

Introduction to Criminal Justice

Introduction to Criminal Justice

A Personal Narrative Approach

SECOND EDITION

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CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Ackerman, Alissa, author. | Sacks, Meghan, author. |
Shlosberg, Amy, author.
Title: Introduction to criminal justice : a personal narrative
approach / Alissa R. Ackerman, Meghan Sacks & Amy
Shlosberg.
Description: Second edition. | Durham, North Carolina :
Carolina Academic Press, [2023] | Includes bibliographical
references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2023027032 | ISBN 9781531025380
(paperback) | ISBN 9781531025397 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Criminal justice, Administration of—United
States. | Crime—United States. | Criminal law—United
States. | Punishment—United States.
Classification: LCC HV9950 .A345 2023 | DDC 364.973—
dc23/eng/20230706
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023027032>

Carolina Academic Press
700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
(919) 489-7486
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge Abigail Eckert as a contributor to this text who aided with editing of several narratives.

Introduction

The lived experiences of real people are often lost in discussions about criminal justice. Texts and teaching too frequently focus exclusively on criminal justice procedures or on macro-level systems. Such conversations lose sight of and devalue the impact of systems on real people; the experiences of victims, offenders, and various criminal justice workers often become obscured in policy debates, system reform efforts, and even in criminal justice education. The result of this loss of focus on real people can lead to various forms of dehumanization.

This dehumanization is endemic not only in criminal justice systems, but has become an unfortunate trend in human services in general. The medicalization of social problems, the current trend toward evidence-based practice, and the increasing encroachment of privatization have all contributed to a minimization of the lived experiences of diverse populations and how they experience criminal justice systems.

This book is different; it presents the lived experiences of real people as they engage with and are engaged by the criminal justice system. It teaches a holistic approach to the study of criminal justice while still providing the nuts and bolts of the field needed in introductory classes. Toward this end, this book presents personal narratives of human beings as they navigate the various roles of the criminal justice system. These include perpetrators, victims, workers, and other roles. Between 2013 and 2023 we solicited over 30 narratives, which we present in the next thirteen chapters.

Narratives from officers working throughout the criminal justice system are included, and they detail why individuals entered into their chosen fields, the paths they took to get there, and the rewards and pitfalls of their chosen careers. Other narratives explain the plight of individuals who have been subjected to the system in some way. Other narratives highlight success stories from individuals who were processed through the criminal justice system. While some of these individuals applaud the system for its role in shaping their successes, others provide negative accounts of their experience and instead highlight what they have done to succeed in life in spite of their encounters. The diversity of these narratives provides this text with depth, humanity, and real world relevance.

These real world experiences will help you consider the ways in which criminal justice actors influence and shape the lives of everyday people. Additionally, by the end of this textbook, you will understand that criminal justice systems also impact the lives of those who work within them. Finally, we hope that your engagement

with this book helps you to think about the ways you've personally been impacted by crime and criminal justice, and how these experiences have shaped your path to a criminal justice career.

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