psychopathology. Sroufe (1983) noted that hurting others appears especially pleasurable for children with insecure/avoident attachment. In contrast to these views, children's enjoyment of non-angry IA may be more the normal rule than the abnormal exception.

Why not all cruelty, all the time? This commentary could have as easily begun with the statement that, throughout history and across cultures, empathy (or kindness, or reciprocity) exists in many forms. In the well-regulated individual, tendencies to aggression, dominance, and cruelty are balanced by prosocial feelings, judgments, and impulses. It is reductions in empathy, either intrinsic (e.g., in psychopathy) or learned (e.g., dehumanizing others through propaganda), that allow the unfettered exercise of dominance motivation.

Shame, violence, and perpetrators' voices

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Abstract: Fostering shame in societies may not curb violence, because shame is alienating. The person experiencing shame may not care enough about others to curb violent instincts. Furthermore, men may be less shame-prone than are women. Finally, if shame is too prevalent in a society, perpetrators may be reluctant to talk about their actions and motives, if indeed they know their own motives. We may be unable accurately to discover how perpetrators think about their own violence.

Nell's argument that cruelty has its origins in evolutionary rewards is fascinating and deeply disturbing. He is correct that, if societies want to curb violence, they must understand what reinforces it (sect. 1.1.1). But having read this theory, I am less optimistic than ever that violence can be diminished.

Nell argues that "effective prevention must begin with perpetrators (sect. 6, para 1.)" and that "violence-prevention workers will need to gather affectively rich descriptions of the inner experience of police and military torturers and interrogators" (sect. 6.1). He also argues that "the challenge for violence prevention is to anchor [shame] them more deeply in the life of the instincts" (sect. 5.3). I begin with a discussion of shame and then turn to the suggestion that we listen to perpetrators.

John Rawls defines shame as a feeling one has when one suffers a blow to one's self-respect as a result of failing to live up to one's values (Rawls 1971, p. 442). Shame is a painful feeling, so we want to avoid it, and the desire to avoid shame motivates us to remain true to our principles. This idea is part of a long tradition of thinkers who see value in shame. Aristotle, for example, held that shame restrained youth, who are more prone to live by feelings rather than reason and, hence, are apt to go astray (Aristotle 1985, 1129b20).

But contemporary understandings of shame view it as potentially debilitating. Gershen Kaufman, for example, explains shame as the breaking of the interpersonal bridge. Our trust in intimate others is founded upon the expectation of mutual responses, and "shame is likely whenever our most basic expectations of a significant other are suddenly exposed as wrong. To have someone valued unexpectedly betray our trust opens the self inside of us and exposes it to view" (Kaufman 1985, p. 13). Kaufman's view suggests that shame is undesirable. Martha Nussbaum, too, argues that shame is an undesirable emotion because it suggests a desire to deflect ourselves from our humanness (Nussbaum 2004).

Nell implies that by inducing shame in humans who behave cruelly, societies will reduce violence. But if Kaufman is right that shame is a feeling of betrayal by and alienation from others, it doesn't seem to provide the motivational source that Nell believes it does. Perpetrators who violate expected norms against engaging in shameful acts might feel less a part of society and, therefore, less concerned with how their acts affect others. This consequence could undermine any attempt to utilize shame as a curb to cruelty and violence.

Evidence does not suggest that inducing shame in perpetrators brings about positive results. Psychiatrist James Gilligan (1996) works with extremely violent perpetrators such as serial killers. His theory is that violence is the ultimate means of communicating the lack of being loved by someone who commits the violence; he calls the absence of love "shame." By working intimately with violent men, he identifies a "logic of shame" that he calls a kind of magical thinking: "If I kill this person in this way, I will kill shame—I will be able to protect myself from being exposed and vulnerable to and potentially overwhelmed by the feeling of shame" (Gilligan 1996, pp. 65–66). In fact, Gilligan says that, throughout his career of working in maximum security prisons, "I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed, and that did not represent the attempt to prevent or undo this 'loss of face'" (Gilligan 1996, p. 110).

Gender differences further complicate the suggestion that shame can serve to dampen instincts toward violence. Eroticized violence is almost always enacted by males in the dominant role. And this may present a problem, because susceptibility to shame, too, may be gendered. Jennifer Manion argues that women may be more prone to shame (Manion 2003), and empirical studies suggest that women are more shame-prone than men (Ferguson et al. 2000; Lutwak et al. 2001). If susceptibility to shame is gendered, then attempts to attenuate violence in those more likely to perpetrate it will be a difficult task.

I now turn to the idea of listening to perpetrators. Attending to the voices of those who do violence seems correct. Yet Nell's suggestion may present more difficulty than one might expect. As John Conroy points out, interviews with torturers are likely to be flawed for two reasons. One reason is that torturers usually do not consent to be interviewed when they are actively torturing; the other is that torturers who are willing to talk about their cruel behavior are most often dissenters, not sadists (Conroy 2000, p. 121). This raises the question of whether we can obtain an accurate understanding of why people engage in cruel and violent acts. Our motives often elude us; many of us are well defended against seeing ourselves in a bad light. People who commit wrongful acts that are blatantly against norms of a society are even more likely to deflect their own motives. Elaine Scarry argues that torturers routinely supply themselves with a false motive so as to block any feelings of sympathy toward the actual sufferer (Scarry 1985, p. 59).

People who are violent may also dissemble. Nell discusses ways in which hunters retell stories of hunting successes, thus reinforcing details and accompanying emotions. But social responses to the retelling of an event will vary depending on the group to which one is storying. Norms for acceptable and deviant behavior are culturally bound. For example, a gang member may boast to the others in his gang of a successful retaliation against a rival gang and expect praise and congratulations, but he would probably consider boasting to others outside his gang as an act of foolishness. Furthermore, most of us are keenly aware of which actions are considered outside the pale of acceptable deviance, and perpetrators of cruelty and violence are no exception. They may try to infer what their audience is likely to tolerate and tailor their descriptions and explanations to suit the civility of a researcher or therapist.

A paradox may be at play here. If we want to create spaces where perpetrators can freely talk about their actions and the motives behind them, we must have a climate free of shame. But if Nell is correct, more social shame needs to circulate in order to erect barriers to violence. Can societies accomplish both these things? I would like to think so, but I fear not.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X06369051 Published online by Cambridge University Press