

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF COMMUNITY
CORRECTIONS—UNDERSTANDING THE
LINK BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND
COMMUNITY CHANGE

Almost 20 years ago, I authored an article in *Crime and Delinquency*, “Reintegrating the concept of *community* into community-based corrections” (Byrne, 1989), in which I argued that police and community corrections agencies were undergoing an unprecedented—and controversial—role reversal: Police departments were reinventing themselves as community problem solvers by incorporating the roles and responsibilities of traditional probation and parole officers into community policing initiatives; at the same time, community corrections agencies were moving in the opposite direction by incorporating the surveillance and control activities traditionally associated with police. What can we now say about the impact of this role redefinition on the performance of both the police and community corrections agencies?

For police, a careful review of police innovation over the past two decades reveals that this role reversal was mostly a case of smoke and mirrors. Despite the rhetoric (and the generally positive media coverage of various community policing initiatives), nothing much changed in terms of traditional police activities; and perhaps more importantly, there is no credible scientific evidence that community policing innovations have significantly improved police performance (Manning, 2003; National Research Council, 2004). In fact, it can be argued that under the guise of community policing, a wide range of coercive policing strategies have been initiated in high-risk, high-minority concentration neighborhoods (e.g., zero tolerance policing in New York City; hot spots-driven drug sweeps in Jersey City, New Jersey; “voluntary” warrantless searches for guns in targeted Boston neighborhood residences; and the proposed CCTV surveillance of high-crime neighborhoods in Newark, New Jersey). These strategies seem to be antithetical to a community policing model with its roots in probation and parole, in large part because community policing has been defined and implemented in ways that exacerbate the problem of citizen trust and cooperation with the police (Manning, 2005).

It does not have to be this way. Noncoercive community policing models based on the core principles of community corrections can be envisioned.

In this regard, Todd Clear (2007:202) recently offered the following observation about the distinction between coercive and noncoercive community policing models: “Problem-oriented policing can also be friendly to community interests, as police enlist members of the community to help in identifying high-priority problems. The key seems to be the degree to which citizens perceive the police as legitimate in their use of authority. When citizens see the police as fair in the way they enforce the law, they are more inclined to cooperate (Tyler and Fagan, 2006), even in high-crime communities (Pattavina, Byrne, and Garcia, 2006).” The irony here is that if someone had bothered to ask an old school probation or parole officer, he would have told them: It all starts with building trust and establishing relationships that emphasize both fairness and procedural justice (Clear, 2007).

Although much of the role redefinition I just described for police was for the most part, just smoke and mirrors, it seems to me that community corrections took its role redefinition to heart. Today’s community corrections system is noticeably different than its predecessor (two decades ago) in three areas: (1) the expanded use of surveillance technology; (2) the increased application of control-based conditions of supervision, along with the use of incarceration to sanction technical violators; and (3) the recruitment of a new generation of surveillance and control-oriented line staff. First, today’s community corrections system has invested considerable resources in the initial development of a surveillance infrastructure that allows for electronic monitoring with real-time offender location restrictions, random—and instant—drug and alcohol testing, remote alcohol and drug monitoring, and a variety of new technologies for monitoring sex offenders (polygraphs, penile plethysmographs, and even computer surveillance software). Second, community corrections officers today are asked to focus more on offender accountability and control, as evidenced by higher technical violation rates that are less a function of offender behavior (offenders are not getting worse) and more a function of agency policies and procedures (we set more conditions and monitor compliance more closely than we did two decades ago). Finally, today’s line community corrections officers are more likely to have been educated in criminal justice programs than in sociology, psychology, and social work, which likely translates in more involvement in administration and less in direct offender counseling and change (Byrne and Pattavina, 2007; Harris and Byrne, 2007).

I suspect that the depressing performance of community corrections in the past two decades is directly related to these three changes, which can be linked to the community corrections system’s attempt to become more like the police. In 2005, only 59% of all probationers and 45% of all parolees successfully completed their supervision terms, due to rearrest and/or

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a technical violation. This continues a long-term downward trend in the success rate of both probation and parole (Glaze and Bonczar, 2006), which has recently sparked new legislative initiatives to shorten probation and parole terms; provide adequate treatment for offenders with drug, alcohol, and/or mental health problems; and restrict the use of incarceration at the front end—for first-time, convicted drug and nonviolent offenders—and back end—for technical violators of the terms of community supervision (Byrne, 2008; Clear, 2007; Jacobson, 2005; Petersilia, 2007).

NEW STRATEGIES OF COMMUNITY SUPERVISION

There is no reason to doubt the claim that rehabilitation is back in vogue in the United States; for many critics of current correctional policies, this rediscovery of individual offender rehabilitation is long overdue (Cullen, 2007; Jacobson, 2005, MacKenzie, 2006). However, it certainly seems that something is fundamentally different about the current policy debate over the need to infuse corrections programs with a healthy dose of rehabilitation. Individual offender rehabilitation is being presented to the public at large—and to federal and state policy makers in particular—as the most effective crime-control strategy currently available. The argument is simple, seductive, and not all that offender friendly: Don't provide convicted offenders with treatment because it will *help* them as individuals. After all, better education, better mental and physical health, better personal relationships, better housing, and better job skills are all laudable features of individual offender transformation, but doesn't everyone deserve these opportunities for personal improvement? We need to provide rehabilitation to these individuals, not because it is the right thing to do, but because the provision of rehabilitation has been demonstrated to reduce the likelihood of reoffending significantly, which makes us—and our communities—safer. We are not doing it for them; we are doing it for ourselves and for our communities.

Of course, some would argue that this represents one of the *big lies* of individual offender rehabilitation, because even significant reductions in the recidivism of the seven million offenders currently under correctional control in this country will not likely change the crime rates of most communities, because offenders do not live—in large numbers—in *most* communities. They live in a small number of high-crime, poverty-pocket neighborhoods in a handful of states. For example, California and Texas alone account for almost a quarter of all offenders under correctional control in this country today; and within both states, offenders are clustered in a small number of high-risk neighborhoods (Byrne, 2008). Although crime rates have been steadily dropping across the country over the past 30

years, these high-crime, poverty-pocket areas have not changed for the better; in fact, just the opposite is true (Sampson and Bean, 2006). Because residents of these communities do not have the social capital to address adequately the long-standing problems found in high-risk, high-poverty pocket areas, the prospects for community change are bleak, with some arguing that *relocation* may be the only viable strategy at this time; even here, the research on the impact of large-scale relocation experiments offers—at best—a mixed bag of positive and negative consequences (Sampson et al., 2008). The fact that these poverty pocket, high-crime areas are areas with very large concentrations of minority—mostly black—residents suggests that racial disparity continues to play a central role in the creation—and control—of this country’s crime problem (Sampson, 2004).

Although much of the current debate about offender surveillance versus offender treatment has centered on offender risk level and on individual risk reduction, an equally important dimension of the problem has been drawing much less attention: community risk level and community risk reduction. As we consider how and where to target correctional resources, offender location and community context represent a critical issue to consider, along with offender risk level, and the timing, location, and quality of service and treatment provision.

Several jurisdictions are now considering the development of a concentrated community supervision strategy that incorporates the following three risk dimensions: (1) high-risk offenders, (2) high-risk locations, and (3) high-risk times for reoffending (Byrne, 2008). The Maryland Proactive Community Supervision model that Faye Taxman (2008, this issue) has evaluated represents one of the best examples of how to define this multidimensional view of risk operationally.

The “new” underlying assumption of rehabilitation advocates is that individuals convicted of both violent and property crimes should be given a “second chance” to transform their lives, but this must occur under the watchful eye of our surveillance-oriented corrections system. Although the hoped for transformation process will likely vary from offender to offender, rehabilitation programs designed to “treat” individual problems in such areas as mental health, substance abuse, education deficits, and lack of employment or vocational skills represent the core technology of offender change (Byrne and Pattavina, 2007). However, even the most ardent supporters of rehabilitation recognize that the criminal behavior of offenders is not likely to change dramatically—desistance is the new buzzword—unless we address the underlying community context of criminal behavior (Kubrin et al., 2007; Mears and Bhati, 2006). Based on the research evidence highlighted in several evidence-based reviews and meta-analyses conducted in recent years, the provision of “treatment” has been

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directly linked to statistically significant, but marginal reductions—about 10%—in criminal behavior (Cullen, 2007; MacKenzie, 2006).

I suspect that the general public—already wary of the prospects for individual offender change—will be expecting a bit more for its investment in rehabilitation than marginal reductions in offender recidivism. If we cannot demonstrate the link between participation in the next generation of individual offender rehabilitation programs and community protection, then support for rehabilitation—tenuous at best—will quickly dissipate. Although the general public seems to believe in the *possibility* of individual offender change, I think you will find that most of us are skeptical about the *probability* of individual offender change, particularly among individuals with serious substance abuse and/or mental health problems.

What can be done to improve the success rate of the next generation of correctional treatment programs? The article by Taxman and the policy essays by Corbett (2008, this issue) and Rosenfeld (2008, this issue) directly address this question. Faye Taxman's article presents the results of her recent evaluation of Maryland's Proactive Community Supervision model, which emphasizes the critical mentoring role of line community corrections officers and the need to train line staff on how to use noncoercive offender change strategies. In the Maryland model of community supervision, *positive* reinforcements for offender progress in treatment are the focus, not the *negative* consequences for noncompliance with various surveillance and control conditions. It is assumed that line community corrections officers can handle the inevitable role conflict that originates from their attempts to provide both informal and formal social control.

Taxman's (2008) research findings also highlight the challenges that program developers face when they attempt to implement new strategies across a diverse statewide system. In Maryland, implementation levels seem higher than in most other community corrections programs, which is likely the result of the unique researcher-practitioner partnership associated with the development of the Maryland Proactive Supervision Model. However, it is important to keep in mind that when a program is not fully implemented, examination of overall differences between treatment and control groups may lead to misleading conclusions about the effect—or lack of effect—of a particular program. The best—or worst—example is found in evaluations of the first wave of intensive probation and parole supervision programs, which have been widely reported as having no effect on offender recidivism. In fact, those evaluations actually demonstrated that a combination of close contacts and the treatment provision—when implemented as designed—resulted in significant reductions in recidivism (Byrne and Kelly, 1989; Petersilia et al., 1992). The problem was not the program model itself; the program simply was difficult to implement as designed, in large part because in times of limited resources,

we were more willing to spend money on the technology of control and less willing to invest in rehabilitation, the core technology of offender change.

Corbett's (2008) essay highlights the key features of the Maryland program, but it emphasizes that taking this program to scale in a statewide community corrections system will be a challenge, in large measure because you are asking line staff to become directly involved in the offender change process. With the expanded use of brokerage strategies over the past two decades, it can certainly be argued that offender surveillance became the primary responsibility of line community corrections officers, whereas individual offender change was somebody else's problem, and that somebody was either the local treatment provider or the offender himself/herself (who could "choose" to change his/her life course and desist from crime). Corbett argues that reintroducing the notion that line community corrections officers can and should be directly involved in the offender change process will take time and an infusion of training and staff development resources.

Corbett (2008) goes on to suggest that even with this renewed emphasis on individual offender change, line community corrections officers will also need to be advocates for change in their community, particularly in the area of treatment resource location, availability, and quality. The Reinventing Probation Council (2000) first offered this argument in presenting its "broken windows" model of community supervision. In that model, the authors also make the argument that—like policing—the real measure of success of any community corrections system is the crime rate of the neighborhood and general community. It may be time to revisit this idea, especially in light of recent police-corrections partnerships in the area of offender reentry (Byrne et al., 2004).

Richard Rosenfeld (2008) seems to be drawn to the application of this community-level performance measure by community corrections agencies, but for a decidedly different reason. Although the Reinventing Probation Council (2000) argued that community corrections can have a significant impact on the crime rate of their communities, Rosenfeld argues that if we are really interested in reducing the crime rate, then our money is better invested on crime-prevention strategies with demonstrated community crime-prevention effects, such as "hot spots" policing. He does not think we should abandon our efforts to use correctional resources to improve offenders in such areas as physical and mental health, education, substance abuse, and employment skills. He just thinks that the performance of community corrections should not be measured by linking provision of these treatment services to subsequent offender change, because (1) recidivism is an inappropriate outcome measure for

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community corrections, and (2) community corrections will be setting itself up for failure if it is judged by its recidivism reduction effects.

Rosenfeld's (2008) argument will likely be challenged by those who do not share his pessimistic view of the prospects for significant reductions in recidivism with a revitalized treatment-driven community corrections system. I also suspect that questions will be raised about Rosenfeld's claim that current community corrections programs do not distinguish between the increased number of "first time in prison" offenders and offenders with multiple prior incarcerations because most risk-assessment instruments include prior incarcerations.

Finally, Rosenfeld (2008) argues that hot spot policing—an inherently coercive policing strategy (as currently implemented) with mixed evidence of effectiveness—offers the wisest use of crime-prevention resources, because it is the strategy with the largest known effect on the crime rate of a community. Although I do not share this view, I think Rosenfeld raises an important point: Let's focus on what we know about crime-reduction effects, not what we wish were true. With this caveat in mind, I would urge readers to take a close look at the research on hot spot policing and compare it with the known effects of other types of community-level crime-prevention strategies, both inside and outside the criminal justice system.

A recent systematic review of hot spot research by Braga (2006) identified five randomized field experiments focusing on hot spot policing strategies. These experiments included the Minneapolis RECAP and the hot spot initiatives involving increased police patrols in target areas, the Jersey City DMAP and POP initiatives that included targeted crackdowns and what have been described as aggressive disorder enforcement tactics, and the Kansas City crack house raids conducted by the police in the mid-1990s. According to this review, only the Jersey City evaluations (conducted by the author of the systematic review) demonstrated significant crime-reduction effects, with modest short-term reductions identified in Kansas City, but no effect identified in Minneapolis (Braga, 2006). In light of the mounting evidence that noncoercive crime-prevention strategies—increasing the educational level of residents, reducing the number of people living in poverty—will have a greater crime-reduction effect at the same or reduced cost (Clear, 2007; Stemen, 2007), I suspect that Rosenfeld's assessment (2008) will foster a healthy debate.

CHANGING OFFENDERS AND CHANGING COMMUNITIES

At the center of the debate on how best to allocate our correctional resources is the extent to which we believe in the prospects for change. For some offender groups—murderers and sex offenders come immediately to

mind—many in the public do not care whether these offenders have changed. The public wants these individuals controlled, and legislators across the country have been quick to comply. More than 30 states have now passed legislation allowing for the lifetime supervision of these two groups of offenders. The fact that these offenders represent the two groups with the lowest risks of reoffending is beside the point. For other groups of offenders—nonviolent offenders and substance abusers—we seem willing to consider the possibility of change, even in the face of research that shows these two groups of offenders to be the highest recidivism risks. New legislation limiting the use of prison for certain categories of nonviolent, substance-abusing offenders in California is a good example of support for noncoercive treatment-driven offender change strategies (Petersilia, 2007). Similarly, recent legislative proposals in Washington and several other states designed to limit the use of incarceration for offenders under community supervision who violate the conditions of supervision (often by failure to attend treatment or failing a drug test) is a sign that the corrections system recognizes the limits of coercive offender compliance strategies.

A core assumption of life-course criminology is that desistance is largely unpredictable and the consequence of “human agency.” As Sampson (2007) recently argued: “shift happens,” but individual offender change is unpredictable. Nonetheless, several turning points in the life course have been identified, including marriage, employment, military duty, and relocation. The recently released report on parole and desistance by the National Research Council—co-chaired by Rosenfeld—highlighted the available research on these four major turning points, but they did not consider the possibility of yet another possible turning point in the life course: the changes in offender behavior due to the relationship that is developed between line community corrections officers and the offenders they supervise (National Research Council, 2007). It is possible that there was a mentoring or informal social control effect of line community corrections officers on offenders that may be at least partially responsible for the recidivism reduction effects linked to the Maryland model.

Until we address the underlying community factors that social ecologists have long argued are associated with crime—including location in high-risk neighborhoods, culture, resource availability, jobs, poverty, and a breakdown of informal social control mechanisms—even high-quality, resource-rich rehabilitation programs are not likely to result in broad-scale desistance from crime among individual offenders. Unless we design correctional strategies that (1) recognize the link between person-environment interactions and recidivism, and then (2) attempt to change both individual offenders and individual communities, we will continue the cycling of these individuals from community to prison to community.

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It seems inevitable that the next generation of community corrections programs will attempt to change offenders through the provision of various forms of treatment, but that line community corrections officers will also be monitoring compliance with treatment using the latest surveillance technologies. The question is as follows: How does a community corrections system find the appropriate *tipping point* between surveillance and control on the one hand and the need for both individual and community change on the other? The research article by Faye Taxman (2008) represents yet another example of how a state-level community corrections system—in this case, it is Maryland—can reinvent itself based on a careful evidence-based review of the research on the effectiveness of both offender surveillance and control and offender change strategies. When viewed in the context of recent quality evaluation research on these competing strategies conducted in several other states, including California, Washington, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas, an interesting picture emerges: First, individual offender change is much more likely to be the product of *noncoercive* than *coercive* community corrections strategies (Kleinman, 2005); and second, line community corrections officers have a critical role to play in this individual change process, not only as mentors and role models for the offenders under their direct supervision, but also as advocates for change in the communities where offenders reside (i.e., change in community attitudes, tolerance, resources, and location).

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