Forensic Psychology Essay, Research Paper

Part I: The Job

Forensic Psychology is the application of the science and profession of psychology to questions and issues relating to law and the legal system. The word “forensic” comes from the Latin word “forensis,” meaning “of the forum,” where the law courts of ancient Rome were held. Today forensic refers to the application of scientific principles and practices to the adversary process where specially knowledgeable scientists play a role.

There are several types of Forensic Psychologists although most fall into three different categories, criminal investigation, courtroom experts, and/or correctional psychiatrists. I decided to focus on the criminal aspect since it interests me the most.

Forensic Psychologists can play a number of key roles in a criminal investigation. Immediately following a crime a forensic psychologist may be asked to act as a criminal profiler. Criminal profiling involves the psychologist using their understanding of human behavior, motivation, and pathology to create a psychological profile of an offender. The profiles can be surprisingly accurate. From observations of the crime scene one can infer the behavioral characteristics of the individual who created it. To a profiler everyone is a slave to his or her psychological makeup. In turn, profilers use their knowledge of the typical offender to predict not only how the investigators can expect the offender to behave in the future, but also what their physical appearance will likely be. While profiling may seem very exciting, few psychologists are ever involved in this field. There fortunately are not a lot of serial offenders out there. Unfortunately, there are even fewer places where one can obtain profiler training.

Part II: Education and Employment

As mentioned above there are very few psychologists involved in the field. In turn there are very few schools which offer courses in this area. Criminal Forensic Psychologists generally hold graduate degrees although it is not unheard of to posses only an undergraduate degree.

Florida State University offers a graduate Criminal Forensic Psychology degree and recommends a series of courses both in Psychology and other criminal and social sciences. It takes the average student four years to complete the undergraduate program and an additional two years to complete graduate studies.

Undergraduate / Graduate Courses

?Social Psychology

?Abnormal Psychology & Personality Psychology

?Child Psychology & Developmental Psychology

?Industrial Psychology

?Behavior & Drugs.

?Psychotherapy

?Motivation

?Introduction to Criminal Law

?Advanced Criminal Law

?Criminology

?Forensic Anthropology

Since there are not many serial offenders, Forensic Psychologists specializing in criminal cases have the best chance of finding work in highly populated urban areas or with one of many federal agencies including the DEA, ATF, and FBI. I enjoy traveling therefore I would prefer working with a federal agency which would require even more training. After a long and rigorous application process Federal Agents receive six months to a year of basic training. Only then are agents assigned to a specific federal agency.

Federal Agents make anywhere between $32,000 and $100,000 a year, based on their position and seniority. Federal Agents with a background in Forensic Psychology generally start at around $40,000 and gradually move up from their eventually ending at the higher end of the pay spectrum. Federal Agents are forced to retire at 55.