

ACJS *today*

Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Newsletter



Article

Leadership that Connects

By: David L. Myers

What does our discipline need most right now?

Over the past year, I have thought about that question frequently while preparing to serve as President of ACJS. This question also has shaped numerous conversations with colleagues, practitioners, and students, with many possible answers to consider:

- We need innovative research capable of addressing increasingly complex problems.
- We need educational programs that prepare students not simply for their first job, but for careers centered on ethics and lifelong learning.
- We need practitioners equipped to navigate rapid technological change, workforce shortages, evolving public expectations, and increasingly complex organizational environments.
- We need institutions that earn and sustain public trust.
- We need communities that are safer, stronger, and more just.

Each of these potential priorities is essential. The more I reflected on them, however, the more convinced I became that they all point toward something even more fundamental. None of these priorities can be realized fully unless we strengthen the connections among them, and we need committed and collaborative leadership that intentionally

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builds those connections. That type of thinking originally inspired the theme of the 2027 ACJS Annual Meeting, which is **Criminal Justice Leadership: Forging Stronger Connections Between Research, Education, and Practice** (<https://www.acjs.org/2027-annual-meeting/>).

My hope is that this conference theme encourages us to think critically about leadership and the future of our discipline. Traditionally, leadership has been associated primarily with position, title, and authority. We think of university presidents, deans, police chiefs, agency directors, judges, and elected officials. These leaders carry tremendous responsibility, and their contributions are crucial, but leadership is not confined to organizational charts or reserved only for those with formal titles.

Relatedly, although higher education and criminal justice generally are viewed as separate professions, they also share some remarkable similarities. Universities create knowledge, cultivate critical thinking, and prepare future professionals. Criminal justice organizations apply knowledge to protect communities, promote justice, and strengthen public trust. Both depend upon leaders who develop people, foster ethical cultures, embrace innovation, and steward institutions that serve the public good. The parallels between these professions are striking, and they serve as a reminder that effective leadership transcends organizational boundaries.

Leadership, at its best, is measured less by authority than by influence, and the future of our discipline will be shaped not only by what we know, but by how well we connect what we know with whom we serve. As I have reflected on the extraordinary diversity, productivity, and talents of the members of ACJS, I also have become convinced that our greatest strength lies not in the expertise of our members, but in the opportunities that exist to connect that expertise across professions and

experiences. Leadership is ultimately an act of stewardship, as we all inherit institutions and organizations shaped by those who came before us, and we have a responsibility to leave them stronger for those who follow.

These beliefs are increasingly supported by research and scholarship across multiple disciplines. Studies focused on servant leadership emphasize that effective leaders create environments in which others flourish through service, trust, and stewardship (Coleman et al., 2026; Ferdik et al., 2025; Dahleez & Aboramadan, 2025; Eva et al., 2019; Parker, 2026). Studies of ethical leadership similarly demonstrate that integrity and fairness strengthen organizational commitment and performance (Bedi et al., 2016; Maduforo, 2026; Philipp & Lopez, 2013; Souryal & Whitehead, 2020), while psychologically safe environments encourage learning, collaboration, and innovation (Edmondson, 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009). In higher education, relationship-rich learning environments have been shown to enhance student success and belonging (Felten & Lambert, 2020; Gallup, Inc., & Lumina Foundation, 2024), while implementation science reveals that evidence creates impact only when organizations possess the leadership, culture, and capacity to translate knowledge into practice (Fixsen et al., 2024; Nilsen, 2020; Taxman, 2025).

Increasingly, the challenges confronting both higher education and criminal justice cannot be solved within disciplinary or organizational boundaries. Artificial intelligence is transforming the way we teach, learn, investigate, and analyze information (Gilman, 2026; Khairullah et al., 2025), and universities are rethinking how they educate students in an era when information has become increasingly accessible, while critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal skills have become even more valuable (Demeo, 2026; Lam, 2026; Sposato, 2025). Recruitment and retention are pressing concerns across both universities and

criminal justice agencies (Mintz, 2024; Niles, 2026; Santos et al., 2024; Supiano, 2026). Questions surrounding justice system legitimacy, employee wellness and burnout, public trust, and evidence-based practices continue to reshape our work (see, e.g., Hummels & Akridge, 2026; Lu, 2025; Seltzer, 2026; Tankebe & Bottoms, 2024; Welsh et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2025).

Although these issues exist in different institutional contexts, they reflect common leadership challenges that require trust, collaboration, ethical decision making, and a commitment to learning. They cannot be addressed effectively in isolation, and they require leaders who can build relationships, encourage innovation, and connect knowledge with action. In other words, they require leaders who understand that the most enduring influence they will have is not simply through the decisions they make, but through the connections they create. Leadership, therefore, is the connective tissue that enables research, education, and practice to enhance one another and ultimately strengthen the people and communities we are privileged to serve.

The Connective Tissue of Leadership

If there is one lesson emerging across modern leadership scholarship, organizational research, and criminal justice, it is that complex problems are rarely solved by individual expertise. Increasingly, they require meaningful collaboration across disciplines, professions, and institutions (Edmondson, 2019; Fixsen et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009; National Research Council, 2015; Nilsen, 2020; Taxman, 2025). The most successful organizations are not necessarily those possessing the greatest individual talent; they are those that effectively connect people, knowledge, and purpose.

Few professional organizations are as intentionally designed as ACJS to foster these connections. Every

annual meeting, section activity, committee initiative, and collaborative project creates opportunities for researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, and students to learn from one another. This is not just an organizational strength, but rather one of our Academy's defining purposes. Relationships have always mattered, but they are becoming increasingly essential as the challenges confronting higher education and criminal justice continue to grow in complexity. As I reflected on these ideas over the past year, I became convinced that leadership is not simply another component of our profession. Rather, it is what allows every other component to function effectively.

In biology, connective tissue provides structure, stability, communication, and support. It binds separate parts and systems together while allowing each to perform its unique function. If connective tissue is removed or weakened, healthy systems become fragmented and less effective. Leadership serves much the same purpose within criminal justice and higher education. It connects researchers with practitioners, faculty with students, and experienced professionals with emerging leaders. It also connects universities with communities, evidence with implementation, and innovation with tradition. Leadership strengthens relationships when it becomes less about authority, directing others, and individual accomplishment, and more about stewardship, developing others, and collective impact.

Throughout my reading over the years, from historians and organizational psychologists to leadership researchers and higher education experts, I have been struck by how often they reached similar conclusions. To summarize, leadership begins with service, trust grows from integrity, and talent is intentionally developed through mentoring (Coyle, 2009; Sinek, 2017; Sylvia, 2010; Wisdom, 2025). Organizations flourish when people feel connected, and vision

matters when it is translated into action and measured (Clark et al., 2024; McChesney et al., 2012; Zak, 2017). Although these ideas and findings emerged from different disciplines, together they suggest a common framework based on purpose, character, culture, practice, and impact, with connection being the key factor that ties the other components together.

Why This Matters Now

Despite the many contemporary challenges that exist, I remain deeply optimistic about the future of our discipline. I regularly see researchers committed to improving practice, faculty preparing future professionals and leaders, practitioners embracing innovation, and students whose curiosity and commitment remind us why this work matters. These strengths exist within and across ACJS. Our opportunity is to strengthen the connections among them. Relatedly, research suggests that organizational resilience depends less upon predicting future challenges than upon developing cultures characterized by trust, learning, adaptability, and collaboration (Clark et al., 2024; Duchek, 2020; Edmondson, 2019; Gallup, Inc., & Lumina Foundation, 2024; Yu et al., 2025; Zak, 2017). These characteristics do not emerge by accident. They emerge through committed and collaborative leadership that listens, mentors, communicates, and connects, which is why I believe the theme of the 2027 ACJS Annual Meeting is both timely and important.

ACJS is one of the few professional organizations where academics, practitioners, policymakers, and students can gather as colleagues. Although we approach important questions from different perspectives, employ varying methodologies, and often work within distinct institutional cultures, this diversity is not only one of our defining characteristics, but it is also one of our greatest strengths. Furthermore, our annual meeting provides

an excellent chance to enhance our connections, learn from each other, and enjoy some focused time away in a collegial and supportive environment. It is also where the Academy's mission becomes visible (i.e., Transforming Justice through Research, Education, and Practice).

Within our Academy, researchers present findings that shape policy and practice. Practitioners bring invaluable experience that informs future research. Educators prepare the next generation of professionals, and students contribute fresh perspectives that challenge established assumptions and inspire new lines of inquiry. The Annual Meeting creates the conditions in which exchanges naturally occur. Certainly, the conference provides opportunities to learn through paper presentations, panel discussions, workshops, poster sessions, and keynote/plenary events. However, some of the most meaningful learning often occurs outside the formal program, such as in conversations between sessions, discussions over coffee (or other beverages), and projects that emerge from shared curiosity rather than careful planning.

These informal moments deserve our attention because they remind us that professional organizations do more than disseminate knowledge. They build community, create trust, foster mentoring, encourage innovation, and strengthen professional identity. They also provide an opportunity to enjoy the journey, see old friends, celebrate accomplishments, and develop future leaders. As we prepare to gather in Orlando, I hope we view the Annual Meeting as more than an opportunity to present our work or attend intellectual sessions. I hope we view it as a chance to strengthen the relationships that define our profession, enhance scholarly dialogue, learn through conversations, generate new collaborations, and reinforce the Academy we collectively serve. Once again, leadership is rarely exercised in isolation, and it flourishes in

communities where people are willing to learn together.

Looking Ahead

Preparing to serve as ACJS President has reminded me that leadership is one of those subjects we can study for a lifetime while continuing to learn something new. In the coming months, I anticipate exploring this topic further with members across our regional meetings and, eventually, during the Presidential Address at the 2027 Annual Meeting. Rather than viewing these events as separate conversations, I hope we approach them as part of a continuing dialogue about the future of criminal justice leadership.

The challenges confronting our profession vary across institutions, agencies, and communities, but they also reveal notable commonalities. Whether discussing mentoring in higher education, organizational culture within criminal justice agencies, evidence-based practices, workforce development, artificial intelligence, or public trust, the same underlying question emerges: How do we create stronger connections that improve our profession and the communities we serve?

I do not presume to have all the answers. Instead, I hope we can learn from one another. One of the greatest privileges of serving as ACJS President is the opportunity to engage colleagues whose backgrounds, experiences, and expertise differ from my own. Researchers, practitioners, educators, students, and policymakers each contribute perspectives that deepen our collective understanding. Leadership then becomes less about delivering answers than about asking better questions, encouraging meaningful dialogue, and creating opportunities for shared learning.

My hope is that by the time we conclude our conference in Orlando, our conversations through-

out the year will have strengthened not only our understanding of leadership but also our connections to one another. Perhaps this is the enduring lesson of the power of stronger connections: research creates knowledge, education develops people, practice changes lives, and leadership creates the connections that allow each to strengthen the other. As we begin this academic year together, I invite you to join me in valuing leadership centered on strengthening connections. I look forward to learning with you, serving alongside you, and continuing this important conversation in the coming months, culminating with our 2027 ACJS Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida, March 30–April 3, 2027.

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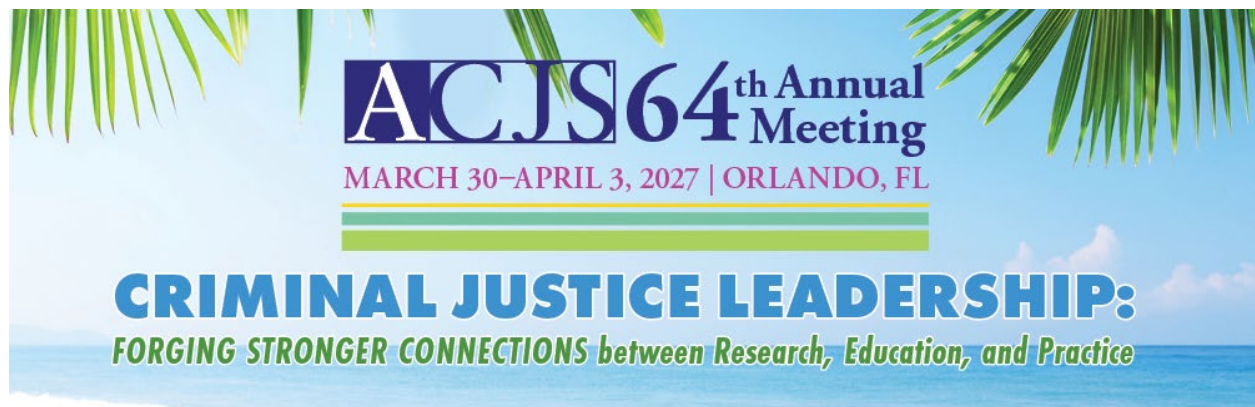
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Join us for the **ACJS 64th Annual Meeting**, March 30- April 3, 2027, at the Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center, Orlando, FL. ACJS President David Myers is excited to bring you a content-rich program from the theme “*Criminal Justice Leadership: Forging Stronger Connections Between Research, Education, & Practice*”. We seek to bring together scholars, educators, and practitioners to explore how leadership can bridge longstanding gaps across the criminal justice landscape and in higher education. As our discipline evolves in response to new social challenges, technological advancements, and policy demands, effective leadership is essential in aligning scientific research with real-world application. By fostering evidence-based dialogue and researcher-practitioner partnerships, this conference will highlight the importance of collaboration in developing informed, ethical, and forward-thinking approaches to criminal justice, while cultivating leaders who can navigate, motivate, and unify others toward continuous learning and successful outcomes for individuals and their communities.

The Annual Meeting, set in Orlando, FL, from March 30-April 3, 2027, will combine a strong academic emphasis with professional development in a family-friendly, island-inspired atmosphere, creating an engaging environment that encourages connection, innovation, and the meaningful exchange of ideas among participants.

Submission Deadline preferred: September 25, 2026

Final Deadline: October 9, 2026

Early Bird registration is available through February 12.

To register for the 64th Annual Meeting, make hotel reservations with the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center, or become an Exhibitor/Sponsor, visit <https://s5.goeshow.com/acjs/annual/2027/index.cfm>.

We hope to see you there!

Raising the Standard:

How ACJS Program Review Advances Academic Excellence in Criminal Justice Education

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Jay Albanese, Deputy Chair, jsalbane@vcu.edu

At a time when higher education is under scrutiny, enrollment is declining, and institutions face a looming demographic cliff— with the number of 18-year olds graduating from high school projected to decline by 15% in 2041 (Marcus, 2025¹)-- it is critical to respond to growing concerns about program quality, public confidence, and expectations for institutional accountability. These challenges are particularly significant for criminal justice programs, making rigorous external review and quality academic standards more important than ever.

Although there is no single specialized accrediting board dedicated to criminology and related academic programs, there are several associations that oversee quality academic standards. Among them, ACJS is the only organization dedicated specifically to criminal justice education.

Once every five to ten years, your Associate's, Bachelor's, or Master's degree programs will typically undergo an external review, as required by the state or regional accrediting body.

This process generally requires your program to carry out **three time-consuming tasks**:

1. The program prepares a comprehensive self-study on trends and current status of program mission, program history, faculty, students, student outcomes, and support.
2. The university invites external reviewers to conduct an objective evaluation of the program. A physical, on-site campus visit is an essential component of the process, allowing reviewers to interview students, faculty, and administrators, and prepare an assessment with recommendations for improvement.
3. The university administration and the program review the findings together and prepare a plan of action for the next several years. So, *the typical review of your program begins internally and concludes as an institutional planning process.*

Program reviews provide a crucial opportunity for an expert in the field to assess the program's strengths and communicate to university leadership the necessary steps for its future success. The unfortunate truth is that administrators are often more likely to listen to outside voices than they are to their own faculty. Once a qualified outsider verifies what the faculty has usually been saying about the program for years, there is a better chance that the university will be responsive and maybe even provide some resources.

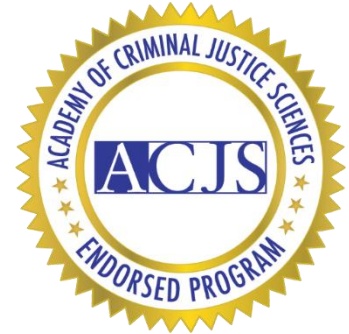
Below are three important contributions that ACJS can make:

- A. ACJS is the only academic body that has written **Quality Standards** for academic programs in criminology and criminal justice. The standards were adopted by ACJS membership, and they have been updated multiple times by the Academic Review Committee (ARC) to keep

¹ Marcus, J. (2026, August 3). *Pace of college closing picks up, with more projected*. The Heichinger Report. <https://heichingerreport.org/pace-of-college-closings-picks-up-with-more-projected/>

up with the modernization of college education. The purpose of the standards is to distinguish programs that are delivering an excellent collective educational experience in an increasingly competitive academic marketplace. <https://www.acjs.org/academic-program-review/>

- B. Having trained ACJS reviewers perform your external review can result in an **ACJS Endorsement** of your academic program. This endorsement seal (pictured here) enables you to transform your internal review process into an external marketing tool, showcasing your academic program as an excellent one among peer institutions. ACJS accomplishes this by recognizing programs that meet most of the ACJS Quality Standards. ACJS provides special recognition to AA/AS, BA/BS and MA/MS programs that undergo program review using the Quality Standards with at least one ACJS Certified Reviewer and meet at least 85% of the standards (including mandatory standard C.4). ACJS has trained reviewers from all regions who have review experience to match your institution's needs.



<https://www.acjs.org/certified-reviewers/>

- C. **Consider ACJS Endorsement for several reasons:** First, an ACJS review doesn't cost anything beyond what your program would ordinarily pay for an external review. Your university negotiates the external reviewer fee with the individual ACJS reviewers, just as administrations do with all their program reviews. Second, the ACJS Standards are comprehensive and include all the components typically found in college and university self-study templates. Most administrators do not object to programs using the disciplinary standard for their reviews, as is done for many other academic departments.

Programs that successfully undergo review by ACJS Certified Reviewers (by meeting the published ACJS Quality Standards) will be recognized as an **ACJS Endorsed Program**. ACJS Endorsed programs are listed on the ACJS website as endorsed, and they can market themselves both on their websites and promotional materials as such for the next seven years. <https://www.acjs.org/acjs-endorsed-programs/>

Please feel free to contact us with any questions about this process.

Congratulations to the Academic Programs that have recently earned ACJS Program Endorsement!

Curry College
Bachelor's program

Kutztown University
Bachelor's program

Roger Williams University
Bachelor's program



Educating for the Carceral State? Five Decades of Neoliberalism, Austerity Politics, and the Remaking of the CCJ Higher Education

By: John J. Sloan, III

Introduction: A Field Remade by the Market

Since the 1980s, those involved with criminology and criminal justice (CCJ) higher education can readily identify with the following shifts:

- Departments are asked to increase enrollments while controlling instructional costs.
- Programs are evaluated by graduation rates, credit hours produced, job placement proportions, research expenditures, and USNWR (or comparable) rankings.
- Faculty document their productivity through increasingly elaborate quantitative review systems.
- Proposals for new degrees and certificates are increasingly justified primarily through indicators of “market demand.”
- Courses and programs without obvious occupational utility struggle to retain their place.
- Students are encouraged to treat their degree as an “investment,” valued mainly through employment and earnings.

Collectively, these shifts point to neoliberalism’s reconstruction of American higher education around notions of “competition,” “private investment,” “managerial control,” and measurable “returns on investment” (ROI)¹. In short, American postsecondary institutions (PSIs) are expected to behave more like businesses (Warner, 2022).

Neoliberalism supplied the necessary governing

logic by recasting PSIs as competitive enterprises; knowledge as a commodity; students as customers/consumers and investors; and (public) higher education as a private route to employment rather than a public good. Austerity politics (Brown, 2016), a primary tool of neoliberalism, then supplied the necessary discipline for implementation. As a result of declining or unstable public support, pressure to contain labor costs, and demands to “do more with less,” PSIs were pushed to depend even more on tuition, expand marketable programs, quantify program performance, and substitute contingent labor for secure faculty appointments (Fabricant & Brier, 2016; Giroux, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Neoliberalism was not governmental retreat. Rather, it reallocated public authority to constrain social provision, enforce strict market discipline on populations, and expand punitive social institutions (Wacquant, 2009). Neoliberal influences on American higher education strengthened and normalized the fusing of career preparation with market competition; use of managerial assessment tools and precarious labor; and carceral state expansion (Herrine, 2025). And it turns out that CCJ higher education was especially susceptible to these logics. Its vocational roots, including police education and federally supported police training through the Law Enforcement Education Program in the late 1960s and 1970s, predated the neoliberal turn and helped “pave the way” for change (Morn, 1995; Oliver, 2016).

¹The term “neoliberalism” has many connotations and definitions depending on disciplinary focus (Vallier, 2026). It can be broadly defined as the extension and installation of competitive markets into all areas of social life, especially the economy and politics (Birch, 2015). Its development and spread are most associated with the work of a group of 20th-century public intellectuals, politicians, and policymakers who claimed the market as the most efficient and moral institution for organizing human life and the primary mechanism for creating, promoting, and maintaining social order and welfare (Birch, 2015, p. 571).

The result has been a gradual redefinition of the purpose of CCJ higher education programs, how their value is measured, who teaches in them, and which societal institutions they implicitly serve. This is not to argue that every CCJ department followed the same path. Rather, widespread fiscal and organizational incentives *systematically favored a specific model of CCJ higher education* that has become increasingly common across PSIs. As described below, that model favors the vocationalization of programs and corporatization of assessment, views students as “customers,” encourages adjunctification of faculty, and helps reproduce the carceral state.

Vocationalization of Programs and the Corporatization of Assessment

A longstanding tension in CCJ higher education has been between liberal arts or social science models and more applied, practitioner-oriented ones (Boots & Kim, 2024; Kuykendall, 1977). The former treats crime, law, punishment, and social control as objects of theoretical, historical, ethical, and empirical inquiry. The latter emphasizes preparation for employment in policing, courts, corrections, private security, and related agencies. These purposes need not be mutually exclusive: a strong program can prepare students for work while teaching them to question the assumptions, power relations, and institutional consequences embedded in that work.

Under neoliberal conditions, however, the balance tilted toward the model easiest to successfully market (Trappen, 2026). Programs learned to advertise “career readiness,” develop internships, cultivate practitioner expertise, and seek training academy partnerships. They implemented flexible delivery modes and relabeled courses and programs using occupationally recognizable titles. Student demand and credit-hour production then became core indicators of a program's institutional

value. In such an environment, “criminal investigation” appears more immediately saleable than “political economy of punishment.”

National research continues to find substantial variation in the rigor and coherence of CCJ bachelor's programs, including uneven conformity with disciplinary curriculum standards (Sloan, 2019; Sloan & Buckwalter, 2017). For example, debate over the awarding of academic credit for police academy training is illustrative. Is CCJ higher education chiefly validating occupational competencies, or is it providing knowledge and critical reasoning that professional training alone cannot supply? Empirically, faculty support for awarding police academy credit is strongly associated with a vocational conceptualization of CCJ higher education (Schafer & Castellano, 2005).

Simultaneously, corporatized assessment changed the meaning of “quality.” Under this new meaning, programs are judged by metrics involving enrollment, retention, graduation, placement, student satisfaction, grant dollars, publication counts, citation measures, and rankings. Faculty become “portfolios” of measurable outputs and departments become “revenue and performance” centers. Such indicators can be useful, but audit systems tend to displace substantive judgment with what can be counted (Power, 1997; Trappen, 2026).

The result is a particular CCJ program appears “successful” because it is large, inexpensive to deliver, and popular with students. This, despite its curriculum being theoretically thin or insufficiently attentive to diversity issues of race and gender, societal inequality, and institutional power. Empirical research shows that diversity-related content of CCJ programs (Miller & Alves, 2023) and incorporation of ethics education into them (Sloan, 2026) remain unevenly institutionalized

across departments and curricula.

Student as Customer or Consumer

The prevailing “student as customer/consumer” model follows directly from converting higher education from a social good into an individual purchase (Azevedo, 2025; Flaherty, 2025). As tuition and debt become more consequential, students are encouraged to ask what tangible ROI a college degree will yield in a field like CCJ where a college degree is (mostly) not required for entry-level positions (Trappen, 2026). Postsecondary institutions respond by marketing credentials, extending convenience, reporting employability numbers, and offering amenities that support a collegiate “lifestyle.” Education thus becomes transactional: students purchase credits, institutions promise opportunity, and programs compete for customers (Trappen, 2026).

Higher education CCJ is especially compatible with this model because its occupational destinations are visible and culturally familiar. Surveys have long shown that many criminal justice majors enter programs with law-enforcement or related career ambitions (Kimmel & Tartaro, 1999), and recent research continues to examine how perceived job attractiveness shapes students’ choice of major and career plans (Stringer & Murphy, 2020).

Those aspirations are legitimate. Many students seek public-service careers and reasonably expect that their degree will improve their prospects. The problem arises when career preference becomes the organizing authority of a curriculum (Qinlan & Corbin, 2023). As PSIs become more consumer-oriented, they create incentives to offer what they believe students and parents want, rather than what an intellectually serious education requires. Research repeatedly warns that consumerism in higher education weakens the transformative purposes of learning by encouraging students to

value credential possession over engagement with knowledge that is sometimes difficult to master (Molesworth et al., 2009; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005).

In CCJ curricula, theory, statistics, research methods, constitutional law, and substantive writing may be treated as obstacles between students and the job they imagine. Courses that challenge the history, structure, and function of policing, prosecution, imprisonment, or conventional definitions of crime may be seen as “politically biased” rather than necessary exercises in institutional scrutiny. The pressure is intensified by reliance on student evaluations, retention targets, and satisfaction measures (Trappen, 2026).

The “customer” is not always right because education is not merely the delivery of preferences. Its democratic function is to complicate those preferences, expose students to evidence that unsettles common sense, and cultivate reasoning beyond occupational self-interest. A curriculum tailored mainly to consumer demand risks producing graduates who know the justice system’s vocabulary without understanding its history, distributional consequences, or contested legitimacy (Leighton et al., 2024).

Adjunctification and Erosion of Faculty Power

Neoliberalism and austerity politics have also transformed who performs the work of CCJ higher education. PSIs have reduced costs and increased flexibility by shifting instruction away from tenure-earning faculty lines and toward adjunct, part-time, visiting, and other non-tenure-track faculty. This “adjunctification” is not simply a staffing adjustment. It is a wholesale reorganization of academic labor that centers insecurity, limited bargaining power, and institutional disposability of faculty (AAUP, 2026; Bousquet, 2008).

CCJ programs often benefit from instructors with substantial professional experience. Police officers, district attorneys, correctional officials, victim advocates, and other practitioners can offer knowledge career academics may lack. The problem is not practitioner participation per se, but the substitution of low-cost, contingent instruction for a stable faculty capable of curriculum development, mentoring, research, and shared governance (AAUP, 2026).

When adjuncts teach multiple courses across institutions, receive little support, and have no reliable role in department decision making, faculty and students bear the costs. Academic freedom is weakest where employment is least secure. An instructor whose renewal depends on favorable evaluations, administrative approval, or relations with local agencies may avoid controversial material. In CCJ, that may mean softening discussions of police violence, prosecutorial discretion, prison conditions, racial inequality, union influence, or agency misconduct. It may also mean teaching standardized courses built around adopted textbooks and prefabricated learning-management systems rather than developing a distinctive scholarly perspective.

Under such conditions, governance migrates upward. As managerial authority expands and permanent faculty influence diminishes, curricular decisions are more often framed as matters of efficiency, branding, and enrollment management (Ginsberg, 2011). Adjunctification thus reinforces vocationalization and consumerism: inexpensive instructors deliver high-demand courses to tuition-paying students in programs evaluated mainly by throughput.

From Criminal Justice Education to Carceral Reproduction

The most consequential transformation traceable to

neoliberalism is CCJ higher education's relationship with the carceral state. Herein lies a central political contradiction: The same era that invoked scarcity to discipline public higher education also sustained and expanded an extensive apparatus of policing, prosecution, imprisonment, surveillance, and collateral control (Mintz, 2021). For some 50 years, the U.S. has used crime as a governing framework extending far beyond the criminal courts (Simon, 2007; Wacquant, 2009). CCJ higher education programs were nurtured and grew in this environment; some even organized curricula around the institutional architecture of police, courts, and corrections.

Such a structure is *descriptively* understandable, but it is *not* neutral. It treats the carceral state and its apparatuses as the "natural center" of the entire field. Textbooks, internships, career fairs, practitioner networks, training academy credit arrangements, and agency partnerships channel students toward employment with the very institutions the curriculum should be critically examining. Departments thereby become sites of carceral reproduction by providing personnel, credentials, legitimacy, and professional identity to a system that continues to evidence racism, sexism, and classism (Leighton et al., 2024).

This does not mean CCJ faculty intentionally indoctrinate students to become "pro" system or that careers in criminal legal system agencies are inherently legitimate. It means that organizational routines can reproduce institutional arrangements without explicit agreement of the parties. When policing, courts, and corrections constitute the required core of the CCJ major while restorative justice, abolition, community safety, state and corporate crime, inequality, and the social harms of punishment remain rarely available electives, students receive a powerful lesson about *essential knowledge*. When success is measured by placement with these agencies, carceral expansion

becomes an employment opportunity rather than a political and moral problem (Sloan, 2026).

The danger lies with an “administrative CCJ” that helps institutions operate more efficiently while leaving their history, purposes, and power insufficiently examined. Kraska (2006) warned that criminal justice scholarship needs a theoretical infrastructure capable of explaining crime-control institutions themselves. Public criminology offers a related alternative: research and teaching conducted in dialogue with communities, especially those most affected by criminalization and punishment (see Loader & Sparks, 2010; Uggen & Inderbitzin, 2010). These approaches ask not only how the system works, but whose interests it serves, whose harms it recognizes, and which alternatives it renders unthinkable.

Conclusion: Reclaiming CCJ as a Democratic Project

The answer is not simply to purge CCJ curricula of practical knowledge or disparage students seeking public-service careers. Rather, the answer is to reject the premise that employability and critical education are incompatible. Future police officers, attorneys, crime analysts, correctional professionals, victim advocates, and policymakers need more—not less—exposure to theory, history, research methods, ethics, diversity, and the voices of people subjected to state control.

Reform requires protecting a rigorous social science and liberal arts core. This core treats race, class, gender, state crime, corporate harm, and collateral consequences as *foundational* rather than peripheral. It requires diversifying internships beyond carceral agencies (or their shadow). It requires evaluating programs by intellectual quality and public contribution rather than enrollments and placement. It also requires investment in secure faculty positions, meaningful shared governance,

and academic freedom for all faculty members, full-time or otherwise.

The central question is ultimately normative. Are CCJ programs primarily designed to staff existing institutions or to educate people capable of judging those institutions democratically? Neoliberalism and austerity have pushed the field toward the first answer while disguising that choice as “being practical.” Reclaiming CCJ higher education requires making the choice visible—and rebuilding programs that prepare students not merely to enter the machinery of (in)justice, but to understand, challenge, and transform it.

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John Sloan is professor emeritus of criminal justice at The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) whose work has mainly focused on the hidden architecture of coercive authority—how institutions create, legitimate, and constrain policing in places not ordinarily recognized as being policed, such as college campuses—and appeared in such journals as *Criminology*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *Social Forces* and the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*. He also serves as an Editor for the *Journal of Historical Criminology*. His most recent book is "Cops on Campus: Rethinking Safety and Confronting Police Violence" (University of Washington Press). He earned a PhD in sociology from Purdue University.



Membership Accomplishments

Marty Greenberg has published his 9th book, *Engaging Underprivileged Youth in the Nation's Capital: The Officer Oliver Cowan Story*.

Greenberg, M. A. (2026). *Engaging underprivileged youth in the Nation's capital: The Officer Oliver Cowan story*. Bloomsbury.

John J. Sloan, III published an article in the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*.

Sloan III, J.J. (2026). Integrating ethics education into criminology and criminal justice departments and programs: A modest proposal. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*. Advance online publication.
doi:10.1080/10511253.2026.2684444

Ellen G. Cohn, Ph.D., has been promoted to Professor in the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice at Florida International University.

Sharon Gandarilla-Javier, Ph.D., LMSW, MA, concluded her PSC-CUNY Enhanced Research Award study, "Acculturative Stress and Trust in Law Enforcement Among Latinas Who Have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence" (\$11,998), with Dr. Noam Haviv serving as Co-Principal Investigator. The pilot was designed to inform a training and certificate program for law enforcement officers and social service providers. As a licensed social worker, Dr. Gandarilla-Javier is deeply committed to the research she does alongside survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

Gennaro F. Vito and **George Higgins** have published the fourth edition of *Introduction to Criminal Justice Research Methods* (Charles C Thomas) Publishers. **Dr. Higgins** was recently named Interim Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Affairs at the University of Louisville.

Kimberly Collica-Cox, Ph.D. was promoted to Distinguished Professor in the Dyson College of Arts and Sciences at PACE University.

Christopher D. Zaleski, JD has been promoted to the rank of Full Professor as of August 15, 2026. He continues to serve as the Department Chair of Criminology at The Chicago School and now has an additional role as Director of Community College Partnerships within the College of Undergraduate Studies.

On July 1, 2026, **Carlos E. Posadas, Ph.D.** became Academic Department Head of Criminal Justice at New Mexico University.



Claire Nolasco Braaten, J.D., LL.M, Ph.D., received a U.S. Fulbright Scholar ASEAN Research Award. Information can be found at the link below:

Fulbright Award Will Take Professor to Front Lines of Global Cybercrime Research:
<https://news.tamusa.edu/2026/07/Fulbright-Award-Will-Take-Professor-to-Front-Lines-of-Global-Cybercrime-Research.html>

ENGAGING UNDERPRIVILEGED YOUTH IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL



The Officer Oliver Cowan Story

MARTIN ALAN GREENBERG



BLOOMSBURY



Over the past few months, **Frank Schmallegger, Ph.D.** has been busily creating *Freedom or Safety?*, a free interactive learning platform available at criminaljustice.today. Open to all criminal justice students, the site allows participants to follow *Miranda v. Arizona* through every stage of the criminal justice process. Students assume the roles of key decision-makers—including investigators, magistrates, judges, correctional officers, and parole board members—and make and defend their decisions before learning what occurred in the actual case. An artificial intelligence guide named “Balance” encourages students to consider both individual rights and public order without supplying answers or assigning grades. Instructors (who can sign up at the site) retain control of their classes, can monitor student progress, and may grade a culminating capstone exercise. Student work remains private within each class and is shared only with the instructor. The platform enters early-access beta this fall, and criminal justice instructors are invited to request access, create a class, and share a join code with students. Participation is free and unlimited, regardless of which textbook is in use. LMS integration is available and continuing to grow. Feedback and error reports are welcome at schmall@justicestudies.com. -- BTW: The site is ad-free!

"The Inquisitiveness of Gen-Z" -- **Zorain Nizamani**, PhD Student, Criminology, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

As a child, I was always inquisitive and curious, asking questions and raising concerns. Subsequently, I graduated law school in 2019 and started writing op-eds for a newspaper in Karachi, Pakistan. The main theme of my op-eds revolved around societal and political issues. I authored nearly 50 to 60 articles from 2020 to 2026. On 1st January 2026, my last op-ed titled "It is over" was published and within hours, it was pulled from the newspaper's website. The op-ed spoke about how patriotism cannot be forced, it has to be earned. It also spoke about the fact that there seemed to be a massive disconnect between the rulers and the gen-z of Pakistan.

This article made rounds on social media and print media. Media houses in India and Bangladesh also commented on how removal of the article reinforced my point of gen-z being disconnected and ostracized by the current rulers.

Since then, newspapers back home have refused to publish my work.

I continue to write and share my work on LinkedIn but what I have learned are two things. 1) The pen is always stronger than the sword and 2) always question those who hold public office, they are there to serve us, not the other way around.

Following are the news articles for your perusal:

1: <https://www.indiatvnews.com/trending/news/who-is-zorain-nizamani-pakistani-phd-student-viral-oped-ignites-gen-z-uprising-debate-2026-01-08-1024978>

2: <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/pakistan-news-it-is-over-why-a-deleted-op-ed-by-a-gen-z-is-going-viral-in-pakistan-10467311>

3: <https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/trending-globally/zorain-nizamani-op-ed-it-is-over-pakistan-gen-z-debate-express-tribune-10466131/>

4: <https://theprint.in/go-to-pakistan/pakistan-army-deleted-article-new-youth-icon-zorain-nizamani/2819397/>

5: <https://thediplomat.com/2026/01/why-are-pakistans-powerful-generals-panicking-over-an-op-ed-article/>

6: <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/pakistan-deleted-gen-z-article-row-zorain-nizamani-13966138.html>

Matt DeLisi, Ph.D., of Iowa State University was honored as a new American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Fellow. Additional information can be found at the following link:
<https://www.news.iastate.edu/news/science-association-honors-iowa-state-researcher-studies-criminal-behavior>

Natasha N. Johnson* CbB* has had a very successful few months of publishing:
Johnson, N. N., & Johnson, T. L. (2026). Black women at the intersection of educational leadership in the United States. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 41(6), 1001-1026. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-03-2026-0314>

She has a forthcoming journal article with Dr. Thaddeus Johnson, "Governing Generative AI in the U.S. Higher Education: An Equity-First, Risk-Calibrated Policy Playbook". This article was accepted for inclusion in *Educational* 's upcoming Special Issue "Artificial Intelligence and Educational Policy in the United States".

Additionally, Dr. Johnson's `npcqclr_rgmI ugrf Awlrmpg_ Hmflqml* H,B,* rgrjcb P_n mI Rpg_j @cwmIb @mpbcpg8 NgmIccpgIe ? Tqprs_j Cvaf_lec ?apmqq rfc ?kcpqa_q * ^_qcb mI rfcpg k_Isqapgnr ugrf Npmd, Jsqq Apjmq KmI_r_jtm Tgb_j* P_n mI Rpg_j gI _Ejm`_j Aj_qqpmmk8 CvnjmgIe P_ac* Fgn+Fmn* _Ib K_qq GLa_pacp_rgmI Rfpmsef Tqprs_j Cvaf_lec Ncb_emew * u_q _aacnrcb dmp gIajsqgmI gI rfc ?kcpqa_I ?qqmaq_rgmI md Amjjcecq _Ib SIgtcpqgrwIq &??A$S"%q 0.04 AmIdcpIac mI Ejm`_j Jc_pIqIe gI U_qfgIermI* B,A, &Lmt, /0+/2* 0.04'`

Navigating the Pseudo-Family Paradox in Women's Prisons

By: Aiyana Bage

When it's your real family, you ride or die So when you're taking on that role in there, in prison, then that means whatever they come with and their packages, you're gonna carry too," an incarcerated woman from a Los Angeles correctional facility describes (Kolb & Palys, 2018, p. 686). Isolated far from home in uncomfortable prison conditions, female inmates often turn to pseudo-families to cope with the emotional, physical, and psychological stressors associated with incarceration and the loss of "free world" relationships. Pseudo-families are defined as fluid micro-social structures found in women's prisons and jails, which resemble familial roles in society, incorporated as pseudo-mothers, pseudo-fathers,

and pseudo-children. These widespread, concurrently expanding systems are fueled by a variety of personal motivations, such as "the need for protection, the need for belonging and comfort, and for smuggling contraband" (Munarini & Thobane, 2023, p. 1). The inherent moral disparity in the definition is also reflected on a wider scale, stimulating avid debate on whether these social networks benefit the women involved.

Existing scholarship has historically treated pseudo-families as either adaptive support systems or harmful social structures. However, the evidence suggests a more complicated reality: pseudo-families simultaneously alleviate and reproduce the harms of incarceration. This article refers to this tension as the "pseudo-family paradox," the phenomenon by which the same informal networks can promote emotional survival, rehabilitation, dependency, and exploitation, depending on institutional and interpersonal context. Pseudo-

families may serve as beneficial for incarcerated women, with promises of mutual protection and a sense of normalcy; however, their tendency to foster manipulation and erode individual identity confounds their role in promoting genuine rehabilitation, highlighting potential reform areas for both research and implementation.

Pseudo-families can act as a crucial social therapy tool for incarcerated women, providing familial comfort, psychological healing, and alleviating the deprivations of confinement. The core of the problems involved with isolation often stem from the human biological need for social interaction. A research report published by the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States (2023), the nation's leading public health authority, demonstrates how social connection improves fundamental biomarkers in the human body, as formative bonds "are associated with better regulation of the neuroendocrine system in both early life and adult attachment" (p. 32). In the context of incarceration, this correlation explains why female inmates are highly driven to form social bonds despite being surrounded by possible street rivals. Socialization can help soothe the psychological burden of incarceration during their sentence. Additionally, the report details the dangers posed by isolation, which can act as an independent risk factor for a variety of ailments, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, infectious diseases, cognitive dysfunction, and especially depression and anxiety.

In an observational study that analyzes the specific relationship between pseudo-families and stress reduction, sociologists Edison and Haynie (2023) state:

Women who perceived having access to larger friendship networks experienced much lower stress levels than victims perceiving fewer friendships the incarcerated women feeling isolated from other unit residents,

regardless of whether or not other incarcerated women nominate them as friends, is likely to be particularly stress inducing. (p. 278)

This highlights how significantly the perception of friendship networks can be associated with inmate stress levels, especially for women who had been victimized in the past. Taken together, these findings suggest that pseudo-families play a crucial role in regulating the mental health and emotional stability of incarcerated women by reducing the harms of isolation and fostering essential social connection.

On the other hand, some suggest that pseudo-families create false family bonds that women value over long-standing connections outside of the prison, contributing to greater social isolation later on due to dependency during incarceration. The first aspect of this argument comes from the geographical relocation of inmates; the action of moving prisoners from a local prison to a different one much farther away to deal with budget cuts or overflow, reducing visitation and degrading familial ties. An extensive research brief published by the Council on Criminal Justice (2024) emphasizes how women's involvement in the U.S. criminal justice system has grown recently through a stronger focus on female arrests from low-level offenses.

This phenomenon is exacerbated because there are fewer U.S. women's prisons than necessary, and consequently "women are incarcerated on average 160 miles from home, which means that most incarcerated mothers never receive a visit from their children" (p. 42). Due to the lack of biological family visits for women in prisons, pseudo-families may offer a distraction and eventually a full substitution for lost familial bonds. Furthering this point, criminologists Greenfelder et al. (2021) conducted The Women's Prison Inmate Networks Study, which focused on conditions of confinement and reentry experiences of women incarcerated in

Pennsylvania. The interviewed “women often reported strong mother-child relationships,” which “conflicted with children’s own narratives” (Greenfelder et al., 2021, p. 47). This demonstrates that incarcerated mothers’ perceptions of their relationships with their children may differ substantially from their children’s own experiences, complicating assumptions about the state of family relationships during incarceration and introducing the possibility of psychological pseudo-family influences.

Criminologists Aranda-Hughes et al. (2020) provided evidence for the harms that extreme pseudo-relationships between incarcerated women could enable. Staff reported how women ended up in solitary confinement through pseudo-family incentivized misconduct, either by “acting out on behalf of family or through following family into solitary confinement” (p. 13). Women maintained relationships through various methods, including “synchronizing their threats of self-harm, women appeared able to undermine institutional controls within the unit to be placed in close proximity to a partner, even if only temporarily” (p. 16). These findings indicate the extreme lengths that women would go to build and maintain their pseudo-family relationships, valuing prison bonds over individual safety.

However, this argument is limited due to no direct association between pseudo-families and the loss of external social relationships thus far, and as mentioned in the Council on Criminal Justice’s brief, “There are significant markers for successful community reintegration for women positive health outcomes and well-being, high levels of connection with and support from friends and family, ability to access crucial resources” (Council on Criminal Justice, 2024, p. 68). Challenging the substitution theory, it is also possible that pseudo-families are an effective practice grounds for social connections to have improved relationships post-release.

Overall, pseudo-families can both support inmate mental health and deepen social dependency during sentencing, suggesting that post-release reintegration may be highly circumstance-dependent.

Furthermore, there is existing literature connecting pseudo-families with improved family reunification because of properly corrected behavior and mental health. The emotional and psychological support from pseudo-family networks allows incarcerated women to work on rebuilding their lives for post-release. The release of incarcerated women, as well as the success of their “reunification” through rekindling familial relationships, can be vastly shaped by their experiences in prison, meaning the prison sentence is a critical time for intervention, social connection, and behavioral reform. In a study examining the association between pseudo-families and motherhood in maximum-security prisons, Dillavou et al. (2022) found “pseudo-motherhood did not translate into weakened relationships with biological children,” and realized that other factors like age, substance use, and previous challenges were more accurate predictors. Moreover, the study explains how these kinship networks can “offer support, both relational and financial, and role fulfillment to women” until they are able to reconnect with their children and family. Pseudo-families may function as a stabilizing support system that aids, rather than undermines, long-term family reunification after release.

Conversely, in the contemporary prison system, pseudo-families can also perform as the equivalent of gangs in men’s prisons: coercive, exploitative, and detrimental to mental health and safety. In her PhD thesis, Dublin (2021) explores the blurry distinction between gangs and pseudo-families, proposing the term “gang-families” to better capture the complicated nature of pseudo-families. Within most prisons, group units are more likely to get in trouble, expecting retaliation against enemies

and performing gang-like activities such as “having girlfriends, fighting, and being involved in the underground economy of the prison (selling and using drugs and other contraband)” (Dublin, 2021, p. 31). This potential aspect of pseudo-families risks deleterious harm to family members, as it may prevent proper correctional work and promote rearrest behaviors. A study authored by Munarini and Thobane (2023) analyzed pseudo-families as a coping mechanism for female offenders, finding that pseudo-families are “considered a threat to correctional security” with smuggling, narcotics, excessive violence against staff and other inmates, as well as other illegal activities (p. 363). These activities can lead to extended sentences, weaker social ties, and ineffective rehabilitation.

However, this argument can be viewed as relatively weak when considering the prisons across the country. Reiter et al. (2025) published a study regarding the field of prison research itself, arguing that it is inherently oversimplified as a large body of evidence. This can be applied to multiple commentators in this paper who focus on limited institutional prison samples to collect data (see, e.g., Aranda-Hughes et al., 2020; Dublin, 2021; Greenfelder et al., 2021; Munarini & Thobane, 2023). Instead, the authors call for context-sensitive studies that avoid generalizing demographics and consider lived experiences, placement patterns, and staff roles to inform reform. Still, it is important to not invalidate the existing research. Greenfelder et al.’s research from Pennsylvania, Aranda-Hughes et al.’s research from Florida, and Munarini and Thobane’s research from South Africa bring up similar characteristics, demonstrating how pseudo-family networks transcend geographic, language, and cultural barriers to soothe the human need for socialization. While there is potential for pseudo-families to adopt gang-like dynamics that threaten safety and rehabilitation, policymakers must push for context-sensitive research, accounting for differences. As such, the development of support

programs during incarceration aimed at ensuring a smoother reunification process, informed by newfound research on pseudo-family bonds and past traumas, would empower pseudo-family structures to have a greater focus on genuine rehabilitation.

In conclusion, although pseudo-families may provide comfort, protection, and help maintain familial status quo, there are critical risks when networks are left entirely unregulated, from exploitation to excessive dependency. The use of pseudo-families as an agent of therapeutic social cohesion supports existing systems, but by analyzing risk factors, a more thorough picture of the pseudo-family paradox has been developed, establishing pseudo-families as a “paradox” to explore rather than a “tool” to exploit. For the stakeholders affected by this research—incarcerated women, prison staff, and families involved in the prison system—pseudo-families can act as a safety net or the worst last resort. To address major gaps in the research space, policymakers should push for more context-sensitive research to avoid bias by overgeneralization, develop prison support programs that enhance the existing pseudo-family structure, and adopt a guided family visitation pipeline.

While context-sensitive research would enable more informed knowledge on pseudo-family systems, internal and in-to-out support systems that promote healthier relationships, offer relationship counseling, and reduce geographic barriers during prisoner relocation can address what may be the root of the problems: the nature of human relationships. Future research can focus on this concept by examining the underlying reasoning for the specific behaviors and characteristics found across different pseudo-families. Whether women’s families are pseudo or biological, human-centered progress in prison rehabilitation moves corrective systems from harsh facilities to places that protect

families, rebuild lives, and foster safer communities for the future.

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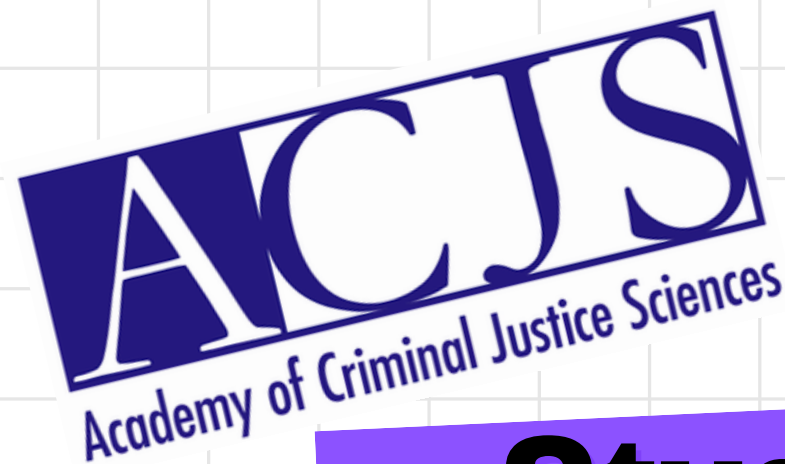
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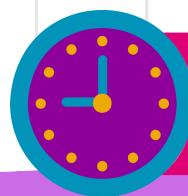
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The Silent Scripts of Consent: A Cognitive-Neuroscientific Reconceptualization of Sexual Violence

By: *Ridhi Banerjee & M. Sanjeev Singh*

Abstract

Explanations of sexual violence tend to assume correct perceptions of lack of consent preceding the behavior, focusing on motives and situations as factors driving these actions. This article contests the above assumptions and suggests an alternative framework that takes into account cognitive psychology, social cognition, and neurocognitive criminology in order to explain sexual aggression. The proposed theoretical model relies on the concept of "silent scripts of consent," referring to preconscious processes through which sexual cues are interpreted using schemata. The article shows how lack of consent could be interpreted as consent through schema utilization, selective perception, expectancies, and reinforcement. Additionally, feedback resistance and schema stability contribute to the consistency and persistence of misperceptions. Empirical and neurocognitive evidence is provided to demonstrate that there exists sufficient scientific evidence to prove that consent misperception is quantifiable, predictable, and causes aggressive sexual behavior. The model also suggests that sexual violence may be committed within the context of perceived legitimacy, not necessarily leading to self-identification with criminals.

Introduction

The mainstream theories about sexual crimes are mostly grounded on theories of motivation,

disposition, and situations, taking for granted that offenders accurately perceive non-consent and decide to act against it. This assumption has not been investigated enough yet. Social psychology research demonstrates that perception in ambiguous social conditions is not based on reality but rather constructed by schema-based processes, when previous knowledge influences the process of interpretation even before conscious judgment (Abbey, 1982; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Therefore, the core of analysis needs to be reconsidered. The key issue does not only include the explanation of offending but the process of cognitive transformation of non-consent into consent perception. The transition means defining a new place where the criminogenic process takes place.

In cases when ambiguity, urgency, and affective arousal are present, top-down processing is dominant in perceptual encoding. Stimuli are selected and categorized according to predefined schemas in the brain. Experimental studies have shown that people with sexually aggressive cognitive schemas tend to perceive ambiguous or even negative stimuli as signals of sexual interest (Malamuth et al., 1991; Abbey et al., 2001). In such situations, the sexual aggression can stem not only from intentional violation but also from perceptual misrecognition of consensual boundaries. This difference becomes crucial for the analysis because in the case of violation, it presupposes recognition of non-consent, while in misrecognition, the very border is reconstructed before behavioral action.

This is addressed through the concept of *silent scripts* of consent, which can be conceptualized as pre-conscious, schematically based interpretive processes that inform perceptions of sexual exchanges in real time. They function outside of conscious deliberation and correspond to

processes of automatic thinking, according to dual-process theory (Kahneman, 2011; Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Their invocation is contingent on external stimuli and does not necessitate reflection. Instead of influencing retrospective reasoning, they dictate initial meaning construction. Operationally, they are marked by automaticity, non-reflexivity, repetition-based reinforcement, and resistance to disconfirmation. The first quality supports fast processing via highly developed associations (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Non-reflexivity constrains the involvement of higher-level monitoring mechanisms when resources are scarce cognitively. Schemas are reinforced due to confirmation biases (Nickerson, 1998), while interpretation stability is ensured through reinterpretation of disconfirming evidence (Festinger, 1957). In terms of function, the scripts are responsible for the process of cue-to-meaning transition; here, uncertainty is resolved to mean agreement, resistance can be reframed as negotiability or a contextual norm, and lack of an actual refusal should be seen as compliance. The foundational structures of these schemas are rooted in sexual scripts and hostile masculinity.

Conceptual Framework

The term *sexual scripts*, as described by Simon and Gagnon, refers to culturally acquired schemas of cognition that guide people in their anticipations about interaction. Once activated through cognition, the sexual scripts work as perception schemas, not simply behavioral ones. The concept of hostile masculinity in Malamuth's confluence theory refers to adversarial attitudes, sexual entitlement, and conditional acceptance of forceful actions in sexual behavior (Malamuth et al., 1991). Both types of schemas operate through top-down processes by which incoming stimuli are selectively interpreted according to schema-consistent perceptions. In the face of ambiguity, the processes of inferential expectancies result in biased

perception due to prioritization of consistency over accuracy of stimuli interpretation (Abbey et al., 2001).

The perceptual structuring process is additionally influenced by cognitive distortions specific to sexual offenses that act as pre-perceptual filters. Entitlement distortion lessens the amount of evidence needed for the inference of consent. The distortion of harm minimization diminishes the importance of signs indicating distress, which hampers inhibitory behaviors. Distortions of resistance misinterpretation translate refusal into conditional or symbolic terms (Ward & Keenan, 1999; Polaschek & Ward, 2002). It is important to note that these distortions take place before the input stage. Studies have found that people who hold these distortions demonstrate different interpretations of standardized stimuli, with greater attributions of sexual motivation and reduced interpretations of refusal behavior (Abbey, 1982). Perceptual set theory offers an additional approach, with particular attention paid to the function of expectancies in organizing perception in situations of uncertainty (Bruner, 1957). Under conditions of incomplete knowledge, perceptual systems depend on inferential processes driven by expectancy to produce meaningful perceptions. Expectancy structures that correspond to entitlement structures do not encode resistance as a negation but rather place it into a narrower interpretive scope. According to empirical studies, men who possess a sexual aggression schema perceive resistance behavior in women as merely symbolic, ambiguous, and socially expected (Abbey et al., 2001).

Mechanistically speaking, the shift from non-consent to what appears to be consent is possible through the following neurocognitive process. Predictive expectations can be created through associative priming of prefrontal and social cognitive schemas. Selective attention acts to prioritize stimuli that are consistent with such schemata while ignoring

information that does not support these predictions. Through interpretive assimilation, information becomes integrated through predictive processing into coherent representations of the environment, thereby reducing the discrepancy between predictions and perceptions (Friston, 2010). While this happens, fast and unconscious processes of justifications ensure that no reflective thinking intervenes in this process, and thus executive control processes do not get activated. This enables behavioral execution based upon such a reality. However, because there has been no perceived violation, higher order evaluative processes are not engaged, leading to behavioral execution without a classification of criminal actions.

Convergent validity through empirical studies and neuroscientific studies exists for the above-mentioned mechanisms. Empirical evidence demonstrates that sexual refusal interpretation bias reliably predicts sexually aggressive behavior, with substantial effect sizes proving that such cognitive misinterpretations serve as causal intermediaries and not simple correlations. Further, neurocognitive research finds that people who have aggressive attribution bias tend to have different brain activity in networks of salience and semantic processing, including P300 and N400 brain waves that mediate expectancy violation and meaning integration, respectively. Such findings confirm that ambiguity processing is biased toward schematic interpretations within the framework of these networks.

In addition, behavioral studies find that men tend to underestimate women's stress associated with being victimized, with moderate effect sizes proving that perceptual errors of this nature constitute stable distortions rather than accidental mistakes. On the larger scale, studies on the prevalence of sexual aggression show that one out of every four women has either been forced to participate in sexual activities against their will or subjected to an attempt

of sexual assault. Finally, cognitive risk factor research shows that sexually biased thoughts and misinterpretation of social cues reliably predict sexually violent behavior in both clinical and non-clinical samples.

From the above arguments, three hypotheses emerge. First, rape can happen in situations where there is legitimacy because the processes of cognition construct a consent process even though objectively, the consent does not exist. Second, consent perception is deliberately constructed through schema-based processes rather than accidental misconstructions. Third, criminal actions do not necessarily arise from criminal identities because there is no violation of the act in the cognitive system. This theoretical perspective is situated in cognitive interpretive criminology, which differs from theories based on environmental factors such as rational choice, routine activities, or strain. Such models assume correct perceptions; hence, they fail to explain the distortion process in cognitive perspectives. In the above approach, the moral disengagement process is broadened to include pre-perception disengagement, which happens before any evaluation takes place (Bandura, 1999). Moreover, the theory of sexual scripts is reinterpreted as a schema-rooted perceptual theory of immediate interpretation.

Conclusion

Indeed, a serious problem exists between law and cognitive structures. Law defines sexual violence as an act committed without the individual's consent. Cognitive structures, on the other hand, might interpret sexual violence based on the existence of consent. The same behavior, as such, will be interpreted differently and classified as either sexually violent or not—a crime based on legal principles, but legitimate in personal perception (Abbey et al., 2001). The continued presence of these distortions is ensured by the neurocognitive

process of reinforcement. The consistent use of schema-based interpretations leads to the development of associative connections (Hebb, 1949). Reward-related processes further reinforce these associations by rewarding the individual for meeting his/her expectations. The creation of schemas is founded on social learning and influenced by cultural stories and experience in observing sexual behavior (Bandura, 1977; Malamuth & Check, 1981). Error-correction mechanisms will be rendered ineffective because of confirmation bias and dissonance reduction (Nickerson, 1998). In addition, cognitive error detection systems will become irrelevant when there is no perceived conflict (De Neys, 2012). Through consolidation, these schemas become automatic and resistant to change (McClelland et al., 1995).

In conclusion, sexual violence is reframed as an outcome of distorted cognition resulting from neurocognitive structures. With this approach of identifying distortion as occurring at the perception level rather than the behavioral one only, a more accurate theory that combines elements from cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and criminology is achieved. Such a theoretical approach suggests that in order to address the

phenomenon of sexual violence, the cognitive aspects of perception need to be tackled.

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Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences
Corrections Section

2027 American Correctional Association Student Research Awards - Call for Submissions

The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) is excited to announce the **American Correctional Association Student Research Awards presented by the ACJS Corrections Section**. This prestigious award funded by the American Correctional Association recognizes **outstanding student research in the field of corrections** and will be presented at the 2027 ACJS Annual Meeting in Orlando.

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Eligibility Criteria:

1. Applicants must be enrolled in a graduate or undergraduate program at the time of submission.
2. Students must have submitted an abstract to ACJS for any student paper, poster, or roundtable session or any regular paper session or roundtable on or before the final conference submission deadline, October 9, 2026, and must present their work at the 2027 Annual Meeting in Orlando.
3. The student paper must have a **corrections-related focus**, broadly defined.
4. Papers should be sole authored.
5. Submit a YouTube or Zoom video in which you present/explain your research using .ppt or pdf slides. Video presentations (including your .ppt or .pdf slides) should be a total of 8-10 minutes in length.

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A committee of ACA representatives and ACJS Corrections Section members will evaluate materials based on originality, scientific rigor, and visual appeal. Winners will be notified by early February, and awards will be presented at the Corrections Section Business and Awards Event at the 2027 ACJS Annual Meeting in Orlando on Thursday, April 1, 3:30-5:00pm. See the ACJS 2027 Program for details.

Note: The Committee may decide not to give the awards or to give fewer than three awards in any given year.

For inquiries, please contact the **review committee chair, Peter Wood**, at peter.wood@emich.edu

ACJS encourages all eligible graduate and undergraduate students to take advantage of this opportunity offered by the **American Correctional Association** to gain recognition for their scholarly work and engage actively with academic and practitioner communities.



Building Better Traffic Stop Data: Lessons from Nebraska's Implementation of the Connecticut Model

By: Ryan Spohn, Julie Garman, Justin Nix, Sadaf Hashimi, Travis Carter, & Mark Foxall

Traffic stops are one of the most common—and consequential—points of contact between law enforcement and the public. They are also one of the primary ways agencies, researchers, and policymakers try to understand whether policing practices are fair and equitable. In Nebraska alone, more than 383,000 traffic stops were reported across 185 law enforcement agencies in 2024 (Nebraska Crime Commission NCC, 2025). Given the scale of these interactions, even small differences in practice can have meaningful implications for both public safety and community trust.

Nebraska has been engaged in this work for more than two decades. In 2001, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB 593, prohibiting racial profiling and requiring law enforcement agencies to collect and report traffic stop data, including information on race, reason for the stop, and outcomes such as citations, searches, and arrests (NCC, 2025). Since then, the NCC has produced annual reports tracking trends and supporting statewide discussions about fairness in traffic enforcement. Reporting consistency has improved over time, with 89.4% of agencies submitting complete data in 2024, compared with 73.4% in 2010 (NCC, 2025).

These efforts have created a strong foundation for understanding traffic stop activity across Nebraska.

At the same time, they have also highlighted the next step in this work—moving beyond summary reporting toward more detailed, actionable analysis. Nebraska's current approach relies on aggregated reporting, which provides a useful statewide overview but makes it more difficult to examine traffic stop patterns in greater depth.

This is where the Connecticut Model becomes important. Rather than treating data collection as the end goal, the model emphasizes a broader process: standardized data collection, multiple analytical approaches, and sustained collaboration with agencies to interpret findings and improve practice (Ross et al., 2020). Several states have adopted variations of this model, and it offers a strong roadmap for turning traffic stop data into more meaningful and practical insights.

In Nebraska, researchers at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR), the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice (SCCJ), and the Violence Intervention and Policing Research (VIPR) Lab are partnering with the Nebraska Department of Transportation Highway Safety Office (NDOT-HSO) to implement this model as part of a multi-year effort focused on supporting fair and safe traffic stops statewide. Now in the second year, the project is focused on strengthening Nebraska's traffic stop data infrastructure, expanding analytical capacity, and working collaboratively with agencies to better understand traffic stop patterns.

This work is supported through funding provided by the NDOT-HSO, which was awarded to support implementation of the Connecticut Model in Nebraska. Under the federal Incentive Grant Program to Prohibit Racial Profiling, states are required to collect and analyze racial data from traffic stops, with an emphasis on improving data systems, supporting evaluation, and informing

training and education efforts (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, 2021). In Nebraska, this funding is being used to strengthen data collection and analysis, provide direct resources to agencies, and build the capacity needed for more advanced traffic stop analysis.

Implementing this work across Nebraska means working within a system that includes a wide range of agency sizes and capacities. The state includes both large metropolitan police agencies and smaller rural departments, each with different resources and infrastructure. Some agencies have modern records management systems (RMS) that support data extraction and internal analysis, while others rely on older systems or more manual processes. These differences shape how data are captured and reported and influence what kinds of support are most useful in different settings.

One of the major goals of the current phase of the project is understanding those differences more clearly. The research team is conducting a statewide survey of law enforcement agencies to better understand how traffic stop data are collected and reported, what barriers agencies face, and where infrastructure gaps remain. At the same time, an advisory board composed of law enforcement leaders, state partners, and researchers is helping guide the work to ensure that recommendations are practical and responsive to Nebraska's varied policing environments.

What works for one agency may not work for another. Larger agencies may benefit from tools like dashboards or other data visualization platforms that allow them to monitor traffic stop patterns and conduct internal analyses. Smaller or rural agencies, where the number of stops may be relatively low, may need different forms of support, such as simplified reporting processes, technical assistance, or system upgrades. In practice, this means support must be tailored to each agency's

unique challenges rather than applied uniformly across the state.

That flexibility is one of the Connecticut Model's greatest strengths. Its emphasis on partnership encourages researchers and agencies to work together to identify what is feasible and useful within each local environment (Ross et al., 2020). In Nebraska, this has meant focusing not only on data analysis, but also on building the infrastructure and capacity needed to make the work sustainable.

In addition to improving data systems, the project supports training opportunities for law enforcement agencies focused on officer wellness, trauma-informed policing, and implicit bias. These trainings are designed to support officers while also strengthening fair and safe traffic enforcement practices. They also align with Nebraska's continuing education requirements, helping connect data-informed insights to everyday policing practice. The goal is to ensure that what agencies learn from traffic stop data can meaningfully shape how officers engage with the public.

At its core, this work is about more than data. It is about helping agencies better understand how traffic enforcement operates in their communities and identifying opportunities to strengthen consistency, transparency, and public trust. The Connecticut Model provides a strong foundation, but implementing it in a state like Nebraska requires adaptation, patience, and ongoing collaboration.

Efforts to improve traffic stop data are often framed as a first step toward identifying disparities. However, Nebraska's experience shows that an equally important step comes before that, namely building systems strong enough to support reliable analysis in the first place. That work is ongoing. Creating a clearer understanding of fairness and equity in traffic enforcement is incremental, shaped by local context, and dependent on continued

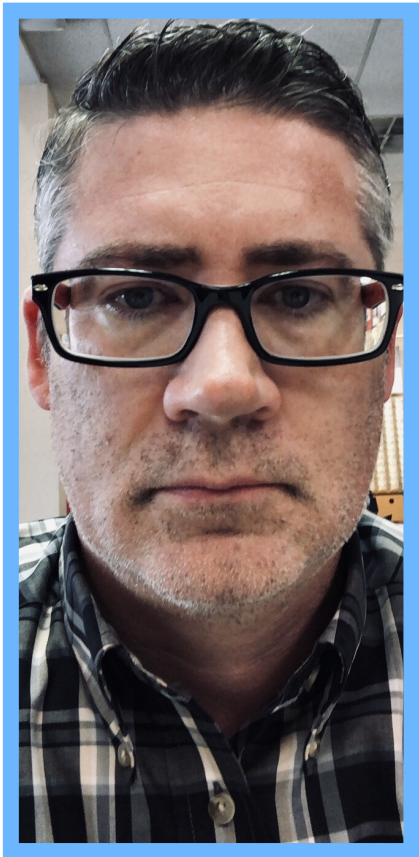
investment in both people and systems.

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Dr. Mark Foxall currently serves as a member of the faculty of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), School of Criminology and Criminal Justice (SCCJ). He holds a Ph.D. in criminal justice, a Master of Public Administration, and a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice. Dr. Foxall assumed the university faculty position after he retired as the Director of the Douglas County Department of Corrections in Omaha, Nebraska. He also served as a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Director of Project Impact with the United States Attorney's Office, District of Nebraska; and a police officer in Omaha, Nebraska. Dr. Foxall is also a graduate of Leadership Omaha and a Certified Jail Manager as recognized by the American Jail Association. Dr. Foxall has engaged in jail related consulting work for the American Correctional Association across the country as well as in the United Arab Emirates and Germany. In collaboration with his university and the American Jail Association (AJA), he also hosts the Jail Executive Institute (JEI), a national jail leadership seminar. Dr. Foxall has also developed and delivered a variety of training related to jail leadership, management, culture, operations, diversity and mental health.



Region One - Northeastern Association of Criminal Justice Sciences (NEACJS)

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Theme: TBD

Abstract Deadline: June 15, 2026

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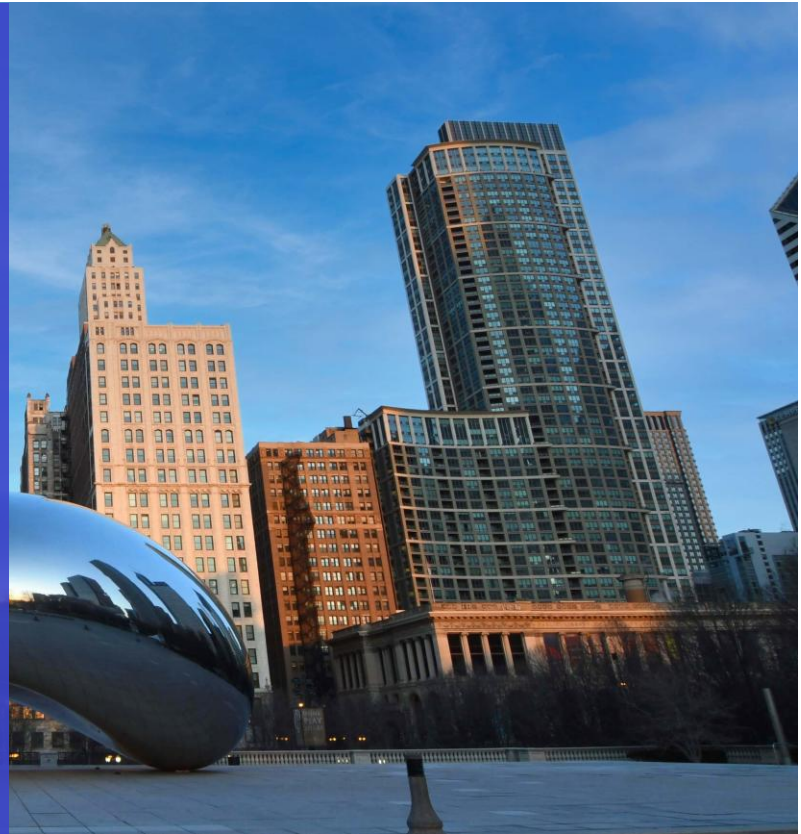




Annual Meeting

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Criminal Justice Association

**September 24 & 25,
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Membership & Registration

Visit the MCJA [membership website](#) to **renew your membership** – which runs October 2025 to September 2026 – as well as **register** for the annual conference. The preregistration discount rate ends on September 15th.

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<https://www.mcja.org/#/>

Conference: September 24th & 25th, 2026 @ Chicago, IL

Hotel: Aloft Chicago Mag Mile

Abstract Deadline: TBD for 2027

Award Submissions: TBD for 2027

Awards: Student Travel Scholarships, Student Paper Competitions, Poster Competitions, Practitioner Award, Tom Castellano Award

To have regional information included in *ACJS*
today, please email sgavin@sbu.edu by the
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Arkansas - Arizona - New Mexico - Oklahoma – Texas

Preliminary Conference Schedule

Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice Annual Conference
"Transforming Criminal Justice: Technology, Data, and Artificial Intelligence"
October 6 – 10, 2026
AC Hotel Fort Worth Downtown
101 West 5th Street, Fort Worth, Texas

The Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice (SWACJ) invites submissions for the 2026 Annual Conference, themed "Transforming Criminal Justice: Technology, Data, and Artificial Intelligence." Conference registration information is available on the SWACJ website – www.SWACJ.com. We ask all participants to consider staying at the conference hotel and to join us for all activities. The AC Hotel by Marriott Fort Worth Downtown offers a modern, centrally located venue with convenient access to restaurants, cultural attractions, and entertainment in the heart of Fort Worth. We look forward to your participation and to advancing the conversation on the future of criminal justice.

Day 1: Tuesday, October 6, 2026 – Planning Team arrival and conference setup

Day 2: Wednesday, October 7, 2026:

9:00 - 11:00 A.M. - Executive Board Meeting

11:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M. – Registration/Check-In

12:30 – 2:30 P.M. - Quiz Bowl (Undergraduate)

2:30 – 3: 45 Pm – Roundtable and Paper Presentations

3:45 – 4:00 P.M. – BREAK

4:00 – 5:15 P.M. – Paper Presentations

6:00 – 9:00 P.M. – Past President's Reception

Day 3: Thursday, October 8, 2026

8:00 – 12:00 P.M. – Registration/Check-in

8:00 – 12: 00 P.M.- CSI Competition (Students)

9:00 - 10:15 A.M. – Paper Presentations

10:15 – 10:30 A.M. – BREAK

10:30 – 11:45 A.M. – Paper Presentations

12:00 – 1:30 P.M. – Conference Luncheon & Keynote

1:30 - 5:00 P.M. – Registration/Check-in

2:30 - 3:45 P.M. – Roundtable/Paper Presentations

3:45 – 4:00 P.M. – BREAK

4:00 – 5:15 P.M. – Paper Presentations

6:00 - 9:00 P.M. – Poster Session (with Networking)

Day 4: Friday, October 9, 2026

9:00 – 10:15 A.M. – Roundtable/Paper Presentations

10:15 – 10:30 A.M. - BREAK

10:30 – 12:00 P.M. – Awards & General Business Meeting

Day 5: Saturday, October 10, 2026

Conference wrap-up. Planning Team departs

NOTE: The Detailed Conference Schedule will be available by October 1, 2026



Negotiating Boundaries: Social Movements, Race, & Immigration Enforcement in the United States Race Relations and Social Movements

By: *Anastasios G. Goulos*

Abstract

This research analyzes how immigration enforcement shapes everyday experiences of safety, belonging, and community participation in the United States, as well as how local social movements respond to enforcement practices. Drawing on sociological scholarship on migration, race, and contentious politics, the study uses a qualitative research design centered on semi-structured interviews with adult participants connected to the University of St. Francis community in Joliet, Illinois. The paper argues that immigration enforcement functions not only as a policy apparatus but also as a social force that influences trust, visibility, and public life. The discussion highlights recurring themes of fear, conditional belonging, limited institutional responsiveness, solidarity, and polarization, while also showing how community organizations and advocacy networks can create support, information sharing, and collective dialogue. The study concludes that more just and effective responses to immigration conflict depend on de-escalation, institutional accountability, and inclusive forms of civic engagement.

Drawing on the foundational work of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow on social movements, Doug McAdam's political process theory, and Paul

Almeida's analysis of immigrant-based movements, this study situates immigrant rights activism within broader frameworks of collective action and state response (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2004; Mora et al., 2018). The research also engages with Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss's work on labor and immigrant mobilization, Douglas Massey's migration theory, and John Solomos's scholarship on race and ethnicity (Milkman & Voss, 2004; Massey et al., 1993; Murji & Solomos, 2015).

Introduction

Immigration enforcement occupies a central place in contemporary debates over citizenship, race, legality, and national belonging in the United States. Although immigration policy is often discussed in legal or administrative terms, its effects are deeply social, shaping how multi-generational and ethnic communities interpret safety, membership, and public participation. At the same time, social movements have played a critical role in contesting exclusionary enforcement practices, expanding political visibility, and redefining the boundaries of who is recognized as entitled to dignity and voice. This study examines the relationship between immigration enforcement and local social movement response through a sociological lens that centers lived experience, collective action, and institutional power. In doing so, it asks how enforcement is perceived at the neighborhood level, how communities interpret conflicts between institutional practices and local needs, and how movement-based responses influence public dialogue. By bringing together scholarships on migration, race, and contentious politics, this project seeks to show that immigration enforcement is not merely a state function but also a social process that reshapes everyday belonging and the possibilities of democratic participation.

This inquiry is also shaped by the researcher's own family history. As a member of a first-generation Greek American family, the researcher is connected to the immigrant experience through parents who arrived in the United States in 1969 with fear, uncertainty, isolation, and very little money, yet with a determination to pursue the American Dream. This personal and familial background does not substitute for participants' experiences, but it informs the researcher's sensitivity to questions of migration, belonging, sacrifice, opportunity, and the social meanings attached to becoming part of American civic life.

The Violence of Both Sides

A central dimension of this research is the examination of coercion and escalation involving both institutional actors and social movements. On one side, immigration enforcement agencies have sometimes employed aggressive tactics—such as raids, detentions, and deportations—that can traumatize individuals and fragment communities. These practices, often justified as necessary for national security or law enforcement, may intensify tensions and provoke resistance (Nicholls, 2019; Massey et al., 1993).

Conversely, although social movements and affected communities primarily advocate for rights and justice through peaceful protest and mobilization, some forms of action may become confrontational or disruptive. These can include civil disobedience, direct action, and, in rare cases, clashes with authorities. Such responses are often rooted in frustration with perceived injustice and the absence of institutional responsiveness, but they may also contribute to cycles of escalation and mutual distrust (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2004).

This dual dynamic underscores the need for policy frameworks that prioritize de-escalation, dialogue, and restorative approaches. Recognizing the harms

associated with both state and non-state escalation is essential for developing responses that foster trust, protect human rights, and promote social integration.

The Limits of Violence in Immigration Reform

While both institutional actors and social movements have, at times, relied on coercive or confrontational tactics, the evidence suggests that violence is ultimately ineffective—and often counterproductive—when pursued as a path to lasting immigration reform. Aggressive enforcement measures such as raids, detentions, and deportations may generate fear and mistrust, fragment communities, and intensify tensions rather than promote compliance or integration. Likewise, confrontational movement tactics, though sometimes rooted in justified frustration, can provoke backlash, reinforce negative stereotypes, and weaken broader public support for reform (Nicholls, 2019; McAdam et al., 2001).

Research on collective action and contentious politics suggests that durable policy change is more likely to emerge from strategies that emphasize nonviolent mobilization, coalition-building, and negotiation (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2004; Milkman & Voss, 2004). Violence tends to entrench division, reproduce cycles of retaliation, and divert attention from substantive policy debate. In the context of immigration, it can also obstruct efforts to build broad-based alliances and engage policymakers in meaningful dialogue.

Accordingly, this study emphasizes the importance of de-escalation, restorative justice, and inclusive policymaking. By centering nonviolent approaches and engaging affected communities in the reform process, policymakers and community actors may be better positioned to advance responses that are both effective and just.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

- **De-escalation and dialogue:** Policy responses should prioritize communication, conflict resolution, and reduced reliance on coercive enforcement strategies.
- **Restorative justice:** Restorative practices may help address harm, rebuild trust, and interrupt cycles of escalation.
- **Inclusive policymaking:** Engaging affected communities and movement actors in policy design can strengthen legitimacy and responsiveness.
- **Human rights protections:** Policy frameworks should center the dignity, safety, and rights of all individuals, regardless of immigration status.

Through qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and policy analysis, this study aims to contribute to sociological discussions of race, migration, state power, collective action, and institutional conflict. Its broader objective is to identify evidence-informed strategies for fostering more just, peaceful, and inclusive social relations within ongoing debates over immigration enforcement.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design centered on semi-structured, in-depth interviews. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the project examined lived experience, meaning-making, and perceptions of belonging, conflict, and collective response—dimensions that are not easily captured through survey instruments alone. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask consistent core questions across participants while also leaving space for clarification, follow-up, and participant-led elaboration. The design was especially well suited to research on immigration enforcement and community response because it captured nuance, ambivalence, and variation in how individuals interpret the relationship between

institutional power, racialized social boundaries, and local mobilization.

Seven adult participants were selected through purposive sampling from the University of St. Francis community and the broader Joliet, Illinois community, as depicted in **Figures 2 and 3**. As part of the recruitment process, an email invitation was sent to prospective participants explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the opportunity to take part in a semi-structured interview. Interested individuals were invited to respond to the email if they wished to be considered for participation. Participants were recruited because they were positioned to offer relevant community-based perspectives on immigration enforcement, belonging, and local social movement response. Selection focused on adult participants who were second-, third-, or fourth-generation U.S. citizens, as well as community members whose professional or personal experiences connected them to the study setting. The final sample included one male immigrant business owner in his late fifties; one male University of St. Francis staff member in his mid-to-late fifties; one 20-year-old female University of St. Francis senior; one 22-year-old male University of St. Francis graduate; one female immigrant business professional in her thirties; one female business owner in her early fifties; and one female law enforcement professional in her late forties. The sample size of seven participants was appropriate because the study was exploratory and qualitative rather than statistical or generalizable. In small-scale qualitative research, a limited sample allows for more detailed, in-depth interviews and closer attention to participants' narratives, meanings, and contextual experiences. The goal was not to measure population-wide attitudes, but to identify recurring themes, local perceptions, and interpretive patterns related to immigration enforcement and community response. Seven participants also provided enough variation across age, gender,

institutional affiliation, and professional background to support meaningful thematic comparison while remaining manageable within the scope, timeline, and ethical obligations of the project. Because of this design, the sample was best understood as sufficient for generating rich narrative data and preliminary analytical insight rather than for producing statistically representative conclusions. The interview questions were appropriate to the project because each one maps directly onto a core analytical dimension in the literature: the first examines how enforcement presence shapes everyday safety and belonging; the second explores perceived tensions between institutional enforcement and community needs, including whether institutions respond or remain unchanged; and the third investigates how local social movements or community organizations respond to enforcement practices and how those responses are interpreted by community members. Together, these questions operationalize the study’s central interest in the intersection of state power, race, migration, and collective action. All interviews were conducted in accordance with Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) standards for human subjects’ research.

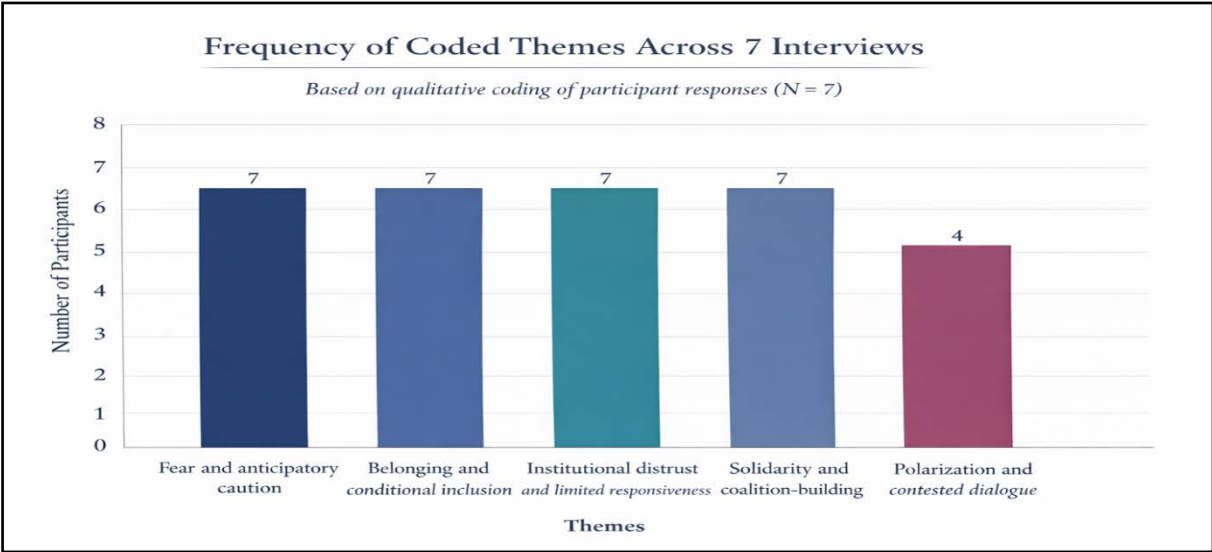


Figure 1
Frequency of Coded Themes Across 7 Interviews. The figure displays the frequency with which five major themes appeared across participant responses: fear and anticipatory caution, belonging and conditional inclusion, institutional distrust and limited responsiveness, solidarity and coalition-building, polarization and contested dialogue.

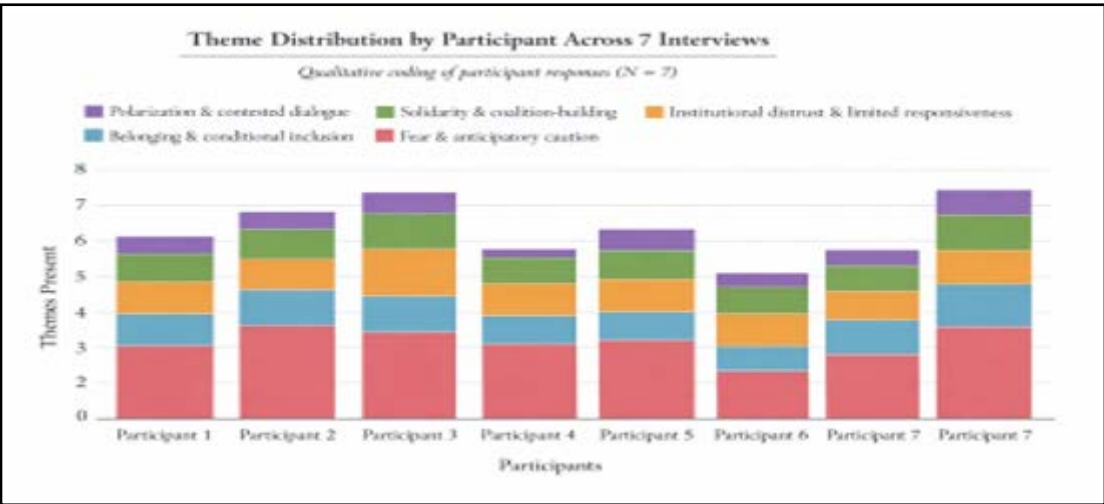


Figure 2
Theme Distribution by Participant Across 7 Interviews. The figure presents a stacked bar chart showing the distribution of coded themes across Participant 1 through Participant 7, including fear and anticipatory caution, belonging and conditional inclusion, institutional distrust and limited responsiveness, solidarity and coalition-building, and polarization and contested dialogue.

The interview questions were as follows:

1: How, if at all, has the presence of immigration enforcement agencies in your neighborhood influenced your day-to-day sense of safety, belonging, or comfort?

A: If you feel comfortable sharing, can you describe a specific experience or moment that illustrates this impact?

2: Can you describe a time when you perceived a tension or conflict between immigration enforcement practices and the needs of your community?

A: To your knowledge, did that incident lead to any change in how institutions responded to your community's needs, or did things remain the same?

3: In what ways, if any, have you seen local social movements or community organizations respond to immigration enforcement tactics, and how did those responses affect the broader community?

A: Looking back on those responses, would you describe the dialogue they generated as mostly constructive, mostly harmful, mixed, or something else?

Prior to each interview, participants received a clear explanation of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the expected duration of the interview, and their right to decline any question or withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained before data collection began. Interviews were conducted in a private setting, and confidentiality was protected by using pseudonyms or coded identifiers in notes, transcripts, and any subsequent reporting. Audio files, notes, and transcripts were stored securely and accessed only by the research team. Because the topic may involve stressful or emotionally sensitive experiences, the interviewer used a trauma-informed, non-leading approach, reminded

participants that they may pause or stop the interview at any time, and provided appropriate support or referral information if a participant became distressed. This protocol is designed to protect participant autonomy, privacy, and well-being while maintaining ethical standards consistent with IRB expectations for minimal-risk qualitative research.

Because qualitative research is shaped by the researcher's social position, institutional affiliation, and interpretive framework, reflexivity was treated as an integral part of the analytic process. The researcher's affiliation with the University of St. Francis may facilitate access and rapport with participants, but it may also shape how questions are received and how participants frame their responses. To address these dynamics, the study incorporates reflexive memoing throughout data collection, memoing, and analysis, careful attention to how assumptions inform coding decisions, and ongoing consideration of how the researcher's proximity to the study setting may influence interpretation. This approach is intended to strengthen transparency, analytic rigor, and awareness of the relational nature of qualitative inquiry.

Personal Reflection

This research is personally meaningful because it is connected to the researcher's own family story and understanding of migration. As a member of a first-generation Greek American family, the researcher grew up with an awareness that immigration is not only a matter of law or policy but also a deeply human experience shaped by fear, sacrifice, hope, and perseverance. The researcher's parents arrived in the United States in 1969 scared, alone, and with very little money, yet they carried with them a determination to build a better life and pursue the American Dream. Their experience provides an important personal context for this study because it

reminds the researcher that migration often involves both vulnerability and courage.

At the same time, this personal background requires careful reflection. The researcher's family history does not represent the experiences of all immigrants, nor does it replace the voices of the participants in this study. Instead, it serves as a source of sensitivity and responsibility. It encourages the researcher to listen carefully, avoid assumptions, and recognize that immigration enforcement can affect people differently depending on race, generation, class, legal status, profession, and community context. This reflection, therefore, strengthens the study's commitment to ethical qualitative research by acknowledging how the researcher's perspective may shape interpretation while also emphasizing the importance of centering participants' own accounts.

Ultimately, the researcher's background reinforces the central purpose of the project: to examine immigration enforcement not simply as an institutional practice, but as a social force that shapes belonging, trust, dignity, and participation in community life. Remembering the struggles and hopes of a family that came to the United States seeking opportunity deepens the researcher's commitment to approaching this topic with empathy, scholarly rigor, and respect for the complexity of immigrant and immigrant-descended experiences.

Identifying Gaps in Literature Review

Existing scholarship on social movements, migration, and race provides a strong theoretical foundation for this study, but it does not always connect macro-level analysis to the everyday perceptions captured by the revised interview questions. Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam explain how political opportunities, contention, and mobilizing structures shape collective action, while Almeida

and Nicholls show how immigrant rights activism develops in response to exclusionary policy environments (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2004; Mora et al., 2018; Nicholls, 2019). Massey's work on migration theory and Murji and Solomos's scholarship on race and ethnicity help explain why immigration enforcement is experienced not only as a legal process but also as a racialized social boundary that affects belonging, identity, and community membership (Massey et al., 1993; Murji & Solomos, 2015). These bodies of literature directly inform the study's first two interview domains by framing enforcement as both an institutional practice and a lived social condition.

At the same time, there remains a gap in research that links participants' firsthand accounts of enforcement, institutional responsiveness, and local movement activity to practical policy implications. Milkman and Voss highlight the importance of organizing, labor, and coalition-building, while more recent work on social movements and social policy underscores how mobilization can shape public discourse and institutional change (Milkman & Voss, 2004; Ishkanian, 2022). The third interview question addresses this gap by asking how participants interpret local social movement responses and whether the resulting dialogue is perceived as constructive, harmful, or mixed. By pairing established theories of contention and migration with qualitative interviews focused on belonging, institutional conflict, and community response, this study aims to bridge abstract sociological theory with grounded evidence about how enforcement regimes are negotiated in everyday life. In doing so, it contributes to scholarship on immigrant heritage, racialization, and movement-based policy change while offering a more direct empirical basis for recommendations centered on de-escalation, restorative practice, and inclusive policymaking.

Discussion

The interview data suggest that immigration enforcement is experienced not solely as a discrete legal intervention but as an ongoing social condition that shapes perceptions of trust, mobility, safety, and belonging. Participants consistently described enforcement as producing anticipatory fear that extended beyond direct contact and influenced broader neighborhood routines, public participation, and interpersonal relations. As shown in **Figure 1**, these patterns converged around recurring themes of fear, conditional belonging, institutional distrust, solidarity, and polarization. **Figure 2** further demonstrates how these themes were distributed across individual participants. This finding is consistent with prior scholarship that conceptualizes migration control as a boundary-making process through which legality, race, and social inclusion are negotiated in everyday life (Massey et al., 1993; Murji & Solomos, 2015). Similarly, participants' emphasis on indirect effects—such as social withdrawal, reduced visibility, and altered patterns of community engagement—supports research showing that exclusionary enforcement climates reverberate beyond those directly targeted and affect wider patterns of collective life (Mora et al., 2018; Nicholls, 2019).

A second important pattern concerns the perceived gap between community needs and institutional responsiveness. Although some participants acknowledged efforts by schools, churches, and local organizations to provide reassurance or practical support, most described formal institutional change as limited, symbolic, or incomplete. This pattern reflects key insights from political process and contentious politics scholarship, which note that institutions often respond selectively to grievances while preserving underlying structures of authority (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly, 2004). At the same time, the interviews highlight the importance of grassroots and community-based responses. Legal

clinics, know-your-rights campaigns, faith-based partnerships, advocacy events, and mutual-aid efforts were frequently described as mitigating isolation and strengthening solidarity. As illustrated in **Figure 4**, these dynamics can be understood as relational and cyclical: enforcement contributes to fear, reduced participation, and institutional distrust, while community organizations and social movements create alternative pathways of support, advocacy, and public dialogue.

Figure 5 complements this pattern by summarizing both the coded thematic frequencies and the distribution of dialogue assessments across participants. These findings echo research on labor-community alliances and the policy significance of collective mobilization, while also underscoring that movement-generated dialogue may be simultaneously constructive and polarizing (Milkman & Voss, 2004; Ishkanian, 2022). Taken together, the discussion suggests that immigration enforcement and social movement response should be understood relationally: enforcement generates not only legal consequences but also social conditions to which communities respond through contested but meaningful forms of collective action.

Illustrative Interview Excerpts

The illustrative interviews further demonstrate how participants articulated these dynamics in their own words. One participant described enforcement as creating “an indirect but persistent sense of unease,” while another observed that “belonging is unevenly distributed,” especially when some families feel compelled to avoid visibility in public spaces. A third participant emphasized that institutions often offered reassurance without deeper transformation, noting that “there was more discussion than actual change.” Others underscored the role of collective response: one respondent referred to “legal clinics, information sessions, and solidarity,” while another explained

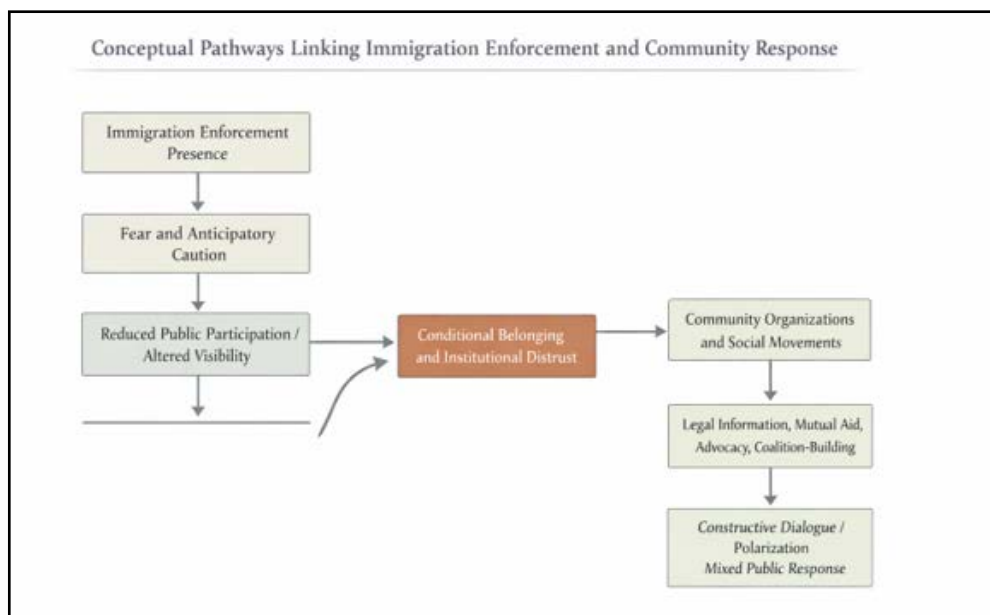
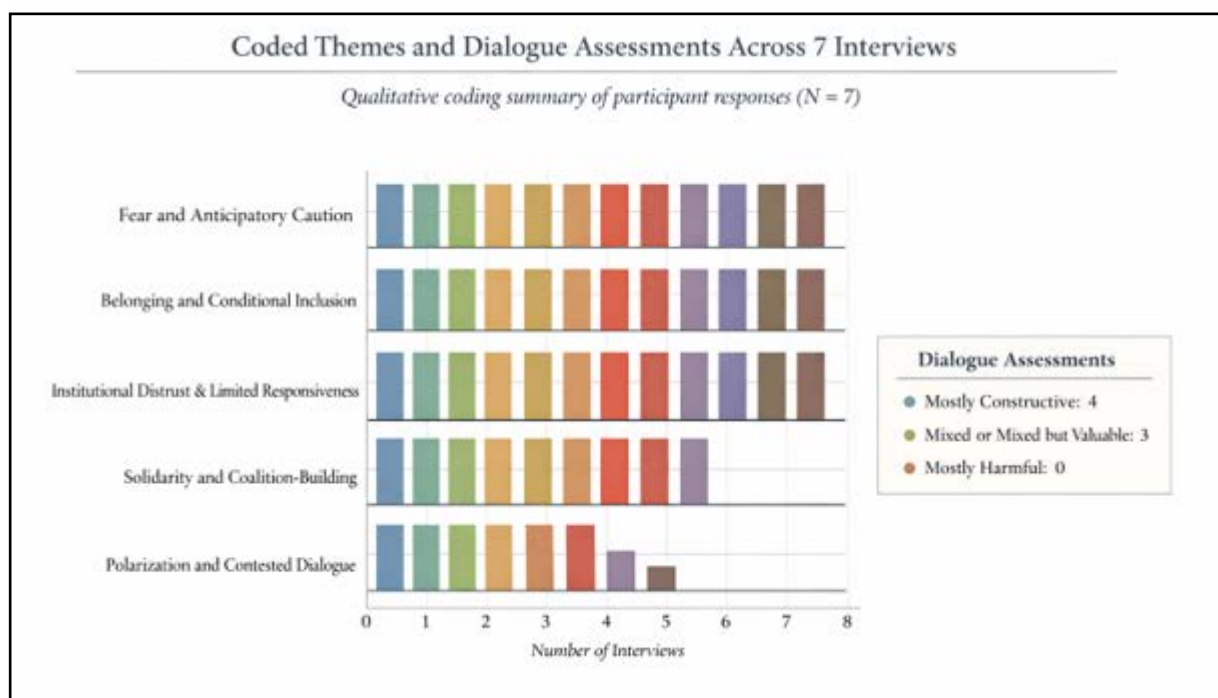


Figure 4 Conceptual Pathways Linking Immigration Enforcement and Community Response. The figure presents a conceptual flow diagram illustrating how immigration enforcement presence may contribute to fear and anticipatory caution, reduced public participation, conditional belonging, and institutional distrust, while also showing how community organizations and social movements can generate legal support, mutual aid, advocacy, and varied forms of public dialogue.

Figure 5 Coded Themes and Dialogue Assessments Across 7 Interviews. The figure summarizes the frequency of five coded themes across participant responses and includes a companion breakdown of dialogue assessments categorized as mostly constructive, mixed or mixed but valuable, and mostly harmful.



that advocacy efforts made immigration “a human and community issue rather than just a legal one.” Finally, one participant described the dialogue generated by movement activity as “mixed but valuable,” capturing the broader finding that contested public conversations can still produce visibility, accountability, and civic engagement.

Coded Thematic Analysis

A preliminary coding of the seven illustrative interviews suggests five recurring themes. **Fear and anticipatory caution** appeared in nearly every account, often expressed through avoidance of public events, reduced mobility, or heightened vigilance in everyday spaces. **Belonging and conditional inclusion** emerged as participants reflected on how enforcement practices shaped

who was perceived as fully welcome in neighborhood life. **Institutional distrust and limited responsiveness** were another common theme, as respondents often distinguished between supportive language from schools, churches, or local leaders and the absence of deeper policy or structural change. **Solidarity and coalition-building** surfaced in descriptions of legal clinics, know-your-rights campaigns, mutual aid, public education, and collaboration among churches, student groups, and community organizations. Finally, **polarization and contested dialogue** appeared where movement responses increased awareness but also revealed competing definitions of safety, legality, and community responsibility. Taken together, these themes indicate that enforcement is experienced not simply as a legal phenomenon but as a social force that shapes trust, public participation, and the meaning of collective belonging.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it relies on a small, purposive sample and is intended to generate exploratory insight rather than statistically generalizable findings. Second, the interview material presented in this study demonstrates the analytical potential of the research design rather than reporting actual participant data. Third, the focus on members of a single university community in one geographic area limits the extent to which the analysis captures variation across regions, institutional contexts, or immigrant-origin groups. Future research could extend this design by incorporating actual interview data from a broader sample; comparing responses across multiple communities; and examining how generation, race, class, religion, or local policy context shape perceptions of enforcement and collective response.

Participant Summary by Theme

Participant	Safety/Belonging	Institutional Conflict	Movement Response	Dialogue Assessment
1	Neighborhood tension; reduced openness; fear affected broader comfort.	Community needed support, but enforcement climate discouraged help-seeking.	Legal clinics, information sessions, marches, solidarity-building.	Mostly constructive.
2	Emotional distance; awareness that belonging is uneven.	Trust undermined by fear of visibility in public spaces.	Know-your-rights campaigns and faith-based partnerships.	Mixed, leaning constructive.
3	Uncertainty in everyday life; isolation for families and children.	Inclusive institutions were undercut by enforcement fears.	Support networks, transportation help, legal referrals.	Mostly constructive.
4	Neighborhood felt divided; safety interpreted differently by residents.	Public trust is weakened by suspicion and disagreement.	Marches, petitions, educational forums.	Mixed.
5	Belonging felt fragile; public safety varied by social position.	Tension between enforcement and family stability.	Student, church, and advocacy collaboration; education plus support.	Mostly constructive.
6	Invisible pressure; lower participation in community events.	Institutions sought engagement, but families felt safer remaining invisible.	Resource-sharing spaces and public education.	Constructive overall.
7	Fear spread socially; routines and mobility shaped by possibility of enforcement.	Relational community needs conflicted with enforcement pressures.	Public education, advocacy, and mutual aid.	Mixed but valuable.

Additional research might also explore longitudinal change to assess whether social movement strategies produce durable institutional shifts over time or primarily influence public discourse in the short term.

Conclusion

This study argues that immigration enforcement should be understood not only as a policy apparatus but also as a social force that shapes everyday belonging, institutional trust, and local collective action. The illustrative interview data suggests that enforcement affects communities indirectly as well as directly by generating fear, limiting participation, and deepening uncertainty about who can move comfortably through public life. At the same time, the findings point to the significance of local social movements, faith-based organizations, and community networks in creating forms of support, information-sharing, and coalition-building that partially counteract isolation. Yet the study also shows that these responses unfold within contested public debates, where solidarity and polarization can coexist. Taken together, the project

The researcher’s first-generation Greek American family background further underscores the personal and scholarly significance of this study. The experience of parents arriving in the United States in 1969 with fear, uncertainty, isolation, and limited financial resources reflects the vulnerability, hope, and determination that often accompany migration. While this family history is distinct from the experiences of the participants and does not stand in for them, it deepens the researcher’s awareness of how immigration is lived not only through policy categories but also through memory, sacrifice, aspiration, and the search for belonging. In this sense, the study is informed by a personal understanding that the American Dream is shaped by both opportunity and struggle. Linking this background to the research reinforces the importance of approaching immigration enforcement with empathy, historical consciousness, and a commitment to policies and community practices that protect dignity while strengthening trust, inclusion, and democratic participation.

Selection Stage	Process / Criteria	Resulting Participants
Recruitment outreach	Email invitations were sent to prospective adult participants from the University of St. Francis community and the broader Joliet, Illinois community.	Prospective participants were invited to respond voluntarily if interested.
Sampling strategy	Purposive sampling was used to identify participants with relevant community-based perspectives on immigration enforcement, belonging, and local social movement response.	Seven adult participants were selected for semi-structured interviews.
Selection focus	Participants were selected from second-, third-, or fourth-generation U.S. citizens and community members whose professional or personal experiences connected them to the study setting.	The sample included university-affiliated participants, business owners/professionals, and a law enforcement professional.

Figure 3
Note. This chart summarizes the recruitment and selection process used to identify seven adult participants for the qualitative interview portion of the study. Prospective participants were contacted through an email invitation, screened through purposive sampling based on their connection to the University of St. Francis community and the broader Joliet, Illinois community, and selected for their ability to provide relevant perspectives on immigration enforcement, belonging, and local community response.

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Dr. Anastasios Goulos brings nearly three decades of law enforcement experience from the Cook County Sheriff's Office K9 Unit and the Will County Forest Preserve District Police Department where he played a key role in major narcotics and currency seizures and assisted in the apprehension of violent offenders, while maintaining accountability and transparency to the community he served. In addition to his policing career, he is a higher education professional with more than 14 years of experience and currently serves as an assistant professor of criminal and social justice (CSJU) at the University of St. Francis.

His academic work emphasizes mentoring, advising, criminal justice research, and both undergraduate and graduate instruction, integrating practical law enforcement experience with contemporary justice reform principles. Now entering his third year at the University of St. Francis, Dr. Goulos is actively researching restorative justice, domestic violence victimization rates, and immigration enforcement, about which he is guest speaker at Yale University's Annual Bouchet Conference on Diversity & Graduate Education. His goal is to develop this research into an undergraduate textbook on policing, designed to support a diverse population of domestic violence survivors and students in criminal justice education.

Dr. Goulos has contributed strategically to both law enforcement and academic institutions and is committed to advancing experiential learning that balances theory and practice. He's the editor of the ACJS Police Forum Newsletter and in 2025, he was recognized as Advisor of the Year by Alpha Phi Sigma, the National Criminal Justice Honor Society.



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