

BOOKS ABOUT FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

Contemporary books about the relationships between crime and mental illness have been written by psychologists, psychiatrists, attorneys and journalists. Books have been written for a variety of audiences including a general audience as well as students, scholars and practitioners in psychology, psychiatry, law and criminal justice. Crime is an important topic in our society and interrelates with social problems like homelessness, prison overcrowding and victims' rights. Crime is a popular topic with the public, as evidenced by the prevalence of TV shows and movies about crime and by the sales of some of these books.

Books that are written for a general audience tend to focus on sensational crimes, celebrity criminals or single themes like the use of neuroscience in the courtroom. Examples include Canter (2010), Davis (2017), Ewing & McCann (2006), Samenow (2014) and Vinocur (2020).

Textbooks written for graduate or undergraduate courses in psychology and criminal justice cover a wide range of topics at an introductory level. Examples include Bartol & Bartol (2019), Green & Heilbrun (2019), Howott (2018), Huss (2013) and Shipley & Arrigo (2012).

Books written for scholars and practitioners in the field presume that the reader already has an advanced level of sophistication in the law and forensic psychology. These books fall into two categories:

(1) Large tomes with a wide scope. Examples include Melton, Petrila, Poythress & Slobogin (2017); Cutler & Zapf (2014); and Weiner & Otto (2013a, 2013b). The latter three books are edited and contain contributions by well-known authors, most of whom have university affiliations.

(2) Smaller books of narrower scope that are directed toward single topics like the assessment of risk, deception and specific types of crimes like filicide. Examples include Heilbrun (2009); McKee (2006); Meloy & Hoffmann (2021); Otto & Douglas (2010); Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier (2015); and Rogers & Bender (2018).

I have selected ten of these books for closer review.

Bartol, C. R. & Bartol, A. M. (2021). *Introduction to forensic psychology: Research and application. Sixth edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

736 pages.

BSR: 206,734

This undergraduate-level textbook states that it was written for a variety of college majors. We can assume that the authors meant majors in psychology and criminal justice. The content is organized around five themes: (1) police and investigative psychology; (2) psychology and law; (3) criminal psychology; (4) victimology and victim services; and (5) correctional psychology. The text covers both criminal and civil law and a

wide range of topics including child custody, guardianship, sexual harassment, inmate classification, career opportunities in corrections and recommendations for components of doctoral-level programs in forensic psychology. It contains a glossary, list of references and list of cases.

Canter, D. (2010). *Forensic psychology: A very short introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

145 pages.

BSR: 868,658.

This book is part of Oxford's series of "Very Short Introductions." In seven chapters it provides short and basic discussions that give the reader a sense of the breadth of the field without delving too deeply into any particular area. A wide range of topics are discussed including

- A theoretical discussion of what turns a person into a criminal.
- Examples of how psychology serves the courts, with discussions of insanity, false confessions and psychological testing.
- Working with offenders, including assessment and therapy in prisons.
- Working with the police, including assistance during investigations.

The book mentions famous forensic psychologists like Hugo Munsterberg and Gisli Gudjonson, frequently used tests like the MMPI and

WAIS, and the landmark insanity trial of *Regina v. M'Naghten*. The book includes a glossary and a short bibliography but no reference list and no list of cases. The focus is on the United Kingdom.

Cutler, B. L. and Zapf, P. A. (Eds.) (2014). *APA handbook of forensic psychology*. (In two volumes.) Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Volume 1: 594 pages.

Volume 2: 545 pages.

BSR: 3,016,098

This large, edited book in two volumes presents a comprehensive review of forensic psychology in 33 chapters. Most were written by authors with university affiliations. Matters of service to the courts include concepts of *mens rea*, insanity, risk assessment and competency to stand trial. The book addresses not only daily service to the courts but also long-range topics like the deterrent effects of capital punishment. The research reviews are designed for scholars and practitioners. The writing presumes a good level of familiarity with the field.

Ewing, C. P. and McCann, J. T. (2006). *Minds on trial: Great cases in law and psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

292 pages.

BSR: 136,266

In this collection of cases, Ewing and McCann have included only U.S. cases and have intentionally avoided using any of their own cases. Cases are reviewed in such areas as profiling and service to law enforcement in the investigation of crime. The cases chosen include such “celebrity” defendants as Patty Hearst, Woody Allen, Mike Tyson and Lee Harvey Oswald. The book has a great deal of entertainment value and was written for a general audience. Each chapter is written about a single defendant, with no subheadings, and the conceptual implications are fitted into the narratives.

Green, E. and Heilbrun, K. (2019). *Wrightsman’s psychology and the legal system. 9th edition.* Boston MA: Cengage Learning, Inc.

496 pages.

BSR: 224,346.

This wide-ranging textbook written by two university professors is designed as a textbook for criminal justice majors. Its many topics embrace both civil and criminal law. It covers such concepts as family law, child custody, psychological evaluation, jury selection, the validity of eyewitness testimony, roles of the forensic psychologist, expert testimony, the admissibility of expert testimony, and restorative justice. It discusses not only these discrete areas within forensic psychology but also large conceptual issues and “basic choices” in the interaction between psychology

and law. Chapters begin with a set of orienting questions that assist the student in structuring their reading. Case examples are presented in a series of boxes. These boxes contain questions designed to develop critical thinking skills. Readers not only gain a lot of information about forensic psychology but also develop their personal sense of values.

Meloy, J. R. & Hoffmann, J. (2021). *International handbook of threat assessment*. Second edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
760 pages.

BSR: 56,856

This large book about international threat assessment is directed to an audience of public safety professionals in all countries. It is up-to-date and state-of-the-art. Chapters include information on threats against high-profile potential victims.

Melton, G. B., Petrila, J., Poythress, N. G., Slobogin, C., Otto, R. K.,
Mossman, D. & Condie, L. O. (2017). *Psychological evaluations for the courts: A handbook for mental health professionals and lawyers*.
Fourth edition. New York: Guilford Press.

964 pages

BSR: 35,764

This large book can be found on the shelves of many forensic practitioners and it has been used as a textbook in graduate-level courses. The scope is very wide and it includes some topics that are not generally found in books about forensic psychology, including free will and an overview of the law. It spans both criminal and civil law and includes such topics as civil commitment and guardianship.

In their section on free will, Melton et al. mention the differences between psychologies that accept the existence of free will (e.g., existentialism) and those that do not (e.g., psychoanalysis, behaviorism).

Samenow, S. (2014). *Inside the criminal mind*. New York: Crown Publishing.

369 pages.

BSR: 26,825

This popular book is directed to a mass audience. It is iconoclastic in tone, rejecting traditional sociological and psychological theories about the origins of crime. According to Samenow, every infant is born with a certain temperament, and there is a temperament that leads to criminal behavior. Criminals are “self-centered, controlling, dishonest, irresponsible, and callous” (p. 5-6). They are pleasure-seeking and narcissistic. They delight in taking advantage of others. They want recognition and glory without having to do the hard work that is required to get them. Crime is a matter

of personal responsibility. Social factors like poverty, parenting styles and gangs are unimportant in the development of criminal behavior. It is not the case that rejecting parents create criminal children. Rather, parents reject children who have criminal tendencies. Case material is taken from Samenow's own counseling practice.

Shipley, S. L. & Arrigo, B. A. (2012). *Introduction to forensic psychology: Court, law enforcement and correctional practices. Third edition.* San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

720 pages.

BSR: 1,715,658.

This undergraduate textbook is a straightforward exposition of the many dimensions of forensic psychology. The wide range of topics includes insanity, competency to stand trial and jury selection. The methods that are employed by psychologists in performing these evaluations are explained. Case examples are given. The literature is reviewed. Readers are exposed to a lot of valuable information.

Vinocour, S. (2020). *Nobody's child: A tragedy, a trial, and a history of the insanity defense.* New York: Norton.

338 pages.

BSR: 175,928.

This author has been both an attorney and a forensic psychologist. The book focuses on her psychological evaluation of a Rochester, NY, woman who was convicted of murder in the second degree and was sentenced to 25 years to life in the death of her 3-year-old grandson. The trial is portrayed as a miscarriage of justice and the product of an inept public defender.

The book is part memoir and is confessional in tone. Ms. Vinocour shares information about the behavioral pathology in her own family and her personal history of child abuse.

Her first reaction to the case is "Fry the bitch!" (p. 15) and, "The woman could go to hell as far as I was concerned." (p. 16)

The "history of the insanity defense" announced in the title is tucked into the narrative in short segments as it becomes relevant to the trial. The chapters are numbered and not named, and there are no subheadings to help the reader follow the shifting contexts.

The book is intended for a mass audience and there is no list of references or list of cases. Notes on each chapter are gathered at the very end. Some of these notes are from scholarly texts but many are from the internet, bloggers and the popular press.

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- McKee, G. R. (2006). *Why mothers kill: A forensic psychologist's casebook*. New York: Oxford.
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- Vinocour, S. (2020). *Nobody's child: A tragedy, a trial, and a history of the insanity defense.* New York: Norton.
- Weiner, I. B. & Otto, R. K. (Eds.) (2013a). *The handbook of forensic psychology. Fourth edition.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Weiner, I. B. & Otto, R. K. (Eds). (2013b). *The Handbook of psychology*.
Volume 11: Forensic psychology. Second edition. Hoboken, NJ:
Wiley.