

Lonnie Athens' Four Stage Violentization Process

“Violentization” is analogous to “socialization,” i.e., people become the kind of people they are as a result of social experiences. Some of these are “consequential and unforgettable,” “have a lasting impact,” leave “a permanent mark...regardless of their wishes.”

“The significant experiences which make people dangerous violent criminals do not occur all at once...but...gradually over time.” It is “a developmental process with discernible stages.” It is not inevitable, not all who start the process finish it.

The four stages of the Violentization Process are:

Brutalization: includes three elemental experiences: violent Subjugation; personal horrification; violent coaching. All three add up to coarse and cruel treatment by others with lasting and dramatic impacts.

Belligerency: desperate to do something about the violent treatment, the decision is made to resort to violence if necessary to stop the treatment. The person resolves to use “serious violence” if provoked and if it has a chance of success.

Violent Performances: This is the transition from a resolution to use violence to its actual use. This is a crucial phase: “Intentionally injuring another human being gravely for the very first time in one’s life is not as casual a matter as those who have not seriously contemplated, much less performed, such action might believe.”

Virulency: A readiness to use extreme violence to attack another with minimal or no provocation.

As Athens says, “Not poverty or genetic inheritance or psychopathology but violentization is the cause of criminal violence.”