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OVERVIEW OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

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The term “forensic” refers to matters that pertain to courts or to law, both civil and criminal. Forensic *science* involves the application of scientific knowledge to legal problems. Today, virtually all branches of the natural and social sciences have made this application. Psychology, the science of behavior, is no exception.

The forensic sciences as a whole have become popular career choices among students, and many scientific professions now have forensic specialties. In addition to forensic psychology, we have, for example, forensic engineering, forensic medicine, forensic pathology, forensic anthropology, forensic archaeology, forensic psychiatry, and forensic social work. Nonscientific professions, such as accounting and linguistics, also have forensic specialties.

The focus of each discipline is evident from the terms. Forensic anthropology, for example, refers to the identification of skeletal, badly decomposed, or otherwise unidentified human remains. Forensic linguistics is concerned with the in-depth evaluation of language-related characteristics of text, such as grammar, syntax, spelling, vocabulary, and phraseology, either to profile an offender or to determine whether specific writing samples are from the same author (Black, 1990). Forensic pathology is the branch of medicine concerned with diseases and disorders of the body that relate to questions that might come before the court. The forensic pathologist examines the bodies of crime victims for clues about the victim’s demise. Popularized in a number of television shows, the work of the

Editors’ Note: Adapted from Bartol, C. R., & Bartol, A. M. (2004), “Forensic Psychology: Introduction and Overview,” in C. R. Bartol & A. M. Bartol, *Introduction to Forensic Psychology* (Chapter 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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pathologist is actually quite nonglamorous, though of course crucial. “While the TV world of forensic science provides instant gratification, the real world is tedious and slow” (Hempel, 2003, p. 14). Forensic social workers, as well as other mental health practitioners, may conduct child custody evaluations, and forensic psychiatrists and psychologists evaluate juveniles and criminal defendants. These are but a few of the many tasks performed by forensic professionals.

Psychologists have long been conducting research and providing services in the legal arena. J. McKeen Cattell conducted the first experiment on the psychology of testimony in 1893, and an American psychologist testified as an expert witness in a courtroom in 1921. In 1917 and 1918, respectively, psychologists used psychological tests to screen law enforcement candidates and developed the first inmate classification system. William Marston was appointed a professor of legal psychology in 1922, and Martin Reiser became the first full-time police psychologist in 1968.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that the term “forensic psychology” emerged. In 1971, the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry each established organizations that, according to Grisso (1996, pp. 98–99), “set the stage for developments that would identify forensic assessment as a specialty and would promote the quality of mental health evaluations for the courts.” These organizations were the American Psychology-Law Society (AP-LS) and the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law (AAPL). In 1974, an interdisciplinary program in psychology and law was initiated at the University of Nebraska, and in 1978 the AP-LS created the American Board of Forensic Psychology. This became the examining board for certifying diplomates in forensic psychology, under the auspices of the American Board of Professional Psychology. (Although we do not discuss them here, parallel developments occurred in the field of psychiatry.) A diplomate is a professional with extensive knowledge of and expertise in his or her area. Following this initial activity in the 1970s, forensic psychology developed very rapidly over the next two decades and embraced not only practitioners but also a large body of research literature. In 2001, the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association voted to recognize forensic psychology as an applied specialty within the field, joining clinical, counseling, school, and industrial/organizational psychology.

There are two major approaches to defining forensic psychology—the narrow and the broad. In the narrow sense, forensic psychology refers to the application and practice of psychology in the legal system, particularly the courts. This narrow definition focuses heavily on clinical practice. A broader conception of forensic psychology covers a wider landscape of psychology’s involvement with legal matters, as will be discussed below. It is probably accurate to note that the narrow term is the more favored within psychology. For example, Ronald Roesch (cited in Brigham, 1999) notes that “most psychologists define the area more narrowly to refer to clinical psychologists who are engaged in clinical practice within the legal system” (p. 279). In addition, in recognizing forensic psychology as a specialty in 2001, the APA Council of Representatives endorsed a narrow rather than broad definition. “It was ultimately decided that the petition for specialization should define forensic psychology narrowly, to include the primarily clinical aspects of forensic assessment, treatment, and consultation” (Otto & Heilbrun, 2002, p. 8).

Nevertheless, we prefer a broader definition, and the readings in this text reflect this breadth. “We view forensic psychology broadly, as both (1) the research endeavor that examines aspects of human behavior directly related to the legal process . . . and (2) the professional practice of psychology within, or in consultation with, a legal system that

embraces both civil and criminal law” (Bartol & Bartol, 1987, p. 3). This broad definition includes not only clinicians (also called practitioners) but also social, developmental, counseling, cognitive, experimental, industrial-organizational, and school psychologists, some—but not all—of whom are clinicians. The common link is their contribution to the legal system. Thus, the social psychologist who conducts research on eyewitness testimony, the psychologist who offers workshops to police on interviewing child witnesses, and the clinician who initiates a sex offender treatment program in a prison setting are all engaging in forensic psychology, broadly defined, even though they may not call themselves forensic psychologists. The field also includes research and theory building in criminology; the design and implementation of intervention, prevention, and treatment for youthful offenders; and counseling of victims of crime.

The readings in this book, then, are organized to reflect the division of a broadly conceived forensic psychology into five subspecialties: (1) police psychology, (2) psychology of crime and delinquency, (3) victimology and victim services, (4) psychology applied to the courts, and (5) psychology applied to corrections. While we separate these subspecialties for organizational purposes, it is important to note that there is considerable overlap among them. The correctional psychologist, for example, is well versed in the psychology of crime and delinquency. The police psychologist may offer services to victims as well as to police. All of the above may testify in court, and all of the above may be conducting research in more than one subspecialty area. The point here is to emphasize that the various subareas of forensic psychology are not mutually exclusive.

POLICE PSYCHOLOGY

Police psychology is the research and application of psychological principles and clinical skills to law enforcement and public safety (Bartol, 1996). Included in the term “police” is a range of primarily public agents, such as sheriffs and their deputies, fish and wildlife officers, airport security personnel, marshals, constables, and many types of other state and federal agents.

The relationship between psychology and law enforcement has waxed and waned over the years. Overall, though, we have seen an increase in the services provided by psychologists to the police community. This is partly because law enforcement agencies have become more professional and their administrators and agents better educated, and partly because the public has demanded more accountability on the part of police. However, in recent years there has been tension between psychology and some components of the law enforcement community, most particularly federal agents and military personnel involved in the interrogation of individuals suspected of being involved in terrorist activities. Psychologists do not condone techniques such as sleep deprivation, simulated drowning, sexual humiliation, or exploitation of phobias in order to obtain information. In fact, the American Psychological Association (APA) has called on the U.S. government to ban such techniques (Farberman, 2007). When these techniques are used, psychologists consulting with law enforcement must decide the most effective way of voicing their opposition.

Nevertheless, despite these tensions, psychologists today engage in many activities that are far more routine and satisfying. They perform pre-employment psychological assessment and evaluations for a variety of special situations, including fitness-for-duty, assignment to special units (e.g., SWAT teams), and deadly-force incidents. Some provide counseling

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or therapy to officers and their families, assist in hostage negotiations, and conduct workshops on stress management. Forensic psychologists are also increasingly asked to do investigative-type activities, such as criminal profiling, psychological autopsies, handwriting analysis, and eyewitness (or earwitness) hypnosis. Larger police departments usually hire full-time, in-house police psychologists, while the smaller departments usually use psychological consultants.

CRIMINAL AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

The psychology of crime and delinquency, sometimes referred to as criminal psychology, is the *science* of the behavioral and mental processes of the adult and juvenile offender (Bartol & Bartol, 2009). It is primarily concerned with how criminal behavior is acquired, evoked, maintained, and modified. Recent research has focused on the offender's cognitive versions of the world, especially his or her thoughts, beliefs, and values and how they can be changed, if necessary. It assumes that various criminal behaviors are acquired by daily living experiences, in accordance with the principles of learning, and are perceived, coded, processed, and stored in memory in a unique fashion for each individual. Criminal psychology examines and evaluates prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies directed at reducing juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior.

Criminal psychologists also are interested in research on specific crimes as well as the perpetrators of these offenses. The focus has been on violent crimes, particularly murder, sexual assault, and aggravated assault such as that associated with hate crimes or domestic violence. For example, psychological concepts and principles associated with aggression, reinforcement, and deindividuation can help us understand causes and aid in the prevention of these violent offenses. In addition, criminal psychologists have addressed causes and prevention of drug abuse, theft, fraud, and other nonviolent crimes.

The topic that has caught considerable attention from psychologists in recent years has been criminal psychopathy. A psychopath is a person who demonstrates a discernible pattern of psychological, cognitive, interpersonal, and neurophysiological features that distinguish him or her from the general population. The term "criminal psychopath" is reserved for those psychopaths who persistently engage in a wide variety of antisocial behaviors that are harmful to others. As a group, criminal psychopaths tend to be "dominant, manipulative individuals characterized by an impulsive, risk-taking and antisocial life-style, who obtain their greatest thrill from diverse sexual gratification and target diverse victims over time" (Porter et al., 2000, p. 220). Porter and his associates go on to say that, "given its relation to crime and violence, psychopathy is arguably one of the most important psychological constructs in the criminal justice system" (p. 227).

More recently, attention has been directed at "juvenile psychopaths." There is considerable debate over whether such a label can be applied to children and adolescents, and as a result most researchers prefer to use phrases like "juveniles with psychopathic features" or with "psychopathic tendencies." Attempts at diagnosing youths as psychopaths have raised "conceptual, methodological, and practical concerns related to clinical/forensic practice and juvenile/criminal justice policy" (Edens, Skeem, Cruise, & Cauffman, 2001, p. 54). Can characteristics of adult psychopathy be applied to children in the first place? And, if it is discovered that psychopathy is a meaningful term for certain youth, what are the ethical issues

of labeling a child a psychopath? A third debate centers on how accurate the assessment instrument must be before it should be used in courts. After all, a clinical diagnosis may destine the child to be considered dangerous and incorrigible throughout life. There is also concern that a diagnosis of psychopathy may be used to justify decisions to transfer juvenile offenders to the adult criminal justice system. A fourth debate examines whether psychopathy can be prevented or treated effectively. Recent research has put some of these fears to rest, however. For example, Randall Salekin and his colleagues (see, generally, Salekin & Lochman, 2008) have demonstrated that a number of instruments are now available for detecting psychopathic features in youths, and—even more important—a number of promising treatment approaches now exist. There is also little documentary evidence that the psychopathic label applied to juveniles has been misused in courts, but research in this area is still needed.

Female psychopathy and differences in psychopathic behavior due to ethnic, racial, and cultural factors have not received much research attention. These issues and the many questions concerning juvenile psychopathy will be the topics of greatest concern in future research on psychopathy.

It should be noted that developmental psychologists are becoming increasingly involved in the study of crime and delinquency. Although it is generally agreed that crime and delinquency have many causes that involve both individual and environmental factors, and that they take many forms, developmental psychologists have discovered that there are many developmental pathways or trajectories to crime. Some offenders start in early childhood, while others start in early adolescence or later. Moreover, these developmental trajectories appear to differ as a function of cultures, subcultures, and sociodemographic environments. Overall, developmental psychologists have been instrumental in shifting the psychological study of crime away from personality traits as sole or even major determinants of criminal and delinquent behavior and more toward an interactive cognitive and social focus as they relate to developmental changes across the life span.

One of the most exciting developments on the criminal psychology front is the current interest in applying research and principles from *positive psychology*. Traditionally, the field of psychology has focused on mental disorders, abnormality, and maladjustment. Positive psychology—a field that has emerged over the last decade—focuses instead on human strengths and what makes individuals emotionally healthy (Seligman, 2002). A primary illustration of positive psychology is the recent interest in resilience in children and adolescents who are exposed to adversity in their lives and have been assumed to be good candidates for delinquency. Resilience research indicates, on the contrary, that many become productive, prosocial adults. Positive psychology also helps us to understand how victims of crime can become survivors and how prisoners can benefit from treatment programs. Thus, principles from positive psychology are highly relevant to clinical work in corrections.

VICTIMOLOGY AND VICTIM SERVICES

Victimology is the study of persons who have experienced either actual or threatened physical, psychological, social, or financial harm as the result of the commission or attempted commission of crime against them. The harm may be direct or primary (against those who experience it and its consequences firsthand) or indirect or secondary (against

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family members, relatives, survivors, or friends who experience the harm because of their closeness to the victim) (Karmen, 2001). This latter group is often referred to as the *covictims* of the crime. Interestingly, some researchers are also beginning to look at the effects of crime on relatives and close friends of the perpetrator (Eschholz, Reed, Beck, & Blume Leonard, 2003; reprinted in this text).

Violent victimization of children, such as terrifying abductions, school shootings, and sexual attacks, can disrupt the course of child development in very fundamental ways and can be associated with emotional and cognitive problems over the course of the life span (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995). In adults, there is strong evidence that the effects of criminal victimization—such as assault, robbery, and burglary—are both pervasive and persistent (Norris & Kaniasty, 1994). Until recently, psychological services were received by a very small fraction of crime victims (2 to 7%) (Norris, Kaniasty, & Scheer, 1990). Today, psychologists counsel victims, perform psychological assessments, and testify in courts about the effects of victimization, such as in the case of victims who experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of their experiences. Some practicing psychologists accompany police officers who must notify persons of the sudden death of a loved one, and others serve as consulting psychologists in domestic abuse situations, including elder abuse. Increasingly, forensic psychologists are beginning to play major roles in the research, evaluation, and treatment of crime victims from diverse cultural contexts and age groups.

Psychologists also provide victim-related services in civil cases. A plaintiff in a civil suit who alleges emotional distress as a result of employment discrimination or sexual harassment may require a psychological assessment to document that distress. Likewise, the specialized assessment conducted by a forensic neuropsychologist may be warranted when brain disorder is alleged or suspected.

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE COURTS

Psychologists in this area conduct research on a very wide assortment of topics that have relevance to the judicial system, such as eyewitness testimony or the effects of prejudicial publicity on juries. Some psychologists who primarily conduct research on legal topics prefer to call themselves legal psychologists, and the terms “legal psychology” and “forensic psychology” are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature.

Psychologists also consult with judges and lawyers, perform assessments, and testify in both criminal and civil courts on such matters as competency to stand trial, criminal responsibility (insanity defense), involuntary civil commitment of the mentally disordered, child custody determinations, and criminal sentencing. This expert testimony based on clinical activities is the essence of the narrow definition of forensic psychology.

Expert testimony is perhaps the most visible function within this subspecialty area, but it is not always required. For example, many psychologists perform pretrial evaluations of criminal defendants and assess juveniles with respect to their amenability for rehabilitation—i.e., are they good candidates for certain treatment programs? Reports of the results of these assessments are often entered into the official record of judicial proceedings, even when the direct courtroom testimony of the psychologist is not needed. Finally, psychologists provide many services behind the scenes, such as advising lawyers on selecting jurors or preparing witnesses for trial.

CORRECTIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Correctional psychology is arguably the fastest growing branch of forensic psychology, broadly defined. We must keep in mind, though, that many—perhaps most—psychologists providing clinical services to corrections do not refer to themselves as forensic psychologists (Magaletta, Patry, Dietz, & Ax, 2007; reprinted in this text). The number of persons incarcerated in the United States has passed the 2 million mark. Although only a portion (7–10%) of these individuals qualify as “chronic offenders,” it is estimated that each chronic offender costs society about \$1.3 million over the course of the offender’s lifetime (Crawford, 2002). In addition, over 4 million persons are under correctional supervision in the community, such as on probation or parole. Clearly, there is a great need for the services of correctional psychologists, who make substantial contributions to corrections, particularly pertaining to inmate classification systems, psychological assessments, program/treatment evaluation, crisis intervention strategies, and substance abuse treatment approaches.

Psychologists in correctional settings give direct services to inmates, including crisis intervention and individual and group therapy, particularly in such areas as substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment, and violence prevention or anger management. They also administer a wide variety of psychological assessments (intellectual, personality, aptitude, vocational and educational), interpret results, and prepare comprehensive reports. Their recommendations are often considered in decisions to release prisoners, change their security levels, or assign them to a variety of programs. The above services also are offered to offenders who are serving their sentences, or the end of their sentences, in the community, specifically on probation or parole. Finally, correctional psychologists also offer consultative services relating to corrections staff, which may include screening and selection, employee assistance counseling, and mental health consultation with hostage negotiation or crisis support teams.

Like the legal psychologists discussed above, whose research can be applied to the court process, correctional psychologists also conduct research that has relevance to corrections. For example, what is the effect of imprisonment on special populations of offenders, such as the mentally disordered or the elderly? What are the effects of crowding and isolation on those who are not mentally disordered or elderly? Evaluation of rehabilitation programs and the development of offender classification systems are other professional activities uniquely associated with correctional psychology.

The foregoing sections indicate that the field of forensic psychology, as we define it broadly, provides ample opportunities for psychologists interested in interacting with some aspect of the law. The rapid expansion of the field has been accompanied by calls for specialized graduate programs, increased training, and guidelines and standards to achieve more standardization of practice. Some psychologists also support the certification of individuals, particularly clinicians, who specialize in forensic psychology.

EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

The growth in the field of forensic psychology is demonstrated by the recent development of several graduate programs (both at the master’s and doctoral level) throughout the world, particularly in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. There has also been considerable growth in *training* opportunities in forensic psychology at the predoctoral,

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internship, and postdoctoral levels (Otto & Heilbrun, 2002). In recent years, a discernable expansion has also occurred in the number of doctoral programs in clinical and counseling psychology that offer one or more courses or internships in forensic psychology. Many colleges and universities offer courses in forensic psychology, legal psychology, or psychology and law at the undergraduate level.

Most of the graduate programs in the United States either concentrate on clinical or counseling psychology as they relate to corrections, or social psychology as it relates to legal psychology or psychology and law. Some universities offer a combined JD and PhD as part of the academic package. Formal programs offering specific degrees in police psychology are virtually nonexistent in the United States and Canada, although there are several programs called “investigative psychology” in the United Kingdom. Canada leads the world in research in correctional psychology, and the curricula in Canadian forensic programs reflect this strong research or empirical attention. Students graduating from any of the worldwide graduate programs are expected to be able to analyze, organize, apply, and transmit existing knowledge in the field of forensic psychology, broadly defined.

Standards and Guidelines

Psychologists who specialize in forensic psychology are assisted in their work by standards or by guidelines that inform their professional practice. All psychologists who belong to the American Psychological Association—regardless of their specialization—are expected to comply with the standards of their profession as outlined by the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2003). A violation can result in a complaint to the APA’s Professional Conduct Board and a variety of sanctions that include expulsion from the association itself.

The APA or its subdivisions also put forth guidelines, which are suggestions for practice and—unlike the APA standards—are usually not accompanied by an enforcement mechanism. Guidelines are offered in a number of areas associated with research and clinical practice. A good example is the *Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists* (Committee on Ethical Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists, 1991). “The primary goal of the SGFP is to improve the quality of forensic psychological services by providing guidance to psychologists delivering services to courts, members of the bar, litigants, and persons housed in forensic, delinquency, or correctional facilities” (Otto & Heilbrun, 2002, p. 7). In addition, there are guidelines for the very specialized and complex custody evaluations conducted by psychologists (e.g., in divorce situations).

Another set of APA guidelines addresses issues of cultural diversity. In clinical and counseling practice throughout the United States, psychologists are finding that their clients are often from cultural backgrounds different from their own (Morris, 2001): “The majority of service providers are European Americans with middle-class values and orientation; a sizeable portion of the diverse client populations are African-Americans and under-served with mixed values and orientations” (p. 563). It is interesting to note that only half of the doctoral-level clinicians in one survey felt competent to provide services to African Americans despite their training exposure and diverse clientele (Morris, 2001; Allison, Crawford, Echemendia, Robinson, & Kemp, 1994). In addition, psychologists are encountering in their practices more persons of Latino, Asian, Native American, Persian, and Arabic heritage.

It is extremely crucial for practicing psychologists to be sensitive to the cultural values and norms held by persons to whom they are providing service, just as it is crucial to expand the

racial and ethnic representation within the profession itself. This may be especially important for forensic psychologists, who are often called upon to assist in making decisions that may drastically affect the life of someone they are evaluating or treating. The APA (1993) took notice of this important issue by publishing its *Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services to Ethnic, Linguistic, and Culturally Diverse Populations*. The *Guidelines* emphasize, for example, that psychologists “consider the validity of a given instrument or procedure and interpret resulting data, keeping in mind the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the person being assessed” (p. 46). In addition, the *Guidelines* further recommend that “Psychologists who do not possess knowledge or training about an ethnic group seek consultation with, and/or make referrals to, appropriate experts as necessary” (p. 46).

Psychologists working in correctional facilities are guided by a series of standards developed by the American Association for Correctional Psychology (Standards Committee, 2000), which has recently changed its name to the American Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology. (Note that, although they are called standards, they really are guidelines, since there is no enforcement mechanism associated with them. However, they do incorporate many of the principles outlined in the APA Standards.) The AACP Standards provide the minimum acceptable levels for psychological services offered to offenders, whether they are adults or juveniles; held in local, state, or federal facilities; or supervised in the community. They cover such topics as licensure, staffing requirements, confidentiality issues, duty to warn, professional development, informed consent, segregation, and a host of other areas relating to this work.

Licensing and Certification

The rapid development of the field of forensic psychology has been accompanied by calls for certification or accreditation of those who practice it. In any profession, certification or accreditation is usually a sign that an individual possesses the requisite knowledge and competence to qualify as an expert in the field. In forensic psychology, some movement toward certification can be observed, but primarily for those psychologists who provide services to the courts, such as by conducting pretrial evaluations or testifying as expert witnesses. It should be noted that all states and all Canadian provinces require a *license* to practice psychology (Tucillo, DeFilippis, Denny, & Dsurney, 2002), with one of the chief criteria—in almost all states—being possession of the doctoral degree. Thus, anyone who offers clinical services as a forensic psychologist must be licensed. However, someone who conducts research on matters related to the law (or even offers seminars) need not be licensed. Moreover, few states require specific certification as a forensic psychologist.

Although there are few formal doctoral programs in the discipline, a variety of national and state certification boards have emerged. For example, as noted earlier, the American Board of Professional Psychology has awarded diplomate status in forensic psychology since 1978. Diplomate certification in forensic psychology attests to the fact that an established organization of peers has examined and accepted the psychologist as being at the highest level of excellence in his or her field of forensic practice. The psychologist must be licensed in order to qualify for diplomate status. The American Board of Psychological Specialties (ABPS), which is affiliated with the American College and Board of Forensic Examiners, also issues certifications to forensic psychologists. Criteria used by the various boards and organizations to grant credentials or titles vary widely, though (Otto & Heilbrun, 2002).

Several authors (e.g., Grisso, 1996; Otto & Heilbrun, 2002) posit that if forensic psychology is to continue to grow and develop, some oversight of both the certification process and

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the practice is necessary. Currently, they note, a relatively small group of forensic specialists devote themselves full time to this field, while a much larger group of psychologists provide occasional forensic services or provide such services only within a circumscribed area, such as child custody evaluations. Otto and Heilbrun argue that forensic psychology, as a field, must acknowledge the fact that forensic practice is occurring at a variety of levels and for different reasons. The field must develop a plan to ensure that forensic practice overall is well-informed and competent. This plan is especially needed in the area of forensic testing and assessment.

Otto and Heilbrun (2002) and Donald Bersoff and his colleagues (1997) suggest that forensic psychology should recognize three levels of psychologists or clinicians who provide services in the field. First, there would be the “legally informed clinician” who has a basic education in law relevant to professional practice, “including information about confidentiality, privileged communication, and response to subpoenas for clinical records or personal notes” (Otto & Heilbrun, p. 15). Second, there would be the “proficient clinician” who has a mid-level expertise gained from academic coursework, professional training, and a supervised experience in forensic psychology. This professional’s knowledge should consist of relevant law, procedures, and ethics applicable to the kinds of forensic practice in which the individual engages. The third category would be the “specialist clinician” who would demonstrate the highest level of expertise obtained through formal training in forensic psychology at the graduate and postgraduate levels. Training in this category should include intensive and in-depth understanding of the relevant law and legal procedures as well as knowledge about a range of relevant psychological procedures and issues. Whether these three levels of expertise eventually become recognized remains to be seen.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As recently as 25 years ago, the term forensic psychology had barely been introduced into psychological or legal literature. Today, as we have seen, it is a commonly encountered term, but it still defies definition. While the consensus might seem to favor a narrow definition limiting it to clinical practice, the contributions of research psychologists may be undermined by such an approach. In addition, it is important to consider the context in which forensic psychology is practiced. Limiting forensic psychology to work with civil and criminal courts—which seems to be the consequence of a narrow definition—does not recognize well enough the law-related functions performed by psychologists working with law enforcement, corrections, or victims. Finally, the many contributions of psychologists who study the psychology of crime and delinquency deserve to be included in this field. As we noted in this chapter, recent concepts and research in developmental psychology and positive psychology, for example, have direct relevance to the interests of forensic psychologists.

The readings included in this book reflect the broader definition. While the majority deals with criminal justice, we must emphasize that forensic psychologists also do much of their work in the civil arena. Neuropsychological assessments, child custody evaluations, and mental status evaluations in discrimination suits are just a few examples. In fact, when we include the many ways in which forensic psychologists interact with juveniles under the “civil” rubric, the distribution of forensic psychology services between criminal and civil contexts may be equal.