

Correlation between Clinical and Forensic Psychology

Forensic science, or criminalistics, is a multidisciplinary approach utilizing the different branches of science coming together in the interest of solving complex cases as it pertains to matters of law. For the last twenty years, television shows have dramatized and sensationalized forensics, the role it plays in the legal system is irrefutable. Of those disciplines, Psychology, and the duty of analyzing human behavior, is often one misunderstood. Both forensic and clinical psychologists have an interest in investigating and analyzing human behavior and the catalysts of such behavior, however the objectives, goals, and purposes each play in evaluating and diagnosing these behaviors are vitally distinct.

The most obvious difference in clinical psychology and forensic psychology is the type of relationship and agency, or who the psychologist represents or works for. One of the biggest key differences is the matter of the law. In clinical psychology, it is a doctor-patient relationship, and the fiduciary duty is to the patient, and the patient's welfare, or best interests. It is used to help individuals overcome personal obstacles and reach a healthy level of mental stability. Alternatively, in forensic psychology, it is an evaluator-evaluated relationship, and the fiduciary duty is to the court, attorney, or any other retaining agency.

Another distinct difference in clinical psychology and forensic psychology is the nature and purpose of the relationship. For the clinical psychologist it is to assess, diagnose, and potentially treat or help a member of the general public who is seeking a mental health diagnosis. To aid in the improvement of wellbeing, relieve suffering, and achieve therapeutic goals. With the help of clinical psychologists, individuals can receive help and overcome their challenges, allowing these individuals to live full, long, and healthy lives. For the forensic psychologist, it is to fact find, assess, and apply legal criteria to form a legal diagnosis, and answer a legal question, and then inform the court, judge, or jury in the form of depositions, testimony, or a verbal and or written report. When it comes to the legal side of psychology, it is

extremely important to have these evaluations as it could make or break a case. Many individuals in a serious and intense court case have been able to use a forensic psychologist to determine they are mentally not capable of standing trial.

As to the ethical considerations and Standards of care of clinical psychologists and forensic psychologist, according to The American Psychological Association (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2010a, hereinafter referred to as the Ethics Code) establish mandatory standards of practice for clinical psychologists, while there are only specialty guidelines for forensic psychology. Furthermore, it seems “due to the absence of any regulatory organization, forensic science has no official recognition or registration that should provide certain rights and responsibilities to forensic scientists and that the only possible restraint upon professional misconduct of a forensic scientist is through membership of such a craft organization.”

Another difference between the two types of professionals is going to be the way they perform their work. For clinical psychologists, they can take a natural empathetic, accepting, and supportive role while helping their clients. Their whole goal is to find the root of their clients' issues and create beneficial ways to resolve their issues and create a healthy environment and mental stability. One of the key elements is a clinical psychologist is able to provide their own opinions and share ways to help. Clinical psychologists are also only recommended for personal help. No individual is required to collaborate with a clinical psychologist. It is a completely different role when it comes to forensic psychologists. When a forensic psychologist is working with an individual, they have to be objective, or neutral. They cannot show emotion, or bias while seeking or attaining the evidence or information. The intent or purpose of Forensic psychology is not for solutions. It is used to help identify the truth for legal purposes. Forensic pathologists are not looking for a solution and cannot give private opinions or help search for solutions. While the forensic psychologist is performing their work, they are expected to simply

evaluate and try to determine mental stability for criminal cases. There are so many different situations and scenarios as to why you would need a forensic psychologist: threat assessments at schools, child custody cases, counseling sessions for victims, and providing intervention and treatment programs for adult and juvenile offenders. Most of the time, individuals do not have an option when it comes to collaborating with a forensic psychologist.

There are many varied factors that go into determining whether a person is mentally competent or their intentions when it comes to forensic psychology. One of the largest factors is determining if the individual that has committed a crime has what is considered a “guilty mind” and simply knew what they were doing was wrong, or if the mental connection was not there to help the individual realize if their actions were wrong or not. It is also stated that there is not a psychological definition of insanity, there is only a legal definition. Some individuals can use the claim of legal insanity to justify their actions and help in a legal case. Forensic psychology is not strictly used for individuals on trial, it is also helpful for the victims of these crimes. It helps the courts get a better sense of what the victim went through. A huge thing that a forensic psychologist must examine and define is what the individual was thinking at the time that the crime took place, not what the individual is thinking at the time of questioning, while clinical psychologists are looking at information for the bigger picture, at all mental aspects of their client.

Given the circumstances, the objectives, goals, and purposes that play in evaluating and diagnosing behaviors in clinical psychology and forensic psychology, are vitally distinct based on the relationship and agency, the purpose and nature of the relationship, and the ethical considerations and Standards of care. Although the basis of the work is similar, it also has many differences; one of the most important is how the law takes place.

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