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News

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*****Psychiatry turns to fine arts,
humanities to find the causes
of the roots of Violence in
America.

DALLAS--Despite a thin veneer of civilization, people are still violent. So anything that can explain the origins of violence will be of great help in working toward eventual solution of this cultural problem, says Dr. Kenneth Altshuler, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas.

The department along with its psychiatric services at John Peter Smith Hospital in Fort Worth, is taking the lead in sponsoring a series of symposia in April and May on violence in America. Co-sponsor is the Elmwood Foundation of Fort Worth.

The series, planned for April 12-13 and 26-27 on the UTHSCD campus, will bring together psychological insights on violence along with insights from the fine arts and humanities. A fifth symposium will be held May 4 on the South Campus of The Tarrant County Junior College System. Funding for the programs, which are open both to professionals and the general public, comes from the Texas Commission for the Humanities, the Carl J. Aldenhoven Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

"Since a potential for violence is inherently present in all societies," says Altshuler, "its control must have been a part of all psychological evolution."

There are only two reasons people in the United States can have their civil rights abrogated: if they are dangerous to themselves or to others, the psychiatrist points out. "And the tendency to violence is implied in both of these.

"The law has placed on the profession of psychiatry the responsibility for helping eliminate these tendencies in our society. We have been asked to predict violence, and our record has been poor.

"Anything that can enlighten us to the origins of violence can be of great help in this dilemma. We must turn to society itself for the roots of violence and the factors that contribute to them, as well as to those assets that may lead to their containment."

Altshuler, who says he chose psychiatry as his discipline because of its involvement with many kinds of knowledge, believes psychiatry is in a unique position to learn from the arts and humanities, as well as sociology and sociobiology, in our culture. The Violence in America symposia have been planned with this philosophy in mind.

Outstanding psychiatric input on the program will come from Drs. Carol Nadelson of New England Medical Center, Boston; Herbert Hendin, Columbia; and David Barash, The University of Washington, Seattle. Nadelson is one of the outstanding national authorities on female sexuality and rape, her topic for the series. Hendin, who will speak on suicide, is internationally known for his books on suicide in the Scandinavian countries and among blacks in America. The sociobiology of violence will be Barash's topic. The professor is a well-known writer/researcher in this new field. He is also recognized for his studies of the sociobiology of the family.

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first add violence

Besides addresses and panels, the programs will rely heavily on images of violence presented in art and photography exhibits on film and videotape. A new television documentary on violence will be shown on KXAS, the producing station, April 9 in cooperation with the symposia. It will also be shown to symposium participants during the second weekend. The May 4 program will focus on prison life and violence. The Fort Worth Federal Correctional Institute will be among the sponsors that day.

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