

# ACJS *today*

Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Newsletter



## Article

### Advocating for Educating College Students on Elder Abuse in Criminal Justice

By: *Sophia Stefani & Shanell Sanchez*

It is widely recognized that the global population is aging, leading to an increasing number of elderly people in the future. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024b), it is projected that by 2030, one in six people worldwide will be aged 60 years or older. The WHO's estimate as of 2024 suggests that nearly one in six elderly individuals has experienced some form of abuse after turning 60 (WHO, 2024a). Research shows that seniors have faced various forms of victimization, including psychological or verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and financial exploitation (Rosay & Mulford, 2017; Rosen et al., 2022; WHO, 2024a; Yon et al., 2019). Elder abuse is a serious concern that can occur in different settings, by family members, friends, or acquaintances.

According to the WHO (2024a), 15.7 percent of abuse cases were reported by individuals when the elderly lived in community settings. In comparison, 64.2 percent were reported by staff or other people in institutional settings. The variation in reports cannot be easily explained, as multiple factors contribute to higher rates inside institutions, including more trained healthcare professionals, increased interaction with outsiders, higher operational costs, and a greater likelihood of encountering more cases of abuse. From a criminological

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perspective, these low estimates are recognized as stemming from underreporting and underrecognition of abuse, as well as a reluctance to report.

We are arguing for promoting more courses in criminal justice and criminology to encourage discussions about elder abuse and to prepare future professionals. College students study a wide range of subjects during their degrees to equip them with comprehensive knowledge that may be related to their future professions. However, when guiding students about their future careers, it's important to prepare them for situations they may encounter as societal demographics continue to change over time. Majors often teach about child abuse, teenage dating violence, and intimate partner violence. We encourage our programs to include discussions on elder abuse in courses and to recognize that it can be a form of intimate partner violence. Frequently, the family is most likely to perpetrate elder abuse, with about 47 percent of cases involving family members (National Council on Aging, 2024). Elder abuse differs from other examples of IPV in a few key ways, the main one of which involves financial abuse.

Financial abuse is one of the most common forms of elderly exploitation and is glossed over by many practitioners when discussing elder abuse, which ignores a very large demographic of victims (Jackson & Hafemeister, 2014). Another key difference is seen within gender when examining reports of elder abuse. IPV is a heavily gendered crime with 4 in 5 reported victims being female (Catalano, 2015). While women still make a majority of reported abuse claims, with around 72 percent, we know there can be underreporting (Rosen et al., 2022). The barriers and shame to report elder abuse fall disproportionately on male victims, meaning they likely make up a much higher portion than reported. A nuanced approach encompassing IPV would help students understand

the complex issues facing our aging population and the need for practical solutions and support for survivors of elder abuse. Like other areas of criminal justice where victims are affected, elder abuse victims can feel shame and confusion about what has happened, or may not recognize that a crime has been committed against them. As our field continues to educate first responders, social workers, and other professionals, we need to close this knowledge gap. Equipping our students with the tools and understanding to recognize and prevent elder abuse can empower them in their careers.

During my undergraduate studies, I conducted a research capstone focusing on college students' awareness of elder abuse in comparison to child abuse. The study revealed concerning results, as only 43 percent of the student sample were knowledgeable about the warning signs of elder abuse and the potential services. In contrast, a vast majority of students demonstrated awareness of the services and warning signs of child abuse. Students were randomly selected in a cluster format with a variety of rankings and majors chosen. More than 55 percent of the students surveyed were third- or fourth-year students, which means students nearing the end of their undergraduate degree, and they were wholly confused or unaware of questions regarding elder abuse. These findings are concerning given the aging population. As an undergraduate student passionate about combating elder abuse, I find it concerning that there are few textbooks and courses dedicated to the population I hope to serve. The goal of this article is to encourage academics in the field to educate students about elder abuse and produce more books.

The current level of knowledge about elder abuse is lacking in many areas. One of the largest gaps is connected to the organizations that deal with abuse. Many people are not aware of who

investigates or interacts with the parties involved outside of the traditional police force. The organizations responsible for it are Adult Protective Services APS or the Department of Human Services DHS, depending on the state of residence. When college students were surveyed about these organizations, less than one percent answered correctly. Some of the incorrect answers were “the Department of Justice” and “HR,” indicating a significant lack of knowledge on the subject. While the Department of Justice may be involved in extreme cases of widespread elder abuse, investigating individual cases is not their role (About DOJ, 2025). This lack of knowledge is not only alarming but also incredibly dangerous. If people are unaware of the governmental programs available to address elder abuse, it can create a barrier to trust and collaboration with these programs.

One area in criminal justice that needs more attention is identifying risk factors and factors of victimization facing the elderly. Similar to young children, certain elderly populations have higher risk factors than others. When discussing the elderly, the term younger-old age indicates people under 70, and older-old age is anyone 71 plus. Research has indicated that the younger age group faces more abuse compared to their older counterparts (Rosay & Mulford, 2017; Rosen et al., 2022). For instance, research has found “participants under the age of 70 were three times more likely to experience emotional abuse and four times more likely to experience physical abuse than those aged 70 or above” (Rosay & Mulford, 2017, p. 3). Only about one-third of undergraduates surveyed in my sample were aware of this information. It is important to note, however, that it is only a correlation that needs further research. We encourage people in academia to explore elder abuse risk factors more to minimize harm.

Elder abuse is a serious issue that must not be

ignored in criminal justice courses and the field. As we age, we all eventually become vulnerable, and it is crucial to provide support for people. Future practitioners like myself need extensive education to effectively combat elder abuse and prevent future harm. Research is necessary to explore the topic, identify risk factors, find ways to prevent the crimes, and help survivors overcome their trauma. As a graduating senior, I have dedicated my undergraduate studies to studying elder abuse because I want to protect our aging community members. I encourage my classes to engage students in meaningful discussions about elder abuse, acknowledging it as a form of IPV but also recognizing it as a separate issue that needs its attention, along with more research, to understand its impact on our communities.

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# Robert A. Brooks and Jeffrey W. Cohen

## *Criminology Explains School Bullying*

University of California Press

ISBN: 9780520298279

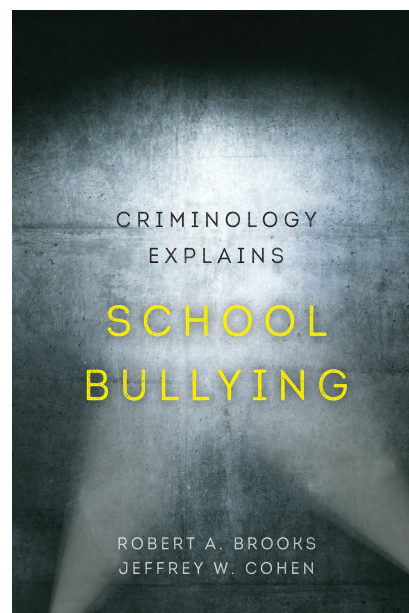
*Review by Nadia Wilson*  
Lamar University

Robert A. Brooks and Jeffrey W. Cohen provide a comprehensive explanation of school bullying through the lens of several different criminological theories in their book, *Criminology Explains School Bullying*. Initially inspired by the disparate treatment of two bullying-related suicides that occurred between 2009 and 2010—nearly identical in almost all ways except for the color of the victims' skin—the authors set out on a journey to analyze why school bullying takes place. In doing so, Brooks and Cohen ultimately solidify their legacy in the burgeoning field of academia surrounding the topic, which has flourished over the last three and a half decades. *Criminology Explains School Bullying* presents a number of diverse theories to explain school bullying and allows readers to find and learn from the consistencies and inconsistencies between these theories.

Addressing first the defining features of school bullying, which can take place directly, indirectly, in person, or even online, the authors discuss the expected presence of an uneven power dynamic, the element of repetition, and the intent by the bully to cause harm to the target. One's understanding of bullying, of course, is affected by a multitude of factors, including culture, language, age, and role—teachers, parents, and students, for example, may

all have differing understandings of the term. The law, too, provides a separate understanding, as statutes between states can define bullying in broader terms than can be found in academic research. Brooks and Cohen contend, rightfully so, that a consistent definition would be required to enable reliable reporting and effective research-based intervention and prevention efforts.

Brooks and Cohen continue at the start of the book to provide an overview of the potential effects of school bullying. While victims might experience lower academic success, a decrease in school attendance, and even mental and physiological difficulties that extend into adulthood, schools as a whole might see higher dropout rates and lower test scores. Witnesses to bullying might experience the anxiety of worrying they are next, while parents and families anguish over their children's suffering. The effects of bullying are pervasive and extend far beyond the child on the receiving end of the taunts and jokes. Brooks and Cohen also touch on the diverse responses to these effects, including community initiatives, civil lawsuits, restraining orders, and criminal prosecution—something the authors do *not* support. So, how does such a pervasive issue come to be? Brooks and Cohen spend the majority of their time addressing this very question.



The authors find their start with deterrence theory, which posits generally that a proportional, reliable, and quick punishment acts to deter corresponding negative behavior. In the context of school bullying, the authors specifically hone in on the importance of a reliable or certain form of punishment, pointing to studies which suggest students are more deterred by the threat of certain punishment from teachers and parents, as opposed to the less likely threat of intervention by police. Along these same lines, the authors posit that the mere existence of school anti-bullying policies does not provide the certainty of punishment. Rather, the *consistent* and *fair* implementation of such policies is required to achieve the desired effect on the student population.

Importantly, Brooks and Cohen discourage sole focus on the severity element of deterrence theory as it relates to school bullying, contending that increasingly severe punishments will not have the desired effect when emphasized alone. For example, the authors explain that zero-tolerance policies may only cause students to find less conspicuous ways to bully, and that anti-bullying laws have arguably proven to be ineffective. They ultimately, however, are resigned to the fact that the literature is mixed with regard to deterrence theory, and this much is certainly true. One study, for example, analyzed rates of bullying in states with anti-bullying laws between 2002 and 2010 using the School Survey on Crime and Safety, concluding that states with such laws saw up to an 8.4 decrease in the likelihood of students experiencing bullying (Nikolaou, 2017). Brooks and Cohen might very well attribute this study and studies like it to a misinterpretation of the deterrence theory; regardless, they are correct in acknowledging diverse academic takes on the theory.

The authors transition from a discussion of deterrence theory to the suggestion that victimization theories could be used to explain

school bullying. One take—potentially controversial in that it places the onus of the problem on the victim—posits that bullying could be explained by lifestyle routine activity theory. That is to say, when students are routinely exposed to risky situations, such as by participating in school activities and engaging with poorly behaved students, they are more likely to find themselves victimized. At least one cited study backs this claim, concluding that the more involved a student was, and the closer they were to problematic students, the higher the likelihood they would be bullied.

Setting aside the knee-jerk desire to point to victimization theory as a means of “victim blaming,” the authors bring forth ample support to suggest that increased opportunities for exposure in a negative school environment does allow for bullying to become more commonplace. In a sense, this victimization theory actually places some of the blame on school administrators for fostering an environment where ample opportunities for bullying arise. Indeed, scholars agree that bullying becomes more likely in an atmosphere where supervision is scant and where teachers are disconnected from their students, leaving them to fend for themselves (Espelage & Swearer, 2009). Brooks and Cohen acknowledge this in their discussion of the final and necessary element of lifestyle routine activity theory: the absence of capable guardianship.

Brooks and Cohen depart from macro-level theories and next set their sights on micro-level theories, including biosocial and psychological theories, to explain school bullying. The former focuses on the interaction between biological and environmental factors. For example, the authors dedicate a portion of their time discussing stimulation-seeking theory, citing a study which concluded that bullies exhibited low levels of arousal, thus encouraging them to seek out activities and aggression, whereas victims

displayed high levels of arousal.

An important comparison is drawn here, as the authors point out that low levels of arousal can correspond to other physiological factors, which are themselves associated with violent criminal behavior in males. This brings to light a significant importance in this work: what do school bullies and career criminals have in common, biologically? Is there a correlation to be found, and if so, how can that information be used to discourage deviant behavior early on? This acts as yet another demonstration of why the study of school bullying can contribute to the wider field of criminology as a whole.

Whereas biosocial theories focus on biological factors found in both aggressors and victims, psychological theories focus on mental attributes. Of particular interest in this discussion is the authors' callback to their initial chapter's focus on the lasting effects of bullying. Victims of bullying, Brooks and Cohen explain, are at higher risk of depression, anxiety, and substance use. These mental afflictions can not only increase risk of victimization at the outset, but can also develop *after* the fact as a result of that victimization, lasting into adulthood. Both biosocial and psychological theories create thought-provoking policy implications. For example, Brooks and Cohen explain that biosocial factors may be accounted for through implementation of health education and policies to reduce economic disparities, as children who are economically disadvantaged may be more likely subject to undesirable environmental factors. All the while, however, the authors caution that "medicalizing deviance" runs the risk of distracting from larger social problems (p. 114).

Transitioning next from biosocial and psychological explanations to sociological explanations for bullying, Brooks and Cohen view bullying through the lens of social disorganization, strain, and

subculture theories, focusing first on the effect of socioeconomic status as it relates to the development of both victims and school bullies. One analysis of almost thirty studies found a positive correlation between low socioeconomic status and victimization, potentially due to the fact that children of low socioeconomic status often have other unfavorable experiences at home, such as the witnessing of violence or abuse. Setting aside any connections between bullying and absolute socioeconomic status, the authors pay special attention to the correlation between bullying behaviors and victimization and *relative* socioeconomic status, providing support for the conclusion that rates of school bullying display a positive association with income inequity, generally.

Within the authors' discussion of social disorganization theory, another callback to their discussion of victimization arises—specifically their discussion of lifestyle routine activity theory—suggesting yet another common ground between theoretical frameworks. Brooks and Cohen cite a number of studies that connect student behavior with school atmosphere, including how secure and connected to school students feel, during their exploration of social disorganization theory. Indeed, the connection between school involvement and school bullying has been explored to some degree. One study based on self-reporting found that schools with so-called "healthy" climates, where students felt a sense of security and belonging and where an emphasis was placed on successful teaching strategies, enjoyed low, if not nonexistent, rates of bullying (Winnaar et al., 2018). Perhaps the relationship between a positive school environment and lack of instances of bullying can be explained from multiple angles, including social disorganization and lifestyle routine activity theories. This connection gets to the very heart of the authors' reason for compiling differing theories into

While acknowledging that strain theory usually requires an economic goal that cannot necessarily be applied to the school setting insofar as bullying is concerned, Brooks and Cohen still suggest that strain theory could be adapted to explain school bullying. For example, rather than the need to achieve a certain economic status, students might wish to achieve a certain level of social acceptance or popularity, and they may resort to deviant (bullying) behaviors in order to achieve that goal. Interestingly, strain occurring as a result of victimization could also be used to explain why some student victims lash out and become the perpetrator, in an attempt to relieve some of that strain, according to the authors.

Brooks and Cohen would be remiss not to acknowledge the suggestion that school bullies learn their behaviors from their family, friends, or surrounding community. After all, such an explanation—that bullies must have learned it at home—is often offered by victims' parents in lay terms and without the knowledge that robust academic support for the idea exists. Cohen and Brooks tackle this contention next in their discussion regarding differential association theory. The contention that bullies learn from their friends rings especially true in the realm of cyberbullying, as the authors explain, citing studies from the United States, Jerusalem, and South Korea, which all found that students with deviant friends were likely to engage in those same deviant behaviors.

Turning to imitation theory, the authors confront research which suggests that school bullying can be connected to physical discipline, violence, and abuse within the home, though they do not spend much time examining the possible link between domestic violence and bullying behaviors within this context. Researcher Anna Baldry (2003) conducted a study involving the self-reporting of more than 1,000 Italian schoolchildren in

elementary and middle school, finding correlative evidence between students who experienced interparental violence and students who exhibited bullying and victimization behaviors at school. While these findings were correlative rather than suggestive of causation, the association itself is undeniable and worthy of further exploration.

In what could be interpreted as a culmination of recurring themes throughout the book, Cohen and Brooks transition onward to the application of critical criminology—a frame of thought that takes into account multiple theories through a lens of inequality, social justice issues, and restorative justice measures—to school bullying. They explore the relationship between bullying and gender norms, acknowledging that bullying often occurs as a way to enforce gender roles and expectations amongst peers. Sexual identity issues also translate into bullying on the schoolyard; interestingly, though, the authors comment on society's tendency to romanticize victimization in this respect. Queer student victims, they contend, are often held out as brave or resilient, suggesting the need for society to shift focus back to curbing deviant behavior, rather than applauding victims for putting up with it after the fact.

The authors' robust discussion involving critical criminology paints a poignant picture: larger social justice issues seep their way into our schoolyards and into the minds of young children, manifesting in ways, ironically, not far different than in the adult realm. Accordingly, just as restorative justice principles can be applied in the so-called adult world, so too can they be applied within the context of school bullying. Brooks and Cohen explain that this could take the form of empowering school-aged youth, helping them find their voices and their worth, and by "affirming ing their needs and responsibilities" (p. 213). What might this look like in practice, though?



Brenda Morrison (2002) expands on the idea of restorative justice within a school setting, discussing an approach taken by a primary school in Australia wherein students were taught to manage feelings of shame and accept responsibility for wrongdoing. This program provided a fun and safe space for conflict resolution where students learned to voice their concerns and respect each other, including their own wrongdoer, in the process. Though Morrison's study predates Brooks and Cohen's work in *Criminology Explains School Bullying*, it underscores the very idea that Brooks and Cohen open with—the problem of school bullying is pervasive, and its lasting effects make it worthwhile to focus efforts on understanding and resolving it.

Ultimately, Brooks and Cohen contribute valuable insight to the study of school bullying—a topic to which entire journals, conference lectures, and scholarly articles have been devoted over the last decade. As interest in the topic expands, so too

must our understanding of how school bullying relates to criminological theories. By understanding how and why bullying takes place, administrators, scholars, and even students can work together to curb the epidemic. With its concise definitions, demonstrative explanations, and ample opportunity to draw connections between varying theories, *Criminology Explains School Bullying* certainly brings us closer to the target.

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# ACJS at the United Nations: Update from the ACJS Representative

*By: Yuliya Zabyelina*

In May 2025, as the official and alternate representatives of ACJS to the United Nations, Dr. Laura Ilesue (Sam Houston State University) and I traveled to Vienna for the 34th Session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). We attended as part of a strong ACJS delegation that, in addition to the ACJS representatives, included incumbent ACJS President, Dr. Stephanie Mizrahi (California State University, Sacramento) and Dr. Hyeyoung Lim (University of Alabama at Birmingham).

Our shared goal was to highlight the role of the scholar-activist in bridging research, advocacy, and policy for sustainable change. Working closely in the months leading up to the event, Dr. Ilesue and I coordinated every detail of our ACJS side event, *The Researcher-Activist in Criminal Justice: Bridging Research, Advocacy, and Policy for Sustainable Change*. From drafting the concept note to liaising with UNODC, confirming the speakers, and promoting the session across professional networks, we ensured the panel would offer both global relevance and practical impact.

The session featured compelling contributions from our distinguished panelists: Dr. Ilesue presented on building stronger partnerships among NGOs, academia, and UNODC; Dr. Lim spoke about advancing human rights through scholar-activist engagement in police accountability; and I addressed the transformative potential of researcher-activism in criminal justice reform. The discussion was enriched by the insights of our discussant, Dr. Stephanie Mizrahi, whose reflections

tied together the themes of interdisciplinary collaboration and actionable policy change.

The Q&A that followed brought forward several important points from participants and observers alike. These included the need for more formalized channels of cooperation between UN agencies and academic institutions; strategies for ensuring that scholar-activist research is accessible and actionable for policymakers; methods to safeguard academic freedom and neutrality while engaging in advocacy; the importance of integrating marginalized and community-based perspectives into international justice reform discussions; and ways to measure the long-term policy impact of research-driven advocacy. Participants also raised questions about overcoming institutional barriers within both academia and intergovernmental organizations and how to sustain transnational networks of researchers, practitioners, and activists beyond one-off events. It was also noted that, in the U.S. context, participation in high-level policy fora is often undervalued in tenure and promotion processes, which can limit the extent to which scholars are able to dedicate time and resources to such engagement—despite its clear potential to advance justice and inform policy.

In addition to the ACJS-organized panel, we co-sponsored several high-profile side events that highlighted the Academy's commitment to advancing global dialogue on critical criminal justice issues. These included *New, Emerging and Evolving Forms of Crime* (Spanish only), which examined shifting criminal landscapes and the implications for policy and research (organized by the International Sociological Association) and *Centering Victims in a Changing World: Upholding Victims' Rights Amid Evolving Crimes*, which focused on safeguarding victims' rights in the

context of rapidly evolving criminal threats (organized by the World Society of Victimology). ACJS also lent its support to Human Trafficking Enterprises, Global Trends, and Victim-Offender Overlap, a panel exploring the complexities of trafficking networks and the blurred boundaries between victimhood and offending (organized by Criminologists Without Borders). Through these partnerships, ACJS not only amplified its international profile but also contributed substantively to conversations on crime prevention, justice reform, and victim protection.

At the CCPCJ, I was also invited to serve as a panelist at the session Strengthening Civil Society Engagement at the 15th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice organized by the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, with the support of the UNODC Civil Society Unit and other partners. The panel brought together diverse stakeholders to discuss strategies for enhancing civil society's role in shaping the agenda and outcomes of the UN Crime Congress, and my contribution focused on practical approaches for bridging academic expertise with grassroots advocacy to inform inclusive and evidence-based policy outcomes.

By the end of the CCPCJ, the exchange of ideas went beyond the event itself, sparking interest in continued collaboration and in exploring concrete ways to embed scholarly expertise into ongoing UN discussions on crime prevention and criminal justice. The experience also marked the start of planning for the Academy's engagement at the forthcoming 15th UN Crime Congress, where we aim to build on this year's momentum by organizing events that further connect research with global policy debates.

## Are you interested in engaging with the United Nations?

The ACJS Representative to the United Nations serves as the primary liaison between the Academy and the UN. In this role, the representative monitors and reports on UN activities relevant to crime prevention, criminal justice, anti-corruption, and related fields. Through these communications, the representative helps ensure that ACJS remains connected to international policy discussions, fosters collaboration with other organizations, and highlights avenues for member participation in UN-related initiatives.

Any ACJS member interested in becoming involved in UN-related engagement—whether through attending sessions (online or in person), contributing expertise, or participating in side events—is encouraged to contact Dr. Yuliya Zabyelina directly to explore avenues for participation.





## JOURNAL OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

### **Book Review - Artificial Intelligence in Forensic Science: An Emerging Technology in Criminal Investigation Systems**

Edited By Kavita Saini, Swaroop S. Sonone, Mahipal Sing Sankhla, and Naveen Kumar

Boca Raton

ISBN: 978-1-003-28781-0

Gracia Gazali

Published Online: September 8, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2558116>

### **Book Review - Robotics, AI and Criminal Law: Crimes Against Robots**

By mil Mamak

Routledge

ISBN: 9781032362793

Anh Tuan Pham

Published Online: September 9, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2558111>

### **Social Dominance Orientation and Perceived Attractiveness of Occupations: Evidence from Japanese University Students**

Tomoya Mukai

Published Online: September 10, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2555806>

### **Narratives of Teaching Race in Criminal Justice and Criminology**

Deirdre Caputo-Levine & Vanessa Lynn

Published Online: September 12, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2556899>

### **Assessing the Representation of White Collar and Corporate Crime in Jamaican Undergraduate Criminology and Criminal Justice Programs**

Deneil D. Christian

Published Online: September 15, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2560447>

### **The Code of Thrones: Gamifying Criminal Law to Rule Student Motivation**

Jonathan Torres-Tellez

Published Online: September 25, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2565822>

### **Attitudes of University Students Toward Individuals Who Have Committed Sexual Crimes: The Role of Sociodemographic and Personality Variables**

Marta Sousa, Ana Filipa Silva, Joana Andrade, Andreia de Castro

Rodrigues, Ana Rita Cruz, & Olga Cunha

Published Online: October 6, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2566475>

### **Book Review - Comprehensive Deterrence Theory: The Science and Policy of Punishment**

By Daniel P. Mears and Mark C. Stafford

Cambridge University Press

ISBN: 9781009592772

Theodore Wilson

Published Online: October 14, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2573310>

### **"It Was A Humbling Experience": Service Learning in A Criminal Justice Research Methods Course and Student Perceptions of the Judicial System, Research, and Careers**

Fei Yang, Clete Snell, & Katherine Shoemaker

Published Online: October 23, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2577226>

### **"Tearing Down the Pillars of Traditional Criminal Justice Education: A Critical Pedagogy, Abolition and Anarchist Approach"**

William Calathes

Published Online: October 24, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2574434>



**The Fitchburg State University 4+1 Police Program:  
Examining Perceptions of an Academic-Academy  
Integrated Training Program**

Katherine P. Hazen, Zachary Miner, Eileen Kirk, Michael  
McCutcheon, & Lilian Bobea

Published Online: October 24, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2025.2576825>

**JUSTICE QUARTERLY**

**Revisiting the Importance of Friendship Quality in Our  
Understanding of Delinquency: A Between-and Within-  
Individuals Approach**

Jean Marie McGloin, Megan Bears Augustyn, & Michael Jacob  
Lebron

Published Online: September 3, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2025.2550302>

**How Subject Gender Shapes the Level and Progression  
of Police Use of Force**

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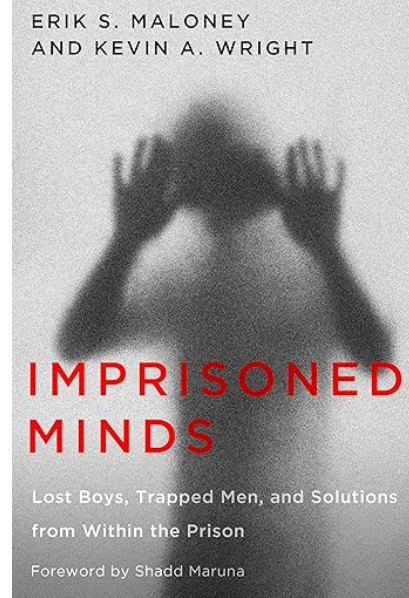
# Erik S. Maloney and Kevin A. Wright's

## *Imprisoned Minds: Lost Boys, Trapped Men, and Solutions from Within the Prison*

Rutgers University Press  
ISBN: 978-1978837263

Review by Alberto Betancourt Gomez  
Lamar University

*Imprisoned Minds* was written by Erik S. Maloney, a prisoner serving a life sentence, and edited by Kevin A. Wright, the director of the Center for Correctional Solutions and an associate professor at Arizona State University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Wright's work focuses on improving the lives of people living and working in correctional systems through education, research, and community engagement. His research has appeared in journals such as *Justice Quarterly*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, and *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*. Wright co-founded the Arizona Transformation Project, developed Arizona's first Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, and has received awards for his contributions to teaching and mentoring. The book *Imprisoned Minds* shares powerful testimonies from incarcerated men, drawing a direct link between childhood trauma and later criminal behavior. Rather than excusing crime, *Imprisoned Minds* aims to understand it. The authors show that justice and empathy can coexist by examining how trauma, poverty, and broken support systems contribute to criminal behavior and future outcomes by bringing together personal experience and academic knowledge to tell the stories of incarcerated men. It is clear that the book encourages professionals in



the criminal justice system to see inmates as people shaped by their circumstances, not just statistics.

Chapter 1 of the book begins with Erik S. Maloney narrating his own life as he reflects on his life choices and explains the transitioned mindset he developed throughout the years, from a boy's mindset making impulsive decisions to a man's mindset rationalizing his behaviors. He described this process as having what he called "an imprisoned mind," as he wrote, "So here I am. Twenty-four years later, a forty-five-year-old man once arrested as a twenty-one-year-old boy" (p. 194). Maloney argued that there is a strong connection between the development of the imprisoned mind in prisoners and childhood trauma: "The development of the imprisoned mind starts with emotionally sensitive children who've experienced trauma that is left untreated, the child then begins to experience mental and emotional distress. Without knowledge of healthy coping mechanisms, they eventually turn to drugs and alcohol and begin making other risky decisions" (p. 2). Maloney shared that his childhood lacked good memories; he was conceived in prison, had no maternal presence, and grew up without his father, who spent most of his life incarcerated. What hurt him most was his father's broken promises, reinforcing that he had

Chapter 2 is titled "I Was Never Allowed to Have Closure, and Because of That, It Still Doesn't Feel Real to Me" (p. 9). Erik S. Maloney narrates the life story of an inmate by the name of Kidd. Kidd faced one of the most painful moments of his life when his daughter, Trinity, passed away due to medical complications. He was incarcerated at the time and was unable to attend her funeral. This experience continues to haunt him, and Chapter 2 captures the emotional weight of that loss. It is a heartbreaking and compelling story that invites readers to view incarcerated individuals with greater compassion and fosters a deeper understanding of the struggles prisoners endure. Kidd's life story began with the struggles and racism he faced growing up. A half-Black, half-Mexican young man, he was not accepted by either Mexican or Black children; even his own mother threw racist comments at him from a young age. Kidd stated, "My own mom used to discriminate against me. She used to tell me, 'Quit acting like a n—boy!'" (p. 9). Later, Kidd experienced the trauma of losing his mother to suicide. He recalled, "There I found my mom's body lying in a pool of blood. She had a gun in her hand and a hole in her head. I don't know how long I stood there looking at her before I panicked" (p. 11). Although this reference is not drawn from *Imprisoned Minds*, Kidd's emotional struggles mirror what Ratnarajah and Schofield (2007) identify as common outcomes among children bereaved by parental suicide: unresolved grief, identity confusion, emotional withdrawal, and increased vulnerability in the absence of supportive environments. Kidd was later placed in foster care but lacked stability, often running away and getting into trouble. He turned to gangs and drug dealing as a means of survival and to find a sense of belonging. Kidd explained, "I longed for a sense of belonging, and school was a constant reminder I didn't belong. I joined my cousin's gang, and I quickly found I didn't belong there either" (p. 18). Kidd found guidance in Rico, a seventeen-year-old who became his role model. He started using and

selling marijuana, which led to fights and more serious crimes. After joining the Crips (a criminal gang) for protection, Kidd spent much of his youth in and out of correctional facilities under constant correctional control.

Chapter 3, titled "This Kind of Robbed Us Kids of Our Childhood" (p. 29), features Erik S. Maloney narrating the life story of an inmate by the name of The Sergeant, whose life illustrates how survivor's guilt and traumatic brain injuries can lead to criminal behavior and increased suicide risk. The Sergeant mentioned, "My brother and I had gotten someone else killed because of my actions... I even contemplated suicide" (p. 46). Raised in a violent home with an abusive stepfather, The Sergeant stayed in school to escape the chaos and later joined the military, where he built a long-term career. Throughout his story, The Sergeant provides detailed accounts of his duties and the trauma he faced during service, shedding light on the psychological toll of military life. He struggled with alcohol use, disciplinary issues, and the lasting impact of traumatic experiences. After leaving the military, he sought adrenaline in dangerous ways, including riding a motorcycle that led to a serious crash. Although not part of the book, Maresca et al. (2023) explain that head injuries, especially those affecting emotional and behavioral centers of the brain, can increase aggression and antisocial behavior, which supports the struggles The Sergeant faced. He was eventually incarcerated after a standoff involving a stolen refrigerator, during which his friend was fatally shot by an off-duty officer. He accepted a plea deal and was charged with second-degree murder. His story highlights the hardships many veterans face after their service ends, leaving the reader to consider how untreated trauma can turn even those trained to protect into individuals caught in a cycle of pain, loss, and incarceration.

Chapter 4, titled "But She Wasn't Accepting That,

So I Left" (p. 51), features Erik S. Maloney narrating the life story of an inmate by the name of Oso. His mother gave him away at the age of two months. His father and mother came from poor communities and were living the criminal lifestyle, providing no attention to him growing up. As he described, "My mom was a Mexican 'Cholla' girl who smoked crack and was an alcoholic. My dad was an old school 'Chollo' who lived in the same neighborhood and began partying together" (p. 51). Oso shared that his mother had a strong addiction to crack cocaine. Later in life, he developed the same addiction, which led him to impulsive behaviors, legal troubles, and eventually selling drugs to support his habit. Oso believed he had difficulty learning in school because of fetal alcohol syndrome, caused by his mother's drug and alcohol use during pregnancy. As he stated, "Mom loved partying. Only, her kids seemed to get in the way of that. The fact I was born with symptoms of fetal alcohol syndrome shows just where her priorities were" (p. 51). According to Tauger (2018), early research from the 1900s recognized that infants born to drug-using mothers could show signs of addiction and withdrawal at birth, providing evidence that addiction could begin before birth. These infants were seen as medically affected, not morally flawed, suggesting that Oso's lifelong challenges may indeed stem from prenatal drug exposure.

After repeatedly getting into trouble with the law and struggling in school, and with his mother dealing with her own addiction and prison sentence, Oso was sent to live with his grandmother Juanita (his father's mother) and her husband Enrique on a ranch in Tucson, Arizona. Oso said he loved the peace and quiet, caring for animals, and the structure that Enrique provided. He felt like he belonged as he mentioned, "I was assigned the task of making sure that all of the animals had water each morning before I went to school. After school, I helped to clean the horse stables. It was

hard work, but I enjoyed doing it with Grandpa Enrique" (p. 52). But his past came back to haunt him. His mother was released from prison and tried to regain custody of him. His father also came to live at the ranch, which Oso described as an unpleasant experience. When Enrique became ill, Oso began misbehaving in school and getting into trouble again. He was placed in an alternative program for troubled youth, which he enjoyed, especially being around animals again. After completing the court-assigned program, Oso received terrible news: his grandmother had passed away. She was the only person he truly loved and admired for taking care of him. With no one else wanting to take custody of him as a juvenile, his older brother Daniel (nicknamed "Demon") stepped in. Although Demon was involved in drug smuggling and gangs and was not a good role model, Oso developed a strong bond and loyalty toward him. Oso mentioned, "What mattered to me was that I was with family. I attached myself to Demon whenever he wasn't at work" (p. 55). Oso was devastated when his brother was assassinated. Overwhelmed by grief, he attempted suicide by pulling the trigger of a loaded gun, but it didn't fire. He reflected, "Sometimes I think about the gun failing to fire when I pulled the trigger. I've fired the gun since so I know it works. I now believe God had a hand in it" (p. 59). Seeking revenge for his brother's killers, Oso turned to selling and smuggling drugs for his uncle. He later met Constance, a woman with children, and felt a sense of purpose, but his meth addiction continued. He missed the birth of their son and, burdened by guilt, didn't feel worthy of love. Oso is now serving a five-year sentence for armed robbery. Throughout his chapter, Oso revealed painful details of his life struggles and childhood traumas, helping readers understand the deep-rooted issues that shaped his path.

Chapter 5, titled "His Beatings Did Ignite in Me One Trait of His That I Did Possess ... Spitefulness"

(p. 72), features Erik S. Maloney narrating the life story of an inmate by the name of Dee, who is of mixed ethnicity, half Polish and half French, and who struggled to fit in. Dee shared that his greatest trauma came from his father, who pushed him relentlessly and disciplined him through physical abuse. Dee explained, "He had a bad temper and blew up over the smallest things. He also had big expectations. He expected things to be a certain way, and if his children didn't conform to that, then he believed he could beat them into conformity" (p. 72). Rather than shaping him, Dee said the beatings only fueled hatred. He recalled, "He thought his beatings would cause me to be more like him, but they had the opposite effect. His beatings did ignite in me one trait of his that I did possess ... spitefulness" (p. 74). One of the most compelling stories Dee shared was about being unwanted and sent to live with his grandfather in Mexico. There, Dee faced neglect and abuse. His grandfather was constantly drunk and aggressive, and Dee had no adult supervision. Dee described a traumatic moment in his life: "He was strong, and there was nothing I could do to get him off me. With one hand, he took his cigar out of his mouth and put it out on my stomach. The pain was excruciating, and it caused me to shriek" (p. 77), leaving the reader in disbelief that a human being could cause so much pain to a child. Although not part of the book, Wiggers and Paas (2022) explain that harsh physical punishment can lead to increased aggression and antisocial behavior, reflecting Dee's early life experiences. Dee learned to manipulate others to survive, doing and saying whatever it took to get what he wanted. Dee's impulsiveness led him to steal a truck full of methamphetamine, sell the drugs, and recklessly party with the money. The truck's owner later found and kidnapped him, brutally beating Dee before leaving him for dead. Dee recalled, "Before I could even be scared, I was yanked off my bike and pulled into the van... They began to beat me as the van sped off. Each punch brought immense pain"

(p. 85). Betrayed later by a friend named Jay, Dee sought revenge and killed him. He accepted a plea deal and is now serving a life sentence with the possibility of parole.

Chapter 6 starts with "So That Meant I Had to Sell Dope in Order to Make the Kind of Money I Felt Like I Needed" (p. 95). Erik S. Maloney narrates the life story of an inmate by the name of Oakland. His story is a compelling example of how socioeconomic disadvantages and life circumstances can shape criminal behavior. He described an abusive, neglected childhood with a drug-addicted mother and an absent father. Bullied for wearing dirty clothes, he turned to drug dealing to fit in and afford necessities. Later, a positive role model, Reverend Tinsley, helped him earn a football scholarship. However, struggling to adapt to college life and maintain a certain image, Oakland returned to selling drugs: "It convinced me that I couldn't show back up to school broke and be around all those rich kids... So, I knew I'd have to go back to Oakland and make enough money to hang with the kids at my new school" (p. 102). His life unraveled further after witnessing a friend's death and being shot himself. After losing his scholarship, he moved to Arizona and briefly found success, but his addiction returned. He was imprisoned after taking items from someone's home to settle a drug debt, an act of street-level retaliation common in drug culture (Jacques, 2010). Though released on parole through a plea deal, he was re-incarcerated for failing to afford transportation and drug testing. While not part of the book, Barak and Leighton (2018) explain that poverty and social conditions, especially in marginalized communities, heavily influence criminal behavior. Oakland's story leaves the reader critically thinking about how class, race, and social status may play a significant role in criminal engagement.

Chapter 7, titled "I Was Institutionalized. I Was a

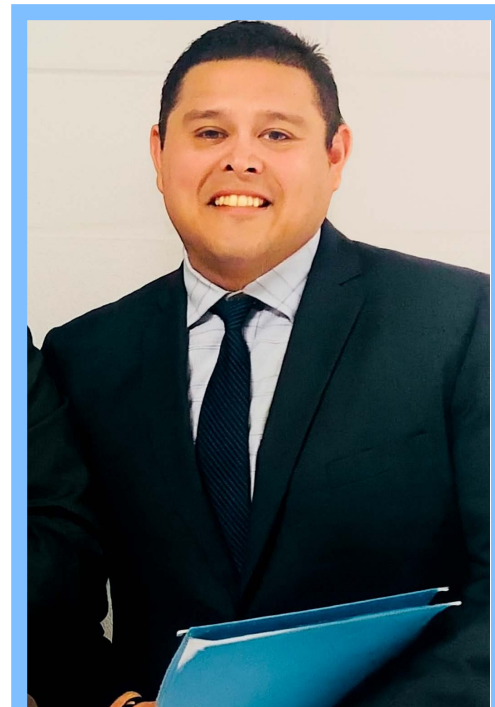


Mess.” (p. 115), features Erik S. Maloney narrating the life story of an inmate by the name of Unique, who grew up in a violent environment with drug-addicted parents and no positive role models. Influenced by gang members and pimps, Unique said he became involved in gang activity and even managed prostitutes at a young age: “My new family became made up of a bunch of pimps and gangsters” (p. 119). Later, Unique met Carmen, the sister of his best friend, but he walked away from a serious relationship, which marked the beginning of his downfall. He recalled, “I wasn’t ready for that kind of commitment and couldn’t take the pressure” (p. 122). Unique was incarcerated for robbery and attempted murder. In prison, he struggled to survive amid constant gang pressure and killed another inmate in self-defense. After his release on parole, he couldn’t find stable work and ended up back in prison. According to the author, Unique was scheduled for release in 2018, but no updates were given about his life after incarceration.

In conclusion, I truly loved this book. *Imprisoned Minds* ends with Erik S. Maloney offering powerful closing remarks and a critical analysis of each convict’s story, tying everything together into a heartbreaking and insightful reflection on incarceration. His final comments reinforce the major themes of abuse, neglect, trauma, and survival that run throughout the book. It helps readers see incarcerated individuals not just as criminals, but as people shaped by painful life experiences, often lacking support, guidance, or mental health resources. The book highlights the urgent need for early intervention and support for at-risk youth and shows how qualitative research can reveal deep connections between trauma, social status, and criminal behavior. I highly recommend it to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the human side of incarceration.

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**Alberto Betancourt** is a graduate student at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, where he was recognized as the 2025 Graduate Student of the Year. He has been a commissioned Texas Peace Officer for over eight years and currently teaches Criminal Justice at Rio Grande City High School.





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**2025 Outstanding Educator Award Recipient: Dr. James Hawdon**



The Outstanding Educator is SCJA's top award, recognizing excellence in teaching, research, and service. This year's recipient, Dr. James Hawdon, exemplifies these qualities through a distinguished career dedicated to the advancement of criminal justice education. Dr. Hawdon has spent his entire academic career in the southern region, beginning as a graduate student at the University of Virginia, followed by faculty service at Clemson University, and continuing in his longstanding role at Virginia Tech. A highly accomplished scholar, he has authored more than 120 refereed articles, generating over 5,800 citations with an h-index of 43.

Equally noteworthy is his impact as an educator. Dr. Hawdon is known for pedagogical creativity and for encouraging students to think critically and differently about the field. Many of his former students have gone on to academic careers, a testament to his mentorship and guidance. Dr. Hawdon's record of service is similarly distinguished. He has served on the SCJA Board of Directors, contributed significantly as an Associate Editor of the *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, and participated in numerous SCJA committees over the years. His leadership and commitment to the association have strengthened the organization and the discipline alike.

Committee reviewers emphasized the remarkable quality and quantity of his publications, the breadth of his sponsored research, and the strong endorsement provided in nomination letters from students, colleagues, and peers across the field. Together, these achievements affirm Dr. Hawdon's outstanding contributions to teaching, research, and service, making him a most deserving recipient of the award and lifetime membership in the association.

## **Congratulations to the Other 2025 SCJA Award Winners!**

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**Outstanding Masters Student Award:** Karina Costa Baraldi, University of Alabama

**Tom Barker Outstanding Undergraduate Award:** Zoey Andrews, University of West Georgia

**Springer Outstanding American Journal of Criminal Justice Article:** " *The Compounding Effect: How Co-Offending Exacerbates the Harm Caused by Violent Offenders*" by Emily Piper (Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge), Barak Ariel (Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge), Vincent Harinam (Mournival Applied Research), Matthew Bland (Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge).

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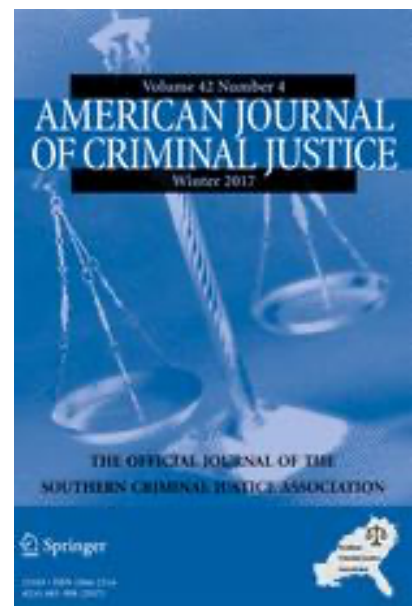
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**Award Submissions: July 15, 2025**

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# James Ptacek's

## *Feeling Trapped: Social Class and Violence Against Women*

University of California Press

ISBN: 9780520381612

*Review by Russell Sherman*  
*Lamar University*

The author of the book *Feeling Trapped: Social Class and Violence Against Women*, James Ptacek, has made invaluable contributions to the research of violence against women since 1981. The focus in this book is on victims and offenders of female heterosexual intimate partner violence. He goes beyond statistical research. It is rife with emotional insights into the lives of the victims of intimate partner violence. Ptacek's research shows some differences in violence based on social class. Reading the entire text gives a true overview of his writing. This review will focus on generalities that may not be translated to all social classes.

*Feeling Trapped* highlights the inequity of men and women in a patriarchal society. Ptacek argues that the patriarchy is primary to the entrapment of women (p. 15). There is more to the abuse than just physical domination. Women contend with many abusive behaviors that include verbal, economic, physical, and sexual abuse by men who seek to isolate them from family and friends, and in many cases, work to eliminate the chances of someone discovering the abuse. Ptacek has selected extracts from interviews with sixty women from various races and socioeconomic backgrounds who have been the victims of intimate violence. In this review, there is a brief overview of the main topics, which are the abuses suffered by women, the need for masculinity that drives the abuse, and the underlying factors that



keep women from escaping the abusive relationships. It will be offered that the research contained in this book has value that extends beyond academia.

There is a long-held belief that mainly women coming from poor socioeconomic backgrounds are subjected to abuse. Ptacek shatters this myth, exposing the abuses endured by women from across a spectrum of races and social classes. Women recount the verbal abuse attacking women's identities when they do not live up to the patriarchal standards of femininity as framed by the abusive men. Of the types of abuse, the ones that are typically dealt with by law enforcement include physical and sexual abuse. It is much harder for law enforcement to intervene in verbal and economic abuse in a relationship. Law enforcement professionals can glean some good information from *Feeling Trapped*. Police who make disturbance calls should familiarize themselves with the nuances of verbal and economic abuse that women may mention, which could be indications of deeper physical and sexual abuse being perpetrated against them.

There is a concept known as the "bad wife" wherein women are degraded as a "bad" woman, wife, girlfriend, or mother. These verbally abusive

acts serve to confine women within the patriarchal framework of failed femininity. Abusive men routinely call upon the “bad wife” image to justify their actions (p. 43). Men use verbal attacks on women, attempting to shame women into feeling guilty about being the “bad wife” (p. 27). Among the women interviewed, they identified that men utilized any source of pride they had against them. Men attacked women by focusing on their jobs, appearance, education, and womanhood or motherhood. They will attack anything important to their femininity and self-esteem.

In line with verbal abuse is economic abuse. Ptacek identified that 66 percent of women reported sabotage of education and 83 percent reported employment sabotage (p. 100). Employment sabotage is behavior that interferes with the ability to work. It can include doing things to interfere with going to work, threatening violence, threatening to make someone leave work, and making demands to quit a job. Other forms of economic abuse include theft or control of money, destruction of property, and intentionally damaging a credit rating. These types of abuse are the ones that are hard for criminal justice professionals to intervene in. Rowan (2024) identified that coerced debt or economic abuse makes it harder for victims to leave their abusers. Police may not recognize the woman as being victimized because her husband is coercing her to drop out of school or coercing her to open accounts that put her in debt or maintain possession of the income, providing her a small allowance, if any.

Ptacek identifies that masculinities are encouraged and permitted according to social constructs (p. 21). According to Eren and Usyal (2020), violence practiced by men is mainly associated with social structure. The violence associated with masculinity in Western societies is transforming, but it still exists. The women interviewed by Ptacek identified the public persona of their abusers as charming or nice,

while in private, they engaged in abuse and violence (p. 23). The projection of these masculinities onto women conveys the self-image of their rights as men. The contrasting public and private faces of men tended to conceal abuse and made victims feel trapped. During a police response to a domestic violence case where there have been no signs of physical abuse, responding officers may be lulled into believing that the woman is blowing things out of proportion.

Isolation is a tactic used by men to ensure control. By undermining relationships between women and their friends, family, and co-workers, men are imposing control. Isolation helps eliminate the ability of a woman to talk to anyone about the abuse. This isolation can undermine the ability to leave abusive relationships. Women pointed to coerced isolation in addition to verbal abuse, which created self-esteem issues and depression (p. 165). Isolation in some cases went as far as not allowing women to answer phone calls when the man was not at home.

Physical abuse of women takes many forms, including pushing, grabbing, slapping, punching, choking, and in extreme cases, assaults or threats with weapons. Hamilton et al. (2021) assert that Western countries' police response to family violence has routinely treated it as a private matter. The Minneapolis Experiment tested whether arrest, advice, or separation had the greatest impact on future violence. This study showed that arrest was the most effective measure to deter future violence (Hamilton et al., 2021). This has led to jurisdictions implementing mandatory arrest policies. Some studies have found that between 20 and 40 percent of law enforcement officers have perpetrated domestic violence (Castro, 2022). Professionals, including police, need to recognize that responses can be corrupted by bias (p. 17). This is important in legislating mandates for police who respond to

calls of domestic violence.

Ptacek describes sexual abuse as more than mere rape. Sexual abuse in *Feeling Trapped* encompasses several dimensions besides physical rape. Men, in many cases, would accuse women of being excessively sexual. Men would accuse them of having sexual relations with everyone from ministers to grocery clerks (p. 85). Men would control the appearance of their mate to include how they were dressed and whether they wore makeup. Women interviewed by Ptacek identified that they viewed men's infidelity as a form of sexual abuse to punish them (p. 86). Another form of sexual abuse identified was reproductive abuse. In these instances, women were coerced to become pregnant, or men sabotaged contraception to force women to become pregnant. Men would consume pornography and try to coerce women into acting out what they would see. These are all things that police need to be able to recognize as potential sexual abuse, or acts leading up to physical rape. Nearly two-thirds of women in the study identified that their partners threatened or used force to coerce sex (p. 89). Although marital rape is recognized in all 50 states, there are some inequities between states' definitions of rape. As late as 2019 there were still seventeen states that do not recognize the act as rape if the partner was unconscious, drugged, or incapacitated (p. 92). Oliver (2023) identifies that in a rape culture, rape survivors are made to feel ashamed and can, in some cases, internalize their victimization. Perpetrators convince authorities, peers, and juries that they are the true victims and are the ones being harmed by the accusations.

The ability of police to recognize the nuances of sexual abuse as it is described across a spectrum of violations can help them identify and better investigate potential criminal sexual assault cases. By understanding the spectrum, police may recognize signs of physical rape by something a

woman says to indicate other, less enforceable abuse like cheating and controlling appearance. Recognition of the signs could allow police to customize their response and ask more questions in an attempt to uncover potential rape that the victim may be too ashamed to admit at first.

Many emotions must be overcome to escape from abusive relationships. Emotions may include love, fear, anger, guilt, and shame. Each of these emotions, on the surface, seems to be a very individual experience. However, Ptacek points out Hochschild's theory, whereby the listed emotions were molded by the activity of survivors, abusers, family members, and friends (p. 136). Advocates and support groups can play an important role in helping women recover from the abuse they experienced. Women feeling shame about being abused said many of the same harsh things about themselves that their partners had said (p. 132). Eren and Usyal (2020) point out that some people consider violence acceptable up to a point. This is the point where police need to check their perceptions and make sure that their background in relationships does not weigh in on their response to domestic violence calls, where maybe they believe she is not injured, or are convinced that the man was defending himself when he caused the minor injuries. Ptacek asserts that the responses from family, friends, and police matter (p. 117). Ptacek identifies how the economic strain of leaving is overwhelming for most women (p. 143). Many times, police are very mechanical in their response to calls for service because it becomes routine to deal with domestic violence. Many women asserted that arresting the offender did not matter (p. 149). Some of the women interviewed by Ptacek said they wanted support and recognition of their danger.

This is a very brief dive into *Feeling Trapped*. It would be in the interest of any criminal justice professional to read this book and glean

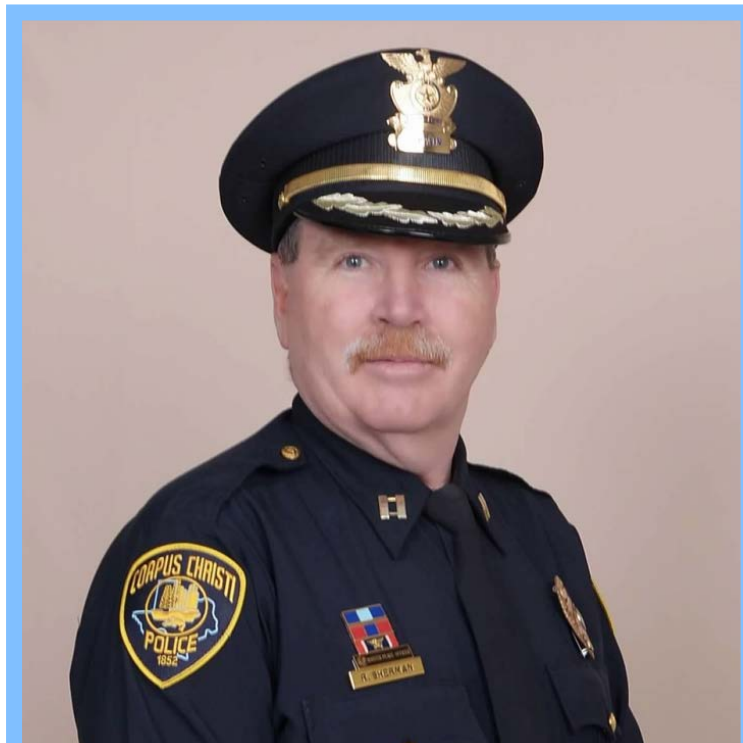


information to help them in their role in family violence response. The information presented offers insights that are helpful to everyone, from family members and friends to police and advocates. Hamilton et al. (2021) highlights family violence response that includes a coordinated response between police and social services. Police provide for violence intervention, and social workers and victims' advocates provide victim support through social services and referrals. Stulz et al. (2024) highlights the importance of care providers working together and providing women with support, encouragement, and counseling to assist in their recovery. *Feeling Trapped* provides a small glimpse into the firsthand accounts of women escaping violence. It can help advocates understand the needs of violence survivors and develop access to the appropriate resources needed by women to emotionally and economically succeed on their own. Ptacek found that only fifty percent of women sought help from domestic abuse programs, and most of them only did this after separation (p. 133). The problem does not seem to be access to the programs as much as the isolation the women experience, which does not allow them to utilize the available programs. Criminal justice professionals working closely with advocates can overcome this barrier.

One program developed by the Department of Justice is the Domestic Violence Home Visit Intervention. DVHVI is a coordinated response between police and social services to domestic violence cases (Smith, 2012). The program ultimately was not found to reduce repeat violence, but did increase victims' feelings of safety. The criminal justice community should take a closer look at the findings from this program and determine how it may be altered or enhanced to produce better results.

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**Ellen J. Green**

*Murder in the Neighborhood: The True Story of America's First Recorded Mass Shooting*

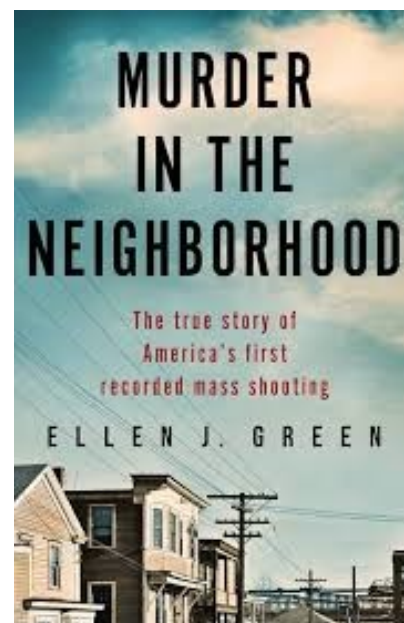
Thread Books

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Review by Bradley W. Klingberg  
Lamar University

*Murder in the Neighborhood: The True Story of America's First Recorded Mass Shooting* is a historically accurate analysis of a crime representing a turning point in the United States, the first mass shooting of its kind. A unique feature of the book is that it offers scholars the ability to glean valuable insights because of the meticulous research conducted to ensure the details of the incident were recounted with accuracy, while the author simultaneously crafts a story to be captivatedly entertaining for casual readers. This is accomplished by telling the story through those who directly experienced the event. The perspectives of a child named Raymond Havens, as well as Howard's mother Freda Unruh, were heavily relied upon. The perspectives of professionals, including psychiatrists and lawyers, were also called upon. When these perspectives are cobbled together, a vivid and entertaining story emerges, with the concurrent benefit of providing ample opportunity for scholarly analysis.

Chapter 1 sets the tone of the book, written through Raymond's perspective, capturing key elements of the killer's background. The killer, Howard Unruh, was a combat veteran who was described by Raymond to be a loner. Raymond and his father were two of the very few people that had regular, lengthy interactions with Howard prior to the



incident, placing them in a distinctive position to provide contextual background. Shortly after the shooting, Raymond is brought to the police station where he is interviewed as a witness. Effective witness interviews are very important in our understanding of mass murderers because so many perpetrators do not survive the incident, with many offenders committing suicide or being killed by police (Lankford, 2015). Unfortunately, these witness interviews are not always done optimally. Raymond's account of his police interview is an example of this; he described the interviewer as not knowing what to ask, and he stated he did not want to provide important details. Raymond was interviewed by a police chief, but research shows that a trained forensic interviewer may have had better results, had the option have been available when the incident occurred in 1949. The police chief primarily used closed-ended questions, but a forensic interviewer would have used open-ended questions, which are about six times more likely to elicit a more detailed response in children (Stolzenberg & Lyon, 2017). The police chief's inability to obtain detailed information from Raymond was unfortunate because he was a wealth of potential knowledge. Despite being a 12-year-old child, Raymond had observed key details about Howard, such as the differences in behavior displayed by Howard before and after



his military deployment and the meaning behind the stolen gate that precipitated the shooting.

For the purposes of analyzing the crime, it is fortunate that the perpetrator lived and was willing to share his thought process. Shortly after the incident Howard gave a statement to prosecutor Mitchell Cohen, describing the incident as something he planned as revenge on neighbors who wronged him, but that led to killing strangers because he felt mad at everyone. Further analysis can be accomplished by studying the letters Howard wrote to his mother, Freda, as well as Freda's accounts of Howard's childhood. Howard was described as very meek as a child, being bullied by his younger brother. Freda hoped that his experience in the military would help with Howard's socialization, but it seemed to have had the opposite effect. The letters written by Howard and accounts from his superior officers suggest he was adept in his role as a machine gunner, but perhaps not surprisingly, Howard came home from war feeling isolated and angry after a heavy exposure to death and misery. Given this background, it seems reasonable to conclude that Howard may have been experiencing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following his combat role in military service.

When having a discussion about the propensity for violence in those suffering from PTSD, it is important to note that most people diagnosed with PTSD are not violent. Based on studies of Vietnam War veterans with PTSD, only 25% engage in criminal behavior when returning home, and even then, many of these will be nonviolent incidents (Jay, 2018). Any public stigma that attaches all veterans suffering from PTSD to violence is unfounded. However, some studies do see correlation between violence and PTSD (Voorhees et al., 2016). Another study that focused on Vietnam veterans studied the propensity for violence among veterans exposed to higher levels of war zone trauma

(McFall et al., 1999). While the correlation between PTSD and violence has significance, correlation does not equate to causation. Also important, the violent behavior noted in the related studies included incidents such as property destruction and verbal threats, almost never reaching the level of violence displayed by Howard. Chalking up the incident to be simply a result of PTSD, or any other mental conditions that may have manifested during Howard's exposure to combat, might be tempting to those looking for a simple explanation of how such an incident could occur. However, given the number of veterans who are diagnosed with PTSD and go on to commit mass murder is extremely small (Jay, 2018), further analysis is necessary.

When reviewing the literature about the leading causes of mass shootings, some studies have found that as many as half of mass shooting incidents are related to personal and professional grievances or other life stressors (Edwards & Kotera, 2022). This falls neatly in line with Howard's custodial statements, claiming he was looking for revenge based on a series of grievances with his neighbors. Later psychoanalysis would reveal Howard's inner conflict in addressing his homosexuality was problematic for him, given his religious background and belief that it was sinful. Howard's homosexuality would eventually become public knowledge, becoming a source of consistent ridicule from the community, driving his resentment and paranoia to another level. Howard became fueled by anger, writing diary entries featuring plans to take his revenge. Interestingly, Howard's plans for revenge revolved around the use of a machete and not the use of firearms. On the surface, it seems more likely Howard would favor the use of firearms in his revenge fantasies, given he had easy access to firearms, lots of training in their use, and an apparent affinity for a specific Ruger revolver, a detail he shared with Raymond. Instead, Howard purchased a machete with the

intent of using it for his revenge murders, only to change his mind in the hours leading up to the incident. As revealed throughout the book, a specific set of circumstances predicated the incident, which included the loss of his secret lover, Van, quickly followed by the loss of a deeply sentimental item, a gate he made with his father, possibly playing a role in the shifting of the plan.

An interesting aspect to consider is how Howard's life would have progressed if he had not enlisted in military service. As discussed prior, Howard's personal grievances and life stressors are more consistent with other mass murderers than is his potential PTSD diagnosis, so given his peculiarly isolated childhood and possible Oedipus Complex regarding his mother, it seems likely he would develop violent feelings toward those around him regardless of his military experience. Had this alternate version of Howard, who didn't have military training and easily accessible firearms, been exposed to a similar set of specific circumstances, like losing Van and the gate on the same day, there could have been a different type of violent outburst. Perhaps this hypothetical individual would have used a machete to kill his intended victims, resulting in a still horrific but much smaller kill count that wouldn't merit a significant place in history. From this point of view, Howard's military service may have not turned him into a killer but simply gave him the opportunity to become a more proficient one. While this hypothetical can, of course, never be proven, research that finds significant links between mass murderers and firearm access further supports this idea (Jay, 2018).

Literature focusing on mass shooters finds three common factors: suicidal motives and life indifference, perceived victimization, and desires for attention or fame (Lankford, 2018). Howard did not incorporate committing suicide into his plan, but his actions indicated he was life indifferent. Howard

had no plan of escape, and he simply retreated into his residence when he was out of bullets. Howard must have known he would face eventual armed resistance, either by police or other armed neighbors, but the idea of being shot didn't seem to be of concern. In fact, Howard was shot, but he was completely unphased by it, and spoke openly in police custody while bleeding from his gunshot wound. Perhaps one attribute that separates Howard from other mass murderers is that he seemed to have a genuine respect for police officers and had no desire to shoot at them. Howard described positive interactions with police, specifically Officer Ferry, which likely spared the officer's life. Had Howard's life experiences with law enforcement been different, his story may have ended with a deadly police shootout. After speaking with Howard on numerous occasions after he was confined to a psychiatric facility, Freda came to an interesting conclusion: that Howard felt there was no path forward for him except revenge. Howard may have not wanted to die, but his behavior consistently suggested he was indifferent to life.

In Lankford's (2018) article, he lists perceived victimization as the second common factor in mass shooters. Howard's perceived victimization is a running theme throughout the book. Much of the perceived victimization by Howard is very real, as incidents involving homophobic slurs were regularly thrown his way, as well as sometimes physical objects, such as mud. But in addition to these very real incidents of mistreatment, Howard often interpreted other incidents of innocent intention as personal attacks. An example given by Freda was when Howard became enraged after being given incorrect change and was certain it was a personal attack. According to the literature, it is not uncommon for the offender's perception of persecution to be wildly

exaggerated (Lankford, 2018). The final act of persecution against Howard that put him over the edge was the theft of his gate. Even though Howard did not know which individual actually took the gate, in his mind, they were all guilty enough that they needed to pay for it, so he took their lives without remorse.

Lankford (2018) lists desires for attention or fame to be the third common characteristic in mass shooters. Howard had no apparent desire to achieve notoriety; however, his crime is distinctive from most other types of criminals who wish to remain unknown so they can avoid punishment. An important distinction in mass shooters is that many are not fame seeking, but those who are typically have higher kill counts (Lankford, 2018). It seems that these types of killers have noted that their kill count is associated with media coverage, so they will orchestrate their plan to kill as many as possible. Unfortunately, a high volume of media coverage on Howard, as well as subsequent mass murderers, likely predisposed some of the deadliest mass shooting events in history.

While Howard did share some characteristics with the average mass murderer, one item that sets him apart in a more exclusive category is his apparent high level of intelligence. Raymond's accounts of Howard spending time studying chemistry, constructing atomic structures, and other scholarly pursuits suggested he had the potential to make significant contributions to whatever field of study he applied himself to. However, Howard enrolled in a pharmaceutical program that he failed. Details are sparse about why he was unable to complete his schooling, but it is suggested his personality traits may have played a bigger factor than his intelligence. Further evidence for Howard's high level of intelligence is presented when psychiatrists find that Howard scores a 141 on the Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Scale. While this level of intelligence is not seen with consistency among

mass murderers, it is not completely unique either. For example, Amy Bishop, a neurobiologist at the University of Alabama, shot six of her colleagues, killing three, after being denied tenure (Keefe, 2015). The incident shares comparable details beyond the shooter's intelligence, such as the offender described the incident to have come out of nowhere, previous exposure to shootings, and a lack of resistance when being taken into custody by law enforcement.

In the weeks and months after the incident, much attention was paid to the mental state of Howard. The community was steadfast in holding Howard accountable, insisting he be put to death for the murders. This put the prosecutor in precarious position because if Howard was found legally insane and avoided legal prosecution, it could cause serious backlash from the community. In order to complete his mental evaluation, Howard was examined by four psychiatrists. An interesting aspect of the evaluation is what appears to be a heavy use of sodium amytal, believed to be effective in making people more truthful, or as described by the doctors treating Howard, a truth serum. While not commonly used in this manner in modern medicine, these types of treatments, known as narcoanalysis, were very popular in the late 1940s after World War II, especially in the treatment of PTSD. Although the decline of narcoanalysis came rapidly after the era, many researchers of the time believed it was the future of medicine (Denson, 2009). Despite the public pressure, the psychiatrists seemed to be intent on finding the truth about Howard's mental state, and they had him committed for additional psychiatric evaluation. Howard never did stand trial; he lived the rest of his life in psychiatric confinement, living to the age of 88.

*Murder in the Neighborhood: The True Story of America's First Recorded Mass Shooting* is an intriguing book, suitable for the casual reader who

is interested in the topic, while also providing an opportunity to conduct an in-depth scholarly analysis on a crime that is rare, yet very influential in society. Because the incident is believed to be the first of its kind, such a detailed documentation is as useful as it is impressive. Hopefully the book will inspire additional research that will be of positive use to society, and it will not be used as inspiration for future mass murderers.

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