

The Basic Sciences of Forensic Psychiatry: A Preface

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Recently, in the midst of endeavoring to write a paper, I had occasion to peruse the issues of this *Bulletin* extending all the way back to Volume I. In so doing, I got a bit lost in the pages and in the articles. Rather than attending strictly to the research task at hand, I began to wander through the types of articles I saw with relative frequency in those pages — as well as wonder about them.

Any long-standing member of this Academy has reason to take enormous pride in its *Bulletin*. This journal represents the outstanding source of much of the current reference literature in forensic psychiatry. Likewise, those of us who have attended most of the annual meetings of the *Academy* have been able to see, hear, and meet most of the individuals who have contributed so markedly to this developing literature.

The literature itself, however, has generally been rather pointed in its focus and direction. More often than not, the papers deal with specific issues affecting the interfaces between the mental health professions and the civil and criminal laws. Often, the articles represent case or program studies that might well be applied to our own cases or projects, or to the consultations we perform as forensic psychiatrists. Obviously, in that light, the papers published here have served a valuable and a practical purpose.

A distinct change in focus can be noted easily when the following series of five papers are examined and digested. Certainly, they need no apologia, and this introduction must not be misinterpreted as such. Nonetheless, the first two papers, by Professors McKenna and Coe, come from quarters and disciplines not ordinarily seen in these pages. The sciences of biological anthropology and biochemistry-neuropsychopharmacology are as important to the study of psychiatry and the law as are the case studies and the developments in case and statutory law about which we read so often. The scientific basis for our profession has often been questioned by our detractors — and, much more constructively, by those who seek to provide such a basis for us. It is time that a basic science literature of forensic psychiatry be developed.

It is most appropriate that the development of this literature proceed in the pages of this *Bulletin* as well as in the programs of the meetings of the Academy. As an example, the two papers presented as part of the San Diego Zoo session on aggression in 1981 (reprinted as the first two papers in this series) were followed the next year by a presentation on developments in the research on schizophrenia. Certainly that is an illness germane to our work

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and often confused by nonmembers of this Academy with that vague entity called legal insanity.

So much of what forensic psychiatrists are asked centers on needed information about aggressive actions. These may be overtly criminal behaviors, or they can be more subtle forms involving, for example, attitudes toward children during times of divorce, toward employers or work situations in cases of compensation for disability, or toward a whole spectrum of people in personal injury cases. The nature of aggression *per se* represents a multifaceted phenomenon in its own right, and the first two papers in this current series, from disciplines not ours, shed considerable light on that sometimes vague concept. Why are some people more aggressive than others or aggressive in different ways than others? What is the biological *substratum* of aggression, or of the aggressive personality? What does research into animal behavior tell us about our own aggressivity? What roles do chemicals play in the expression of this tendency or this personality facet?

The remaining papers follow the first two as a matter of natural consequence, and they demonstrate further the trend toward developing a literature on a basic science level in forensic psychiatry. The papers on the topic of hormonal interaction in sex offenders continue directly the issues highlighted by Professors McKenna and Coe. Rada *et al.* studied and report the difficulties in determining any relationship between plasma androgen levels and overtly aggressive, criminal behavior. Bradford, on the other hand, demonstrates that the administration of substances that suppress the plasma testosterone may decrease the sexual drive and, by inference, the likelihood of the commission of sexual offenses. It is neither unexpected nor inappropriate that research findings are often confusing, sometimes even contradictory. This is why it is so necessary for clinical researchers to be able to go back to the source, to basic animal and biochemical research.

This series is capped by a paper from the Clarke Institute in Toronto. Although that old bugaboo, dangerousness, is the apparent subject, the real essence of this major article focuses on research methodology in the determinations of those variables in behavior we have so often labeled as dangerous and which we are asked to predict. As forensic psychiatrists, we are all familiar with questions asked us by examining or cross-examining attorneys, judges, or whomever, reflecting their inability to deal with basic concepts of why some people are as they are. If we are sufficiently honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that we, too, have some of those same problems that prevent the formulation of competent and understandable answers to some of those questions. Nonetheless, we continue to be asked, and this probably will not stop.

At times, we can provide the questioners with some psychodynamic formulations about the development of the aggressive behaviors in the individuals in question. But there is always the nagging, doubt-provoking question as to why this person developed those aggressive problems when

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others, perhaps with ostensibly similar backgrounds, did not. Obviously, ostensible is the key word because careful dissection might reveal that backgrounds may not be as similar as superficially seen to be. But the factors elaborated in the first two papers here, compounded by the next two and capped by the fifth provide a firmer basis for our attempts to answer still unanswerable questions.

The development of a basic science literature in our profession proceeds. □