



Portrayal of Forensic Psychiatrists in Crime Fiction: Analyzing Representations, Their (Fictional) Ethical Issues, and Implications

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Abstract. This essay explores the challenges of creating characters in crime fiction that are forensic psychiatrists. Forensic psychiatrists work at the interface of mental health and criminal law, and appropriate representations can both lend authenticity to crime fiction as well as potentially help to destigmatize mental illness.

From Hannibal Lecter to Professor Diomedes, forensic psychiatrist characters play important roles in crime fiction. This article will describe various representations of forensic psychiatrists in crime fiction and the conflation of this role with that of forensic psychologists, criminologists, and psychoanalysts. Once it is ascertained that a character is indeed a forensic psychiatrist, their work-related actions can be analyzed and a determination made as to whether their behavior comports with ethical requirements. Excepting cannibalism and pedophilic acts, fictional forensic psychiatrists still engage in ethical conundrums galore, against which there is guidance in real life. These range from acting as hired guns in testifying and interrogation of suspects with police to adopting their evaluatee.

After a review of ethical standards in the field of forensic psychiatry and examples of these fictional violations, the article will discuss their relevance to real-world perceptions and describe potential downstream effects from these portrayals, including to those who pursue mental health defenses in court. Thus, finally, the author, who is a forensic psychiatrist and writer, will make the case that ethics of crime fiction writing should entail corrective portrayals of forensic psychiatry's fictional counterparts.

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