

*RISK REDUCTION:  
INTERVENTIONS FOR  
SPECIAL NEEDS  
OFFENDERS*

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**REAFFIRMING  
REHABILITATION:  
PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR  
CORRECTIONAL TREATMENT**

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The American public is often portrayed as vengeful and uniformly punitive toward lawbreakers. Although citizens do harbor "get tough" views, their corrections-related attitudes are flexible and complex. Thus, the public supports a range of community alternatives to prison, especially for nonviolent offenders. Most notably, by a substantial majority, Americans continue to believe that rehabilitation is an important goal of corrections. They are most strongly supportive of efforts to reform youthful offenders.

and they endorse a range of early intervention programs. In the end, Americans are not rigidly punitive, but rather endorse a correctional policy agenda that is reasonable and balanced—that is, an agenda that seeks to exact justice, protect society, and rehabilitate offenders.

When commentators attack offender treatment, they confidently, if not smugly, make two assertions: rehabilitation does not work, and the public does not advocate it anyway. Taken together, these two criticisms seem to deal a fatal blow to rehabilitation as a guiding principle for what to do with lawbreakers. After all, why pursue a policy that not only is ineffective but also violates the “public will” in a democracy? The problem is, however, that both of these criticisms turn out to be misleading, if not false.

## Challenging the “Nothing Works” Doctrine

The idea that “nothing works” to change offenders can be traced back to the classic 1974 article by Robert Martinson. Based on a larger report (Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks, 1975) which ran more than 700 pages and was both more complex and judicious in its conclusions, Martinson distilled this message: “With few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported thus far have no appreciable effect on recidivism” (1974, p. 25). This boldly pessimistic view appeared incontrovertible. It was based on a systematic analysis of 231 studies published between 1945 and 1967. Who, in the end, could argue with the data?

As it turns out, Martinson’s results were not as solid as he imagined. Even so, many scholars embraced his study’s conclusions without the level of skepticism that they are trained to bring to research findings, especially those voiced so emphatically. But by the time Martinson was writing, many people—including criminologists—had come to mistrust rehabilitation, which, from the early part of the century until the late 1960s, had been the dominant correctional ideology (Rothman, 1980).

Liberals, with visions of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* fresh in their minds, doubted rehabilitation because they believed it was a benevolent idea that had been corrupted to mask the coercive mistreatment of offenders in prison. Conservatives blamed rehabilitation for being too lenient toward offenders—teaching them that crime pays—and thus increasing their willingness and ability to prey on the public. Already harboring such antitreatment sentiments, those on the left and right—normally strange bedfellows—both jumped on Martinson’s “nothing works” bandwagon (Allen, 1981; Cullen and Gilbert, 1982).

A few scholars, however, took issue with Martinson’s ideas, although their protests were faintly heard amidst the cacophony of cheers accorded the “nothing works” doctrine. Ted Palmer (1975), for example, pointed out that almost half of the studies reviewed by Martinson showed a positive treatment effect on recidivism. Gendreau and Ross (1979) offered “bibliotherapy for cynics” by reviewing study after study finding that rehabilitation interventions could diminish the propensity of offenders to return to crime. A closer look at Martinson’s own study reveals more reasons for doubt. Of the 231 studies reviewed, only 138 contained outcomes that measured recidivism. Of these, fewer than 80 measured actual treatment programs (the others measured sanctions, such as whether an offender was placed on probation). Further, with only three behavior-modification programs in the data set, Martinson’s review contained no treatment category for cognitive-behavioral programs (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000). This omission is noteworthy because research has shown that it is precisely these programs that are most effective in reducing recidivism (Andrews and Bonta, 1998; Gendreau, 1996).

In the quarter century following Martinson’s classic work, the research has become even more convincing that rehabilitation does work. Perhaps the most compelling evidence has come from the technique of *meta-analysis*. Typically, scholars had summarized studies and counted how many did or did not reduce recidivism; this “vote-counting” method was the strategy used by Martinson. A meta-analysis, however, computes things differently: across a sample of evaluation studies, it measures the average size of treatment’s effect on recidivism (much like taking a player’s batting average across all games in which he or she participates). Using this statistical approach, recent studies generally find that correctional rehabilitation programs decrease recidivism an average of 10 percent (Lose, 1995; Redondo, Sanchez-Meca, and Garrido, 1999).

Most significantly, there is considerable variation in the “effect size” of programs. Those interventions that conform to certain “principles of effective treatment” (Gendreau, 1996), such as using cognitive-behavioral programs and focusing on high-risk offenders, achieve reductions of recidivism in excess of 25 percent (Andrews and Bonta, 1998; Cullen and Gendreau, 2000). Correctional programs that emphasize punishing and/or closely supervising offenders have been found to have no effect on—or even to increase—recidivism (for example, Cullen, Wright, and Applegate, 1996; Gendreau, Cullen, and Bonta, 1994; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; Petersilia and Turner, 1993).

The claim is false, then, that rehabilitation does not work. This does not mean, of course, that all programs reduce recidivism or that implementing effective interventions is an easy task. Still, two conclusions are manifest, if not incontrovertible. First, compared with punitive correctional programs, treatment interventions consistently achieve greater savings in crime, thus serving to protect society in important ways. Second, knowledge and technology now exist to make offenders less criminogenic, including serious, violent lawbreakers (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998). Not to use this knowledge in the service of society is inexcusable.

This brings us to the main focus of this paper: the claim that even if rehabilitation “works,” the public—wishing to “get tough” with offenders—will not support it. This assertion, however, is misleading. It is based on misunderstandings of how to measure public opinion and on a selective reading of the existing data. When appropriate methodological techniques are used and the full array of studies are considered, we find that the American public’s view toward corrections is far more complex and balanced than is typically characterized. Most noteworthy, people want offenders punished *and* rehabilitated. Below, these issues will be explored in more detail, starting with a brief section on the methodology of assessing public opinion, which will set the stage for a more detailed discussion of what the people in the United States really think should be done with offenders.

## Why Opinion Polls Overestimate the Public’s Punitiveness

It perhaps is not an exaggeration to say that we have now entered an era of instant, or near instant, public opinion polls. When a newsworthy issue arises—maybe a political controversy or a debate over crime-related policies such as “three-strikes-and-you’re-out” laws—a major polling organization, usually working on behalf of a television network or national newspaper, rushes out, conducts a survey, and reports “what the citizens think” about the issue at hand. These polls are useful, as far as they go, but because they are initiated on short notice, they tend to ask respondents only one or two questions about the policy issue in question. In fact, even when these surveys are done with more careful planning, they still tend to try to assess people’s attitudes through a restricted number of questions. In part, this is because asking a lengthy roster of complicated questions in a telephone poll would be inordinately expensive.

It would be erroneous to assert that these one- and two-question polls tell us nothing useful about what people think about criminal justice issues, such as whether they support capital punishment or would like the courts to hand out stiffer sentences to “criminals.” Even so, the limits of this methodological approach, which are *not* stated when the poll results are reported in the media, are substantial. We therefore must ask this salient question: Is it really possible to assess a person’s views with one or two questions?

The answer is that these questions tend to measure *global attitudes*—that is, what people think about an issue, such as punishing offenders, in a general way or as a “first impression.” These global attitudes are “real” in the sense that they exist, but they are misleading in that they do not exhaust what respondents would say about a policy issue if the full complexity of their thinking were assessed with a series of questions. These crime-related polls also defy straightforward interpretation because they generally ask about how respondents wish “criminals” to be sanctioned by the law. The difficulty, however, is that the word “criminal” tends to inspire visions of the worst kind of offender. Accordingly, questions that fail to specify which offenders they are asking about will tend to elicit more punitive sentiments because many citizens, as they respond to a poll, will have in mind heinous criminals (Roberts and Stalans, 1997).

Opinion polls suffer another problem: when inquiring what should be done with lawbreakers, they usually ask people to answer questions with “yes” and “no” responses or, at most, furnish only a limited number of sanctioning options (for example “put in prison or on probation”). Again, however, such an approach artificially truncates what respondents might actually believe about an issue by forcing them to select between two answers, neither one of which might capture their true views. The most sophisticated surveys furnish respondents with a variety of choices, for in this way they can more finely calibrate the attitudes people hold. As it turns out, when people can choose from a range of possible penalties, they usually lower their punitiveness. They tend to favor interventions that balance the punishment and control of offenders versus the achievement of other correctional and policy goals (for example, reform offenders, save money by not incarcerating all lawbreakers).

A final concern is that most polls published in the media ask questions only about punishment-oriented policies, such as public support for capital punishment, harsher sanctions, and sending habitual offenders to prison for life. Although more subtle, the problem here is that asking *only about punishment policies* is inherently distorting because it does not

assess the other side of the coin: what people think about rehabilitation and about less punitive policies such as community corrections.

To portray public opinion about corrections accurately, it is necessary to move beyond the kinds of polls publicized in the media. Instead, we need to consider research that assesses citizens' attitudes through surveys that: 1) use multiple questions, including carefully constructed scales capable of measuring complex opinions; 2) give respondents multiple sentencing or policy options when they are queried about how they would like to penalize lawbreakers; and 3) ask questions that cover the full range of possible views on corrections, including both punishment and rehabilitation. When research meeting these standards is examined, we arrive at a more balanced portrait of what Americans wish the correctional system to accomplish (for example, Cullen, Fisher, and Applegate, 2000; Flanagan and Longmire, 1996; Roberts and Stalans, 1997; Sundt, 1999).

## Five Conclusions about Public Opinion on Corrections

In recent years, research on public opinion about punishment and correctional policies has grown considerably (for summaries, see Cullen et al., 2000; Roberts and Stalans, 1997; Sundt, 1999). Although many questions remain to be answered, it is now possible to paint a reasonably clear portrait of what Americans think should be done with lawbreakers. The existing research can be organized around five main conclusions.

### 1. *The American Public Is Punitive Toward Crime*

Numerous investigations reveal that in the United States, there is a large reservoir of punitive sentiments toward offenders (Scheingold, 1984). Polls on capital punishment, for example, show that throughout the 1990s, between 70 and 80 percent of Americans favored the death penalty for convicted murderers (Cullen et al., 2000; Moore, 1995). Similarly, when asked if they believe that courts in their community "deal harshly enough with criminals," about 80 percent of respondents in poll after poll answered "not harshly enough" (Maguire and Pastore, 1998; Smith, 1998).

Most instructive, it appears—as Warr (1995, p. 23) notes—that "Americans overwhelmingly regard imprisonment as the appropriate form of punishment for most crimes." The 1987 National Punishment Study lends support to this conclusion. Respondents were given

vignettes describing an offender, victim, and the nature of the crime committed. They were then asked what sentence they would like to prescribe—much as a judge would do in a courtroom. There were 24 crimes rated, which were presented in nearly 10,000 different vignettes (each vignette was different because it reflected unique combinations of offender, victim, and crime characteristics). Across the vignettes rated, the respondents favored a prison or jail sentence in 71 percent of the cases, with an average sentence of eleven years (Jacoby and Cullen, 1998; Jacoby and Dunn, 1987). A more recent national study employing the vignette methodology reports similar conclusions, with the public "quick to sentence the defendants to prison" (Rossi, Berk, and Campbell, 1997, p. 277; Rossi and Berk, 1997).

### 2. *Public Punitiveness toward Crime is "Mushy"*

Additional polls could have been cited above to substantiate the point that Americans believe that lawbreakers should be subjected to harsh punishment. These sentiments are real and likely influence the willingness of citizens to vote for initiatives—such as "three-strikes-and-you're-out" laws—in referendums. Few politicians, it seems, lose elections by promising to "get tough on crime," and there is no mass movement among the public to curtail the coerciveness and inhumanity of the prison system.

These observations are important because at times critics make the mistake of trying to suggest that the punitiveness found in polls does not capture the "real" opinion of the public. Again, we have been critical of the conclusion that the public is *exclusively* punitive in their crime-related sentiments, arguing—like other critics—that faulty methodology obscures the true complexity of what the public thinks should be done with offenders. Still, the surveys that uncover harsh views and support for locking up criminals are not spurious but are measuring beliefs that people harbor. The key issue, however, is that these beliefs are not fixed or rigid but flexible or "mushy" (Durham, 1993).

By "mushy" we mean that public opinion is best viewed as not being locked on a fixed value but rather as operating within a *range* of attitudes. The views that people express thus may vary depending on what factors they are asked to consider and what choices they are given through which to express their opinion. As noted above in the section on methodological considerations, oftentimes the views Americans express become less punitive when they are asked not to answer simple questions but to deliberate about questions that are constructed to approximate real-life policy decisions.

This point—and the “mushiness” of public opinion—can be illustrated through three examples that relate to current policy issues. First, consider the finding that more than seven in ten Americans support the death penalty. This figure is so high and stable (not having changed much in about two decades) that it seems absurd to suggest that the public is not firmly behind the execution of murderers. Even here, however, the support for this punishment option is “mushy” or contingent on what choices people are given. Research is now fairly convincing in showing that when people are not simply asked whether they support the death penalty, but whether they support executing offenders versus giving them life in prison without parole, support for capital punishment falls to about half of those surveyed. When the option is life without parole plus having the offender work to pay restitution to the victim’s family, more people select this option than favor the death penalty (Bowers, Vandiver, and Dugan, 1994; McGarrell and Sandys, 1996; Moon, Wright, Cullen, and Pealer, 1999).

A second example comes from research on “three-strikes” laws that mandate life in prison for offenders convicted of a third felony. Polls find more than 70 percent of the public favors this policy when asked if they support “life sentences without parole for criminals with three violent crimes” (“Dick Tracy Wins,” 1994, p. A14; Cullen et al., 2000). But do such “global” or first-impression views hold up when people are asked what sentences they wish to hand out in real-life cases that involve real-life people?

To test this issue, Applegate, Cullen, Turner, and Sundt (1996) asked a 1995 sample of Cincinnati residents if they supported passing a “three-strikes” law in Ohio; 88 percent stated they either “strongly” or “somewhat” endorsed this policy. The same sample members, however, were also asked what sentence they would give to an offender described in a vignette who would qualify for a life sentence under the “three-strikes” law being considered in Ohio. Notably, across the vignettes, only 16.9 percent of the sample assigned these “three-strikes” eligible offenders a life sentence. These findings suggest that the public may support a “three-strikes” law in the abstract—perhaps reflecting an underlying view that repeat offenders should not cavalierly be placed on the streets—but that their global views do not translate into the belief that specific offenders should actually be locked away forever.

Third, on the surface, it seems indisputable that Americans want offenders sent to prison. But, again, how firm is that support? Some shakiness in support for the policy of imprisonment may come from the

public’s belief that prisons are “schools of crime.” In an Iowa survey, for example, 60 percent of the respondents stated that the “majority of inmates” would be “more dangerous” when they were released from prison; less than one in ten said “less dangerous,” with the remaining sample members answering “don’t know” (Doble Research Associates, 1997). Most instructive, however, is research on “intermediate sanctions” and, more generally, on community alternatives to prison. To be sure, citizens do not favor the use of “regular probation,” perhaps because they see it as a penalty that is overly lenient and exposes the public to the risk of victimization. They also are reluctant to use community corrections as an option for violent criminals. Nonetheless, there is a growing body of research that shows Americans endorse punishing a range of offenders with intermediate sanctions such as restitution programs, community service, boot camps, intensive supervision probation, and home confinement/electronic monitoring (for a summary, see Cullen et al., 2000). Furthermore, there is evidence that although Americans often “prefer” prison as a penalty, they will “accept” community corrections as an alternative—again, so long as it is not simply a sentence of probation (Turner, Cullen, Sundt, and Applegate, 1997). Finally, there is evidence that citizens also support the concept of “restorative justice” in which offenders would remain in the community and work to repair the harm they have done to victims and to the larger community (Doble Research Associates, 1994; Cullen et al., 2000).

### 3. *Public Support for Rehabilitation Is Strong*

A number of commentators have observed that Americans harbor punitive attitudes toward offenders and that recent crime policy in the United States is consistent with these views (for example, prison and jail populations approaching two million, calls to make prison life more painful, the reintroduction of chain gangs, and more attempts to control and closely watch offenders in the community). One writer in *The Wall Street Journal* asserts that “public opinion, in its attitude toward crime, is overwhelmingly repressive; ‘ordinary people’ do not want to reform offenders but instead ‘want them punished, as severely and cheaply as possible . . . They favor punishment that is deterrent and retributive” (Johnson, 1994, p. A10).

As noted, however, this conclusion is misleading. There is now a large body of research revealing that although citizens may be punitive, *they also want the correctional system to rehabilitate offenders* (for example, Cullen et al., 2000; McCorkle, 1993; Sundt, 1999; Thomson and Ragona, 1987).

We can point to three types of surveys that reinforce this contention. First, there has been considerable research conducted on what the public believes should be the "goals of imprisonment." In a 1996 statewide survey in Ohio, respondents were asked what should be the "main emphasis of prisons." Among the options provided, 41.1 percent chose "trying to rehabilitate the individual so that he might become a productive citizen" versus 31.9 percent for "protecting society from future crimes he might commit," 20.3 percent for "punishing the individual convicted of a crime," and 6.7 percent for "not sure" (Applegate, Cullen, and Fisher, 1997). One might argue that taken together, the respondents selecting the two punitive options (protect society and punishment) exceeded the percentage selecting the rehabilitation option. Still, at the very least, four in ten Ohioans endorsed offender treatment as the main purpose of corrections. The picture becomes even more complete when we look at how "important" the respondents believed each prison goal to be (as rated individually). In this case, more than eight in ten Ohio respondents rated rehabilitation as either "very important" (45.1 percent) or "important" (37.3 percent). With these results in mind, it is difficult to suggest that Americans reject offender treatment as an integral goal of the correctional enterprise.

Second, studies have presented survey respondents with a number of statements about various aspects of rehabilitation and then have asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with these statements (typically using a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). The results from the Ohio study of Applegate et al. (1997) are illustrative of the sentiments Americans display. More than eight in ten members of the sample agreed that it is important to rehabilitate adults who have committed crimes and are now in the correctional system and felt that it was important to provide treatment for offenders who are in prison and who are supervised by the courts and live in the community. Even when asked about providing treatment services "for offenders who have been involved in a lot of crime in their lives," a majority of the sample—54.2 percent—favored placing these chronic lawbreakers into rehabilitation programs. There is, we must note, some evidence that the public is less supportive of treatment for "violent" offenders (Cullen, Skovron, Scott, and Burton, 1990; Sundt, Cullen, Applegate, and Turner, 1998). More research is needed, however, to determine if these views are first impressions, and therefore would change if respondents were informed of the successful interventions

being undertaken with serious and violent criminals (Henggeler, 1997; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998).

Third, research also has explored whether citizens will favor rehabilitation when asked what should be done with offenders described in vignettes. Might support for treatment decline when people are asked not about their global views about rehabilitation but to assess vignettes that more closely approximate real-life cases? As it turns out, this is not the case (McCorkle, 1993). Applegate et al.'s (1997) Ohio research reports that in rating vignettes, high percentages of the respondents supported "the use of rehabilitation" and believed that "it was right to put people [like the offender] in programs that try to cure the particular problem that caused them to break the law."

In summary, the research convincingly shows that regardless of the survey method employed—polls about the goals of prisons, studies using detailed scales consisting of statements assessing various dimensions of rehabilitation, or vignettes describing real-life cases—the American public firmly endorses the correctional system making efforts to reform its wayward population. This finding is important because it means that the strong support for offender treatment cannot be attributed to some methodological artifact but rather, reflects empirical reality.

The public may believe that the state should force offenders to pay for their crimes and should place violent offenders safely behind bars, but they also recognize the utility, if not the morality, of the correctional system making offenders less criminogenic and more likely to be productive citizens. There is a realization, we suspect, both that lawbreakers will eventually return to society and that rehabilitation is one of the few tools at the state's disposal to make these offenders less dangerous, thus helping to protect the commonweal of the community.

#### 4. *The Public Especially Supports Juvenile Rehabilitation*

In the early 1990s, with juvenile violence rising rapidly, it became common to speak of an epidemic of youthful crime being perpetrated by "super-predators" (Dilullo, 1995). With some justification, calls were made to consider incarcerating chronically dangerous youngsters. Polls appeared showing that a majority of Americans believed that such youthful violent predators, as well as serious property criminals, should be punished the same as adult offenders (Maguire and Pastore, 1995; Triplett, 1996). Again, however, reading only these polls would leave a misleading impression of what Americans wish the correctional system to accomplish with juvenile delinquents. The research is unmistakable

that they also want the system to make a concerted effort to rehabilitate wayward youths. Moreover, support for treating youths invariably is found to be even higher than the considerable support the public shows for treating adults (for example, Cullen, Golden, and Cullen, 1983; Gerber and Engelhardt-Greer, 1996; Moon, Sundt, Cullen, and Wright, 2000; Steinhart, 1988).

Several studies illustrate citizens' firm endorsement for "saving children" from a life in crime. In a 1995 study conducted in Cincinnati, for example, Sundt et al. (1998) discovered that more than eight in ten residents believed that the rehabilitation of juveniles was either "very helpful" or "helpful." In the Applegate et al. (1997, p. 247) statewide study of Ohioans, more than 95 percent agreed that "it is important to try to rehabilitate juveniles who have committed crimes and are now in the correctional system." Similarly, in a 1998 survey in Tennessee, almost two in three respondents expressed the belief that rehabilitation should be the "main emphasis of juvenile prisons."

Moreover, virtually all of the respondents—94.5 percent—answered that rehabilitation as the purpose of juvenile imprisonment was "very important" (64.5 percent) or "important" (30 percent). About the same percentage agreed that it was important to treat youthful offenders whether they were in the community or in prison. Three-fourths concurred that "rehabilitation programs should be available even for juveniles who have been involved in a lot of crime in their lives" (Moon et al., 2000, pp. 46-48).

We should note as well that support for a range of early intervention programs aimed at "nipping juvenile crime in the bud" or targeting "at-risk youths for help" are immensely popular with the American public—including, for example, preschool programs, training parents in how to raise their children more effectively, programs to help dysfunctional families, attempts to identify and treat troubled youth early in life, and the implementation of after-school programs (Cullen, Wright, Brown, Moon, Blankenship, and Applegate, 1998). Most instructive, research shows that when asked to choose between spending tax dollars on either early intervention programs or incarcerating more offenders, more than seven in ten Americans favor the early intervention option (Cullen et al., 1998; Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates, 1997).

##### 5. *The Public Wants the Correctional System to Act Responsibly*

How can we make sense of all the polling and research data about what the American public wishes the correctional system to accomplish?

Answering this question requires some degree of modesty because a truly definitive study of the varied dimensions of such public views remains to be undertaken. Still, by weaving together various strands of information drawn from an array of surveys, we are safe in conveying the central hope, if not expectation, that citizens have of correctional interventions: they want the system to act *responsibly* in the sanctioning of offenders.

This rather broad conclusion can, of course, be taken to mean many things, but we believe that it involves five main components. First, citizens are opposed to "lenient" sentences—if by this we mean that offenders are merely placed on probation "supervision" that does little to inconvenience their lives or to protect the public. Phrased differently, they want some type of intervention with offenders that is well thought out. Second, the public is "risk averse;" they do not want dangerous offenders walking the streets. They understand that prisons may be "schools of crime," but the immediate and almost certain threat posed by these offenders supercedes the future and potential threat these offenders *may* pose if they *ever* get out of prison. Third, most Americans see prison as a preferred punishment for most criminal offenses, but they also are open to—and sometimes outright in favor of—community sanctions for many offenders who are not seriously violent.

Fourth, and most important for our purposes, Americans clearly favor offenders using their time in the correctional system *productively*. This sentiment is why "warehousing criminals" makes so little sense to them. Restorative justice is popular, we suspect, precisely for this reason: it moves beyond the philosophy of simply "getting tough" with offenders, and explores how the correctional sanction can be put to good use by rectifying the harm that offenders have caused victims, the community, and themselves.

Rehabilitation has the same appeal: it furnishes the opportunity to, in essence, save a life by redirecting offenders from a hopeless life in crime to a life in which they stay out of trouble and perhaps contribute to society in positive way (Nagin, 2000). For juveniles, the stakes are particularly high because so much of their lives lie ahead—undoubtedly an important reason why the public is especially willing to attempt to transform them from lawbreakers into law-abiding citizens. At the very least, rehabilitation promises to enhance public safety by increasing the chances that offenders will leave prison or community supervision being less likely, rather than more likely, to victimize others.

Fifth and finally, it is time to realize that the public has high expectations for the correctional system. Citizens want corrections to accomplish multiple goals. Their collective "will" might be summarized in this way: Offenders harm others—hurt them, take their property, and so on—and thus deserve to be punished. These offenders also may pose an immediate threat to their fellow citizens and thus need to be controlled, either in prison or by strict measures in the community. But offenders also have a life ahead of them in which they can continue to be a burden on society or, alternatively, to contribute to the commonwealth of society. Rehabilitation offers the prospect of returning offenders to their communities as less criminogenic and perhaps even as good citizens. Thus, to not undertake treatment of offenders is a risky, if not unreasonable, policy.

## Reaffirming Rehabilitation

Initially, this essay noted two objections to retaining rehabilitation as an integral goal of corrections: it does not work, and the public will not support it. As we have endeavored to document, both of these objections are questionable, if not incorrect. Researchers have done the important service of demonstrating that treatment interventions can substantially reduce recidivism, especially among high-risk, serious offenders. They also have shown that allocating resources to deterrence- or punishment-oriented correctional programs is ill-advised if one's goal is to reduce crime. Further, as we have reviewed, the public is in no way opposed to concerted efforts to involve offenders in treatment programs. Polls which suggest that Americans are *exclusively* punitive are mistaken. The public is too reasonable to hold such a narrow view. They recognize that by *reaffirming rehabilitation*, the correctional system has the potential to improve the lives of offenders and to make society safer.

Again, much work needs to be done to make rehabilitation an effective correctional policy. As noted, research does not state that all treatment interventions are equally effective. There is now an increasing body of knowledge identifying the principles of effective intervention (Andrews and Bonta, 1998; Gendreau, 1996). To build public trust and to deepen support for rehabilitation, it will be incumbent on correctional policymakers and practitioners to use the existing knowledge to develop and sustain the most effective interventions possible. If this challenge is taken seriously, then a new era of corrections is not beyond reach—an

era in which the limits of punishment will be more clearly appreciated and the possibilities of rehabilitation more clearly realized.

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