

Book Review of *Forensic Psychology: Concepts, Debates and Practice*

John J. DeFrancesco
American International College

Forensic Psychology: Concepts, Debates and Practice
By Joanna R. Adler (Ed.)

2004. United Kingdom: Willan Publishing.
ISBN: 1-84392-010-7. \$59.95.

The term forensic, literally translated from the Latin *forensis*, means forum or a place of assembly (particularly referring to the Ancient Roman Senate) for public discussion and debate (Arrigo 2000). Present day definitions typically refer to forensics as any professional activity that involves contact, interaction, or involvement with the legal and criminal justice systems (Arrigo 2000; Bartol and Bartol 2004). Currently, professional forensic activities are burgeoning. Indeed, almost all professions have a forensic concentration. For example, there are professionals with expertise in forensic dentistry, forensic accounting, forensic medicine, forensic engineering, and forensic psychology to name a few. Forensic psychology, the subject of the book under review, is believed to have had its beginnings in 1908 when Hugo von Munsterberg published his book *On the Witness Stand*. This book, while controversial, noted that psychology had much to offer the legal community. Nevertheless, psychologists did not emerge as significant players in the forensic system until much later (Bartol and Bartol 2004). The American Psychological Association and the Committee on Ethical Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists (1991) developed guidelines for forensic psychology practice and also defined forensic psychology as:

all forms of professional conduct when acting, with definable foreknowledge, as a psychological expert on explicit psycholegal issues, in direct assistance to courts, parties to legal proceedings, correctional and forensic mental health facilities, and administrative, judicial, and legislative agencies acting in an adjudicative capacity.

Psychologists are now engaged in such forensic activities as competency and criminal responsibility evaluations, child custody determinations, risk assessments, jury selection, jury behavior, eyewitness testimony, police psychology, offender treatment and the like.

Many colleges and universities offer courses and degrees in forensic psychology, however, a considerable amount of training, education, and experience is required to engage in the aforementioned forensic activities. Adler's book is not an introductory text and is aimed primarily at those who already possess a background (i.e., courses and/or degrees) in forensic psychology. In this edited book, Adler brings together experts in the field of forensic psychology whose goal is to provide the reader with an in-depth analysis of practice issues as well as current research and policy concerns. Many of these experts are from countries other than the United States, particularly the United Kingdom. However, this diversity provides the reader with a broad and comprehensive view of the discipline.

The book is separated into seven sections or content areas with each section consisting of two or three chapters. Section 1, *Forensic Psychology in Context*, offers two chapters. Chapter 1 orients the reader to the field of forensic psychology outlining some of the historical underpinnings of the profession as well as focusing on current practice and policy concerns. Chapter 2 provides a detailed investigation of public attitude and opinion toward crime and punishment. The authors suggest that attitudes can be shaped by a plethora of variables and that sometimes these variables can be manipulated and blurred by socio-political processes.

Section 2, *Investigation and Prosecution*, is comprised of Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 delves into the rather worrisome area of wrongful convictions or miscarriages of justice. The author relates that many wrongful convictions are made, that many individuals are oftentimes imprisoned and even executed, and that evidence used to convict these individuals is sometimes flawed and altered. Suggestions are made to minimize the possibility of wrongful convictions being made. Chapter 4 investigates the area of offender profiling. The authors claim that the traditional way of profiling, in which characteristics and descriptors of offenders are sketched from crime scene observations and data, is flawed. They state that a more systematic, reliable, and empirical approach would better serve society.

Section 3, *Testimony and Evidence* presents two similar chapters on eyewitness testimony. Chapter 5 questions the reliability of eyewitness testimony and describes factors that may impede eyewitness accuracy and credibility. Particular attention is paid to the effects

of cross-examination on the witness. The next chapter examines how age influences eyewitness testimony. The authors note that younger adults have significantly better eyewitness skills than older adults (60-80 years). For example, older adults tend to have more recall and recognition problems than younger adults.

Section 4, Correlates of Criminality: Sensation and Substances, contains three chapters. Chapter 7 is a somewhat esoteric examination of how sensational interests and materials, such as interest in the occult, militarism, and violent and macabre topics, may contribute to or be associated with deviant behavior. The Sensational Interests Questionnaire (SIQ) is presented as a useful tool for assessing sensational interests and determining risk. Chapters 8 and 9 explore the relationship between substance abuse and criminal activity. The authors explain that there are varying reasons and explanations for the association between substance abuse and crime depending upon the type of user. Also presented are non-traditional alternative interventions for treating this population.

The two chapters in Section 5, Persistent Offending, are somewhat disparate. The first is an analysis of Moffitt's developmental taxonomy of offending; the strengths and weakness of her theory are explored and directions for future research are presented. The next chapter investigates stalking behavior. The authors elucidate the effects that stalking can have on a victim and concomitantly attempt to define the type of person who engages in this type of behavior and the type of person who may be a likely victim.

In Section 6, the focus of the next three chapters is on Intervention and Prevention. Chapter 12 focuses on domestic violence, while Chapter 13 delves into delinquency. The authors of both chapters address misconceptions, prevention programs, traditional and non-traditional treatment approaches, and socio-political issues that can affect practice and policy in the aforementioned areas. Chapter 14 considers parental and community training programs as viable methods for preventing delinquency. These programs are examined from legal, political, sociological, and psychological perspectives and are viewed as being quite successful.

The final section, Punishment and Corrections, is comprised of two chapters with Chapter 15 addressing

women in the prison system and Chapter 16 speaking to the application of psychology in the criminal justice system. The former involves an outline of demographic and other psychosocial data that characterize women in the prison system, how they tend to be treated somewhat differently, and how many of these women can be treated effectively outside of a correctional institution. Chapter 16 details how psychologists, particularly those with forensic backgrounds, are utilized in the criminal justice system. The author also states that psychologists with backgrounds in other areas of psychology, such as educational psychology, may also be of assistance to a forensic population. Future trends and areas for practice are delineated.

Adler's *Forensic Psychology: Concepts, Debates and Practice*, is an excellent resource for forensic psychologists, other psychologists, and mental health professionals who may be involved with or have contact with the forensic community. The book is not an introductory text and does require the reader to have a background in forensic psychology to fully appreciate the content. Further, the book addresses various issues, policy, and practice concerns in many countries other than the United States. Nevertheless, Adler's authors are experts and present highly relevant information to all who practice in the field of forensic psychology.

REFERENCES

- Arrigo, B.A. (2000). *Introduction to forensic psychology*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Bartol, C.R. & Bartol, A.M. (2004). *Introduction to forensic psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Committee on Ethical Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists. (1991). Specialty guidelines for forensic psychologists. *Law and Human Behavior*, 6, 655-665.
- Munsterberg, H. (1908). *On the Witness Stand*. New York: Doubleday Page.
- Phares, E.J. and Trull, T.L. (1997). *Clinical psychology*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.