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## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define the practice of forensic psychology and distinguish it from other fields of psychology and other fields of forensics.
2. Describe the development of forensic psychology from first early cases to the present day.
3. Compare and contrast the educational requirements of the master's degree and doctoral degrees as they apply to forensic practitioners.
4. Recognize the importance of following ethical guidelines as a psychologist and some of the unique challenges of doing so that are specific to the field of forensic psychology.
5. List and describe the various career paths open to those with degrees in forensic psychology.

*Many children grow up dreaming of being a firefighter or maybe an astronaut or a singer or a doctor or an actor. Not me. From as early as I can remember, I wanted to be a psychologist. I was fascinated with the workings of the human mind. I managed to find a course or two on the topic in high school and then majored in psychology in college. I did well enough in college to be accepted to a combined master's/PhD program, and I spent the next five years after college grinding away with tests, writing papers, practicums (more papers), and an internship (and even more writing!). Finally, at age 27, having completed all my studies, I entered the workforce as a psychologist. Just a few years after doing so, I was faced with a sad realization. I wasn't happy with the work I was doing. The clients were fine, nice people. It just wasn't what I had pictured or hoped for. To be honest, I was less than thrilled with the idea of continuing to do what I was doing for the next 25 years.*

*I had always had an interest in criminal behavior, so on a whim, I called the State Correctional Institution at Pittsburgh. After learning that they did indeed employ psychologists and talking to the person in charge of the psychology department, I was invited to visit the prison for a few days to see exactly what it was that psychologists did in that setting. The prison was a grim and foreboding castle-like penitentiary, very much like what you may have seen in Shawshank Redemption or other prison movies. My guide walked me across the main yard, which also seemed to be straight out of a movie, with several hundred muscular, angry-looking men lifting weights and playing basketball. I asked my guide what kind of offenders were incarcerated in this prison. In a matter-of-fact tone he said, "Oh we got 'em all. Murderers, rapists, and child molesters. Death row. Hell, we got one guy who they say is a cannibal. But I bet you don't want to meet him!"*

*But indeed, I did want to meet him. As strange as it may sound, I knew that I had found my calling. For those who want to study the depths of the human mind, what could be more fascinating than to talk to those who have committed the most extreme acts? What compelled these people to do the things they did? What were they thinking and feeling when they committed these acts? And had their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors changed since then? How? And why? So I asked my guide to take me to the man who was reportedly a cannibal, and I did talk to him. And thus began the next stage of my career: as a psychologist in a maximum-security prison.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1888, the people of London England were scared—and with good reason. Women were being murdered, and the murders were especially gruesome. The victims were found with their throats slashed and with some of their internal organs removed. At least five women were killed in such a manner, and perhaps more by the same individual. Naturally, people wondered, who was doing this? What kind of person would do such a thing? And why? Speculation ran wild, with one popular theory being that the murderer was a doctor and their medical training was allowing them to cleanly remove the internal organs, though this still did not answer the questions of who



The crimes of Jack the Ripper, whose true identity is still unknown, frightened the people of London and likely led many to wonder what kind of person would commit such atrocities.

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was doing so or why they were doing it. Although the term *forensic psychology* did not exist at that time, the case of Jack the Ripper stirred the imagination. This may have been the beginning of the notion that by analyzing the crime, we could learn something about the criminal—a precursor, perhaps, to the ideas of modern forensic psychology.

For some time now, there has been tremendous interest in movies and television shows about forensics. On TV, millions watch shows such as *CSI*, *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Dexter*, and *Forensic Files*. In the movie theater, people happily munch their popcorn while watching *Silence of the Lambs*, *Seven*, *Psycho*, *No Country for Old Men*, or any of a slew of similar movies. It is vitally important to keep in mind that as fascinating and exciting as these shows are, they are not necessarily accurate representations of forensic psychology or

any other aspect of forensic investigation. Many such programs make it seem as though forensic psychology is at least partly supernatural, as if the psychologist has some mysterious ability or magical intuition that leads them to be able to identify the perpetrator. While years of experience may lend some insight, there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that forensic psychologists have any supernatural ability. Forensic science must be based on just that: empiricism and research. Just as we know that superheroes flying through the sky make for great movies but have no basis in reality, it is important for us to keep in mind that media portrayals of forensic psychology may be equally exciting but is no more realistic than the ability to fly like a superhero.

### Definitions and the Importance of Keeping an Open Mind

The term **forensics** generally refers to scientific tests or techniques that are used to detect crimes or to solve those crimes. **Forensic evidence** has been obtained by scientific methods and

is used to help solve crimes. Forensic evidence may include (but is not limited to) fingerprints, DNA, ballistics, blood spatter patterns, tire tracks, computer data, photos or video, or many other sources of evidence. In the instance of, say, the robbery of a grocery store, the forensic evidence gathered might include images of the offender on the store's security camera, fingerprints, eyewitness reports of the appearance of the offender, and video of the offender's car arriving at or leaving the scene as captured on security cameras in the parking lot. All these pieces of evidence can be collected and analyzed by various forensic experts as part of an effort to apprehend the criminal.

During his career in the department of corrections, the author of the present textbook was taking a break from a meeting with departments lawyers. One lawyer commented that the main thing that lawyers and psychologists have in common is that they begin answering any question with the phrase, "Really, it depends . . ." That truly struck a chord. Upon learning that someone is a forensic psychologist, members of the public frequently announce that they are big fans of television programs and movies about the topic and then launch into a series of questions along the lines of "I've just never understood why someone would kill another person. Why do they do it?" The answer to such a question invariably starts with "Really, it depends . . ." and that is indeed the case.

Such behavior depends whether the (now deceased) individual committed a home invasion in the middle of the night, in which case, the reason for killing them might very well have been self-defense. It depends on whether an ex-lover killed the new lover in a fit of rage, in which case, the reason for the killing might have been jealousy. It depends on whether the offender believed that the victim was the devil and was infiltrating their soul in order to take over the earth, in which case, the reason for the killing may have been a severe mental illness—or a thousand other explanations. It is vitally important for the budding forensic psychologist to remember that the answer to such questions is rarely a simple one, and even when an answer appears to be simple, a competent forensic psychologist will keep an open mind and consider that things may not be as simple as they at first appear to be. As we shall see in this chapter, and in subsequent ones, it is not uncommon for the answer to our questions to begin with "It depends."

## THE VARIETY OF FORENSIC PROFESSIONALS

Whether we are aware of it or not, a great deal of what we do and when we do it is stored on our cell phones, computers, and other devices and is subject to forensic analysis. A **forensic digital analyst**, for example, would retrieve and collect evidence related to crimes and cybercrimes. This might involve retrieving hidden or supposedly deleted search history from the accused individuals' computer or phone. In many cases, even the cars we drive integrate our daily technology and collect considerable data about our location, driving speed, where stops were made, and, in some cases, even whether or not our hands were on the wheel. All of this information may be collected and analyzed by a digital analyst in order to aid in solving a crime. A forensic digital analyst might determine the location of a person's cell phone at a given time by identifying the last cell phone tower the phone received a signal or ping from. A forensic digital analyst might also serve as an expert witness when testifying about cybercrime or cyber security.

When we watch the local weather report, we are more likely to be thinking about whether or not we need to have an umbrella with us today than we are thinking about solving a crime. However, a **forensic meteorologist** may use their expertise in the science of

weather to reconstruct weather data for a particular place and time and use this in civil or criminal proceedings. For example, a forensic meteorologist might study precipitation patterns, temperature, and other data to reconstruct whether or not weather may have played a role in the fact that a plane crashed during landing. In a criminal case, such an expert might reconstruct the weather data in the area of the crime in order to determine whether or not it is possible that no footprints were left outside the crime scene due to the weather at that time and since then.

If at first glance we don't associate weather with forensics, then it seems likely that we might not initially associate entomology (the study of insects) with forensics. However, **forensic entomologists** can and do provide valuable insight into helping solve crimes. For example, such a professional can use their expertise about insect development and populations to assist in determining how long a body has been exposed and decaying and whether or not that body has been moved or its position changed.

Nursing as we know it is a profession that involves providing care to the sick and injured. Forensic nursing involves nurses who are trained to provide such care to those who have been victims of violence. For example, forensic nurses provide care to those who have been sexually or physically assaulted; such care often involves assisting in the collection of evidence (such as DNA) that will be used in the investigation of such offenses. Forensic nurses may also be used as expert witnesses in some cases.

### Definition of Psychologist and Forensic Psychologist

Psychologists, as the name implies, are experts in the field of psychology. In broad terms, they attempt to understand and explain the manner in which people think, the emotions they experience, and the manner in which they behave. In terms of day-to-day activities, depending on their area of specialization, a psychologist may be involved in conducting research, performing evaluations, report writing, or counseling or crisis intervention, among a wide variety of other tasks. The term *psychologist* may only be used by those with a doctoral degree (either a PhD or PsyD or, in a few states, a master's degree) and who have passed the psychological licensing exam in their state. Other clinicians may refer to themselves as counselors or therapists or a variety of other titles, but it would be inaccurate for them to refer to themselves as psychologists.

According to the **American Psychological Association (APA)**, **forensic psychology** involves the application of clinical knowledge and research to the judicial and legal systems (Ward, 2013). More narrowly, a forensic psychologist engages in many of the same activities outlined above for any psychologist but performs these duties in a forensic or legal setting. Forensic psychology, then, might be thought of as the application of psychological practices and principles to those people who work in or come into contact with the legal/criminal justice system. In this text, the terms *forensic psychologist*, *forensic practitioner*, and *forensic clinician* will be used interchangeably, but it should be noted that these titles are not necessarily identical.

Dr. Martin Reiser was hired by the Los Angeles Police Department in 1968 and may have been the first psychologist to work full-time in a police department, thus opening the door to the notion of forensic psychology. He evaluated officers, helped them learn to cope with stress, and discussed issues related to suicide prevention of those officers. Dr. Reiser was known to keep a bulletproof vest in his car and to assist with hostage negotiations procedures (Chawkins, 2015).

In 2001, the APA first officially recognized forensic psychology as a legitimate subspecialty within the field of psychology. This meant that forensic psychology had generated enough research, data, and literature that it could be distinguished from other areas in the field of psychology (Packer & Borum, 2003). APA now has its own division: Division 41, the American Psychology-Law Society. There are now numerous journals and scholarly articles related to forensic psychology and related topics.

By 2012, there were more than 40 colleges and universities offering degrees in forensic psychology (Burl et al., 2012). However, it should be noted that one does not necessarily have to attend a specialized program in forensic psychology to eventually work in this field. The present author obtained a PhD in 1992, when there were few (if any) programs specializing in forensic psychology. Continuing education, conferences, independent study, and practical experience can (and indeed, should) always be obtained even after the completion of one's master's or doctoral degree. Continuing education is an important and required step to maintaining licensure and competency to practice, and there is no substitute for practical experience in helping one to prepare for a career in forensic psychology.

## Educational Requirements

The road to becoming a psychologist is a long one. At a very minimum, a master's degree is required, and this typically takes at least two years after achieving a bachelor's degree. A specialized forensic degree is not necessarily required but the practitioner must make certain they have the necessary training and education to adequately perform the duties they are entrusted with. Indeed, such education, supervision, and training are required by both the APA ethical guidelines and specialty guidelines pertaining to competence; clinicians must only practice in areas in which they are adequately trained.

Students aspiring to a career in forensic psychology often ask if they should obtain a master's degree or a doctoral degree; "Which one is better?" As noted above, a truthful answer to this question might begin with the phrase "Really, it depends . . ." because of a number of factors. Such a decision may depend on one's college grades; master's degree programs are less stringent in terms of who they admit, though good grades and scores on admission tests such as the graduate record exam are still advisable. A master's degree generally requires two years of full-time study after receiving a bachelor's degree and should involve some clinical experiences, practicums, and/or internships as well. It will certainly allow for entry-level jobs and clinical work with some clients. At times, depending on licensure and training, supervision by a doctoral-level clinician may be required. In some programs, people with a master's degree are permitted to teach undergraduate courses. However, some jobs may be limited or not permitted to those without a doctoral-level degree.

A doctoral degree can certainly pave the way for some opportunities that would not be available with a master's degree. As we will discuss, doctoral degrees include the PhD (doctor of philosophy), the PsyD (doctor of psychology), and in some cases, the EdD (doctor of education). The PhD tends to be more research-oriented than the PsyD and can take 3–5 years after the master's degree; the PsyD, which is more clinically oriented than the PhD, may take 2–4 years after the master's degree, including an internship. Doctoral-level training, then, requires a substantially longer commitment of time (and likely money as well!) from the potential student. Such degrees allow employment in a wide variety of areas, from psychological testing to research to graduate teaching to supervising other clinicians to private practice and even expert witnessing.

To the uninitiated, forensic psychiatry may sound much the same as forensic psychology, but these are two separate vocations entirely. Psychiatrists are medical doctors (MDs) rather than PhDs or PsyDs. As such, psychiatrists have attended medical school rather than graduate school and therefore have the ability to prescribe medications and to provide expert testimony on issues related to psychotropic and other medications.

## CAREERS IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

It is not uncommon for those in the field of psychology to change jobs or direction on occasion. The present author, as noted at the beginning of this introduction, did not begin his career determined to be a psychologist in the state prison system; in fact, it was the furthest thing from his mind! Psychology, and specifically forensic psychology, has a much wider scope of practice than one might originally think. Many students interested in forensic psychology have the same goal in mind—to be a criminal profiler in the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI’s) Behavioral Assessment Unit. Although that is certainly an admirable goal, it is important to keep in mind that they may go on to participate in a wide variety of other fascinating and rewarding career opportunities available to forensic practitioners.

A question frequently asked by those considering a career in forensic psychology is “What exactly is it that a forensic psychologist does?” Once again, the answer to that question may begin with “Really, it depends . . .” In many cases, it depends on exactly what setting the clinician is working in, and there are a wide variety of such settings.

In a courtroom setting, forensic psychologists may offer expert testimony or may work with a lawyer to help select a jury or prepare a witness to give testimony. Forensic psychologists may be tasked with assessing a defendant and providing a report to the court as to that defendant’s competency to stand trial and to assist in their own defense. In still other cases, such a psychologist might be asked to render an expert opinion about any mental health issues the defendant may (or may not) have or may testify in regard to a plea that the defendant is **not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI)**.

In a law enforcement setting, forensic psychologists may work with police agencies to conduct assessments of officer candidates or officers whose fitness for duty is in question. In this same setting, some practitioners will provide evaluation and assistance to officers who have been involved in critical incidents, such as shootings or suicides. Some forensic psychologists may be involved in educating officers in verbal de-escalation or may provide support to hostage negotiations or other specialized response teams. Still other forensic psychologists might provide education and emotional support to officers or others who have been victims of violent offenses.

Some forensic practitioners, including the present author, are employed in a correctional setting such as a jail or prison. In this type of environment, a psychologist would conduct assessments of incoming inmates, provide consultation to administration of the institution, deliver crisis intervention services, and provide individual and group mental health services to incarcerated individuals with a wide variety of mental health challenges.

In addition to the above career paths, some forensic psychologists choose to work with offenders or accused individuals who have been placed in inpatient psychiatric facilities. Such clinicians may conduct testing, evaluations, provide individual or group counseling, or focus on restoring competency so that the accused may be tried in a court of law.

Some forensic psychologists may choose to work with those who have been victimized as part of an ongoing effort to help those individuals recover from the emotional trauma that they

suffered as a result of that victimization. Still others may choose to teach at the college or university level; for those interested in becoming a forensic practitioner, the possibilities are wide and varied.

In discussing forensic psychology careers, it would be remiss not to mention the fact that such careers can be challenging for the clinician. As portrayed in books, movies, and television, a career in forensic psychology appears to be very exciting. Indeed, that may often be the case. However, what is rarely (if ever) portrayed in the media is the fact that such excitement can come at a high price. Testifying in court, counseling those who have been victimized, conducting crisis interventions, and the other responsibilities noted above can take a significant emotional toll on the provider of those services. It is important for the forensic clinician to recognize signs of stress not only in those around them but also in themselves and to have adaptive methods of coping with and alleviating such stresses. Only when the forensic psychologist is taking care of themselves can they adequately do the same for others.

## Ethics

**Ethics** may be thought of as those moral principles that guide one's behavior or the manner in which one conducts oneself and treats others. We would perhaps say that a person who is considerate, compassionate, and fair toward others and who refrains from lying, cheating, or stealing is acting in an ethical manner. On the other hand, we would likely say that a person who is deceitful and cruel and only concerned with their own welfare while disregarding the law and the welfare of others is acting unethically.

The code of ethics for psychologists has been established by the APA. Among other ethical principles, this code holds that psychologists should protect their clients from harm, keep their interactions with clients confidential (with a few exceptions that will be discussed later in this text), and only conduct evaluations, counseling, and other services in cases in which they are trained and fully competent to do so. It is vitally important that psychologists diligently follow these and the remainder of the ethical guidelines established by the APA, as even a single failure to do so can bring harm to their client and can also harm the reputation of mental health clinicians in general. Forensic psychology, as a unique and challenging subspecialty of psychology, does have specialty guidelines for forensic psychology that were adopted by the APA Council of Representatives in 2011. These guidelines reinforce the importance of diligence, integrity, and competence among other aspirational guidelines and goals.

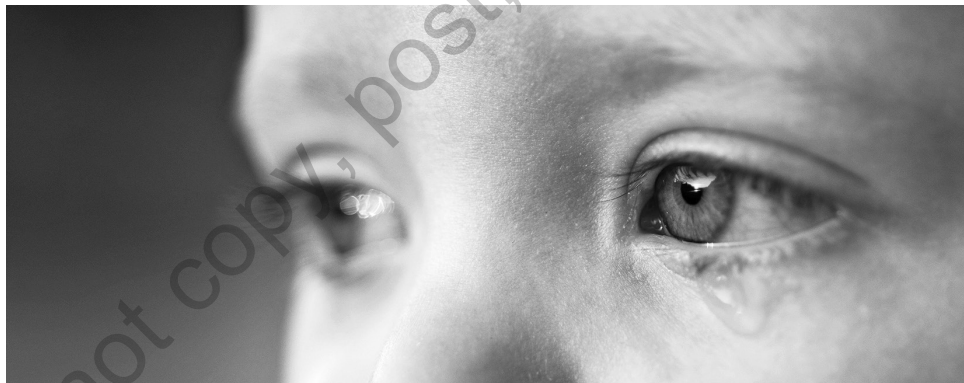
Adherence to such guidelines during forensic practice is every bit as important as it is in any other field of psychology, but arguably, it can be more challenging in the stressful and difficult field of forensic psychology. For example, during his career in corrections, the author of the present textbook was the subject of death threats on occasions too numerous to count and was physically assaulted on several occasions during that career. In such cases, the clinician may have no choice but to continue to work with those who have threatened or assaulted them. In such cases, it is imperative that the clinician is able to continue to treat that client in a compassionate and professional manner and provide them with the same quality of services that any client is entitled to, regardless of what may have transpired previously.

In maintaining an ethical practice, it is vitally important for the forensic psychologist to make their client aware of the fact that different guidelines apply in that setting than would apply in a private practice clinical setting. For example, in the latter setting, it is understood that the person coming to the psychologist for evaluation and treatment is the client, that their conversations will be confidential (with a few exceptions, as already noted), and the psychologist

might in one way or another be an advocate for that client. In a forensic setting, however, it is important to make clear to the individual that it is the court, parole board, or other agency that is the client and that information discussed during the evaluation or session was requested by that agency and will be disclosed to them. In the forensic setting, it is not to be assumed that the psychologist is necessarily an advocate for the individual but may be a neutral party in that regard, whose job is simply to provide an accurate and unbiased report to the court about the accused's competency, appropriateness for parole, or other relevant issue. In regard to ethical practice, all such matters must be made quite clear to the individual in question.

## THROUGH THE EYES OF THE VICTIMS

Many forensic psychology textbooks have a chapter devoted to those who have been victimized in some manner. In this book, we do not have a single chapter devoted to victims. Instead, you will find that most chapters have a section called “Through the Victim’s Eyes.” The trauma and challenges that victims undergo deserve more than a passing reference or a single chapter. Such experiences are incredibly difficult, complex, and multifaceted and it only does them justice to infuse them throughout the text. The author worked in corrections for 20 years; after talking to both victims and offenders and now teaching classes in victimology, he shares that this is only the beginning of being able to understand the courageous journey of those attempting to heal and grow after having been victimized.



Volodymyr Tverdokhlib/Alamy Stock Photo

## First Responder Psychology—Chapter 2

The number of books, movies, and television shows that portray police, firefighters, FBI agents, combat veterans, and other **first responders** (those trained to respond immediately to emergency events) is too numerous to count. Typically, these jobs are portrayed as exciting and glamorous—the FBI agent breaking down a door to rescue a kidnapped child from the arms of a serial killer, a police officer tackling the kidnapper before they can push their victim off the edge of a building, or a firefighter rescuing a child from a burning building. While making for an exciting program, such portrayals do little justice to the reality of being a first responder. In the media, first responders are often portrayed as heroes who respond to crisis situations, resolve those situations, and then bask in the adulation of the crowd around them, without any portrayal of the challenges and stresses of such an occupation. In a movie, we may see the “good cop” shoot a



number of “bad-guy criminals” in what appears to be a justifiable situation. The officer then walks away, receiving pats on the back for doing such a great job and appearing unconcerned with the consequences of their actions. In reality, the career of a first responder can be tremendously difficult; the taking of a human life, even when required in self-defense, is likely to have a tremendous impact on the shooter; of course, the impact of that event on the family of the person who was shot will also be incredibly traumatic. First responder careers can take a tremendous physical and emotional toll on first responders and on their families, as we will see in Chapter 2.

As it pertains to first responders, forensic psychologists may assist with interviews and evaluations of those who are applying for such positions. Such evaluations may include psychological testing to help determine whether a particular individual is likely to be well-suited for a first responder occupation. The forensic practitioner may also assess individuals who are already working as first responders in making certain that they are still mentally and emotionally fit to continue to perform such difficult and often hazardous duties. Such practitioners may provide clinical intervention in the case of first responders who are identified as struggling with mental health concerns and/or who have been involved in a critical incident, such as a shooting or other event that is beyond the realm of normal human experience.

In some settings, forensic psychologists provide organizational or operational support to police and other organizations, such as assisting with hostage negotiations or attempting to intervene and verbally de-escalate individuals who are potentially suicidal. They may also provide consultation to supervisory personnel related to issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as programs and interventions that may assist first responders in reducing and managing stress. Consultation related to reducing alcohol/substance abuse and preventing suicide may be of special importance; as will be discussed in Chapter 2, drug and alcohol abuse, divorce rates, and suicide rates are unfortunately all too common among those who work as first responders.

It is important to know that it is not only uninvolved, innocent third parties who can be victimized. The first responders themselves can be victims as a result of carrying out their job responsibilities. For example, it is not uncommon for police officers to be threatened or assaulted during the course of their duties. This makes them both a first responder *and* a victim. The same is true for a paramedic who is assaulted by the very patient they are trying to care for or a corrections officer who has bodily fluids thrown on them. As one corrections officer told the author of the present textbook, “In this job, it’s not a question of will you be assaulted. It’s a question of when, and how bad is it gonna be?” We would be remiss not to discuss the role of first responders as victims.

### Psychology of Investigations—Chapter 3

It is important for the forensic practitioner to be able to distinguish between so-called normal and abnormal human behavior. On the surface, this may seem easy. We may consider it to be normal to consume meat, to tip the server at a restaurant, to drink alcohol, or any of an almost infinite number of other behaviors. However, such assumptions about what is normal are typically based on our own experience, and it is important for us to understand and accept that such practices are not necessarily the norm for every person or every culture in every time frame.

We might consider it to be normal and even commonplace to assist a person who is injured or in distress. We might also believe it to be normal for a person to refuse to follow the order of an authority figure if that authority was ordering them to cause someone else significant pain. However, as we will see in Chapter 3, an individual stopping to help someone in distress or a person refusing the order of an authority figure to inflict pain on someone are not as commonplace

as we might think and, in some cases, may actually represent the exception to the rule. Our perceptions about normal behavior may not always be as accurate as we would like to believe.

In Chapter 3, we will also look at our ability to detect deception in others. We may assume (and that is something a good forensic psychologist should not do!) that we can tell if a person is lying to us. After all, we may reason, such a person will be nervous about the lies they are telling, and that anxiety should manifest itself in some observable way. Surely we will be able to tell from their sweating, their lack of eye contact, and their nervous tics that they are lying . . . won't we? We will examine this assumption and evidence about the accuracy of the polygraph or "lie detector" and its role in conducting investigations.

Eyewitness testimony often plays an important role in findings of guilt. But as we shall see, our memories are quite fallible and may be easily influenced by even a single word in the manner in which a question is phrased. We will also look at what is referred to as the *own race bias* and the difficulty and inaccuracy that people experience in identifying those who are of different ethnic or racial backgrounds than their own.

### The Juvenile Justice Process—Chapter 4

Those who work in the mental health fields often debate whether behavior is a product of nature or nurture. That is, does a person (or animal, for that matter) engage in a particular behavior because the genetics, biology, or chemistry of their body lead them to do so (the "nature" point of view)? Or do they engage in that behavior because at some point during their development, they learned to do so (the "nurture" point of view)? We may express the belief that babies cry because over the centuries, those babies that cried were more likely to be fed than those who did not cry, so now their genetics is such that they are programmed to cry. On the other hand, it could be argued that babies quickly learn that crying will be rewarded with a meal of warm milk, thus making them more likely to cry in the future. While it is not certain that this debate will ever be settled once and for all, it is the case that forensic practitioners examine and debate similar nature versus nurture issues when examining the development of juvenile criminal behavior, as we will examine in Chapter 4.

By definition, **juveniles** (usually thought of as those under 18 years of age) are still developing physically, mentally, and emotionally, and therefore represent an especially vulnerable population. Parental behavior such as drug use, drug use while pregnant, and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect are only a few of the many factors that play a critical role in a child's development. Most people agree that young people represent an incredibly valuable and delicate resource, and forensic practitioners can and often do have a vital role in the decisions that are made in the legal system about how to best manage the young people who come into contact with that system.

Especially with children and juveniles, it is vitally important for the forensic practitioner to help guide court decisions related to rehabilitation versus punishment in changing juvenile criminal behavior. Although some may think on the surface that placement in a juvenile detention center will "scare the kid straight," this should not at all be taken for granted. As we will see in Chapter 4, such placement may very well have the opposite effect. Juvenile detention centers can be violent places with rampant criminal activity and gang membership. It is entirely possible that instead of mending their ways, a young person will instead become more violent in order to adapt and survive in a hostile environment. Clearly, this is the opposite of what anyone would want to happen and only increases the chances of that young person re-offending. Instead, targeted programs of rehabilitation, including drug and alcohol treatment, education, mentoring, and a stable living environment, may help to both save taxpayer money and reduce the chances of that young person growing up to commit further offenses.

If and when a juvenile is placed in a detention center, the forensic psychologist may be involved in evaluating incoming youth to determine what mental health services (if any) they might need during their stay and in delivering mental health services in that setting. Such youth have often been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused or have been neglected, and the practitioner may be charged with providing treatment to them in such cases.

## Aggression and Violent Behavior—Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, we will also learn that correlation does not imply causation. That is, simply because two factors are related does not necessarily mean that one of those factors caused the other. For example, perhaps there is a case in which a school shooter played violent video games and listened to violent music lyrics before committing the shooting. It would be easy (but incorrect!) to jump to the conclusion that the video games and music caused that person to commit the shooting. An astute forensic practitioner realizes the importance of reaching conclusions based on all the evidence and research that is available to them, not merely based on opinions, coincidences, or assumptions.

As mentioned above, the debate about nature versus nurture and their relative influence on human behavior is ongoing in the field of psychology. Forensic psychology is certainly no exception to this rule, especially when it comes to an examination of aggression and violent behavior. Indeed, forensic psychologists have an important role in understanding the conditions under which people engage in violent behavior, and we may find that in some cases, both nature and nurture play a role in aggression and violence. In Chapter 5, we will begin to look at and differentiate between different types of aggressive and violent behavior, and we will discuss the manner in which human biology, brain development, hormonal factors, the use of alcohol and other drugs, and other factors can play a role in influencing such behavior.

As we will also see, research as far back as the early 1960s suggested that when children observed an adult behaving in an aggressive manner, the children tended to imitate that behavior, becoming more aggressive themselves (Bandura et al., 1961). We will also look at violence between intimate partners and within families—what that is and how that can impact not only the direct victim but the indirect victims (such as children) and the intergenerational transmission of violence.

Forensic and other psychologists may work with victims of violent behavior. Being victimized by violence directly or indirectly (such as witnessing a violent act toward others) can have profound and lasting physical, emotional, and psychological impacts on the victim and can lead them to develop mental illnesses, impair their functioning, and destroy relationships. In this chapter, we will learn about the signs and symptoms of **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**.

## Sexual Assault, Rape, and Child Molestation—Chapter 6

In Chapter 6, we will examine the difficult topics of sexual assault, rape, and child molestation. We will examine the differences between date rape, acquaintance rape, stranger rape, and statutory sexual assault. We will also discuss the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impact on those who have been so victimized, including (but not limited to) mental health concerns such as PTSD.

In many courtroom dramas (and, at times, in actual courtrooms), we will see a defense attorney imply that the victim is at least partly to blame for the fact that they were assaulted. Perhaps the defense attorney questions the victim as to how much they had to drink, what they were wearing, why they were out so late, or other questions that suggest that the victim's own actions

contributed to the fact that they were assaulted. We will also discuss the psychological research on why we are so often willing and even eager to blame the victim for the awful thing that was done to them when instead it is the offender who is truly the blameworthy one.

In some settings, a forensic psychologist may conduct a psychological evaluation of an accused sex offender so that they can make a recommendation to the court as to whether the accused, if convicted, should be considered a sexually violent predator (SVP). If such a determination is made, the SVP will be subjected to more frequent and more lengthy sex offender registration requirements. In correctional settings, psychologists also perform sex offender assessments and provide sex offender treatment to those who are convicted of and incarcerated for such offenses. With sex offenders, some members of the public may believe that society should simply lock them up and throw away the key. However, it is important to realize that many such offenders will eventually be released back into the community. When that day comes, does the public want them to be released no better than when they were originally incarcerated, or would the community prefer these offenders to have had some treatment in order to decrease their risk of re-offending?

Forensic and other psychologists will often interact with, assess, and treat those who have been victims of sexual assault. It should be noted that this can be challenging and emotionally difficult work first and foremost for the victim but also to a lesser degree for the therapist. Hearing someone graphically describe the manner in which they were sexually assaulted can be heartrending indeed. In this chapter, we will spend some time discussing the role of working with those who have been so victimized and the courageous battle such individuals fight in regaining their lives and functioning.

### Extreme Violence: Mass Murder, Spree Killing, and Serial Killing—Chapter 7

In Chapter 7, we will take a look at extreme violent behavior. So many of the media portrayals that we have already discussed involve depictions and descriptions of incredibly violent offenders. In such depictions, we may see the young FBI agent interviewing the famous serial killer, the police on the scene of a school shooting, or the bomb squad attempting to defuse the explosive before it can erupt in the crowded stadium. Such portrayals are exciting but often have little or no basis in reality.

In the media, we often see or hear the words **mass murderer** or **spree killer** or **serial killer** used interchangeably, but in fact, such terms describe different offenses and offenders. In Chapter 7, we will define each of these terms and learn that mass murderers and spree killers share a number of similarities, but serial killers may be distinctly different than the former two groups. There will also be a discussion of some of the infamous offenders in these categories.

Chapter 7 will also discuss what makes the individuals who commit such offenses so different from most other people. You may be able to imagine yourself reacting with violence if a family member was being threatened or had been assaulted. However, in all likelihood, it would be impossible for you to fathom engaging in multiple acts of violence against people that you barely knew, who had done nothing to you or your family. In Chapter 7, we will discuss the signs and symptoms of what is referred to as **antisocial personality disorder**, which simply means that an individual feels little (or in some cases, absolutely no) remorse for their actions, even when those actions are extremely harmful to others.

### Behavioral Analysis—Chapter 8

Movies such as *Silence of the Lambs* and television shows such as *Mindhunter* purport to show us the early days of the FBI's Behavioral Sciences Unit (which have now evolved into the Behavioral

Assessment Units). The Behavioral Sciences Unit (BSU) was originally formed in the early 1970s by Patrick Mullany and Howard Teten and consisted of a handful of agents. Later, John Douglas and Robert Ressler joined the group and the BSU began to collect data on sexual and violent crimes, establishing a database of such offenses and offenders. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, these agents and others began to provide consultation and training to other law enforcement agencies regarding serial sexual and violent offenders. Some of the books that came from this, including Ressler's *Whoever Fights Monsters* and Douglas's *Mindhunter* (among many others) fueled the public's imagination and desire to learn more about the dark side of the human mind.

In this chapter, we will take a deeper dive into the beginnings of criminal profiling and behavioral analysis. We will discuss the notion that the crime tells us about the criminal and the belief of some forensic psychologists that behavior reflects personality. For that reason, some forensic practitioners believe that by studying a crime scene and the behavior of the offender, they will be able to reach some conclusions about the personality of the offender and perhaps the future behavior of that offender. Different methodologies of behavioral analysis will be explained, and we will examine the debate about whether such techniques are empirically grounded and reliable.

We will also discuss the portrayal of forensic psychologists and profilers in the media and the idea that such portrayals are not necessarily (or at all likely) to be accurate. The notion that forensic psychologists have some supernatural or psychic ability, as we will see, is a complete fabrication. Indeed, such profiling has been wildly inaccurate at times, as we will see in the case of the Beltway Snipers; in such cases, such notions can do more harm than good. We will also discuss the fact that despite media portrayals of criminal profiling as commonly accepted and unfailingly accurate, only 10% of forensic psychologists surveyed stated that they had ever engaged in any type of criminal profiling, and only 17% expressed the belief that such profiling was based on scientifically reliable techniques (Torres et al., 2006).

Turning to the victim, we will discuss **victim–offender mediation**, in which the victim of an offense requests to talk with their offender. In such cases, it is hoped that the victim, in cooperation with a state agency specializing in this type of remediation, will be able to obtain some emotional closure and healing by talking to their offender. In some cases, such interactions can also help the offender to understand the impact of their offense on that person and the community.

## Forensic Psychology and the Courtroom—Chapter 9

In Chapter 9, we will discuss the legal system and the role of forensic psychologists in that system. The legal system is a world unto itself, and to those unfamiliar with the structure of the court system, terminology, procedures, and professionals in the courtroom, it can be an intimidating and complex world indeed. In this chapter, we discuss federal and state court systems and the difference between criminal and civil matters. We will also discuss the roles of those professionals in the courtroom, referred to as the **courtroom work group**.

The role of the forensic practitioner related to court can be quite varied. Some practitioners might assist a lawyer in picking a jury that they believe will be favorable to their client. Others might help to prepare a witness for the rigors of the witness stand and cross-examination. Some may be used as expert witnesses on topics related to mental health issues or the potential consequences of suffering from abuse or other trauma.

We will also examine what psychologists can teach us about the reliability of memory, the influence of leading questions, and how changing a single word in the way a question is asked can have a significant impact on the answer provided by a witness.

As we will see in this chapter, defendants are to be afforded a jury of their peers. However, there can be debate about exactly what comprises *peers*. With some frequency, defendants who

are part of a racial or ethnic minority may find themselves being judged by a jury that is comprised of few (or zero) members who are racially or ethnically diverse. Such diversity, equity, and inclusion in the jury pool is vitally important in helping the jury to understand and appreciate the life experiences of minority group members and to reduce (or ideally, eliminate) any bias or prejudice (Joshi & Kline, 2015).

## Psychology and the Law—Chapter 10

Having gained a foundation in the workings of the legal and court system in Chapter 9, in Chapter 10, we take a deeper dive into the intersection of psychology and the legal system and will discuss the complexities (of which there are many!) when these two systems interact. As we shall see, psychology and the law have been intertwined since at least 1843, when Daniel M’Naughten was put on trial for shooting a man he believed to be the prime minister of the United Kingdom. At trial, it was obvious to all parties involved that M’Naughten was very seriously mentally ill. The defense, in cooperation with the prosecution and the judge, found the defendant to be not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI); he was then committed to a psychiatric institute rather than being incarcerated. We will discuss how this plea is now used in differ-

ent states, alternatives to this plea, and why it is so controversial. We will also compare and contrast the cases of Jeffrey Dahmer and Andrea Yates as they apply to the NGRI plea.

Forensic practitioners can become involved in the legal process early on, conducting evaluations of the accused’s competence to stand trial. As we will see, it is a relatively common practice as legal proceedings begin to make certain that the accused has the mental capacity to understand what they are accused of and the courtroom process itself and that they are able to assist their lawyer in their own defense. The assessment of competence (and attempts to restore the accused to competence when necessary) are vitally important in making sure that the due process rights of the accused are not violated.

In Chapter 10, we will discuss the impact of **deinstitutionalization**, the release of thousands of people from psychiatric institutions into the community, and we will see that this release was followed by a subsequent influx of individuals with mental illness into the criminal justice system and eventually into jails and prisons (Earley, 2007). It is not difficult to imagine that the stark and hostile environment of jail or prison would be counterproductive to the mental health of almost anyone and could certainly exacerbate the severity of mental illness for those who are already suffering from such a disorder. Thus, mental health practitioners have become a vital part of the correctional system, which was ill prepared to assess, treat, and care for those with mental illnesses. As we will see, an increasing number of counties today are implementing various types of specialized courts to divert those with mental illness, drug addictions, and other issues from incarceration into a program of monitored treatment when possible.

Psychologists hold the issue of confidentiality to be of paramount importance. After all, their clients may reveal and discuss deeply personal and difficult issues based on the notion that those discussions will remain confidential. However, especially in forensic settings, there may be



Some forensic psychologists will work and testify in a courtroom setting similar to this one.

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exceptions to the boundaries of confidentiality, which the psychologist should make the client aware of in advance. As we shall see, if a client discloses that they are going to harm or kill themselves or have plans to harm or kill a specific other individual, it is important (and required) that the psychologist disclose this information and take steps to inform and protect the individual(s) who have been threatened.

## The Correctional System—Chapter 11

In the United States (U. S.), citizens hold their freedom to be of the highest possible importance. With some exceptions, we are allowed to say what we want and go where we want with limited concerns in regard to having those freedoms taken away from us, unless we commit a criminal offense of some type. As we will see, even if a person has a serious mental illness, if they are not committing an offense and pose no identifiable risk of harm to themselves or others, we cannot deprive them of their basic rights and freedoms. In Chapter 11, we will also discuss the process of *involuntary civil commitment*—that is, placing a person in a psychiatric unit or institution against their will—and the manner in which we attempt to balance that individual’s due process rights with the safety of those in the community.

Chapter 11 will also focus on the role of psychology for those in the jail and prison system. As we will see, the U. S. has the highest incarceration rate of any nation on the planet, according to the World Prison Brief, a database kept by the Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research at Birkbeck at the University of London. Some might argue that this is because Americans are tough on crime and will not tolerate criminal offenses while some other countries let people get away with a lot more. On the other hand, it could be that the U. S. is incarcerating people at great expense and, at times, without good reason. A great many of those who are incarcerated in the U. S. are in jail or prison for nonviolent offenses. As we will see, in such cases, taxpaying citizens are often paying more money to incarcerate offenders than they would be paying to send someone to college! We must ask ourselves whether we believe that we need to spend thousands (and thousands!) of dollars per year to incarcerate someone who committed a nonviolent retail theft of items with practically no value.

It is also worth noting that incarceration in the U. S. demonstrates evidence of great racial disparity, with Black Americans being incarcerated at nearly five times the rate of white Americans, and Latinx persons being incarcerated at 1.3 times the rate of non-Latinx white Americans (Nellis, 2021). It goes without saying that such disparity can have devastating, long-lasting consequences, including (but not limited to) children growing up without the emotional or financial support of one (or in some cases, both) parents. The Sentencing Project also found that in 12 states in the U. S., more than half those incarcerated are Black.

Psychologists in the jail and prison setting perform evaluations of incoming inmates to determine their need for mental health treatment or placement in a specialized unit to meet a particular need. Forensic practitioners may also conduct crisis intervention, psychological evaluations on those being considered for release, and routine screening and treatment. In my own experience, when being interviewed by a student who was preparing a paper on the topic of forensic psychology, I was invariably asked “What is an average day like here?” I could honestly answer “That’s my favorite part of this job: No two days are the same—ever. Maybe not every day is easy, but it is never boring!”

In this chapter, we will discuss **evidence-based corrections**; that is, what steps can the correctional system take to try to ensure that those who are released will not commit further offenses? Some might say that if the prison environment is truly punishing, it will discourage offenders

from committing offenses in the future because they will not want to return. However, others might argue that a punishment-focused environment will only make inmates more angry and violent and perhaps more likely to re-offend after release than they would have been. We will examine the evidence as to whether the correctional system should involve punishment versus rehabilitation.

## CONCLUSION

For many years, when a brutal or unusual crime has been committed, people have wondered what kind of person would do such a thing. What could they have been thinking or feeling when they did so? This curiosity about bizarre and violent behavior is natural and perhaps has planted the seed that gradually evolved into the field of forensic psychology. As with the discipline of psychology, and with the subdiscipline of forensic psychology, research and clinical work eventually blossomed into its own discipline, complete with educational requirements, guidelines for practices, and its own set of ethical guidelines for this complex and challenging field. Pioneers such as Dr. Reiser with the Los Angeles Police Department, and the founders of the FBI's BSU opened our eyes to the importance of psychologists working in concert with the legal system to help make decisions that impacted those who practice in these fields and those who come into contact with the forensic system.

At present, we are inundated with books, movies, and television shows purporting to show us forensic psychologists tracking down serial killers and other dramatic storylines. It is important for the student interested in becoming a forensic practitioner to be able to separate facts from the fiction of such dramatic portrayals. Portrayals of criminal profilers as having some magical insight or intuition are erroneous; the field of forensic psychology must depend on research and experience, not nonexistent magic.

As we have seen (and will see in greater depth in the body of this text), forensic psychology offers many opportunities for those who have interests in both psychology and the law. Working with police and other first responders, assisting the courts, counseling victims, and providing assessment and treatment to those who are currently incarcerated are only a few of the opportunities that are available to those who are interested. While the field has grown greatly since its inception, for those who enter this field, there is still a great deal to learn and to discover.

### Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. Compare and contrast the profession of forensic psychology to other forensic sciences, including forensic digital analyst, forensic nurse, and forensic entomologist.
2. Describe the differences between a master's degree education in psychology and a doctoral-level education in psychology.
3. Describe several of the ethical challenges that may be faced by a forensic practitioner during the course of their duties.
4. List and describe some of the careers in forensic psychology.



**KEY TERMS**

American Psychological Association (APA)	Forensic meteorologist
Antisocial personality disorder	Forensic psychology
Courtroom work group	Forensics
Deinstitutionalization	Juveniles
Ethics	Mass murderer
Evidence-based corrections	Not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI)
First responders	Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
Forensic digital analyst	Serial killer
Forensic entomologists	Spree killer
Forensic evidence	Victim–offender mediation

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