Keynote address

Daniel Murrie, PhD

How reliable and objective are forensic psychological evaluations?

The justice system often relies on expertise from psychologists. But how reliable are expert conclusions about an offender’s competence, sanity, or violence risk? Can forensic psychologists really offer objective opinions in an adversarial legal system?

Dr. Murrie’s lecture summarises a programme of research addressing the reliability, accuracy, and objectivity of forensic evaluations. Much of this emerging research reveals that evaluators differ in important ways, and that biases are deeply ingrained in ways that influence expert conclusions – even on ostensibly objective forensic tests and evaluations. However, this research programme documenting problems in forensic psychology also serves as a step towards improving the practice of forensic psychology. Thus, the lecture explores not only problems, but potential solutions, considering lessons from the broader forensic science disciplines.

Daniel Murrie, PhD serves as Director of Psychology at the Institute of Law, Psychiatry and Public Policy (ILPPP), a Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, and an instructor in the UVA School of Law.

Dr. Murrie’s teaching duties at the ILPPP involve directing the UVA postdoctoral fellowship in forensic psychology, and supervising other psychiatry and psychology trainees at ILPPP. He oversees the state-wide training program—a unique state/academic partnership—for psychologists and psychiatrists learning to perform court-ordered forensic evaluations.

As a forensic psychologist, Dr. Murrie performs a variety of criminal and civil forensic evaluations of juveniles and adults, both within the ILPPP’s forensic clinic and in a private practice. These include evaluations addressing adjudicative competence, legal sanity, capital sentencing, sexual offender risk assessment, violence risk assessment, and psychological injury. He also provides threat assessment and related consultations for universities and businesses.

As a researcher, Dr. Murrie has co-authored 50 peer-reviewed scientific publications, three books, and numerous book chapters, all addressing forms of forensic mental health evaluation. His programmatic research addresses reliability and bias in forensic psychological evaluations. Recently, this work has expanded to include collaboration with the forensic science community to consider bias and reliability in other forensic disciplines as well.

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