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**11.4 FAMILY INTERACTION AS  
ANTECEDENT TO THE DIRECTION  
OF MALE AGGRESSIVENESS**

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The development of aggressiveness has been the focus of much recent research in social science. Attacks on the problem have been from two directions: studies of antisocial behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; McCord & McCord, 1959) concerned with delinquents, and studies of general aggressiveness (McCord, McCord, & Howard, 1961; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957; Sears, Whiting, Nowlis, & Sears, 1953) based on samples of nondelinquents or pre-delinquents. The two approaches have yielded generally similar findings—of rejection, punitiveness, inconsistency—in the backgrounds of delinquents and of aggressive boys. This apparent similarity in environment and the fact that the majority of delinquents participate in aggressive behavior has created a tendency to translate the results of delinquency studies into conclusions about aggression and vice versa.<sup>1</sup> Yet, one of the few attempts to measure the relation between socialized and antisocial aggression, reported by Robert Sears,<sup>2</sup> gives no support for this tendency. Sears, in a study of 76 boys and 34 girls, found no positive relationship between antisocial aggression and other forms of aggressiveness (prosocial, aggression anxiety, projected aggression, or self-aggression), as measured by self-report scales of aggressiveness. Despite the difficulties inherent in use of self-report techniques to measure aggressiveness, it seems reasonable to reassess the

<sup>1</sup> One notes, for example, that *Adolescent Aggression* (Bandura & Walters, 1959) is a study of delinquent adolescents—although the focus of the book is on the development of aggression.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished mimeographed report, "Relation of Early Socialization Experiences to Aggression in Middle Childhood," by Robert Sears.

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assumption that socialized and antisocial aggression have similar roots within the family circle.

Since most previous work on the etiology of delinquency has utilized control groups of nonaggressive boys or boys who, at the minimum, were presumably less aggressive than the delinquents, and many studies of nondelinquent aggressiveness have been carried out without distinguishing predelinquents from nondelinquents, the possibility arises that the two types of studies may have been confusing the origins of aggression with the origins of criminality. Both theoretically and practically—for some parents would like to see their children become “aggressive,” though few would wish them to be criminals—the distinction seems to have importance. Thus, the question remains: In what ways do the family backgrounds of aggressive delinquent boys differ from aggressive nondelinquent boys? Or, somewhat differently stated, “What family environments tend to produce antisocial as opposed to socialized aggressiveness?”

There are, of course, many ways to define “antisocial” and aggressive. Some of these overlap in such a way that, by definition, the aggressive child is antisocial and vice versa. In order to inquire into the difference between forms of aggression which are considered acceptable by society and those which are condemned as criminal, definitions must be used which will make the two forms of behavior distinguishable. For the present study, an outgrowth of the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study (Powers & Witmer, 1950), it was possible to use a longitudinal approach employing behavioral measures of both aggressiveness (in childhood and early adolescence) and antisocial behavior (in late adolescence and adulthood).

## **METHOD**

The Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study took place between 1939 and 1945, during which time 255 boys living in deteriorated areas surrounding Boston, Massachusetts, between (on the average) ages 10 and 15, were observed at home, at school, and at play. Teachers and social workers who visited the families approximately every other week recorded their observations of the behavior of parents as well as children after each visit. The social workers appeared unannounced and with a frequency which enabled a variety of types of observations—at meals, in the midst of crises, and performing daily routines. In 1956 and 1957, trained researchers, reading these running records,

classified each boy and his parents on variables ranging from occupation and religion to affectional interaction.<sup>3</sup> Interrater agreement, tested on a random sample, was high and the categorized ratings yielded strong relationships to completely independent measures of social deviance among the subjects when they had become adults (McCord & McCord, 1960).

To measure aggressiveness, the raters utilized reports made by teachers, camp counselors, and psychologists in addition to those of the home visitors. Those boys who reacted aggressively to most forms of frustration (they were involved in fist fights, bullying, or destructive behavior) were designated as "highly aggressive." The boys who, although they occasionally reacted aggressively, were generally realistic in response to frustration, were classified as "assertive." And those who rarely, if ever, exhibited aggression were considered "nonaggressive." Interrater reliability on this measure was .867.

To ascertain antisocial behavior, in 1955 the names of the 255 boys in the study were checked for court records. Those who had been convicted for larceny, breaking and entering, assault, or sex crimes were classified as "antisocial."<sup>4</sup>

Using these measures of aggressiveness and antisocial behavior, we found that adolescent aggressiveness was strongly related to antisocial behavior. Yet half of the aggressive adolescents had no records of antisocial behavior, and approximately two-thirds of the criminals had not been highly aggressive in adolescence. In order to concentrate upon the differentiating factors among aggressive boys, three groups were selected for comparison: the 26 men who, during early adolescence, had manifested extreme aggressiveness and had criminal records as adults (aggressive-antisocial men); the 25 men who, despite showing extreme aggressiveness during the earlier period of study, had not developed criminal records (aggressive-socialized men); and the 52 men who were neither aggressive nor criminal (nonaggressive men). Use of these three groups permitted differentiation among presumed causal conditions which contributed to antisocial aggressiveness and to socialized aggressiveness—for the two aggressive groups had exhibited similar behavior in childhood. Those conditions which differentiated the aggressive-antisocial from the aggressive-socialized men may be presumed to promote antisocial aggression; those which distinguished

<sup>3</sup> See McCord and McCord (1960) for a complete description of the ratings.

<sup>4</sup> This definition of "antisociality" is admittedly one which accepts society's definition of what is opposed to its interest. We recognize, of course, the numerous alternative definitions which might be employed with different results.

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the aggressive from the nonaggressive—but failed to differentiate between the socialized and antisocial—may be presumed relevant only to a general syndrome of aggressiveness.

**Table 1** *Family Background and Level of Aggression*

The Parents:	Percentage of Non- aggressive	Percentage of Aggressive- Socialized	Percentage of Aggressive- Antisocial
Were in conflict	( <i>N</i> = 43) 12	( <i>N</i> = 21) 38	( <i>N</i> = 21) 57
Provided little supervision	( <i>N</i> = 52) 25	( <i>N</i> = 25) 48	( <i>N</i> = 26) 77
Used extreme threats	( <i>N</i> = 41) 32	( <i>N</i> = 22) 64	( <i>N</i> = 23) 87
Rejected the boy	( <i>N</i> = 42) 10	( <i>N</i> = 19) 21	( <i>N</i> = 23) 87
Used inconsistent discipline	( <i>N</i> = 52) 48	( <i>N</i> = 25) 72	( <i>N</i> = 26) 81
Held low expectations for boy	( <i>N</i> = 51) 55	( <i>N</i> = 25) 84	( <i>N</i> = 26) 81
Provided no religious training	( <i>N</i> = 50) 52	( <i>N</i> = 24) 79	( <i>N</i> = 26) 62

*Note:* The *N* reflects the number of subjects for whom there was sufficient information for a rating to be made for the category.

## RESULTS

Even more than their socialized counterparts, the aggressive-antisocial men had experienced family discord, neglect, and parental attacks. Slightly more than half the aggressive-antisocial men had been reared by parents who were in almost constant conflict. Seventy-seven per cent had had no adult supervision during childhood. The parents of 87 per cent of the aggressive-antisocial men had frequently used extreme threats (e.g., of castration or of turning out of the house) in their child rearing. Seventy-seven per cent of their mothers (compared to 56 per cent of the aggressive-socialized and 42 per cent of the nonaggressive) rarely expressed, verbally or nonverbally, approval of or pleasure in their children. The fathers of 61 per cent of the aggressive-antisocial men (compared to 45 per cent of the aggressive-socialized and 23 per cent of the nonaggressive) openly displayed dislike of their offspring.

Other influences which are related to the level of aggression among socialized men (cf. McCord et al., 1961)—inconsistency in mother's discipline, low expectations, and absence of religious training<sup>5</sup>—were

<sup>5</sup> A mother who attended church or Mass once a week was assumed to provide religious training.

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not found with greater frequency in the backgrounds of aggressive-antisocial than of aggressive-socialized men.

In addition to those conditions which also produced a relatively high proportion of aggressive-socialized men, the aggressive-antisocial men had been subjected to greater parental punitiveness. Parental discipline was judged on the basis of direct observation. Physical punishment (ranging from spanking to brutal beatings) was considered "punitive" and was opposed, for purposes of categorization, to such techniques as withdrawal of privileges, scoldings, or isolation. A significantly higher proportion of the aggressive-antisocial men than of the aggressive-socialized men had received punitive discipline from both their parents ( $p < .01$ ).<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2** *Punitiveness and Direction of Aggression*

Punitiveness by:	Percentage of Non- aggressive	Percentage of Aggressive- Socialized	Percentage of Aggressive- Antisocial
Both parents	20	22	70
One parent	35	61	26
Neither parent	45	17	4
Total	( <i>N</i> = 40) 100	( <i>N</i> = 18) 100	( <i>N</i> = 23) 100

*Note:* The *N* reflects the number of subjects for whom there was sufficient information for a rating to be made for both parents.

Among single factors, the greatest direct influence on antisocial aggression, seems to come from the nature of the paternal model. Fathers were considered deviant if they were criminals or alcoholics; their aggressiveness was rated on the same scale as was that of their sons. A significantly higher proportion of the aggressive-antisocial men than of the aggressive-socialized men had been reared by deviant and aggressive fathers ( $p < .05$ ). The fathers of 38 per cent of the aggressive-antisocial men, 12 per cent of the aggressive-socialized men, and 8 per cent of the nonaggressive men had been deviant and aggressive.

The measures of family interaction cannot be presumed to be independent, for a rejecting family was more likely to be punitive, a deviant father was more likely to be aggressive and rejecting. When,

<sup>6</sup> The chi-square test, two-tailed, was used to test for the significance of obtained differences.

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as frequently occurred, these characteristics appeared in combination, the result was most likely to be an aggressive-antisocial son.

Other variables—intelligence, religious affiliation, neighborhood, father's birthplace—were tested and found to have no significant relationship either to antisocial aggressiveness or to socialized aggressiveness within our sample.

**Table 3** *Summary: Differentiating Backgrounds*

	Percentage of Non- aggressive	Percentage of Aggressive- Socialized	Percentage of Aggressive- Antisocial
High drive production and:			
Deviant model	4	0	42
Nondeviant model	2	8	8
Moderate drive production and:			
Deviant model			
and high controls	6	8	35
Nondeviant model			
and high controls	19	12	0
Low controls	4	52	8
Low drive production and:			
Low controls	17	12	7
High controls	48	8	0
	(N = 52) 100	(N = 25) 100	(N = 26) 100

*Note:* The absence of "perfect" relationships may be attributed to failures in measurement, incompleteness of the theory, or to potential freedom in behavior. See McCord and McCord (1960) for a discussion of this issue.

By combining various background conditions, it is possible to illustrate the different influences which relate to socialized and to antisocial aggressiveness. Rejection, punitiveness, and use of threats, we presumed, would tend to increase aggressive drive. By counting the mother and father separately for rejection and punitiveness, we obtained a drive producing scale ranging from zero to five—with scores of zero and one considered "low," two and three as "moderate," four and five as "high." We assumed that supervision, parental agreement, consistent discipline, high expectations, and religious training would tend to produce a controlled environment. A family providing two to five of these conditions was considered to have relatively high

controls; families providing none or only one were considered to have low controls. The combinations of high drive production with deviant model (regardless of controls) and moderate drive production combined with deviant model and high controls tended to produce aggressive-antisocial men ( $p < .001$ ). Moderate drive production with low controls (regardless of the model) tended to result in aggressive-socialized men ( $p < .001$ ). Low drive production and high controls (regardless of model) tended to produce nonaggressive men ( $p < .001$ ).

### SUMMARY

In a longitudinal study of antisocial aggressiveness in males, reports on direct observation of behavior in childhood and early adolescence were used to rate general level of aggressiveness. Criminal records were used to ascertain antisocial behavior during adolescence and adulthood. To distinguish between conditions which contribute to socialized aggressiveness and those which direct aggression into antisocial channels, the family backgrounds of men who had been equally aggressive in childhood were compared. The results suggest that extreme neglect and punitiveness, coupled with a deviant-aggressive paternal model, produces antisocial aggressiveness. In contrast (though not contradiction), moderate neglect, moderate punitiveness, and ineffective controls produce socialized aggressiveness.

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