



Violence and Aggression in the Heat of Passion and in Cold Blood

The Ecs-TC Syndrome

Ehor Boyanowsky*

The heat was beginning to scorch my cheeks; beads of sweat were gathering in my eyebrows. It was just the same sort of heat as at my mother's funeral and I had the same disagreeable sensations—especially in my forehead, where all the veins seemed to be bursting through my skin. I couldn't stand it any longer . . . I was conscious only of the cymbals of the sun clashing on my skull . . . of the keen blade of light flashing up from [his] knife . . . everything began to reel before my eyes . . . every nerve in my body was a steel spring, and my grip closed on the revolver. The trigger gave. . . . (Camus, 1946, p. 50)

Introduction

In the heyday of deterministic criminology during the 19th and early 20th century, theories and empirical research on environmental influences on behavior proliferated. Perhaps the earliest formal statements were propounded by Quetelet in 1833 as the thermic theory of delinquency (Sylvester, 1972) and by Kropotkin, who stressed the importance of humidity as well as temperature as a cause of violent crime (Cohen, 1941). Lombroso (1899) made elaborate statistical studies of seasonal as well as geographic variations in crime, and Gaedeken (1909), following Dexter's (1899) monumental monograph on weather and crime posited a direct physiochemical effect. Virtually all analy-

*Professor of Criminology, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Prof. Ehor Boyanowsky, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, V5A 1S6.

ses found the same relationship: an increase in assaults from January to July and an increase in property crimes with the onset of winter.

Because some climatic determinists, such as Huntington (1945), arrived at conclusions that were perceived to be racist, the whole tradition of research fell into disrepute, especially with the advent of marxist sociology. Not until the report of the United States Riot Commission (1968) pointed out that the majority of riots in 1967 occurred during those days when the temperature soared above 80°F was there a resurgence of interest. Goranson and King (1970) determined that 15 of 17 cities experiencing riots in 1967 had abnormally hot temperatures during those days of mass violence. Temperatures remained hot in eight cities in which riots persisted beyond 2 days, and dropped in seven cities in which riots were brief. Since then the vast majority of studies has found a linear relationship between environmental or ambient temperature and assaultive crime (Feldman & Jarmon, 1979; Michael & Zumpe, 1983; Rotton & Frey, 1985) but not homicide, a much rarer crime. Only Baron and Ransberger (1978) have found a curvilinear relationship between heat and collective violent behavior. That conclusion concurred with their laboratory findings that the relationship between ambient temperature and aggression follows a curvilinear function, with moderate heat increasing aggression, and temperatures over 85°F resulting in a decrease. Carlsmith and Anderson (1979) have since demonstrated that Baron and Ransberger's (1978) conclusion in regard to collective violence was faulty, an artifact of their data analysis and, in subsequent studies, further demonstrated the monotonic relationship between hot weather and crime, especially violent crime (Anderson, 1987; Anderson & Anderson, 1984).

In a more recent analysis, Field (1992) obtained similar findings, even in the relatively temperate climate of England and Wales. His conclusion is that the routine activity theory of crime explains the data. That is, the effects of temperature are mediated through social behavior. When the weather is warm, people spend more time outside and so encounters between motivated offenders and suitable targets are more frequent, and homes are more likely to be left unguarded. So, too, riots could be facilitated by social effects, such as the gathering of crowds, leading to the spread of violence through conformity pressures, or modeling and social contagion when an aggressive reaction to an otherwise innocuous incident is observed (Boyanowsky & Allen, 1973). Michael and Zumpe (1986) found, however, that wife battering increased concomitantly with summer temperatures, a result that would suggest there existed a more direct relationship between rising ambient temperature and aggression.

There is much evidence that at the psychological level, heat produces negative affect, justifying the metaphors that one is "getting hot under the collar" or lashing out in the "heat of passion," as Camus (1946) described above, both in humans (Griffitt, 1970, Griffitt & Veitch, 1971) and in animals (Finger, 1976; Greenberg, 1972). In fact, in one study of 100 men and women asked to describe in detail the physiological cues they experienced during six different emotions, in describing anger, especially as a precursor to lashing out aggressively, 98 made references to experiencing strong increases in facial and cranial temperature (face flushing, neck heating, temples burning, etc.); 90 also

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