

ORIGINAL ARTICLE: STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Fairness: True Concept or Delusion

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Abstract

This is a student perspective paper on psychology and law, following the Roundtable Unconference on Psychology-Law knowledge fusion for real-world challenges that took place at Hult International Business School, London, on 3 December 2025.

As humans, we are naturally biased. Innately, this bias serves as a survival mechanism, a way to sense and detect important information in our environment. However, as the world has advanced, our bias has evolved into something far more insidious: preordained notions about people based on race, wealth, background, and circumstance. So how can we fairly interpret people's actions when we already have these preconceived ideas about who they are and why they do what they do? It is a difficult question that may be hard to fathom, but one that cannot be ignored.

When looking into the justice system in America specifically, there is a well-known racial- and wealth-based disparity where people of colour are disproportionately affected by incarceration and overall interactions with the law. Studies have shown that bias influences everything from who gets stopped by police to how long certain people are sentenced for different crimes. A system built by humans is a system that carries human biases within

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it, whether we are conscious of them or not. So the question becomes: is there truly a way to be fair when the systems already in place are designed to build perceptions that lead to harmful biases? I do not think the answer is simple, but I do believe that bringing multiple disciplines like psychology into the conversation is one of the most powerful steps towards a true, fair, and just legal system.

When looking into psychology, many branches directly link to the justice system and I believe the interdisciplinary relations between the two are invaluable. The law, by definition, is a system of rules that a country or community recognises as a governing body, and that has the power to enforce agreed-upon penalties. But a system can only be as fair as the people designing it and operating within it. When a lawyer needs to better understand a client's background or state of mind, they usually call upon a specialist, such as a psychologist, to testify to what may be a motivating factor or to the person's state of mind to determine whether they can be held accountable. This is not about making excuses for violent or negligent behaviour. It is about ensuring that the full story is told, because without it, the law would simply be reactionary to appearances rather than the truth. A person who grew up in a cycle of trauma, neglect, or systemic disadvantages is not the same as a person who acted out of calculated malice. Without psychology, the law would have no way of distinguishing between the two.

During my own experience in high school, this concept was brought to life. I was part of the mock trial team, where a behavioural psychologist did something the law could not: she separated behaviour from assumption. The defendant was a teenager who was charged with assault on another student. On the surface, this could be dismissed as teenage angst or "boys being boys". But the psychologist for the prosecution was able to demonstrate that this was a pattern of behaviour, that the defendant was not really remorseful, and that signs of psychopathy were present. With this testimony, the defendant's composed nature, good looks, and family background would not be enough to dismiss the case. The psychologist gave the courtroom a framework for understanding not just what happened, but why it happened, which changes the entire case. The law needed psychology to do its job properly. Both are valuable on their own but together, invaluable.

With the world growing more complex, single-discipline thinking becomes increasingly insufficient for the challenges we face. We live in a time where AI can draft legal briefs, create essays, and process data at a scale no human can match. And yet, for all its capabilities, AI cannot read the room. It cannot read social cues or understand the tension between what someone says versus what they actually mean. It cannot account for lived human experience or recognise when bias is distorting judgement. These things still require a human being who has been trained to look beyond the surface, and more importantly, someone who has been trained in multiple disciplines. The people who will matter most in courtrooms, boardrooms and any other human-centric space will be those who can move between fields, asking the right questions and not the surface-level ones. Interdisciplinarity is not just for academic bragging rights or for a degree plan. It is, at a fast pace, becoming a necessity, and in the case of law and justice, can determine the difference between someone's life or death.