

# Adlerian Psychology: A Help in Solving the Current Crime Problem

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The rise of violence and the increase in crime which are sweeping the world cause one to consider the help that Adlerian Psychology can give to the prevention and cure of such behavior. Alfred Adler was an acknowledged expert on the psychology of the criminal. In different countries, especially in the United States, authorities asked his advice about crime. The writer was present in 1930 when he gave an address, "The Individual Criminal and his Cure" to the National Committee on Prison and Prison Labor in New York (1932).

Adler did not feel that the human being is a mere product of heredity and environment, but that he uses his inherited capacities and his acquired impressions as bricks with which to build his life style with his own creative power. The way to reveal the life style is to discover the goal towards which an individual is striving. One should not look at the "offense" nor the "offender" in isolation, but should understand the whole human being in his relationship to the world. Adler felt that there is no "born criminal."

In spite of progress in many fields, there is a tendency to overlook the **whole** human being (body and mind) and to attribute too much to physical factors. This is reflected in the current discussion about the relation between XYY chromosomes and crime. Some people are now inclined to believe that individuals with abnormal numbers of sex chromosomes may be predisposed to crime.

Murder cases are on record in various countries (Australia, England, Scandinavia, and the United States) where the defense pleaded that the murderer's XYY chromosome should be taken into account. In California, however, a judge held that there was no clear link between the XYY chromosome and human behavior.

With some other criminals, the XYY chromosome was found to be significant. In 1962, the late Professor W. M. Court Brown reported that three percent of the criminals at the State Hospital, Carstairs, Scotland, who had been admitted for mental illness had an extra Y chromosome. This was the beginning of a series of reports by Professor Court Brown, Dr. Patricia Jacobs, Dr. W. H. Price, and colleagues at the Clinical and Population Cytogenetics Research Unit, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, Scotland. They found that the presence of an additional Y chromosome is associated with above-average tallness. This unusual tallness was also reported to be found with XYY criminals in other countries.

These and other investigations in England, Scandinavia, and United States show that some siblings of XYY criminals exhibited similar behavior though they had normal chromosomes. On the other hand, some well adjusted people were found to have XYY chromosomes. Thus, the XYY chromosome cannot be the sole cause of criminal behavior.

After years of research, Professor W. M. Court Brown, Dr. Patricia Jacobs, and Mr. W. H. Price stated in a letter to the British Medical Journal, 23, November, 1968:

. . . There is, however, no evidence, which indicates that an XYY male is inexorable bound to develop antisocial and criminal traits, and in fact our own experience in Edinburgh suggests a spectrum of behavior ranging from the apparently normal through those with a mild personality defect to those who are severe psychopaths. Some are high-grade defectives, but by no means all, and the concept of the "born" criminal," if it means that XYY males are predestined to lives of crime is highly misleading. To call an extra Y chromosome the "criminal" chromosome as has been done by the popular news media seems odd . . .

This conclusion provides a fascinating and contemporary confirmation of Alfred Adler's findings of six decades ago. In his "Studies Uber Die Minderwertigkeit Von Organen Und Ihre Seelische Kompensation" (1907). "Study of Organ Inferiority and its Psychical Compensations" (1917) and numerous other writings, Adler defined the circumstances under which "Organ inferiority" may lead to mental illness and crime, or on the other hand may be compensated for and lead to the highest achievements. This could also be related to the chromosomal abnormality.

In the opinion of this writer, other factors may lead to an XYY's "criminal behavior;" for example, his psychological reaction to his unusual tallness. Abnormal stature—whether too short or too tall—may induce an individual to form an opinion of being inferior. Some undersized people feel it is a shortcoming as well as the fact that abnormal tallness may be responsible for an inferiority complex. Unusual tallness may cause the XYY male to have an inferiority complex because (1) he may consider himself an outsider because he is physically different from others, or (2) he might have, as a child, because of his abnormal tallness, been thought of as being older and been expected to achieve more than his age permitted. Such children fear that they cannot live up to these expectations and wrongly generalize that they can never live up to anyone's expectations. Thus they get discouraged and develop an inferiority complex. They may limit themselves to the degree of appearing immature and stupid. Erroneously believing they cannot achieve anything useful, they over-compensate by striving for personal superiority and may turn to crime if this is not achieved in a useful manner.

In the following report by two non-Adlerians on an XYY young man, the father himself referred to his son's "pronounced inferiority complex." In their paper entitled, "An XYY Patient of Above Average Intelligence as a Basis for Review of the Psycho-pathology, Medico-Legal Implications of the Syndrome, and Possibilities for Prevention," Dr. P. D. Scott and Dr. J. Kahn (1968) describe an XYY case who is not in an institution.

### From Their Case History

In 1967, an Irishman was referred to a forensic outpatient clinic for aggressive phantasy by his probation officer. He was 26 and was, at the beginning of 1967, placed on probation for a first offense (embezzlement). "He is the oldest and tallest of a tall family of five children (three males, two females) born at two-year intervals. Father is a successful professional man, always concerned about his children and holding high expectations for them. At 19 he was concussed in a road accident."

His father stated, "From an early age my son suffered from extreme nervousness and a pronounced inferiority complex; he had a rash on his body which he still has. He was a continuous bedwetter." After doing badly in his examinations, he was placed in a boarding college where his bedwetting subsided and his nervousness decreased. His relationship with his mother had been good, but she too was the subject of some of his hostility. Eventually his exasperated father gave him the money to go to London where he had always wished to go. The patient then made a remarkably good adjustment; he found lodging, advanced himself in employment to a respectable salary and remained as long as five years with one firm. From age 20 to 22 he says he associated with a girl who bore him a baby, but ultimately refused to marry him so he left the country. The patient said he embezzled the money to visit his daughter and her mother. He has the most aggressive feelings against his father. He is six feet and six inches tall and has slight acne. Tests show above average intelligence.

Scott and Kahn conclude:

Thus it is probable that the XYY complement may have a less important medico-legal implication than might have been at first supposed. It seems likely that the XYY complement will not in itself be held to excuse an offender from personal responsibility, but will have to be assessed in relation to other factors . . . It will have to be assessed against all those factors which might aggravate or potentiate the genetic handicap and these will be the indications of the direction which preventive action might take. Clearly this will require much further study. Meanwhile, it may be premature to impute anything more to the XYY syndrome than tallness and a tendency to an, as yet ill-defined immaturity of personality.

This writer is in complete agreement with the statement by Dr. Scott and Dr. Kahn that, "It seems likely that the XYY complement will not in itself be held to excuse an offender from personal responsibility, but will have to be assessed in relation to other factors."

It is felt that Adlerian Psychology can contribute much toward the investigation and treatment of XYY criminals. It may be that the wrong self-concept regarding their abnormal height and the resulting inferiority complex are as important as that which is attributed to the kardiotype. In addition to physical treatment, criminals of any age can be "cured" by obtaining insight into and changing their erroneous concept of life by enlarging their social interest and by setting themselves a constructive goal and pursuing it. Adler stated that every criminal can be rehabilitated if one can win his confidence. He taught that in order to prevent crime, teachers should see that no child leaves school without a fully developed "social interest." It has been proven in different countries, especially in Europe and in the United States, that pupils advance when they are under the direction of teachers who are trained in Adlerian Psychology. In many areas, Adlerians hold group sessions with pupils and parents (Dreikurs and Sonstegard, 1967).

An excellent example that nobody is doomed by heredity and environment to be and remain an offender, is shown in the autobiography of an "incurable" burglar whom Adler cured and introduced to this writer. This moving autobiography is published in the book *Alfred Adler: The Man and His Work* (Orgler, 1963). After his rehabilitation, this former burglar "went straight" for 30 years up to his death and was of great help to others.

In addition to Adlerian training for teachers and parents, this writer strongly advocates that all correctional personnel who work with criminals in any setting be thoroughly trained in Adlerian Psychology. It is felt that this approach to the wide spread crime problems would be of tremendous benefit in solving these problems.

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