

Research Assessment 2

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Gutheil, Thomas G. "The History of Forensic Psychiatry." *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 33.2 (2005): 1-4. Print.

Analysis:

To thoroughly understand how and why my chosen field of Forensic Psychiatry works the way it does, I decided to investigate its history. Learning the history of the career can help me understand how the field came to be and why certain standards exist in Forensic Psychiatry.

For centuries, people have claimed and had actual mental illnesses and even then there were people who determined whether or not they were actually sick. Although, forensic psychiatrists and psychologists did not exist back then nor to the same extent, the basis of the field has always existed. One example of an interesting historical legend of retired Roman General Cincinnatus. A legend states that Cincinnatus saw a group of men coming from Rome and knew that they were coming to request him to lead an army. To escape involvement in the plan, he decided to fake mental illness by taking his plow and sowing salt as if it were seed. Unfortunately for the retired general, the delegation suspected his performance and placed Cincinnatus's infant grandchild in the path of the plow to test him. When he stopped plowing, they revealed his terribly hidden evasion plan. As can be seen, even in the classical era, the stem of why forensic psychologists and psychiatrists are needed still existed. Of course today we have professionals who use less direct and less controversial methods to diagnose individuals.

The first legitimate appearance of psychiatric witnesses came with the turn of the nineteenth century. Before that, the law did not see the usefulness of having psychiatric testimony, since judges set the guidelines anyways. After however, medical and psychiatric witness testimonies became increasingly valuable in the pursuit of justice, truth and objectivity. Since the nineteenth century, minor progressions in developing the field were made until the significant publishment of the paper the

Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity by Isaac Ray in 1838. The paper is considered a international classic in the field of Forensic Psychiatry. It is astonishing to me that research papers were being published as far back as the 1800s. To know that his paper influenced and guided my chosen career field interests me greatly and I will undoubtedly read the paper in the near future.

Another significant time for forensic psychiatry occurred in the 1850s and 60s when mental illness was a front and center topic at many debates. The main argument of these debates was whether or not mental illness could occur without actual physical damage. An example given in the journal to illustrate this argument was whether alcoholism was a moral issue or an actual disease. In that time period it was a bitter argument between psychologists and neurologists. Personally, I would believe that alcoholism would be a combination of the two. It first starts with conscious decisions to drink alcohol

but later transforms into a physical dependence. The body become so used to it that it becomes to constantly crave it and terrible hangovers would cause individuals to drink more alcohol to prevent them. That is why I believe Psychiatry covers all bases when treating individuals with mental illnesses, because although some of it is purely psychological the other half can be caused because of chemical imbalances and medical related issues. Relating to that, a major point made by the article was the question of whether certain things were illnesses of the brain or illnesses of the mind was a important question that always needs to be answered when evaluating a patient.

Overall, when looking into the past many of the issues, questions and goals of Forensic Psychiatry remain the same. For instance, similar psychiatric debates still exist, truth and justice are still priorities, the issues of malingering (the faking of mental illnesses) is always front and center and public criticisms are almost identical. While this could be seen as concerning, I believe that old issues are being actively being solved. Although the biggest problems may be being solved, progress is being made. Certain therapies and medications are working very well and even better forensic psychiatrists are being brought in to evaluate prosecuted individuals. Not only do forensic psychiatrist identify those who have legitimate claim to pleading not guilty by reason of insanity but they also help identify those who are making false claims.