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The impact of specialist training on professional identity, organisational membership, organisational commitment, and stress in correctional psychologists

Ashlee Curtis
(Student at School of Psychology, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia)

Andrew Day
(Professor in Clinical and Forensic Psychology, School of Psychology, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia)

Abstract:

Purpose
– Recent years have seen some significant changes to the psychology profession in Australia that have prompted debate about the role of specialist areas of practice. This study aims to investigate those attitudes and values that might be associated with one particular specialism, that of forensic psychology.

Design/methodology/approach
– The influence of specialist forensic training on the professional identity of 30 correctional psychologists was examined in relation to their self-reported level of stress, organisational membership, and organisational commitment.

Findings
– The results suggest that exposure to specialist training in forensic psychology may not be directly associated with organisational commitment, membership or stress, although some differences between forensic psychologists and those who held other professional practice qualifications were observed.

Research limitations/implications
– The main limitations of the study include the small sample size and the use of a scale that has not been well-validated. Replication and extension of the study is required.

Practical implications
– The study has implications for the recruitment and retention of psychologists in correctional settings and for the development of professional identity in post-graduate training programmes.

Originality/value
– This study is the first to explore the differences in professional identity, organisational commitment, organisational membership and stress in a sample of psychologists who practice in the correctional setting.
Professional psychology in Australia has experienced some significant changes in recent years. Not only has a system of national registration become mandatory for all allied health professionals, but specialist titles for some areas of psychological practice (clinical, forensic, organisational, and health) have been introduced (Psychology Board of Australia, 2011). Such changes, in addition to new Federal Government arrangements for the funding of clinical psychology sessions (Department of Health and Aging, 2011), have prompted renewed debate about a range of different professional practice issues, including the distinctiveness of different specialties within professional psychology, the competencies that are required to practice in a specific area, and the need for specialist post-graduate training pathways.

One defined area of specialism is that of forensic psychology. According to the Australian Psychological Society (APS, 2010) forensic psychology is the application of psychological theory, concepts and skills to the legal and justice system and to people who work in, participate in, or are influenced by it. Forensic psychological practice is thus concerned with the provision of expert psychological evidence in courts (and other tribunals), consulting to the legal and justice system, as well as the provision of assessment and intervention services to those in custody. Forensic psychology is a relatively small disciplinary area in Australia, with only five accredited training programmes available nationally, in comparison to the 60 or so clinical psychology programmes that are offered (Australia Psychology Accreditation Council, 2011). The aim of this study is to examine the idea that the type of specialist training received will influence how psychologists who practice in a forensic setting view both themselves and the organisations in which they work. Using a sample of registered psychologists who work (or have worked) in prison settings, it is hypothesised that those psychologists who have received specialist training in forensic psychology will be more likely to subscribe to attitudes that are consistent with those of the criminal justice system and will feel a stronger sense of organisational identity than those who have completed other training pathways. Such questions are of particular interest given current debates about the value of specialist training pathways in professional psychology (Day and Tytler, 2011), as well as the demand from employers to recruit graduates with competencies that are well matched to their area of business.

In many ways the aims of this study can be understood in terms of an attempt to describe the professional identity of the forensic psychologist who works in the prison setting. Professional identity has been defined as the values and beliefs of the professional that guide their thinking, actions, and interactions with the client (Fagermoen, 1997). It has been shown to be associated with a range of factors including age, status, level of education, and field of trade (Puurula and Lofstrom, 2003). For example, it has been shown that younger employees are generally less committed to their organisation than older employees.

A “forensic” professional identity can be understood as the values and beliefs that guide forensic practice. It has some overlap with the term “forensic mindset” which has been used to describe how the forensic practitioner is expected to have an over-riding obligation to the court and community rather than to an individual client (APS, 2010), perhaps reflecting support for the broader values of the criminal justice system. It has been suggested that if an individual’s values are consistent with those of the organisation and system in which he or she works, then his or her level of organisational commitment is likely to be higher (Amos and Weathington, 2008; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Posner, 2010).

Organisational commitment is important in the prison setting, not only because of its association with employee recruitment and retention, but also because it is correlated with both job satisfaction and employee well-being (Al-Hussami, 2009; Begley and Czajka, 1993; Meyer and Allen, 1997; Siu, 2002). It can be described as the individual’s identification with the organisation in which he or she works and can be understood in relation to three distinctive components: affective commitment, or the individual’s emotional attachment to the organisation; normative commitment, or the employee’s feeling obliged to stay with the organisation; and continuance commitment, or the commitment to stay with an organisation to avoid the costs of leaving (Puurula and Lofstrom, 2003).
This study aims to investigate the professional identity of those psychologists who work in, or have worked in, prison settings. There have been no previous attempts to operationalise the construct of professional forensic identity as it applies to correctional psychologists, or to consider how this might relate to levels of organisational commitment. Specifically, the study aims to establish whether psychologists with specialist forensic qualifications have a stronger sense of forensic identity, hold more punitive attitudes towards offenders, and have a stronger sense of organisational membership and commitment than those psychologists who do not hold specialist qualifications. Furthermore, if the level of value-congruence with the organisation in which they work is higher, it would seem plausible to expect forensically trained psychologists to be more satisfied with their job, be more productive, experience lower levels of workplace stress, and have less intention to leave to organisation. It is hypothesised that:

H1. Psychologists who hold specialist forensic qualifications will possess a stronger sense of forensic identity than those who hold qualifications in other specialisms.

H2. Those with specialist forensic qualifications who work in prison settings will have a higher level of organisational membership and a stronger commitment towards the goals of the prison.

H3. A stronger sense of forensic identity will be related to higher levels of organisational membership and organisational commitment.

H4. Those correctional psychologists with forensic qualifications will experience lower levels of stress than those without forensic qualifications.

Method
Ethical clearance was obtained at the beginning of the study from the Deakin University through the Faculty of Health Human Ethics Advisory Group, to recruit participants at professional development events, including a national forensic psychology conference. Potential participants were provided with a plain language statement and a questionnaire, which they were asked to complete and return in a reply paid envelope. No identifying data was obtained from participants.

Participants
30 practising Australian psychologists who had worked in Australian prisons voluntarily participated in the study. Participants had a mean age of 39.20 (SD = 9.03), 20 were female and ten were male. Half of the sample (15) were trained as forensic psychologists (15 had qualifications in other areas of psychology). Of those who were forensically trained, 11 had experience working in prison settings, compared with six of those who held other psychology qualifications (Table I). The average length of employment for those who worked in prisons was 7.47 years (SD = 6.29).

Measures
The questionnaire comprised the following scales.

Forensic identity scale (FIS). This scale was developed specifically for use in this study to measure the construct of forensic identity. A 13-item scale was designed to measure the extent to which the respondent identifies with the criminal justice system, understands their professional role in relation to community safety, and subscribes to the belief that motivation to change is not a precondition for change for offenders. For example, the item ‘‘The severity of someone’s offence does not affect how I work with them’’ was included to assess the extent to which services provided were determined by the offending history of the client (as would be indicated in the correctional model). Each item was rated using a five-point Likert-type scale, with a rating of 1 indicating that the respondent ‘‘strongly disagreed’’ with the statement, and 5 that he or she ‘‘strongly agreed’’. Initial examination of the data suggested that the 13-item scale had poor reliability (a = 0.65), and as such items with an item/total correlation of 0.25 were deleted in accordance with the recommendations of Field (2005). This resulted in a nine item scale, with an acceptable level of reliability (0.72) (the Appendix).
Attitude to punishment scale (APS; Furnham and Alison, 1994). The APS is a 19-item scale which purports to measure attitudes regarding the use of punishment for offenders. Participants are invited to rate their attitude on a seven-point Likert-type scale (with 1 being ‘‘strongly agree’’ and 7 being ‘‘strongly disagree’’). Items are divided into two subscales; anti-punishment and pro-punishment. Those who score highly on the pro-punishment scale are likely to be more supportive of harsh punishment of offenders. Those who score highly on the anti-punishment scale are more lenient. A total punitiveness score can be obtained by reverse coding the anti-punishment items and adding the score to the pro-punishment items. The higher the total score, the more generalised the respondents pro-punishment attitude is. Cronbach’s a for this scale in the current study was 0.77.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forensic training</th>
<th>Clinical training</th>
<th>Clinical and forensic training</th>
<th>Other psychological training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The psychological sense of organisational membership scale (PSOM; Cockshaw and Shochet, 2007). The PSOM was developed by Cockshaw and Shochet (2007) who adapted it from Goodenew’s Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (1993). Items in the PSOM focus on being liked, accepted, feeling included, respected and valued by workmates or managers/supervisors and aim to measure the extent of belonging the individual feels to the organisation. The PSOM consists of 18 questions, which are separated into two subscales; belonging and rejection. A sample question for the belonging subscale is “I feel like a real part of my organisation” and a sample question of rejection is “it’s hard for people like me to be accepted here”. A five-point Likert-type scale is used to record responses with a rating of 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree”.

Organisational commitment scale (OCS; Allen and Meyer, 1990). The OCS consists of 24 items relating to three components; affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. The eight-item affective commitment scale is used to determine the participant’s level of emotional attachment to an organisation. A sample question is “I really feel as if this organisation’s problems are my own”. The eight-item continuance commitment scale was used to measure the extent to which an individual remains with an organisation due to the perceived costs of leaving (“I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organisation”). The eight-item normative commitment scale was used to measure how obligated the participant feels to remain with the organisation (“If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organisation”). All responses were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree). Cronbach’s a for the measure in this study was 0.82.

Working environment scale 10 (WES-10; Friis 1981, adapted from Rossberg et al., 2004). The WES-10 was adapted for use in this study to measure how the participants felt about working in the prison environment. It consists of ten items, scored across four subscales; self-realisation, nervousness, conflict, and workload (an example of an item assessing Self-realisation is “does what you do in a prison help you to have more confidence in yourself?”). The workload and conflict subscales focus on the work environment, the Self-realisation subscale focuses on personal growth, support and achievement value and the Nervousness subscale aims to measure how nervous or tense the staff members feel in their organisation (Rossberg et al., 2004).

After completion of the quantitative scales, participants were provided with three open-ended questions to complete. These were designed to provide respondents with the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the construct “forensic identity”. The questions were as follows: “what are the values and beliefs that guide your thinking, actions, and interaction with offenders?”; “how are these different or distinctive from those generally held by those who work in other areas of professional psychology”; and “why do people choose a career in forensic psychology”. 
Results

Type of qualification and forensic identity
In order to test the H1 that those who held specialist forensic qualifications would possess a stronger sense of forensic identity than those with qualifications in other specialisms, the two groups were compared using an independent samples t-test. This showed that although those with forensic qualifications scored higher on the measure of forensic identity (M = 29.55, SD = 6.58) than those without forensic qualifications (M = 28.32, SD = 4.59), the difference was not statistically significant t(28) = 2.060, p = 0.05, and had a small effect size of 0.23 (Cohen, 1988) (Table II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forensically trained</th>
<th>Other trained</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>d-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forensic identity</td>
<td>29.55</td>
<td>28.32</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitiveness</td>
<td>63.00</td>
<td>60.53</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro punishment</td>
<td>56.19</td>
<td>57.63</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti punishment</td>
<td>31.18</td>
<td>28.97</td>
<td>-1.13</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td>61.27</td>
<td>59.43</td>
<td>-0.77</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>51.00</td>
<td>43.71</td>
<td>-2.18</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>10.27</td>
<td>15.71</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td>66.00</td>
<td>70.57</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>23.45</td>
<td>24.14</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative commitment</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>22.66</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance</td>
<td>19.55</td>
<td>23.57</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>29.18</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-realisation</td>
<td>12.38</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervousness</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of employment</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>9.83</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Significant at: *p < 0.05 and **p < 0.01

Type of qualification and organisational membership and commitment
An independent samples t-test was also used to investigate whether those who held specialist forensic qualifications scored differently on measures of organisational membership and commitment than those who held other qualifications. No significant differences were observed between the groups on the total score scales and, as such, the H2 was not supported. However, there were group differences on the two subscales of organisational belonging and organisational rejection (t(16) = 22.18, p < 0.05, d = 1.09, and t(16) = 3.05, p < 0.01, d = 1.53, respectively), with large effect sizes. Although those with forensic qualifications possessed a lower level of organisational commitment (M = 66.00, SD = 8.79) than those who did not possess a specialised forensic qualification (M = 70.57, SD = 3.05), the difference was not statistically significant, t(16) = 1.31, p < 0.05, but did produce a large effect size (0.65).

Type of qualification and level of stress
The hypothesis regarding levels of stress and type of qualification was also tested using an Independent samples t-test. This showed no significant difference between those with forensic qualifications and those without on their self-reported level of stress when working in the prison setting (Table II).

Forensic identity and organisational membership and commitment
Finally, in order to examine the relationship between a sense of forensic identity and higher levels of organisational membership and organisational commitment, a correlational analysis was undertaken. A non-significant weak correlation, r = 0.04, n = 18, p > 0.05, was found between forensic identity and organisational membership. A non-significant moderate correlation, r = 0.35, n = 18, p > 0.05, was found between forensic identity and organisational commitment suggesting that as forensic identity increases, so too does organisational commitment. A significant correlation was observed between
forensic identity and stress, \( r = 0.50, n = 17, p < 0.05 \), demonstrating that the stronger a person’s forensic identity the more workplace stress they experience.

**Qualitative data**

Participants were also asked to answer three open-ended questions that described the values and beliefs that guide their thinking, actions, and interactions with offenders. Of the 11 with forensic training, four identified contributing to “community safety” as a value/belief they possessed, with a further three answering “to help offenders control their lives”. In addition, “respect” and “seeing offenders as human beings” were identified as core beliefs/values. Of those participants who had received other psychological training, five stated that “preserving the offenders rights and dignity” is important to them, whilst three named “respect” and “empathy”, and two identified “compassion” and “seeing offenders as humans”.

Participants were also asked how the values/beliefs that they hold differ from those held by practitioners who work in other areas of professional psychology. Four (of the 11) forensically trained psychologists who responded answered that “other psychologists are more judgemental” than themselves. Two reported that they are “not different”, and one claimed that forensic psychology is “more focussed on the community and society”. In contrast, those participants trained in other areas of psychology tended to answer that they are “not different” (five out of 14). Similarly to the forensically trained participants, two of the participants with other psychological training reported that forensic psychology is “more focussed on the community/society” and two stated that “forensic psychology is set in a legal context”.

When forensically trained psychologists were asked why they chose a career in forensic psychology, respondents reported that they found it “interesting” (two out of 13 responses) or “challenging” (6), and that they aimed “to rehabilitate” (7), “to understand offending behaviour” (3) and to “assist with system change” (4) (some participants responded with more than one reason). Those who had received other psychological training (including clinical) also stated that forensic psychology was “interesting” (ten out of 14 responses), “challenging” (4), and that they aimed “to prevent crime” (2), “to make a difference to society” (2) and “to work with vulnerable/marginalised people” (2).

**Discussion**

This study investigated the construct of the “forensic identity” and its relationship to organisational membership, commitment, and stress in a sample of forensic psychologists. It was hypothesised that those psychologists who held specialist qualifications in forensic psychology would score more highly on measures of forensic identity and report a stronger sense of organisational membership and commitment and lower level of stress than those with other types of training. The results, although preliminary given the relatively small sample of psychologists who participated in the study, did not offer support for these hypotheses, suggesting that the type of qualification held has relatively little influence on subsequent professional identity and organisational commitment.

The current study raises some interesting issues for professional training in applied psychology. For example, the results of the study do not offer any strong rationale for prisons to target forensically qualified staff in their recruitment processes, at least when organisational membership and commitment are considered relevant to selection processes. There is some support for the existence of a “forensic mindset” or “forensic identity” in the responses to the open-ended questions, but no apparent reason to believe that this arises from the type of training those psychologists received. It seems that training may have some influence, but that organisational socialisation may be equally as important. In other words, psychologists who work in correctional settings come to adopt the values and beliefs of their organisation. This may be why they choose to work there or perhaps because these organisations are able to change or adapt their employee’s values through socialisation or in-house training.
Organisational socialisation can be described as the process by which new employees learn about the organisation and acquire knowledge about the social aspects of their role and the skills necessary to perform (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Cooper-Thomas et al. (2004) have suggested that new employees own values may change significantly after socialisation into the organisation has occurred. They argue that if new employees are faced with organisational values that are different to their own, they may begin to reflect on their own values and potentially adapt them to be consistent with those of the organisation.

There are a number of strategies that organisations use to socialise newcomers, although Jones (1986) has argued that the most effective of these are the serial-disjunctive and investiture-divestiture tactics proposed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979). Serial tactics involve an experienced job incumbent facilitating the socialisation of new recruits by serving as a role model and are typically employed when the role in the organisation requires a continuity of skills, values and attitudes (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Disjunctive tactics are conducted without the assistance of experienced job incumbents. Investiture tactics involve the organisation acknowledging and supporting the personal characteristics of the recruit, whereas divestiture refers to an organisation ignoring, discouraging or attempting to change personal characteristics of the recruit (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Divestiture processes are thus used to promote values and attitudes that are appropriate to the organisation. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) argue that once the divestiture socialisation tactics are completed then the individual feels strongly about maintaining that identity. A potentially interesting avenue for further research would be to examine the socialisation strategies of correctional agencies when new employees are recruited.

Alternatively, it may be that individuals are first attracted to an organisation if it seems to share similar values to themselves (Schneider, 1986). Employees are then selected by the organisation, in part, because they share similar values (De Cooman et al., 2009). Employees who have value-congruence with the organisation tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment and retention (Amos and Weathington, 2008; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Simosi, 2010). What is less clear is whether the values that psychologists hold change substantially over the course of their professional training. It may be that values are relatively unamenable to change through education. DeMatteo et al. (2009) have argued that in the US forensic practitioners should receive training and experience in substantive psychology, research design/methodology and statistics, conducting research, legal knowledge, integrative law-psychology knowledge, ethics and professional issues and clinical forensic training. In Australia, however, those who are being employed into forensic practitioner jobs are not necessarily those trained in forensic psychology, and it is essential to understand whether this is an acceptable way for prisons to recruit employees.

Prison administrators are also concerned with preventing staff turnover wherever possible as it results in important resources, such as time and money, being expended to recruit and train new staff (Minor et al., 2009). Rather unexpectedly, this study reported a significant moderate relationship between forensic identity and stress, suggesting that those who hold a stronger sense of forensic identity are possibly more susceptible to stress. This finding is somewhat counter-intuitive and requires further replication to establish its veracity.

It is particularly important to note that this study represents an investigation into professional identity rather than professional competence. The findings do not imply that forensic psychologists are more (or less) competent to practice in prison settings as this study did not consider the quality of work that psychologists with different backgrounds provide. Nonetheless, the idea of professional identity is regarded as one of the key objectives of ongoing professional supervision and is often related to the development of ethical work practices (Day, 2012).

Although the current study has provided an interesting pattern of findings in relation to specialist professional psychology training in Australia, it is appropriate to consider some of the limitations of the study. Although a relatively large number of specialist practitioners were recruited for this study, the final sample size was relatively small for a quantitative analysis. This significantly reduces
the power of the analyses. According to Cohen (1977) to achieve 80 percent power with statistical significance of \( p < 0.05 \), a minimum of 26 participants would be required for a large effect, 64 for a medium size effect and 393 for a small effect size. Thus, in this study it is possible that the non-significant results still provided evidence of group difference when medium to large effect sizes were observed (Kirk, 2006). This specifically applies to H2, that those with specialist forensic qualifications who work in corrections settings will have a higher level of organisational commitment, as a large effect size of 0.65 was observed.

A further limitation of the study is the use of the FIS as one of the main dependent variables. This scale was developed specifically for use in this study, but the original 13-item scale did not display adequate reliability (Hunsley and Mash, 2008). As a consequence, a number of items were removed, which improved the scale’s reliability, but there is clearly a need to develop this measure through exploratory factor analysis. Finally, given that no information on the number or characteristics of forensic psychologists is publicly available, it is not possible to know how representative the recruited participants are of all psychologists who work in correctional settings. The majority (75 percent) of participants in this study were female, and gender is known to exert a significant influence on professional identity in other disciplines (Puurula and Lofstrom, 2003; Shim et al., 2009). In particular, Shim et al. (2009) found that males possessed higher levels of professional identity than females, and Passarelli (2011) discovered that gender has an effect on organisational commitment, with men being more committed to their workplace than women. Given this it would seem important to establish that the gender profile of the current sample is indeed representative of the broader population.

This line of research has the potential for some application. The notion of a professional identity is relatively new to the field of psychology, and there have been no previous empirical investigations of the identity of different specialisms within professional psychology. The adaptation of this construct may help organisations to select more appropriate staff, who may be more committed and satisfied and who are less likely to leave the organisation. The current study can only be considered to be a pilot and it does seem to be an area that would be worthy of further investigation.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the current study did not discover any significant differences between forensically trained and non-forensically trained psychologists in their professional identity, organisational membership, organisational commitment or levels of workplace stress, although the effect sizes suggested that with a larger sample size such differences may emerge. The qualitative data did offer some support for the existence of a ‘forensic identity’, although this may not develop during training. It is suggested that whilst initial training is essential, the socialisation tactics utilised by the organisation may be of equal or greater importance. This study represents a first step towards understanding the professional identity of psychologists and how it might impact upon their work. It identifies the need to consider the role that specialist-training programs have to play in developing graduate qualities and promoting those beliefs and values that are associated with different areas of practice.
Implications for practice

- When selecting psychologists to work in prison settings it is appropriate to assess the values and beliefs that underpin their professional identity and which are likely to guide their thinking, actions, and interactions at work.

- It cannot be assumed that specialist training in forensic psychology leads to the development of a particular professional identity and, as such, there is a need to consider how new staff are inducted into organisations and to identify how in-house training might promote high levels of organisational commitment.

- Professional identity may be related to levels of staff stress and may be relevant to why staff leave organisations.

- There is a need for those who are involved in training psychologists to assist students to develop the type of professional identity that is likely to be compatible with the needs and values of the organisation in which they seek to work.
References


Further reading


Appendix.

The forensic identity scale
Below are a series of questions about your work, and how you understand your role within the organisation in which you work. Please read each statement below carefully and then decide whether you agree or disagree with each statement. Circle the number that best represents how you feel – there are no right or wrong answers. Please circle one (and only one) number for every statement and try not to miss any questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When working with an offender I always think about risk that</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/he presents to the community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I believe that offenders should be able to choose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which programs they attend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I always think about the legal context in which programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>are offered</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Offenders should be expected to attend rehabilitation programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The severity of someone’s offence does not affect how I</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>work with them</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. My role is to help offenders become more accountable for</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>their actions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. My primary responsibility when working with offenders is</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the community or the court</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I am most concerned with the well-being of the</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offender I am working with</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. My responsibilities to the department I work for</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outweigh my responsibilities to the individual offender</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Corresponding author

Ashlee Curtis can be contacted at: ajcur@deakin.edu.au