

Book review

Forensic Psychology: The Basics (3rd Edition)

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The field of Forensic Psychology is wide ranging and overlap with other professional and academic disciplines ([Division of Forensic Psychology, 2021](#)). The focus on Psychology within the Criminal Justice System can be fascinating for students but also daunting to navigate. In addition, the recent increased focus in UK Forensic Psychology on non-prison settings and on trauma-informed approaches indicate a dynamic discipline that can sometimes be difficult for students to fully appreciate. As a long-standing educator of undergraduate Psychology, Criminology and Forensic Science students, I am familiar with some of these areas of confusion – including where “Psychology” stops and “Criminology” begins, what the overlaps are between Forensic Psychology and Clinical Psychology and in some cases how we can have a science of the “psychological and behavioural aspects” of criminal behaviour that does not involve the analysis of fingerprints or DNA! Fortunately, “Forensic Psychology: The Basics” is well equipped to help students navigate this complex and evolving field in an accessible and engaging way.

Summary and evaluation of the book

The book comprises eight chapters and begins not just with a definition and outline of the field but also of the role of the Forensic Psychologist in the UK. This immediately grounds the book in the UK context and the

importance of professional practice. This fits well to the needs of the main target audience, namely, students who not only need to make sense of the discipline but also to determine whether Forensic Psychology is for them. Chapter 1 also includes some historical discussion, but this is framed in terms of how it informs contemporary professional practice. This focus on current debates in the field is reflected in later chapters, with a focus on forensic mental health, psychological vulnerability and potential future challenges for the discipline. However, the book also emphasises the role of research in successful Forensic Psychology practice and provides a clear and accessible overview of key theoretical perspectives informing the discipline.

Chapter 2 focusses on theory but provides an interesting take on this – by framing evolutionary psychology (e.g. [Taylor and Workman, 2023](#)) as an overarching approach that integrates the other theoretical perspectives. The author acknowledges that this is not a universally accepted position, and it does provide a specific lens through which the discipline of Forensic Psychology is interpreted in later chapters. This leads to a slight under-emphasis of strengths and identity-based approaches, although these are discussed to some extent where appropriate (psychological assessments and interventions in Chapter 4), and an emphasis on the individual/clinical rather than the social aspects of Forensic Psychology later in the book. However, overall, the use of evolutionary psychology in this way is well justified and fits appropriately to

the focus of the later chapters – particularly the chapters on forensic mental health and psychological assessment.

The challenge for later chapters is to cover some very large topics in a very small wordcount. The emphasis is given to those topics which are of greater relevance to professional practice and associated research (forensic mental health, psychological assessment and intervention and psychological vulnerability), with one chapter being allocated to topics associated with “legal” rather than “criminological” psychology. This latter chapter prioritises topics where UK forensic psychologists could usefully contribute – namely, police investigations and psychological profiling. While this means that juror decision-making and sentencing is not addressed in depth, this makes sense given that jury selection in the UK is a random process with few permitted exclusions (www.gov.uk). However, this and other chapters manage to balance breadth of coverage with clarity of argument and writing suitable for the target audience of this book. This is achieved not only by using evolutionary psychology as an overarching approach but also by pulling common threads through these core chapters.

Each of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 includes key considerations of risk, policies, guidance and pathways to management or intervention and considerations of ethics and professional practice. For example, Chapter 3 focusses on the concept of dangerousness. This provides a focal point to consider topics as diverse as personality disorders, the mental health of ex-service personnel and motivations of those committing terrorist acts and a way to appreciate the importance of risk assessment and intervention discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 also introduces the Mental Health Act (2007). This

provides context for the discussion of psychological vulnerability in Chapter 5, connecting well to the discussion of fitness to plead and the risk of suicide and self-harm in prison. This approach of drawing common themes and ideas across chapters is applied when discussing research in Chapter 7 – with research methods contextualised with reference to practice in investigation, court and intervention settings – and dangerousness forming one of the future challenges discussed in Chapter 8.

Unique value and contribution of the book

This book is now in its third edition, and this is a testament to its utility as an introduction to this area for students. The target audience is not simply undergraduate students in Psychology but also those who might have some experience of psychological topics within their own practice (e.g. Criminology students with career plans for Probation, Law students). For this reason, it is important that the book is accurate, engaging and, above all, understandable for these audiences. “Forensic Psychology: The Basics” achieves this in the ways discussed above, by including those common threads across chapters and with the use of evolutionary psychology as an overarching approach. It also has chapter features that support understanding such as “case study” examples that give additional depth to the overall narrative. However, the unique value of this book comes in introducing the reader to the professional practice challenges that they would face and framing the introductory content in this context. This emphasis on personal relevance by encouraging identification with the content has been shown to be useful for learning and engagement (e.g. [Priniski *et al.*, 2018](#)). Employing it here provides a clear opportunity for

students to grasp the basics of Forensic Psychology.

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Further reading

Gov.uk (2026), "Jury service", available at: www.gov.uk/jury-service