What You Should Know:
Advances in Psychology and Law
October-December 2018

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In the Courtroom

Spotlight on Reform-Minded Prosecution
In Philadelphia, recently elected DA Larry Krasner is working to use his position to keep people out of prison. A few recent changes include instructing ADAs to no longer prosecute marijuana possession, stop seeking bail on lower-level charges, and begin plea negotiations at the low end of the state’s sentencing guidelines. Read more here.

Research Roundup
A recently published study sought to examine the impact of evaluator empathy on forensic assessments and found that expressive empathy impacts the evaluator’s ratings, not the examinee’s disclosure. For more information on risk assessment and risk factors, be sure to check out this special issue from Behavioral Sciences & the Law.

A Unique Approach to Juvenile Court
If you're interested in juvenile justice, take a look at this PBS feature highlighting the Newark Youth Court, where youth charged with minor offenses are put up against a jury of their peers.

Supreme Court Rulings to Watch For
Keep an eye out for a few rulings from the Supreme Court coming down the pike.

One ruling could impact the reach of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act. In October 2018, the court heard arguments in Gundy v. United States challenging the attorney general’s extension of sex-crime-registration law to offenders convicted before the law was enacted.

The court is also considering a case focused on mental disability and the 8th Amendment. Specifically, in Madison v. Alabama the court will decide whether a state may execute a prisoner whose mental disability leaves him with no memory of committing a capital offense, or whose cognitive dysfunction prevents him from remembering the crime or understanding the nature of the execution.

In the Community

Bambi Behind Bars?
A Missouri judge recently ordered a poacher who illegally killed hundreds of deer to watch the movie Bambi once a month while serving his year-long prison sentence. Unconventional sentences like this have been subject to criticism – it has been suggested that they may violate the 8th Amendment’s prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment, and some research indicates that shame-based punishments are not an effective in reforming offenders. See this article for a discussion of these considerations.
In the Wake of November’s Elections
As you may have heard, Florida voters passed a ballot initiative to restore voting rights to convicted felons. Check out this article about how other states can follow suit.

Recent Justice-Reform Legislation
The First Step Act was recently passed, which seeks to reduce recidivism and create significant sentencing reform at the federal level. See here to read the actual bill, and here or here for additional information and opinions on how the bill may actually take effect and outlining next steps.

New Directives Allow Mental Health Patients to Specify Care Preferences
Mental health patients with serious mental illness can now complete a psychiatric advance directive (PAD) to specify what treatment they would like to receive when they become too sick to do so themselves. At least 27 states have authorized PADs, and many are claiming that PADs can help people with serious mental illness better manage their symptoms and ensure appropriate care.

In Corrections

Mental Illness in Prison
Recent neuroscience research highlights the psychological and biological consequences of solitary confinement. For more reading about the treatment of incarcerated individuals with mental illness, check out this recent article.

Electric Chair over Lethal Injection?
In Tennessee, prisoners sentenced to death may choose the electric chair over lethal injection. A Tennessee prisoner recently chose electric chair because the state still uses a drug that has been involved in several botched executions, and he feared a long and painful death.

Media Roundup

As we wrap up 2018, click here for a list of justice-related podcasts and films from 2018 that are worth your attention, and click here for a list of recently published books that highlight issues related to mass incarceration.

Final Thoughts

And lastly, on a positive note.... Click here to read about ten women who made important changes in the justice system in 2018.

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).