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Community and National Intervention Strategies

INTRODUCTION

It has become evident that many—if not most—traditional approaches to the prevention and treatment of gangs have not fared too well. It is time to think creatively. The authors have been involved in the study and teaching of the subject of crime and delinquency for more than 40 years (collectively much longer!), and we are convinced that some very fundamental changes need to be made in the way we live and think before we see any significant decrease in the gang problem. Adults have referred to the "problems" with youths in general—and gang members in particular—with such value-laden questions as "What's wrong with kids these days?"[1] The implication is that youths in trouble need to change their attitudes, their behaviors, their lifestyles, their methods of thinking, and so on. It seems that it is always *they* who have to change.

THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM

Decades ago, a book by Thomas Kuhn, called *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, was published (1970). In this book, he argued that in the sciences certain paradigms or models serve to guide those who practice the scientific method. A paradigm can be defined as a collection of beliefs shared by scientists. They include general agreements, models, or theories about how problems are to be understood and resolved. These theories or models are used to measure success at explaining things, and they make note of certain anomalies that come up and can be used to guide improvements to the theory.

However, there are certain occasions when some of these anomalies may lead to what can be called a crisis in the paradigm itself. The prevailing paradigm cannot provide the answers to the questions being asked or problems to be solved; this is what Einstein meant with the quote that began this chapter. These are called "revolutions" in scientific thinking, and they usually lead to rather dramatic shifts in the thinking about a phenomenon. Classic examples include the discoveries of Copernicus, who challenged the conventional paradigm of viewing the sun revolving around the earth; Darwin's work on evolution; the work of Isaac Newton and Galileo; and the work of Noam Chomsky (often called the "Chomskian Revolution") in the field of linguistics. The development of Renaissance Humanism and the Reformation also come to mind. More recent examples include the Human Genome Project.

During these "revolutions," the prevailing paradigm always sort of runs into a brick wall in that there are some anomalies that cannot be explained via the prevailing models or paradigms. The answers to these tough questions must come out of a totally different paradigm, a new way of thinking. These paradigms come from people who think creatively and are unconstrained by convention.

The myopic view that youths are the only ones who need to change is usually accompanied with various labels that clearly describe the source of the problem. The labels keep changing, along with changing times. As Jerome Miller has noted, we began with "possessed" youths in the seventeenth century, moved to the "rabble" or "dangerous classes" in the eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries, and to the "moral imbeciles" and the "constitutional psychopathic inferiors" of the early twentieth century. We continued in the twentieth century with the "psychopath" of the 1940s, the "sociopath" of the 1950s, and more recently the "compulsive delinquent," the "unsocialized aggressive" (or even the "socialized aggressive"), and finally the "bored" delinquent. "With the growth of professionalism," continues Miller, "the number of labels has multiplied exponentially" (Miller, 1998: 234).

Miller asserts that the problem with these labels is that they maintain the existing order, buffering it from threats that might arise from its own internal contradictions. They reassure

> … that the fault lies in the warped offender and takes everyone else off the hook. Moreover, it enables the professional diagnostician to enter the scene or withdraw at will, wearing success like a halo and placing failure around the neck of the client like a noose. (Miller, 1998)

More importantly, the labels reinforce the belief that harsh punishment works, especially the kind of punishment that includes some form of incarceration so that the offender is placed out of sight and, not coincidentally, out of mind.

A recurring problem in juvenile justice reform—and with other "reforms"—is that after so much political maneuvering, numerous reports and hearings in Senate chambers, and announcements that "change is coming," the end result is that nothing much has changed or that the changes are cosmetic. A review