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978-0-521-04211-6 - Biology and Violence: From Brith to Adulthood

Deborah W. Denno

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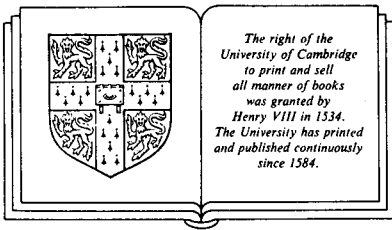
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Biology and violence

From birth to adulthood

DEBORAH W. DENNO

University of Pennsylvania



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To my parents

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Foreword

The Collaborative Perinatal Project (CPP), launched in 1959, was one of the most ambitious and costly medical projects undertaken until then. Designed to obtain base-line data on birth defects, the project has yielded hundreds of ancillary books and articles in the medical literature. This remarkable study covered twelve cities, including Philadelphia, and when the data collection process ended the original records were put into storage. Upon learning of the project, and having engaged in an earlier birth cohort study, I sought permission to access the files and had significant physiological, psychological, and psychiatric data converted to computer tape for future use.

When the National Institute of Justice learned of our data bank, we were encouraged to submit a proposal that would link the CPP data with school records and files from the Juvenile Aid Division of the Philadelphia Police Department in order to determine how many of the children born each year of the project had a record of delinquency. Our previous experience with a 1945 birth cohort informed us about how to analyze delinquency through the span of years from age 10 to age 18. Because most of the staff of the Sellin Center for Studies in Criminology was involved in yet another birth cohort – those born in 1958 – it was necessary for me, as director of the Center, to select someone capable of learning the medical literature in order to make the proper analytical linkages with the known sociological variables and forms of delinquent behaviors. That someone, I knew from the beginning, was Deborah Denno.

The author of this volume has mastered the language of medical science, quantitative analysis, and sociological concepts to such an extent that in her person there is an interdisciplinarity that many of us have called for in criminology over the years. This young scholar has both the medical term *anomia* and the sociological term *anomie* under her commanding understanding. This volume represents years of devoted scholarship and inten-

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sive research, a grand product for the author and our Center. Colleagues in different disciplines should find this volume a mine of information in the review of relevant literature and in insightful analysis of new data.

Marvin E. Wolfgang
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Preface

Twelve years ago when I was a graduate student following the typical rites of passage for getting my Ph.D. at the Sellin Center for Studies in Criminology and Criminal Law, University of Pennsylvania, Marvin Wolfgang asked me if I wanted to analyze the criminal records of a sample of subjects who had participated in one of the largest medical studies in this country. When he described the study's data, I knew that I would want to be part of any effort to examine possible links that could exist between biology and crime. What I did not know was that the results of the ensuing "Biosocial Project" would form my dissertation and that the Project would dominate the next ten years of my professional life.

Those ten years were immensely enriching, but also frustrating. The Biosocial Project seemed always to be shrouded in politics. From the start, I was continually concerned that the Project might be discontinued because some influential social scientists at the time thought that any studies involving biological data were oppressive or fascist. A number of my colleagues told me that they could not understand why the Criminology Center had agreed to take on the Project because it wasn't "mainstream sociology." In the isolated apprehension that one often acquires as a graduate student, I feared that as time went on I might not be able to finish my dissertation and that my professional goals would be tainted as a result of my association with the Project. I did not attempt to write or publish anything from the Project the first year it was funded. Even after I got my Ph.D., I was aware that I might never be able to complete the additional data collection efforts and analyses necessary for this book because grant reviewers so strictly favor mainstream topics.

As both an attorney and a social scientist now, and thus with perhaps a somewhat broader perspective on my past experiences, it seems even more disturbing that such fears existed, although they have hardly ceased for others; biosocial studies of crime are still regarded skeptically and

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biosocial criminologists are still academically detached. Regardless, there has been a relatively greater acceptance of multidisciplinary research within the last decade and an optimistic harbinger might suppose that a number of disciplines will begin to see the lights that shine from other fields.

The purpose of this book is to analyze, from a variety of disciplines and methodologies, the lives of a select group of nearly 1,000 subjects and their families who were studied from the time of the subjects' births through their young adult years. Although this book focuses on the links between biology and violence, it also provides new information on other areas, such as intelligence, achievement, and the family. The depth of this information is enhanced because the subjects are analyzed with two different methodologies: statistically, as a group, and individually, through a study of detailed home interviews. As the home interviews show, many of the subjects in the Biosocial Project were victims of physical or sexual abuse, regardless of whether or not they became violent offenders. One value of a multidisciplinary approach, however, is the recognition that, in an attempt to eliminate precursors of crime, we can also try to remedy those factors associated with a number of different types of social pain that may not be represented through an official police record.

Over the life span of the Biosocial Project, I have become indebted to numerous individuals and agencies. Foremost is my gratitude to my mentor, Marvin Wolfgang, who has been a constant source of intellectual inspiration and support ever since I met him. It was Marvin's eminent contributions to theory and research in criminology that first drew me to the field; it is his personal integrity, erudition, and deep concern for his students that have made the Biosocial Project work so rewarding. The Project never would have started or survived without his care and academic courage. I cannot express strongly enough my thanks to him.

The Biosocial Project's research funding was provided entirely by the National Institute of Justice, the U.S. Department of Justice. Funding for this book in particular was provided by Grant No. 85-IJ-CX-0034. Points of view expressed in this book are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of Justice. I am most grateful for the research support from the National Institute of Justice and for the informed supervision of the Biosocial Project's primary grant monitors, Helen Erskine and Winifred Reed.

Frank Elliott has been an exceptional instructor in the areas of biology and crime. I owe a great debt for the time, care, and attention to

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detail that he has given to my work, and for his advice and continuous encouragement.

I thank Steven Auran for his excellent data preparation, computer programming, technical assistance, and analytical commentary throughout the Project. I am also most appreciative of Neil Weiner's generosity and unfailing support and friendship.

Much credit is due to the many individuals whose work or advice contributed to the Biosocial Project: Paul Allison, Richard Clelland, Erica Ginsburg, Ruben Gur, Solomon Katz, Mark Keintz, Esther Lafair, Sarnoff Mednick, Ben Meijs, Terrie Moffitt, Israel Nachshon, and Selma Pastor. I am also grateful for Katharita Lamoza's careful copyediting. Finally, the Biosocial Project could never have been conducted without the contributions of the following organizations and their members: the graduate students and research assistants at the Criminology Center; members of the Philadelphia police and the Philadelphia School Board; and researchers at the Institute for the Continuous Study of Man.