**Brief Summary**

**Justice: Fact or Fiction?**

With no single definition of justice, we must rely on various theories as the foundation for our ideas about what justice means.  Both individual and cultural definitions of justice may influence how criminal justice professionals understand the concept of justice. Whether justice actually exists or is something that we have yet to achieve remains debatable.  Justice may be illusive for some, while others believe that we can define and achieve justice by comparing it to that which is unjust.

**Justice in Criminal Justice**

It is important to explore the various ways in which justice has been defined and how these definitions affect the criminal justice system.  We first distinguish between an emphasis on procedural justice, social justice, or individual justice. We then consider five overarching perspectives – vigilante justice, transitional justice, ideological justice, discourse perspective justice, and postmodern justice – that influence further thinking on what justice is (or isn’t). Finally, we turn our attention to various perspectives of the broad form of justice called distributive justice.

**Distributive Justice.**

Distributive justice broadly focuses on giving people what they are due; but it raises significant questions about how to actually achieve this through the criminal justice system.  From the earliest philosophies of Aristotle to contemporary philosophers such as John Rawls, we see the process, progression, and continuing struggle of deciding how we should distribute justice fairly in society.

**Individual and Community Interests in Distributive Justice**

Under the umbrella of distributive justice there is further variation in deciding whom justice is for.  Can one model of justice balance the needs of individual offenders, victims, and society, or must we emphasize one over another to satisfactorily achieve justice?  The four models of distributive justice—compassionate, participatory, mechanical, and authoritarian—define focal points to resolve such conflicts and to achieve justice; however, they also lead to a larger question: "How do we know when we have accomplished justice?"