

INTRODUCTION FROM THE ISSUE EDITORS

Marking 25 Years of Convict Criminology by Building a New Table: Transformative Social Justice, Inclusion and Activism as Part of a Larger Social Movement

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In the last 25 years, the social climate within the United States and globally has shifted and changed in many different ways. While some progress has been made within the world of system-affected people, such as the establishment of numerous resourced organizations that support academics that have experienced criminalization (e.g. Underground Scholars in the University of California system, California State University's Project Rebound, the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network, the Huskies Post Prison Pathways at the University of Washington – Tacoma, etc.), we still face oppression. For example, in recent years, formerly incarcerated (FI) students have challenged exclusion from graduate programs from major universities that have claimed that they support FI students and perspectives. In the last 10 years, FI students have filed complaints with universities to challenge their exclusion from research projects on the basis of their race and legal backgrounds. Many of our conversations have evolved, however many issues remain the same. Amongst many ongoing actions to amplify our voices, create awareness for our cause, and fight stigmatization, some of us now spend more time working on prison abolitionism, racism, and classism in higher education and the criminal legal system, while actively building equal rights initiatives.

Yet, a social movement has begun, a movement of System Affected Academics (Tietjen, forthcoming), and Convict Criminology (CC) is part of this movement. The system affected academic (SAA) movement is comprised of the cumulative actions of multiple organized groups of justice-involved individuals in academic roles, working towards justice and equality focused societal change for fellow system affected people. The adjective *affected*, meaning acted upon or influenced, was not chosen out of convenience, but out of a sense of the breadth of variation in experiences and interpretations that carceral-impacted individuals describe in regards to how the criminal justice system interacts with their lives. The advocacy, activism, and activist-scholarship of system affected groups affiliated with higher education are impacting change, and we are taking seats at the tables of justice policy organizations. More importantly, system affected

academics are building their own table, by creating their own structures and networks of systemic change. By engaging in transformative social justice, purposive efforts of inclusion and activism, we are building a *new table* as part of a larger social movement.

CC at twenty-five years is a story of stepping up to cultural, social, and policy shifts within both the criminal legal system and society. In the tough-on-crime harshness of the 1990s, founding members and supporters of CC began having conversations. Amongst these system-contacted scholars and aspiring scholars, they shared that their research and academic voices were being ignored and/or not taken seriously by the academy. Since the term “convict” was a pejorative term being used to stigmatize them, they decided to take this term back as an act of language reclamation, thus calling themselves Convict Criminology. Yet, the social and cultural climate of the United States has shifted in the last few decades, allowing for a more rehabilitative perspective within the criminal legal system. This has perhaps allowed CC scholars to engage with further transformative work more successfully. New CC scholars see the carceral system from both similar and different perspectives (more social acceptance and resources for system-contacted people) compared to the first generation CC scholars of a quarter century ago. Some CC scholars are also discussing discontinuing the use of the term convict to bring our discipline more in alignment with current cultural norms that value person first language usage as a means to overcome the impacts of labeling and stigmatization. As mentioned above, pervasive systemic discrimination and bias that system-contacted people face is still here. However, decades of working for change within these oppressive systems has provided our movement a knowledge collective from which we can draw upon.

This special issue highlights the advocacy for the strong and growing presence of women within CC, with women comprising approximately 50% of membership within the American Society of Criminology (ASC) Division of Convict Criminology that was formed in 2020. For example, Dr. Alison Cox and Dr. Michelle Malkin, longstanding CC members who are both contributing authors to this issue, address the “struggle for inclusion” that persists in CC in their new *Critical Criminology* article (2023), “Feminist Convict Criminology for the Future”. As women’s incarceration has outgrown the pace of men’s incarceration in recent decades (Carson,

2021; Kajstura & Sawyer, 2023), their experiences in correctional settings are also unique from that of their male counterparts (DeHart & Lynch, 2021). Cox and Malkin (2023) note the importance of incorporating feminist epistemology and theory into the discipline to help shape a more diverse and inclusive CC. Feminist criminology has provided insight into the lived experience of women who are criminalized, as well as individuals with multiple oppressed/stigmatized statuses. Feminist *convict* criminology is one method to boost scholarship documenting the unique, intersectional, and shared experiences of formerly incarcerated and system-affected people in terms of age, race, gender and gender identity, sexuality, and nationality.

Malkin and Cox open this issue through their ethnographic analysis, which provides a first-hand account of how one woman experienced her incarceration at a women's federal medical center. Their research provides insight into both women's and LGBTQ advocacy efforts from a CC perspective. In "Here She Comes: Women of Convict Criminology", Dr. Denise Woodall provides a powerful exploration of CC women's struggle to be heard within "malestream" criminology. Finally, Dr. J. Renee Trombley engages in the feminist methodological tool of reflexivity to provide an auto-ethnographic analysis of identity and intersectionality within the CC perspective.

This issue also demonstrates the strength that is fostered through activism. After twenty-five years, it is important to recognize that activism within CC is rooted in a scholarly history of empowerment and overcoming adversity. Dr. Jennifer Ortiz suggests, rightfully so, that our activism needs to move outside academia and beyond the "ivory tower" to truly make both a difference and an impact. This is imperative in regard to the current social climate we find ourselves in, as well as the larger social movement as a whole. In her piece, she calls for the need for collective activism among CC scholars and those involved with the discipline. Relatedly, Dr. Jeffrey Ian Ross and Dr. Grant Tietjen provide both a framing and understanding of activism within CC to date. Dr. Daniel Kavish uses quantitative analysis to answer questions about who becomes labeled and what effects this has on the development of criminality, through an interactionist lens. The discussion on the future of CC is again taken up in the *Responses* to this issue of the *JPP* with pieces by Dr. Jeffrey Ian Ross, one of the founders of CC, along with Dr. Jennifer Ortiz, who is the current Chair of the Division of Convict Criminology for the American Society of Criminology.

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ABOUT THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS

Grant E. Tietjen, PhD is an Associate Professor in the Criminal Justice Program at the School of Social Work and Criminal Justice at the University of Washington – Tacoma (UWT). He earned his PhD from the Department of Sociology at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) in 2013. Dr. Tietjen has written, researched, and lectured on convict criminology, mass incarceration, class inequality, criminological theory, and pathways to correctional/postcorrectional education. He has published multiple peer reviewed papers in journals and edited volumes, including most recently in *Humanity and Society*, *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict & World Order*, and *Criminal Justice Studies*. He is the author of *Justice Lessons: The Rise of the System Affect Academic Movement*, with the University of California Press, slated for publication in 2024. Dr. Tietjen works closely with multiple System Affected Academic organizations, including Huskies Post Prison Pathways (HP3) at UWT and the Division Convict Criminology (DCC) in the American Society of Criminology (ASC). HP3 is a support program for formerly-incarcerated students. As part of UWT HP3, he is a member of the Steering Committee for this growing initiative. He has also been involved with the CC discipline since 2005, mentoring new CC members, and serving as the group’s Co-Chair from 2017-2019. During this time, Dr. Tietjen has worked with many other dedicated CC members to strengthen the CC organization. In 2020, he was appointed as the inaugural

Chair of the newly formed American Society of Criminology Division of Convict Criminology, and currently serves as DCC Vice-Chair. Dr. Tietjen can be reached for questions at grantt5@uw.edu.

Alison Cox, PhD is an Assistant Professor at East Carolina University in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology. Her research interests include prison visitation, the impact of incarceration on families, critical criminology (e.g. convict, feminist, queer, and rural), and qualitative methods. Her scholarship has been published in *Criminal Justice Studies* and *Critical Criminology*. She is also a contributing author to *Convict Criminology for the Future*, edited by Dr. Jeffrey Ian Ross (University of Baltimore) and Dr. Francesca Vianello (University of Padua).

Dr. J. Renee Trombley is an Assistant Professor in Criminal Justice and Criminology at Metropolitan State University – Denver, where she also serves as a Faculty Fellow and is currently developing the Justice Impacted Scholars Alliance. Dr. Trombley is dedicated to building opportunities in higher education for justice impacted folks, both in the community and in prisons and jails. Her research interests include restorative justice, peacemaking criminology, convict criminology, violence and victimization among youth, and juvenile justice and delinquency, as well as the use of qualitative methods in academic research. Dr. Trombley has spent time writing, publishing, and presenting on issues related to trauma among youth, juvenile justice and schools, restorative justice and reentry, restorative justice in higher education, and convict criminology and identity.