On any given day in the United States, more than 1.6 million offenders are imprisoned in state and federal institutions. When inmates in jails and other custodial facilities (e.g., juvenile institutions) are included in the count, the nation's incarcerated population surpasses 2.4 million (Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009). There are also approximately 4.2 million offenders on probation and more than 828,000 people on parole (Glaze & Bonczar, 2009). Taken together, in excess of 7.4 million Americans are under the supervision of the correctional system. To put this number in more understandable terms, 1 in every 100 American adults is behind bars, and 1 in 31 is under some form of correctional control. For African Americans, this latter figure is 1 in 11 (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008, 2009).

It can be misleading to cite statistics and imply that some crisis is at hand. For example, on any given day in America, about 540,000 people are in hospitals and more than 18 million are enrolled in college degree programs. Are these numbers cause for concern? But in this case, the United States clearly has grown remarkably fond of an ever-expanding correctional system that is, in Travis Pratt's (2009) words, “addicted to incarceration.” Other Western industrial nations exercise more restraint in locking up their citizens, both in terms of how many and for how long (Tonry, 2007). It is hard to imagine that in the early 1970s, the number of inmates in state and federal prisons dipped below 200,000. If we turn to today's count—the 1.6 million cited above—we see that the United States has experienced more than a seven-fold increase in its prison population. Might this just be a product of the growth of the nation's citizenry? Yes, America's population has jumped from just over 200 million to just over 300 million. But this increase explains only a fraction of the expansion of the incarcerated population.
So, why do we place so many people in the correctional system? The simple answer, of course, is that they have committed crimes and been convicted, and thus some response by the government is required. But this explanation has two problems. First, it suggests that the amount of crime and the amount of corrections in a nation are tightly connected. But this is not the case. Within the United States, correctional populations do not rise and fall as crime rates rise and fall. Further, cross-nationally, nations with similar crime rates have incarceration rates that are dissimilar. To a degree, then, how many people are in prison or under community supervision is a policy choice. And this choice itself has a lot to do with what we hope to accomplish through a correctional intervention (Tonry, 2004, 2007).

This discussion thus leads us to the second problem with the simple notion that people are in the correctional system because they are offenders. This explanation begs the larger question of what purpose is served by intervening in the lives of offenders. What do we hope to accomplish? Our book is designed to address this very question. It is also intended to demonstrate that theories matter because they affect correctional policy.

Now, as just implied, across time in the United States competing visions have been set forth of what corrections should be about. We call these rival perspectives theories of corrections. They are comprised of three components. First, there is a statement of the purpose or goal of corrections. These tend to emphasize either restraining and inflicting pain on offenders or helping and reforming offenders. Second, each theory has an implicit or explicit blueprint for how the correctional system should be arranged, including policies, practices, and organizational structure. Ideas thus matter; they influence what we do in corrections. Theories also breed conflict because each one demands that the correctional system be organized in a different way. Third, theories make a claim of effectiveness. Advocates assert not only that a theory’s core goal is moral but also that their theory can be implemented effectively—in short, that it “works.” For example, proponents of deterrence theory claim that we should place offenders in prison because it yields lower reoffending rates than a community sanction. Is this really the case? This is where evidence-based corrections comes in and proves critical in discerning what works and what does not work. Data, not mere opinions, should play the central role in guiding allegiance to any given correctional theory and the correctional system it proposes.

Importantly, correctional theories are not autonomous entities that exist in some virtual reality above the world they seek to guide. Rather, they are produced by and believed by humans who live in particular socio-historical times. If you were living in the first part of the 1900s rather than today, your view of the world and of offenders might be quite different. If you now reside in a red state or a blue state, or perhaps in an urban neighborhood wracked by crime or in a gated community in a ritzy suburb, your policy preferences might not be the same. One author of this book (Cullen) grew up in Massachusetts in an Irish family in which John Kennedy was admired and nary a Republican was in sight. He was schooled by the Sisters of Notre Dame who expertly inculcated not only a deep capacity for guilt but also a deep commitment to social justice. As a grade-school child, he learned the value of charity, donating coinage—and even the occasional dollar bill—to aid the poor and to help missionaries save “pagan
babies” (yes, this is what the good Sisters called non-Catholic children in foreign lands!). Perhaps it is not surprising that his first book was called *Reaffirming Rehabilitation* (Cullen & Gilbert, 1982). Be forewarned: Cullen remains a supporter of rehabilitation—as is the case for coauthor Jonson, whose Catholic upbringing is a story for another time. We claim to be so now not because of nuns, priests, or the Pope, but because we are scientists who can read the empirical evidence. We will leave it to the readers to determine if this is indeed the case.

Thus, the chapters in this book are arranged—from front to back—in a rough time line to show how the fate of correctional theories largely has hinged on the prevailing social context. For example, in politically liberal times, theories embracing offender reformation have flourished, whereas in more conservative times American corrections has been directed by theories advocating punishing offenders harshly and through incarceration.

In Chapter 2, we begin this story by showing how the theory of rehabilitation emerged in the Progressive Era of the early 1900s and dominated American corrections into the 1960s. The social turmoil of the sixties led to the attack on this therapeutic vision and resulted in theories emphasizing punishment. The conservative times of the 1980s, dominated by President Ronald Reagan, constituted a receptive context for seeing offenders as wicked super-predators beyond redemption and in need of caging. More recently, the limits, if not at times bankruptcy, of political conservatism have created space for more reformist approaches to offenders.

The key intent of this analysis is to sensitize readers to the reality that social context matters. What people experience shapes how they see the world, which in turn makes them more receptive to certain correctional theories than to others. This is true of readers, of criminologists, and of us. Large shifts in the social context thus tend to produce shifts in the extent to which a given theory continues to “make sense” to the American public. It can also affect whether politicians believe that they can use specific crime control policies—such as favoring “law and order”—to advance their careers (Garland, 2001; Simon, 2007).

If context has a defining influence on correctional theory and policy, this may mean that, by contrast, something else plays only a limited role in guiding system practices. What might this “something else” be—something that is not paid attention to sufficiently? Some readers might anticipate the answer to this question: It is the evidence on whether a theory has merit. Does what the perspective proposes actually work? A huge problem in corrections is that many policies and practices have been based more on common sense rooted in individuals’ experience than on hard empirical evidence. This failure to consult the evidence has led to correctional interventions that either are ineffective or iatrogenic—a fancy medical term meaning that the “cure” actually makes the patient, in this case the offender, worse off. In medicine, we call using interventions not based on the scientific evidence quackery. As we note below, *correctional quackery* is widespread and its eradication is a key challenge for those hoping to make American corrections better for offenders and better for public safety (Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002).

Thus far, then, we have identified the core themes that inform the chapters that follow. Let us summarize them clearly here:
• Correctional theories identify what the purpose of the correctional system should be and what policies should be implemented.

• Historically, the popularity of competing correctional theories has been shaped by the prevailing social context. People’s experiences affect what ideas about crime and its control make sense to them.

• Theories should be judged in large part on whether the policies they suggest achieve what they promise. Is a theory guilty of false advertisement—of making claims it cannot produce?

• The key to knowing what does and does not work—to knowing which theories should be embraced—is to look at the data. Corrections should be evidence-based.

In the remainder of this chapter, we address two topics in some detail. First, we have already mentioned that there are different theories of corrections. Thus, we start out by telling what these are and then discuss issues related to them. In particular, we show why knowing whether these theories work—whether they have utility—is essential to knowing whether we should endorse them. Second, this analysis leads us directly into an examination of evidence-based corrections, a movement that argues for the use of data to inform correctional policy and practice. A large part of this book is about using evidence to evaluate the relative merits of the competing correctional theories. We alert readers—as we have done above—that corrections is a domain in which those in charge do many things to those under their control without ever consulting the research evidence on what the best practices might be. Readers might think that we are joking or, in the least, exaggerating. We are not.

In a way, we are mystified by this reluctance to consult the evidence before intervening in the lives of others. We consider it unprofessional, especially when peoples’ lives are at stake—including both offenders themselves and those they might victimize in the future (Latessa et al., 2002). Still, we realize that the evidence on what does and does not work in corrections is not always clear. Studies can reach conflicting conclusions, and those who must daily face real-life inmates and community-based offenders are often undertrained and overworked. Finding out what is a best practice—separating quackery from effective policy and practice—is often a daunting challenge.

In this context, this book attempts to present the evidence on rival correctional theories in what we hope is an accessible way. Make no mistake: Some issues are technical and some conclusions are, at best, provisional. But we trust that after taking an excursion through this volume’s pages, readers will be more equipped to know the merits of the main correctional theories and will be more prepared to practice evidence-based corrections.

Theories of Corrections

What we call theories of corrections are often referred to as philosophies of punishment. This terminology is employed because each approach—for example, rehabilitation or deterrence—is seen as providing a philosophical justification for why it is legitimate for the
state to punish someone through the criminal justice system. In the case of rehabilitation, the justification would be that the state sanctions in order to reform the wayward offender. We prefer the construct of theories of corrections, however, because it is broader in scope. It includes not only the goal or justification for sanctioning an offender but also the accompanying blueprint for how the correctional system should be designed in order to achieve a given goal. Thus, if rehabilitation is seen as corrections’ main goal, then this will dictate a certain kind of sentencing, whether to have a separate juvenile court, the nature of community supervision, and the use of therapeutic programs in prison.

Thus, each philosophy or goal logically suggests a corresponding theory about which policies and practices should be pursued in the correctional system. This link between goals and what is done in corrections is often missed. In part, this is because most of us have multiple ideas of what the correctional system should accomplish—that is, we have multiple goals we want corrections to pursue. This is probably a practical way of viewing things, but it does mean that we often embrace goals that require incompatible correctional policies and practices. Take, for example, parole. The goal of “rehabilitation” would justify this policy (i.e., release inmates when they have been “cured”), whereas the goal of “deterrence” would not (i.e., parole would just teach inmates that they will not be fully punished for their crimes). Now, if we wanted the correctional system to deter and to rehabilitate, that might be a reasonable thing to desire. However, organizing the system to accomplish both goals fully is impossible. In this case, it is not feasible to both have and not have parole!

Again, in judging correctional theories, a key issue is that of effectiveness. Most often in corrections, we measure effectiveness—whether something works—by its impact on recidivism (although sometimes the focus is on crime rates). That is, if you follow a certain theory of corrections, does it make it less likely that offenders will return to crime? We could use other outcome measures, such as whether the theory saves money or makes offenders more employable and better citizens. But let’s be serious here: The “biggie” criterion for measuring effectiveness in corrections is whether something reduces crime.

As noted above, it is a daunting challenge to determine whether a policy—say, placing youths in a boot camp or in a prison cell—works to diminish reoffending. This is why, as criminologists, we are driven to distraction when scholars, policy makers, media commentators, or people at the donut shop just glibly say that a certain policy “works.” How do they know? Well, it’s their “opinion.” That is not good enough! Remember, we favor science over attitude. We want all readers to jump on the bandwagon of evidence-based corrections!

Six Theories in Brief

The intent at this point is to give a brief introduction to the major theories of corrections. These will be reviewed in greater detail in chapters devoted to each one. There are six main theories of corrections:

- Retribution or Just Deserts
- Deterrence
At the core of this theory is the mandate to pay an offender back for his or her wrongdoing. This attempt to “get even” is sometimes called “retribution” and sometimes called “just deserts.” Conservatives tend to favor the former term, liberals the latter. Why? Because conservatives wish to ensure that offenders feel the pain they have caused, they thus seek retribution. By contrast, liberals wish to make sure that offenders suffer no more than the pain they have caused; they want to see justice done but only that which is truly deserved. This distinction between retribution and just deserts is more than semantics—more than a war of words. Conservatives typically believe that retribution is achieved only when harsh punishments—especially lengthy prison terms—have been imposed, whereas liberals typically believe that just deserts is achieved through more moderate punishments and shorter prison sentences. Despite these differences, those in both political camps embrace the idea that the core purpose of the correctional system is to balance the scales of justice.

Note, however, that “getting even”—this balancing the scales of justice through a figurative eye-for-an-eye approach—is unrelated to the goal of reducing crime and of making communities safer. Offenders are punished as an end in and of itself—to achieve justice. Such pain or punishment is seen as warranted or “deserved” because the offender is assumed to have used his or her “free will” in deciding to break the law.

Because retribution or just deserts seeks to be an end in and of itself, this theory is called non-utilitarian. Theories that are utilitarian seek to sanction offenders not simply to sanction them, but for some other purpose. This purpose is most often to reduce crime. For example, I might put you in prison in hopes that someone else will learn of your fate and be too afraid to break the law. This is the so-called notion of punishing Peter to make Paul conform. To someone who believes in retribution, this action would be immoral. Peter should be punished only for what Peter personally has done. What Paul might or might not do should not be a consideration. In any event, hard as it is to keep straight, let us repeat the point: Principled advocates of retribution or just deserts could care less about how criminal sanctions affect crime. They are in the business of doing justice, not controlling crime.

As we will note shortly, utilitarian theories make the claim that their approach to corrections works best to reduce crime. This is an empirical issue. We can test these assertions by examining the data. This is where evidenced-based corrections becomes important. For the most part, evidence is not central to evaluating retribution or just deserts. This theory is based mainly on values—on the principle that people who harm others deserve to be harmed equally in response. We will not delve deeply into the issue
here, but suffice it to say that this theory does make claims that can be evaluated with evidence—not about reducing crime but about other things.

For example, retribution or just deserts bases its morality on the assertion that people break the law due to their free will. This is why this theory demands that punishments should be calibrated to the seriousness of the crime; the more serious the crime, the harsher the punishment. Focusing exclusively on the crime presumes that all people are the same and thus face the same choice when it comes to crime. The only thing that separates them is how they decide to exercise their free will—to break the law or not. But what if criminological research shows—as indeed it does—that the propensity for crime begins in the first years of life and that offenders are, through no conscious choice of their own, quite different from non-offenders? What does this do to the free will assumption? In short, criminological evidence has implications for the claims of retribution theory whenever they are based on some view of how people and the world actually operate.

**DETERRENCE: SCARING OFFENDERS STRAIGHT**

Deterrence theory proposes that offenders should be punished so that they will be taught that “crime does not pay” and thus will not to return to crime. Note that deterrence theory assumes that offenders are rational. Accordingly, efforts to increase the cost of crime—usually through more certain and severe penalties—will cause offenders to choose to “go straight” out of fear that future criminality will prove too painful. They will refrain from reoffending so as to avoid the cost of the criminal sanction. This is called *specific deterrence*; sometimes, the term *special deterrence* is used. In any event, the key point is the assumption that punishing Mary—such as putting her in jail for a while—will make her less like to recidivate.

There is also the concept of *general deterrence*. Here, the assumption is made that people might decide to commit or not commit a crime depending on what they see happens to other people who break the law. One reason to punish Mary, then, is to make Paula think twice and not commit the crime she might have been contemplating. So, just to sum up: When *other people* in society refrain from crime because they witness offenders’ punishment and fear suffering a similar fate, this is called *general deterrence*.

What kinds of correctional policies do you think that deterrence theory favors? To start with, deterrence advocates oppose discretion—that is, giving people like judges the freedom to place, for example, one robber in prison but not another or allowing parole officials to release one robber earlier from prison than another. You and I might disagree with deterrence theory on this point; we might want to give judges and parole board members such discretionary powers because no two robbers are the same. The two robbers just mentioned might have offended for different reasons—one to get money to buy drugs and party all night, the other in response to a mental disturbance. Similarly, when sent to prison, one robber might have worked harder than the other to be rehabilitated. Does it make sense to keep them both behind bars the same length of time? Because people, including any two criminals, differ, treating them the same in
corrections ignores this important reality. It can result in interventions that do not work. Your authors, Cullen and Jonson, do, in fact, believe this.

Such thinking by Cullen, Jonson, and most other criminologists, according to deterrence theory, is mistaken. (Cullen and Jonson will return to this issue later in this book.) Deterrence advocates believe—or at least are willing to assume—that offenders exercise rational choice when breaking the law. This view is akin to the idea of free will, only a bit more specific. Offenders are seen to use their free will but in a rational way: They assess the potential costs of committing a crime, such as going to prison, versus the potential benefits, such as stealing money or, say, a computer.

If people do in fact consciously weigh costs and benefits, then two things follow. First, in many criminal situations, the benefits of crime are staring offenders in the face: They can see the laptop computer that is there for the taking or a pusher’s hand is displaying drugs to get high on if only they exchange some cash. Put another way, the gratifications tend to be immediate and often easily attained (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). So why not succumb to temptation and grab these crime benefits? According to deterrence theorists, people will exercise self-control only when a little accountant in their heads pops up and says: “Hmm. Let’s do the calculation. Not a good idea. If you steal that computer and get caught, you will go to jail. It’s not worth it. Walk on by that computer, my foolish friend!”

Second, the critical issue thus becomes whether this little accountant thinks the crime—stealing the computer—will lead to an arrest and, if so, knows what punishment a subsequent conviction will actually bring. According to deterrence theorists, we cannot be ambiguous here. We cannot say, “Well, if you are caught, you might or might not go to prison. And if you go to prison, you might stay five years but you might get out in one year.” Every time judges and parole boards exercise discretion, they claim, the cost of punishment is made either less certain or less severe. No wonder, then, that the little accountant often concludes: “Hmm. How the hell do I know what’s going to happen to you? Take the damn computer, sell it for some hard cash, and then let’s get high and party down, dude!”

Deterrence theory thus provides a basis for a particular kind of correctional system. Punish the crime, not the criminal. This is done not to achieve retribution or just deserts but to reduce crime. Deterrence is a utilitarian theory; it is all about crime control. Punishments are to be fixed tightly to specific crimes so that offenders will soon learn that the state means business. Do the crime and you will do the time. No wiggle room allowed; no parole once sent to prison. Instead, the sentences served are to be determinate, not indefinite or indeterminate. Convicted offenders should be told at sentencing precisely how long they will spend in prison; once the sentence is imposed, no early release—the cost is carved in stone and not mitigated later on. Ideally, if prison sentences are going to be imposed, they should be made mandatory for everyone convicted of a crime. To stop the behavior, it is held, make the cost clear and unavoidable: Possess an illegal firearm, sell drugs, rob a store, then it is automatically off to prison.

**INCAPACITATION: LOCKING UP PREDATORS**

Here, no assumption is made about offenders and why they commit their crimes. Instead, criminals are likened to wild, predatory animals, such as a tiger, whose essential
natures are given and are not going to change. For whatever reasons, the argument goes, those we send to prison have shown that they are predatory. We do not really care why they got that way, and we should have no illusions that they can be reformed. Good sense mandates that we remove them from society. To keep us safe, we place predatory animals in cages and behind sturdy walls. We should do the same with predatory offenders.

Thus, the explicit utilitarian goal is to reduce crime by caging or incarcerating offenders. The amount of crime saved—that does not occur—because an offender is in prison and not in the community is called the *incapacitation effect*. When prison is used to lock up everyone who has committed a certain crime (e.g., all gun offenders), this is called *collective incapacitation*. When an effort is made to predict who will be high-rate offenders and lock up only them, this is called *selective incapacitation*.

Sounds good, huh? There is a compelling, virtually indisputable logic to incapacitation. If dangerous offenders are behind bars, then they are not in my community—or any community—committing crime. What could be wrong with that? Well, to an extent, nothing. But incapacitation theory confronts two daunting difficulties. First, its main correctional advice is to build more and more cages to house more and more offenders. This approach creates a correctional system that constructs prisons constantly and then fills them to the brim. We suspect that this is done because most offenders standing before the court manifest at least some risk of recidivating. If judges have an incapacitation mind-set, then it is logical to think: “Better safe than sorry; better send this one to prison.” Other options—such as sending offenders into a community-based rehabilitation program—are not considered.

The issue of how to spend the public’s money is important. Prisons are very expensive to build and maintain; they run 24/7, and guarding inmates is labor intensive. There is an immense opportunity cost to prisons. An opportunity cost is what you forgo—what you do not do—when you spend money on one thing (e.g., going out to eat) rather than on another (e.g., seeing a movie). In corrections, money devoted to prisons cannot be devoted to treatment programs or, perhaps, to creating early intervention programs. Closer to home, such funds also cannot be employed by the government to subsidize college education. In most states, students reading this book now pay higher tuition because tax dollars once used to defray such costs have been steadily siphoned off to pay for an ever-expanding prison complex. Whether many readers of this book realize it, they are paying indirectly to incapacitate offenders.

Second, the theory of incapacitation has nothing useful to say about what to do with the more than 700,000 offenders who return to society each year—most after serving about two to three years behind bars (Petersilia, 2003; Sabol et al., 2009). In fact, the theory is deafeningly silent on this issue. Should we simply ignore this horde of prison veterans and hope for the best? Further, the theory has nothing useful to say about whether we might reduce ex-inmates’ chances of recidivating—which usually hover somewhere between 40% to 60% within three years—while the offenders are still in prison. Research evidence now shows that simply caging offenders, placing them in prison and doing little else, either leaves their criminal propensities unchanged or strengthens them (Nagin, Cullen, & Jonson, 2009). There is that darn iatrogenic effect again—a correctional practice that worsens an offender’s criminality. This finding is not good for incapacitation theory.
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: REDUCING HARM

When a crime takes place, harm occurs—to the victim, to the community, and to the offender. The traditional theories of corrections do not make rectifying this harm in a systematic way an important goal. Even with retribution—where the state punishes and balances the scales of justice—any reward or satisfaction to the victim is indirect. In contrast, in restorative justice, the state acts more as an arbitrator and less as an adversary. The goal is for all harms to be rectified and the injured parties to be restored. Offenders must restore the victims and community they harmed. This might be done by apologizing and by providing restitution to the victim and doing service for the community. In exchange, however, the offender is, ideally, forgiven by the victim and accepted back into the community as a full-fledged member.

Restorative justice is both non-utilitarian and utilitarian. It is non-utilitarian because there is an overriding concern for achieving justice in and of itself. In this case, the justice is not, as it is in retribution or just deserts, adversarial with the goal of inflicting pure harm on the offender. Think of Lady Justice with her scales tilted downward on one side. In retribution, the scales are balanced by pulling the offender down by having the individual experience pain—arrest, public stigmatization, prison, continued exclusion by the community. By contrast, in restorative justice, the scale tilted downward is pushed back up—restored to its previous position. The goal is thus to motivate offenders to admit their wrongdoing, apologize to victims, and take steps to compensate victims and the community for the harms suffered. The response of others is to hate the sin—it is condemned and shamed—but to love the sinner, if not literally, then at least in the sense of making reintegration possible. Restoration, not retribution—getting everyone back to normal, not getting even—is the goal.

Restorative justice is utilitarian, however, because it claims that its approach of harm reduction is more likely to lower recidivism than the typical correctional response. In fact, advocates of restorative justice wish to take offenders out of the traditional justice system, using prisons only as a sanction of last resort. They prefer to create a parallel justice system that is devoid of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, and so on. Instead, when a crime occurs, the plan would be to have a “facilitator” call for a “restorative justice conference” (Braithwaite, 1998, p. 326). At this conference, multiple parties will be convened: the offender, the offender’s family members, people from the community who know and will support the offender, the victim, and his or her kin and supporters. The victim’s story, including harm experienced, will be told, and the offender will feel remorse and apologize. Guided by the facilitator, the group will develop a plan for restitution and for using members of the family and the community to build relationships with the offender so as to make recidivism unlikely.

There is much that is appealing about this theory, but also a good bit that is potentially problematic. One immediate difficulty is how to implement restorative justice in a nation that has more than 2.4 million offenders incarcerated—a number that may stabilize shortly but is unlikely to head south of 2 million in our lifetimes (at least in Cullen’s!) (Carlton, 2009). The other problem is that restorative justice theory is antiscientific. Its advocates believe, for example, that
research on what works to make rehabilitation programs more or less effective is irrelevant. They are convinced that the key to reducing crime is the good faith efforts of non-professionals to construct a web of supportive relationships around the wayward that makes reoffending unlikely. We are all for social support and agree that the needless stigmatizing and rejection of offenders is counterproductive (Cullen, 1994; Cullen & Jonson, 2011a). Still, we are uncomfortable with any correctional theory that is not rooted in sound scientific criminology and in evidence-based corrections.

**REHABILITATION: SAVING THE WAYWARD**

As already intimated, Cullen and Jonson, your authors, are advocates of rehabilitation. We must let you in on a bit of a secret. When authors favor a certain theory, they usually discuss it toward the end of the book—as we do here. Why? Because they want to tell you what is wrong about all the rival theories before explaining why their perspective is the best! We are disclosing this information so that readers will understand where our potential biases might rest. We say “potential,” because our goal here is not to be biased—to pull some ideological wool over the readers’ eyes. Rather, we support rehabilitation for what we see as a good reason: the empirical weakness of the other theories of corrections and rehabilitation’s consistency with what we know about the causes of offending and how best to reduce it. To be direct, Cullen and Jonson are convinced that a correctional system devoid of rehabilitation will increase recidivism and endanger public safety.

In the rehabilitation perspective, the goal is to intervene so as to change those factors that are causing offenders to break the law. The assumption is made that, at least in part, crime is determined by factors (e.g., antisocial attitudes, bad companions, dysfunctional family life). Unless these criminogenic risks are targeted for change, then crime will continue. Thus, crime is saved—recidivism is reduced—to the extent that correctional interventions succeed in altering the factors within or very close to offenders that move them to commit crimes (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

What we have just outlined is not based on Advanced Rocket Science Criminology but is taught in Introduction to Criminology—a course readers might have taken. Every theory covered in the introductory course identifies a set of factors that is purported to increase the risk of crime: exposure to strain, differential association with antisocial peers, lack of social bonds or self-control, stigmatizing labeling, residing in a disorganized neighborhood, neuropsychological deficits, biosocial developmental trajectories, and so on. Does any of this sound familiar? Criminologists assume that crime is chosen but not according to some vague notion of rational choice. Rather, crime is held to be chosen for a reason—something is driving or shaping the choice. Again, criminological theories tell us what those reasons are (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2011).

The implications of Introduction to Criminology are thus profound. If individuals do indeed commit crime because of the risk factors identified by criminologists, then it follows logically that their offending will continue unless they are cured of the
criminal forces within and around them. This is why rehabilitation makes sense: It involves the use of correctional programs to cure what is wrong with offenders. In turn, this means that the system should be arranged to deliver effective treatment. We will describe the components of a rehabilitation-oriented system in Chapter 2, but for now we will note that it involves policies such as pre-sentence reports, indeterminate sentences and parole release, making prisons therapeutic, and having probation and parole officers provide or broker services for their supervisees. The overriding goal is to individualize treatment: Know what is criminogenic about each offender and try to fix it.

Introduction to Criminology is also why advocates of rehabilitation do not believe that inflicting harsh punishments on offenders is a prudent crime control policy. These approaches just do not change what makes criminals recidivate. Thus, rehabilitation theory predicts that if offenders are incapacitated—simply warehoused without treatment—then they will leave prison no better off, and worse off if they have been exposed to criminogenic risk factors while behind bars. The theory also predicts that deterrence-based policies will not be very effective in preventing reoffending because they are based on a limited, if not incorrect, theory of crime (crime is simply a rational choice). For the most part, these predictions turn out to be true.

To be fair, rehabilitation has its own challenges to overcome if it is to claim the mantle as the guiding theory of corrections. For one thing, it is not easy to change people who do not want to change and may have spent their whole lives developing into hard-core criminals. Further, saving people within correctional agencies is difficult. Prisons are hardly ideal therapeutic settings, and many correctional workers lack the professional orientation, therapeutic expertise, and organizational resources to deliver effective interventions. Many programs initiated under the guise of rehabilitation are non-scientific and have no chance of reducing reoffending. For those readers not inclined to like rehabilitation, there is plenty of grist for your mill. We believe, of course, that the alternative correctional theories are far more problematic. But this will be for each reader to decide.

**EARLY INTERVENTION: SAVING THE CHILDREN**

Early intervention involves placing children at risk for a criminal future into programs early in life so as to prevent them from developing into a juvenile or adult criminal. For example, young, single, disadvantaged mothers are likely to smoke or ingest drugs during pregnancy, which in turn compromises the development of the fetus’s brain. The resulting neuropsychological deficits can make the mother’s offspring irritable as a baby, hard to discipline as a toddler, and unable to focus on schoolwork as a child. These behaviors often lead to harsh and erratic parenting, rejection by other children, and failing grades in school—and, as you might imagine, place the youngster on a pathway to early conduct problems, associations with like-minded antisocial peers, dropping out of school, and progressively deeper involvement in delinquent behavior. How might this criminal trajectory be prevented? David Olds (2007) ingeniously came up with the idea of sending experienced nurses to visit these at-risk
expectant mothers both during pregnancy (to encourage healthy behavior) and after pregnancy (to help the mothers in parenting skills). This program has proven successful in achieving healthy pregnancies and thus in saving children from struggling with crime-inducing deficits that can be traced to the womb.

The appeal of early intervention lies in its inherent logic: If something can be prevented, then why not do so? Why wait until the child develops into a predator who hurts someone and must be incarcerated? Does not a "stitch in time save nine"? Of course, few things involving humans turn out to be as easy as they sound on the surface. It is a daunting challenge to identify who the future criminals of America will be. Further, unlike the correctional system, there is no early intervention system to take up this child-saving task. Still, there should be, and the persuasive logic of early intervention is becoming more difficult to ignore. It now appears that early intervention programs will be an increasing part of the effort to save at-risk children and adolescents (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). It is why we have chosen to include it in this book.

In a way, early intervention is not really a correctional theory in that it does not carry advice on how to organize the correctional system. Whereas corrections focuses on what should be done with people after they have broken the law, early intervention focuses on what should be done with people before they have broken the law. In a way, early intervention is the counterpart to rehabilitation—just that it takes place earlier in the life course. Thus, similar to rehabilitation, early intervention is based on the criminological reality that individuals with certain traits and exposed to certain social conditions develop propensities to engage in crime. Only if these propensities are diagnosed and cured through some treatment will the individual be diverted from crime. This is preferably accomplished in the beginning stages of life (early intervention) but, if not, then it must be accomplished later in life (correctional rehabilitation).

Finally, as readers proceed through the discussions of the various views on corrections, Table 1.1 might serve as a useful synopsis of the theories. For each theory, the table summarizes its core goal, whether it is utilitarian or non-utilitarian, whether it focuses on the crime or the criminal, and the key correctional policies it recommends.

Utility, Opinion, and Evidence

We live in a society that values justice. This is why we expect offenders to be punished at a level that is consistent with the seriousness of their crime. That is, we want a measure of “just deserts,” with more serious crimes receiving harsher punishments. Any correctional system will thus have to pay attention to issues of retribution or just deserts. An offender’s punishment must fall within acceptable lower limits (it cannot be too lenient) and acceptable upper limits (it cannot be too harsh). However, the difficulty with a system based exclusively on retribution or just deserts is that we also live in a society that values utility—that wants things to “work.” Our correctional system thus is expected to balance these competing expectations: to do justice and to be utilitarian—that is, to exact retribution and to work to reduce crime.
## Table 1.1 Theories of Corrections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Utilitarian</th>
<th>Focus on</th>
<th>Key Correctional Policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retribution/</td>
<td>Get even</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Determinate sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Deserts</td>
<td>Do justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limit discretion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deterrence</td>
<td>Scare the public straight</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Mandatory sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Abolish parole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Scare offenders straight</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>High levels of imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incapacitation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Imprison all offenders</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Mass incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective</td>
<td>Imprison high-rate offenders</td>
<td></td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Incarcerate career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative</td>
<td>Reduce harm to offender, victim, and</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Sentencing conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Restitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Offender reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation</td>
<td>Reform offender</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Treatment programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Probation and parole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Juvenile justice system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention</td>
<td>Treat at-risk youngsters to prevent a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Nurse home visitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>criminal career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Head Start</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multisystemic therapy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correctional policies and practices that violate these expectations of justice and utility risk being challenged. That is, one way to discredit a correctional policy—such as parole release—is to oppose it on the grounds that it creates injustice or increases crime. Of course, the opposite also holds: One way to advocate for a policy is to say that it promotes justice or reduces crime!

As we have seen, with the exception of retribution or just deserts, all other correctional theories embrace utility. They all claim that if their ideas are followed, crime will be reduced.

Importantly, this claim is an *empirical issue* that can be decided by examining the existing evidence. Utilitarian goals only “make sense”—only seem worthy of our
support—if, in fact, they have utility or benefits. If you advocate deterrence but the correctional system does not deter, then you are in big trouble! The same holds for the other correctional theories. In fact, philosophers would argue that if a utilitarian philosophy has no utility, then it has no moral justification. That is, the very morality of a utilitarian correctional philosophy hinges on its “coming through”—on it achieving the goals it states it will achieve.

At this point, we can see why a person’s “opinion” is irrelevant. Whether a certain way of doing corrections has utility—for example, placing an offender in prison as opposed to a community cognitive-behavioral treatment program—is not a matter of what you, me, some politician, Snoop Dogg, or Snoopy might think. Saying that something works to reduce crime does not make it so. In fact, many people who set up correctional interventions suffer the sin of hubris—of unwarranted overconfidence. They easily delude themselves that some program they like—especially when they can give it a catchy name like scared straight or boot camp—will reduce recidivism simply because they think it will. But if we know anything about the history of failed programs in corrections, hubris typically is the first step to doing something stupid that has no chance of working.

Again, determining whether a correctional philosophy has its intended utility—whether it “works”—is not a matter of opinion but of scientific evidence—of research findings. This is why it is essential for us to take seriously the need for evidence-based corrections—a topic we examine in some detail in the next section. Before doing so, however, we want to emphasize that a major purpose of this book is to subject the utilitarian claims of the major correctional theories to empirical scrutiny. If we do what any given correctional theory advises, will these policies and practices result in less crime? Which theory is most supported by the empirical evidence? Which theory should guide American corrections in the 21st century? These are large and important questions, and ones that all students of corrections should take seriously. Again, our intent in this book is to provide readers with a careful assessment of these issues. Regardless of which theory readers favor at this book’s end, we trust that mere opinions will be relinquished in favor of a serious understanding of the evidence.

Evidence-Based Corrections

Around the year 2000, a general movement was initiated to make criminal justice evidence-based. Lawrence Sherman (1998) was the first to use the term explicitly in this policy domain when he called for an evidence-based policing. Shortly thereafter, Cullen and Paul Gendreau (2000) and Doris MacKenzie (2000, 2006) set forth the case for evidence-based corrections. More broadly, there were calls to make policy and practice systematically evidence-based in other social domains, including education, medicine, and—as we will see below—baseball (Ayres, 2007; Davies, 1999; Timmermans & Berg, 2003).

In short, there was an emerging recognition in the United States and beyond that we had done a poor job of using the research we produced to help us make the best
CORRECTIONAL THEORY

decisions possible—especially as these decisions impacted other people’s lives. In some areas, such as medicine, scientific data were valued but often not organized in an optimum way to help doctors make correct, life-saving decisions. In others, such as criminal justice and baseball, the use of research was vigorously resisted and dismissed. These domains have had occupational traditions that value common sense and personal experience—sometimes called clinical judgment—over research evidence. Such ways of thinking and doing business die hard. Still, even in these more resistant areas, there is an increasing recognition that ignoring research data reduces effectiveness and exacts a high cost. This book thus is part of the effort to suggest that using the best evidence available to inform correctional policy and practice is a good idea.

CORRECTIONAL QUACKERY

Consider if medical doctors made decisions that affected the lives of patients without any reliance on medical research on “what works” to cure patients. We would call them “quacks.” We would sue them in civil courts and perhaps cart them off to prison for needlessly injuring and killing people. Yet, in corrections, we often make decisions on the lives of offenders—which have implications for others, including future victims—based on myth, tradition, politics, convenience, personal opinion, and personal experience. The result is what Cullen and his good friends, Edward Latessa and Paul Gendreau, call correctional quackery (Latessa et al., 2002).

By correctional quackery, we are saying that much of what is done in corrections has the scientific standing that the practice of bloodletting would have in medicine! More formally, Latessa et al. (2002) define correctional quackery as “interventions that are based on neither (1) existing knowledge of the causes of crime nor (2) existing knowledge of what programs have been shown to change offender behavior. . . . The hallmark of correctional quackery is thus ignorance” (p. 43).

Our position is that correctional policy makers and practitioners (as well as those working in other agencies in the criminal justice system) have a professional responsibility to seek out research evidence and to use this evidence to inform their decisions. Corrections is not a “science” like medicine, but this does not mean that research evidence would not allow better decisions to be made. This is a theme we will revisit in this book.

INSIDER AND OUTSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Some readers might object that we should not place so much faith in “the evidence.” What about “personal experience” that comes from working in agencies? Does not this count for something? In this regard, the late Robert K. Merton (1972), a former professor of Cullen’s at Columbia University, distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: insider and outsider.

Insider knowledge refers to knowing about something because of all the personal experience an individual has had as an “insider”—as someone, for example, who has
worked in a correctional agency or as a police officer. A person might have had many years to “make observations.” The individual has rich data, so to speak, and is able to understand the complexities of working in a criminal justice environment. Sometimes, this is also called clinical knowledge. It is having an “experienced eye” and a “gut-level feeling” about what is going on and what one should do with, say, a particular offender.

Outsider knowledge refers to knowing about something because one applies a standard methodology—the scientific method—to determine what is “really true” in the world. “Outsiders” do not work in an agency but rather conduct studies to develop a body of research literature on the subject. They assume that if high-quality studies are conducted, the resulting knowledge will allow us to “know what is really going on.” Personal experience is irrelevant because, in the end, faith is placed only in “what the data say.”

Now, importantly, what kind of knowledge—insider or outsider—do you think is valued in this book? Right: It is outsider or scientific knowledge that counts as “evidence” here. In taking this position, we do not mean to be arrogant about what someone—including readers—might know about corrections who work in the system. Insider knowledge has a place in making decisions on the job. Sometimes, it is the only knowledge available. Sometimes, a situation is so unique that a worker needs to “put everything in the mix” and use his or her experience to make an informed clinical judgment.

But three problems typically are associated with “insider knowledge.” When these occur, they can result in insider knowledge being incorrect or only partially correct. They can lead to “correctional quackery.” First, there is the N-of-1 problem. This is the issue of generalizability. You and your experiences are, in essence, one case. In research, we use the letter “N” to refer to the number of cases—thus the idea of an “N of 1.” Relying on personal experience—insider knowledge—means that you assume that what you have experienced also holds for other people in other settings. But this may not be the case, especially since you play a role in affecting your environment in ways that other people may not affect their environment (you are not a passive observer of “what’s going on” but an active participant). Basing policy on your experiences thus may result in decisions that would not work for other people and in other places.

Second, there is the conflicting-personal-experience problem. What happens when the “knowledge” you draw from your personal experiences differs from the “knowledge” someone else draws from his or her personal experiences? Who is right? Whose “insider knowledge” should we believe? Science, however, has rules (i.e., the scientific method) for trying to figure out which knowledge is best. Science is messy, too, and there are disagreements. But, again, the scientific method at least provides an agreed-upon strategy for figuring out whose knowledge is correct.

Third is the selectivity-of-perceptions problem. In deciding what is true about your world, you do not have to record or take down every instance in which some practice is tried. Let’s take baseball. Many managers use their personal experience and “gut feeling” about when, for example, to have runners steal a base. If they call a steal and it works, they believe that the strategy “works.” But what about the three previous times when the runner was thrown out? If the manager had looked at all instances in which a steal was attempted, he might conclude that having runners steal is not a good
strategy. But without such statistics—without a scientific approach—managers are free to selectively perceive the events in their environment. Now, the same selective perception can occur with personal experience. We may focus on the events that seem important to us—the successes or failures we have had—but ignore other events that were not as important (or pleasing) to us. We may thus form opinions about the world that are distorted by these selective perceptions.

The problem in corrections is, again, hubris: the belief by too many people—whether policy makers or practitioners—that their view of how to punish or rehabilitate offenders is correct because of all the personal experience they have had in the system. There is not a sense that their clinical judgment might be idiosyncratic, not shared by others, and focused on successes but blind to failures. Of course, if American corrections were a bastion of success—taking in the predatory on one side of the system and releasing them as angels on the other side of the system—we would be trumpeting insider knowledge and the clinical judgment it yields. In fact, Cullen and Jonson would not be writing this book. But the stubborn reality is that corrections is an area more often marked by failure than by success. On the face of things, it seems that we should be doing a better job. Phrased differently, ignoring research evidence has not produced much success.

EVIDENCE-BASED BASEBALL

Cullen and Jonson both like baseball and, as a result, think it holds important lessons for life. When Cullen was a youngster, his grandfather would take him to Red Sox games at Fenway Park, where bleacher seats were 50 cents. Jonson somehow became an Atlanta Braves fan. Growing up in Defiance, Ohio, her options for watching baseball on television were severely limited. With each and every Braves game televised on TBS, she became a die-hard Atlanta fan. If Cullen and Jonson were the Commissioners of Corrections, we thus would make everyone examine what has occurred in baseball over the past decade. This analysis would begin by having everyone read Michael Lewis’s (2003) wonderful book, *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*. (It’s now in paperback—not too expensive to purchase.) We believe that this book holds important lessons for corrections (see also Cullen, Myer, & Latessa, 2009).

*Moneyball* is illuminating because it tells what happens when insiders who use insider knowledge run a baseball franchise as opposed to making decisions based on statistics or data—that is, decisions about who to draft, who to sign in free agency, and how to manage a game. As it turns out, major league baseball is—or at least traditionally has been—the ultimate insiders’ game. Most general managers, managers, coaches, and scouts are people who at one time or another played the game. They have been socialized into and learned a culture that tells what are supposedly good baseball practices and what are bad baseball practices.

Strangely—that is, “strangely” for a sport that compiles reams of statistics—most of this insider wisdom is based not on statistics or evidence but on tradition rooted in personal experience (Gray, 2006; Schwarz, 2004). As it turns out, most of this insider wisdom is also wrong. (As some baseball fans might recall, this insight was made many
years ago by the guru of statistical baseball, Bill James.) For example, it is “common knowledge” that in the late innings of a close game—when a team has a runner on first and no outs—the manager should have the batter “bunt” the runner over to second base to be in “scoring position.” If you have a fast runner, a manager might choose to have the player try to steal a base. However, when the results of these tried-and-true strategies are actually studied, it turns out that bunting decreases the chance that a run will be scored in the inning (because a team is giving up an “out” for one base). Stealing a base increases the likelihood of a run scoring only if the player has at least a 70% chance of stealing the base successfully.

Insider perspectives also shape who are drafted by major league teams. Teams have scouting departments because they believe that scouts—most of them having played in the major or minor leagues—can eyeball a player and tell who is likely to make it to the majors. Once again, this usually turns out to be an incorrect assumption. Scouts typically are wowed not by statistical performances but by how a player “looks.” They like players with a “major league body”—someone who is tall and rangy, who can run fast, or who can throw over 90 mph. This is because their job is not to read statistics but to use their “experience” to pick out the guy who will become a star. They can “tell” who is a baseball player when looking at prospects because they are insiders and their insider status gives them special expertise.

As you now can anticipate, this turns out not to be the case. Many highly effective ballplayers are overlooked by scouts because they are under six feet, a bit chubby and slow, and throw only 88 mph. This occurs even when their statistical performance is far superior to other players who “look better.” This is because “everyone knows” that you can’t be a major league player if you are undersized and not athletic in appearance. A key problem with the tradition of baseball is that those in charge are convinced they are right. It is that darn hubris thing again. They do not subject their knowledge to empirical test. When a bunt leads to a winning run being scored, they talk about “good strategy.” When it does not, they do not wonder whether the strategy was stupid, but talk about players not hitting in the clutch with men in scoring position. Equipped with selective perception, their views about baseball are virtually impossible to falsify—to prove wrong.

As detailed in Moneyball, however, this situation changed when Billy Beane became general manager of the Oakland Athletics. He was once an athletic “phenom” who was drafted in the first round by the New York Mets (along with Darryl Strawberry!). Blessed with a “great body” and tons of athleticism, Billy Beane had one problem: When a pitch came his way, he could not tell a “ball” from a “strike.” This meant that he did not do a good job getting on base. When Billy Beane became a GM, however, he realized that being an “athlete” (which he was) was not the same thing as being an effective baseball player (which he was not). He lost his trust in scouts and in accepted insider-baseball wisdom. He realized that what really mattered was not how a player looked, but how he performed over long periods of time.

Billy Beane also bought into a theory about baseball—in essence, the “theory of outs.” The defining aspect of the game is that each inning has three outs. In effect, this means that anything that contributes to an “out” being made is bad for the offense and good for the defense because it limits the ability to score runs—and scoring runs is how baseball
games are won! This means that what matters most for the offense is getting on base. Walks—long seen as irrelevant—are a very good thing. Not striking out is good, because any ball “put in play” has a chance of being a base hit. Hitting a home run is really good because it creates a run and prevents an out. In contrast, the best pitchers are those who strike out hitters, do not walk hitters, and do not give up home runs.

If these facts are true, then it would only make sense to draft, trade for, and sign free agent players who get on base a lot (i.e., have a “high on-base percentage”) or, if pitchers, those who do not walk a lot of hitters and give up a bunch of home runs. In the end, it would make almost no difference whatsoever whether the players who do this are housed in athletic bodies or can throw 95 mph. Rather, you would know who the most effective players are by looking at their statistical history of performance. Preferably, you would mostly draft college players, because then you would have a longer statistical history to use in judging their performance. You would also scour the major leagues for undervalued players who performed well on key statistics (e.g., on-base percentage, slugging percentage) but were not the kind of athletic specimens who inspire awe. Further, if you used statistical data to select players—rather than insider knowledge—then arguably you would create a team that, collectively, produced a lot of runs and did not give up a lot of runs. Since scoring more runs than your opponent is what wins games, you would—over the course of a season—win a lot of games.

Now, Billy Beane was not the first person to argue that statistics should be used to make baseball decisions (Schwarz, 2004). Most famously, Bill James long advocated using statistics to manage baseball more effectively, and coined sabermetrics, a term that “married the acronym for the Society for American Baseball Research and the Latin suffix for measurement” (Schwarz, 2004, p. 127). However, the insider culture within baseball was so hegemonic—it dominated virtually everyone’s thinking—that James was ignored for years (Gray, 2006). (He was eventually hired by the Red Sox before they ended an 86-year drought and won their two World Series championships in 2004 and 2006.)

Beane was innovative in that he was the first GM to use statistics systematically to control how he managed his team, the Oakland A’s. Accordingly, he provided a test case for whether evidence-based baseball is more effective than insider-based baseball. Readers will have already figured out that Beane showed the value of an evidence-based approach—or Cullen and Jonson would not have devoted so much space to him. From 1999 to 2006, Beane’s teams averaged 94 wins a season. By contrast, the New York Yankees averaged just 97 wins annually.

So what is the big deal? As Lewis points out in Moneyball, the issue is, well, money. During this time, the Yankees’ payroll was three times higher—and yet they won only on average three games more per season. Between 1997 and 2005, the Oakland Athletics paid an average of $423,053 a win; the Yankees’ cost per win in player salaries was over $1.2 million (Cullen, Myer, & Latessa, 2009). Further, during this time, the A’s lost a cavalcade of all-stars to free agency or to trades made necessary by the threat of free agency. The only way that Beane would be successful on such a small budget was to practice evidence-based baseball: to use statistics rather than insider knowledge to make player-personnel decisions.

In short, the story of Billy Beane and the Oakland A’s is a case study of what happens when decisions are based on scientific evidence and when those you are competing
against base their decisions on custom and personal experience. Over the long haul, *rationality produces distinct advantages*. Other teams, for example, did not draft a pitcher like Barry Zito—an all-star pitcher—because he throws the ball only 88 mph. The Oakland A’s did draft him because his past statistical performance was outstanding. They were more interested in how many batters Zito could get out rather than in how much “heat” he had on his fastball.

Billy Beane hired an assistant, Paul DePodesta, who had no professional baseball experience but did have a Harvard University education. In *Moneyball*, Lewis (2003) described DePodesta’s thinking in this way:

> He was fascinated by irrationality, and the opportunities it created in human affairs for anyone who resisted it. He was just the sort of person who might have made an easy fortune in finance, but the market for baseball players, in Paul’s view, was far more interesting than anything Wall Street offered. There was, for starters, the tendency for everyone who actually played the game to generalize wildly from his own experience. People always thought their own experience was typical when it wasn’t. There was also a tendency to be overly influenced by a guy’s most recent performance: what he did last was not necessarily what he would do next. Thirdly—but not lastly—there was the bias toward what people saw with their own eyes, or thought they had seen. The human mind played tricks on itself when it relied exclusively on what it saw, and every trick it played was a financial opportunity for someone who saw through the illusion to the reality. There was a lot you couldn’t see when you watched a baseball game. (p. 18)

In recent years, the Oakland A’s have not fared so well. Enduring baseball poverty and repeatedly losing star players have taken a toll. But perhaps more than this, Lewis’s *Moneyball* unmasked Beane’s advantages. In less than a decade, virtually all baseball teams have come to employ sabermetricians and to use statistics in personnel decisions. Even the scoreboards at baseball parks now report not only batting averages but also OBP (on-base percentage) and slugging percentage—statistics that relate to run production and winning games. Although still holding on tightly to the traditional insider culture, the baseball world has had to become smarter—lest it fall prey to the data and rationality of GMs like Billy Beane.

Now, we trust that you can start to see—or even better, to start to truly feel—the connection between *evidence-based baseball* and *evidence-based corrections*. Why not become the Billy Beane of corrections? Of course, we well know that simple comparisons between baseball and corrections are a stretch. It is one thing to predict how many runs a team will score and quite another to predict the recidivism rate for a treatment program. But the broader point is worth truly contemplating: *In human endeavors—whether it is baseball, medicine, or corrections—ignorance is a dangerous thing*.

The special risk of insider knowledge is that it is a potential source of a particularly troublesome type of ignorance: beliefs that, because they are rooted in our personal experience, we just “know” to be true (or cannot believe are incorrect). The challenge for those of us in or who care about corrections, then, is to escape the blinders of mere personal experience, to take steps to learn about the existing scientific evidence, and to use this evidence to support interventions that are the most likely to be effective.
Conclusion: What’s Ahead?

Corrections is serious business. People’s lives are at stake—both offenders and potential victims. The harsh reality is that, similar to fighting cancer, success comes in small doses, incrementally, and only after careful research and experimentation. But corrections is not merely a matter of science and public health. It also is a political institution—an arm of the state (a fancy name for the government). As a result, it is vulnerable to being caught up in larger socio-political movements that change the social context and thus usher in new ways of thinking and new ways of doing.

Starting in the next chapter, we describe some major shifts in American society that have reshaped the nature of corrections. Perhaps the key transformation occurred in the late 1960s into the mid-1970s when rehabilitation came under attack and lost its status as the dominant theory of corrections. Despite many appropriate criticisms, Cullen and Jonson, your authors, regret this development. As rehabilitation declined, the theories of retribution or just deserts, deterrence, and incapacitation ascended. Together, they provided a powerful justification for a mean season in American corrections—a time not only when mass imprisonment became a near-permanent state social institution but also when gleefully trumpeting inflicting pain on offenders was celebrated. Only in more recent times have we seen the revitalization of competing approaches such as the theories of restorative justice, rehabilitation, and early intervention.

Over the book’s chapters, we thus tell this story of the struggle between two visions of corrections—one rooted in pain and prisons and the other rooted in betterment and social welfare. Again, our tour across history and into the bellies of these theories will be undertaken on a ship of science. The intent is to leave readers equipped with the knowledge and skills to be consumers of correctional research knowledge and thus able to practice evidence-based corrections. Let the trip begin!