

Book Review:

The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Forensic Neuroscience

Edited by Anthony R. Beech, Adam J. Carter, Ruth E. Mann and Pia Rotshtein

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'The rise of so-called 'neurolaw' cases is becoming more pressing in that forensic practitioners are grappling with understanding the impact neuroscience is having upon the forensic field' both for legal proceedings and rehabilitation (p.5). The premise and timely need for a handbook of forensic neuroscience is very aptly set with this introduction.

The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Forensic Neuroscience (henceforth referred to as 'the handbook') opens with the claim that an individual's cognitions, genetics and environmental factors together underline their neurobiological makeup and guide pro/antisocial behaviour. Recent research vehemently supports the idea that offending aetiology and predisposition relies heavily on the interaction of nature and nurture. Therefore, the first volume of the handbook (both are sold together) sets out to consolidate existing peer-reviewed research in the field of neuroscience relating to different aspects of forensic relevance. It is crucial to note that the book is very self-aware in its extent and content alike. The

authors make clear that neuroscience research is not at a level where they can 'tell a parole board to release someone based on a brain scan' but not too far from it either (p.6).

The book is structured very well in three parts — introduction, general neuroscience research and neurobiology of offending — with standalone chapters discussing a wide variety of topics ranging from aggressive behaviour to offending with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). It is important to talk about the structure of the book because it is an immense strength of this volume. It could, however, use an appendix at the end of Volume 1 to allow for quick-referencing and easy lookup(s). (It is situated at the end of Volume 2).

You don't need to have prior knowledge of the very formidable names such as 'anterior insular cortex' or the 'ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC)' to know how they interact with empathy or psychopathology. Each chapter starts with a basic explanation of neuroscience and then relates it to the construct being talked about in a very accessible language. This is especially helpful for practitioners trying to learn more about a specific deficit, or looking for help with a particular offending behaviour. Students and researchers alike have so much to look forward to and learn.

The volume successfully combines the various authors' academic prowess and the years of practitioner and research experience that the accomplished editors bring with them. This means that the book charts out the origins of neuroscience in forensic settings right from the

phrenology days to good old Phineas Gage and the 'social brain'. For me, the winning moment for this section is when they critically examine all the contributions made by researchers within the bigger context of social impact. For example, when talking about Kraepelin's 'influential' work and him being the father of modern psychiatry, the authors clearly recognise his role in the support for eugenics and racial cleansing. It is of immense importance to situate most, if not all, research we rely on in a retrospective lens to gauge the harm they may have caused to marginalised communities, and use it accordingly. Therefore, as a person of colour, I extend my gratitude to the authors for doing this throughout this book.

The book progresses onto key concepts of forensic neuroscience in Part II and looks at aggression, sexual behaviour, reward sensitivity, emotion regulation, empathy and deception. All of these ideas are covered in great detail with an impressive number of approaches, for example, social factors, neuroimaging research, genetics and personality trait interactions. Chapters include advanced neuroimaging data to show high-quality brain scans or reader-friendly diagrams highlighting the regions of interest, accompanied with very clear and comprehensive captions. Each chapter comes with a handy Key Points box at the start, followed by 'Terminology Explained' which is a very helpful tool for reference. In addition, the text is substantiated with extra and related information in different 'Boxes' which are very concisely

written. Furthermore, if you want a swift snapshot of the chapter or want to know more than what was listed in the Key Points, each chapter has an insightful 'Conclusions' section along with 'Implications for Forensic Applications'. This can easily become your quick go-to guide bridging all the research discussed in each chapter along with evidence-based practice suggestions and future directions.

The chapter on social neuroscience of empathy made some very insightful comments about distinguishing empathy from morality. It was noted that empathy can imply engagement in pro-social behaviours and moral decision-making, while being influenced by 'interpersonal relationships and group membership' (p.162). They also illustrated that despite empathy playing a key role in care-based morality development, 'by no means is morality reducible to empathy and emotion sensitivity' (p.161). All other chapters in Part II follow similar lines of interesting research and approachable writing while discussing a plethora of concepts.

Part III of this volume deals with the 'Neurobiology of Offending' and delves deeper into the underpinnings of psychopathology, Antisocial Personality Disorder, offenders with ASD, violent and sexual offending, brain injury, adolescent offending and alcohol-related aggression. These chapters discuss risk factors, possible predispositions to higher chances of offending, rehabilitation needs and concept-specific in-depth research. The claims made are backed by extensive evidence and show a clear humanitarian approach in dealing with vulnerable groups, such as at-risk youth or individuals with ASD.

The authors make important connections about comorbidities in

a clinical-forensic population and discuss how the interactions of factors such as earlier victimisation, poverty, poor parenting and questionable ability to form intent (in the case of ASD) might lead to debunking the monolith of the 'criminal offender'. One of the highlights in this section was a clear statement that should act as a word of caution for people designing treatment programmes for sexual and violent offending — when you efficiently treat a socially unacceptable behaviour, you also reduce the potency of its socially acceptable counterpart. Specifically, in the case of pharmacological interventions for forensically relevant sexual behaviours, they can alter testosterone to inactive levels and even change serotonin activity. It is important then to weigh out the social benefit costs of these treatments with the price being paid by the individual in focus.

In conclusion, this first volume of the handbook imparts knowledge on various core aspects of forensic neuroscience in clear and comprehensive writing styles which are successful in engaging both the layperson reader and specialised researcher. I strongly recommend it as a well-researched and thorough volume and cannot wait to read and review Volume 2. This handbook is, therefore, an essential text for anyone looking to know the current status of forensic research at the basic, intermediate and advanced level across multiple forensic settings. Something for everyone!

Aarohi Khare, Doctoral Researcher, University of Kent

Classic Book Review

The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil

By Phillip Zimbardo

Publisher: Rider books (2007)

ISBN: 978-1-84-604103-7

(paperback)

Price: £12.99 (paperback)

Having reviewed over twenty books for the Prison Service Journal, it is without doubt, that that this classic by Phillip Zimbardo was the book I have most eagerly anticipated reading. It allowed me to hark back to my undergraduate days as a Psychology student, where the Stanford Prison Experiment was a staple reference in so many Social Psychology essays. However, my research for essays at the time never delved in to the minutiae of what actually went on over those six fateful days in the summer of 1971. In fact, apart from a few press stories and the occasional research paper the full account has never been published before. However, in this book, Zimbardo has recorded what happened to an excruciating level of detail, and I use that adjective because of the difficult reading it makes to get through those eight chapters that cover less than a week of almost immediate and escalating abuse of power. Indeed, Zimbardo explains in the preface that he found it 'emotionally draining' reviewing the videotapes and other records that helped him construct these chapters in particular.

Zimbardo grew up in a poor Sicilian family in 1930s New York where his prejudicial treatment at the hands of authority figures and experience of crime, elicited an inquisitiveness into other people's behaviour. Having excelled in academia, he accepted a position as Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, where with a grant from the US Office of naval research, he commenced the