Support for Restorative Justice in a Sample of U.S. University Students

Eileen M. Ahlin¹, Jennifer C. Gibbs¹, Philip R. Kavanaugh¹, and Joongyeup Lee¹

Abstract
Theories of restorative justice suggest that the practice works best when offenders are enmeshed in multiple interdependencies or attachments to others and belong to a culture that facilitates communitarianism instead of individualism. Restorative justice principles and practices are thus believed to be incongruent with the individualistic culture and legal system of the United States, especially compared with that of nations like Australia and Japan. Using a nonprobability convenience sample of students enrolled in a large public university in the United States, our study examines attitudes toward restorative justice as a fair and just process for reintegrating offenders and meeting the needs of victims. Results indicate that our sample holds less punitive attitudes than citizens in either Australia or Japan. Our findings are discussed in light of recent policy shifts in the United States that suggest a concerted move toward decarceration following the 2008 recession.

Keywords
restorative justice, attitudes, punitiveness, corrections

Introduction
The United States uses prisons and jails as a correctional option to punish offenders at a substantially higher rate than all other Western nations. In 2012, more than 1.5 million persons were incarcerated in U.S. federal and state prisons and another roughly

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700,000 were housed in the nation’s jails, with an incarceration rate of approximately 707 per 100,000 (National Research Council [NRC], 2014; U.S. Department of Justice [U.S. DOJ], 2013). Although these numbers are still the highest in the Western world, they represent a decline from the peak of 775 incarcerated persons per 100,000 in 2007. The deep and prolonged economic recession that began in 2008—and the resultant pressure placed on state and federal budgets—appears to have stalled and may have prompted a reversal of the upward trend that has defined the U.S. correctional landscape for decades, as the number of releases from U.S. prisons exceeded that of admissions for the fourth consecutive year (U.S. DOJ, 2013). Even prior to the recession, however, the benefits of prison expansion for the nation’s social and economic health had been questioned and alternative possibilities for better addressing the correctional needs of offenders suggested (Gilmore, 2007; Hooks, Mosher, Rotolo, & Lobao, 2004; Mauer, 1999; Tonry, 1996). Indeed, the “get tough” and “just deserts” philosophy that has defined U.S. corrections since the early 1970s is increasingly regarded as a source of injustice, as long sentences and the resulting social marginalization has been disproportionately borne by the poor, and minorities (Alexander, 2010; Mauer, 1999; NRC, 2014). Such inequities necessitate a rethinking of correctional policy and approaches.

As retributive policy fads such as mandatory minimum sentences and “three strikes and you’re out” are revised or altogether abandoned at both the federal and state levels, alternative approaches to justice and corrections emphasizing the restoration of community harmony and peacemaking among offender and victim have gained an increasing foothold in the U.S. correctional landscape (Verrecchia & Hutzell, 2010). Having been implemented in international justice systems for decades prior to their piecemeal adoption in various U.S. jurisdictions (Rodriguez, 2007), restorative justice is “a process where all stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm” (Braithwaite, 2004a, p. 28), rather than passively relying on state apparatuses to dispense legal punishment.

While restorative justice appears to be a promising alternative to retributive approaches that make liberal use of incarceration, politicians in many U.S. jurisdictions are reluctant to endorse them for fear of alienating constituents by appearing “soft” on crime (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2013; Roberts & Stalans, 2004). This is to be expected given that the United States has been in a holding pattern following a roughly 40-year period where “get tough” approaches to crime received overwhelming support despite calls for evidence-based practices in corrections to deter would-be offenders, reduce recidivism, and end the decades-long experiment with mass incarceration (see Clear, 2007; MacKenzie, 2000). Even with evidence suggesting that restorative justice conferences reduce the frequency of recidivism, at least in the United Kingdom (Sherman, Strang, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, & Ariel, 2015), restorative approaches are often believed to be incongruent with the individualistic culture and legal system of the United States and its focus on retribution—especially for the most serious offenses (Roberts & Stalans, 2004). Dunn and Kaplan (2009) have posited that individualism in American culture is hegemonic—that is, it is so ingrained in cultural institutions that
the majority of citizens accept it uncritically. Individualism is also characteristic of the U.S. legal system, which was founded on Enlightenment ideals of rationality and free will that are codified in the U.S. Constitution. In noting how individualism strongly informs citizen beliefs about the causes of crime and the appropriateness of punishment, Scheingold (1984) argued that Americans tend to envision crime as “a rather straightforward problem whose diagnosis and treatment are embodied in widely accepted and universally understood moral truths” (p. 59). Harsh punishment is thus the preferred manner of dealing with law violators because it “is both morally justified and practically effective” (Scheingold, 1984, p. 60).

Accordingly, much of the literature overlooks the extent to which restorative justice may find support among the U.S. citizenry. The viability of restorative justice in corrections is particularly pertinent at this juncture in U.S. history because of the shifting landscape of public opinion following the decriminalization of marijuana possession in a number of states and the retroactive release of nonviolent offenders from the federal prison system. While such policy shifts may simply reflect an increasingly pressing need to control costs, they may also suggest a shift in correctional attitudes among U.S. citizens. To fill this gap in the literature, our study examines perceptions of restorative justice as a useful approach for reintegrating offenders and meeting the needs of victims compared with more punitive approaches, drawing on a sample of U.S. university students. In addition, to assess whether culture plays a role in determining support for restorative justice, we compare the results from our sample with those from Australian and Japanese citizens, as reported by Huang, Braithwaite, Tsutomi, Hosoi, and Braithwaite (2012).

We begin with a brief overview of restorative justice theory and a review of the extant research on perceptions of restorative justice, including a description of the study of Australian and Japanese respondents by Huang and colleagues (2012), which we partially replicate and extend to a sample of university students in the United States. Next, we detail our methods, including our survey instrument, and present our results. We conclude by discussing our findings in light of the current philosophies toward corrections in the United States.

Restorative Justice in Theory and Practice

Restorative justice is the counterbalance to punitive punishments. Unlike retribution and just deserts, restorative justice uses a holistic approach emphasizing the victim’s needs as well as restoring community harmony by reintegrating the offender after communicating disapproval for their actions. Restorative justice proponents employ a wide variety of practices, including offender–victim mediation (Zehr, 1995), family-group conferencing (Alder & Wundersitz, 1994), and sentencing circles (Jaccoud, 1998; Stuart, 1996). These practices overlap conceptually in that they empower the involved parties—victim and offender—to determine how best to repair whatever harm has occurred. Restorative justice programs vary across contexts, with emphases on conferences in Australia and New Zealand, and victim–offender mediation in the United States (Daly, 2001; Miller & Hefner, 2015).
The major theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of restorative justice practices were formalized sometime after the first victim–offender reconciliation or mediation programs were implemented piecemeal in Canada in 1974 and the United States in 1977, and their development owes much to the civil and victims’ rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Daly & Immarigeon, 1998). These movements helped inform an emerging body of critical legal scholarship that distinguished formal Western justice systems rooted in law, increasingly defined by the abundant use of incarceration, from the informal processes that characterized more tribal, agrarian societies (Harrington, 1985; Henry, 1983).

In the late 1980s, John Braithwaite developed his theory of reintegrative shaming to contrast social responses to crime that have a stigmatizing, alienating effect on offenders, versus informal methods of social control that have the potential to induce feelings of shame in an offender through social disapproval, while also working to reintegrate the offender back into the social fabric, rather than marginalize them. That is,

\[ \text{restoration is sought by shaming the sanctioned act and encouraging that individual to take responsibility for their criminal behavior . . . Restorative justice therefore is assumed to promote shaming that is reintegrative and, relative to traditional court processing, less stigmatizing.} \]

(Scheuerman & Matthews, 2014, p. 854)

Although substantively distinct from restorative justice programs, Braithwaite’s work is regarded as the theory behind the model of family-group conferencing in Australia (Daly & Immarigeon, 1998), and the principle of “restoring” harmony to victims, offenders, and communities was formalized in his theory of crime, shame, and reintegration (Van Ness & Strong, 1997; see Braithwaite, 1989). He modeled his theory after the practices of various Asian nations’ educational and justice systems, which emphasize reintegration into the group or society following sanctions (Braithwaite, 2004b). Asian culture is strongly influenced by Confucianism, which is a philosophy predicated on the de-emphasis of the individual, highlighting instead the well-being of the family and community—and deep feelings of obligation to them—for effective maintenance of the social order (Lee & Mock, 2005). His theory also incorporates insights from the child development literature emphasizing more authoritative approaches to child discipline, where the wrongdoer is confronted with moral reasoning and sanctions fall on a wide continuum and may be formal or informal (Braithwaite, 2004b).

Braithwaite (1989) further specified high levels of interdependency and communitarianism as the micro- and macro-level conditions under which restorative justice practices will be most successful. Interdependency refers to the stake in conformity or social capital that a person has to the group or society. Communitarianism may be defined as interdependency at the aggregate or community level. Both concepts imply that principles of mutual respect and cooperation of offender and victim/community are necessary to be successful. In describing the restorative practices in the Japanese legal system, he noted: “Apology has a central place in the aftermath of Japanese legal conflicts . . . Ceremonies of restoration to signify the reestablishment of harmony
between conflicting parties are culturally pivotal . . .” (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 64). He also contrasted the reintegrative and potentially transformative aspects of restorative justice programs with the just deserts and retributive logic of the U.S. criminal justice system, which responds only to the initial harm caused by meting out punishment rather than restoring harmony to lives and communities.

Of course, the ability to restore community harmony and to strengthen social bonds is contingent on one having ties to begin with—an increasingly uncertain prospect given the anomic nature of many communities in postmodern Western societies, which rarely feature high levels of interdependency (Blackwell & Cunningham, 2004; Johnstone, 2011) and which are increasingly defined by increasing residential mobility and heterogeneity (Putnam, 2000). In light of the differences between Western and Eastern nations, restorative justice conferences, then, may provide opportunities for weakly enmeshed persons to build interdependencies and shore up social capital (Bazemore, 2005; Braithwaite, 1989). Indeed, across countries, compared with traditional retributive responses to crime, meta-analyses show that these programs are effective in reducing recidivism and increasing both victim and offender satisfaction (Latimer et al., 2005). However, the effectiveness of the programs may be due to a self-selection bias—that is, these programs work because participants want to be involved. In politically charged environments, though, public perception may matter more to implementing and continuing restorative justice practices than evidence of effectiveness.

**Public Perceptions of Restorative Justice**

Citizens are generally receptive to restorative justice principles in two countries where such practices are most prevalent: Australia and Japan. However, attitudes toward restorative justice are affected by several factors. In assessing support for restorative justice in nationally representative samples of citizens from Australia and Japan, Huang et al. (2012) found that respondents with higher social capital generally endorsed restorative justice, whereas those with more traditional and socially conservative attitudes were supportive of punitive forms of justice. Current policy changes in the United States suggest that citizens—especially young adults—are becoming less socially conservative, particularly in terms of who is labeled as an offender (e.g., illegal drug user) and who will serve time in prison. This recent change in public attitude toward these correctional policies may have a carryover effect and influence young persons’ perceptions about the utility and appropriateness of restorative justice as an alternative to current correctional policies in the United States, though research on this topic is limited.

Relatively few studies have examined public perceptions of restorative justice in the United States. Among those that have, support has been mixed. Gromet and Darley (2006) conducted a two-part study examining perceptions of restorative justice among a sample of college students. They found that as offense seriousness increased, support for assigning restorative justice decreased in favor of “just deserts” logic. Roberts and Stalans (2004) similarly found that public support for alternatives to punitive
sentencing decreased as offense severity increased, indicating a desire to punish more harshly offenders who committed more egregious crimes, which may not be appropriate for restorative-justice-based resolutions. Furthermore, respondents supported measures such as mandatory sentencing, the “war on drugs,” and the elimination of prison rehabilitation programming, though support for imprisonment decreased as awareness of alternative sentences increased—especially for youthful offenders. This suggests that the public is not informed of the various possibilities for sanctioning offenders, and, in fact, Roberts and Stalans concluded that the public often lacks knowledge about restorative justice and is unable to envision alternatives to the punitive logic of the modern U.S. criminal justice system. However, research also suggests modest support for restorative justice innovations when situated within a more traditional, punitive justice system framework (Roberts & Stalans, 2004), or nested within a broader conceptualization of rehabilitation (Huang et al., 2012), not necessarily separated from state oversight.

The Current Study

The current study contributes to the small but growing body of research assessing public perceptions of restorative justice within a bifurcated political-cultural milieu in the United States that on one hand boasts the most punitive justice system in the Western world, while on the other hand has tacitly acknowledged the unsustainability of mass incarceration, particularly of low-level and nonviolent offenders. Specifically, we assess whether the findings of Huang et al. (2012) can be replicated drawing on a sample of U.S. university students. We also compare correlates of support for restorative justice principles and practices across the three countries to gauge whether demographic characteristics and culture are factors in such perceptions.

Method

Sample

A nonprobability convenience sample for this study was identified from students registered at a large public state university with nearly 40,000 residential students in the northeastern United States in March 2014. We draw on a young adult sample of college students rather than a more diverse sample of U.S. citizens to examine the original tenet by Braithwaite (1989) that young persons have fewer interdependencies and are less likely to experience communitarianism. We test whether these factors also influence perceptions of restorative justice. Invitations for the online survey containing a description of the study and a web link to the survey instrument (disseminated using Qualtrics) were emailed to 5,000 randomly selected undergraduate and graduate students. Students were also informed about the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a US$20 incentive. During the 4-week enrollment period and after multiple email reminders, slightly more than 64% did not open the web link to the survey. Of the 1,848 participants who opened the survey web link, the majority did not complete the
entire survey and were excluded from the sample, leaving 195 cases that comprised our final sample.

**Survey Instrument**

We constructed a 57-item closed-ended questionnaire (see the online appendix) modeled after the one developed by Huang et al. (2012). Using these data, four attitudinal scales were compiled and each scale was used as a dependent variable. Independent variables were created from a variety of scales gleaned from the questionnaire. Details on the dependent and independent variables, and our control variables, are provided below.

**Dependent Variables**

The *Wrongdoing Deserves Punishment* scale was derived using Items 34 and 35 and assesses perceptions on offender punishment. The two-item scale has moderate reliability ($\alpha = .61$). The *Punishment Can Prevent Future Crimes* scale corresponds to Items 37 to 40 in the questionnaire and has high reliability, with an alpha coefficient of .87. This scale determines the perceived deterrent value of punishment. The *Benefits of Restorative Justice* scale was derived from Items 41 to 43 and has an alpha coefficient of .85. After introducing the concept and practice of restorative justice, this scale asks respondents to give their opinion on how the various participants (victim, offender, and community) might benefit from restorative justice conferencing. The *Support for Participation in Restorative Justice* scale is composed of five items, Statements 44 to 48 in the questionnaire, and had an alpha of .70. This scale gathers general perceptions on the utility of restorative justice conferences and whether respondents would be likely to engage in one themselves. The alpha levels for the dependent variable scales are similar to those attained by Huang and colleagues (2012; see Figure 1).

**Independent Variables**

The *Social Capital* scale is a combined measure of the “community participation” ($\alpha = .73$) and “individual engagement” ($\alpha = .79$) scales. The alpha coefficients suggest that they are internally consistent as individual measures. Following Huang et al., the two measures were combined because they were moderately correlated ($r = .32$). The *Individual Engagement* scale is composed of Items 1 to 3 to determine how involved the respondent is in his or her own community. The *Community Participation* scale is derived from Items 20 to 23 in the questionnaire to assess the level of interactivity among the community members. Because our sample includes students who may reside on campus, unlike the Huang et al. (2012) study, our measure of social capital does not include the question asking “How many people in your neighborhood do you know by name?” The *Traditional Values Are Decaying* scale is derived from Statements 24 to 27 in the questionnaire and has a high reliability alpha coefficient of .78. This scale addresses perceptions of morality in the community and between community members. The *Poverty Is the Poor’s Fault* scale is generated from Items 28 to 30 in the
questionnaire, with moderate reliability ($\alpha = .66$). Responses to this scale underscore current sentiment about economic conditions and distribution of monetary equality. The *Fear of Victimization* scale was derived from Items 31 and 32 in the questionnaire and has high reliability ($\alpha = .86$). This scale determines whether respondents fear that they or their family or friends will be the victims of a crime. In comparison with Huang et al., the present operationalization does not include two items that measure the perceived likelihood of victimization of family members and self, respectively. The *Victim Voice and Amends* scale is comprised of Items 6 to 9 in the questionnaire ($\alpha = .75$) and addresses the respondents’ beliefs about allowing the victim to participate in the sanctioning process. The two items in the *Victim Benefits From Forgiveness* scale, Statements 18 and 19, are highly correlated ($r = .64$). Both statements address potential benefits to the victim by participating in the sanctioning process. The *Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Offenders* scale, Items 11 to 17, has a high reliability alpha coefficient of .87. This scale focuses on the benefits of participating in restorative justice for the offender. The alpha levels for the independent variable scales are also similar to those attained by Huang and colleagues (see Figure 2).

**Control Variables**

In hypothesis testing, we include a variety of demographic variables such as race (minority = 0/White = 1), sex (female = 0/male = 1), and marital status (unmarried = 0/...
married = 1). Age in years was initially included in the data collection, but it was severely skewed with a wide range for a college student population (from younger than 18 to older than 50). Academic class was therefore incorporated as an alternative and ranged from freshmen to doctoral student. The final demographic variable, household income, was initially measured as an interval scale. Considering its severe skewness, household income was grouped into three tiers using percentile ranks: high, middle, and low.

Findings

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the scales for our sample juxtaposed with the statistics for the Australian and Japanese samples from the Huang et al. (2012) study. Concerning social capital level, responses for our sample fell between the Australian and Japanese samples. For the conservatism measures (i.e., Items 2 and 3 in Table 1) and fear of victimization, the American sample scored lower than both the Australian and Japanese samples. The American respondents appear to be less inclined than the respondents in the Huang et al. study to offer victims voice (i.e., Item 5 in Table 1), though, overall, American support for restorative justice generally fell in between the Australians and Japanese. Finally, the American sample appears to be much less punitive than the Australians and Japanese. This is noteworthy in that the justice system across the United States has generally been more punitive than that of other countries (Phelps, 2011).

Table 2 presents ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis output from the model using the Wrongdoing Deserves Punishment scale as the dependent variable. Poverty is the poor’s fault, fear of victimization, and all of the restorative justice
Table 1. Mean Scale Scores (N = 195).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Social capital</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Traditional values are decaying</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Poverty is the poor’s fault</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fear of victimization</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Victim voice and amends</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Victim benefits from forgiveness</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>4.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Benefits of restorative justice</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Support for participation in restorative justice</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Wrongdoing deserves punishment</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Punishment can prevent future crimes</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bold numbers are the indication of original findings in the current study juxtaposed with the previous findings that are cited from a reference (base) study.

Table 2. Standardized Betas From OLS Model With “Wrongdoing Deserves Punishment” as Outcome (N = 195).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic class</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.092***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.250**</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional values are decaying</td>
<td>0.325***</td>
<td>0.183***</td>
<td>0.184***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty is the poor’s fault</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.176***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of victimization</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.080**</td>
<td>0.079**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim voice and amends</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>0.198***</td>
<td>0.311***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim benefits from forgiveness</td>
<td>-0.169</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.059*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>-0.227***</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confucian face/duty</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>.205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. OLS = ordinary least squares.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001; Bold numbers are the indication of original findings in the current study juxtaposed with the previous findings that are cited from a reference (base) study.

measures failed to reach statistical significance with this Punitive Justice scale as the outcome variable. In contrast, American students who score highly on the measure “traditional values are decaying” (\( \beta = .325, p < .001 \)) and those who were married (\( \beta = .250, p < .01 \)) were more supportive of punitive justice. The model’s explanatory power (\( R^2 = .243 \)) was comparable with that for Australians and slightly higher than Huang et al.’s (2012) finding for the Japanese.
Table 3 reports the results of the model using the Punishment Can Prevent Future Crimes scale as the outcome measure. Again, there appears to be a notable discrepancy in the findings between the student sample and the other two samples. Unlike the Australian or Japanese respondents, traditional values are decaying and fear of victimization failed to achieve a significant relationship with this Punitive Justice scale; level of victim advocacy was also not significant in the student sample. However, students who scored high on the Poverty Is the Poor’s Fault measure were more supportive of punitive justice ($\beta = .384, p < .001$), as was the case for both Australian and Japanese respondents. Also, those with high support for victim forgiveness ($\beta = -.230, p < .01$) and offender reintegration ($\beta = -.197, p < .05$) were less supportive of punitive justice, as was the case in Japan. Another noteworthy finding was that, despite the absence of Confucian face/duty items, which were significantly related to punitive justice for both the Australian and Japanese samples, our model for the American student sample has substantially larger explanatory power ($R^2 = .370$) than Huang et al.’s model (2012).

While the results of the first two models identified noticeable discrepancies between the student sample and the other two samples, there appears to be similarities among all three samples in the model when the Benefits of Restorative Justice scale is the outcome (see Table 4). The standardized regression coefficients for the student sample are aligned with those for the Australian and Japanese samples reported by Huang and colleagues (2012). The findings are generally identical across the three samples. American students who scored high on victim advocacy ($\beta = .210, p < .01$) and those with high support for victim forgiveness ($\beta = .295, p < .001$) and offender reintegration ($\beta = .207, p < .01$) were more supportive of restorative justice principles and practices.
Table 4. Standardized Betas From OLS Model With Benefits of Restorative Justice Scale as Outcome (N = 195).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-0.162*</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic class</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>-0.105***</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.103</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>0.073**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional values are decaying</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty is the poor’s fault</td>
<td>-0.118</td>
<td>-0.020</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of victimization</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim voice and amends</td>
<td>0.210**</td>
<td>0.240***</td>
<td>0.174***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim benefits from forgiveness</td>
<td>0.295***</td>
<td>0.116***</td>
<td>0.076*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders</td>
<td>0.207**</td>
<td>0.312***</td>
<td>0.197***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confucian face/duty</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>.113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. OLS = ordinary least squares.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001; Bold numbers are the indication of original findings in the current study juxtaposed with the previous findings that are cited from a reference (base) study.

In addition, female students were significantly more supportive of restorative justice than their male counterparts. For the demographic variables, though, our results diverge from those reported in the Huang et al. study. In particular, being male failed to reach significance in both the Australian and Japanese samples, and academic class was negatively related to the Benefits of Social Justice scale for the Australian sample though not statistically significant for the American student or Japanese samples. Also in contrast to the Huang et al. research, social capital failed to reach significance in our American student sample but was significant in the Japanese sample. As was the case for Punishment Can Prevent Future Crimes, our model for the American student sample appears to explain Benefits of Restorative Justice scale ($R^2 = .492$) substantially better than the model for the Australian and Japanese samples in Huang et al.

Table 5 includes findings from a model with the Support for Participation in Restorative Justice scale as the outcome. Again, the findings are generally the same across the three samples. American student respondents who scored high on “social capital” ($β = .190, p < .01$) and those with high support for victim forgiveness ($β = .270, p < .01$) and offender reintegration ($β = .170, p < .05$) were more supportive of restorative justice than those who scored lower on these dimensions. Unlike the Australian respondents, those who were older in our sample tended to support participation in restorative justice practices ($β = .195, p < .05$). Again, our model’s explanatory power ($R^2 = .393$) was substantially larger than the models for the Australian and Japanese samples.
Limitations

Our findings should be viewed in light of several limitations. First, while comparable with other online surveys, our response rate was lower than desired. Second, the sample was drawn exclusively from the student body attending one university in the northeastern United States and thus not representative of Americans as a whole. Future studies would benefit from using a sample that is drawn from a wider sampling frame. We believe that a nationally representative sample of U.S. citizens would assuage most of the limitations of our study. Another related point to consider is that the demographic composition of our sample—especially given that our respondents were younger, on average, than the Australian and Japanese respondents—may account for the relatively low fear of victimization and the divergence from the punitive attitudes for which Americans are typically known. Notably, however, older respondents in our sample were more likely to be supportive of restorative justice, which is contrary to Huang et al.’s (2012) Australian sample where younger respondents indicated stronger support for restorative justice principles and practices. In light of these limitations, and based on the results of our study suggesting that social capital and liberal views on crime and punishment are associated with attitudes toward restorative justice, future studies should assess such attitudes among large, more general samples of the U.S. population.

Conclusion

It is generally believed that American culture is focused on punitive measures despite evidence to the contrary (see Cullen, Cullen, & Wozniak, 1988). However, recent support
for decriminalization of marijuana in an ever increasing number of states and statewide efforts to reduce the number of inmates through prison realignment and early release of nonviolent drug and other low-level offenders indicates that U.S. citizens may indeed be adopting attitudes consistent with restorative justice principles and practices. The purpose of this study was to identify factors associated with such attitudes, as studying citizen attitudes is important to assess whether restorative justice may be a viable means to address the numerous problems associated with prison overcrowding and state and federal budget shortfalls, and whether such approaches would be welcomed and used as an alternative sanctioning strategy in the United States, as is the case in nations like Australia and Japan.

Similar to Huang and colleagues (2012), in our sample of U.S. students we find that those respondents with higher social capital were more supportive of restorative justice principles and practices. In addition, those U.S. student respondents who believed that traditional values are decaying favored punitive criminal justice practices, a finding also congruent with those citizens in the Australian and Japanese samples. Similarly, those respondents who believed in personal responsibility for success disagreed that victims benefit from forgiveness, and respondents who were unsupportive of offender needs for reintegration and rehabilitation were more likely to adhere to a belief in the deterrent effect of punishment. Here, we also find that women were more likely than men to find restorative justice practices beneficial—unlike the Australian and Japanese samples where sex of the respondent failed to reach significance in any of the models (see Huang et al., 2012).

Despite a reputation for punitiveness and an adherence to the deterrence doctrine among a subset of our respondents, we find that American students have similar attitudes toward restorative justice as do Australian and Japanese citizens (Huang et al., 2012). In fact, the U.S. student sample held less punitive attitudes than either the Australian or Japanese samples. These findings may be suggestive of the recent shift away from “get tough” sentiments that have dominated public opinion for decades and should further suggest to legislators that restorative approaches to justice may, in fact, be endorsed by those of their constituents who have recently become old enough to vote—or at least those currently attending or who have recently graduated from a university. Alternatively, these findings may simply be an artifact of our more limited sample and the fact that their mean age is lower than the respondents in the Huang et al. (2012) study.

However, our results are not surprising in light of extant research on attitudes toward restorative justice, and support prior studies suggesting that persons who are educated on alternatives to the current U.S. criminal justice process tend to adopt less punitive attitudes (Roberts & Stalans, 2004). The survey instrument used here described the concept of restorative justice prior to asking respondents their opinions about such practices, which likely affected their responses. However, informing victims about restorative justice practices for certain crimes and providing options to victims to determine how their case is handled could indeed be a stepping stone to introducing restorative justice approaches on a wider scale.
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Notes
1. Whether the consecutive annual declines in incarceration rates constitute a trend is not yet clear. The nation’s own data indicate that over half of the decrease in the incarcerated population in 2012 is attributable to a 28,700-prisoner drop in the state of California’s correctional population, driven by that state’s Public Safety Realignment Act of 2011 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013).

2. Our main point of departure from the Huang et al. (2012) study is that we intentionally excluded the “Confucian face/duty” variable. Huang and colleagues used a few items to capture the idea of family centrality and the hierarchical relationship it has to culture. To the extent that the idea of Confucian face/duty may have exerted a substantive impact on the dependent variables in our study or may have had an interaction with another variable(s) precludes a direct comparison between the studies. However, a close look at Huang et al. concludes that the variable most likely had no impact on three of the four dependent variables. It has a significant effect on the Punishment Can Prevent Future Crimes scale, but the effect appears to have been negligible.

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