**Chapter 02 Group Dynamics, Communication, and Social Interaction**

**Summary**

The significance of cultural diversity in the criminal justice system is evidenced in a recent Bureau of Justice statistics report which notes that 95% of state and local law enforcement training academies offer training in cultural diversity, while 85% train cadets with regard to hate/bias crimes.[[1]](#endnote-1) The median number of hours for cultural diversity training is eight, while the median number of hours devoted to hate/bias crimes is four. The need for more effective interaction with the various cultural groups entering the criminal justice system is well-documented. Many solutions have been offered in response, including promotion of multiculturalism in criminal justice education.

Researcher William Calathes argues that “Criminal justice education has missed much by promulgating a ‘melting pot’ philosophy. Our students think in terms of white monoculturalism, the assumption that we all belong to one system, which is that of white Anglo-Europeans.”[[2]](#endnote-2) The changing nature of society encourages greater recognition of multiculturalism in criminal justice curriculums, as today’s criminal justice students are tomorrow’s justice professionals.

At any stage during the “suspect turned offender’s” journey through the criminal justice system, he/she could very easily encounter someone who doesn’t view society in the same manner as he/she does. For instance, cultural differences may result in a jury rendering an unfavorable verdict based on preferences or prejudices. The opportunity for miscommunication increases as the number of contacts throughout case processing increases. In turn, there’s a greater chance of misunderstanding and misguided behaviors because the suspect/offender encountered a greater number of individuals. An overriding goal of the criminal justice system, then, should be to eliminate, or at least reduce the likelihood of injustices occurring from improper personal interactions.

Addressing cultural differences as they exist throughout the system is a vital first step toward addressing the issue, as evidenced for example, in the training provided to correctional officers at the New Mexico Corrections Training Academy. The Academy requires cadets to recognize and practice facial expressions, posture, positioning, and distance. Such training, which is not restricted to the New Mexico Corrections Training Academy, helps cadets understand various aspects of nonverbal communication.[[3]](#endnote-3)

The criminal justice system is, by nature, supported by human interaction. Consider the various contexts of human interaction found at all steps involved in criminal case processing. To begin, a crime is committed and someone contacts the authorities. The police investigate primarily through interviewing witnesses and suspects. An arrest may ultimately be made, and the suspect is turned over to the courts where he/she will interact with judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and possibly jurors. If convicted, the offender is turned over to the supervision of some correctional group and will encounter many different situations involving individuals from various backgrounds.

The manner in which social interaction takes place in the criminal justice system is influenced by the technological revolution society is currently experiencing. For instance, computers eliminate much of the busywork previously associated with running background checks on individuals and vehicles. The need to communicate with a dispatcher is reduced as mobile computer units are found in many police cars. In corrections, global positional satellite monitoring (GPS) is used to track some offenders serving their penalties in the community. For instance, in June 2006, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford signed a bill that mandates GPS monitoring for sex offenders convicted of certain offenses. This form of electronic monitoring will likely increase in the criminal justice system, as the number of face-to-face contacts required as part of probation and paroles are likely reduced. Email has significantly changed the manner in which many of us interact, as it is easier for many of us to send an email as opposed to making a phone call or personally visiting our target recipient. In the end, understanding and comprehending technology-base communications is becoming increasingly important.

1. Hickman, Matthew J. (2005). *State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies,*

   *2002*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. NCJ 204030. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Calathes, William. (1994). “The case for a multicultural approach to teaching criminal

   justice.” *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *5*(1): 1-14. P. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cesarz & Madrid-Bustos. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)