New Directions in Correctional Research

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• Four broad areas of correctional research
  ○ mass incarceration
  ○ community corrections
  ○ institutional corrections
  ○ prisoner reentry

• Three overarching themes
  ○ understanding the impact of correctional policies on race and inequality,
  ○ appreciating how politics can constrain corrections,
  ○ overcoming the Americentric tendencies in correctional research.
Mass Incarceration: Causes

- **Sentencing policy changes**
  - the forces behind the punitive turn
    - Mass incarceration as a rational response to increasing crime
    - Mass incarceration as the fusion of politics and public opinion
    - Mass incarceration as the control of marginal populations
    - Mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow
    - Mass incarceration as a grand social experiment

*need to be able to offer a convincing account of the dominant story of our time... a comprehensive understanding of the nature of this major shift in penal practice across places and within particular policy mechanisms*
Mass Incarceration: Effects

- Growing literature on impacts
  - on individuals and families,
  - on communities,
  - and on crime in those communities,
    - differential impacts of incarceration on the poor, on women, and on minorities.

- Research on effects of incarceration (Sampson, 2011: 820):
  - Crime control effects
  - Criminogenic effects
  - Societal consequences – Sampson’s “incarceration ledger”

   need a comprehensive “societal account of causal pathways” that can capture “simultaneous null, positive, and negative effects on crime... and different time horizons of influence (ranging from instantaneous to long run over the course of lives)”
**Mass Incarceration: The Beginning of the End?**

- *The Punishment Imperative: The Rise and Failure of Mass Incarceration in America.*
  - combination of political shifts, accumulating empirical evidence, and fiscal pressures
  - declining prison populations
    - One-third of the states have closed or plan to close prisons
    - Two-thirds have enacted criminal justice reforms designed to reduce prison populations
  - newly developing consensus that what has happened with the penal system can no longer be justified or sustained.

*need to start examining the effects of a decline in the use of imprisonment... parsing some of the differential effects of prison reduction schemes across places so that we can adequately respond when policy-makers and practitioners ask how to best handle the release or diversion of offenders from prison*
Community Corrections: Jails

- Jails – 13 million admissions annually
  - Extending what we know to prisons to jails
    - Spatial concentration
    - Collateral consequences
    - Impact on recidivism
  - Jail population management
    - Jail diversion/pretrial release programs
  - Jail programming
    - Jail based mental health services
  - Understanding jail population changes
    - reciprocal relationship between local jail policy and state correctional populations.

need a strategic program to update the literature and increase our knowledge about jails
Community Corrections: Probation

- Jails are understudied and probation has been all but ignored.
  - What works?
    - The best structure of probation supervision:
      - classification by risk;
      - focus on criminogenic needs;
      - use of cognitive-behavioral methods and motivational interviewing
      - Structured sanctions for violators
    - almost all of this literature uses non-experimental designs to support the findings
      - results of experimental studies have not always borne out received wisdom about community supervision methods

need to continue to investigate what is currently thought of as “evidence-based” using rigorous designs.
Community Corrections: Intermediate Sanctions

- original arguments for intermediate sanctions were that they
  - advance justice by offering judicial alternatives that save money, and increase public safety
    - an assertion has not been very well tested empirically.
- unanswered questions:
  - How have intermediate sanctions worked in practice?
  - How have intermediate sanctions affected the overall cost of the corrections system?
  - How have they affected public safety, especially as measured by arrest rates for crimes?

*need for a major investigation of the assumptions and consequences of the intermediate sanction movement*
Institutional Corrections: Doing Time

- Our understandings of what it means to do time based on an old model of incarceration
  - Physical environment of incarceration has changed
  - Social environment of incarceration has changed

- The many social and physical changes in prison cannot have occurred without affecting what it means to be in prison.

Need additional research describing the world of imprisonment to make this longstanding literature more contemporary.
Institutional Corrections: Correctional Programming

- Expansive “What Works” Literature
  - correctional programming can work for some offenders, in some settings, under some circumstances
    - Relatively few comprehensive theories of offender change
- Need to better understand:
  - Dosage of treatment required to achieve the desired effects
  - Why principled-programs fail
  - Success among high-risk inmates for whom all indicators have suggested almost certain failure
  - Implementing and sustaining prison programs that work

_need to refine our what works knowledge-base around correctional programming to focus on important questions that remain unanswered with the goal of developing more comprehensive theories of offender change_
Introducing Project Greenlight

- Material about Project Greenlight that follows is based on a final report to NIJ (Brennar et al., 2005).
  - Described as: “a short, intensive intervention that had the potential to serve a greater number of people at a lower cost.”
  - close collaboration among corrections, parole, and community-based organizations
  - daily classes designed to help participants develop the skills necessary to get a job, find housing, spend time wisely, and make good decisions.
- Goal: “Use the time that inmates spend in jail or prison to prepare them for release and introduce them to support services they can look to after their return to the community.” (VERA Report, Brennan et al. 2005)
Evaluating Project Greenlight

  - Included a comparison and a control group
  - Upstate comparison group were released from upstate prison facilities with no pre-release services.
  - Transitional Services Program (TSP) control group participated in a limited pre-release program run by DOC (also at the Queensboro Correctional Facility).

- Final sample sizes (Total N = 735):
  - Project Greenlight  N=344
  - TSP  N=278
  - Upstate  N=113
Evaluating Project Greenlight

- Evaluation involved extensive interviews with program participants and analysis of official New York Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) data.
  - Four measures of recidivism
    - all arrests
    - serious felony arrests only
    - parole revocations
    - re-incarcerations*
The positive intermediate impacts of the program did not translate to reductions in aggregate recidivism.

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<thead>
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<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>GL</th>
<th>TSP</th>
<th>Upstate</th>
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<td><em>Any new arrest</em></td>
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<td>35%</td>
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<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Revocations</em></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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VERA’s Reluctant Conclusion

• “In almost every instance, people who received in-facility re-entry programming recidivated more often than those that did not, and that the more intense the programming, the greater the recidivism.”

Smoothing the Path from Prison to Home (2005:29)
VERA Institute of Justice Final Report
Parole and prisoner reentry

- large body of research offers guidelines about effective programming for reentry
  - has not resulted in a program or set of programs demonstrated as effective through randomized field trials
  - “[w]ith some exceptions, the characteristics of interventions, including parole supervision itself, that are effective in increasing parolees’ desistance from crime are unknown ...” (NRC, 2008, p. 72-73).

**need to better understand parole as an institution**
Prisoner Reentry: Desistance and Redemption

- Desistance and Reentry
  - desistance research – importance of work and family
  - correctional programming research – individual cognitive behavioral change and recidivism
- Gendered aspects of reentry and desistance
  - Challenging the dominant narrative about desistance from crime (Giordano et al. 2002, 2008)
- Redemption
  - Developing the construct theoretically and empirically

*need to confront the apparent disjunction between desistance research and correctional programming research and to continue to develop our understanding of time to redemption*
Three Overarching Themes

- understanding the impact of correctional policies on race and inequality,
  - ought to remain vigilant about identifying and documenting disparities with the goal of eventually overcoming and eliminating them

- appreciating how politics can constrain corrections,
  - ought to continue to recognize the ways in which correctional change continues to be constrained by politics and political interests

- overcoming the Americentric tendencies in correctional research
  - ought to expand our horizons and begin to think about incorporating best practices from other places