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1 Introduction: coercion and punishment in the fabric of social relations

JOAN McCORD

Democracy depends heavily on consensus. Persuasion, coercion, and fear provide the means for bringing about that consensus and jointly account for much of the education or training of children to participate in society. Children must be taught to act appropriately – in ways that differ from society to society and from context to context. How they are taught remains something of a mystery.

This book developed from the ways in which researchers responded to the mystery. Successful socialization can be viewed as subtle coercion, possibly making punishment unnecessary. The question of how best to socialize children so that they function well is a large and crucial question that has fascinated parents, educators, philosophers, and psychologists for centuries.

Persuasion seems a natural adversary of punishment from the perspective of a teacher or a parent. If children can be persuaded to do as the adult wishes, no punishment need be considered. A child persuaded to help clean the home need not be punished for having failed to do so. Although a threat of punishment might be persuasive, the boundaries between persuasion and punishment remain reasonably clear.

Coercion can be less clearly identified. Conceptually, coercion implies forcing people to do what they would not otherwise have done. For example, when an individual is forced at gunpoint to do something he or she would not otherwise choose to do, the action can be described as one of coercion. Alexis de Tocqueville (1839/1945) noted that the public

> among a democratic people, has a singular power, which aristocratic nations cannot conceive; for it does not persuade others to its beliefs, but it imposes them and makes them permeate the thinking of everyone by a sort of enormous pressure of the mind of all upon the individual intelligence. (p. 11)

Tocqueville thus asserts that public opinion can be coercive.

To learn how to eat with utensils as is done in Western societies, for example,

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children must be taught complicated processes of holding forks, knives, and spoons. They come to expect to have the utensils for certain types of meals. Social customs, including some that involve when to eat and sleep – perhaps even when to be hungry or tired – are formed by weapons that appear to be as powerful as guns in creating uniform behavior.

Coercion implies forcing individuals to choose to do things that they might not otherwise do were choice more broadly allowed. It need not imply either threat or resistance. Actions that at one time are coerced can become voluntary at another, showing no apparent difference in their circumstance. I argue that from this point of view, socialization necessarily requires coercion.

Voluntary actions have historically been distinguished from those performed with coercion by identifying what Aristotle considered a "moving principle" of action. When the moving principle is within the agent, when the agent knows what he or she is doing and wants to do that thing, the action is voluntary. Persuasion can lead a person to want to do something, and therefore, to do it voluntarily.

Punishments can be justified only on condition that the agent who is punished should have done a different thing. Importantly, then, the use of punishment implies a belief that the punished person *could* have done a different thing. Therefore, punishments are inappropriate when actions are coerced.

Threats of punishment can lead to voluntary choice. Threats of punishments are often used by parents, teachers, or by society to persuade people to behave in acceptable ways. If the threats fail to be persuasive, punishments may follow.

Threats of punishments can also be coercive. Punishments can restrict choice, thus rendering actions involuntary. When a person fears punishment, he or she may not perceive possibilities for choice that would be evident in the absence of such fears. From this perspective, coercion may be seen as beneficial through providing a means for avoiding punishment. And yet the right to resist coercive action seems to be a right for which many are willing to fight and even to die.

This volume considers mental health, antisocial and criminal behavior, and substance abuse in relation to a variety of types of coercive interactions and punishments. It includes evidence gathered in families, schools, and penal institutions. The authors scrutinize methods for gathering data as well as substantive issues.

Some chapters suggest that subtle coercion can be powerful in shaping behavior. Dumas and LaFreniere (Chapter 2), for example, show how anxious and aggressive children tend to coerce their parents into behaving aversively. By exchanging children in laboratory situations, they show also that mothers of the aggressive and the anxious children were capable of behaving with positive affect. This evidence raises questions about designing interventions to teach parents techniques for positive interaction with children – techniques they may already know but fail to use with their own children.

Patterson suggests that a considerable amount of experience "goes by unnoticed." Among the little-noticed experiences discussed in the chapters to follow are those linked with classroom seating. Charlebois, Bernèche, Le Blanc, Gagnon, and Lar-

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ivée (Chapter 12) found that 85% of the boys they traced between the ages of 9 and 11 years were sitting in roughly the same classroom locations in different years. Both teachers' and the boys' behavior reflected this placement: aggressive children seated in middle rows became less disruptive than their previously similarly aggressive classmates seated elsewhere. The fact that teachers were less intrusive in their interactions with children sitting in middle rows may provide a clue to understanding this result.

Coercion by peers can be subtle. Boivin and Vitaro (Chapter 11) captured differences between aggressive boys involved in networks and those who were loners. The affiliated aggressive boys tended to be more aggressive than the unaffiliated ones. Furthermore, within networks, those who were less aggressive than their peer associates tended to become more aggressive. Both discoveries raise a question about whether training aggressive boys to have more social skills might be useless or even counterproductive. A part of the answer might be given in the evaluation study by Pepler, Craig, and Roberts.

Pepler, Craig, and Roberts (Chapter 13) studied effects of social skills training on children in Grades 1 through 6. The training seemed to increase the children's social skills: They were better liked by their peers, and their teachers rated them as having fewer behavior problems than they had prior to the training. Yet their aggressive behavior on the playground had not been reduced.

Coie, Terry, Zakriski, and Lochman (Chapter 14) considered networks in sixth and eighth grade. To their surprise, the researchers discovered that aggressive deviant cliques tended to be perceived as socially preferred. In a second study, they also found that having deviant peer associates had a positive effect on social status for boys, although not for girls.

Using a different set of measures and different groups of children, Schwartzman, Verlaan, Peters, and Serbin (Chapter 21) also found that aggressive children were approved by their peers. Although both boys and girls preferred their same-sex peers to be nonaggressive in first grade, boys preferred aggressive girls and girls preferred aggressive boys by the time they reached seventh grade.

Bates, Pettit, and Dodge (Chapter 7) examined children's shifts in aggressiveness between kindergarten and first grade. They were unsuccessful in discovering links to harsh prior discipline, changes in discipline, or stressful events. Their findings raise issues about why aggressive behavior changes.

Evidence from several chapters suggests that punishment typically operates to increase aversive behaviors of children and to aggravate other forms of social problems. Straus (Chapter 4) presents evidence, for example, that punishment in childhood increases the probability of subsequent depression. Tremblay (Chapter 8) discovered that disciplining techniques based on power were more likely to lead to delinquency than were techniques based on attachment. Kaplan and Damphousse (Chapter 18) found that negative sanctions tended to increase deviance especially when these were used without also using personal and social restraints.

The coercive model proposed by Patterson (Chapter 5) includes bidirectional

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influences between parents and their children. On this account, parents become increasingly reluctant to intrude, giving children expanding domains for selecting theft or other antisocial forms of behavior as sources of stimulation.

Kandel and Wu (Chapter 6) investigated the bidirectional interacting coercion process from the mother's perspective, finding that punitive discipline tends to produce aggressive behavior, which in turn reduced closeness and supervision. Cohen and Brook (Chapter 9) also investigated bidirectional coercion processes. Their focus was on patterns of the relationship between conduct disorder and punishment from infancy through adolescence. The results of their analyses suggest that although lack of closeness between mothers and their children independently contributes to conduct disorder, use of punishments also should be considered an influence contributing to developing conduct problems.

Laub and Sampson (Chapter 15) considered both informal and formal sanctions to investigate consequences of punishment. Their analyses showed that harsh discipline increased the likelihood of serious criminal behavior during adolescence, but after adolescence had residual effects only when mediated by prior delinquency. In addition, they found that by decreasing the probability of job stability, longer incarceration increased recidivism. Le Blanc (Chapter 17) also considered both formal and informal sanctions in his models. Although his data are only weakly predictive, they suggest that beliefs formed early influence criminal behavior.

Etiological differences between aggression of girls and that of boys showed up in a study of infants observed with their mothers at 12, 18, and 24 months of age. Keenan and Shaw (Chapter 10) found that aggressive boys became more aggressive by the age of 2 years if their mothers were unresponsive, whereas aggressive girls became more aggressive if their mothers were depressed. Fletcher, Darling, and Steinberg (Chapter 16) report sex-related differences in the etiology of drug use as well. Among teenagers, they found that together with peer use of drugs, teenagers' perceived absence of parental monitoring tended to increase the likelihood that girls – but not boys – would begin to use drugs. In their multigenerational study, Stattin, Janson, Klackenberg-Larsson, and Magnusson (Chapter 19) showed that mothers' tolerance for annoyance, as well as their experiences in terms of discipline, influenced their disciplinary behavior. The fathers' tolerance for annoyance and experiences in terms of discipline, however, had little impact on their disciplinary behavior.

In addition to the focus on substantive issues, chapters address methodological problems with using common measures of interactive processes. Maughan, Pickles, and Quinton (Chapter 3), for example, compare retrospective and prospective data. They discuss several interpretations of the results showing that retrospective reports evidence links not revealed through prospective ones. Stattin and his coworkers show the extent of discrepancy between contemporaneous and retrospective reports of physical punishment, and Barnes-McGuire and Earls (Chapter 20) indicate the difficulties of crossing cultural lines while attempting to assess interaction in families.

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Evidence from several studies, based on data from various age groups, using disparate measures gathered from different cultures, suggests that fear – at least as related to punishments – fails to lead to successful socialization. In addition, evidence from these studies provides grounds for questioning the assumptions justifying teaching parents of aggressive children how to use more positive discipline and teaching aggressive children how to be more socially skillful. In sum, the authors of these chapters have provided food for thought.

Each chapter, of course, contains far more material than has been described here. The authors explore new territories as well as scrutinize familiar terrains. Coming from several disciplines, they have created a base of evidence on which new research should be built. Perhaps even more significantly, they have raised important questions about the effects of punitive policies.

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I Mental health, coercion, and punishment

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2 Relationships as context: supportive and coercive interactions in competent, aggressive, and anxious mother–child dyads

JEAN E. DUMAS AND PETER J. LAFRENIERE

In 1622 William Gouge published an early treatise on education written in English. In it he warned parents about the many "vices" of children, of which one is "stubbornnesse, when children pout, swell, and give no answer at all to their parents. This is too common a fault in children, and many parents are much offended and grieved thereat" (p. 248).

It obviously did not take social scientists to discover that oppositional, defiant, or otherwise coercive behaviors can be a major source of stress for parents of young children. Descriptive studies of family interactions have shown that mothers commonly attempt to manage their preschoolers by commanding or disapproving once every 3 to 4 minutes and that instances of child noncompliance or defiance, which are very common at that age, tend to elicit more parental attention than instances of positive behavior (Forehand, King, Peed, & Yoder, 1975; Johnson, Wahl, Martin, & Johansson, 1973). Clinical and laboratory evidence suggests that such increases in attention are commonly associated with corresponding increases in both aversive and indiscriminate responding on the part of parents and play a key role in differentiating between functional and dysfunctional family interactions (e.g., Dumas & Wahler, 1985; Patterson, 1982; Sawin & Parke, 1979; Snyder, 1977). For example, in a careful laboratory study, Snyder found that when compared with functional families, dysfunctional families (1) exhibited displeasing behaviors at a much higher rate than do functional families, (2) provided fewer positive and more aversive consequences for pleasing behaviors and fewer aversive and more positive consequences for displeasing behaviors, and (3) were less responsive to all consequences than were functional families. Although aversive and indiscriminate responding clearly play a role in the development and maintenance of dysfunctional child behavior in general, and coercion in particular, the processes that may account for this association remain a source of debate.

Applied researchers and clinicians commonly assume that aversive and indiscrimi-

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nate patterns of family relationship reflect a lack of effective parenting skills and seek to account for such skill deficit at least partly by looking at the socioemotional context in which families operate (Patterson, 1982). Coercive family processes have thus repeatedly been linked to the presence of adverse contextual factors (for reviews, see Dumas, 1989a, 1994; Griest & Forehand, 1982; Wahler & Dumas, 1987). Generally speaking, adverse factors such as maternal emotional distress or depression (Brody & Forehand, 1986; Dumas, Gibson, & Albin, 1989; Hops et al., 1987), marital discord (Fantuzzo et al., 1991; Jouriles, Murphy, & O'Leary, 1989), social isolation (Dumas 1986a; Dumas & Wahler, 1985), and socioeconomic disadvantage (Dumas & Wahler, 1983; Webster-Stratton, 1985) are associated with elevated probabilities of behavioral dysfunction in children (especially aggressive or antisocial behaviors), as well as with child-rearing difficulties in parents. For example, Dumas (1986a) found that mothers were more likely to act in an aversive and indiscriminate manner toward their children when they had experienced a large proportion of aversive contacts with adults in the 24-hour period preceding a home observation than when they had not, even though their children's behavior did not differ under these two conditions. Social and economic adversity has also been related to the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions with dysfunctional families (Dumas, 1984; Dumas & Wahler, 1983; Wahler, 1980). Dumas and Wahler (1983) found that families burdened by socioeconomic disadvantage and social isolation were unlikely to benefit from a standardized program designed to train parents in effective child management skills.

Adverse contextual factors must clearly play a major role in any comprehensive understanding of child and family functioning. However, Dumas (1989b) noted that most studies of contextual factors conceptualize them as external entities that are characteristic of a person's or family's environment (e.g., unsupportive community contacts) and argued that this conceptualization was too narrow. As clinical and developmental evidence shows (Dumas & LaFreniere, 1993; Hinde, 1987; Kochanska, 1992), contextual factors include external, environmental factors, as well as interactional factors that reflect a person's relational history with other persons. In this perspective, we assume that family relationships, whether they are supportive or coercive in nature, are part of behavioral repertoires of responses that characterize the manner in which family members interact (see Voeltz & Evans, 1982; Wahler & Dumas, 1989). Specifically, these repertoires are transactional in nature, such that patterns of interaction established in the past between two or more persons tend to influence the manner in which these persons are likely to keep interacting (Olson, 1992; Sameroff & Emde, 1989). For example, the likelihood that a mother's command to her child will end up in immediate compliance, rather than in a protracted coercive episode, depends on the stimuli that both of them exchange (e.g., the clarity of the command), on the presence of external contextual events (e.g., child involvement in a competing activity), *and* on the interactional history that child and mother have acquired over the years. In other words, it depends in part on the repertoire of responses they have acquired as a function of living together, that is, on their *relationship*. As we have argued elsewhere (Dumas,

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LaFreniere, Beaudin, & Verlaan, 1992), coercive family processes may reflect two different sources of stress, one that originates in unfavorable environmental conditions (*environmental stress*) and the other in dysfunctional patterns of interaction (*relationship stress*).

A growing body of findings supports a relationship approach to stress, pointing to transactional influences both within and across contexts (Dumas et al., 1989; Dumas & Gibson, 1990; Hart, Ladd, & Burleson, 1990; Kochanska, 1992; van Aken & Riksen-Walraven, 1992). For example, Dumas and colleagues (1989, 1990) found that maternal depressive symptomatology was systematically related to the behavior of conduct disorder children, not only toward their own mothers but also toward other family members. Thus, conduct disorder children tended to be more compliant and less aversive toward their mothers when the latter were depressed than when they were not. However, the same children were less compliant and more aversive toward their fathers and siblings when their mothers were depressed than when they were not, suggesting that maternal dysfunction was related in a complex manner to the children's relationships with their mothers *and* other family members. Similarly, Hart et al. (1990) found that children whose mothers relied on power assertive methods of discipline were less likely to be accepted by peers and more likely to resort to coercive methods to resolve peer conflict than were children whose mothers were authoritative and supportive in their discipline.

This chapter describes a series of studies conducted to compare supportive and coercive patterns of interaction in socially competent and dysfunctional children and their mothers, as well as to specify the implications that reliable differences may have for prevention of long-term behavior disorders. Although the behavior of dysfunctional, in particular aggressive, children and their mothers has received considerable attention, our research differs from previous work in two important respects. First, we assessed mother–child interactions in the course of a laboratory task that was purposely selected to elicit low levels of conflict and high levels of interest and cooperation from all children. This choice allowed us to determine the extent to which dysfunctional children and their mothers differ in their interactions from competent dyads when they are observed under optimal, rather than typical conditions. Second, we compared three groups of children – socially competent, anxious, and aggressive – in interaction with their mothers. Using a newly designed instrument (see later), we selected these groups on the basis of independent teacher ratings so as to assess the extent to which the children's behavior in one context would be predictive of their relationships with their mothers in a different context. The competent group was selected to provide a direct comparison of patterns of interaction in functional and dysfunctional dyads, while the anxious and aggressive groups were selected to contrast such patterns in dyads in which children present clearly distinguishable sets of behavioral and emotional difficulties. Coercive family processes have been extensively studied in aggressive, conduct disorder children and their families, but not in families in which children present a different set of behavioral difficulties. Anxious children and their mothers were selected as a

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comparison group because children who display behaviors that are symptomatic of anxiety and withdrawal represent the second most prevalent form of childhood dysfunction after aggressive and conduct problems (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981) and because empirical evidence suggests that these two forms of dysfunction are associated with different parental practices.

Considerable evidence shows that parents of aggressive children can be described as emotionally distant from their children, toward whom they take a "permissive" stance characterized by low levels of control and a pattern of indiscriminate responding. This contrasts with parents of anxious children, who also show little warmth but tend to be "authoritarian," displaying elevated levels of control and a predominantly discriminate but aversive pattern of responding (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The characterization of parents as "permissive" or "authoritarian" derives from an early model of child development, in which parents are viewed as molding the child through their parenting style. However, as we have argued elsewhere (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1992), a transactional model recasts the child as an active agent and assumes that patterns of parent–child interaction reflect each partner's ongoing contribution to the relationship. Specifically, we hypothesize that coercive family processes may result in very different outcomes for the child, depending on the "relative balance of power" in the parent–child relationship. In aggressive dyads, this balance has shifted to the child and the mother is unable to exercise appropriate control, whereas in anxious dyads the shift favors the mother, leaving the child with insufficient opportunities to assert a developmentally appropriate degree of autonomy.

The three studies described here address this hypothesis from different perspectives. These studies, which are part of an ongoing, large-scale evaluation of socio-emotional development in the preschool years, relied on the same experimental paradigm (outlined later). In the first one, we compared conditional probabilities of positive and aversive maternal and child responsiveness to establish the extent to which the three groups differed when observed under the same experimental conditions. In the second study, we focused specifically on control–compliance sequences as a measure of coercion in the three groups. Finally, in the last study, we compared patterns of mother–child interactions when children in the three groups completed the experimental task with their own and with an unfamiliar mother, in an attempt to disentangle the effects of maternal and child characteristics (individual effects) from the effects of cumulative past interactions between mothers and their own children (relationship effects).

Study 1

Participants

A random-stratified sample of 42 competent (22 girls, 20 boys), 42 anxious (22 girls, 20 boys), and 42 aggressive (25 girls, 17 boys) children was selected on the

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