

Can We Treat Criminality? by Brianna Johnson

Effectively identifying and treating the sources of criminality in America will inevitably remain a problem in the future for young Americans. With increasing numbers of prisoners, as demonstrated by the overcrowding of our prisons nationwide, we need to find some way to treat those being released back into the community.

A Clockwork Orange gives us an example of an extreme treatment for criminality. The protagonist, Alex, chooses a life of theft and assault, leading to his imprisonment in a crowded jail. He is removed from prison and taken to a new treatment building where, after having been given medication, he is tortured and forced to watch violent films until he associates violence with involuntary illness. He loses his ability to even make a choice about his behavior; all he can do is submit to the violence directed toward him. The mere thought of violence makes him feel sick. Alex's external signs of violence may have been treated, but he wasn't really changed. In the next to last chapter, he returns to his life of crime, and only when he finally chooses to grow up does he really leave crime behind. His treatment didn't bring peace into his life or inspire him to want to be crime-free.

Although this type of torturous punishment is not acceptable in our society, there are less radical treatments we could use. Internal and external sources of criminality must be examined to find the most effective treatments of criminality for our government to implement.

To make decisions about criminality treatment, we must first understand where criminality itself originates. The sources of criminality are believed to be a result of both biological and environmental factors. Criminologist Daniel Glaser notes in "Criminality Theories and Behavioral Images" that criminality is explained by three theories: monistic, pluralistic, and integrative. The monistic theory attributes criminal behavior to free will, biological factors, instinct, or frustration resulting in anger (435-437). The pluralistic and integrative theories focus on the fact that criminals are multi-dimensional in their actions and that the source of their criminality can shift from one cause to another randomly or be several causes combined (437-439). Classically, we accept many ideas about where criminality comes from and what causes a criminal act. Biological factors such as disability or chromosomal deformities can indicate a propensity to criminal behavior. Environmental factors, such as one's economic situation or sexual, physical, or verbal abuse during childhood, can increase the likelihood that someone will participate in a criminal act. Excessive drug or alcohol use may also spur criminal acts. Free-will and independent choice can lead to criminal behavior as well.

Depending on the source of criminality, we can choose the best treatment. This isn't to say that we should bypass punishments for those who break the law or shorten the life sentences of people who have committed atrocious acts that make them unfit for society. It's natural human instinct to punish wrongdoers. In addition, people don't want to spend any more money on criminals in our society than they already do for housing, feeding, and providing basic care. However, our current approach of punishment without treatment isn't working. What we need are better ways to identify and treat criminality in its earliest stages and effective treatments for those preparing to reenter society following jail sentences. If we can provide some type of personalized therapy for these troubled citizens, we can better prepare them to lead lawful lifestyles outside of the prison gates. Currently, our society doesn't personalize treatment for criminals. This lack of personalization may be the problem with our system and why recidivism remains high.

Our prisons mix all prisoners together and give them the same general treatment. Though there are jails that separate offenders, in some cases the old, young, mentally ill, and disabled are all crowded into the same jails. The article "Study Finds Hundreds of Thousands of Inmates Mentally Ill" by Fox Butterfield states that nearly "one in five of the 2.1 million Americans in jail and prison are seriously mentally ill" (A14). The jail systems are becoming a fallback for mental hospitals (A14), and this means that people aren't getting the health treatment they need and deserve. In the Wyoming state penitentiary,

there was only one psychiatrist on duty for two days a month (A14). In Iowa, there were only three psychiatrists for over 8000 inmates (A14). Mentally ill patients require medication and psychiatric assistance. In prisons where it's estimated that 20% are mentally ill (A14), the inaccessibility to psychiatric help is outrageous.

We can't treat the underlying issues when all prisoners are put in the same cells. The Federal Bureau of Prisons website notes that although 53% of inmates are incarcerated for drug offenses, they are in the same prison system with criminals who committed more severe offenses such as robbery, extortion, and even homicide ("Quick Facts"). Some prisons with different security levels separate violent and nonviolent offenders, but those that don't present a serious question. How can we provide those with drug issues the help they need when we're also trying to punish the sex offenders and extortionists? How can we provide specific treatment to any of the offenders when they are all living together? The prison system mixes all offenders together, but their treatments need to be specific to their source of criminality.

Crime isn't just an individual's issue; it is a social issue that has enveloped entire communities. Michael J. Gilbert and Tanya L. Settles write about a new system of programs in "The Next Step: Indigenous Development of Neighborhood-Restorative Community Justice," an article published in *Criminal Justice Review*. They propose to implement restorative community justice. Restorative justice focuses on the harm crime does to individual victims, neighborhoods, the larger community, and the offender. The main goal is to encourage and facilitate a healing process through structured programs that bring together offenders, their victims, community representatives and government officials. Offenders must assume responsibility for the crime and repair harms done (11). Victims are encouraged to recognize the harms perpetrated against them in an effort to regain their self-esteem and confidence. The main medium used to achieve goals is open, but controlled, dialogue (12).

Community justice, according to Gilbert and Settles, involves more structure and is controlled by criminal justice agencies like law enforcement and government officials. The main goal here is to focus on improving conditions among neighborhoods, and therefore the larger communities plagued by crime. The main strategies are increased surveillance of certain areas, better crime detection, and punishment for those guilty of crimes. Proponents of community justice want more social control of crime, implemented with programs like neighborhood watch and focused local police surveillance (8-9). The combination of restorative and community justice leads us to neighborhood-restorative community justice. Each program would need to be customized to support the unique communities and the specific crimes they face the most. In communities where domestic violence is the most prominent, they could tailor their services to anger management, anti-violence services, and increased patrol of child services in schools. If drugs were the main issue, they could focus on rehab treatments and drug education programs in schools. The unique installations for victims and criminals would focus on treatment for the specific regional issue.

Different programs for those on probation are another option. Probation is commonly used in our justice system. In the article "The Future of Probation: Reintroducing the Spiritual Dimension into Correctional Practice," John T. Whitehead and Michael C. Braswell note that in the past 25 years, the number of people on parole and probation has grown to surpass those in prisons (207). Probation is now a mainstream punishment in correctional practices. As the program continues to grow, consider what could happen if a spiritual dimension was included. This spiritual dimension may focus on religion, but it could also be a more nondenominational program focusing on psychology and psychiatry. Pushing beyond the basic goal of correction and toward finding deeper meaning in their lives could be the way to prevent criminals from committing crimes again (226). Programs for those on probation focusing on spiritual activities such as meditation or yoga could lead those who commit crimes to find more meaning and peace in their lives (225). It's a fact that long-term mental and physical health benefit from strengthened religion and spirituality in one's life (223). These benefits fit perfectly with the often drug-fueled and unhealthy lifestyles of those committing crimes. The spiritual activities would be personalized too, and criminals could choose what they preferred for spiritual guidance.

“The Future of Probation” quotes one anonymous drug addict who chose to turn to Jesus for spiritual guidance while in prison. He was quoted as saying that he found a “peace that surpasses all understanding...reaching inside and touching my heart and soul” (221). Another criminal convicted of robbery said his “lack of purpose had caused [him] to drift and be unfocused” (221). Hearing those who have worked past their criminality through spirituality is the only way we can really judge its effectiveness.

Another possible program the United States could use for treatment is the Good Lives Model of rehabilitation (GLM). Paul R. Whitehead, Tony Ward, and Rachael M. Collie write about the GLM in the article “Time for a Change: Applying the Good Lives Model of Rehabilitation to a High-Risk Violent Offender.” They note that although other rehabilitation programs have been tested for use with juvenile, sexual, or other categories of adult offenders, there wasn’t information on programs for violent offenders (578-9). The GLM, used in New Zealand, “focuses on promoting individuals’ important personal goals, while reducing and managing their risk for future offending” (579). If the individual has basic “goods” in life such as “skills, values, attitudes, and resources” (581), they are much more likely to live a life free of crime. Here, the success lies in the individualization of the therapy. Each criminal is viewed as a human being looking for meaning in life rather than just someone who needs to be changed to fit society. The therapy focuses on what is important to the individual and looks to bring them meaning much like the spirituality model. However, the GLM specifically attempts to help the person replace the violence in their life with something that is safe, healthy, and satisfying (581).

In one case study, a Maori man on parole in New Zealand, referred to as Mr. C. in the “Time for a Change” article, participated in the GLM. He started off visualizing his desired new life after prison. This type of rehabilitation of identifying dreams helped Mr. C. develop goals that he wanted to achieve. He wanted to leave his gang, get rid of the violence in his life, engage in a healthy monogamous relationship, go to college, and get his driver’s license. These goals wouldn’t be easy for someone with twenty convictions for various crimes from aggravated robbery to sexual assault (583). After setting his goals, he focused on what he thought was important and looked at how all of his goals interacted (588). His Maori culture helped to connect him to something and give him a feeling of belonging. Therapy sessions helped Mr. C. to actually work toward his goals. He got into school and started a new relationship after leaving his gang (592-3). He had two violent setbacks but recalls that he felt guilty for his actions even if he was acting in retaliation. He had to stop attending his classes due to transportation issues, but quickly after reenrolled (593). Ultimately, Mr. C. found success as he began to engage in “prosocial” activities and left his criminal lifestyle behind (593). His university application exemplifies his transformation:

To change my life I need to change the way I think and live. The opportunities that [education] can open for me are limitless. For someone like myself this is a big lifestyle change in a way I thought would never be possible. I’d like to utilize my education into helping troubled teens that are falling into a lifestyle [like] I’ve lived for the last ten years.... To be given an opportunity like this words cannot express. My life is about to change. (qtd. in Whitehead et al. 593)

One would hardly expect someone with the violent past of Mr. C. to be capable of writing something so emotionally vulnerable and caring. The GLM brought meaning to his life and a second chance to find a purpose.

Increasing studies in behavioral sciences may be the way to discover more programs—like restorative community justice, spiritual dimensions in probation, and the GLM—that work effectively. Philip R. Magaletta, Robert D. Morgan, Lorraine R. Reitzel, and Christopher A. Innes authored the article “Toward the One: Strengthening Behavioral Sciences Research in Corrections” that suggests that, with seven million U.S. citizens under some correctional form of supervision, it is necessary to understand why correctional programs work and why they don’t (934). If we unite people specializing in counseling, criminology, economics, education, medicine, political science, biology, sociology, and other facets of psychology, we could have more insight into corrections (936). Depending on a criminal’s past

experience with drugs, his community, or violence, we could use behavioral science to decide the most effective course of action to treat his own source of criminality. The problem is that all the specializations that add up to behavioral science use different methods of analysis that may be difficult to translate and interpret among the various fields. Development of unity among these fields, as advocated by Magaletta et al., would be nothing but beneficial to our society so we can personalize effective treatments.

Better development of behavioral science combined with these programs would give something more to our society than justice. Such approaches have the potential to bring peace into the lives of victims, offenders, and the many communities where the cycle of crime has continued for too long. The identification and treatment of criminality would become a success if we could personalize services to communities, add spirituality, and use human-centered programs to emphasize more than just punishment.

Works Cited

- Butterfield, Fox. "Study Find Hundreds of Thousands of Inmates Mentally Ill." *New York Times* 22 October 2003: A14. 25 April 2008 <<http://www.nytimes.com>>.
- Gilbert, Michael J., and Tanya L. Settles. "The Next Step: Indigenous Development of Neighborhood-Restorative Community Justice." *Criminal Justice Review* 32.1 (2007): 5-25. *WilsonWeb OmniFile*. H.W. Wilson. James Madison U. Lib., Harrisonburg, VA. 19 April 2008 <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>>.
- Glaser, Daniel. "Criminality Theories and Behavioral Images." *The American Journal of Sociology* 61.5 (1956): 433-444. *JSTOR*. 20 April 2008 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- Magaletta, Philip R., Robert D. Morgan, Lorraine R. Reitzel, and Christopher A. Innes. "Toward the One: Strengthening Behavioral Sciences Research in Corrections." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 34.7 (2007): 933-944. *WilsonWeb OmniFile*. H.W. Wilson. James Madison U. Lib., Harrisonburg, VA. 20 April 2008 <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>>.
- United States. Federal Bureau of Prisons. "Quick Facts about the Bureau of Prisons." 2008. 25 April 2008 <<http://www.bop.gov/about/facts.jsp>>.
- Whitehead, John T., and Michael C. Braswell. "The Future of Probation: Reintroducing the Spiritual Dimension into Correctional Practice." *Criminal Justice Review* 25.2 (2000): 207-233. *WilsonWeb OmniFile*. H.W. Wilson. James Madison U. Lib., Harrisonburg, VA. 20 April 2008 <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>>.
- Whitehead, Paul R., Tony Ward, and Rachael M. Collie. "Time for a Change: Applying the Good Lives Model of Rehabilitation to a High-Risk Violent Offender." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 51.5 (2007): 578-598. *WilsonWeb OmniFile*. H.W. Wilson. James Madison U. Lib., Harrisonburg, VA. 20 April 2008 <<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>>.