In the Courtroom

Can we Rely on Technology?
Recent research explores the use of computer-based test interpretations in forensic assessment, particularly in child custody contexts, and argues that interpretations and conclusions generated by test software should be inadmissible. See here for the full article.

Checklists for Lawyers
Research shows that checklists improve consistency and efficacy in technical fields, but would they work in the legal field? A recent pilot study conducted out of the San Francisco Public Defender’s Office explored whether similar tools might promote consistent and effective legal representation by public defense attorneys, who are often overburdened and under-resourced. See here for the full report outlining the study’s findings.

Supreme Court of Canada Looks at Testing of Indigenous Inmates
A recent Canadian Supreme Court case addressed whether the use of certain psychological and statistical tools in corrections was appropriate for incarcerated Indigenous offenders. The court ultimately held that the use of such tools was not appropriate and that norms for those tests should be determined for ingenious populations. Read the full opinion here.

...and SCOTUS Takes on the Death Penalty and Sex Offender Registration
SCOTUS will look at two death penalty cases this month. First, the Supreme Court will hear a case argued by Bryan Stevenson on whether the Eighth Amendment allows for the execution of a prisoner who is so severely mentally disabled that he cannot remember his offense (see Madison v. Alabama). Second, in Bucklew v. Precythe, the Court will examine the appropriate rules for challenging the method of execution in a death penalty case. Finally, the court will consider a case that may impact sex-offender regulation (see Gundy v. United States).

In the Community

Can we Prevent Violence Using the Past?
The FBI is embarking on a new project to understand the minds of mass killers. The Behavioral Analysis Unit is planning to use interviews to better understand motivation and predictors of mass killings. Anyone else sensing Mindhunter’s second season?

Research Round-up
A recent longitudinal study on patterns of desistance shows that after approximately 10 years offense-free (five for juveniles), the risk of future criminal behavior for those with a record is not meaningfully different from that of the general population. This study could have far-reaching implications particularly in the wake of Miller/Montgomery.
Speaking of longitudinal studies, another recently published article explores the link between depression and criminal behavior, noting that it can be a risk factor for both aggressive and income-related offenses.

Finally, in case you were experiencing research-block or needed some inspiration, see here for an article about preventative justice, why it’s important, and what we, as a field, can do to improve its research base.

A recent study based on Columbus, Ohio found that just 6% of police officers in the city accounted for half of all the use-of-force complaints, suggesting that a small group of officers engaged in a disproportionate amount of the alleged violence reported to Columbus’s internal affairs bureau by officers and civilians.

---

**In Corrections**

**Current Directions in Prison Reform**
Read up here on a bill that was recently passed by the House that will move to a vote in the Senate. The First Step Act shifts focus from sentencing reform towards creating more rehabilitative options during incarceration. Notably, the bill only addresses the federal system, and it has been subject to criticism for only focusing on the back end of the pipeline. See here for the full bill.

**Risk-Needs-Responsivity Model in Practice**
A newly published study pilot study tests the application of the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model for probationers by assigning low-risk offenders to a tele-probation system rather than more intensive monitoring. Though only using qualitative data, this study sets a foundation for more research and highlights the logistical challenges of applications of the RNR model when public safety is at stake.

**Banning Books in Prison?**
The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections recently passed a restriction on books that could be sent to prisoners from outside providers. While some have suggested this could help inmates transition to reading e-books on tablets, others have expressed concern about prisoners’ ability to afford tablets and e-books.

---

**Media Roundup**

Interested in tackling mass incarceration? Check out this new book by the director for the Center of Court Innovation, which presents an agenda for prison reform and a plan for dismantling mass incarceration. And while you’re at it, pick up a copy of Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison, which examines the often tumultuous first year after release from prison. And click here to listen to conversation with author, Bruce Western.

For everyone looking for new content for those long workday commutes, a new season of Serial just came out and highlights every day innerworkings and injustices in a Cleveland courthouse. The Center for Court Innovation also has a podcast series focusing on different aspects of criminal and social justice.
Final Thoughts

And lastly, on a positive note....
See here for a short video on the use of restorative justice in schools and the positive impact it can have on students and communities.

Until Next time!
If you have any questions, or see or read something that you would like to be included in future updates, please feel free to contact us! Alice Thornewill (alice.thornewill@gmail.com) and Shelby Arnold (shelby.a.arnold@gmail.com).