominantly irrational inclination towards destruction.

According to Spitz, the primary objective throughout the initial year of an individual's existence is to construct the foundational level of genuine ego structure.¹² The measurement of this phenomenon is achieved by the recognition of the supremacy of the reality theory, so enabling the neutralization of instinctive drive energy. The ego's growing ability to integrate and organise information results in a shift in the aims of the drives, which were previously aligned with the pleasure principle, and are now recognised as being incongruent with the ego. These objectives are disregarded in favour of self-directed ego pursuits and more intricate protection systems. Aligned with the reality theory, the commitment of love within object interactions emerges as the pivotal element in facilitating progressive development and establishing a cohesive integration of drives.¹³

In his discourse on ego autonomy, David Rapaport expounded upon the concept of being autonomous in relation to both the environment and the desires. The individual engaged in speculation over the necessity of external stimuli and nourishment for the preservation of diverse cognitive structures, including those within the ego. Moreover, the deterioration of certain structures may occur when stimulus-nutrient is withheld, depending on the period during which they develop and the corresponding mental balance within them.¹⁴ When the mother is not there, the child's bodily requirements may still be met. However, the mother's absence in

¹¹ Spitz, R.A. (1946) Anaclitic depression. *Psychoanalytical Study of the Child*

¹² Spitz, R.A. (1951). *The Psychogenic Diseases in Infancy—An Attempt at their Etiologic Classification*. *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 6, 255–275.

¹³ Sigmund Freud; *Das Ich und das Es* (1923)

¹⁴ Rapaport, D. (1942). *Freudian Mechanisms and Frustration Experiments*. *Psychoanal Q.*, 11:503-511.

her role as a protective environment to shelter the newborn from external stimuli may lead to an early development of the child's ego independence from the id.

When considering the aforementioned findings on the untimely onset of sexual arousal in individuals with criminal tendencies, it becomes apparent that the mother's inability to fulfil her role in safeguarding the infant from overwhelming stimuli is implicated. The subsequent adjustment of the delinquent to their surroundings may be characterised as allo-plastic, since it involves the externalisation of their drive activity.¹⁵ This concept assumes that the proper development of certain ego functions, including an intact ego and motor apparatus function, is crucial for delinquency. The ego's fundamental autonomous functions must have reached a state of irreversible structurization before the mother's departure. In instances of psychotoxic disruptions between mother and newborn, the ego's development has not yet achieved adequate autonomy from the physical body, much alone from the unconscious instincts.¹⁶

IV. DELINQUENCY VIA SCAPEGOATING: GUILT, BLAME AND AGGRESSION

One method by which individuals within a culture express hostility in a manner that is seen socially acceptable is through the process of directing aggressiveness and other prohibited impulses onto scapegoats. The individual exhibiting delinquent behaviour might be perceived as a convenient target for the fulfilment of suppressed violent and libidinal desires. Adelaide Johnson examined this particular area of inquiry pertaining to the dynamics inside familial relationships. Johnson discovered evidence supporting the existence of what she referred to as superego lacunae, which denotes the absence of superego in specific

¹⁵ Jacobson, E.; *The Self and the Object World*, New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1964

¹⁶ Edward Glover; *Freud or Jung* (1950)

delimited domains of conduct.¹⁷

This absence of superego was shown to be associated with dissocial acting out. The individual found herself in a unique circumstance where she had the opportunity to examine the superego of both parents of wayward kids, whom she had previously provided therapy for. It has been consistently observed that the primary parent, often the mother but with the father also playing a role, tends to unknowingly foster amoral or antisocial behaviours in the kid. The scenario unfolds as the mother exhibits latent dissocial inclinations, which are restrained by her superego, preventing her from acting upon them.¹⁸ However, as a result of the establishment of a narcissistic economic environment including the kid, the youngster ultimately exhibits behavioural manifestations of the mother's dissocial inclinations. The aforementioned unconscious yearning is then actualized through the kid in a vicarious manner. By employing this approach, a parent who appears to have good intentions will unintentionally promote a specific conduct that aligns with their subconscious dream.¹⁹

Within the familial context, a scapegoat is established to serve as a receptacle for the parents' dissocial views. In many cases involving adopted children, it is common for the adopted kid to be designated as the scapegoat, with any observed antisocial behaviour mistakenly attributed to inherited factors. The kid's superego incorporates the parents' dualistic perception of the child, encompassing both their unconscious and conscious impressions, along with other identifications.²⁰ The outcome is a circular superego that perpetuates a pattern of unmanageable action, subsequent punishment, and further action. The suppressive impact of the superego intermittently asserts its authority. August Aichhorn has

¹⁷ Experience, Affect and Behavior Psychoanalytic Explorations of Dr. Adelaide McFadyen Johnson

¹⁸ Selke, Ruth. "Sechs Lebensläufe als sozialhygienischer Beitrag zur Frage Alkoholismus und Tuberkulose." *Klinische Wochenschrift* 11.19 (1932): 805–807.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud; *Die Traumdeutung* (1899)

²⁰ Freud, Anna, and Ruth Selke Eissler. (1965). *The psychoanalytic study of the child*. Vol. 3. Yale University Press.

extensive knowledge of the scapegoat phenomenon.

In a personal correspondence with Ruth Eissler, the individual described the scenario as follows: the balance of libidinal dynamics within the family unit is preserved, but at the cost of the kid who, overwhelmed by this weight, employs defensive mechanisms and, depending on the specific circumstances, may manifest as delinquent behaviour or neurotic tendencies. The delinquent individual and their shortcomings should not be considered in isolation. Instead, it is crucial to examine their connection with their family unit, particularly in terms of their emotional and sexual drives.²¹ If the child's well-being is sacrificed in order to maintain a stable emotional state, any attempts to address and rectify the child's issues would inevitably shatter this balance. The youngster engages in self-defence mechanisms to cope with the excessive libidinal demands imposed upon him, causing the parent who exploited him for personal gratification to experience neurotic breakdown.

Ruth Eissler proceeded to provide an account of a case involving a juvenile offender, wherein the mother derived indirect satisfaction from her own deviant tendencies, as represented by the deed of theft. Moreover, the behaviours shown by her offspring fulfil two supplementary purposes. The individual derives a masochistic form of enjoyment, which functions as a means of both punishing and alleviating her feelings of guilt.²² Additionally, she used her kid as an escape route, attributing blame to him and therefore assuring herself of her personal innocence. According to Ruth Eissler, this structure serves to safeguard the mother from experiencing prolonged depression due to the influence of her acute superego.

The individual in question exhibits an excessively intense superego, which

²¹ Psychoanalyse und Erziehungsberatung, Beiträge zur Kinderpsychotherapie; 7. Reinhardt (München), 1970. 126 S.

²² Eissler-Selke, Ruth. (1946). About the historical truth in a case of delusion. Psychoanalytic Review, 33, 442–459

manifests as a redirection of hostile impulses towards the kid's ego. These impulses are perceived by the mother as being present in her internal world, where the child functions as a love object that has been narcissistically absorbed.²³ The examination of narcissistic object relationships, with a particular emphasis on the involvement of the father, was a central theme explored in a scholarly article authored by Phyllis Greenacre.

The individual in question demonstrates a special interest in the manifestation of aggressive behaviour in infants, primarily focusing on the anal-ambivalent stage of developmental progression. In cases when the expression of hatred is restricted within the first narcissistic bond established with the mother, anger tends to be redirected onto the father. However, in many instances of partnerships, the mother may also refrain from permitting such actions because to concerns over potential retaliation from the father, therefore adopting an excessively vigilant approach towards safeguarding the kid.²⁴ Consequently, his aggressive behaviour quickly shifts its focus from the family unit to the broader societal context. In these instances, Greenacre established a correlation between delinquent children and dads who occupied prominent roles within the society.

The home-life is regarded with contempt and repulsion from their elevated social status. The maternal figure has a sense of guilt as a result of the perception of being inadequate, leading her to seek solace from the kid. The individual in question exhibits profound sensations of guilt due to her permissive behaviour towards the kid. Subconsciously, she becomes aware of her unsociable emotions as a result of the child's criminal actions,

²³ Greenacre, Phyllis (1953), "Certain Relationships Between Fetishism and Faulty Development of the Body Image", *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 8: 79–98

²⁴ Greenacre, Phyllis (1966), "Problems of Overidealization of the Analyst and of Analysis—Their Manifestations in the Transference and Countertransference Relationship", *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 21: 193–212, PMID 5965395

as expounded up by Ruth Eissler and Johnson.²⁵ To clarify, the mother releases a wayward offspring whose objectionable conduct causes the father to feel ashamed. The present circumstances suggest that a male youngster may have challenges in developing genuine object interactions.

The individual's aggressive tendencies do not manifest in his romantic relationships. As a result, his interactions with his parents continue to exhibit a significant degree of ambivalence. The parents are consistently immersed in the kid's narcissistic environment, and they are both subject to affection and criticism in accordance with the child's fluctuating instinctive patterns. It is noteworthy that the youngster does not exhibit significant remorse in relation to these dynamics. In this analysis, we will endeavour to establish a connection between these familial circumstances and their implications for the broader social collective, as well as the role of individuals within the natural environment.²⁶

Edward Glover observed that significant progress in the psychoanalytical examination of delinquency may be attained by effectively applying recognised psychoanalytical ideas to the issue. The individual perceived the concepts of guilt and the necessity of punishment for criminals as fundamental components that should be comprehended and implemented. However, it is evident that the healthy functioning of society is partially attributed to the scapegoat system, wherein the criminal is held accountable for the latent criminal inclinations present within the community, despite the fact that criminal activity is influenced by individual functions and values.²⁷ In the prehistoric era of totemism, the act of victimising and punishing the scapegoat serves as a means of expiating the communal guilt.

²⁵ Eissler-Selke, Ruth. (1976). *Gezeiten: Gedichte in deutscher Sprache*. New York: Abaris Books

²⁶ Melanie Klein; *The Collected Writings of Melanie Klein, Volume 4 – Narrative of a Child Analysis*, London: Hogarth Press.

²⁷ *Psycho-Analysis*, Publisher: Roberts Press, 2007, ISBN 1-4067-4733-5

The facilitation of social cohesiveness within a group is enhanced by the establishment of a shared target for the expression of hostility. Undoubtedly, the treatment of delinquents is a formidable challenge. The delinquent individual assumes the role of a scapegoat, not exclusively for the mother or the immediate family, but also for the broader cultural context. It is evident that families, entire towns, or even entire nations can be subjected to scapegoating by others.²⁸ The substantial prevalence of criminal populations throughout nations serves as evidence not only for the existence of individuals with criminal tendencies, but also for a connection between their role as victims and the preservation of societal unity.

V. SOCIETY, AGGRESSION AND DEVIANCE

Unless one is willing to posit the presence of inherent malevolence, it is imperative to deduce that the burden of accountability is collectively with mankind. Guilt is posited as a cultural mechanism aimed at addressing the issue of aggressiveness. As individuals, it is imperative for us to acknowledge and reconcile with our inherent inclination towards aggression, channelling it into cultural aspirations while diverting it from harmful endeavours.²⁹ However, as demonstrated in the thesis, instances of sado-masochism as well as illicit conduct resulting from feelings of guilt indicate that an excessive amount of guilt might serve as a catalyst for the expression of aggressiveness. Increasing blame is not the optimal resolution to the issue at hand. The exclusive and effective method for addressing violence and excessive guilt sentiments is through the processes of elimination and repression of driving impulses.³⁰

²⁸ Spitz, R.A. (1964). The derailment of dialogue: Stimulus overload, action cycles, and the completion gradient. *Journal-of-the-American-Psychoanalytic-Association*, 12, 752–774.

²⁹ Buss, A. H. (1966). Instrumentality of aggression, feedback, and frustration as determinants of physical aggression. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 3(2), 153.

³⁰ Hokanson, J. E. (1961). The effects of frustration and anxiety on overt aggression. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 62(2), 346.

Freud agrees with the notion that the primary impediment to the development of civilization lies in the inherent inclination of individuals to engage in acts of hostility towards one another. Consequently, aggression serves as the fundamental underpinning of all interpersonal relationships characterised by affection and love among human beings. The individual perceived the sole viable avenue for transformation to lie in the advancement of the societal superego. According to his statement, the origin of this phenomenon is similar to that of an individual's superego. Nonetheless, this phenomenon is rooted in the lasting impact made by exceptional individuals who possess remarkable intellectual prowess or exhibit an extraordinary degree of a specific human inclination, frequently resulting in an exaggerated influence.³¹ Sigmund Freud, as an individual, exemplified the characteristics that were vital in the emancipation of sexual instincts from the distorted moral standards prevalent in the latter part of nineteenth-century middle-class society.

It is important to acknowledge that Freud's influence, both direct and indirect, played a pivotal role in this process. However, it is apparent that the release of humanity's aggressive instincts is not a desirable outcome.³² In his work "Civilization and Its Discontents," Freud expressed his aspiration that eternal Eros will use its power in order to coexist with its equally everlasting antagonist, following the cataclysmic events of the First World War. Despite the occurrence of WW2, Freud's proposition for the integration of desire and aggressiveness as a driving force has not been exceeded as a prominent scientific and cultural ideal. The efficacy of this approach is demonstrated via the therapeutic endeavours of August Aichhorn in his work with delinquent adolescents.³³ In 1930, Freud

³¹ Zillmann, D., & Cantor, J. R. (1976). Effect of timing of information about mitigating circumstances on emotional responses to provocation and retaliatory behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 12(1), 38-55.

³² Sigmund Freud; (1938) *The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence*

³³ Sigmund Freud; (1930) *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*

expressed worry on the potential consequences of technology and industrialization on the manifestation of mankind's aggressive instincts, particularly in the context of apocalyptic warfare.³⁴

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Spitz's primary focus revolved around the detrimental capacity of aggressiveness, both internally inside the family unit and externally directed at it. The author saw support for this assertion via the disintegration of the conventional familial framework and the labour requirements imposed by industrialized nations, which compelled women to enter the workforce and thus deviate from their maternal roles.³⁵ The escalation of adolescent delinquency and the rise in neuroses and psychoses within Western adult culture can be attributed to a combination of economic and social factors.³⁶ The individual referred to this phenomenon as malevolent and attributed it as the primary factor responsible for the fast decline of the necessary circumstances required for the typical progression of first object relationships.

From a sociological perspective, the author noted that disrupted object connections during the initial year of an individual's existence, whether they are abnormal, inappropriate, or inadequate, can have significant repercussions that pose a threat to the fundamental structure of society.³⁷ The author presented a pessimistic portrayal of those involved in delinquent behaviour. When individuals are deprived of the emotional support and care that they rightfully need, their only recourse is to seek the dismantling of a societal structure that has caused them harm and

³⁴ Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud; (1933) *Warum Krieg?*

³⁵ Spitz, R.A. (1957). *No and yes: on the genesis of human communication*. New York: International Universities Press

³⁶ Ishaan Deepak Joshi, 'Self-Identity, Symbolic Interactionism and Criminal Behavior: The Labelling Theory Standpoint' (2023) 2 *IJHRLR* 165-175. Available at www.humanrightlawreview.in/vol-2-issue-4/.

³⁷ Ishaan Deepak Joshi, 'The Criminology of Delinquent Behavior through the Lens of The Conflict Theory' (2023) 2 *IJHRLR* 176-186. Available at www.humanrightlawreview.in/vol-2-issue-4/.

made them feel like powerless targets. Infants who lack affectionate nurturing are more likely to develop negative emotions and attitudes as they mature into adulthood.³⁸

³⁸ Ishaan Deepak Joshi, 'A Dissection of Durkheimian Literature: Anomie, Deviance and Suicide' (2023) 2 IJHRLR 137-148. Available at www.humanrightlawreview.in/vol-2-issue-4/.