

Despite the issues with the current state of behavioral science, I wholeheartedly support the book's goal. Although it is self-evident that law is at least partially tasked with responding to and incentivizing behavior, research on the underlying mechanisms that affect what I call "legal behavior" is currently dispersed and lacks organizing principles. This book is a step forward at changing that. Partly to blame is the legal field that resisted experiments (Lynch Holly et al., 2020) and does not systematically study behavior. This book should be required reading for every law student, and hopefully, in the future, the legal profession will embrace "behavioral thinking."

## REFERENCES

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*Conviction: The making and unmaking of the violent brain.* By Oliver Rollins. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021. 248 pp. \$25.00 paperback

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Oliver Rollins' *Conviction* offers a careful analysis of the neuroscience of violence, or what he calls "the violent brain model." The book's argument is twofold. On the one hand, much of neuroscience's engagement with abnormal brain function is fundamentally motivated by a desire to identify criminal propensity and the future risk for violent behavior. This research program and its predictive logics operate through a medical model in which pathology is identified by neurological biomarkers rendered legible through brain imaging techniques and organized alongside the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

On the other hand, situating the propensity for violence as abnormal neurological function inevitably reifies normative frameworks. For Rollins, these normative ideologies are racialized and gendered: "Memorialized within the categorization of violence is a contested history, an expressly gendered and racialized politic that often reinforces normatively hierarchical social arrangements based upon these powerful social practices" (44). *Conviction*, then, traces how violence risk prediction is shaped by racialized notions of normativity. In this way, the book reads as a sustained critique of the social construction of violence.

In Part 1, "The Making of the Violent Brain," each chapter explores the developmental history of the violent brain research program, originating in Cesare Lombroso's late 19th-century "criminal anthropology." Researchers today leverage technological innovations to claim a more objective scientific account, bolstered by the ability to visually "picture" neuronal activity linked to violent behavior. Here, Rollins exposit how the role of new technoscientific devices, such as neuroimages and brain scans, serve as key evidence for neurological abnormality. Yet, the process of interpreting images as evidence remains controversial because it assumes that neuroscientists can clinically distinguish "risky" or "psychopathic" brain activity from "normal" or "healthy" activity. Part 1 concludes by discussing how this interpretive element is laden with sociocultural presumptions regarding what constitutes the *normal*.

In Part 2, "The Unmaking of the Violent Brain," each chapter explores how social forces are undertheorized and biological explanations are overemphasized within the construction of the

violent brain model. The friction is perhaps most clear in the biosocial paradigm. According to Rollins, biosocial risk models assume that sociological analysis cannot fully capture why people behave violently because it fails to engage biological aspects. And yet, the perspective works to identify and interpret “when and how biomarkers for violence are activated, or exploited, by social causes” (93). Selecting *how* and *what* parts of the social will matter illuminates the inherently open and always incomplete process of biosocial knowledge production. As Rollins clarifies, “There will always be decisions about what is measured—and, importantly, how it is measured (fitting) and made meaningful throughout the process of the violent brain” (99). In other words, greater accuracy of information introduced by technoscientific innovation does not necessarily lead to causal explanations, nor does it eliminate the uncertainty affirmed by sociocultural complexity.

For the remainder of Part 2 and the book, Rollins discusses what he terms “the taboo of race” within the violent brain model. This taboo emerges from the 1950s post-war milieu in which researchers distanced themselves from racial and eugenic theories of social inferiority. Research in the United States pivoted to proxy variables, such as deviant behavior and intelligence scores, to discuss genetic inferiority without openly discussing their purported connections to race. But as Rollins notes, the racial undertones of this transition were not missed. A Harvard psychiatrist in 1973, Alvin Pouissant, is quoted, asking, “When all these institutions around the country decide to study violence, who do they go look at? The *black* man. But who’s committing all the violence? The *white* man, white society, white policeman...They don’t consider that something’s wrong with *their* brains...” (104, emphases in original).

While researchers today attempt to deracialize genetic notions of violence under a colorblind logic, this approach undermines the powerful effects of racial inequality as a criminogenic condition. Here, the concept of “violence” is offered as a racially colorblind signifier, enabling a form of *scientific racism without racist scientists* (106). In other words, an individualized discourse of risk eclipses the impact of social structure in producing violence. Thus, Rollins carefully questions the limitations of a predictive model which, by design, sidesteps the crucial role of racial inequality, even as it shapes and conditions the very object of its study.

Rollins concludes by further interrogating interventions offered by the neuroscience perspective. The “therapeutic promise” of the violent brain model focuses less on the eradication of violent behavior, and rather, on the neuroprediction of risk and expansion of penological power (126–127). In this sense, the research program is not interested in structural solutions, but in symptom management (128). The interventions imagined here are contradictory and caught between calls for increased criminal justice surveillance and improving societal conditions (130–135).

*Conviction* arrives at a timely moment in which controversial questions surrounding neurological maturity, culpability, and future dangerousness present immediate concerns in the criminal justice system. As Rollins discusses, the US Supreme Court case, *Roper v Simmons*, 2005, ruled that juveniles cannot be sentenced to death because ongoing neurological development in young people makes them more susceptible to risky behavior. A series of subsequent cases have challenged the constitutionality of sentencing children and teens to life without parole, and other virtual life sentences. Perhaps this is an area where *Conviction* could pursue a deeper analysis of recent legal debates posed around future risk, such as the idea of “permanent incorrigibility” crucial to *Jones v. Mississippi*, 2021.

The intellectual contribution of *Conviction* can be situated with the likes of Dorothy Robert’s *Fatal Inventions*, Alondra Nelson’s *Body and Soul*, and Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *White Logic, White Methods*. Rollins’ blending of sociological and medical knowledge makes for a thorough and persuasive argument about the persistence of colorblind racial logics at the intersection of neuroscience and criminology. *Conviction* is primarily written for an academic audience and would make for a welcomed addition in graduate seminars within criminology, sociolegal studies, psychology, or any course that explores the relationship between race and science.