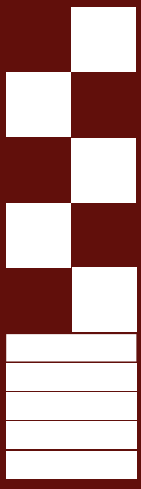
Early Media Effects Theory & the Suggestion Doctrine

Selected Readings, 1895–1935

edited by
Patrick Parsons



a
mediastudies.press
public domain
edition

Early Media Effects Theory & the Suggestion Doctrine

edited by Patrick Parsons

Published by:
mediastudies.press
414 W. Broad St.
Bethlehem, PA 18018, USA

Copy-editing: Emily Alexander

Cover design: Mark McGillivray

Landing page: mediastudies.press/early-media-effects-theory-the-suggestion-doctrine

Public Domain series - issn (*online*) 2770-2480 | issn (*print*) 2770-2472

isbn 978-1-951399-28-3 *(print)* | isbn 978-1-951399-26-9 *(pdf)*

isbn 978-1-951399-29-0 *(epub)* | isbn978-1-951399-27-6 *(html)*

doi 10.32376/3f8575cb.f1e0489e | lccn 2024931261

Edition 1 published in December 2024

Contents

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"The Influence of Newspaper Presentations Upon the Growth of Crime and Other Anti-Social Activity" (1910 & 1911)

Frances Fenton

American Journal of Sociology *16, no. 3: pp. 342–71 [with elisions]; and*
American Journal of Sociology *16, no. 4: pp. 538–64 [with elisions].*

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This section considers writing focused on the influence of media in social and political life and conducted within the suggestion paradigm in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1921, Park and Burgess had observed, "At the present time there are many promising developments in the study of suggestion in special fields, such as advertising, leadership, politics, religion" (424). Such work, indeed, was well underway by then.

One of the first and most ambitious efforts involved a study of the impact of newspaper reading on crime and antisocial behavior. It appeared in

sociology's leading journal, the *American Journal of Sociology*, which devoted the better part of two issues to the report. It was the published doctoral dissertation of Frances Fenton (1880–unknown). Fenton was one of the rare women in the field at the time. She earned her doctorate in the University of Chicago's sociology department in 1911. That same year, she married a fellow graduate student, Luther Bernard (whose work appears earlier in this anthology). While they divorced in 1922, she retained her married name and, as Frances Fenton Bernard, later joined the faculties at Wellesley College, Mount Holyoke College, and in 1924 was named dean of Smith College, where she served until 1928.

Her study was impressive for its time in its use of empirical data, as Fenton employed both a methodical content analysis along with data from courts records and a survey sent to two hundred members of the justice system. The conclusion drawn—that newspaper reading could trigger antisocial behavior—lacked the analytical rigor required by today's social science, but seen through the lens of suggestion theory, which was the lens used by Fenton, a causal relationship appeared to be a reasonable conclusion. "On the basis of the psychology of suggestion," she wrote, "a direct causal connection may be established between the newspaper and crime and other anti-social activities" (370).

The following excerpt includes Fenton's detailed discussion of the suggestion doctrine, with a thorough review of the extant literature on the topic (again demonstrating its ubiquity in the field). She describes the relevant forms of suggestion's impact—"conscious" and "unconscious"—and offers the qualifying note that the degree of influence can vary from person to person: "Whether a person exposed to (external stimuli) gets a suggestion or not depends, in general, on the kind of person he is" (368).

While the study is narrowly directed at "the suggestive power of the newspaper," Fenton adds, in conclusion, that similar pernicious effects could be expected from moving picture shows, the theater and even literature. She also offers recommendations for newspaper reform that include laws "to restrain newspapers from, or to punish them for, detailing certain types of anti-social facts."—*P.P.*

References

Park, Robert, and Edward Burgess, eds. 1921. *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

"The Influence of Newspaper Presentations Upon the Growth of Crime and Other Anti-Social Activity" (1910 & 1911)

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

(1) STATEMENT OF PROBLEM; (2) EXPLANATION OF STANDPOINT; (3) PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

1. The present study is an attempt to investigate the question, How and to what extent do newspaper presentations of crime and other anti-social activities influence the growth of crime and other types of anti-social activity? That is, do people get the idea of, or the impulse to, committing criminal and other anti-social acts from the reading of such acts or similar acts in the newspapers? It is not necessary at this point to define criminal acts any further than to say that, although they vary somewhat in different states and at different times, penal codes adequately define them as "an act or omission to act forbidden by law and punishable upon conviction." The expression, "other anti-social acts" refers to activities not technically criminal, but perhaps immoral in character, and detrimental to group life, which have not yet, and may never, become incorporated in penal codes. [...]

The causal relationship implied in the question proposed above, "Do people get the idea of, or the impulse to, committing criminal and other anti-social acts from the reading of such acts or similar acts in the newspapers?" is intended to include in general all the influences of newspapers upon anti-social activity, both conscious and unconscious on the part of the person so influenced, and more specifically those influences coming from the general-news section, to a consideration of which this study is mainly limited. That is, it includes (1) cases of so-called pure suggestion in which the person affected is unaware, in part or wholly, of the part the newspaper account has had in influencing his activity; (2) cases in which the person consciously models his act upon a similar act related or described in the newspaper; and (3) cases in which newspaper accounts have had an influence in the gradual building up of standards, ideals, images, which are partial, even if only remote, causes of anti-social activity.

The aspect of the newspaper question here dealt with has been distinctly limited to the problem as above stated, and to the attempt to get actual evidence for or against the assumption made so generally today, that the

newspaper has an influence, through suggestion, upon the growth of crime and other anti-social activity. Many other phases of newspaper influence as a social factor of immense importance need scientific investigation. But in this particular study no attempt is made to deal with them, nor is any attempt here made to discover what is the chief difficulty with the newspaper, nor the causes of the difficulty or difficulties. [...]

The suggestive power of the newspaper through its accounts of anti-social activities, through its comic supplements, through its possible influence on children, on the weak and unstable, on women, etc., has been emphasized by a number of writers.[1] The psychology of suggestion has been mentioned in this connection and explained in a popular way.[2] Also on this assumption, various practical steps have been taken to protect certain classes of people mentioned above from the effects of newspaper suggestion to anti-social activity. An example of this is to be found in the following statement from a letter written by Mr. F. G. Pettigrove, President Massachusetts Prison Commission, that "no daily papers are given to prisoners in the state prison or reformatories" of Massachusetts, and also "it is the general policy of penal institutions in America not to admit a daily newspaper." [...]

The present problem is a phase of the general problem of the control of stimuli to activity for the purpose of diminishing crime. It is scarcely necessary to point out the importance of this problem. However, a few general statements will indicate *how* important it is, as well as emphasize its connection with the present study.

We know very little as yet about the way in which habits grow up in the individual. Orthodox psychology, while it has given us many conclusions which are of value for social practice, has centered its attention almost exclusively on conscious processes in the individual and, with the exception of the studies of certain French and American writers[3] who have definitely treated suggestion and hypnotism, but who in only a few cases may be classed as orthodox psychologists, has dealt very slightly with the unconscious and only slightly conscious activities which form so large a part of our conduct.[4] Any valid control of conduct, individual, or social must be

[1] "Crime against American Children-Comic Supplement of Sunday Paper," *Ladies Home Journal*, January, 1909, XXVI, 5; "Are Newspapers Weakening Our National Fibre?" *Current Literature*, XLI, 517; "Newspaper Responsibility for Lawlessness," *Nation*, LXXVII, 151; "Newspapers' Sensations and Suggestions," *Independent*, LXVII, 449–51.

[2] S. W. Pennypacker, "Sensational Journalism and the Remedy," *North American Review*, CXC, 590.

[3] Notably Binet, Janet, Ribot, LeBon and Sidis, Ross, James, Morton Prince.

[4] Cf. William McDougall, *Introduction to Social Psychology* (Methuen & Co., 1908), 3,

based on a knowledge of this unconscious source of our stimuli to activity, as well as on a knowledge of conscious processes.

Little as we know in detail of the way in which habits are unconsciously acquired or grow up in the individual (because we know so little of what the individual starts out in life with), we do know the general fact that habits are unconsciously as well as consciously acquired, and that a part, at any rate, of the material out of which they grow are the social stimuli with which individuals come in contact—other people's activities, the drama, literature, art, newspapers, etc. We have enough evidence, certainly, to be sure that social control, the control of conduct, is in large part the control of unperceived stimuli to conduct, especially early in the lives of individuals. We are just beginning to evaluate our education, our drama, our novels, and our other forms of art and social stimuli on an objectively social basis and thus on a functional basis. The really preventive and constructive work of the juvenile court and of juvenile protective associations, as well as that of other ameliorative and preventive organizations, such as the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, is really based on this principle, that of pushing preventive measures as far back in the environment as possible, and thus of controlling the conscious and unconscious formation of habits.

In this process of evaluation, the newspaper as a social factor of immense importance, must be included. For the reason, then, that the newspaper is far-reaching in its influence,[5] and that it repeats and includes stimuli from other sources as well, from the drama, the novel, etc., and because of the general conviction that newspapers do incite to anti-social activity, this study has been undertaken.

2. The general standpoint from which the investigation is made is that of a study of both conscious and unconscious suggestion and the effect of such suggestion from a constructively social point of view.[6] It is necessary

15; also *Physiological Psychology* (J. M. Dent & Co., 1905), 1, 2. For statements as to the province of psychology bearing out the above assertion, see James, *Psychology* (Henry Holt, 1889), 1; Wundt, *Outlines of Psych.* (tr. Judd 2d revis. Eng. ed.; Wilhelm Engleman, 1902), 3, 23; Titchener, *Outlines of Psych.* (Macmillan, 1905, 3d revis. ed.), 6; Stout, *Manual of Psych.* (Hinds & Noble, 1889), 4, 5; Thorndike, *Elements of Psych.* (A. G. Seiler, 1907, 2d ed.), 1; H. Hoffding, *Outlines of Psych.* (tr. Lowndes, Macmillan, 1893), 1; Angell, *Psychology* (Henry Holt & Co., 1908, 4th ed.), 1.

[5] The number of daily newspapers in the United States reported by Ayer and Sons' *Newspaper Annual and Directory*, 1910, is 2,467. On the basis of figures for 1905, the *Bulletin of the Bureau of the Census*, U.S. Depart. of Commerce and Labor, Table 76, gives the average circulation per issue as 21,079,130. This would allow an average of one paper for every four inhabitants or one paper for every family.

[6] Cf. p. 342. In chap. iii this general standpoint will be discussed in detail as a basis for the

here merely to state the fact which has been pointed out above, that much of our conduct is of an unconscious and but dimly conscious sort, as compared with fully conscious and reasoned activity; that it is stimulated by a great variety of suggestions, over which we have, as yet very little control. The process of stimulus and response between newspaper and human activity, which goes on sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, is the subject of study here. [...]

CHAPTER III: THE PRINCIPLES OF SUGGESTION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NEWSPAPER

The problem of this study is that of the general connection between the newspaper and crime and other anti-social activity. The emphasis in this chapter is upon an analysis of the activity as it goes on, rather than upon the types of sources, that is, sections of the newspaper, from which stimuli to that activity come. The standpoint in the most general sense is that of suggestion, if the latter be taken in its broadest meaning to cover all stimulus and response relations, such as are included in the definition of suggestion given in the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology:* "The coming into the mind from without of a presentation, idea, or any sort of intimation having meaning for consciousness which effects a lodgment and takes the place it would have if internally aroused by association."[7] Within this field there are all types and gradations of stimulus and response relations, from so-called pure suggestion, in which there is no perception by the actor of the relation between stimulus and response up to so-called reasoned activity, in which there is such consciousness of this connection. We are accustomed to think chiefly of this latter type in connection with the newspaper and similar stimuli because we are used to thinking of activity as consciously caused, and because we can get direct introspective evidence of the connection from the actor, that is, the person involved can tell of the stimulus

whole treatment.

[7] The word "consciousness" as here used, if the writer is consistent, must connote merely mental processes as such, and not necessarily consciousness of, or attention to, the particular relation of stimulus and image. In other words, "entrance into consciousness" here means simply the process of setting off an activity. The word "consciousness" is, of course, an ambiguous term to all but psychologists. As a matter of fact, we have no adequate definition of consciousness. Nervous terms, terms of stimulus and response, are the nearest ones in which we can express it, and we call conscious acts those in which more than one stimulus is present, and in which therefore there is necessity for inhibition or selection of stimuli. In this discussion "consciousness" is not used in any metaphysical sense, but merely to denote "attention" or "inhibition."

and connection in such cases. The other class of cases at the opposite pole from these, we are not accustomed to connect with the newspaper, cases of so-called pure suggestion or unconscious suggestion, in which there is no perception of the relation between stimulus and response and regarding which, therefore, we can get no direct introspective evidence from the person concerned. Nevertheless, for reasons which will be set forth, these latter cases form a very important share of all cases of newspaper suggestion. It is unconscious suggestion, or suggestion as it is commonly understood, that constitutes a large number of the cases of newspaper influence on crime and other anti-social activity. As yet these cases are an unexplored portion of the field of suggestion and cannot be analyzed introspectively because they elude introspection by their very nature; and, finally, they enter into the other less purely suggested acts and even into reasoned acts as part content of those acts. It is necessary, therefore, to make an objective study of cases of unconscious newspaper suggestion. In no other way can we gain a control of it, and of the stimuli to it.

The only kind of activity stimulated by the newspaper that admits of introspective evidence is that in which there is some degree of conscious planning, and in which, therefore, the person remembers where he got his model or idea. Activity in which unconscious suggestion plays a large part cannot be checked up, except indirectly by the employment of objective methods of analysis, that is, for example, where a resemblance is noted between a newspaper account and the act by some third person, or where, as in cases of suicide, robbery, etc., a marked account of a similar act is found in the person's room or on his person. But all acts are mixtures, complexes of many activities, and suggested parts enter also even into those acts in which conscious planning is the predominant element.

In a later chapter cases of reasoned activities, which constitute direct introspective evidence of suggestion, will be analyzed in detail and it will be shown just how the act goes on. Here, the preliminary theoretical basis for that analysis will be laid by dealing in some detail with the psychology of this more narrowly suggested type of activity for which there is no direct introspective evidence, and which enters into the reasoned type. Suggestion, in this narrower sense, will be defined here and its operation described and illustrated with especial reference to the newspaper.

The first question, then, is, what is unconscious suggestion? The orthodox textbooks on psychology, such as those of James, Angell, Judd, Titchener, Royce, and others, do not contain explicit definitions of suggestion. The

facts of suggestion, when treated in them at all, are dealt with as part of the subject of hypnotism. Consequently these writers cannot be cited in this connection. Definitions of suggestion must be drawn from those who have actually treated this matter. Binet says of suggestion:

> Suggestion when successful, consists of an idea impressed upon a person and reigning dominant in the consciousness[8] of that person; reason, critical power and will are impotent to restrain it.... For suggestion to develop itself accordingly, it is necessary that the subject's field of consciousness do not contain too many antagonistic ideas.[9]

The first part of this definition is too ideational. Ideas are not the only things that can be "impressed" upon a person. Images and bare impulsive tendencies as well may be thus impressed. Otherwise, however, the definition does point out the unitary character of activity in suggestion. Moll says,

> The externally suggested idea of a movement, induces the movement; the idea of an object causes a corresponding sense-delusion. . . . Ideas aroused in us have an effect which sometimes shows itself as other concepts (ideas, sensations, etc.), and sometimes externally as movement; in many cases, perhaps in all, there is both an internal and an external effect. What effect appears, what idea, what feeling, what movement will be induced by the first concept, depends upon the individuality of the person, upon his imagery, upon his character, his habits, and upon the species of the concept.[10]

Moll is here considering suggestion chiefly in connection with hypnotism as a method of producing an effect. Nevertheless, this definition does point out the close relation between stimulus and response (idea and movement), and the external source of the stimulus.

In his *Psychotherapy*,[11] Munsterberg makes the following statement among others, regarding suggestion,

> A suggestion is, we might say at first, an idea which has a power in our mind to suppress the opposite idea. A suggestion is an idea which in itself is not different from other ideas, but the way in which it takes possession of the mind reduces the chances of any opposite ideas; it inhibits them. Every suggestion is thus

[8] "Consciousness" is apparently here used broadly as in the first definition cited.

[9] *On Double Consciousness*, Open Court Pub. Co. (1894), 70, 71.

[10] *Hypnotism*, 63; (tr. Hopkirk), 4th enlarged ed. Scribner, 1909

[11] Moffat, Yard & Co., 1909, p. 86.

> ultimately a suggestion of activity. . . .[12] By small steps, suggestion shades over into ordinary exchange of ideas, propositions, and impressions, just as attention shades over into a neutral perception.[13]

This definition also limits suggestion to an ideational process, but it brings out its quick going-over into activity, its inhibitory character with relation to other ideas, and the fact that the line between suggestion and what we call ordinary stimulus and response relations is not exact.

"'Suggestion' is only another name for the power of ideas, *so far as they prove efficacious over belief and conduct,"* says James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.[14]

To take a more involved definition: The question of suggestion becomes, then, that of the mechanism of attention in working three results: (1) the narrowing of consciousness[15] upon the suggested idea, (2) the consequent narrowing of the motor impulses to simpler lines of discharge, and (3) the consequent inhibition of the discriminating and selective attitude which constitutes belief in reality.[16]

This definition also limits suggestion to an ideational process, and in so far it is too narrow, but it emphasizes the unitary character of the activity, as does the definition of Binet, and it makes explicit the part of inhibition in suggestion, that is, the absence of conflict of stimuli. Although the third point, as stated, simply means absence of inhibition, it serves to emphasize the uncritical attitude in suggestion.

Boris Sidis says, By suggestion is meant the intrusion into the mind of an idea; met with more or less opposition by the persons; accepted uncritically at last; and realized unreflectively, almost automatically.[17] This definition is bound up with Sidis' theory of double consciousness, or disaggregation of consciousness (for which he has been much criticized), which comes out in the phrase, "met with more or less opposition." Otherwise, barring its limitation to "idea" this definition covers the facts of suggestion.

Cooley says of suggestion: "The word is here used to denote an influence that works in a comparatively mechanical and reflex way, without calling

---

[12] *Ibid*., 104.

[13] *Ibid*., 106.

[14] Longmans, Green & Co. (1902), p. 112.

[15] Cf. note at beginning of the chapter.

[16] J. M. Baldwin, *Mental Development in the Child and the Race* (MacMillan, 1906), 3d ed., 104.

[17] *The Psychology of Suggestion* (D. Appleton & Co., 1898), 15.

out that higher selective activity of mind implied in choice or will."[18] This definition implies the main facts of suggestion; its unconscious character, the absence of conscious selection and choice, that is, of attention, and consequently its quick going-over into action.

In short, for the purposes of this study, suggestion is the process by which ideas, images, impulsive tendencies, or any sort of stimulus, enter from without into the composition of the neural make-up or disposition and, at times more or less in the focus of consciousness, at other times not in the focus at all, are transformed into activity by the agency of a stimulus which bears an effective though unrecognized relation or similarity to the image or neural set, and in which there is in large part, or wholly, failure to anticipate the results of the suggested act. For example, when one reads an account of a murder he images it visually, or auditorially, or in whatever terms are characteristic of his type of imagery. These images and motor tendencies stay in his mind, that is, in his neural disposition, and later, when they are called up by some new stimulus, they may become cues, causes, of immediate activity, as appears from the following account of an act. Professor Woodworth says,

> The complete determinant of a voluntary motor act—that which specifies exactly what it shall be—is nothing less than the total set of the nervous system at the moment. The set is determined partly by factors of long standing, instincts and habits, partly by the sensations of the moment, partly by recent perceptions of the situation and by other thoughts lately present in consciousness; at the moment, however, these factors, though they contribute essentially to the set of the system, are for the most part present in consciousness only as a background or "fringe," if at all, while the attention is occupied by the thought of some particular change to be effected in the situation. The thought may be clothed in sensorial images but these are after all only clothes, and a naked thought can perfectly well perform its function of starting the motor machinery in action and determining the point and object of its application.[19]

The fact that the reading of the murder case, as referred to above, was the source of the initial imagery, or that there is a connection between the present stimulus and the image, is not recognized in this type of suggestion, and the activity follows unreflectively upon the calling up of the image;

---

[18] *Human Nature and the Social Order* (Scribner, 1902), 14.

[19] "The Cause of Voluntary Movement," *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology* (Garman Memorial Volume; Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1906), 391, 392.

while in reasoned activity this source is remembered and a high degree of consciousness of the relation between stimulus and image exists. This does not mean that the overt activity in the case of pure or unconscious suggestion is a totally unconscious activity, but only that the relation between stimulus and response is unperceived immediately by the actor. Very intense consciousness may arise in connection with carrying out the activity that is, wherever anything problematical arises in the adjustment that is being made of means to ends. But consciousness is present only when there is some conflict of stimuli, and in the type of suggestion under discussion there is no such conflict of stimuli, only one stimulus being present as stimulus. This is what the "narrowing of consciousness [or attention] upon the suggested idea," referred to by Baldwin, means.

It is clear from the above account and from Woodworth's description of the act that the newspaper can function in suggestion in various ways, in all the ways, in fact, in which it can influence the nervous set. In any one act it may have entered into the constitution of the nervous set as "a factor of long standing," in the composition of a "habit"; it may constitute one or more of the "sensations of the moment," or complex of these sensations; it may be present as a "recent perception," or as a "thought lately present in consciousness." The newspaper as stimulus may be, therefore: (1) either the source of initial images or ideas that have now come to constitute either part of the fringe of a present act or the focus of a present act; or (2) it may be a present stimulus calling up images, ideas, already in the nervous set, as where a present newspaper account of a crime sets the person to committing that crime, or, when he has determined upon a crime, gives him his method. In the former of the two phases of newspaper influence the idea or motor tendency may lie dormant and not come into consciousness at all, or it may take the form of a fixed idea, in which case the person frequently even seeks stimuli which bear upon it. [20]

But acts of pure suggestion not only form a large number of the cases of suggestion, but, as was stated in the beginning of this chapter, enter into less purely suggested acts and into reasoned acts. The difference between a suggested act and a reasoned act, neurologically speaking, is the absence or presence of conflicting stimuli-processes. Every act, however, is a complex of many previous acts, and, as has been pointed out, involves, at any one moment, the total set of the nervous system of that moment. The neural set,

[20] Well-known examples of this unconscious suggestion are to be found in epidemics of crime of various sorts, suicide epidemics, murders, highway and bank robberies, etc. See latter part of chap. vi.

as described by Woodworth, includes a complex of past and present neural experiences into which suggestion has entered more or less frequently. [21]

Suggestion, consequently, is a process that is continually going on in the form of responses to surrounding stimuli. "The fact is," to quote Cooley, "that the main current of our thought is made up of impulses absorbed without deliberate choice from the life about us or else arising from hereditary instinct or from habit." [22] And this again is built up "without deliberate choice from the life about us."

The questions of social importance here are: Under what conditions is suggestion likely to occur? That is, (1) In what sorts of people is this process frequent and habitual; (2) What sorts of stimuli are apt to be suggestive and in what form or through what medium? That is to say, a psychological analysis of objective social conditions as stimuli and of the subjective individual to whom these are stimuli must be made.

Psychology has some evidence as to the kind of stimuli that are likely to set up associations. In general, the more concrete the stimulus the more likely it is to be remembered and to be responded to. More definitely still, frequency, vividness, recency, coexistence, are the objective conditions which have been found experimentally to be most conducive to suggestion. [23] In a later chapter it will be pointed out in greater detail how these conditions operate in the daily newspaper, through its featuring, in the use of varieties of type, wording, position, coloring, illustration, etc.

We have now to consider what types of people, external factors, suggestions, can incite to anti-social acts. Given the objective conditions already mentioned, whether a person exposed to them gets a suggestion or not depends, in general, upon the type of person he is—whether his previously ingrained experience is of such a character as to leave him open to such stimuli. [24] It will leave him open to anti-social stimuli if the rest of the stimulation in his experience has been of a similar character, or if he has had no strong

[21] "There are numbers of people in the community who feel the temptation to approach the brink of crime who need only a slight incentive to convert the impulse into action. The man who killed the Duke of Buckingham happened to be passing a hardware store and saw displayed in the window a huge knife with a keen edge. It was enough. He bought the knife and flayed the duke." S. W. Pennypacker, *op. cit*., 590. The phrase "feel the temptation to approach the brink of crime" does not mean that people are conscious of such a feeling, but merely that in the presence of a stimulus to certain criminal acts they have an impulse to perform them.

[22] *Op. cit.*, 30.

[23] Boris Sidis, op. cit., 28; also E. B. Titchener, *Experimental Psychology* (Students' Qualitative Manual; Macmillan, 1896), 201.

[24] A. Moll, *op. cit.*, 68.

counter-stimulation or training in evaluating stimuli. In other words, the objective and subjective conditions of suggestion revolve themselves, first into a question of how the attention can be attracted, how the eye or ear can be caught. And here, psychology tells us that novel stimuli, stimuli that appeal to organic appetites or native instincts, stimuli that appeal to special acquired interests, are the ones that catch the attention and thus enable the first step toward suggested activity to be taken. [25]

The objective and subjective conditions of suggestion revolve themselves, secondly, into a question of how these stimuli are evaluated, that is, related to social standards. Whether, the attention once caught, these stimuli *are* evaluated by the individual depends, as has been shown, upon his training for such evaluation. Young people whose habits and ideas are in process of formation, the weak and unstable of all ages, are not in a position to estimate these stimuli critically. McDougall says,

> The suggestibility of any subject is not of the same degree at all times; it varies not only according to the topic and according to the source from which the proposition is communicated [he is speaking here of verbal suggestion only], but also with the condition of the subject's brain from hour to hour. The least degree of suggestibility is that of a wide-awake, self reliant man of settled convictions, possessing a large store of systematically organized knowledge which he habitually brings to bear in criticism of all statements made to him. Greater degrees of suggestibility are due in the main to conditions of four kinds: (1) abnormal states of the brain, of which the relative dissociation obtaining in hysteria, hypnosis, normal sleep, and fatigue, is the most important; (2) deficiency of knowledge or convictions relating to the topic in regard to which the suggestion is made, and

[25] Illustrations of how the attention is got in these various ways are to be found, for example, in the yellow journal which represents an appeal both to organic appetites and to a desire for the novel (W. I. Thomas, *op. cit.*); in various forms of advertising, such as pictures of women on cigar boxes, suggestive pictures of women in the windows and on the walls of saloons, bill board signs, notably the illustration for *The Girl from Rector's*, played in Chicago in 1909, which some members of the Chicago Women's Club and of the Juvenile Protective Association took measures to have removed, a very suggestive picture advertising *The Girl in the Taxi*, and others. In addition, a number of advertisements in newspapers are based upon this same appeal. A Colorado paper displayed a picture of Ruth St. Denys dancing followed by the statement that "Some people have called this dancing immoral," and other remarks to that effect, ending with "But whatever you think about the dancing, groceries at—are the ones you want." Book reviews of the type of those generally written by Jeannette Gilder are apparently based on the same principle. Books, such as *Elizabeth's Visits to America* and *Lady Cardigan's Recollections*, are reviewed in the daily papers at some length by her, in advance of their publication. The suggestive and immoral portions are liberally quoted and dwelt upon, with the result that there is usually a wide demand for the books when they appear.

> imperfect organization of knowledge; (3) the impressive character of the source from which the suggested proposition is communicated ("prestige suggestion"]; (4) peculiarities of the character and native disposition of the subject.[26] [...]

It is also true that people are differently suggestible, according to their types of imagery.[27] But the newspaper includes more than one type of suggestion. And this again increases its influence i.e., where more than one sensation area is stimulated, there is more likelihood of response. There are verbal suggestion, which contains indirect suggestions of other types, and visual suggestion in the form of illustrations, colors, differences in the form and size of type, etc.[28] In short, the modern newspaper, especially the so-called yellow and sensational elements in the modern newspaper, represent a mechanics of expression, a world of sensuous appeal, to eye, and ear, which has grown up slowly in other times and in other situations and which is a distinct excitant in ways which frequently are no longer socially useful. Anything which dramatizes, makes for a break in monotony, such as the patrol-wagon, policeman, etc., is a stimulus, is exciting, and is apt to be suggestive to the small boy or to older people of the mental pattern of the small boy. The motor or activity stimuli in the modern newspaper are of just this sort, and, on account of the important part they have played in the development of the race, make a strong appeal.[29]

On the basis of the psychology of suggestion as above developed, a direct causal connection may be established between the newspaper and crime and other anti-social activities.

---

[26] *Introduction to Social Psychology*, 98.

[27] W. D. Scott, "Difference in Suggestibility," *Psych. Rev.* (March, 1910), 147–54.

[28] There is no experimental evidence in psychology to show through which of the senses people are more commonly or easily suggestible, but it is an admitted fact that in modern life the eye has come to be the most important organ for picking up and mediating impressions. A common illustration of this fact is to be found in the effect of certain pictures, such as those representing abnormal activities, which often produce kinesthetic or activity effects in the person viewing them.

[29] "For the great majority of the public the emotion felt in connection with the brutal and exact details with which the press describes the most atrocious crimes vanishes after the first moment of astonishment and horror and we return tranquilly to our own thoughts and affairs; but for the lowest minority, the thing does not end so soon. A few—the predisposed, the degenerates—feel this emotion for a long time; the crime described so minutely has strongly impressed them; they think about it incessantly, it becomes a nightmare; and some day they give way to the obsession as the assassin Lemaire did, who after having stabbed a child to death, said calmly to a police agent who arrested him: 'I read in a newspaper the description of an act similar to that which I have performed, and I wished to imitate it.'"—Scipio Sighele, *Literature et criminalite* (Giard & Briere, Paris, 1908), 210.

It is not possible to measure this influence quantitatively, but it is none the less real because it cannot be so measured, as can, for example, the numerical results of advertising suggestion,[30] which is an analogous case of the influence of suggestion.

It is necessary, therefore, to make, on the one hand, a careful estimate of the matter dealing with crime and other anti-social activities in the newspapers, and on the other hand an analysis of actual and typical cases in which the newspaper is known to have suggested criminal and other anti-social acts. In the following chapter the method of analysis used in tabulating the matter in the newspapers will be discussed.

CHAPTER IV: METHODS USED IN THE PRESENT STUDY

Two kinds of fact regarding the influence of newspapers upon the growth of crime and other anti-social activity have been collected in this investigation: direct evidence of newspaper suggestion, consisting of cases in which the cause and effect relation between the newspaper and anti-social activity is known to have existed; and analyses of the relative amounts of space devoted by newspapers to anti-social and other matter. The latter constitutes a study of the possible objective sources of the stimuli in the newspaper to anti-social activity; the former some of the responses to these stimuli. Both studies are necessary preliminaries to any adequate control of the anti-social activity under consideration here.

The direct evidence was collected from all the available sources, from newspapers themselves, from persons who came in contact with criminals or other anti-social persons, or with juvenile offenders, and from court records. In addition 201 question-lists were sent out, 74 to prison and reformatory

[30] "The actual effort of modern advertising is not so much to convince as to suggest . . . . the idea is suggested by the advertisement and the impulsiveness of human nature enforces the suggested idea, hence the desired result follows in a way unknown to the purchaser [unconscious suggestion]."—W. D. Scott, *Psychology of Advertising* (Small, Maynard & Co., 1908), 83. "Advertisers are, in general, wise businessmen and are usually able to tell whether their advertising pays or not. If it pays, they continue it; if it does not, they cease advertising," says Professor Scott (*ibid*, 180). The brewers spend enormous sums in advertising to show, on physicians' and even on preachers' authority, that beer is nutritious and non-poisonous. They make a close calculation as to approximately how much money this suggestion will cost them and profit them. They advertise especially during local option and anti-saloon agitations, as a means of contra-suggestion. Advertising here has a direct causal connection with the sale of beer. Mail-order houses and department stores advertise only in papers of large general circulation and in those which circulate among certain classes of people, different in the two cases. Also certain forms of "fake" and other miscellaneous advertisements are known to be carried principally, or wholly, by the cheap literary papers which circulate in the rural districts. Cf. *Success Magazine* (June, 1909), 412.

officials, 75 to juvenile court judges and other judges, 45 to chief probation officers, and *7* to other persons. [...]

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

I. *Summary and conclusions.*—The object of the present study has been to show a causal connection between the news paper and crime and other anti-social activity. In how far and in what manner this has been done a summary of the previous chapters will show.[31] [...]

It appears from chap. vi that the newspaper leads to antisocial activity in a number of ways. These may be summed up by saying that it influences people directly, both unconsciously and consciously, to commit anti-social acts. It also has a more indirect anti-social influence on public opinion during criminal trials through its accounts of these trials and through its partisan selection of evidence; and, finally, it aids in building up anti-social standards, and thus in preparing the way for anti-social acts.

Finally, the results from the analyses of the papers are based upon a comparatively extensive number of issues of papers (203), comprising 57 different American newspapers. The per centages, therefore, constitute representative figures, both as to number and kind of papers and total number of issues studied.

The evidence collected for chap. vi unquestionably establishes the *existence* of suggestion to anti-social activity, and indirectly suggests its *extent.* Cases of direct newspaper suggestion to crime and other anti-social activity, cases of exactly analogous suggestion through the similar medium of literature, also similar cases of suggestion through moving-picture shows, theater representations, etc., along with a large body of facts testifying to a wide experience and conviction on the part of experts and others that the suggestion exists, were presented in support of the argument. [...]

III. Recommendations for Changes in the Newspaper

(I) The newspaper is a tremendous influence in the community. Its stimuli reach an enormous number of persons and reach them frequently and insistently. It should, therefore, be an educative and dependable medium. Its possible educative value has scarcely been realized. Suggestive anti-social matter should be excluded from it. This does not mean that all mention of

[31] The concluding chapter was written to accompany chap. vi in its original form with the entire mass of evidence and detailed discussion of evidence included.

anti-social matters should be excluded. It is desirable that the public should be informed on all matters which they can assist in improving. But the news which gives them the information should not be couched in terms or presented in forms and details which make it criminally suggestive or factually misleading. It is possible to deal with anti-social matters in such a manner as to minimize the possibility of suggestion to anti-social activity by confining the treatment to bare statements of fact, by selecting such facts only as are necessary to constructive action in the matter. It is likewise possible to use all of the media which contribute so largely to anti-social results in gaining increased social results. Many of these methods constitute a technique ready made for educative purposes. Large type, vivid and picturesque writing, illustrations, colored type, diagrams, etc., are just as easily the media of social as of anti-social suggestion and when the content conveyed by them is of a social character they are indispensable for readers who are fatigued, or who read in poor light. [...]

(4) Therefore it is important to consider methods possible at present.

(*a)* We need new and adequately enforced laws defining strictly the power of newspapers to deal with news, laws analogous to those already in operation in regard to the use of the mails, billboards, etc. Such laws would, as a matter of fact, in many cases be mere formulations of practices already in vogue. Courts both in the United States and England have already shown their power to restrain newspapers from, or to punish them for, detailing certain types of anti-social facts.

(*b)* Judges should recognize in their decisions the facts already known regarding anti-social suggestion.

(*c)* Public opinion needs to be educated to secure support for constructive legislation along this line and to support such laws as we have or as may be made.

(*d)* Further investigation of the relation of newspaper suggestion and other suggestion to crime and other anti-social activity should be made, and public officials, such as probation officers, juvenile court judges and other judges, superintendents of institutions, etc., should be encouraged and required to keep records of cases of such connection. In this way a better basis for activity regarding the newspapers could be established.