



Dr. Blackman warns that triad of enuresis, pyromania, and sadism may add up to violence.

Three Early Signs Of a Mass Murderer

A triad of abnormal behavioral traits in childhood, with a superimposed confusion of sexuality in adolescence, may add up to the violent criminality of a Presidential assassin or a mass murderer. The triad, which consists of enuresis, fire setting, and cruelty to animals, was reconstructed by Dr. Nathan Blackman from the case histories of 84 criminals referred for psychiatric evaluation.

Dr. Blackman, assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, describes the history of a 25-year-old murderer of five, who had just such a background. As a child he wet his bed, set fires, and tortured pets. "He was also cute, effeminate, had curly hair, and was teased for looking like a girl." During adolescence, he displayed antisocial criminal behavior. A latent homosexuality also became apparent, which in conjunc-

tion with the triad may have led to the quintuple murders. Psychiatric problems alienated the young man from family and friends. He found no self-identity or sense of virility in marriage, crime, drugs, or alcohol. "His defenses broke—and he killed."

The triad of predictive behavior emerged from an investigation made by Dr. Blackman and Dr. Daniel S. Hellman in 1963 and 1964 at the Social Maladjustment Unit in St. Louis. The unit, part of the Malcolm Bliss Mental Health Center, functions as a court clinic, examining and evaluating patients referred by courts, parole officers, and city jails.

The 84 men in the study were consecutive admissions to the unit from September 1963 to July 1964. Thirty-one were charged with such violent crimes as murder, serious assaults, armed robbery, and forcible rape. The other 53 were charged with misdemeanors and less-aggressive felonies.

"No less than 23 of the observed 31 violent criminals had at least two factors in the triad; 14 of these had all three," Dr. Blackman reported at the International Meeting in Forensic Medicine in Copenhagen. Only 15 of the 53 less-aggressive offenders had a positive triad. Seven had all three traits and eight had one or two.

Statistical analysis showed that part or all of the triad's correlation to aggressive crimes was highly significant.

Also significant was the probability of any trait occurring in the presence of any other. Comparing the aggressive and nonaggressive groups as a whole, there was no apparent tie between age and type of crime. But the mean age of those with a complete or partial triad was only 26.6, compared with 35.6 years for the triad-negative men—a statistically significant difference.

Enuresis Linked to Rejection

No correlation was found between the triad and race or marital status, Drs. Hellman and Blackman report in The American Journal of Psychiatry. Parental loss or deprivation was noted in 95%, but there was no association between the triad and whether the subject was the youngest or oldest in a family. A link with intelligence was ruled out.

Enuresis often is an overt expression of retaliation against parental rejection, according to the investigators. That is, the child repudiates sphincter control on his mother's terms because he feels he has lost her as a love object. The psychiatrists cite a study of 367 delinquent boys. Nearly a third were enuretic—and 94.9% of these were over 11 years old. Other studies, they point out, reveal a close association between enuresis and fire setting.

The third factor, cruelty to animals, has been observed by anthropologist Margaret Mead in a variety of cultures. The St. Louis psychiatrists cite her suggestion that the torturing or killing of "good animals" by the child may be a precursor to more violent acts as an adult. "From fantasies of destruction through the act of voiding," they declare, "the child proceeds to the active destruction of fire with its magical omnipotence and then to direct violence against good animals."

If this pattern is allowed to continue, and sexual confusion or latent homosexuality is added in adolescence, the result can easily be violent aggressive behavior against society, reaching its zenith in criminal violence. The triad offers a predictive sign to alert the community to a seriously troubled child. "Even two of the three patterns could signal that here is a child in dire stress, and we had better do something about it fast—or else." ■