



Rhode Island College
Justice Studies

GUARDIANS OF JUSTICE

INTERVIEWS
WITH LAW
ENFORCEMENT
AND LEGAL
MINDS

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My name is Tyler Morra and I am graduating senior with a Major in Justice Studies and a Minor in Sociology from Rhode Island College. Growing up, I always had an interest in the law and how the court system operates and heard many stories from family members and friends who each had a different niche in the criminal justice system. One of my mentors is a cousin who works as a defense attorney. Seeing the path that he took to get there and to further learn about what the job entails, it continues to inspire me to pursue a legal career.

Dedications

Troy Morgan dedicates this work to his father: "I wouldn't be the person I am today without him."

Ethan Bernardo wishes to dedicate this book to his family and to all Justice Studies Majors. And "to my mother who has always supported my journey inside and outside of academia, my successes, passions, ups & downs, and much more. And to my beloved grandfather, whose courageous spirit and unwavering love continues to inspire me, cherished memories are forever etched in my heart."

Priscilla Nichols dedicates this book to those who generously shared their time for interviews, shaping it into a reality. "My heartfelt acknowledgment goes to my family, especially my hardworking parents, and brother Tom, whose unwavering authenticity guides me. To Tom, your support means the world, and I eagerly await your future successes. My father's influence profoundly shaped my career, while my mother's tireless determination has been my rock. To my friends and family, your love and support are cherished. I honor the memory of my late friend Elysia for her bravery. Lastly, I dedicate this to my beloved dog, Zen, my constant companion for 14 years, who stands by me through life's joys and challenges."

Tyler Morra dedicates this work to future justice studies students and to the faculty who make things like this possible. "I would also like to dedicate this book to my family and friends who are involved with or work directly in the criminal justice system."

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome!

The Class Project

This book is born from an intensive writing course for seniors in the Justice Studies Program at Rhode Island College. Its focus is on technical writing and critical thinking skills. Students integrate theory, research, policy, and social issues relating to crime and justice, and in this course, they selected criminal justice professionals to interview in areas they would like to pursue for their own careers. These nine interviews reflect 23 hours of work, including developing a student survey and analyzing survey results.

What you'll read in this book is the culmination of twelve different interviews from all sorts of justice backgrounds; from courts and lawyers to federal agents and local police. We highlight examples of restorative justice approaches that our professionals mention; one of repairing the harm and healing victims, our communities, and yes, even the offenders get help. Their perspectives show us that oftentimes the victim is overlooked, and while we need to address the offender and their actions with perhaps a more holistic alternative, our criminal justice system must broaden its scope to incorporate other supports to ensure long-lasting change, too.

You can expect to read about a wide range of experiences and what it's like to work in these professions. You will learn what education requirements are needed, what the pay is like, and what special skills are required for each. Apart from this, we also obtained insights regarding new recommendations for sentencing on certain crimes like non-violent drug offenses, and what a society with a focus on rehabilitation can look like.

Challenging conventional perceptions of law enforcement came up several times, and yet officers know it is their duty to enforce the law. We see how our legal system intersects with their personal experiences, and how, in some cases, alternative sentencing would be more effective. Yet, since the murder of Mr. George Floyd and many other people, including innocent bystanders, law enforcement officials recognize that it's not always easy to gain community trust. Consider the many individuals in these careers who often face unfair scrutiny by social media

and other public broadcasts, perhaps by calling an officer racist or sexist or there's an undue emphasis on the use of force or excessive use of force rather than acknowledging the leadership and professionalism the vast majority of officers exhibit every day, often without a word of thanks.

For the record, the U.S. Department of Justice (2023) surveyed inmates nationwide, and they reported use of force and excessive use of force in only 1.7% of all arrests (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2023). From the many damaging stereotypes out there, they hinder an officer's ability to serve communities effectively. For anyone in uniform, citizens living in high crime neighborhoods may greet officers with skepticism and challenge their authority. Through our examination, we aim to challenge these prevailing notions by offering insights into their nuanced experiences of justice enforcers, who are compassionate and honorable, and who truly care about our well-being. We hope to inspire some reflection by providing an opportunity to critically think about their work and the insights they provide into our criminal justice system and the potential for reform. This includes addressing systemic biases and promoting accountability, rehabilitation, and reconciliation. We can strive toward a more equitable and more effective criminal justice system that serves all individuals and communities.

This senior capstone project required each student to select three professionals in their areas of interest; research their roles in the criminal justice system; design questions for each interview; conduct the interviews; and then provide peer support in the writing process. These interviews contain a whole host of surprising and educational information we learned from federal agents, officers of the court, local police, and perspectives from the RI Training School on juvenile rehabilitation and the Probation and Parole Board for adults exiting the prison system.

Restorative Justice versus Crime Control

The reader should note that we were curious about alternatives to our traditional crime control model, in part due to mass incarceration and rising mental health and substance use concerns. Our theme evolved around restorative justice, although we never asked these officials a direct question about it. It was our little secret to see if alternatives to the way we do "justice" might be on their radar, too. These interviews provide evidence that more proactive and restorative steps are needed to change the way our criminal justice system works.

You might ask, “How can we tell what is working and what needs to change?” A focus on restorative justice gives us a perspective because it is in stark contrast to our current crime control model. Programs aligned with restorative justice are about helping and healing our communities and the individuals who live in them, particularly for those who face significant inequalities and systemic injustices. These inequalities are structural, which means that youth and adults who become ensnared in our criminal justice system disproportionately have fewer avenues for success. These inequalities - lack of educational opportunities, health care, job training, stable families and more - turn into our inmate population and live in overcrowded prisons. Disproportionately, they are more often poor and people of color where violence and exposure to violence is high in unstable neighborhoods. These at-risk communities are the nucleus of systemic violence, victimization, and an array of criminal activity that are more the day-to-day norm than the exception.

A restorative approach is all-encompassing because it involves everyone and recognizes that most crime does not occur in a vacuum. In practical terms, this perspective views a crime primarily happening between individuals and not between an individual and the state. State prosecution has an important role, but in this model, it is secondary to the harm and healing of the persons involved. These conflicts result in injuries between victim, community, and the offender themselves, so diversion and sentencing programs that connect community, victim, and offender are designed to generate healing rather than retribution. The criminal justice system facilitates their participation in this restorative process to make amends and resolve conflicts. Examples of this approach are circle conferencing, mediation, rehabilitation, and restitution. Diversion programs include drug court, community service, victim awareness classes, education and tutoring, job training, and substance use education and counseling. In California, for example, some district court judges and prosecutors are now seeing “participatory defense models” in their courtrooms in which community members assist in an individual’s defense: they review police reports, find contradictions and inconsistencies at times, and accompany the individual to court. The judge and prosecutor see there’s support for the accused. In some cases, this kind of collective action has produced impressive results: evidence to dismiss charges completely or the offender receives a lighter sentence based on extralegal factors and other evidence presented at court (Jayadev 2019). The restorative justice approach recognizes that individual circumstances are unique, and they must be held accountable, but their poor choices

and criminal behavior are not theirs alone to solve. Indeed, one reason why we have high rates of repeat offenders and mass incarceration is because social and economic inequalities remain, and the risky choices individuals make go along with it.

By contrast, our crime control model is about punishment and individual accountability.

Deterrence theory was first developed by Beccaria (1766), and it may surprise the reader to know that it's the basis of our crime control approach to justice today. It posited that the threat of legal sanctions will deter crime because we are viewed as hedonistic and motivated by our greed and self-interests. If the threat of a penalty is big enough, we humans will think twice before we break the law. The application of deterrence theory has produced a criminal justice system that began centuries ago under the old adage, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" and was used to justify harsh punishment, even torture. Imagine a murderer having molten lead and boiling oil poured into wounds deliberately inflicted by officers, then staked to a pole to partially burn the offender alive, but not quite dead, and finally, tie his arms and legs to six draft horses facing in opposite directions to slowly pull the culprit's body into pieces (Foucault 1977). This was deterrence at its best, and done in a public square so that all those watching would think twice before committing such a crime. Harsh sanctions will "fix" the problem, they said, and those criminals or potential criminals will be taught a lesson and crimes will stop. While this description of a punishment existed in the 18th century, today's "just deserts" are solitary confinement, lengthy prison terms for drug possession, the mentally ill who need medical treatment, juveniles charged as adults, and the criminalization of homelessness, to name a few.

The crime control model derived from deterrence theory continues to govern our justice system, and it is used to craft national and state legislation to reduce crime with laws that focus on punishment and not rehabilitation, such as the Three-Strikes-You're Out law that still operates in part or in whole in several states. If you're convicted of three felonies then it's life in prison. Less severe crime control policies, but equally problematic, are "stop and frisk" and "hot spot" policing which disproportionately target people of color in high crime communities. Mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines used for violent and nonviolent offenders alike restrict prosecutors' and judges' attempts to create alternative sentencing that could reduce prison time or provide an offender with alternative sentencing, such as a drug treatment program.

What does the research say? A meta-analysis on deterrence theory by Dölling et al. (2011) demonstrated that deterrence is only weakly correlated with petty crimes, and perhaps not surprising, it is most effective with law-abiding citizens! From tax evasion, environmental destruction, to prostitution, homicides, weapons, drug and human trafficking, the threat of being locked up to receive your “just deserts” is largely ineffective in changing long term outcomes. If we continue to use this old-fashioned approach, reincarceration and mass incarceration show no signs of stopping.

Although the public perception is that deterrence measures ought to keep our neighborhoods safe, the research shows it’s a poor choice (Dölling 2011; Cornwell 2018; Dolovich and Natapoff 2017; Quintas 2023). It’s time to consider different approaches in the pursuit of “doing justice.” You do not have to take our word for it! Read what these career professionals say about what is working - and what is not - within our justice system to find out for yourself.

So these two contrasting points of view about what justice is and how we should respond are an important part of this book. Ask yourself, what needs to change to make it more equitable, transparent, and restorative rather than punitive? While we do not specifically ask our interviewees for their opinions on restorative justice, these professionals acknowledge that more needs to be done to “fix” our current system, especially for non-violent offenders where there needs to be a balance between law enforcement and access to treatment.

As justice studies majors, we recognize that the crime control model ignores the root causes of many criminal activities because we are not addressing the socioeconomic inequalities that produce them. How can someone with mental health and drug abuse issues construct a reality free from crime when the social forces are stacked against them? Infrastructures of health care, jobs that pay a living wage, affordable housing, and rehabilitation services are not prioritized or readily available for many citizens. At-risk communities are in need, and the cycle of crime, victimization, and violence goes on.

Sharing what we learned to a wider audience in our Justice Studies Major, you’ll read student feedback from a survey we created and distributed to all students in this discipline during the final weeks of the semester. These students concur that more should be done to make real changes to our system. While only n=38 out of 189 students responded, or approximately 20%

of all Justice Studies Majors, their answers add to the conversation about what is working well and what needs improvement. More solutions are needed! Keep reading to find out what they said!

Finally, we hope our book lets you explore the different roles of these professionals within the local, state, and federal justice system. Each role these professionals have ensures a safe and just society, and they work tirelessly to uphold the rule of law with integrity, compassion, and commitment. You will read that each professional gives advice on how to balance a demanding, and often dangerous career, with personal time and family life. We take you on a journey through the lives of these officers, and we hope this information helps you understand their work, the insights they've gained, and how our criminal justice system operates.

We wish to thank all the career professionals who made this book possible. Their selflessness and exceptional commitment to their careers are inspirational to us, and we are indebted to them for their time, insights, and dedication to their work. They are guardians of justice, and we named this book for them.

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Chapter 1: Agents of Change: The FBI and U.S. Immigration Services Unveiled

By Ethan Bernardo

Introduction

Pillars of justice and providing security describe the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. This chapter provides the reader with two interviews with a former FBI Special Agent and a U.S. Customs and Immigration Services Officer. We journey into the heart of these professions to uncover the challenges, dedication, and triumphs that define their roles. From combating violent gang activity to facilitating a path to citizenship, each career offers a unique perspective on the complexities of safeguarding communities and ensuring fairness within the fabric of our society. As we explore each professional's duties, we gain a deeper understanding of the vital roles played by these agencies in upholding the rule of law.

FBI Unmasked: Inside the Frontlines

The FBI is a very intense and difficult field to join in terms of the employment process and field work itself. The FBI is short for Federal Bureau of Investigation which investigates a variety of criminal behavior such as terrorism, white collar crime, cybercrime, civil rights violations, public corruption, and many other major crimes (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016, "What We Investigate"). The special agent, who chose to remain anonymous for this interview, and I had the opportunity to discuss his work on a violent gang task force. His duties primarily focused on disrupting gang violence and bringing peace to communities. This interview took place on February 14th, 2024 at a bar in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, precisely at 5 p.m.

The Violent Gang Task Force, also known as the Safe Street Task Force of the FBI, is responsible for and dedicated to combating violent gangs by employing proactive and coordinated investigations to prosecute offenses like racketeering, drug conspiracy, and firearm violations (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016, “Violent Crime”). This program in the FBI enhances collaboration among federal, state, and local law enforcement. A fundamental aspect of this program’s approach is the Enterprise Theory of Investigations (ETI). By combining short term street level enforcement activities with advanced techniques such as consensual monitoring, financial analysis, and wire intercepts, the ETI aims to dismantle entire gangs that result in prosecution.

This career choice can be life threatening but also rewarding. It can put a stop to gang violence in our communities while upholding justice in our country. Whether you are in the Safe Street Task Force, white collar crime, or terrorism program, each special agent averages around the same salary. An average special agent in the FBI can earn a salary of \$81,000 and \$120,000 per year (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024, “Salary & Benefits”). The educational requirements for an FBI special agent involve a bachelor’s degree and at least 2 years of full-time professional work experience in law enforcement (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2024, “Eligibility”).

The FBI is very focused on upholding federal laws as well as working with law enforcement but also ties its work to restorative justice principles in many ways. Restorative justice is philosophically different from a crime control model because its focus is repairing relationships with the community (Zornado et. al 2020). By investigating and apprehending offenders, the violent gang task force helps restore safety and security to affected communities and addresses the harm caused by criminal activity. Through this program’s efforts to root out and prosecute gang members and their associates, the task force aims to restore a sense of justice and stabilize communities impacted by gang violence. Their efforts contribute to broader goals of rehabilitation, healing, and community well-being.

I began the interview by asking, “*What advice do you give to someone who wants to pursue a career in your field?*” The former agent said not to “expect to become an FBI agent directly out of college.” You need a bachelor’s degree and 2 years of professional work experience or one

year with a master's degree. He mentioned that last year the average age of a new agent entering the FBI Academy was 29. He stated that the application process for special agents can be "very competitive," as a relatively small percentage of applicants are accepted. Also realize that this is a commitment. Your first office could be hundreds or thousands of miles away, and you could be working unpredictable hours, including nights, weekends, and sometimes holidays.

"What specific skills are needed for this career?"

The agent replied that someone who has very good communication skills and collaboration skills would be a good fit. Very good writing skills are important because a special agent must write a lot of reports, and good speaking skills are important since an agent will be speaking to a lot of people. Flexibility is another skill he mentioned since sometimes an agent is "*working in controlled chaos.*" Leadership and showing initiative are both important skills for a successful special agent to have. He also noted that in the past, the FBI has hired applicants who have had one or more of these skills: accounting (including CPA), finance, computer science (IT), engineering, foreign language (e.g., Spanish, Arabic, Chinese), intelligence experience, law experience (lawyers), law enforcement/investigative experience, military experience, physical sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.), and other diverse backgrounds (e.g., teachers, pilots, corporate positions). "*The FBI seeks special agents with any occupation that requires a degree,*" he said because of the "*breadth and scope of the FBI's mission.*"

"How do the stories we tell ourselves about the criminal justice system diverge or are different from the way it actually operates, what's your perspective?"

The agent replied: "*Different people have different outlooks about the criminal justice system, both positive and negative.*" And real life, compared to TV shows or movies, is not the same.

"Can you share a story that illustrates the work you do, and do you have a story that stands out?"

The agent used to be a member of a violent gang safe street task force and investigated with local city police or state police and sometimes the department of corrections. One case in particular he worked on involved a gang meeting. He was able to retrieve an audio and video recording of the individuals for evidence. This gang was planning an act of violence against a

rival gang, and his team was able to disrupt the gang's plan before it happened. The agent mentioned that it was difficult to be in a position to be able to conduct the electronic surveillance. Also, during the same investigation, the task force was able to record admissions of past acts of violence which wasn't easy. Drug buys and gun buys were also made.

“What does the system really do every day in the name of criminal justice, and how does it work from your perspective?”

The agent stated: *“Federal, state, and local police investigate and respond to crimes.”* The agent had a partner who worked for Providence Police, and together they developed some incredible cases. The agent's perspective was that *“collaborating with other officers and agencies brought different skill sets together,”* resulting in productive investigations. He acknowledged that these complex investigations can take a lot of money and time to put together.

“What do you think needs to change for either victims, offenders, or the community?”

The agent believed that there needs to be *“more community outreach and rehabilitation programs.”* In regard to violent gangs, he stated that there are some hard core members who will always be “in the game” and will not enjoy a happy future. But there are other gang members and associates who could step away from their lifestyle by getting some skills for a good paying job. There are a number of job skills development programs in Rhode Island that can possibly help. Unfortunately, if you're a convicted felon, it can be extremely difficult to get job training and get those types of jobs. Community support for a program similar to Homeboy Industries could help. It's a gang intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program run in Los Angeles that works with gang members, including those who were previously convicted of a felony. The agent also mentioned the Nonviolence Institute in Providence, RI. “The mission of the Nonviolence Institute is to create a community that uses the principles and practices of nonviolence to prevent, interrupt, and heal violence, and to uplift the community” (Nonviolence Institute, 2023).

“In your experience, what are some common challenges or obstacles encountered during investigations, and how do you overcome them?”

The agent said, *“A common challenge is developing actionable intelligence which will allow you to take that next step in an investigation.”* Getting actionable intelligence is often done through work with confidential sources, undercover agents, surveillances, and investigative

analysis. The agent collaborates with state and local agencies on these violent gang investigations. Having different ideas and skill sets can help a lot when dealing with difficult cases, and it's the agent's perspective that working with a diverse group and collaborating with each other can better achieve common goals.

“Can you describe a particularly challenging case you have worked on and how you approached it?”

The agent stated that there was a street gang whose members and associates were involved in an increasing amount of violence. *“Some of them were also involved in drug dealing.”* With the goal of disrupting the violence, the task force focused on the drugs. As a result of controlled drug buys, surveillance, telephone record analysis, and intelligence gathering, they were approved for a court authorized Title III (a wiretap) on certain telephones. Numerous subjects were arrested and convicted on federal charges, and much of the violence ended. According to the agent, it was a *“very difficult process.”*

“Is having a personal life difficult as a special agent in the FBI?”

He wouldn't say it's difficult but *“sometimes it's not easy.”* Luckily, he has a very understanding wife and children. He once spent all Thanksgiving Day away from his family while working on a case in a country that doesn't celebrate that holiday. And during one emergency call-out, he missed the wedding of a very close friend. Family and friends need to be aware of the commitment, he said. While applying to become a special agent, the FBI recruiter asked that the agent's fiancée (now wife) come into the FBI office so the recruiter could make her aware of the demands of the job.

“What else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in criminal justice?”

The agent stated that he found that you can do very well in the FBI if you have a *“solid reputation for honesty, integrity, reliability, and hard work.”* It's a statement heard across the law enforcement spectrum.

In conclusion, the special agent I interviewed was oriented towards the crime control model to reduce gang and drug violence but recognizes the need for more restorative justice principles. The special agent believes that there should be more community awareness and rehabilitation

programs for victims and offenders. There are a number of job skills developmental programs in Rhode Island that can possibly help, he explained. Some gang members can be reached, and it's important to give youth and young adults options and choices. Overall, the special agent advises more restorative programs like these to help our misguided offenders and to support the victims involved.

This interview was very enlightening, and I am honored to have received the opportunity to conduct it. This can be a challenging career path to pursue for anyone, but indeed worth it and very rewarding for those of us who wish to make such a commitment.

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A Journey Through Citizenship: Exploring Immigration Services

By Ethan Bernardo



The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is a very important branch of our government that is “responsible for processing immigration and naturalization applications and establishing policies regarding immigration services” (USA.GOV, 2024, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services). The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is operated by the federal government and employs “21,000 government employees and contractors working at more than 200 offices across the world” (Uscis.gov, 2024, Mission and Core Values). Naima A’vant is an Immigration Service Officer whom I had the pleasure to interview, and we met on March 14th, 2024 at Luigi’s Restaurant & Gourmet Express, Johnston, Rhode Island, at 4 p.m.

Officer A’Vant investigates and conducts interviews for persons seeking lawful permanent residence status and naturalization. The USCIS officers require an abundance of documentation which they must investigate and verify, such as marriage certificates, divorce papers, death certificates, medical status, passport identification, and a valid green card, among other identifying documentation. Obtaining a green card is critical for an individual who is not a natural born citizen and who wants to live and work legally in the United States. A green card can allow an individual to apply for citizenship after 5 years and protects them from deportation.

This eligibility means the person receives federal benefits, such as social security and a student can apply for federal financial aid (Immigrationhelp.org, 2024).

Becoming an Immigration Service Officer can be a very rewarding career path. “The average Immigration officer salary is \$86,217 as of February 26th, 2024” (Salary.com, 2024). Although this is the average salary for an Immigration Service Officer and can vary. Salary ranges depend on many factors, including level of education, certifications, additional skills, and the number of years served (salary.com, 2024). At a minimum, an Immigration Service Officer must have a bachelor’s degree, although previous governmental experience can sometimes be substituted (Criminaljusticeprograms.com, 2024). Serving as an immigration officer can be a rewarding career path for an individual who is willing to work hard.

I began the interview by asking, *“What advice do you give to someone who wants to pursue a career in your field?”*

Officer Naima A’vant stated that you should have your resume ready and your words tailored to match the job description. She said, *“It is a very long employment process and to be patient. I believe it is important for any applicant to at least have relevant experience and career related skills that align with the job you are applying for.”*

“What specific skills are needed for this career?”

Officer Naima A’Vant said you need solid writing skills, which is crucial for writing reports as well as note taking on the fly. She describes how these skills are used when conducting interviews during the naturalization process. Officer A’Vant also believes that researching and multi-tasking skills are very important, especially when every file is reviewed and the applicant’s criteria must be thoroughly vetted. Going through the interviews, evidence, and electronic system searches occur during every interview process. Attention to detail is a must.

“How do the stories we tell ourselves about the criminal justice system diverge (or are different) from the way it actually operates?”

Officer A’Vant said our criminal justice system is far from being perfect. She mentioned that anything can come up on a rap sheet, which then must be investigated. Certain information like fingerprint submissions kept by the FBI and other details related to an arrest are some examples

that may deny an applicant for U.S. citizenship. Other criteria in their benefit are federal employment, naturalization, or military service (Fbi.gov, 2024). Officer A'Vant mentioned that *“criminal court depositions can either be dismissed or expunged and not tell us the information needed -- but for immigration it still matters.”*

“Can you share a story that illustrates the work you do? Do you have a story that stands out?”

One story in particular Officer A'vant mentioned was about a couple who married. They married so that one partner could receive her green card. The couple was brought in to be interviewed separately with no script, and Officer A'vant described how it was a *“bad interview.”* During the interview, the husband could not answer any questions right, and their testimonies did not match up. In her words, they were way off and were not comparable. Officer A'vant explained that this is fraud, which was verified by a site visit that established that they were not a couple and not living together, even though they claimed that they did.

According to the U.S. Immigration's statistics on family green cards, every year about 810,558 immigrants apply to become U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents through their families, including marriage. Of these, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (“USCIS”) approves about 88% and denies 12%.”

“What does the system really do every day in the name of criminal justice, and how does it work from your perspective?” Officer A'Vant explained, *“In relation to criminal justice for naturalization purposes, if I have someone coming in to get their citizenship, we go through a 5-year period.”* Their process of vetting the candidate for citizenship includes *“good moral character, especially if there are arrests, and these determine whether the individual gets denied or not.”* Applicants' behaviors are looked at and assessed very carefully.

“What do you think needs to change for either victims, offenders, or the community?” Officer A'Vant believes that for victims, applicants can get taken advantage of because they may be desperate to get citizenship; or they are nervous to come see an officer, which can affect the outcome. One example she mentioned was how applicants may try to avoid taking the citizenship test by securing a legitimate medical waiver. She explained that if you go see a doctor

for a specific medical condition, then in some restricted instances, the citizenship test is waived. The forms must be prepared properly and the medical condition is one on the accepted list. In other words, applicants think they may have figured out how to work around the system by trying to get a medical waiver. Officer A’Vant explained that some individuals do get medical exemptions and avoid taking the citizenship test, but sometimes the criteria are not adequately listed or explained well enough to make a determination. The lack of clarity may make the process stop and could cause the applicant to look bad. The form I-693 must be completed and signed by a civil surgeon as evidence that the applicant “is not inadmissible on health-related grounds” (<https://www.uscis.gov/i-693>).

Inadmissibility can occur if you have a communicable disease, such as Covid-19, tuberculosis, or the applicant has a significant mental health and/or substance use disorder that may represent a public safety issue, such as a DUI, suicide attempt, or domestic violence. Officer A’Vant suggests that individuals obtain “*more knowledge on what the medical form is in order not to get taken advantage of.*”

As an aside, the citizenship test is no small matter. According to the USCIS practice test, applicants must know a lot about civics and the United States, such as having to name the two longest rivers in the U.S. and the name of the U.S. president during World War I (<https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/civics-practice-test-2008>). Some critics of the test argue that not even U.S. born citizens know many of these answers, but they are expected of applicants seeking naturalization.

“Can you describe a particularly challenging case you’ve worked on and how you approached it?”

She explained, “*We have 204c cases which are cases where petitioners marry a beneficiary.*” For example, this means that the petitioner is the green card holder or U.S. citizen and wants to bring in a husband, son, daughter, mother, etc. A recent case she reviewed “*was interviewed and denied*” because of previous fraud. Officer A’Vant explained that at the applicant level, they must verify their lawful resident status. Applicants may have many inadmissibility problems and common among them is when someone has a green card holder petitioning for them. When someone claims someone else is a green card holder and wishes to support their application, that

person must still demonstrate their lawful status. Officer A’Vant said that if an individual “*came on a visa and overstayed, they are not eligible*” and the application is rejected.

“*Can you describe the steps involved in the naturalization process, including any recent changes or updates, and how your office supports applicants through this journey?*” She explained that it is a long process – about five years - and “*the applicant would have to file the application, and if biometrics are not updated, then they would get sent for new biometrics.*” The USCIS has the authority to collect fingerprints, photographs, and digital signatures. Officer A’Vant said, “*security checks have to be cleared and then an applicant would get scheduled for an interview.*” Once cleared, the applicant “*would see an officer like myself and come in for a naturalization interview. The applicant would then have to take and pass the “civics test, reading test, writing test, and then go through all of the questions on the N400 form.*” According to Officer A’Vant, the N400 applicant form includes biographical information such as current legal names, social security number, gender, and country of birth. The last step is when the officer determines if the applicant is eligible or not for naturalization. If the applicant is eligible, the applicant would be approved to attend a naturalization oath ceremony to become a U.S. citizen.

The final question I asked Officer A’vant was, “*What else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in Justice Studies?*” She concluded by stating that if you want a job in the federal government, it is a long process to get your foot in the door. You need time in federal service, and if you’re willing to relocate that would be the fastest way to advance your career. Overall, this is a challenging career to pursue but very rewarding for any of us who wish to pursue it.

Although Officer A’Vant describes the process step by step, there are many hurdles applicants face that should be acknowledged, although we did not discuss them in this interview. For many immigrants, especially those who fled their homeland due to violence and who seek asylum, they incur significant legal fees and often do not understand the lengthy application process, especially if there is a language barrier. Fleeing one’s home also might mean that you’re running for your life, so collecting all the documentation to prove who you are may not be possible. According to Citizen Path, lawyers’ fees are often not within reach

(<https://citizenpath.com/immigration-lawyer-cost/>). According to their website, an applicant can expect to pay between \$150 and \$350 per hour for legal representation. An asylum application can cost between \$1,000 and \$7,000, and a green card petition for a relative can range between \$1,000 and \$3,500. Individuals with conditional resident green cards must also renew with fees between \$300 and \$700 every two years. If USCIS initiates deportation, legal fees can range from \$4,000 to \$12,000 and higher depending on the case.

In conclusion, while Immigration Service Officer Naima A'vant did not specifically address restorative justice principles in this interview, she is oriented towards a restorative approach. Officer A'vant believes many individuals undergoing the naturalization process can get taken advantage of either by peers or professionals, such as doctors for medical exemptions, and even unscrupulous attorneys. She suggests that the applicants educate themselves on the naturalization process which in turn will help them better understand what is expected of them and hopefully avoid the many pitfalls. Eventually they can achieve their goal in becoming a U.S. citizen, but as Officer A'vant explained, there are many hurdles along the way.

Conclusion

The insights shared by these federal agents offer a reminder of the dedication, resilience, and hard work that defines these professions. From the relentless pursuit of justice in the face of violent crime to the compassionate guidance offered to individuals seeking to make a new home in the United States, these interviews of two of our federal officers showcase the vast nature of what it means to be a public servant in our government. While I did not specifically ask about their perspectives on a restorative justice model, the FBI special agent and Immigrations officer acknowledge there's room for improvement and change is needed. The special agent believed that there needs to be more community outreach and rehabilitation programs. He mentioned that there are a number of job skill development programs in Rhode Island that can possibly help further community outreach.

Immigration officer Naima A'vant understands the system is riddled with difficulties, and individuals who may consider having medical exemptions can be taken advantage of. Her advice is to proceed with caution because it's a lengthy, meticulous process.

I have personally learned a lot from both interviews. From the special agent in the FBI, the application process was very interesting, although I always knew that the agency required a bachelor's degree but did not know the age limit to apply is 23. Even more interesting was the diverse career backgrounds accepted by the FBI, such as accounting, computer science, foreign language, and of course law enforcement. Regarding U.S. Customs and Immigration Services, it was interesting to know about some of the various documentation requirements for immigration applications such as marriage certificates, divorce papers, and medical records. Overall, conducting both of these interviews was a great experience for me, and I am glad that I have had the opportunity to share this information with any interested student.

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Chapter 2 Crackdowns: Approaches to Drug Control

By Ethan Bernardo and Tyler Morra

Introduction

Within the criminal justice system, one of the most dominant issues is illicit drug use and its impact on our communities and the nation. Illegal drugs are being made, sold, used, and laced with more potent additives now more than ever, and they are more available than ever before. Among the interviews in this chapter, we will take a closer look at what goes into some of the extensive and dangerous drug investigations that law enforcement handles. We will also share with you a recent survey we conducted among justice studies students (n=38), where respondents expressed their wish for different approaches to sentencing for drug charges and expressed hopefulness that federal and state officials can do more to lower the supply and the demand of illicit drugs in our communities.

This is an interesting area to interview regarding restorative justice because it ties in with a later interview with a defense attorney who defends many drug traffickers and users. The main area in which restorative justice is most useful is for drug charges and addiction in which the defense attorney can advocate for rehabilitation over more punitive measures like incarceration. It is interesting to see how two different perspectives from this DEA officer, who has slightly different points of view, and a local officer assigned to the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas group (HIDTA) views criminal justice differently. Drug trafficking is a major issue our country currently faces and the problem has gotten worse over the decades without much relief. The DEA Special Agent dives into this ongoing issue and describes how his work intersects with citizens and our justice system. From undercover operations to drug busts, you will read firsthand perspectives from a DEA Special Agent and an HIDTA officer on what their work is like and the criminal investigations they pursue.

Targeting Trafficking: Views from HIDTA

By Tyler Morra



Introduction

Both the DEA Special Agent and the HIDTA officer asked to remain anonymous for these interviews. An interview with a life-long police officer who now works with the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas team is the first interview. HIDTA is part of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), first created by Congress in 1988 as part of its Anti-Drug Abuse Act that connects together federal and state law enforcement (www.dea.gov). Working with the HIDTA requires an array of different responsibilities and duties. Most of the work in this field involves high traffic drug areas, and the HIDTA provides assistance to federal and state governments to stop the flow of drugs across state borders. This job requires a lot of time, planning, and effort, as it often involves high profile drug cases where officers and agents may need to travel and be away from home for long periods of time. The salary for someone in this field varies greatly because of the different pay scales police departments have, plus the supplemental pay for the task force. To work with the HIDTA task force, you must get sworn in for federal law enforcement. In the case of my interviewee and for many others, the process starts with applying at a police department, going through all of the required testing and selection process, successfully attending and graduating from the police academy, and then getting sworn in as a law enforcement officer. From there, there are different ways to move up within each specific department, and usually after around your first year on the job, you will be off probation with the opportunity to apply for the HIDTA task force. Working as a police officer and as a member of

the HIDTA task force means you play a crucial role in the criminal justice system: to keep people safe within the country and to try to prevent drug trafficking in your district. This work lends itself to restorative justice principles because this is the front line of charging people with trafficking crimes and attempting to lessen and deter future crimes, including illicit drug use, from happening.

What advice do you give to someone who wants to pursue a career in your field?

For someone just starting out, some key pieces of advice were to be sure that you have some crucial traits such as commitment, integrity, and honesty, because these are essential when it comes to having a career in law enforcement. For someone looking to become a law enforcement officer and to advance to a career within a federal agency, you must do your research; make sure you meet hiring requirements; and try to get as much time in the field as possible with ride-alongs, internships; and talk to people in the field. Extensive training is required, so be sure it is the career for you by doing your research. For those who may already have their feet in the door and would like to progress to work with HIDTA, some key pieces of advice are to stay motivated throughout the selection process, and as spots become available keep trying, even if it takes a few tries.

What special skills are needed for this career?

Aside from some of the ones discussed before like integrity and honesty, you must be able to manage stress effectively; be able to work in a high stress environment, and be able to adapt to your surroundings. Having these skills will help you be more successful within the field and keep yourself and others safe in some possibly dangerous circumstances.

I asked, *“Can you share a story that illustrates the work you do? Do you have a story that stands out?”*

“In this line of work,” he said, “there is no one story that illustrates everything that is done; however, one case that helps paint a picture and give some insight to what is done involved gathering intelligence on a major drug distribution hub and travel route, conducting

surveillance, working with other agencies, including undercover work, wiretaps, and so on.”

Evidence is compiled throughout the investigation to know who and what we are dealing with, how big of an operation it is, and what crimes are being committed. The next step in the process is to present this information and obtain a warrant which gives us access to intercept and make arrests. In this case, along with many others, it is crucial to gather the required evidence in order to establish probable cause that a judge determines and approves the warrant(s). It requires a lot of planning and patience because if you make a move at the wrong time, the whole case can get thrown off, especially if the warrant is not executed correctly or if a person’s rights are infringed upon.

This summary of what is involved in this line of work weighs heavily on the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution. This specific Amendment protects people from unlawful searches and seizures. A warrant must be meticulously executed to ensure that officers are within the scope of their duties and that the case will be able to proceed in court with all of the evidence. In *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961), the court ruled that evidence that was illegally obtained by an illegal search or seizure, and this means it is inadmissible in court. In this case, following the letter of law is real and shows how important the attention to every detail must be. If someone’s rights are infringed upon throughout this process, not only is it unjust to the individual being investigated and charged, but discrepancies may also ruin the state’s case if the evidence was obtained illegally and/or infringed a person’s rights.

“This is challenging work. How do you separate your work from your personal life?”

It is extremely important to separate work and personal life in this field. There are a lot of things that you see, deal with, and continue to think about. The most important thing that someone can do is to *“leave work at work and leave home at home.”* By saying this, it means that you should try to leave the things that you see and deal with at work rather than dwell on them at home and in your personal life. The same goes for your personal life: If you are dealing with some challenging or stressful personal issues, you must not let it impact how you do your job. However, it is sometimes hard to do this! Two helpful strategies are finding a hobby you enjoy and taking vacation time when possible. Taking vacation time is important because even if you

are not traveling like a true vacation, having a couple of days or a week off from work to just focus on yourself, your family, and your hobbies goes a long way in resetting your mentality and response to stress.

“Although your law enforcement work does not involve recommendations for sentencing. Is there a case that you know of where sentencing was rehabilitative? Or vice versa?”

Working as a law enforcement officer and with the HIDTA task force, you do not give recommendations for sentencing. Before any recommendations for sentencing are discussed, our part comes first with charging the individual with a crime. Once an individual is charged with a crime that they are being arrested for, the case goes into the hands of the lawyers and judge. For the most part, the case is out of our hands at that time unless there is testimony required at court in which we would go. However, there are some cases that involved no jail time and had a more rehabilitative approach involving drug rehabilitation and or probation with strict monitoring. Rehabilitation works in some situations if there is an individual that is battling an addiction problem, and the court decides to attack the problem at the root cause, which in turn can definitely help them. Usually, that is not the outcome for many of the HIDTA cases because our cases focus on combating major drug operations and the production, movement, and sale of them, rather than an individual who may be using illegal drugs.

“How do the stories we tell ourselves about the criminal justice system diverge (or are different) from the way it actually operates? What’s your perspective?”

Most of the time, the stories that are portrayed to the public about the criminal justice system involve high-profile cases, and at the time a case becomes public knowledge, the case is almost ready to close. Prior to that, there is an extensive time commitment and planning put into each case and in depth investigations. There is also lots of legal work regarding jurisdictions and paperwork that goes into each and every case. From the perspective of a law enforcement officer and HIDTA task force, these efforts are constant and require attention, time, and effort, not just the ones that we hear about on television or through social media.

“What does the system really do every day in the name of criminal justice, and how does it work from your perspective?”

The justice system has many moving parts that operate together. As far as law enforcement goes and the part that we play in the justice system, our involvement is making arrests, executing search warrants, and deterring crimes. The end goal from the law enforcement side is to try to make society safer and to have less crime. With the HIDTA task force, a key goal is to stop major drug trafficking and sales that end up making their way into our communities. With the goal of stopping the flow of drugs into our communities at the trafficking level, we lessen the amount of drugs that we see in some communities. Stopping the flow of drugs can help make the country safer for everyone with fewer illegal drugs being moved around our streets.

I followed up with, *“What do you think needs to change for either victims, offenders, or the community?”*

Sticking with the topic of drugs, something that is extremely beneficial is treatment for substance abuse and mental health services. This can be said for victims, offenders, or anyone in a community. No matter what someone’s role is when it comes to these issues involving drugs, the number one thing is to get the right treatment. This is something that can not only help the individuals who may have a drug addiction or mental health problem, but also the community as a whole benefits over time. With the proper resources, fewer people will be addicted or suffering from these drugs’ potent side effects.

“What else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in criminal justice?”

Aside from some of the things stated above, something else that is important for someone interested in this career to know is that it is a job that requires a lot of dedication and time. Especially working with HIDTA, this requires traveling and many unknown work hours that can change easily. It requires some flexibility and commitment, but it is a job that cannot be replaced

with any other. It is extremely rewarding, exciting, and you will build bonds and relationships with people such as coworkers that will last a lifetime.

“What focus is of utmost importance right now as far as drugs in the US. For example, how is fentanyl laced marijuana tracked in Rhode Island?”

Fentanyl is definitely an important focus as it is extremely dangerous. As far as tracking fentanyl or fentanyl laced drugs, there is a combination of things that can be done like getting information or tips from other departments and conducting routine surveillance of suspected fentanyl or fentanyl laced drugs. Fentanyl is a crucial drug to catch and stop at the source due to the nature of it, people can easily overdose on it. It is best if it can be stopped at the source before it gets to the point of distribution because it is then that dealers can sell it in smaller amounts to the public. It becomes especially dangerous when it is laced in a substance like marijuana. Someone that buys what they think is marijuana may overdose when Fentanyl is mixed with it.

Relative to the dangers of Fentanyl in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that 60% of opioid deaths are associated with fentanyl laced drugs purchased on the street (Roehr 2018). This statistic puts into perspective how dangerous fentanyl -laced drugs are and why communities need HIDTA intervention.

“From your professional perspective, do you think the war on drugs has been successful? Why or why not?”

The war on drugs has been beneficial in ways regarding the seizure of lots of drugs in trafficking amounts. The trafficking amount of a drug varies depending on the substance, anything exceeding the limits will be considered a trafficking amount. Even with countless efforts to seize drugs, there is always room for improvement. As the war on drugs continues, and police are able to intercept more, traffickers learn new tricks to work their way around interception. Unfortunately, the U.S. has not seen a significant reduction in the drug problem. While HIDTA can help interdict traffickers, we need to look for more rehabilitative methods to support those individuals who are addicted and to keep our communities safe.

In conclusion, both interviews were very enlightening and it was a pleasure to have had the privilege to interview such aspiring professionals. It was interesting to see some of the happenings from the side of a law enforcement officer and the HIDTA task force and how it differs and relates to the side of my first interview with a criminal defense attorney. In sum, we have many moving parts to our criminal justice system, and it seems that everyone has a job to do, and they try to do it to the best of their ability.

The point of restorative justice and having a more rehabilitative justice system was mentioned in both interviews. Both the HIDTA officer and the criminal defense attorney share a similar response, and that is that we would do well to deploy more restorative justice tools in some, but perhaps not all, situations and cases. With every case that is presented to the criminal justice system is unique, it is tough for one person to say that a retributive system vs. a restorative system is the answer for all. However, I think that there was beneficial insight where both of the professionals I interviewed may be able to work together in order to advance and improve the way our criminal justice currently works. Lastly, working as a law enforcement officer and member of the HIDTA task force is a very difficult and demanding job; however, it offers some incredible opportunities and room for growth and improvement.

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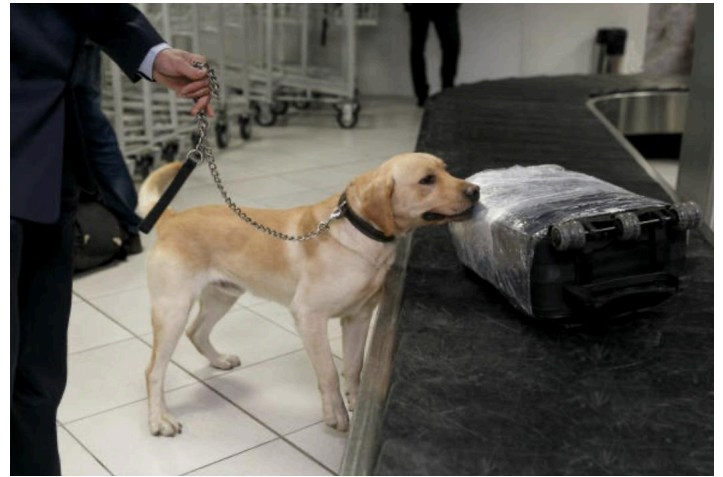
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Enforcing Justice: Inside the Mind of a DEA Special Agent

By Ethan Bernardo



The DEA, or the Drug Enforcement Administration, is an important branch of our government whose mission is to “enforce the controlled substances laws and regulations of the United States and bring to the criminal and civil justice system of the United States, or any other competent jurisdiction, those organizations and principal members of organizations, involved in the growing, manufacture, or distribution of controlled substances appearing in or destined for illicit traffic in the United States; and to recommend and support non-enforcement programs aimed at reducing the availability of illicit controlled substances on the domestic and international market” ([DEA.gov/about/mission#](https://www.dea.gov/about/mission#)). The Drug Enforcement Administration is operated by the federal government and employs 4,140 special agents with a total of 7,337 positions (Justice.gov, 2024, Drug Enforcement Administration “Budget Performance Summary”). The Special Agent I had the pleasure to interview asked to be anonymous. The interview was conducted on April 15th, 2024, at the Rhode Island College Library.

Becoming a Special Agent within the Drug Enforcement Administration can be a very rewarding but challenging career to pursue. The average salary for a Special Agent after completing the training academy is “approximately \$49,746 for a GS-7 and \$55,483 for a GS-9.” After “4 years of service, Special Agents are eligible to progress to the GS-13 level and can earn approximately \$92,592 or more per year” (dea.gov, 2024, the hiring process). The educational

requirements to become a Special Agent within the Drug Enforcement Administration must be “a bachelor’s degree (GPA of 2.95 or higher) which is the bare minimum before applying (dea.gov, 2024, Skills and experience requirements).

“What steps did you have to take in order to become a DEA Special Agent?”

The Special Agent explained that the basics are a college degree, and a candidate must pass a physical test, medical exam, psychological exam, and polygraph test. The Special Agent said that it can be years from applying to getting accepted and going into the actual academy. Sometimes this is because they are looking for certain skills and it is a matter of budget constraints. For example, the Special Agent started off in the county sheriff’s department, then ICE, then to the DEA. During the initial stages of the application, the Special Agent went to grad school, did a couple of deployments in the military, and then continued trying to excel at other related jobs. The Special Agent recommends to not *“become stagnant or complacent, continue to make yourself a better candidate.”*

“What advice do you give to someone who wants to pursue a career in your field?” The Special Agent mentioned to make sure that’s what you want to do, there is a common perception derived from movies and tv shows that don’t portray reality. According to the Special Agent, *“a common saying of the instructors at the academy is that the job is 90% boring and 10% incredible.”* The Special Agent believes that *“if you are certain this is the career you would want to pursue, then you really have to push yourself academically, physically, and to never stop seeking self-improvement.”*

“What specific skills are needed for this career?”

The Special Agent said that *“Other federal government experience would help, try to get into local police or state police departments first.”* The Special Agent mentioned that *“when the agency is recruiting, it will change with the times, first there was a push to hire attorneys and accountants, then law enforcement and military. It depends more on the individual than the career, law enforcement and investigative experience helps, being comfortable with firearms,*

working alone, being part of a team, and being able to take on a leadership role are all very important.”

“How do the stories we tell ourselves about the criminal justice system diverge or are different from the way it actually operates? What’s your perspective?”

The Special Agent said that *“with TV and movies, it is not that glamorous, it can be very tedious, the time frame for everything is much longer than people think.”* The Special Agent acknowledged that *“the public perception believes the criminal justice process should be faster, when it is much more complicated, a case could be a month or 5-6 years.”* During the initial hiring process, candidates are told that *“drugs are involved in everything.”*

I asked, *“With marijuana, is this a target the DEA should prioritize?”*

The Special Agent said that *“no drug is acceptable, even marijuana. Some agents forget it is a bigger cause and concept than just arresting violators. If you believe drugs are a not downfall of society, don’t work for the DEA.”* The Special Agent believes specifics have to be looked at, *“such as marijuana being pushed to kids or when dealers are growing inside a house - that can disrupt a whole neighborhood and lead to environmental hazards.”* The Special Agent commented that more studies get released on long term marijuana use, and decades ago it was very normal, then health hazards and long term effects were identified.”

“Can you share a story that illustrates the work you do? Do you have a story that stands out?”

The Special Agent recounted a previous investigation that started with overdose deaths. *“There was a time when fentanyl became popular as a replacer for heroin, and when we first learned about its distribution, we used to call it a bad batch given how deadly and potent it was.”* The Special Agent explained, *“Most of the public think, ‘Why would you sell something so deadly to your customers, killing your customer base?’ But this is what addicts look for.”* The Special Agent shared the sequence of his investigation. *“With those overdosed death victims, we were able to cultivate a source who bought from a dealer, and we followed that dealer by using our confidential sources. We escalated the amounts purchased leading to more conversations*

between the sources and the dealer which allowed us to follow the dealer to his source, and the surveillance on that source led to identifying multiple members of the distribution network.”

From their investigation, the Special Agent learned that most narcotic sources were coming from Fedex, the U.S. postal service, and UPS. They traced most packages to California to a mail distribution center, and along the way we were able to connect the local source to money contacts in New York. *“We identified the money contacts, shipping center, and worked with our counterparts in both cities to make multiple arrests, where we found more kilos of heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, and then extradited.”*

I asked, *“What does the system really do every day in the name of criminal justice, and how does it work from your perspective?”*

The Special Agent explained that the DEA is a bureaucracy just like any federal agency, and the level of that bureaucracy must identify with new administrators. The Special Agent explained that *“one of the things the DEA prides itself on is working with state and local counterparts, a task force with 10 people would include 3 DEA agents with other agents from different departments.”* The Special Agent believes this inter-agency teamwork is essential. *“Working with other agencies in a task force gives more manpower, resources, and information sharing which allows for more progress.”*

“What do you think needs to change for either victims, offenders, or the community?”

The Special Agent explained: *“For victims, we would have to define ‘victim’ in the sense of drug enforcement, such as if the victim is a user, then there needs to be more drug rehabilitation and more effective drug rehabilitation.”* On the other hand, the Special Agent believes that *“the best way to help is to go after the offenders who are the drug dealers and drug traffickers, and more penalties need to be established.”* According to the Special Agent, deterrence theory can work when the offender understands that their willingness to cooperate depends on whether they are looking at severe penalties, such as a lengthy incarceration and being apart from family members.

“Can you describe a particularly challenging case you’ve worked on and how you approached it?”

The Special Agent said that when it comes to public statements or press conferences, it is rare you hear that the DEA was involved. According to the Special Agent, a target during an investigation was in Rhode Island and was so well networked through family and friends. The Special Agent said, *“over the course of a few years, we had not been successful because the information kept making its way back to the target, agents were identified and the vehicles used were difficult to keep concealed.”* The Special Agent said, *“in order to go after the target, we actually had to work with another DEA group in Massachusetts, and the group was able to make an arrest without the target being aware of anything that was coming.”*

He had casually mentioned that this investigation that led to an arrest took years, so I asked him, *“What is your daily routine like in life as a DEA Agent?”*

The Special Agent said that *“every day is different, surveillance over night or search warrants at 6 AM, or even waiting until an operation starts, which can take a while.”* The Special Agent mentioned that all of the paperwork and report writing is done during business hours, but even that doesn't have to be the case. *“Everything is goal and deadline driven, not work hours driven, so hours are always different but a lot of pluses to everything,”* he said.

“Is having a personal life difficult as a Special Agent in the DEA?”

The Special Agent replied: *“It can be difficult at times, as long as you have the right mindset and foundation, you will be fine.”* The Special Agent also commented that *“having a family is difficult at times; the key is that your job should be your number one priority and that your family knows that.”* The Special Agent mentioned that *“any obstacles, such as family events, you approach that as a team with your family or anyone related.”*

“To wrap up, what else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in criminal justice?”

The Special Agent believes, *“For the DEA specifically, I think it is important to understand the world that you are about to enter when you work for a police department. Most times people are*

happy when you show up on responses, but no one is ever happy when the DEA shows up.” The Special Agent mentioned that “the world of drug trafficking can be shocking at times, with the absence of morals and its disregard for humanity. If someone is not comfortable with investigating a target who completely disregards the safety of their children, or has no concern about the disease of addiction, and you cannot manage the violence, other law enforcement avenues would be better suited to you.”

In conclusion, the DEA Special Agent saw the need for both a crime control model for dealers and traffickers and was very much oriented towards restorative justice principles for victims and users. He believes drug users and addicts are often victims, so effective rehabilitation should be the main priority. The best way to attack this issue, he says, is to go after the offenders first.

I found it very interesting regarding some of the cases this Special Agent has worked on throughout the years. One example he mentioned was the issue with drugs being trafficked through mail service companies, which I was not aware of. Another interesting topic that intrigued me was the marijuana issue our country faces and how some states continue to have harsh penalties for users. Although marijuana is legal for adults in 24 states including Rhode Island, it is still harmful for our youth and can lead to long term effects at a young age (Shen 2020). As of May 2024, only 24 states permit the use of recreational marijuana, and under federal law, it is still illegal and can be punishable up to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine for the first offense (Congressional Research Service 2024).

I learned this can be a challenging career to pursue but very rewarding for any of us who wishes to truly engage in the commitment and dedication it requires. These interviews demonstrate that the drug problem in the United States has no easy fix. While these agents and agencies work hard to reduce the flow of drugs into our neighborhoods, the work is demanding and the demands are high. These interviews tell us what’s involved to work for a federal agency and go after drugs; what steps need to be taken for a career in these fields; and most importantly, their professional insight on how the war on drugs is handled - or could be handled - at the federal and state levels.

One of the key takeaways from these interviews is that these professionals believe in a restorative model for a user who is dealing with a drug addiction. These professionals point to a more rehabilitative sentencing approach because the demand for illegal drugs cannot be handled or “cured” in a prison or jail cell. Diversion sentencing of individuals with non-violent drug offenses would likely decrease recidivism rates among users, and restorative justice would provide drug rehabilitation and counseling to get them on track and away from drugs. These agents recommend studying and advancing these options for non-violent offenders, and one of the first action steps the DEA has approved is to reclassify marijuana from a Level I to a Level III drug. Schedule I substances are drugs like heroin that have a high potential for abuse, with physical and psychological addiction. Schedule III substances are less likely for abuse and are classified as low to moderate potential for addiction, so marijuana would be placed within the same category as Tylenol with codeine, anabolic steroids, and ketamine (<https://www.dea.gov/drug-information/drug-scheduling>). This reclassification is a nod in the right direction, and with decriminalization, more research can be done to better understand its dangers and the potential medical benefits of marijuana use.

Lastly, a student survey we conducted to get justice studies students’ opinions on these issues and more, revealed similar sentiments (Qualtrics 2005:2024). The two survey questions we ran in a cross tabulation on were, *“Do you think federal agents are doing enough to reduce the flow of illegal drugs across our border?”* and *“How much do you agree with this statement? Police, prosecutors, and judges should focus on helping our communities, not just punishing offenders.”* The results were interesting, showing that 65% of respondents thought that more should be done to stop the flow of drugs coming over our border while also agreeing that police, prosecutors, and judges should aim for a more restorative approach to better serve the needs of non-violent offenders and help support our communities. These results tie in with some responses given to us by our interviewees and show that it’s not an either- or question: there should be a more retributive - crime control model approach - to stop drugs coming across the border and prosecute accordingly while also implementing alternatives, like more diversion programs and rehabilitative supports for people suffering from a drug addiction. Implementing these ideas into action could decrease the amount of illicit drugs making their way into our communities while also creating better and safer communities for all. The DEA and HIDTA task force, among

authors, can stop the supply while our criminal justice system seeks alternative sentencing and approaches to rehabilitation to reduce the demand. The Special Agent acknowledges that rehabilitation and restoration are key to deterring recidivism. The agents agree with the justice studies students: more needs to be done to ensure safer, drug-free communities in order to embark towards a better future for all citizens.

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Chapter 3: State Police: Safeguarding Our State and Communities

By Priscilla Nichols

Introduction

In today's complex world, the roles of law enforcement agencies, particularly state troopers, are under increasing scrutiny. As conversations around justice evolve, there's a growing advocacy for restorative justice, as seen in works like *Critical Thinking: Developing the Intellectual Tools for Social Justice* (Zornado, et al. 2020). Within this discourse, the focus shifts from punitive measures to repairing the harm inflicted on individuals and communities.

Since we know that our current criminal justice system is not working well, this philosophical approach advocates for restoring justice without retaliation or revenge. The philosophical path forward involves shifting the lens from viewing a violation of law to acknowledging a violation against people and relationships: the offender is obliged to repair the harm done, and with intensive supports in place, the restorative justice process can effectively work with individuals and families together to keep nonviolent offenders out of jail (Zornado et al. 2020:137). This approach more effectively recognizes the underlying structural factors and circumstances that contribute to criminal occurrence and recurrence from issues like poverty, unemployment, limited access to job training, education, residing in high-risk neighborhoods, inadequate parenting, exposure to violence, and so on. Having a new way of thinking about justice embodies a comprehensive perspective, rooted in the acknowledgment that neither the perpetrator nor the victim is solely responsible for these conditions and personal setbacks.



However, within these evolving ideas about justice, we conducted a recent survey to explore perceptions of state troopers and the level of trust respondents, particularly justice studies students, had with their local state police. Out of 37 respondents, an astonishing 59% expressed uncertainty about whether they had interacted with a state trooper, suggesting a gap between law

enforcement and the communities they serve. Furthermore, a notable 16% reported negative encounters, contrasting with 13% who expressed satisfaction. Yet, a compelling revelation emerges when exploring trust levels: a substantial 45% of respondents reported satisfaction in their level of trust with state troopers, underscoring the complexity of public sentiment and the multifaceted nature of law enforcement relationships (Qualtrics 2005; 2024). In this chapter, we'll explore the perspectives of a State Trooper from the Rhode Island State Police, delving into their career experiences and insights. Through this interview, we aim to uncover valuable information about the profession and hear their insights into restorative justice programs, as well as other useful information about law enforcement practices.

Beyond the Uniform: Exploring the Life of a State Trooper

State troopers are vital law enforcement officers responsible for maintaining order within a state's jurisdiction. They operate under state departments of public safety or highway patrol, ensuring safety on highways, state-owned areas, and rural regions. Duties include traffic enforcement, accident investigation, and emergency response, requiring specialized training. Becoming a state trooper involves meeting strict requirements such as age limits, education, and police academy training. In Rhode Island, troopers earn an average of \$55,611 annually, with higher education leading to higher salaries. While current job openings in Rhode Island may be limited, troopers engage in community outreach and restorative justice efforts, fostering safer communities through dialogue and rehabilitation.

On February 20, 2024, I conducted a phone interview with a friend of my father's, who has served as a corporal in the patrol bureau of the Rhode Island State Police for 12 years. He has been working the overnight shift in the metro Providence area, garnering significant recognition in the community for his expertise and dedication to his career. When I contacted him for the interview, he was enthusiastic and provided valuable insights for those interested in pursuing a similar path. Our chat was casual and enjoyable, especially since he reached out while on duty. In this interview, he opted to maintain anonymity, yet he proved to be remarkably insightful and eager to discuss his professional journey.

When asked for advice on entering this profession, he emphasized the importance of being willing to make significant lifestyle adjustments and maintaining a deep passion for the job. Sacrifices, such as missing family events and holidays while having limited vacation time, are common in this field. However, he stressed that the opportunity is rewarding for those committed to it. He highlighted the necessity of approaching the career with an open mindset, as misconceptions often lead to disillusionment. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of maintaining physical fitness and being mentally prepared for the demands of the job.

One crucial question was about the essential skills needed for this career. His response emphasized the need to "embrace discomfort," referring to the physical discomfort of wearing gear like belts, cross-straps, and vests, along with back pain. He stressed the importance of strong report writing skills, advising against over-reliance on electronics for writing and grammar. He also highlighted the significance of taking pride in one's work, staying motivated, and maintaining a positive attitude towards work beyond just the paycheck. As he puts it: *"The main goal of being police is recognizing that the title of police is bigger than the individual. Stay level-headed and be there for the right reasons, not for power or for a paycheck."*

"Balancing work and personal life is challenging," he notes. Over time, you become desensitized to the separation, though it remains difficult. He acknowledged his absence from his family during Christmas and Thanksgiving last year, noting that while such situations can occur, it's essential to keep pressing forward. As a supervisor, he finds it particularly tough to avoid confronting harrowing situations like death, overdoses, murder, and accidents. He emphasizes the importance of separating these aspects and striving for compassion, both for oneself, one's family, and for the sake of the career. Additionally, he stresses the necessity of being a source of strength and support for victims' families during their moments of vulnerability.

As we reach the middle of our interview, we delve into the more challenging questions about our current justice system, personal stories, what programs are successful, and how training schools are helping kids at risk. He begins by recounting a story about two informants whom he maintains contact with, both of whom were once victims of drug abuse. He describes them as "customers" who would do anything for drugs and collaborate with the police in exchange for

money to support their habit. Despite their troubled pasts, they assisted in numerous cases, leading them to recognize the detrimental nature of their circumstances and the need for positive change. He reflects on such experiences as humbling, noting that they have since remained clean for over a year and are now leading fulfilling lives, thanks to the assistance they received.

Regarding the state police's community outreach efforts, he points out their active engagement in fostering positive relationships with young children through holiday gift-giving, participation in sports games, and involvement in internship programs. These initiatives not only serve to build rapport with the community but also aim to mentor and potentially recruit future troopers. He mentioned a high drop rate in state trooper recruits and the need for effective mentoring and support throughout the training process. He acknowledged the importance of such outreach efforts in nurturing and retaining prospective law enforcement professionals.

When discussing at-risk youth and the training school, he expresses concern about the relaxed laws and regulations in Rhode Island, which may contribute to the school becoming a breeding ground for gangs. He explains that the training school primarily provides basic necessities like shelter and food but doesn't effectively address underlying issues that lead young individuals into criminal behavior. The emphasis is placed on the need for systemic change, suggesting that families and societal structures must address root causes to see meaningful improvements in reducing crime and supporting at-risk youth.

He offers a comprehensive view on necessary changes within communities, addressing both offenders and victims in the justice system. Concerning offenders, he stresses the importance of tackling root causes of criminal behavior, such as the absence of parental guidance and support in inner-city homes. He illustrates this with a specific example of a juvenile lacking proper supervision, and despite displaying religious symbols like a Jesus rosary, the impact of absent parental figures on children's susceptibility to criminal influences is strong.

Regarding community-wide changes, he emphasizes the need to uphold law and order to ensure accountability. He acknowledges the prevalence of unreported shootings and advocates for increased vigilance and community reporting to better address underlying safety concerns.

Concerning victims, he references organizations like MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) and the high rate of DUI cases in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. He suggests that those involved in handling DUI cases, including judges, should demonstrate more empathy and understanding and draw from personal experiences to better grasp the seriousness of such offenses.

His perspective focuses on the influence of societal factors on criminal behavior and stresses the need to address systemic issues like poverty and underemployment, to ensure accountability and foster empathy to support both offenders and victims in the justice system. He expresses disillusionment with current law enforcement practices and public perceptions of police officers, noting concerns about accountability and fairness. On September 28th, Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee enacted a law that downgrades personal-use possession charges for specific drugs to misdemeanors, applicable to quantities of 10 grams or less. Attorney General Peter Neronha regards these charges as avenues towards treatment rather than punitive measures, despite the possibility of up to two years of jail time. This legislation aims to address disparities in law enforcement and public health systems, particularly impacting communities of color. Advocates seek to broaden such initiatives, signifying a shift towards prioritizing treatment over incarceration for substance abuse. Furthermore, in his discourse, he underscores recent changes in drug possession laws, notably Governor McKee's decision in 2021 to categorize minor drug amounts as misdemeanors, linking these adjustments to broader societal perceptions and law enforcement practices.

My interaction with the state trooper I interviewed revealed several key points. Firstly, his remarkable personality and deep understanding of his profession stood out to me. His enthusiasm for his job is infectious, and he is willing and eager to share his knowledge. Beyond the scope of my initial questions, he provided invaluable information on how to navigate the complexities of a career in law enforcement while making time for his family and himself. On a personal note, his dedication as a husband and father to his wife and three-year-old daughter added a heartwarming dimension to our conversation, enriching my understanding of him beyond his professional life. During our short time together, the opportunity to learn from him was truly remarkable, providing valuable insights into his life and what it means to be an accomplished

state trooper with 12 years of experience. Individuals of his caliber serve as sources of inspiration, instilling others with the courage and motivation to chase their aspirations.

Chapter four of *Critical Thinking: Developing the Intellectual Tools for Social Justice* explores cultural cognition, which is the ability to interact effectively with people from different socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds” (Zornado et al. 2020:80). It suggests that “getting others” assists professionals in improving their interactions in various fields, particularly in the intersection of policing and the public. During my interview, the state trooper emphasized the importance of diversity and cultural cognition, aligning with the views expressed by the authors, because it generates better community engagement and can help build trust. However, the trooper noted that the police force maintains a high level of self-regulation, indicating that developing cultural competency skills is deeply ingrained from recruitment to daily operations. While some older individuals may struggle to fully adopt these guidelines due to generational disparities, recognizing the significance of diversity and inclusion remains paramount, especially considering the heightened apprehension among non-white individuals in police encounters.

State troopers are actively addressing issues of racism, implementing stringent guidelines to address mistreatment based on factors such as race, gender, and sexuality, with consequences such as dismissal for those who violate them. In summary, Zornado et al. acknowledges the significant impact of racism and discrimination, particularly in the context of stop and frisk protocols (Zornado et al.2020:74-75). They indicate efforts to reform old rules and regulations in order to reduce the frequency of “over policing.” A comprehensive approach is essential in improving equality in due process and procedural justice. From members of a community to law enforcement and judicial professionals, we would do well to ensure accessible legal aid; attend implicit bias training; strive for transparency and cooperation; have diverse representation at all levels of government; and enact legislative reforms aimed at fostering fairness in the justice process for all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status or background.

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Behind the Desk: An Interview with a State Police Administrative Support Specialist

As an administrative support specialist, Mr. Nichols works behind the scenes in a crucial role, ensuring the smooth execution of administrative tasks vital to law enforcement operations at the Rhode Island State Police. While the specifics of their duties may vary depending on the department's requirements, their primary objective is to offer comprehensive administrative assistance to law enforcement personnel. This



encompasses managing both internal and external correspondence, including emails, letters, and phone calls, with promptness and professionalism. Additionally, they handle tasks such as drafting and proofreading documents, generating reports, and meticulously maintaining records. Serving as the main point of contact for external inquiries, they assist the public in obtaining information, processing record requests, and directing individuals to the appropriate department or personnel for further assistance.

Their adept multitasking abilities and capacity to handle diverse tasks enable law enforcement officers to focus on their core responsibilities of ensuring public safety and enforcing the law. Through their meticulous attention to detail, organizational prowess, and ability to thrive in high-pressure environments, they significantly contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Rhode Island State Police.

Regarding qualifications and salary, the requirements for an administrative support specialist within the State Police may vary depending on the department and jurisdiction. Generally, candidates are expected to possess a high school diploma or equivalent, although additional education or training in office administration or a related field is preferred. Previous experience in administrative roles, particularly in law enforcement or government agencies, can also be

beneficial. In terms of salary, entry-level positions typically start with a base salary ranging from approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year, with opportunities for advancement as experience is gained and additional responsibilities are taken on. Higher-ranking specialists or those with specialized skills may earn salaries upwards of \$50,000 to \$60,000 per year. Additionally, State Police Administrative Support Specialists may be eligible for benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off. Overall, the salary and qualifications for this role underscore the importance of supporting the smooth operation of administrative tasks essential to law enforcement operations and upholding the department's mission of maintaining public safety and enforcing the law.

Within the Rhode Island State Police, a variety of administrative support specialist positions are available, each indispensable for maintaining the department's administrative operations. These specialists play integral roles in supporting law enforcement personnel, allowing them to focus on their core duties effectively. Among these positions is the Records Clerk, responsible for managing and organizing departmental records such as incident reports and arrest records. They ensure the accuracy and accessibility of these records, facilitating efficient information retrieval for both internal and external stakeholders. Another vital role is that of the administrative assistant, who provides comprehensive support to departmental executives and commanders, handling various administrative tasks and facilitating communication within the department and with external partners. Furthermore, positions like the Fiscal Support Specialist and Human Resources Coordinator are essential as they play vital roles in managing financial and personnel matters within the department, ensuring financial responsibility and supporting recruitment and personnel management efforts. Together, these administrative support specialists uphold the department's mission of maintaining public safety and enforcing the law through their dedication, attention to detail, and effective organizational skills.

On March 4th, 2024, I interviewed my father, who has served as the administrative support specialist for the Rhode Island State Police for the past 13 years. Currently assigned to the day shift, he manages supply requests and orders necessary to fulfill requisitions, while also seeking out pricing for various items. During our interview, he expressed enthusiasm in sharing insights about his career. The conversation took on a casual tone, reflecting our typical interactions, and

following the interview, we took the opportunity to catch up on lost time. Throughout the interview, he made the choice to remain anonymous, yet he exhibited a remarkable level of insightfulness and a genuine eagerness to delve into his career experiences.

As we began the interview, I asked why he chose this career path. He responded that it was primarily to provide for his family and because it aligned well with his skill set, two essential aspects for a dedicated family man. The medical benefits for a family of four were also a significant advantage, though he emphasized that the experience gained was more than satisfactory. Initially, it was evident that he faced challenges when starting out, but with time, he honed his skills and expertise, eventually attaining the title he holds today.

When asked for guidance on entering this profession, he stressed the necessity for individuals to possess exceptional organizational skills. He also highlighted the value of having a background in maintenance and carpentry, saying its usefulness to construct tailored storage solutions for the inventory he manages. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of maintaining a determined mindset, as he firmly believes that "hard work pays off." Describing his role within the Rhode Island State Police, he perceives himself primarily as providing support to this noble organization. Recognizing the Rhode Island State Police as the premier law enforcement agency in the state, he takes pride in his daily efforts to assist the troopers by fulfilling their requests to the best of his ability.

He further mentions having numerous friends in his field, many of whom are State Troopers, including one whom I had interviewed previously. The trooper I interviewed states that my father is deeply dedicated, and although he prioritizes his family above all else, he is committed to his career. This comment shows how my father has impacted the Rhode Island State Police and its troopers over the years. My father finds the stories the troopers share with him to be quite intriguing, though some can also be upsetting to hear. Unfortunately, none could be stated at this time due to reasons of confidentiality, but nonetheless, he cherishes every interaction he has while on duty and finds fulfillment in his role during interactions and despite the varied emotions that accompany it.

As we reached the midpoint of our interview, I posed a question that had long been on my mind: "How do you manage to keep work separate from your personal life?" His response was brief yet insightful: *"I find it quite easy to compartmentalize work and personal life. I leave work at work, not bringing it home with me, and simply resume where I left off the following day."* While he was deeply involved with my brother and me during our childhood whenever time permitted, there were occasions when work commitments caused him to miss out on special events and activities. However, with more free time now, it's wonderful to spend quality moments with him whenever possible.

As our interview neared its conclusion, we delved into more challenging topics, including his opinion on the Rhode Island criminal justice system. He underscored the significance of domestic violence laws, highlighting their role in providing better outcomes for victims in abusive relationships. In Rhode Island, women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, yet many refrain from reporting it due to many flaws in our current legal framework. He stressed the importance of holding perpetrators, regardless of gender identity, accountable for their actions, and advocates stricter enforcement to serve as a deterrent. Additionally, he emphasized the need for greater acknowledgment of male victims of domestic violence, stating that they too deserve a platform to speak out. In today's society, there's a shifting perception away from traditional notions of masculinity, and perhaps this allows for more openness and acceptance of their vulnerability than ever before.

He also raises concerns about the ongoing opioid crisis in Rhode Island, emphasizing the urgent need for examination, particularly in light of the alarming surge of the fentanyl epidemic. This epidemic has sadly resulted in the loss of numerous lives, including young individuals. The accessibility of drugs, whether through over-the-counter medications or illicit distribution networks, exacerbates the problem. To tackle this issue, targeted drug law enforcement efforts could deter distributors, while proactive awareness campaigns led by organizations can educate the public about the risks associated with these substances. The goal is to preempt the need for reactive responses, often triggered by social media. Facebook already does this with their selling feature called "Facebook Marketplace" that specifically allows Facebook users to report

drug-selling, and they can file a report against a potential seller. This also goes for those who post similar content on their page, and if it's reported multiple times it will be removed.

Some of his suggestions include taking the initiative to educate oneself about the ongoing opioid epidemic in our community by using credible sources such as <https://health.ri.gov/addiction/> and understanding how one can contribute to creating a solution. The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides detailed information about the connection between drug use and mental health, and their data show that the greatest need for rehabilitative and recovery services for opioid addiction and other illicit drug use is individuals between the ages of 20 and 40 (<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/quick-statistics> 2023). By calling or texting 988, people in crisis can be helped without law enforcement involvement. By becoming more informed about the situations in our community, individuals can better grasp the gravity of the issue and take proactive steps to help. This includes learning about available resources and support services, as well as understanding how to report crimes related to drug abuse and distribution. By increasing awareness and taking action, we can collectively work towards combating the opioid epidemic and ensuring the safety and well-being of our community.

In the end, I decided to reserve my father's short biography for the conclusion, as it's a key aspect of his journey and career development. He expresses deep contentment with his life, affirming he wouldn't change a thing. Recalling his childhood, he shares a heartfelt desire to have become a state trooper. However, financial obstacles prevented him from pursuing this path in college, leading him to enlist in the United States Marine Corps instead. Despite this deviation, he believes fate played a role in guiding him to his current position, and his unwavering dedication has resulted in a fulfilling career.

On a personal level, my father has imparted invaluable wisdom and significantly influenced my career path in law enforcement. His guidance has been instrumental in shaping my character, teaching me the values of determination, respect, and knowledge. He always kept me on my toes, pushing me to become the person I am today. I am deeply honored to pursue his dream job, and I am determined to succeed to make him proud of my future accomplishments as I aspire to

become a state trooper. He has consistently emphasized the importance of perseverance, urging me to never abandon my dreams and to refrain from boasting about achievements until they are accomplished. These words of wisdom have served as constant reminders to stay focused and driven, regardless of the challenges encountered along the way.

Conclusion

Our investigation into the perspectives of a state trooper and support personnel from the Rhode Island State Police, combined with insights from student survey data, offers a deeper understanding of law enforcement dynamics and community perceptions. While the trooper's interview sheds light on the profession, survey results provide a glimpse into justice studies students' wider perspectives, particularly their own interactions and perspectives with state troopers. A trend in the survey of just n=38 justice studies students demonstrated more dissatisfaction than satisfaction, including direct interactions with law enforcement. Despite its limited scope and lack of reliable measures, it would be beneficial for law enforcement to investigate why these perceptions and personal interactions may compromise their effectiveness as peacekeepers and law enforcement officers. Trust levels are also mixed and emphasize the complexity of law enforcement's relationships with the public. Although a small survey, it underscores the necessity for continuous dialogue and engagement between police and communities.

Trust levels are also mixed and by acknowledging and addressing issues such as racism and discrimination within law enforcement, as evidenced by both the survey findings and troopers' perspectives, there is a clear commitment to advancing fairness and equality in policing. Despite evidence suggesting otherwise, hot spot policing persists in high crime areas, but this preventive law enforcement approach lacks community endorsement and contributes to distrust and disengagement within the community. A comprehensive approach, integrating qualitative insights and quantitative data, exemplifies ongoing endeavors to bolster law enforcement-community relations, advance restorative justice principles, and advocate for social justice and criminal justice for all citizens.

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Chapter 4: Inside the Lives of Local Police Officers

By Troy Morra and Priscilla Nichols

Introduction

Inside this chapter we explore perspectives on policing from a veteran lieutenant and detective from two high crime cities in Rhode Island - Providence and Central Falls. First we explore community policing and gender representation in law enforcement that uncover a pivotal aspect of fostering inclusivity and equity within the profession and emphasize the importance of community policing. Through the female perspective, we gain insight into the unique challenges and contributions of women in a historically male-dominated field. Understanding the systemic hurdles, from recruitment to workplace culture, this interview reveals the need for proactive initiatives to address gender disparities and create supportive environments for all officers. This embrace of gender diversity not only strengthens law enforcement but also enhances its effectiveness in serving diverse communities.

Transitioning to the complexities of the criminal justice system, societal inequities and socioeconomic instabilities often contribute to crime and conflict, and while punitive measures are common, a focus on rehabilitation is essential for societal progress. This second interview encapsulates a day spent with a Providence detective, a 30 year veteran who has worked in the Bureau of Criminal Identification division for 18 years. Given his work, he also comments on the rise of artificial intelligence and how it presents both promise and concern. Justice can be nuanced, particularly to take into account critical pieces of information that AI may overlook. Vigilant oversight is imperative to ensure AI aligns with ethical standards and upholds principles of fairness and equity, emphasizing the enduring importance of human judgment and compassion as it intersects with law enforcement and criminal proceedings.



Women in Uniform: An Interview with a Lieutenant By: Priscilla Nichols

As a Lieutenant at the Central Falls Police Department in Rhode Island, Lt. Sarah McNulty's role encompasses various leadership and administrative responsibilities crucial for maintaining public safety and ensuring efficient police operations. Lieutenant McNulty oversees daily patrol activities, supervises officers on duty, and coordinates responses to emergency situations within the community. Additionally, they play a key role in developing and implementing departmental policies and procedures, as well as conducting training sessions to enhance the skills and capabilities of officers under their command. The lieutenant also collaborates with other law enforcement agencies and community stakeholders to address local concerns and foster positive relationships with residents. Their dedication to upholding the law, promoting community engagement, and ensuring the well-being of both officers and citizens is integral to the department's mission of serving and protecting the Central Falls community.

In Central Falls, they are actively recruiting for the position of entry-level police officer, offering a competitive starting salary of \$61,687 along with a comprehensive benefits package. Benefits include a \$1,000 annual retention bonus, tuition reimbursement, and financial incentives ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 for candidates holding bachelor's or master's degrees. Additional perks include health coverage, paid holidays, and more. To qualify, applicants must be U.S. citizens, at least 20 years old, possess a valid driver's license, and have a high school diploma or GED. Successful candidates will undergo various tests, including physical agility, swimming, psychological evaluation, medical screening, and an extensive employment background check. This position presents an excellent opportunity for individuals seeking a fulfilling career in law enforcement and a chance to serve the Central Falls community.

On March 14th, 2024, I had the opportunity to interview Lt. Sarah McNulty at the Central Falls Police Department where she serves as the accreditation manager within the administrative division. With 17 years of service at the Central Falls Police Department, Sarah began her career at the age of 19 as a dispatcher. Currently assigned to the day shift, she holds the distinction of being the first female lieutenant and is a fourth-generation police officer in her family. Sarah's responsibilities include overseeing community policing efforts, educating the public on traffic laws, and enforcing speed regulations. She also manages surveillance cameras throughout the city to ensure compliance with regulations. Our conversation was informal, and Sarah was welcoming and open, even giving me a tour of the station after our interview. Throughout all of our interviews, we gave our interviewees the choice to remain anonymous, however, Sarah gave permission to use her first name, along with her title throughout this interview.

As our conversation began, I asked Sarah about her journey into law enforcement and whether it was something she had always planned for. At 19, she was studying radiology, but soon realized it wasn't the right fit for her. It was during her law classes that she found a new direction when someone offered her a position in dispatch. Excelling in this role, she eventually applied to join the Central Falls Police Department, where she has remained ever since. Climbing the ranks over the years, she also spent time as a school resource officer. Sarah expressed that she genuinely enjoys her career and has no regrets about making the switch.

When asked about advice for individuals considering a career in law enforcement and the essential skills needed, Sarah underscored the significance of open-mindedness, emphasizing its crucial role in effectively navigating the demands of the job. She stressed that without an open mindset, handling the responsibilities inherent in law enforcement becomes challenging. Additionally, Sarah highlighted the importance of patience, as many situations require critical awareness and problem-solving skills, often leading to longer processes. She also noted the growing recognition of mental health awareness within law enforcement training, suggesting its integration into school curriculum and community education initiatives beginning from a young age. Sarah's insights extended to the impact individuals can have within their communities, emphasizing that actions and reactions can profoundly affect someone's life and contribute to community improvement. Her advice highlighted the transformative potential inherent in law

enforcement roles and underscored the importance of holistic approaches to community well-being.

As our interview progressed, we delved into more personal questions, such as how Sarah manages to balance her family life with her demanding career. She candidly admitted that achieving this balance is challenging but essential. Sarah emphasized the importance of not wearing her police uniform outside of work to avoid attracting undue attention and maintaining a semblance of privacy. She stressed the significance of having a robust support system consisting of understanding friends and family members who recognize the demands of her job and offer unwavering support. Sarah highlighted the value of open communication within these relationships, noting that her friends often serve as a listening ear during difficult times. However, she also acknowledged the inherent difficulties of her profession, including tough decisions that sometimes led to the strain or end of friendships. This aspect underscored the sacrifices and complexities inherent in a career in law enforcement.

When questioned about her perspective on the current legal system in Rhode Island, Sarah immediately acknowledged that there is always room for improvement. She emphasized the importance of continuous progress and suggested that everyone, including law enforcement, can strive to do better. Sarah highlighted the need for police to create a more supportive environment for victims, as she recognized the prevailing stigma that paints law enforcement in a negative light. By fostering a culture of trust and understanding, she believes that police can effectively collaborate with communities and carry out their duties more efficiently. Additionally, Sarah identified the need for improvements in administrative practices, particularly in ensuring accurate data collection and adhering to specific standards. Her insights underscored a commitment to enhancing the effectiveness and integrity of the legal system for the betterment of both law enforcement and the community.

Sarah also touched upon the role of lawyers within the legal system, expressing a desire for greater empathy and advocacy regardless of an offender or victim's background and circumstances. She emphasized the importance of lawyers approaching their work with passion and a commitment to defending their clients without judgment. Sarah voiced concerns about

perceived laxity in certain areas of the legal system, noting that punishments often fail to strike an appropriate balance between deterrence and fairness. She provided examples, such as minor traffic violations and non-violent drug possession offenses, where punitive measures do not effectively address underlying issues and could exacerbate socioeconomic disparities. Sarah pushed for a fairer and more uniform method of punishment, aiming for a balanced approach that prioritizes reform and assistance for victims, offenders, and their communities, rather than simply focusing on retribution. Her insights on the complexities inherent in maintaining fairness and effectiveness within the legal system, calling for greater attention to the broader societal implications of punitive measures.

When asked about the discrepancy between personal beliefs and the reality of law enforcement, Sarah offered valuable insights. She points out the stark contrast between the portrayal of policing on reality TV shows and the actual complexities of the job. Sarah stressed that law enforcement entails far more than simply apprehending suspects; it involves navigating intricate legal procedures and ensuring due process. She cautioned against coaching victims on what to say, recognizing the potential repercussions in court and the importance of maintaining integrity as an officer. Sarah also shared her personal stance on accountability, expressing a firm belief that favoritism or special treatment for family members undermines the integrity of the legal system. She stressed the importance of individuals accepting responsibility for their actions, rather than seeking preferential treatment, as this ultimately erodes public trust and respect for the law. Her perspectives shed light on the nuanced dynamics at play within law enforcement and underscored the importance of upholding professionalism and integrity in all interactions.

Community policing is a proactive approach to law enforcement that focuses on collaboration between police officers and the communities they serve. Instead of solely relying on reactive measures such as arrests, community policing encourages officers to build trust and relationships within their neighborhoods, addressing underlying issues and preventing crime before it occurs. Lieutenants within police departments are known for wearing multiple hats as problem solvers, with arrest being the last resort. This model has proven highly effective, with studies showing that communities with strong community policing initiatives experience lower crime rates and higher levels of public satisfaction. Sarah, a lieutenant in the Central Falls Police Department,

recognizes the importance of community policing in her career. In 2023, the department received an international award for Leadership in Community Policing, particularly for their involvement in programs like the "Leading Ladies Initiative." This initiative pairs teenage girls with community mentors from various fields, offering scholarships and support for higher education. Sarah draws attention to the significance of community policing in her department and her role as a lieutenant, highlighting its positive impact on both law enforcement and the community.

Finally, I raised our last question, which centered on Sarah's thoughts regarding necessary changes for victims, offenders, and the community. Concerning the community, she highlighted the Central Falls Police Department's successful rapport with local residents, a primary objective both then and now. This transformation stemmed from heightened officer engagement within the community, exemplified by initiatives such as "Girls on the Run," a program providing free prom dresses to girls from difficult economic circumstances, and officers actively participating in school events. Additionally, the integration of school resource officers at a young age facilitated positive relationships between officers and students, fostering an environment where youth feel comfortable seeking assistance when needed. Sarah noted that while initially challenging, the department's community outreach efforts have resulted in significant strides and strengthened bonds with residents.

Regarding victims and offenders, Sarah stresses the imperfection inherent in every case, noting the challenges posed by uncooperative or dishonest victims juxtaposed with those who actively assist in investigations. She underscores the importance of holding victims accountable, particularly in cases of domestic violence where some individuals may falsely recant their allegations to secure their partner's release from prison. Sarah suggests that judges should consider charging such individuals with obstruction or false reporting. Furthermore, she stresses the significance of holding offenders accountable and carefully evaluating whether charges are commensurate with the offense to prevent recidivism. Moreover, she points out the importance of implementing rehabilitation programs aimed at addressing underlying issues and fostering successful reintegration into society for long-term crime prevention. Her insights highlight the complex dynamics involved in the criminal justice system and the need for fair and equitable treatment of both victims and offenders to ensure justice is served effectively.

Finally, I inquired about any memorable experiences she would like to share from her career, as well as any advice for individuals who wish to pursue a career in criminal justice. Sarah underlines the importance of readiness and focuses on the significant impact the profession can have on one's personal life. She acknowledges the sacrifices, including missed holidays and long, stressful shifts, as well as the potential strain on personal relationships. However, Sarah prioritizes the importance of having a strong support system and reiterates the immense reward that comes from being emotionally, mentally, and physically invested in the career. Her insights serve as a reminder of the dedication required for success in the field of criminal justice and the fulfillment that accompanies it for those who are committed.

Sarah recounts a touching story from her time as a school resource officer, where she frequently encountered challenging students who struggled in class due to personal issues at home. Despite facing difficulties and frequent classroom disruptions, Sarah recognized the resilience and potential in a student. Through consistent support and understanding, she formed a connection with her, providing a safe space in her office where the student could focus on her studies. Over time, Sarah witnessed the remarkable transformation of this student, who eventually graduated from junior high, high school, and even went on to earn a master's degree in childcare education. Sarah recalls the importance of checking in on the student regularly, emphasizing how this simple act strengthened their bond and contributed to the student's success. Their enduring connection serves as a testament to the profound impact that positive relationships can have on individuals, even in the face of adversity.

Another story she recounts is more somber; a few years back, a man's home caught fire. He was a current student at CCRI, working hard to support his family overseas by pursuing his education. Despite his full-time job and dedication to his studies, tragedy struck when his house burned down, resulting in the loss of all his books. Sarah vividly describes the heartbreaking moment when he knelt in a puddle, watching helplessly as the flames engulfed his home, overcome with emotion and tears. It's disheartening to note that there's no available information to provide an update on this unfortunate situation. Scenarios like these are just one of numerous encounters that law enforcement and families face daily, often without adequate preparation for the unexpected events that may arise during their duties.

In conclusion, Lieutenant McNulty proved to be a delightful and engaging conversationalist. I thoroughly enjoyed our interaction and was struck by her infectious enthusiasm and warmth. It was truly inspiring to connect with someone of her caliber, particularly as a female in law enforcement. Seeing female representation in this field is incredibly important, especially for younger generations who may not often encounter officers who look or act like them, and aspire to achieve a position in law enforcement. Meeting with Lieutenant McNulty provided valuable insights and information for future readers interested in pursuing careers in law enforcement. Additionally, her gesture of gifting me a challenger's coin was deeply meaningful, and I am genuinely grateful for her generosity and effort.

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Back against a Clift

By Troy Morgan

For junior police officers, they must be under the supervision of ranking officers, and the person I interviewed is a detective in the Providence Police Department. Junior officers' salaries range from \$65,000 to \$80,000 per year, depending on the department. Police officers are peace officers, trained to protect life and property, enforce criminal and traffic laws, local ordinances, conduct investigations, and perform related work as required. The requirements to become an officer are stringent: you must be 21 years of age, possess a valid driver's license, and have or pass psychological and physical assessments. A recruit must have a high school diploma or its equivalent; speak, read, and write the English language well; and pass a background check. In addition, recruits must pass a drug screening, and an agility examination that includes a swim test.

Our theme of restorative justice translates into restorative policing for this profession. It involves listening and learning, being fair, holding people accountable for their actions, and working together for a solution. Officers are integrated into the community to help citizens and hold offenders accountable.

For my interview I met with Providence Police Detective James Clift. He is a very experienced police officer with over 30 years on the force. He was a knowledgeable, friendly and intelligent man. My other interviews for this book took up no more than an hour of their time, but my interview with Detective Clift lasted the whole day. I was allowed to shadow him all day long. He gave me a tour of the station, and showed me his day-to-day duties. Later we had lunch together and went on a ride-along through Providence. He is well received within the city: I don't think I've met anyone that has been recognized as much as he is because all the while people would come up to Det. Clift and say "Hi." The day I spent with Det. Clift was an eye-opening experience, and I had a great time.

The first question: "*What are your day-to-day duties?*"

He said starting 30 years ago, he began on local patrols. He was a "tramp car," which is a shift in between the hours of two normal shifts, overlapping each, and would fill in anywhere within the

city as needed, as opposed to one area. This schedule allowed him to really get to know the city. Later he would go on to do community policing around Federal Hill and Downtown Providence where he was able to connect with business owners and the people within the community.

Detective Clift grew up in Olneyville and wanted to solve the problems around him. To him, helping the community was personal, and he really wanted to do a good job. In May of 2000, Clift took the detective test. This is a very competitive test, and while there were about 500 people taking the exam, Clift scored in the top 5. He went into the BCI (Bureau of Criminal Identification) Division. Now he responds to anywhere within the city, fingerprinting prisoners to identify them. He would document crime scenes in Providence. His job changed from being on the radio in a patrol car and community policing to being involved after the fact, or commission of a crime, and working with the evidence on hand.

“What are the demographics of the incarcerated, and why do you think this is?”

Clift’s opinion was that the arrestees follow the demographic of Providence. Predominantly Latinx individuals with a number of blacks and other nationalities as well as whites. He looked up the demographics of Providence on his phone, 34% white, 49% Hispanic/Latinx, and 13% black.

The next question I asked was, *“What is the public opinion of the Providence Police and if it’s not so great, what may help it?”* Detective Clift said that he thinks the public looks at the Providence Police as a professional organization doing the right thing. He thinks the news and media outlets paint the police in a bad light, and don’t represent the police as they are. Impoverished areas think the police are doing what they can. When Clift would go to a crime scene, the people there knew he’s there to help and don’t go out of their way to cause trouble or spread hate. He believes the Providence Police are looked at as highly effective and organized, ready to solve the problems we may have.

“How common recidivism is and why do you think that is?”

As a tenured detective, Clift maintains fingerprint cards outside of the system. The fingerprint card system was developed by the FBI and helps law enforcement with biometric identification. Most people in the fingerprint card system that Clift has one card or maybe two, while for some it’s a stack. Those with a stack are repeat offenders and a small segment of the population who

are described as “frequent flyers” in our criminal justice system. These people have no other options other than to get involved with crime, often due to lack of resources, education, housing, jobs that pay a living wage, and mental health related problems. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, “An estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years; 79% within 6 years; and 83% within 9 years” (BJS). The “frequent flyers” often don’t have the opportunities needed to get out and the cycle continues. *“Opportunities make as well break a lot of people,”* Clift said.

I asked, *“How well do you think the criminal justice system is working?”* Clift thinks the system works very well at his level, which is to deter criminal acts that our society determines to be immoral and against the law. He brought up political conflicts that can confuse the public about what is and isn’t appropriate. If an issue becomes well known where a political battle ensues, for example, use of force or lack of equality, these disputes can be good for change; however, it is ultimately going to confuse the public. For example, if the media go after the police to vilify them, a confused public could protest and riot. Trust in law enforcement waivers. Social problems, whether that could be poverty or even police brutality, are enhanced by inequality. He gave an example of two different people getting the same crime. A rich person might have 5 lawyers while a poor one will get an overworked public defense attorney appointed to them. From beginning to end, social and economic injustices follow an individual through the judicial system. Clift said that social ills create inequality, but the system doesn't oppress people. Blaming the system just takes away personal responsibility.

“What needs changing, for victims, offenders, or the community?”

Clift said changes start with the community: it’s changing a lot with the new technology, but people need to be involved. Citizens are a part of the system, and they need to participate in the criminal justice system, the police can’t do it all alone. The U.S. has a population of 330 million with only 1 million police officers, so there’s no way the police can do it without the public getting involved, whether that's more civilian watchdog groups or simply more young people choosing law enforcement careers. They need a mindset of *“I’m here and in it to help society.”* Restorative justice involves listening and learning, being fair, holding ourselves accountable as a community and working together. That’s a different approach than one person arrested for a crime and facing a judge or prosecutor whose job is to convict.

For victims, Clift said the system is slowly getting better. Victims could have trauma that is life-long. Police are starting to have professional counselors with them on some calls. This means a person in crisis would be better served by a counselor or social worker than a police officer. According to the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Denver Police Department recognized this issue and in 2016 developed the Co-Responder Program. The co-responder units answered 1,725 calls, and only 4 percent resulted in a citation or arrest whereas the vast majority were connected to mental health care and treatment (BJA 2016). Providence Police have a similar program called the Smart Policing Behavioral Response Team (BHRT) in which an officer and Providence Center social worker respond to psychiatric/behavioral health emergencies. Rather than arresting for public order crimes and disorderly conduct, the focus is on treatment services (City of Providence, n.d.). As a result of this program, Providence benefitted by this approach. There was a 10% decline between 2018-2019 and then a whopping 48% decline between 2019-2020 (BHRT 2020), although likely associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, this shows that many cases that are intertwined with mental health can be resolved differently and avoid law enforcement intervention.

For offenders, Det. Clift emphasizes personal responsibility. He said society has a tough stance towards offenders, and their lives after release can be more challenging for them. Rhode Island expunged marijuana arrests for the past 20 years as of April 30, 2023 (RIJ), but this simple arrest still hampers people's abilities to get jobs. Clift emphasizes that people must be held accountable, but within reason. *“You can't be too overbearing, and better ways of dealing with offenders need to be figured out.”*

Clift is cautiously skeptical or cautiously optimistic about the use of artificial intelligence in policing. While AI is becoming more used in police agencies and the court system, offenders might feel even more oppressed. The reason is because AI can generate a laundry list of minor offenses for the officer or court to assess and without the human element such that AI produces a different, more severe outcome. Det. Clift was skeptical if the offenders even wanted AI to be a system used in policing. He gave an example of a traffic stop. The police officer checks the AI generated record, then checks out the car and driver to see if there are any prior offenses. While everything looks good from the officer's perspective, the AI generates a list that tells them otherwise. Now the driver gets a ticket instead of a warning or is arrested. Detective Clift

believes that AI can be more biased than humans, so it will need to be overseen by humans to be effective.

“What are the checks and balances used to place a suspect under arrest?” What is the procedure and what information do authorities need? When is there enough information?”

When I asked this question, I thought about firsthand or eyewitness information, cell phone footage, street cameras, fingerprints and DNA. There’s always the need to ask yourself, “Is there enough information to arrest?” At this point in the interview, we were having lunch, and he gave me the example of a masked man coming into the restaurant at that moment with a gun to rob the place. As he made his demands known, he touched the counter. So, would his fingerprints on the countertop be enough to convict? Police can collect a variety of evidence, such as information from their security camera, a statement from the cashier, etc., and a fingerprint on the counter. Ok, is that enough information? *“No!, ”* says Clift. People touch that counter all the time, so that would not be usable evidence. Clift mentioned AI again, where it might think it did have enough information, but Clift thinks that AI will need the human element, someone to supervise. The checks and balances are first, which entails common sense and questioning eyewitnesses face to face to ensure getting enough information. AI cannot do that. The next check is the supervisor requirement. Does the evidence you collect satisfy your supervisor? If yes, then the suspect is arrested and charged, and this is where the third check comes in, the prosecution. The prosecution will recount the information and present it to the fourth check, the judge or jury. Evidence is produced and explained, and the judge or jury will then determine whether that suspect is or is not guilty.

This step by step checks and balances was good to know, although many criminal incidents get plea-bargained between a district attorney and defense counsel, so step four of the process doesn’t mention that. With plea-bargaining, the prosecution process ends quickly, usually resulting in a conviction to a lesser charge. But is that justice? It’s an open question and both the restorative justice model and the crime control model argue its pros and cons.

Before we wrapped up lunch, I asked, *“What else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in the criminal justice system?”* Clift said the job of a police officer isn’t how it is portrayed in the media. It is a demanding job; you must try to embody the perfect

human. You represent the government, and it can be demanding. Living up to that is difficult. People look at you perhaps afraid, or don't like you, or even hate you just by the clothes you are wearing. It is both physically and mentally difficult. You will see stuff that normally people don't want to see or deal with. You'll see people beaten, sexually assaulted, robbed, and you can't reverse the damage done. You can only help the best you can. You must be able to separate work from home for your own good. The longer you work, the better you are able to handle it. Everyone has their own way of coping, some might drink, but for Clift, his coping mechanism is spending time with his family. Despite the challenges, he says it's a very rewarding career. *"You're always in the know, you get information faster than the average citizen. You get to handle and deal with certain aspects that normal people don't have information on or will ever have access to. It's exciting, whether you are undercover or tracking down suspects. Although you won't be rich, you won't be poor, either."*

My interview with Detective Clift was very informative. We went over many facets of his work throughout the day, from recidivism rates to AI and even public opinion. The community should know that the police are doing what they can to help, granted there is a segment of the population that is stuck in a cycle of recidivism, and another segment that does not trust the police for a variety of reasons, including racism and over-policing in high crime neighborhoods. In fact, we surveyed justice studies majors, and over a quarter of the respondents said that they did not trust state troopers, and close to half of those surveyed thought that law enforcement can be both racist and sexist.

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Chapter 5 Balancing Scales: Insights from the Bench

By Tyler Morra



Introduction

Within the criminal justice system, there are many moving parts and different parties involved, such as attorneys and judges. This chapter presents two interviews from one judge and one private defense attorney. The reason for both being such important parts of the judicial process is because in the flesh they represent the 6th Amendment, an Amendment that entitles everyone to legal representation and a fair and impartial judicial process. This chapter will explore some of the requirements for employment in this field; how the jobs impact their family and personal lives; and how the justice system as a whole is viewed through the eyes of these professionals.

Inside the Mind of Justice: A Defense Attorney's Perspective



For my first interview, I chose a criminal defense attorney. Criminal defense attorneys have extremely important but stressful jobs. Some of the things involved in this line of work include meeting with and representing people who have been charged with a crime, going to court for motions or hearings, and also going through trials. There is much more work involved that goes unseen outside of the courtroom. This includes reviewing all laws pertaining to the case,

reviewing all the evidence that has been submitted, and continuing to meet with and keep the client involved throughout each step of the court system.

The average salary for a criminal defense attorney in Rhode Island is around \$100,000. To become a defense attorney, it requires many years of education. After graduating high school, the next step is to get a bachelor's degree from a college and then proceed to take the LSAT, the entry exam needed for law schools before you apply. After getting accepted into a law school, the education time there is 4 years for a part time student or 3 years for a full-time student. After law school, you must also pass the Bar for the state in which you would like to work. Once all of this is completed you can get hired, or you can start your own firm and start representing clients. Criminal defense attorneys play a crucial role in the justice system, and it can be linked to restorative justice in many ways. Part of a criminal defense attorney's job at times is to find ways in which the client might not have to spend time in jail or be able to lessen the time in jail by instead being ordered to rehab or mental health counseling. This fits with a key principle of restorative justice because it creates pathways that support the offender by emphasizing health and wellness over a retributive, punitive model that typically emphasizes long prison sentences.

I began my interview with, *“What advice do you give to someone who wants to pursue a career in your field?”*

Some key pieces of advice were education and personal motivation. Since there is a challenging path toward becoming an attorney, including much testing, and passing standardized exams, it must be something that you truly want to do and have interest in. While in the process of schooling and studying, you must stay motivated and find a good balance between educational pursuits and your personal life.

“What special skills are needed for this career?”

A special skill that is important in this career is attention to detail. When working with clients and reviewing their cases, it is important to obtain and understand every detail. This becomes even more important in a setting where a case goes to trial. You must familiarize yourself with

every aspect of the law regarding the charge, and also make sure that “no stone goes unturned,” as it could make or break the case at trial.

“Can you share a story that illustrates the work you do? Do you have a story that stands out?”

There are many stories that can illustrate different aspects of this work; however, one of the more common ones includes defending clients for drug or gun related charges. One specific story that stood out but could not be talked about in too much detail, but it had to do with an individual charged with possession of fentanyl and who needed representation throughout the legal process. The legal process in this case had to do with meeting the client; attending multiple hearings regarding the case; discussing with the prosecutor; coming to an agreement between both parties in which the client accepted a plea deal, and we avoided going to trial. This is a summed-up version of the day-to-day basis of the work of a defense attorney, including numerous hours of paperwork and reviewing the case.

This brings up the question of whether plea bargaining is justice. Plea bargaining is used in 90% of criminal cases (Sanabria and Bender 2023), and it can be a tool associated with restorative justice practices if it includes making amends to the victims or victims’ families. Otherwise, plea bargaining is often the short-cut to sentencing that does not always produce the best or restorative outcomes for the defendant, the victim, or the community. We know this because repeat offending is high. According to the Department of Justice, half of all incarcerated individuals will reoffend in some way within one year from release. A major factor that drives up repeat incarceration throughout the United States is lack of resources inside and outside of prison, and once out, other resources to connect the newly released offender to things like housing and employment are key for successful reintegration – and they are grossly lacking. While the benefits of plea-bargaining include saving time and costs for legal representation, and the defendant benefits from a lighter sentence, the plea process lets law enforcement off the hook for a more thorough investigation and a robust defense. Although our Constitution requires that a suspect is entitled to a trial by a jury of their peers, this rarely happens, and it does not happen in plea bargaining. Especially for the vast majority of individuals who are unable to afford a

defense attorney, scholars ask if this is justice or merely a way to save the court, legal players, and the public time and money. Defendants may actually be innocent but accept the process, feeling as though if they “choose” not to bargain with the prosecutor, a harsher penalty with more jail time will result. This process is often identified as coercive, especially if the defendant is not well-represented and feels s/he has no real choice. Another disadvantage is that victims or victims’ families may not feel that true justice has been served for the crime committed. Their ability to participate in court proceedings has become minimalized or even irrelevant because a deal has already been struck without their victim impact statements that are typically admitted into the court record before sentencing occurs.

“This is difficult work. How do you separate your work from your personal life?”

One of the challenging factors to separate work from personal life is that defense attorneys are on call at all times, seven days a week. Even on the weekends when the court is closed, people still get arrested and will call for representation. Although most of the time situations that arise over the weekend will be able to wait until Monday, there is still that pressure during “personal time” in which you know that there is additional work on your shoulders before Monday morning even begins. Nevertheless, some ways to create balance from work and personal life include finding a hobby in which you enjoy and making a concerted effort to engage in it as much as possible. The attorney gave examples of going to the gym, exercising, and golfing.

“Your criminal defense work involves recommendations for sentencing. What is a case (or two) that stands out where sentencing was rehabilitative? Or vice versa?”

As a defense attorney, the main goal is to try and get the best outcome for the client and being sure that they were properly handled throughout the entire legal process. For the most part, the client’s needs or wants along with the attorney’s experience come together to try and find the most suitable outcome. One specific case where the client was able to avoid jail time and was given probation along with rehab was a drug case. This was ideal because the individual was using drugs for themselves without intent to distribute. Jail time in this sense would not be ideal because it does not solve any problems, particularly when addiction is the issue. The

rehabilitation route provides therapeutic support that enables the client to get clean and no longer use. Although this worked for this case, the same cannot be done for all defendants because it could potentially make the problem worse for cases involving known repeat offenders rather than a person solely struggling from addiction issues.

This brings up how restorative justice can help in some circumstances. The retributive system that is currently in place in the United States aims to combat crime with punishment such as fines and prison sentences. The restorative justice model aims to combat crimes in rehabilitative ways, whether that is mental health counseling or drug rehabilitation (Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, Platow 2008). In this drug case the attorney described, there was a more restorative approach rather than retributive or punitive one because prison time was avoided. It was shown to be beneficial and effective in this situation. If an approach like this were taken in more cases, more people would be helped throughout the criminal justice process, and it could reduce repeated offenses by providing the support they need.

“How do the stories we tell ourselves about the criminal justice system diverge (or are different) from the way it actually operates? What’s your perspective?”

The attorney responded: *“It depends on the stories we tell ourselves, and the point of view of each person. Personally, I believe that the criminal justice system operates in the way that I picture it, maybe because I have been in the field for so long.”* Some information to note that others may not have a direct view of is that some of the occurrences that happen on the inside is labor-intensive, like talking to the prosecutors and coming to an agreement with a case, or the time and effort that goes into looking into all the details regarding each case between both attorneys and judge. An investment of significant time and what goes on behind closed doors can result in different outcomes and varies case by case. One factor that perhaps students and citizens are not familiar with is how the judicial system works when biases sometimes crop up between the competing parties, including prosecutors and defense attorneys. Although it is a competitive line of work, it can at times seem as if it’s personal. Some people may feel as if being charged with a crime has only a few set outcomes; however, there are many other factors, like attorneys’ personalities and their relationships with each other that impact the case. On the positive side,

oftentimes these same characteristics can get the initial charge lowered and this greatly benefits the defendant.

As far as criminal justice, defense attorneys play a large role in ensuring representation and just treatment. They work hard to ensure fair penalties. With this being said, defense attorneys embody the 6th Amendment to the Constitution to ensure every step of the justice system is carried out to its full extent.

“What do you think needs to change for either victims, offenders, or the community?”

The attorney said that something that needs addressing has to do with drugs and how they are getting much stronger, more common, and more harmful. Drugs like fentanyl are becoming more and more available, and it is more addictive than other street drugs like marijuana or cocaine. From a defense attorney’s standpoint, you can see the ins and outs of the “business” of drug dealing or using, but from a societal standpoint, we are also much more aware of the harmful impact to the victims who have used unknown substances laced with other drugs that augment the effects of their addiction. A common example of this is marijuana laced with fentanyl, and more often than not, the consumer is not aware of what they are buying. As far as what changes can be done within the criminal justice system, that involves possibly more awareness of how harmful these substances can be. Maybe we need more deterrence measures in educating the public, or we need more opportunities for rehabilitation in an attempt to help people recover and to live a better, drug free life.

“What else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in criminal justice?”

Some more information to note about the career of being a criminal defense attorney is that it is not an easy job and requires extensive hours and long work days. Oftentimes, days consist of meeting with clients, in his office or in prison; and then going to court; and then ending the day back in the office. It can sometimes be a lot of travel, and there is always more to be done at the end of the day. This result is working 12-hour days many times. Once you find your niche and

can focus more on what you *want* to do, the stress will start to lessen. You choose your clients and are not taking on too many clients that will make your caseload too difficult to handle. This type of stress is often seen with public defenders. Their caseloads can be overwhelming, and although it is a very rewarding job and you can change the lives of many people, you don't have the same staff support as your opponent, a district attorney. You're working at a disadvantage and your time is limited. Working with defendants, you almost build a bond with them, but this is a luxury counsel on a retainer achieves more than a public defender. The attorney said, "*Some clients will stick with you and stay in touch for years. It is a very good feeling when you give proper representation and have had a major, positive impact on the clients and their families.*"

This last question brought up an interesting point regarding public defenders and how often they can be in high stress situations and have a heavy caseload. In the 6th Amendment, we know that everyone is entitled to the right of defense counsel. In a Q&A from a Vanderbilt University professor Sarah Mayeux urges needed changes for indigent defense counsel. Around 80% of people charged with a crime need a public defender (Hoag-Fordjour, Mayeux 2024), so this is the rule, not the exception. Some of the key takeaways from her talk are to acknowledge the extensive workload, and sometimes even a lack of care and respect for the client who requires a court-appointed attorney. In order to support the due process under the 6th Amendment and everyone's right to counsel, we need to acknowledge what can be done to improve the current circumstances for a public defense. Are public defenders easily obtainable? How is one to know if they are actually in the right hands and being treated justly throughout the process? Some points that can address this could be more competitive pay for public defenders along with more job opportunities. If the government were to pay public defense counsel like they pay their assistant district attorneys, this could attract more people to these positions and reduce the heavy workloads that they currently experience. While public defenders are not paid like assistant district attorneys, it is important to keep in mind that many public defenders provide great legal counsel and services to their clients in an efficient and effective way. They can and do spend many hours on a complicated case without fair compensation.

In conclusion, this interview was informative. It touched upon a variety of topics that compare our retributive model and to principles of restorative justice, principally the crucial role a defense attorney can have on the disposition of a case. For people who may be thinking about pursuing a career as a defense attorney, successful attorneys need to be highly motivated and can expect demands on their time beyond a 40- hour work week. One of the points that stood out to me from this interview is the hours put into their work. Although most people know that an attorney's work is challenging, this interview provided even more of an insight on how time consuming and stressful some of the day-to-day tasks can be.

If by having attorneys who advocate for sentencing that involves drug rehabilitation over prison time, that means you know your client well and the judicial process moves a step closer toward a system interested in restorative justice practices. With this work being so crucial to the courts and criminal justice system as a whole, it is really eye-opening to see how some of these cases and judicial processes unfold. They can either go smoothly, go wrong, or even get mishandled with poor judgment, and other mishaps, even run afoul with the personalities of the court that may or may not be willing to work with each other. I believe that defense attorneys have the capacity to impact these cases in a positive way, and the lives of the defendants and their families deserve that representation in court. This alone is a great motivator to become a defense attorney and actively work to seek justice for everyone.

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Eyes of Justice: An Interview with a Judge

Introduction

I had the pleasure of speaking with a municipal judge. Judges are crucial to having a fair and equal system for all, guaranteed by the 6th Amendment. Judges have many different roles within the criminal justice system; however, some of the most important ones include working with prosecution and defense counsel to ensure fair and equal representation and working with law enforcement to ensure people's rights are not infringed upon during the investigations. The work of judges does not always entail criminal cases. There are also many civil disputes and traffic infractions handled by a judge. The average salary for a judge varies depending on what type of judge, what town, city, or state they are located, and also their experience and time on the bench. However, the average judgeship salary in Rhode Island is approximately \$188,000.

“What advice do you give to someone who wants to pursue a career in your field?”

Key pieces of advice from the judge are maintaining integrity, staying up to date with laws, and having strong critical thinking skills. *“Why are these skills so crucial?”* I asked. The judge explained that there is a lot of pressure, and many factors weigh differently on each case. Each case requires interacting with many different people throughout the day, often for some of the same offenses, but circumstances change, as do extralegal or mitigating factors that must be considered and make each case unique. An example of this is the same judge seeing many different people all charged with possession of narcotics. Maintaining these skills will help

ensure that each individual case is treated as its own and no detail will be overlooked, even if the judge has handled hundreds of the same cases.

“Can you share a story that illustrates the work you do? Do you have a story that stands out?”

The judge chose a case that involved an individual with a traffic violation for speeding. This is a common occurrence in court, and many people will show up to dispute their citations. In this case, the information discussed in court, and given the individual’s personal life issues, the judge determined that the fine should be reduced. He ruled the driver would not have to pay the excessive fines that came along with the citation, but they must pay the court fees. This example, although not the most exciting nor intriguing, represents how the judge considers individual, extralegal and mitigating factors when deciding on a case.

This example is a simple form of restorative justice because rather than handling the matter in a standard, more punitive way, the individual’s circumstances and needs were discussed and taken into consideration. Given a judge’s discretion on cases such as this, they can apply the law harshly and hand out the maximum penalty for each charge, even for a traffic violation. A restorative approach involves dialog and understanding, which resulted in a lesser charge.

“This is difficult work. How do you separate your work from your personal life?”

One of the first pieces of information the judge mentioned, somewhat jokingly, was, *“When the robe comes off, I trade the bench for the couch.”* This comment stuck with me because it does not imply laziness; it shows that creating a balance between work and his personal life is part of his success as a judge. By putting effort into yourself, family, and friends once the workday is over can reduce the many stressors that come with this career. The judge emphasizes self-care and family time due to the fact that legal work can be extremely stressful and can leave you dwelling on cases and a hefty workload long after the work day has ended.

“What special skills are needed for this career?”

The most important skill needed for this career is having a law degree along with a substantial educational background and going through an extensive nominating process. A judge needs at least two to four years as a practicing attorney, licensed in the state and a member of the state bar

in good standing. Nominations and appointments of judgeships in the state of Rhode Island occur through the Judicial Nominating Commission who advertise openings, screen applicants, and then make recommendations to the Governor, with final approval by the state senate. Diving a little bit deeper, the judge explained that another skill crucial to a lasting career, is a constant commitment to fairness and unbiased decision-making. I asked the judge about biases because everyone has their own biases whether they are aware of them or not. The judge said that what separates people who can and cannot have a career as a judge is the ability to recognize any possible biases and to ensure they do not impact a case.

“What does the system really do every day in the name of criminal justice, and how does it work from your perspective?”

The judge said that the justice system has many different goals and responsibilities. The justice system involves keeping communities safe, imposing fair sentencing on offenders, and maintaining justice for everyone. Our judges and juries have the final say and ultimate determination on all cases. The job comes with a lot of stress and pressures every day to make sure the rule of law is carried out fairly and impartially. From his perspective, when individuals are first charged or cited for a crime or violation, all must go through the legal process, which then goes to a judge. With the discretion that judges have to a certain extent, they are able to lessen penalties if appropriate, or decide a maximum penalty for each case. Apart from these decisions, the judge must ensure that each person was handled justly throughout the process and their rights were not infringed upon.

“What do you think needs to change for either victims, offenders, or the community?”

The judge said more victim and community support. Because it is not very often that he sees victims cared for after a case is over, more victim services are needed. The justice system has little to no part in that. Victims and their families are told where they can turn to for help, but more could be done, especially regarding mental health services. The judge said it has become so prevalent and such a crucial part of everyone’s health and wellbeing to keep families and communities safe. The community support aspect is essential; communities need to want to help one another, and more services need to be in place for victims’ and offenders’ reentry into

society for trauma and rehabilitation, especially for those addicted to drugs. We need to make people feel more welcomed and supported.

“What is your position on mandatory sentencing guidelines?”

This judge’s input on mandatory sentencing was informative. Mandatory sentencing can be useful such that judges stay more consistent with every case. The guidelines help keep sentencing in line and limit the blowback from the public who may think that someone was given an unfair punishment. However, mandatory sentencing is not ideal. Set guidelines do not permit a judge to consider individual circumstances and extralegal factors, such as ethnicity, gender, or age. Mandatory guidelines limit a judge’s discretionary abilities, and if a judge would like to lessen the offense, it cannot always be done.

In an article, “The Mostly Unintended Effects of Mandatory Penalties: Two Centuries of Consistent Findings,” the United States is the only country that has adopted mandatory sentencing laws (Tonry 2009). For some watchdog groups like the Sentencing Project, mandatory minimums fuel mass incarceration with no overall benefit for crime control (Nellis 2024). In Nellis’s review of scholars’ research on mass incarceration, the data reveal that mandatory minimums disproportionately produce overly harsh sentences with lengthy jail or prison terms. Mandatory sentencing can also present an opportunity for bias by a judge or a jury and permit them to impose a sentence that may not reflect the many factors in a case. This point was a good piece of information, and we need further thinking on whether mandatory sentencing is justly used or appropriately used for all offenses.

“Do you support residential drug treatment over incarceration? And why isn’t there the political and financial will to generate more diversion programs for non-violent offenders generally?”

The judge responded that this is not something that he deals with on a daily basis for his specific duties, but he was in favor of more residential treatment rather than incarceration for drugs and non-violent offenders. His specific reasoning behind this was to try to get people more help and offer resources that can be carried on for a lifetime rather than a jail or prison sentence.

Recidivism is common and incarceration does not break these addictions. As far as the funding for these programs go, the judge said that it doesn't seem to be prevalent enough to some people, and politicians in particular, do not consider spending the time and money to put programs like this in place. While in prison, some resources and programs are helpful, but there are not enough rehabilitative or therapeutic options, especially for non-violent offenders and drug users.

The judge is perhaps echoing the many studies on recidivism. For example: "The nearly 66,000 prisoners whose most severe crime is drug possession, the average sentence is over one year; these offenders would be better sentenced to treatment or other alternatives" (Austin 2016). While I did not share this study with the judge, it fits with some of the issues we talked about, including how some of these offenses can be better treated from a rehabilitative standpoint.

A judgeship is a difficult career, and this judge pointed out the intensity and commitment needed for "equal justice for all." He recognizes the need for more diversion and rehabilitative programs, and more drug treatment centers. Our criminal justice system is not without bias, even with mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines in place. His view of treating non-violent offenders and individuals addicted to drugs fits within a restorative justice model. While restorative approaches were not something that we discussed for violent offenses and more serious crimes, he did paint a clear picture of how we need new ways of thinking about criminal justice, and in the process, enrich our communities as a whole with support of professionals who work in our justice system every day.

In conclusion, after reading and discussing these interviews, we are able to get a detailed insight into the everyday lives of these professionals. A common topic discussed in both interviews was the work and stress that comes with these careers. While some of the key stressors for each may be different, they made it clear that it is crucial to have some sort of relief or activity to participate in to lower stress from the job and maintain a healthy relationship with family and to oneself. It's needed, especially when your workload never goes away.

Both professionals discussed some key points regarding the criminal justice system, and one particular topic that stood out was recommendations for sentencing. Although in the current

criminal justice system there are mandatory sentences for most crimes, there are still options that can be done, including lowering a charge to a lesser crime, and possibly even getting sentenced to rehabilitation or community service rather than jail or prison. This was interesting because there were some instances listed in the interviews where a rehabilitative route seemed a more obvious choice for some persons and some cases. Both interviews were extremely informative and discussed topics for change. Whether this information is used for general knowledge or for someone who is interested in pursuing a career within these fields, the dedication and commitment to their professions is admirable and their insights invaluable.

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Chapter 6 Youth in Recovery, Prison, and Parole

By Troy Morgan

Introduction

The Adult Correctional Institutions of Rhode Island (ACI) and Parole Board hold that our criminal justice system deters criminal acts, but lack of resources, infrastructures for health care, including mental health, drug addiction, lack of housing, and other basic necessities, tell a different story. We live in a society that wants to punish the criminal rather than give them the helping hand that is needed to pick them up. They will be in an environment full of instability, taken away from society and then when their time is up, they will be placed back into society with few or no supports. In these holding institutions, the adult prison or the juvenile detention center, there are various programs to help the offender to become a productive member of society when they are released, but the message I got from these interviews is that it's not enough. The ACI is an underfunded wing of our justice system, and its focus is on punitive measures.

The Rhode Island Training School's (RITS) goal focuses on rehabilitation for juvenile offenders and its focus is more restorative. The youth are taken from society but with the immediate goal of connecting them back into society in prosocial ways. RITS staff look at what the youth's strengths are and give them a personalized treatment plan to get them back on track, connect with family, get back to school, and reintegrate into society. This model relates to restorative justice because RITS is not designed as a punitive warehouse but rather its goal is to restore and integrate back into society.

Paying Attention at the Juvenile Detention Center

The mission of the Rhode Island Training School (RITS) is to “partner with the families and communities to raise safe and healthy children in a caring environment” (DCYF). RITS is a detention center but designed to promote public safety by offering rehabilitation programs for

at-risk youth. The training school provides supervision, security, and health care for everyone in an individualized and sensitive manner for all genders and cultures. The goals are reviewed annually to make sure objectives are measured for their effectiveness.

For my interview with the Executive Director of the Juvenile Training School, I met with Dr. Larome Myrick. He was very polite, articulate, and very knowledgeable. Above all, he is very passionate about what he does and truly cares about the youth who live there. Even though we had to reschedule our interview due to unforeseen circumstances, he was committed to meeting with me, even with his busy schedule.

“What are your day to day duties?”

Dr. Myrick responded by giving me a history of his work that led him to his current position. He has worked in corrections for 24 years. He was a corrections officer in the Ohio adult system for six years and then became a case manager for the adult prison system. Just after a few months, he was promoted to an adult parole officer. After four years, he obtained his master’s degree, and from there was promoted to a parole program specialist. He was charged with overseeing substance abuse cases for 28 of the 88 counties in Ohio. After four years and earning a Ph.D. somewhere along the line, he transferred to the department of youth services in Ohio as a parole supervisor for youth. Just one year later, he became bureau chief of re-entry for youth services. Since 2018 he has served as the Director of RITA in the state of Rhode Island.

Dr. Myrick tells me that his “day-to- day” changes every day, like troubleshooting issues that occur, whether that happened early in the morning or the night before. He starts with a check- in meeting with his project manager who helps prioritize his work day. For example, if there is a house financing meeting, his project manager, Ms. Shannon, oversees projects and acts as his assistant. He explained that he can’t do it all himself, as he doesn't have the skill set or capacity. He’ll also check-in with the superintendent of the system and other staff to find out any other issues that may have popped up. For example, a youth wasn’t getting his Ramadan meals a certain way, and he had to make sure that the youth was getting the proper support needed and had to talk to the superintendent. *“Trust but verify”* was the phrase Larome Myrick used. Trust what was said, then verify it, and then report it and make sure the proper provisions are in place. Other important roles as the Executive Director of the Training school are to be visible locally and nationally, so he attends conferences and stays in contact with local judges, courts, and

community partners to ensure those relationships are working to support youth in their care. The biggest objective at the training school is getting the kids back out in the community and to liaise with community supports, whether it's to get resources or even volunteers. The society we live in is very punitive and oftentimes departments like his are underfunded. We still have a mentality as a society that wants to punish crimes rather than to rehabilitate.

“What is the training school’s demographic and what youth are receiving the most services?”

Dr. Myrick said the demographic is disproportionately kids of color, no white, no affluent kids. Between all the staff in the facility, ten languages are covered. The goal is to be culturally and linguistically competent, hiring staff with varying and different abilities to address the population’s needs. The kids are vastly kids of color, and it has more to do with having fewer resources than the color of their skin. Another factor Dr. Myrick mentioned is that these kids live in high crime neighborhoods that are surveilled more by law enforcement.

“How does the training school help repeat offenders?”

Dr. Myrick said they continue providing the kids the same support that they need when they initially enter the school. “Unlike a traditional business, the goal is not to have repeat customers,” he said. The training school is given a document that identifies why an adolescent was remanded to the training school, and then staff conducts a needs assessment to develop a tailored program for that individual. Needs change all the time: today it might be housing, tomorrow it could be education, the next day it could be friends, or a combination of all of them. They give individualized treatment plans geared towards helping each and every resident. This is a team approach. It’s also not just one person trying to help, but entire treatment teams, schools, custody staff, superintendent, community partners, and families.

“What programs are most successful?”

There’s no one size fits all approach, it's a wide array of programs because each kid is different. For example, the youth advocate program is a strong one, but the program would by no means work for every kid in residence. The training school tries to find out what the kid’s strengths are and what the kid’s interested in to then tailor a program unique to them. The youth might want to focus on a post-secondary education, post-secondary trade school, or even just getting a job.

School is the biggest program, Dr. Myrick said, and it's the most successful. If a kid is 16 with a 3rd grade reading level, the goal is to get it up, while other kids can be in the training school taking college courses. Then there are the post-secondary options like culinary arts, barbering, and the urban garden project.

Punishment at the training school is not the focus; the goal is to divert these youth away from the criminal justice system, bring them here, and help them develop a skill set to live a better life once they leave. It's a restorative justice approach; there is no punishment while at the training school. The philosophy of reentry is to get the kids integrated back into the community smoothly. Dr. Myrick gave me an example: If a kid is in residence for 6 months, their reentry program begins the first day they arrive rather than towards the end of the 6-month period. On the first day, the RITS is trying to get each kid reconnected to school. Then it's making sure they are calling their family and to encourage visitation. Next, set up medical appointments, dental, vision, and psychological screening. These tasks are prioritized all to get them tied back into the community.

Once they leave the training school, then they receive community supervision, referred to as probation. According to the Department of Children, Youth and Families, "Juvenile probation supervises all formerly adjudicated youth placed on probation by the Family Court. Each youth is evaluated to determine their risk for recidivism. Staff members then create and enforce individualized plans to address the factors which contribute to delinquent behavior in order to prevent recidivism" (DCYF).

The training school doesn't just do compliance monitoring, which means watching to see if you mess up. The probation officer gets to know you, your family, all while you're in residence. Once you leave, you meet with the probation officer. The probation officer does something called community supervision, which is case management, to make sure you are connected to all of the resources necessary for your success, i.e. whether you are going to school or work, making sure you're getting enough food, and having a stable place to live. There is also a program called "Tides Family Services," and they do outreach and tracking. They are not exclusively staffed by DCYF; they are people who work in the community, doing case management and mentoring youth and families.

I asked Dr. Myrick how common repeat offending – recidivism - is and why it happens. He defined recidivism as re-incarceration and not arrest, but every state is different when it comes to measuring their recidivism rates. The range of recidivism varies state by state. In some states, reoffenders can range upwards of 50 or 60 percent. The more successful states have around 25 to 30% of their formerly incarcerated return to prison, or recidivate. Laws and sentencing guidelines can be different depending on the state, too. A state that is tough on crime versus a state that is more lenient will have very different recidivism rates because a “tough on crime” state will have more punitive measures rather than restorative ones. The laws and opportunities between these two philosophies play a big role. Places of poverty create more places of police-surveilled areas, which in turn captures more low-level offenders, whereas the same low level offenders might be overlooked in more affluent neighborhoods. Dr. Myrick gave the example of Florida. There is a law on the books where you can’t sleep in a public area, yet everyone needs to sleep, which then criminalizes homelessness.

“How well do you think the criminal justice system is working?”

“The system is performing as it is expected to, oppressing certain minorities,” he said sardonically. *“We need to focus on trying not to repeat what the system was designed to do.”* Dr. Myrick does not want to have minority groups in the facility but he recognizes the areas they live in set them up for failure. Whether that is hot spot policing in high crime neighborhoods, or something like not having the funds to hire an attorney for an adequate defense. For many youth, going to RIDS is a pipeline to prison, although certainly not from the devoted efforts by Dr. Myrick and his staff. Dr. Myrick said that even though the facility is among the best places at-risk kids can go to, they can’t do it all. Reform and restore is what other people are doing, too, like in the courts, with police, the use of prosecutorial discretion, access to public defenders, and community resources. Everyone has to be on the same page.

“What needs changing, for victims, offenders, or the community?”

A lot needs change, he said, with a focus on prevention, that is, preventing people from coming into the criminal justice system in the first place. We start with mothers who are pregnant, making sure they get access to prenatal care. We need to focus on when the baby is born, to make sure it gets proper health care. Then we must focus on schools, making sure schools are funded adequately and appropriately. We need to focus on kids, because kids turn into adults, and adults

turn into decision makers. If we don't invest in kids at an early age, then we won't reap benefits later on, and the pipeline to prison continues.

“What are the checks and balances that are in place for keeping or releasing a juvenile offender?”

There are a lot of oversight agencies at RITS. There are laws governing the work that the training school can do, and there are also federal laws that must be followed. In addition, there are also the training schools' own internal policies and the supervision to make sure everyone gets what they need. One oversight agency is DCYF, so kids can see their families. External groups, such as Performance, base standards among the groups governing the work the training school does. The Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators is also an oversight agency that requires honesty and transparency, to listen and to make any change that is needed.

“How does the Training School accommodate youth of different cultural traditions?”

There are Muslims who practice Ramadan, for example. There are some youth with cultural or religious beliefs who don't eat pork, and they must provide an alternative to pork, so the training school makes sure they don't cook pork for every meal. On the days that pork is served, these youth will be given something different, something equitable. The example given was if they don't eat pork, they won't be given something like cereal for their meal. The kitchen manager will give out flyers every year to see what the kids like and don't like to find out what the kids want or don't want culturally. For the kids observing Ramadan, they can't eat during the daylight hours, so they will be given a bagged lunch before and a hot lunch in the afternoon. There is also a Muslim staff member who observes Ramadan and works with the kids going through it, whether it's the kids who need prayer rugs, or if the Jewish kids who need kosher meals. The training school makes sure to accommodate different beliefs and religions and dietary needs in general.

As we wrapped up our interview, *“What else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in juvenile justice?”* Dr. Myrick explained that individuals interested in this field can expect rewarding opportunities and benefits, as there is consistently a demand for professionals, ensuring job stability. There are many positions available within this career path. A search on Indeed.com for “juvenile justice” jobs yielded 36 results.

In summary, the job of a facility like the training school isn't to punish youth, although the punishment is often equated with coming to the training school. RITS helps a diverse population, and these youth, once helped, can hopefully be able to pursue a meaningful life. Dr. Myrick said, *“Kids are six to twelve percent of our population, but one hundred percent of our future, so they'll be the ones taking care of us.”*

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Residents at the ACI, Recidivism, and Reform



The job of a correctional officer entails the supervision, custody and control over the adult inmates at the Adult Correctional Institutions of Rhode Island (ACI). Within these walls, correctional officers' responsibilities are care, custody, and supervision of inmates and activities; provide escorts/transport of inmates; inmate accountability; enforce rules and regulations; search for contraband; inspect facilities for safety and security; and write incident reports. Aid in rehabilitation and counseling of inmates happens, too, sometimes formally and sometimes informally. The salary of a correctional officer is \$61,957 - \$89,235. To become a correctional officer, you must be 18 years old, have a high school diploma, possess a valid photo ID, have a valid social security card, be fluent in English, pass the screening process, and complete the 12 week training academy. What I found out is how the ACI fits in with restorative justice

principles because it is similar to the Juvenile Detention Center: they give rehabilitation services like career guidance, support job searching, and independent living skills, thus making offenders more productive members of society.

I met with the Chair of the Probation and Parole Board, Laura Pisaturo, for my interview. She is a wonderful, kind, smart, and very articulate person. We set up the interview at Panera Bread and met at 11:30 a.m.

A LinkedIn profile describes her commitment and expertise to her current role. She has 24 years of experience in the public and private sectors with an extensive background in law, litigating cases, and as a legal educator and scholar. In her current role as chair, she provides leadership to the Parole Board and works tirelessly on creating solutions on a wide range of issues related to parole and sex offender management. One of her professional attributes that caught my eye in the LinkedIn profile was her comment, *“Believer in second-chances.”*

The first question I asked Laura Pisaturo was, *“Tell me about yourself. What are your day to day duties?”* She explained that she was the full-time chairperson of the parole board and has been the chair for almost ten years. The parole board is the governmental body that determines if an offender is a candidate for early release from their prison sentence. The day to day work of the parole board is to assess whether someone should be released to parole early, if so, when and under what terms. She told me that not every state has parole, only about 32 states have a parole board, so she explained: *“Some states have abolished parole completely and your sentence is your sentence.”* She went on to say that it was because these states have become more conservative and their governmental bodies have focused more on the length of a prison sentence rather than restorative sanctions and diversion programs. In these states and like the federal system, there is no parole system. You’ve got only a small chance of having some time shaved off your sentence.

“What are the demographics of the residents, and why do you think that is?”

Laura said the population in the ACI reflects the Rhode Island population, or it should reflect it. She went on to say that the figures don’t bear that out. People of color are arrested more frequently and sentenced more harshly, and she doesn’t believe that people of color in Rhode

Island are committing crime more frequently or recidivating more than the Caucasian/white people.

“How does the ACI help repeat offenders?”

Laura explained that she works for the parole board, and that is a question more geared for the ACI. Although she said she would not want to speak for the ACI, she thinks Rhode Island’s prison system has limited resources, and this makes rehabilitative programming difficult. They try to offer rehabilitation and education programs, whether it’s earning a GED, college prep, or learning a trade, but it’s not enough. A couple of programs have been successful. One sponsored by Polaris teaches inmates about CNC (computer numerical control) manufacturing. Inmates learn how to use this computer software that automates machine tools, which in turn can provide inmates with a high-demand job with a living wage once released. Building Futures is another trade-apprenticeship program that collaborates with the ACI. Not everyone is built for higher education, and trades are a good avenue to a good paying job. The problem is that there just aren’t enough opportunities. The trades offer job stability which can lower the recidivism rate. The recidivism is 47% for inmates who leave and return to prison within three years on a new sentence (RIDOC). Hopefully with more job skill development that number will go down.

“Are parole violations included in recidivism statistics?”

The answer is yes, but the odds of recidivating are less when you’re paroled because you are supervised. The Department's recidivism report does separate out parole violations and people not coming back on parole. Persons released to parole are supervised by a parole officer from the DOC. If a parolee violates any terms and conditions of their parole while in the community, they can be detained and returned to the ACI and must have a hearing before the parole board to determine if revocation of their parole is warranted. Compared to the recidivism rate of inmates who “flat line” their sentences, only about 6% of those who are on parole supervision violate parole and come back to prison. The statistics include people who may have been paroled for a bit of time, gotten off of parole, and now under probation.

“In your opinion, what rehabilitation programs are the most successful for men and women?”

Laura said mental health counseling and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) are the most effective. CBT meets one set of needs, and education and skill-building reaches another set of needs. Cognitive behavior therapy provides training in mindfulness and offers self-help strategies, particularly for depression and anxiety. CBT can help people recognize their triggers that drive unwanted, deviant or criminal behavior. When a parolee is released and faces the tasks of finding housing and a job, their risk of recidivism increases, especially if they're not able to cope with these demands. Not knowing how to self-regulate or knowing where to find help increases their risk. Skill-building is perhaps more obvious and involves education, like earning a GED, and learning an employable trade. At the men's medium security facility, some job training opportunities are in furniture building, license plate manufacturing, and autobody repair.

“How common is recidivism? Why do you think that is?”

Laura responded that although 45% come back in three years, the first 6 months are the most challenging and when they are more at risk to recidivate. The longer someone is out, the less likely it is they will come back. She thinks the recidivism rates in Rhode Island are consistent nationwide, which is over 50%. The department is trying to get the numbers down, but the department is a resource-poor government agency. It is very complicated, but some core reasons why people fail on parole or probation is instability in housing, instability in employment, and instability in health care and mental health care, criminal associates, and illicit drug use. If these basic needs aren't met or available in the community, and they continue to have “criminal thinking,” they will recidivate a lot more quickly. Any one of these could derail someone. Stability in all those areas are needed to reduce the problem of re-incarceration and mass incarceration.

“From your perspective, how well do you think the criminal justice system is working?”

The short answer was “*not well enough.*” She believes that the general public has a very “crime and punishment” perspective. She goes on to say that it is hard to let go of punishment when someone has wronged you or someone else. She thinks we spend too much time on that. She doesn't think the system is working because other areas aren't working. So if our education, housing, and health care aren't working then there's no way the criminal justice system can work well enough to be preventative or rehabilitative. She thinks we are a country of “haves and have-

nots” because those who are well off financially are a little stingy when it comes to the “have-nots.” She emphasized the need for political will. *“It’ll take political will to push the other systems back on the right track, and before that, nothing will change.”* For example, Rhode Island’s prison system was built in the 1970’s and the maximum security facility was built in 1878. The system is old fashioned. We don’t have step down facilities for those leaving the prison and going back into the community; they are just dropped off. People who are eligible to receive parole are about 50% of the population, but only about 35% of those who are eligible receive it. Most people finish their term and just walk out the door. We don’t have natural transitions to get them back into the community. They will fall right back into the struggle that they were in before going to prison. She emphasized that we have very little resources for community corrections.

“Does anything need changing for victims, offenders, for the community that receives them?”

Laura reiterated the need for resources, infrastructures for healthcare which includes mental health, then there’s the need for more public housing. These are anchors for people. More community resources can include work and educational counseling, mentoring, and residential drug treatment programs.

“What are the checks and balances in place for keeping and releasing an inmate?”

Laura explained that the foundation is the sentencing that comes from the court. A judge determines the sentence. The ACI is the custodian of the person sentenced by the court. They can’t be held any longer than their sentence, and their responsibility is to help support them while in their custody. If they have mental health issues, they need to be addressed; try to educate the person if the person wants it; and provide them with tools that will help them with re-entry into the community. It's the legislature that decides what the release criteria are and what gets someone out of prison early on parole. Although the legislators determine the legal criteria, the parole board uses it to review a case and assess eligibility.

“Does the board take into consideration gender, ethnicity, family, and cultural differences when considering parole or violation of parole?”

The Board does not take those demographics into consideration in isolation. She thinks it would be improper for the board to take gender, ethnicity, family or cultural differences into consideration because the question before them is, “Has the person served enough time, have they paid their debt to society?” Part of the sentence is paying your debt to society, and depending on the severity of the crime, the Board determines how heavy that debt is. Factors that the Board looks at are whether weapons were used and were there victims. All this is put into the sentencing, but the parole board looks at the gravity of the crime and evaluates if the person has paid their debt to society. Furthermore, will early release on parole diminish that debt and diminish the severity of their crime? Most inmates are eligible for parole after they have served at least one-third of their sentence. On murder, life sentences, and some consecutive sentence cases that result in long prison “bids” are examined by the amount of time an inmate must serve before initial parole considerations can come forward. Something that the Board looks at is, *“What’s this person’s plan for release? Can they take their place in the community? Can they leave this place, and go back to their place in the community in such a way they are not at increased risk? Do they have stability?”* If they have a kid, and they plan to take care of them, that must be taken into consideration, too. If an inmate was supporting himself and his family with drug money, how will they support themselves when they leave? “The plan” they put in place and present to the Board is very important for early release.

“What else is important to know about your career for those of us interested in criminal justice?”

Laura responded that having a legal or social work background is very important to persons who are interested in pursuing a role in criminal justice, especially for law enforcement. You don’t need a degree, but you need to be able to understand the principles that underpin both of those fields. She doesn’t think you can have a healthy perspective or approach to prosecution, defense, arresting, and investigation, or even sentencing, without a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral and mental health issues that are in our communities. We all have different perspectives on crime and punishment, and even those who have subscribed to the traditional crime control model of law and order, must have an understanding of what goes into committing a crime and the reasons why recidivism is so high. We all have a role to play with reducing recidivism, it’s not just people who work in the criminal justice system. A police officer’s goal

isn't to just arrest, a prosecutor's goal isn't to just convict, and a judge's goal isn't to just sentence. We all need to have a perspective of where it's going to lead. How is this arrest contributing to or reducing recidivism?

Laura Pisaturo's perspective supports a restorative justice approach to our criminal justice system. She emphasizes restoring or repairing the harm done to crime-prone communities in need of good schools, access to health care, jobs that pay a living wage, and affordable housing. The residents get sentenced to prison, and the ACI tries to rehabilitate and help through therapies, education, and even apprenticeships to learn a trade. The trades offer stability that will help the formerly incarcerated for when they inevitably leave, but they are still faced with many obstacles that are structural and not always personal. The general public has a retributive, "eye for an eye" philosophy, believing in a heavy punishment for crimes, including nonviolent ones. When someone has wronged you or someone else, it's hard to let go of a punishment. Our mentality is that the offender must pay their debt to society, and depending on the severity of the crime, that debt must be heavy and sentences lengthy. Laura advocates for thinking about our crime control problem differently. Government supported programs can bring stability to these vulnerable populations and their communities. It is the right decision to make, and it will provide communities and residents who are at high risk for crimes the help they need for long term solutions.

Conclusion

Throughout the interview, I realized how not only the ACI is critical to advance restorative justice practices, but everyone needs to participate in repairing the harm and restoring relationships. The residents go into the ACI to pay their debt to society, and along the way, try to rehabilitate, get some education, and learn a new trade. The same restorative approach takes place at the Rhode Island Training School for juveniles, although the need is to craft short term and long term solutions with individualized plans to help them integrate back into society. The same approach is needed for the adults, too.

In the survey of justice studies students (n=38), respondents thought that restorative justice programs can support and empower victims, offenders, and their communities. They support creating more holistic solutions. Despite this, nearly 30% of survey respondents thought

that plea bargaining and punishing offenders were core practices of restorative justice, and this is not correct. More education on what a restorative approach does and does not do is needed. “Old school” ideas of crime control still exist, and a shocking 11% of those surveyed thought incarceration was the best method of keeping the public safe, even for non-violent offenders. Not only do we need to increase the awareness of alternative methods available to our criminal justice system to these students, but we also need our politicians and community stakeholders to learn more about this approach, too.

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CONCLUSION

Within these pages, we gathered a variety of information that provides many important perspectives, not only on the different types of careers in the criminal justice system, but also these professionals' views on what is working and what is not working as well as it could be. They show us that restoring balance to communities at risk does not easily or neatly fit into our crime control model, and solutions are complex. These professionals recommend implementing more supportive and rehabilitative programs. Through their decades of experience, they see that many benefits of a restorative justice model have a real chance at decreasing recidivism rates; decreasing the rate of drug addiction and deaths due to overdose; and increasing community mental health and well-being over the long term with access to health care services. Each of these professionals gave their expert opinion on these topics independently of the other professionals interviewed, and it was interesting to see the similarities in many of their responses.

In our country today, mass incarceration is a prevalent issue, as we continue to surpass every other country in the world, even those countries with well-known human rights abuses like Russia and China. Restorative justice may be the path forward to promote opportunities for victims, offenders, and communities affected by crime in ways that lengthy prison sentences cannot do. It is important to understand just how much restorative justice can help our communities across the country where victim-impact panels, family group conferences, victim-offender mediation, circle sentencing, and community reparative boards are integrated into the criminal justice system. Many of the professionals interviewed within this book acknowledged that crime rates will continue to exceed, and they communicated to us just how important new approaches are needed that can lead to long term solutions. A restorative model is beneficial to all because its focus is on healing and making meaningful reparations to victims, their families, and communities. While the offender participates in making amends, they are supported, too, by seeking their own health and well-being away from a life of crime.

We want to create opportunities to generate well-being in today's overly-punitive society. We live in a society that is polarized by so many things, and it seems we just want to punish the offenders rather than to just step back to think and act critically about the damage and how to repair it.

Oftentimes for a certain segment of the population, there are offenders who are trapped in a vicious cycle of violence and crime without opportunities for change. Crime is often the unintended consequence of many societal ills, but yet we make sure the offender is personally responsible and pay for their decisions with lengthy jail time. Where are the opportunities to acquire jobs that pay a living wage, access to health care, a permanent place to call home, and opportunities for advancement? Few opportunities collide with great instability, which more likely than not, brings them back into our old-fashion “eye for an eye” justice system. What is pressing for our time is to create new pathways for success rather than failure. Our current system isn’t working so well, so it’s time to help individuals and communities at risk to become more stable, safer, and supportive for the benefit of us all.

We recommend exploring restorative justice principles more deeply and more critically as a path to support, perhaps fix, societal issues. Although there have been some advancements in cases involving law enforcement and restorative justice, there's still significant room for improvement. It's crucial to emphasize these ongoing initiatives and the additional steps required to fully incorporate restorative justice practices into law enforcement practices. Derived from some of our survey responses addressing the role of law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges in providing community support, 87% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that these government entities should prioritize community assistance. Responses and comments from students on who fills the beds at the juvenile detention facility should leave no doubt that long- term supports and community resources for victims, their families, and yes, the offenders are integral to justice and reducing the burdens our criminal justice system demands of these professionals, and others, we interviewed for this book.

We thought all semester long about the title of our book. It was only after taking in the totality of these interviews and during the last week of class that we voted on *Guardians of Justice*. We heard these professionals give us advice about how utterly demanding their jobs are and how one must do them with heart, mind, body, and soul. It’s dedication like no other to keep us safe and our communities free from violence and drugs. They understand what it means to be guardians of justice, but they can’t do it alone. Our criminal justice system needs changing, and we can

choose to look at these changes as opportunities. If we learned anything from these interviews, why can't we all say we are guardians of justice and work to make the world a better place?

Appendix

Student Survey Results



Behind the Badge

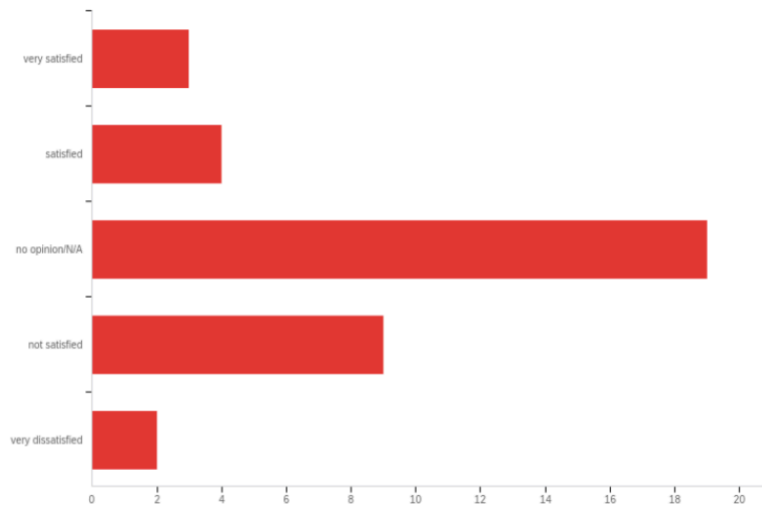
Student Survey Results

Hi! Thanks for taking this anonymous survey for us. We are Justice Studies seniors, and we would very much like your input for our last class assignment! This semester we have interviewed local, state, and federal law enforcement professionals. We are sharing with you some of what we learned, and we would very much appreciate your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers, and your answers can never be linked to you. We seek your input as a Justice Studies student, and Dr. Harrison will post survey results to the Justice Studies web page when we're done. Thank you for your time! Sincerely, Ethan, Priscilla, Troy, Tyler

1-1 - Have you ever had an interaction with a state trooper? If yes, how would you rate your overall satisfaction?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	very satisfied	8.11%	3
2	satisfied	10.81%	4
3	no opinion/N/A	51.35%	19
4	not satisfied	24.32%	9
5	very dissatisfied	5.41%	2
	Total	100%	37

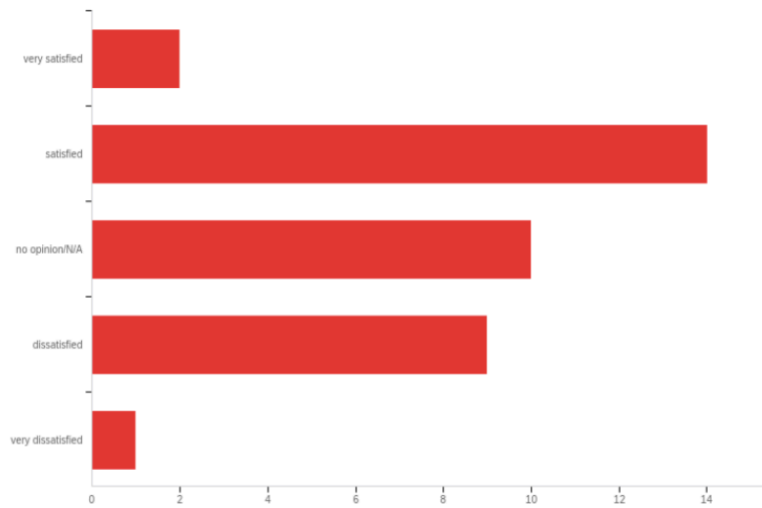
1-1 - Have you ever had an interaction with a state trooper? If yes, how would you rate your overall satisfaction?



2 - How would you rate your level of trust with state troopers?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	very satisfied	5.56%	2
2	satisfied	38.89%	14
3	no opinion/N/A	27.78%	10
4	dissatisfied	25.00%	9
5	very dissatisfied	2.78%	1
	Total	100%	36

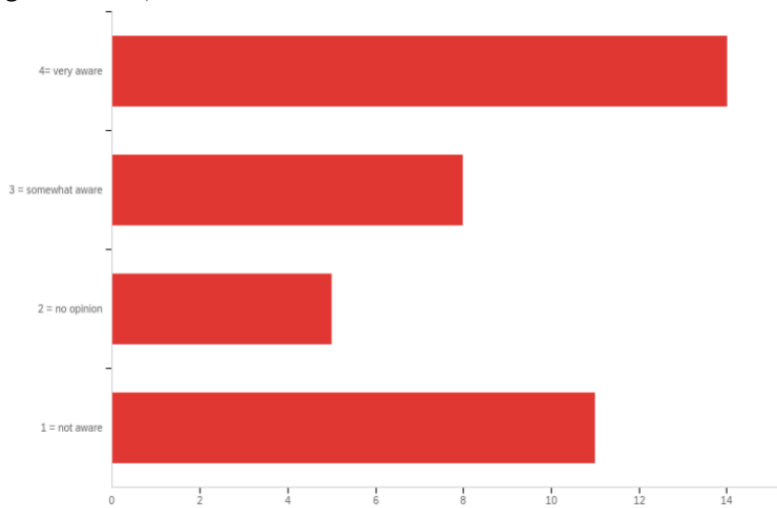
2 - How would you rate your level of trust with state troopers?



3-1 - Are you aware that the majority of youth held at the RI Training School come from single parent households, live in poor neighborhoods, and are adolescents of color?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	4= very aware	36.84%	14
2	3 = somewhat aware	21.05%	8
3	2 = no opinion	13.16%	5
4	1 = not aware	28.95%	11
	Total	100%	38

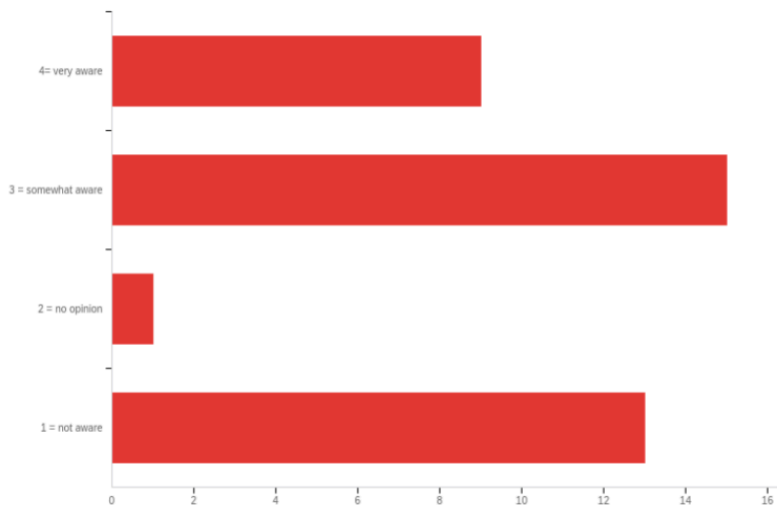
3-1 - Are you aware that the majority of youth held at the RI Training School come from single parent households, live in poor neighborhoods, and are adolescents of color?



5 - Are you aware that the FBI recruits people from all different majors, such as accounting, modern language, engineering, and computer science?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	4= very aware	23.68%	9
2	3 = somewhat aware	39.47%	15
3	2 = no opinion	2.63%	1
4	1 = not aware	34.21%	13
	Total	100%	38

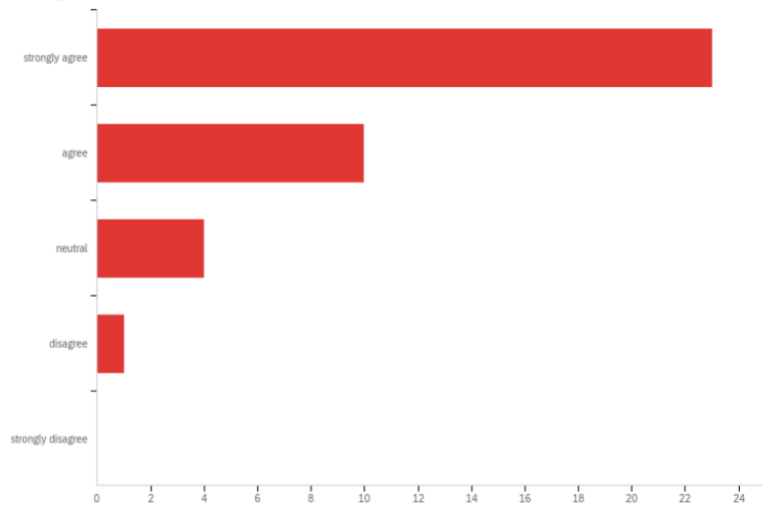
5 - Are you aware that the FBI recruits people from all different majors, such as accounting, modern language, engineering, and computer science?



6 - How much do you agree with this statement? "Police, prosecutors, and judges should focus on helping our communities, not just punishing offenders."

#	Answer	%	Count
1	strongly agree	60.53%	23
2	agree	26.32%	10
3	neutral	10.53%	4
4	disagree	2.63%	1
5	strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	38

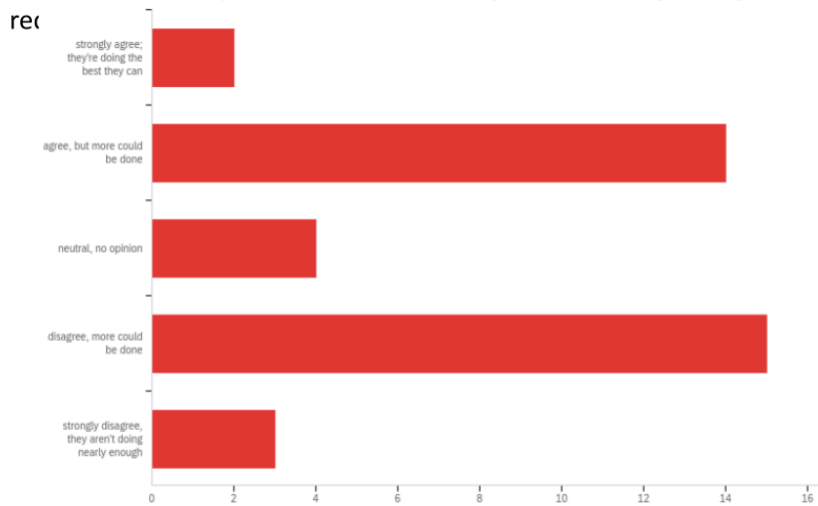
6 - How much do you agree with this statement? "Police, prosecutors, and judges should focus on helping our communities, not just punishing offenders."



7 - The Centers for Disease Control reports that over 150 people die every day from overdosing on synthetic opioids like Fentanyl in the United States. Do you think that federal agents are doing enough to reduce the flow of these illegal drugs across our border?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	strongly agree; they're doing the best they can	5.26%	2
2	agree, but more could be done	36.84%	14
3	neutral, no opinion	10.53%	4
4	disagree, more could be done	39.47%	15
5	strongly disagree, they aren't doing nearly enough	7.89%	3
	Total	100%	38

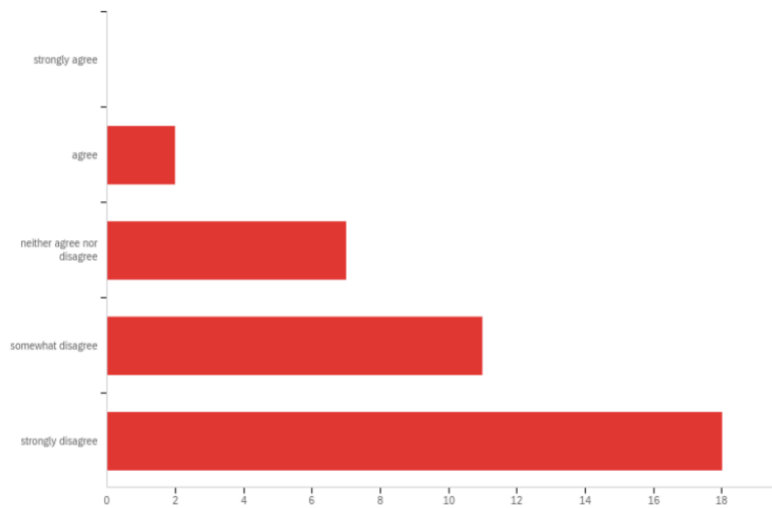
7 - The Centers for Disease Control reports that over 150 people die every day from overdosing on synthetic opioids like Fentanyl in the United States. Do you think that federal agents are doing enough to



8 - To what degree to you support this statement? "We should continue to prosecute – rather than provide rehabilitation for – drug users."

#	Answer	%	Count
1	strongly agree	0.00%	0
2	agree	5.26%	2
3	neither agree nor disagree	18.42%	7
4	somewhat disagree	28.95%	11
5	strongly disagree	47.37%	18
	Total	100%	38

8 - To what degree to you support this statement? "We should continue to prosecute – rather than provide rehabilitation for – drug users."

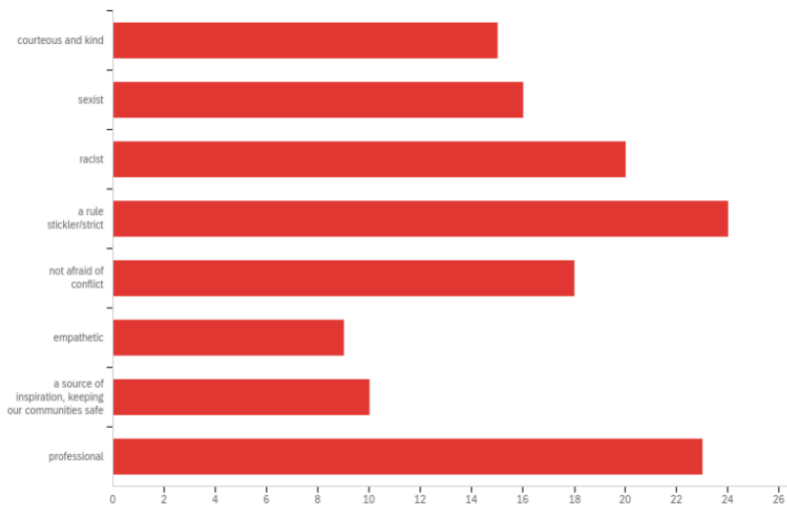


0 5 10 15

9 - This question aims to gauge perceptions of our law enforcement. Click any words that apply.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	courteous and kind	11.11%	15
2	sexist	11.85%	16
3	racist	14.81%	20
4	a rule stickler/strict	17.78%	24
5	not afraid of conflict	13.33%	18
6	empathetic	6.67%	9
7	a source of inspiration, keeping our communities safe	7.41%	10
8	professional	17.04%	23
	Total	100%	135

9 - This question aims to gauge perceptions of our law enforcement. Click any words that apply.



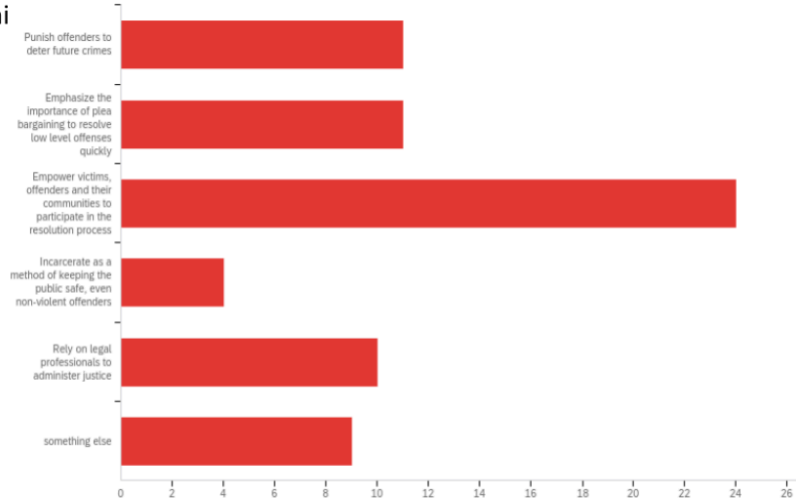
10 - We have studied traditional criminal justice that deters crime through incarceration, and we have studied the restorative justice approach that seeks alternative methods. Which statement(s) do you think best aligns with restorative justice practices?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Punish offenders to deter future crimes	15.94%	11
2	Emphasize the importance of plea bargaining to resolve low level offenses quickly	15.94%	11
3	Empower victims, offenders and their communities to participate in the resolution process	34.78%	24
4	Incarcerate as a method of keeping the public safe, even non-violent offenders	5.80%	4

10 - We have studied traditional criminal justice that deters crime through incarceration, and we have studied the restorative justice approach that seeks alternative methods. Which statement(s) do you think best aligns with restorative justice practices?

#	Answer	%	Count
5	Rely on legal professionals to administer justice	14.49%	10
6	something else	13.04%	9
	Total	100%	69

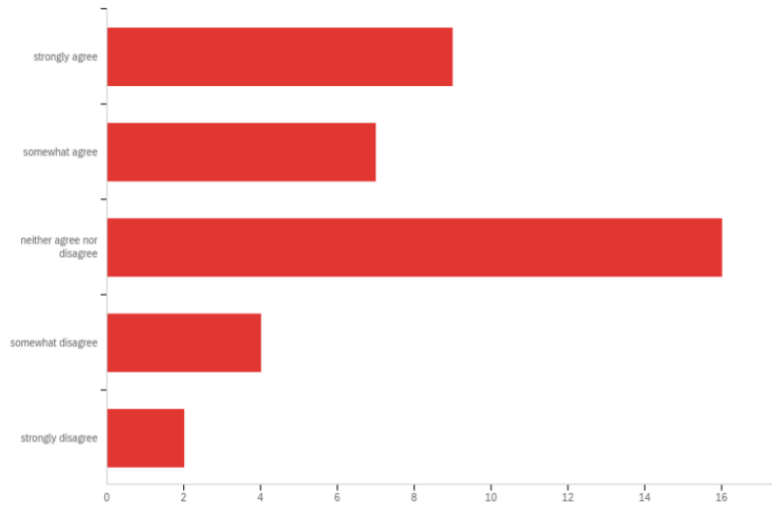
10 - We have studied traditional criminal justice that deters crime through incarceration, and we have studied the restorative justice approach that seeks alternative methods. Which statement(s) do you thi



11 - To what degree do you support this statement? "Artificial Intelligence used in sentencing criminals to prison perpetuates racial profiling."

#	Answer	%	Count
1	strongly agree	23.68%	9
2	somewhat agree	18.42%	7
3	neither agree nor disagree	42.11%	16
4	somewhat disagree	10.53%	4
5	strongly disagree	5.26%	2
	Total	100%	38

11 - To what degree do you support this statement? "Artificial Intelligence used in sentencing criminals to prison perpetuates racial profiling."



Student feedback from survey participants:

- *I think working for the FBI would be an interesting job!*
- *I thought the most interesting question was the one talking about the demographics of the RI Training School and how most of the youth there come from one or more of the details listed. I did not previously realize this!*
- *The information on the opioid crisis was interesting and the information provided did not seem biased. It offered room for people to answer from both viewpoints. Although I do know a lot about the topic, I felt like that was a very broad question to consider all factors!*
- *The question on artificial intelligence used in sentencing offenders was very interesting because I never really thought about how AI can be racist, or how it could play different roles in the justice system. I was really stumped and intrigued when I read that question.*
- *I honestly was surprised by a lot of the questions. Knowing the FBI recruits people from all different majors feels comforting in a way. It makes sense to have different backgrounds to assess different cases and different points of view based on their studies. I found this question really interesting, and after thinking about it more, it makes a lot of sense!*
- *A question that intrigued me was the perceptions of law enforcement, where the questions ranged from "kind and caring for the community" to "sexist or racist." That question had me stumped, and I was really thinking on which parts I agree on!*
- *The question that I found most interesting is one that asked if I was aware that the FBI hired people from all different majors. This includes language, computer science and accounting. I would've expected the FBI to hire solely computer science, criminal justice, forensic science, and maybe even psychology or social science majors. Good to know!*
- *Do I think AI used in sentencing criminals perpetuates racial profiling? I do, although it's not necessarily something I have thought about in depth before. But since AI relies on patterns and data trends, I can see it finding false trends with minorities and unfairly sentencing people based on them. I appreciate how straightforward yet thought-provoking the survey was.*
- *The most interesting thing was learning that most children in the RI training school come from low income families and are people of color. The question really stood out to me because I wasn't really aware of this, but it didn't surprise me.*

Note: This was a survey of convenience and we used a non-probability sampling method. It was sent to justice studies students via an email link, staying open for just 5 days, April 18-22, 2024. It is not a reliable or valid measure of Rhode Island College's justice studies students' opinions, as only 20% of all students majoring in this discipline completed the survey. This survey was anonymous, so we have no way of knowing if the intended students completed the survey or if it was completed by someone else.