BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *Violence Prediction: Guidelines for the Forensic Practitioner*

REFERENCE: Hall, H. V., *Violence Prediction: Guidelines for the Forensic Practitioner,* Charles C Thomas, 2600 S. First St., Springfield, IL 62794-9265, 217 pp., $29.75.

Violence prediction is a most important subject today in our society which is one enmeshed in a surprising degree of criminality. This aura of violence and threat contrasts markedly with our image of ourselves as an advanced, civilized, and genteel society. A book review is not a place to indulge in speculation as to why this is a crime-ridden land. Suffice to say that in numerous circumstances, individuals are frequently assessed for violence potential and that such assessment is fraught with pitfalls—not the least of which is the problem of predicting future events, weighing the possibility of future intervening effects or circumstances, and attempting to deal with cultural factors that play an obviously important role in violence. In any event, numerous variables enter into the assessment mechanism which is relevant both to the criminal justice and mental health systems.

Hall, a psychologist, attempts to deal with these important issues in a book that is hampered to a degree by complex language usage that impairs readability and a choppiness that perhaps reflects the fact that some of the chapters were printed or utilized elsewhere for other purposes. The use of various appendices is not as helpful as it might be, particularly since neither the body of the book nor the examples really provide a mechanism of violence prediction. The body of the book itself (excluding references, appendices, and indices) is but 136 pages.

Some of the material deals more with the evaluation procedure rather than violence prediction per se; however this discussion is pertinent to the examiner role and certainly the issue of "forensic distortion analysis" is important. This terminology refers to the factors that affect the validity of the examination process. The use of word combinations, whether derived from other authors or not, does not really enhance communication. Thus "response style taxonomies" or "statement reality analysis" do not further the process of communication.

Of importance is the discussion of malingering and factors that negatively affect the utility of interviews and tests—aspects the importance of which cannot be overstated.

In the chapter on Accuracy and Impact, the author refers to a significant literature dealing with prediction; the book therefore is a good source for reference articles dealing with prediction.

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Numerous important points are made. How can one predict future violence if we do not really know the extent of such behavior? Many studies use arrest or conviction rates, neither of which really has much to do with the actual rate of violence, a great deal of which is never even reported or is reported but for which no arrests are made. Thus when predictors are accused of inaccuracy, the accusers themselves may not have a statistical base for their criticism. Hall concludes that under the best circumstances, predictions can be about 75% accurate, a rate much higher than that reported in many studies and provides a reasonable discussion for this opinion.

A number of significant articles are discussed, pinpointing variables that seem to be helpful in prediction. Some of the important facts are history (frequency, severity, recency), opportunity variables, and the triggering stimuli. Inhibitory variables are those that contribute to a negative prediction or a prediction that violence is not likely.

Hall points out that a better source for behavior information is that obtained from the actors if certain conditions such as confidentiality are met. I recall a report about sex offenders where offenses admitted to were more than 50 times greater than reported in the crime records.

Reference is made to a numerical system in which acts are graded for frequency and severity. A scale weight is given to each act. For example, minor harm is 1.47, forcible sex act 25.92, and killing 35.67. However, the derivation of the numbers used is not given, and the use of numerical system using 4 numbers and 2 decimal places seems most questionable. My comment reflects my own bias against the attempt to quantify the currently unmeasurable.

On p. 96, "Table XI" apparently actually refers to "Table XIII." The case discussions do not significantly enhance the book's utility.

Overall, the book does attempt to deal with a most important subject. The book, however, is really not a "how to" manual, and the guidelines are at best general. The various checklists and the discussion do provide a broad dimension for an examiner to consider. Those who are concerned with violence prediction will appreciate the effort of the author in attempting to provide a system for future analyses of potential perpetrators of violence.