

# Rethinking the Interface between Mental Illness, Criminal Justice and Academia

*William Wesley Johnson*

Punishment and treatment don't occur within a vacuum. Responses in the justice system affect the mental health system, hospitals, clinics, and the welfare system. These systems are inextricably bound to each other. This paper, drawn from the 2009 Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) Presidential Address, discusses issues regarding the criminalization of mental illness, fiscal crises, and three deinstitutionalization movements. Particular attention is given to the role of academia in reshaping the criminal justice system during the current fiscal crisis.

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Criminal justice academics and criminologists live in a unique world. Many citizens don't understand academia and they don't really know how criminologists go about doing their work. In my lifetime, criminal justice and criminology have emerged as a distinct discipline, providing demonstrable evidence that collectively we are a unique field of study (Frost & Clear, 2007) guided by scientific principles that influence criminal justice policy.

There are numerous examples where evidence from the academic community has guided and influenced policy. Too numerous to list here, such examples include innovations in policing, sentencing, probation and parole, drug treatment, therapeutic courts, and strategies to deal with offenders with mental

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