

Environmental Corrections— A New Paradigm for Effective Probation and Parole Supervision

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Only a small percentage of men have to go back to prison. I think that many convicted fellows deserve another chance. However, we not only have to play fair with the fellow who's gotten bad breaks, but we must also consider the rights of taxpayers and our duties toward them. We don't want anyone in jail who can make good [quoted in Robinson, 2001, p. 32].

—Lou Gehrig, Member, New York City Parole Commission, 1940–1941
Member, National Baseball Hall of Fame

MOST AMERICANS—SUCH as the late Lou Gehrig in the last year of his life—manifest ambivalence about imprisoning one's "fellows." At times, opinion polls show that the public favors lengthy prison terms for offenders (Cullen, Fisher, and Applegate, 2000; Jacoby and Cullen, 1998). After all, the seven-fold increase in state and federal prison populations since 1970 has provoked only muted citizen opposition. And in several states the public have enthusiastically passed "three-strikes-and-you're out" laws (Turner, Sundt, Applegate, and Cullen, 1995; Zimring, Hawkins, and Kamin, 2001). Still, surveys also reveal that most Americans see prisons as potential schools of crime and doubt their deterrent effect. They are against merely warehousing offenders, and instead favor expanding rehabilitation programs. If offenders are not dangerous, Americans are willing to see if these wayward "fellows"—the ones who have "gotten bad breaks" as Lou Gehrig put it—can make it in the community (Applegate, Cullen, and Fisher, 1997; Cullen et al., 2000; Turner, Cullen, Sundt, and Applegate, 1997).

In fact, it is probably misleading to see prison and probation/parole as a strictly zero-sum phenomenon. For individual offenders, of course, the "in/out" decision—whether or not one goes to or is released from prison—is experienced as a zero-sum gaining or loss of freedom. But on a broad policy level, the growth of the incarcerated population to over 2 million offenders has not been accompanied by a commensurate reduction in the size of those under community supervision (Petersilia, 1997). As Petersilia (1997) shows, between 1980 and 1995 prison populations grew 237 percent; the comparable increase for parole was 218 percent and for probation was 177 percent. Numerically, the increase for probation—over 3 million—was about triple the 1.078 million increase for prisons. Furthermore, the number of convicted offenders under community supervision—which increased an average of 3.6 percent between 1990 and 2000—now stands at over 4.6 million. This statistic includes 725,500 offenders on parole and over 3.8 on probation (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

The sheer number of offenders on probation and parole has created a crisis that, in many jurisdictions, is characterized by the twin problems of flat or shrinking resources and rising caseloads—estimated to be an offender-officer ratio of 30 to 1 for parole and 175 to 1 for probation (Camp and Camp, 1999; Petersilia, 1997, 2002; Reinventing Probation Council, 2000). This problem is daunting and, on one level or another, undoubtedly is implicated in any assessment of community supervision. For our purposes, however, we will suspend this broad contextual reality

for much of our essay. Instead, we want to focus on the closely related, but analytically separate, issue of the *effectiveness of probation and parole supervision*. Simply put, if on any given day, 4.6 million convicted offenders are in our midst, one must question whether this is a wise policy to pursue. More precisely, the concern is whether we are supervising these offenders in the most efficacious way possible. Our main thesis is that the current practice of *community supervision could potentially be improved, perhaps dramatically, by adopting a new paradigm—a new way of thinking—about how best to supervise offenders on probation and parole*; we call this paradigm *environmental corrections*. But we do not wish to get too far ahead of ourselves, so let us pause for a moment before revisiting this matter in considerable detail.

The Need to Reinvent Community Supervision

At present, American criminologists hold two incompatible views of probation and parole. First, most criminologists—representing a liberal or progressive position—see community supervision as the *lesser of two evils*: at least it is better than incarceration! There is no agenda as to how probation and parole might be accomplished more effectively. Rather, value inheres in community supervision only—or mainly—because it is *not prison*. In this scenario, prisons are depicted as costly and inhumane. They are seen as causing crime in two ways: by making those placed behind bars more criminogenic and by so disrupting communities—especially minority

communities that lose high percentages of young males to incarceration—as to exacerbate crime’s root causes (e.g., increase institutional disorganization) (see, more generally, Rose and Clear, 1998). Probation and parole are embraced because they are a lesser form of what Clear (1994) calls “penal harm”—a lesser form of the state’s intervention into the lives of offenders. In this viewpoint, the more radical the state’s *non*-intervention, the better (more generally, see Cullen and Gendreau, 2001; Travis and Cullen, 1984).

Second, a minority of criminologists—representing a conservative position—sees community supervision *as an evil*. John DiIulio is perhaps most noted for warning about the risks of failing to incarcerate offenders (Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters, 1996; DiIulio, 1994a, 1994b; Logan and DiIulio, 1992; see also, Piehl and DiIulio, 1995). For DiIulio, probation and premature parole are dangerous policies that allow not only petty offenders but also chronic and potentially violent offenders to continue their criminality. The social injustice of this policy, he claims, is that the victims of these offenders are disproportionately poor and minority inner-city residents; prisons, he says, “save black lives” (DiIulio, 1994a). He tells, for example, a “Philadelphia crime story,” in which a cap on the local jail population by a federal judge led to offenders being given pre-trial release. The consequence, according to DiIulio (1994b, p. A21), was that “9,732 arrestees out on the street on pre-trial release because of her prison cap were arrested on second charges, including 79 murders, 90 rapes, 701 burglaries, 959 robberies, 1,113 assaults, 2,215 drug offenses and 2,745 thefts.” The statistics nationally are even more startling. Writing with William Bennett and John Walters, DiIulio observes that convicted offenders in the community “do tremendous numbers of serious crimes, including a frightening fraction of all murders” (Bennett et al., 1996, p. 105). In 1991, for example, the 162,000 offenders who violated probation—who averaged 17 months under supervision in the community—were convicted of “6,400 murders, 7,400 rapes, 10,400 assaults, and 17,000 robberies” (Bennett et al., 1996, p. 105).

In a way, these two competing perspectives capture “realities” that are both correct. On the one hand, it is foolish to diminish the very real public-safety risk that offenders pose who are released into the community—to “deny their pathology” as Elliott Currie (1985) once put it. Research from life-course criminology

now shows persuasively that there is a group of persistent offenders; some members of this group commit a few crimes annually and some a great number, but virtually all are lawless enough to be arrested and potentially incarcerated (see, e.g., Benson, 2002; see also, Piehl and DiIulio, 1995; Spelman, 2000). In this context, for 1992 the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that 17 percent of all those arrested for felonies were currently on probation (Petersilia, 1997, p. 183). In state prisons, almost 3 in 10 offenders were on probation when arrested; a similar proportion of death-row inmates report committing murder while they were on either probation or parole (Petersilia, 1997, p. 183). Only 43 percent of those under community supervision complete probation and parole successfully. Further, even discounting plea-bargaining and past criminal records, half of those on probation (52 percent) were placed on community supervision for committing a felony offense (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

On the other hand, it is equally foolish to imagine that prisons are the sole solution to crime (Clear, 1994; Currie, 1998; Petersilia, 1992). In fact, it may be that the nation’s thirty-year “imprisonment binge” (Irwin and Austin, 1994) is close to exhausting itself. Faced with spending \$30 billion a year to administer correctional institutions, states are now “reversing a 20-year trend toward ever-tougher criminal laws—quietly rolling back some of their most stringent anticrime measures, including those imposing mandatory minimum sentences and forbidding early parole” (Butterfield, 2001; see also, Jasper, 2001). Furthermore, if prisons reduce crime, it seems likely that this is achieved mainly through incapacitation, not deterrence (Spelman, 2000; more generally, compare Lynch, 1999 with Nagin, 1998). There is beginning evidence, for example, that the longer offenders stay in prison, the higher their recidivism rate is when they are released (Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen, and Andrews, 2000). There also is research suggesting that compared to those imprisoned, reoffending is equal, if not lower, among those who are placed on probation (Cullen, Pratt, Miceli, and Moon, 2002; Petersilia and Turner, 1986; see also, Sampson and Laub, 1993). These findings are inconsistent with the view that prisons specifically deter offenders.

Where, then, do these various considerations leave us? First, in contrast to the desires of conservative commentators, the stubborn reality is that most offenders will not

be incarcerated but will be placed under community supervision. And among those who are locked up, a high proportion will re-enter society in a reasonably short period of time—and perhaps more criminogenic than they were before being imprisoned (Petersilia, 1999; Lynch and Sabol, 2001; Travis, Solomon, and Waul, 2001). Second, in contrast to the implicitly rosy portrait that liberals often paint of the criminally wayward, many of these offenders placed in the community will be occasional, if not high-rate, offenders. *In short, we are left with the inescapable necessity of supervising many potentially active, if not dangerous, offenders in the community.*

In this light, it is odd how little liberal commentators have had to say about the “technology” of offender supervision—that is, how to do it more effectively. They have remained silent for 30 years on methods of improving community-based supervision. In part, this silence represents a larger rejection of the social welfare role in corrections (Cullen and Gendreau, 2001), and the belief that the two sides of the probation/parole officer role—treatment and control—are in inherent conflict and render officers ineffective in their efforts to improve offenders (Rothman, 1980). Again, liberals have endorsed probation mainly as an alternative to prison, and what it should involve—its specific components—has been beside the point. We should note that in response to this failure to articulate a clear progressive vision of probation and parole, there is now a beginning movement to “reinvent” offender supervision under the name of “community justice” or the “broken windows” model (Clear, 1996; Clear and Corbett, 1999; Reinventing Probation Council, 2000). This revisionist thinking is noteworthy, however, precisely because it remains the exception to the rule (see also, Nevers, 1998; Leaf, Lurigio, and Martin, 1998).

In contrast, beginning in the 1980s, conservative commentators had much to say about how to “reform” community supervision: purge it of its social welfare functions and increase its policing and deterrence functions. We will revisit this matter soon, but we will give advance notice that this prescription has been detrimental to the practice of community supervision. It is a failed model (see, e.g., Cullen, Wright, and Applegate, 1996; Fulton, Latessa, Stuchman, and Travis, 1997; Gendreau, Cullen, and Bonta, 1994; Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen, and Andrews, 2000).

To reiterate, then, the purpose of the current paper *is to suggest a new paradigm or strat-*

egy for improving the community supervision of offenders. Our effort, we believe, is both modest and promising. Our admission of modesty comes from the realization that we are, after all, proposing a conceptual framework, not a set of intervention techniques already proven to “work” in the real world. But despite their inherent limitations, new frameworks hold promise because they open up fresh possibilities of doing things; they are often a necessary, albeit not a sufficient, condition for change. In developing a different paradigm or way of thinking for probation and parole, we hope to provide advice where liberals have offered none and provide better advice than that furnished by conservatives.

The main premise of this enterprise is that effective correctional intervention must be based on *effective criminological research and theory* (see also, Andrews and Bonta, 1998). In this regard, we propose to borrow core insights from *environmental criminology*—a theory that links crime causation and crime reduction to the presence or absence of opportunities to offend—and to explore its implications for probation and parole supervision. In short, we wish to move toward a paradigm of environmental corrections.

Such an environmental approach will be novel but not fully new. Ideas often emerge simultaneously, though set forth in different contexts and with different emphases. The “community justice” or “broken windows” model mentioned just above foreshadows many of the insights we offer in this essay. Building on the ideas of community policing, problem-oriented policing, and a “broken windows” view of neighborhood disorder, a community justice model advocates probation/parole supervision that is proactive, neighborhood-based, linked to community groups and other justice agencies, restorative to victims, and concentrated in places where most crime occurs (for discussions of this model and related ideas, see Clear, 1996; Clear and Corbett, 1999; Karp and Clear, 2000; Kurki, 2000; Reinventing Probation Council, 2000). The clearest point of overlap between “community justice” corrections and environmental corrections is that both approaches believe that in supervising offenders, probation and parole officers should be *problem solvers*, sensitive to the *places* in which crime occurs, and enlist the assistance of both experts and *residents* in attempts to reduce crime events from transpiring.

The distinctiveness of environmental corrections is that its focus is, at once, more lim-

ited and more precise. Community justice is a broader paradigm that seeks to change the fundamental nature of corrections and, more generally, criminal justice—just as, for example, the rehabilitative ideal did during the Progressive Era and the “get tough” movement has more recently (Clear, 1994; Cullen and Gilbert, 1982; Rothman, 1980). Environmental corrections is compatible with the multifaceted shift inherent in the call for community justice, but it also can be part of a more incremental effort to reform existing community supervision. The key aspect of environmental corrections is not its revolutionary character but *its novel use of the insights of environmental criminology to illuminate how correctional supervision can lower recidivism by reducing offenders’ opportunities to offend*. Advocates of community justice have offered similar insights (see, especially, Clear, 1996; Clear and Corbett, 1999), but they have stopped short of calling for a systematic environmental corrections that is explicitly tied to environmental criminology.

In the current essay, we follow the admonition of the Reinventing Probation Council, which advised that “*probation agencies must start thinking outside the box for public safety, and design supervision strategies and programs for crime prevention and community betterment*” (2000, p. 19; emphasis in original). We begin by discussing the central ingredients in crime and then make the commonsensical observation that, to reduce recidivism, community supervision must “do something about” each of these ingredients. Our special concern is with one of these ingredients—*opportunity*—and with how environmental criminology provides a theoretical framework for reconceptualizing the specific goals and means of offender supervision. This approach does require probation and parole agencies to “think outside the box,” but not in ways that are counterintuitive or professionally demeaning. Instead, environmental criminology sees the insights of practitioners as integral to any effort to creatively redesign community supervision so that it makes the choice of returning to crime more difficult and less enticing.

Crime in the Making— Propensity and Opportunity

For a criminal event to occur, two ingredients must converge in time and space: first, there must be a “motivated offender”—a person who has the propensity to commit the

criminal act. Second, the person harboring a criminal propensity must have the *opportunity* to commit a crime (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Felson, 1998). This simple idea—that the recipe for making a criminal act is propensity and opportunity—holds potentially profound and complex implications for how to reduce crime. These implications have seldom been systematically or scientifically explored within corrections.

What Works with Propensity

Following the publication of Robert Martinson’s (1974) classic review of research suggesting that treatment programs had “no appreciable effect” on recidivism, it became widely believed that “nothing works” in corrections (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982). Fortunately, this position is no longer tenable (Cullen, 2002; Cullen and Gendreau, 2000, 2001; MacKenzie, 2000). Research from available meta-analysis is now incontrovertible that correctional intervention programs—especially in the community—reduce recidivism (see, e.g., Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, and Cullen, 1990; Lipsey, 1992; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; Losel, 1995; Redondo, Sanchez-Meca, and Garrido, 1999). These programs are especially effective in reducing reoffending when they are consistent with certain principles of effective intervention (Andrews, 1995; Gendreau, 1996; see also, Lurigio, 2000; Prendergast, Anglin, and Wellisch, 1995; Taxman, 2000). Such principles include: 1) using cognitive-behavioral interventions within the context of multimodal programs; 2) targeting for change the known predictors of recidivism; 3) focusing on higher-risk offenders; 4) applying a sufficient dosage of treatment; and 5) providing appropriate aftercare.

The point here is that we are moving toward evidence-based corrections in which we have a good idea of the programmatic principles that induce offender change (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000; MacKenzie, 2000). The challenge is for probation and parole agencies to create programs based on the principles of effective intervention or to be “brokers” in which they place offenders into such programs as a core part of their correctional supervision requirements. The failure to attack offenders’ propensity for crime through such programming no longer can be excused. Not doing so jeopardizes not only the offenders’ chance for reform but also public safety. These assertions are strongly stated,

but the knowledge base on “what works” in treatment is sufficiently developed that it is simply inexcusable 1) to use unproven intervention techniques or 2) to neglect treating offenders entirely (Gendreau et al., 1994).

The main thrust of this paper, however, is not with how probation and parole agencies should seek to reduce offenders’ criminal propensities. As the literature cited above indicates, this issue is being addressed systematically and empirically. Instead, our chief interest is in the other ingredient to crime: access to the opportunity to offend.

What Does Not Work with Opportunity

From the beginning period in which community supervision was invented (Rothman, 1980), it was understood that “supervision” involved both trying to change offenders for the better *and* acting as an external source of control that, backed up by the threat of revocation, tried to keep offenders away from “trouble.” When placed in the community, offenders often were given lists of “conditions” that spelled out the kind of situations they must avoid, including, for example, not frequenting bars, not having contact with criminal associates, and not carrying a weapon. There were also prescriptions of what offenders could do, such as staying employed and attending school. Embedded within these probation and parole “conditions” was the assumption that “going straight” was facilitated by offenders avoiding situations where *opportunities for crime* were present and frequenting situations where opportunities for crime were absent. Unfortunately, this core insight was never fully developed to its logical conclusion: the idea that a fundamental goal of community supervision was to *plan systematically with each offender on how precisely to reduce his or her opportunities for wayward conduct*.

As will be explored shortly in greater deal, opportunity reduction involves, among other factors, problem solving—that is, figuring out how to keep offenders away from situations in which trouble inheres. This approach requires, fundamentally, changing the *nature of supervision*. In contrast, efforts from the 1980s to the present to “intensively supervise” offenders—the deterrence-oriented “reform” advocated by conservatives—have sought mainly to change the *amount of supervision*. This strategy is akin to a police crackdown on crime in hopes of increasing the risk of detection or arrest as opposed to using police

resources to solve the problems fostering neighborhood crime; even if the crackdown works for a specific period or for specific offenders, the effects tend to wear off over time because the underlying problems are not addressed. In any event, whether the literature involves narrative reviews, meta-analyses, or randomized experimental evaluations, the results are clear in showing that deterrence-oriented intensive supervision simply does not reduce recidivism (see, for example, Byrne and Pattavina, 1992; Cullen and Gendreau, 2000; Cullen et al., 2002; Cullen et al., 1996; Fulton et al., 1997; Gendreau et al., 1994; Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen, and Andrews, 2000; Gendreau, Goggin, and Fulton, 2000; MacKenzie, 2000; Petersilia, 1998; Petersilia and Turner, 1993). “There is no solid evidence,” as Travis et al. (2001, p. 21) put it, “that solely increasing parole supervision will result in fewer crimes.”

The weakness in the intensive supervision approach—the “pee ’em and see ’em” model as some officers call it—is that it is based on a crude understanding of crime. Efforts to specifically deter offenders through uncertain and distant threats of punishment are notoriously ineffective (Cullen et al., 2002). It may seem like good “common sense” that more intense monitoring would increase the deterrent capacity of community supervision. But its effects are diminished by two factors: it does not do much to change the underlying propensity to offend and it does not do much to change the structure of opportunities that induce “motivated offenders” to recidivate. In short, the two key ingredients to making crime—propensity and opportunity—are not transformed by increasing the amount of supervision. A new theory of supervision is needed—one that shows how to change the *nature* of supervision. It is to the conceptual building blocks of this approach that we now turn.

Building Environmental Corrections—Learning From Environmental Criminology

Most criminological theories try to explain crime by variation in offender motivation and assume that criminal opportunities are ubiquitous. Environmental criminological theories, however, assume that the driving force behind crime is *opportunity*, because motivations to commit crimes, though variable, are common. In short, environmental criminologists believe that if you create an opportunity to commit crime, someone will eventually

come to take advantage of it. To use an analogy from the baseball movie starring Kevin Costner, *Field of Dreams*: If you “build it”—in this case, a crime opportunity—offenders will “come.”

A Core Theoretical Proposition

The insight from environmental criminology that opportunity is a salient criminogenic risk factor has important implications for the practice of corrections. If risk factors for crime are left untouched—or are targeted for change in ineffective ways—then offenders’ chances of recidivating are increased. Conversely, effective correctional interventions have shown that they target and then change the risk factors underlying criminal behavior (Andrews and Bonta, 1998). Building on this insight, we offer the core proposition to our new paradigm of “environmental corrections”: *The effectiveness of probation and parole supervision will be increased to the extent that officers systematically work with offenders, family and community members, and the police to reduce the extent to which offenders are tempted by and come into contact with opportunities for crime*. We suggest that the ineffectiveness of community supervision has, at least in part, been due to the failure to impact offenders’ access to criminal opportunities.

Environmental Criminology

To develop a new approach to community correctional supervision, it is prudent to draw on that branch of the field that studies crime opportunities—a set of perspectives now grouped under the umbrella of *environmental criminology*. Scholarship in this area is both diverse and growing, and only its key components can be summarized here (for a more extensive review, see Bottoms, 1994). In this regard, four principles guide environmental criminology. First, offenders, like all people, are constrained in their movements by their daily routines and streetscapes, and these constrained movements bring offenders into contact with possible crime opportunities. Second, locations vary in the opportunities for crime they present to people with an inclination to commit crimes. Third, offenders, like all people, read their environments for clues as to what types of behavior are feasible. And fourth, offenders, like all people, make choices based on their perceptions of rewards, risk, effort, and ability to be “excused.”

In short, environmental criminology investigates how offenders interact with their world and the consequences—including

criminal acts—of these interactions. Three important variants of this approach can be found in the extant literature. We briefly review these approaches here.

Offender Movement and Offender Search Theory. Offender search theory is based in the theories of transportation geography. People have “nodes” of activities—homes, schools, jobs, entertainment spots, shopping places, and so forth—and they travel between these nodes along routes. The routes and nodes network create the backbone of a “target” search area—not unlike a search area for a shopper except that the target is for crime and not for purchasing goods or services. Crime targets within sight of the routes and nodes are vulnerable to attack.

Offender search theory predicts that offenders look for targets around activity nodes and close to travel routes between nodes. This is called the “search area.” When the search area overlaps with potential targets, there is a heightened chance of a crime. Targets far from search areas, however, have low probabilities of being victimized, and offenders moving through environments devoid of targets will get into little trouble.

Crime Hot Spots and Routine Activity Theory. Offender search theory describes how people’s routine movements structure the way they identify crime opportunities. Although it provides insight into those areas that will have many crimes and those that will have few crimes, this approach does not predict which targets will be selected within these areas. Notably, the selection of specific places—locations—for the commission of crimes depends on a host of site-specific conditions that, in combination, create an opportunity structure. The result is that a few places are repeatedly the sites of crime, whereas most places have few or no crimes. This concentration of crime at a few “hot spots” is similar to the concentration of criminal activity in a few repeat offenders.

What is it about *places* that make them either seemingly immune to criminal predation or the scene of repeated crimes? Routine activity theory explains this phenomenon. According to this approach, crimes occur when a “motivated offender” (a person with a propensity for crime) and an “attractive target” come together at the same time and place, and in the absence of people who are likely to prevent a crime. The inner triangle in Figure 1 depicts the three necessary elements for a crime to occur. Each of these three elements, however, has a potential “controller”—a per-

FIGURE 1
Routine Activity Theory’s
Crime Triangles



son (or people) whose role it is to protect them (Felson, 1995). If a controller is present, then the opportunity for crime either is diminished or vanishes.

Thus, “handlers” control potential offenders. They are individuals with an emotional bond with the offender and who act in ways to keep the potential offender from offending. Parents, siblings, spouses, coaches, clergy, neighbors, and friends can be handlers. Offenders do not want handlers to know about any of their misdeeds. For this reason, offenders commit their crimes away from their handlers. Not surprisingly, very active offenders have few handlers in their lives, and these are not particularly effective. We note in passing that probation and parole officials can be considered “surrogate handlers.”

“Guardians” control or protect targets (or potential victims, when the target is a person). Owners of things are the primary guardians of their property, though they may enlist others to act as guardians. Friends, neighbors, and colleagues protect each other from criminal predation, thus acting as guardians. Police officers can be considered surrogate guardians. Offenders shun targets with strong guardianship and seek targets with little or no guardianship.

All places are owned and controlled by someone or something. Owners, and their hired employees, are “managers.” They are responsible for the smooth functioning of the place. Managers include store clerks, lifeguards, flight attendants, teachers in their classrooms, bar tenders, librarians, and anyone employed to work at a location. Offenders avoid committing crimes against targets at locations with active managers.

When considered in its entirety, routine activity theory accounts for two important facts about crime. First, it explains why crime is extremely rare, given the ubiquity of crime

targets. For a crime to occur not only do the three necessary elements have to come together at the same time, but also there must be an absence of the three types of controllers. Such a combination of events occurs more frequently than we would like, but it is still relatively rare.

Second, it explains why crime is concentrated and, in fact, concentrated in three important ways. Thus, crime is concentrated 1) in relatively few offenders—“repeat offenders”; 2) in relatively few victims—“repeat victims”; and 3) in a few places—repeat places or “hot spots” of crime. In each form of concentration, the reason is the routine absence of the three controllers when offenders meet targets (Eck, 2001).

Offender Choices and Situational Prevention. Environmental criminology rests on the assumption that people—including offenders—make choices about what actions to take, given the circumstances they are in. This observation brings us to the third environmental criminological theory: situational crime prevention. This theory posits that offenders take into account four characteristics of situations: the possible rewards of offending; the risks of being detected by handlers, guardians, and managers; the effort it would take to attack the target and escape detection by possible controllers; and the excuses one could use to explain one’s actions (Clarke and Homel, 1997). Environments may also be so structured that they stimulate situational motivations to offend (Wortley, 1997). In any event, because the offender’s decision calculus takes place moments before a crime, an intervention that occurs proximate to a crime situation will be more effective in preventing the given criminal act than a more distal intervention. Furthermore, to the extent that active offenders have impaired cognitive abilities that make them more impulsive and take less account of past messages and future consequences, then situational prevention potentially has its greatest influence on the most troublesome people.

Practical Implications

Although useful in other ways, many criminological theories identify sources of crime—often called “root causes” (e.g., inequality)—that provide few practical insights on how to prevent crime in the here and now. Environmental criminology is distinctive, however, in its identification of key elements

of criminal acts that, at least potentially, are more amenable to manipulation. In particular, it focuses on factors proximate and integral to the criminal act—on factors that must converge in time and space or the crime will not occur. Accordingly, this perspective has more immediate practical implications on how to reduce criminal activity. Briefly put, crime is prevented by ensuring that offenders and targets do not converge at the same place and, if they do, that control or guardianship is present. Although we lack the space to review the research studies here, there is now voluminous evidence that policing and private interventions based on the principles of environmental criminology can achieve meaningful reductions in crime (see, e.g., Eck, 2002; Felson, 1998.).

A New Paradigm for Correctional Supervision

Probation and Parole Officers as Problem Solvers

Recidivism is due to offenders' retaining criminogenic motivation or propensity and their having access to opportunities for crime. Thus, to reduce reoffending, an important task for a probation or parole agency is to provide or place offenders into treatment programs, based on the principles of effective rehabilitation, that diminish their propensity for crime (Gendreau et al., 1994). The other task, however, is for probation and parole officers to reduce offenders' access to *crime opportunities*. In many agencies, this challenge will involve reconceptualizing the very nature of what offender *supervision* entails.

Even before the movement toward control-oriented supervision in the 1980s, it was common to distinguish two components of the officer's role: 1) as a counselor or human services provider, and 2) as a controller who "policed" offenders. As suggested previously, the flaw in the policing function of probation and parole officers was that it was based on the erroneous assumptions that effective supervision involved merely watching for and reacting to instances of offender misconduct. Much as in traditional law enforcement, they were acting as "crime busters." But as is well known, policing is in the midst of a paradigm shift that is transforming the role of police officers from that of "arrest makers" to "crime preventers" (Eck and Spelman, 1987). Whereas traditional enforcement involved vehicle patrols and reacting to reports of

criminal incidents, problem-oriented policing values gaining knowledge or understanding about crime patterns (e.g., through mapping and other forms of analysis) and intervening proactively to prevent future criminal incidents from occurring. Opportunity blocking is the core technology of problem-oriented policing. Research suggests that problem-oriented policing is efficacious in lowering crime (Braga, Weisburd, Waring, Mazerolle, Spelman, and Gajewski, 1999; Sherman and Eck, 2002).

In this context, we are proposing that probation and parole officers reconceptualize their supervision function as involving not only watching and busting offenders but also problem solving. The key problem to solve, of course, is how to reduce offenders' access to criminal opportunities. This challenge is daunting but worth the effort: Given that opportunity is a major risk factor in reoffending, the failure to "pay attention" to opportunity reduction will increase the likelihood of recidivism and endanger public safety.

Reconceptualizing Supervision

At this juncture, we are going to offer ideas on what supervision oriented toward opportunity reduction might entail. These suggestions are informed, though not exclusively, by the concepts and insights of environmental criminological theories. We recognize that the recommendations we offer might appear on first blush—indeed, might be—"unrealistic," given the limited resources available. Regardless, although we trust that some specifics we offer might prove useful, our goal is to provoke a new wave of thinking about what it would mean if officers took seriously the task of keeping offenders away from crime opportunities.

Assessment. Forward-looking agencies realize that, as in medicine, treatment interventions should be based on diagnosis. Instruments to assess offenders' risk and needs, such as the Level of Supervision Inventory, are now being used to classify high-risk offenders and to direct interventions (Bonta, 1996). In a similar way, officers would now complement risk-needs assessments with a diagnosis of the *role opportunity plays in the probationer's or parolee's offending*. Some insights might be gained by mapping in detail the locations (e.g., streets, bars) where past offending has taken place. It might also be useful to interview offenders and to use cognitive intervention techniques, such as "sequencing," in which offenders would

describe, in very concrete ways, the steps or sequence of activities that lead them to search for and select crime opportunities and/or to wander into situations where "trouble happens." Further, officers might attempt to map out the routine activities of their supervisees to see whether crime opportunities inhere in their daily activities. Eventually, research studies could be undertaken to develop a "Crime Opportunity-Routine Activity Inventory" and/or other methods that would increase the ability of officers to assess how an offender under supervision creates or comes into contact with crime opportunities.

Working with Offenders. Informed by their opportunity assessment—and, more broadly, by environmental criminology—officers would focus on three tasks. First, with individual supervisees, they would try to *disrupt routine activities that increase crime opportunities*. As opposed to broad supervision conditions, such as "not associating with known felons," officers would seek to prohibit contact with specific people (e.g., past co-offenders), traveling on specific streets (e.g., outlined on a map given to offenders), and access to specific establishments (e.g., bars where trouble often ensues). Second, behavioral change involves not only extinguishing inappropriate conduct, but also replacing it with preferred alternatives. Officers thus might work with offenders to develop daily "activity calendars" scheduling prosocial activities (more generally, see Spiegler and Guevremont, 1998, pp. 326-327). This process might involve officers "brokering" prosocial activities—that is, developing rosters of "things to do" in the community or at home to lead offenders away from crime opportunities. Third, officers would see themselves not exclusively as "enforcing supervision conditions" but as *handlers of offenders*. Although the threat of revocation—a formal sanction—would necessarily loom in the background, the goal would be to exercise *informal social control* over offenders. This would entail using positive reinforcements for prosocial routine activities and building a "bond" with offenders. It might also involve taking whatever steps possible to increase the *effort* offenders would have to expend to access crime opportunities (e.g., challenging "excuses" for being in a forbidden location, responding as soon as possible when informed that an offender deviated from an agreed-upon calendar of activities).

Working with Family Members and the Community. Ideally, officers would also attempt to enlist an offender's family, prosocial

friends, and community members (e.g., minister, teacher) to assist in designing an opportunity reduction plan. Recall that these people are potential *handlers* of the offender. One strategy would be to have a “problem-solving conference” in which offenders and those in their intimate circle would jointly identify problematic routines and places and decide how these might be avoided. Because they are close on a daily basis to offenders, such intimates also might be able to supply positive reinforcements (e.g., praise, tickets to a ballgame, favorite meal) if offenders fulfill a “behavioral contract” to adhere to prosocial routines. As a last resort, they also might assist officers in knowing when offenders are backsliding into routines and places that place them at risk for crime.

Working with Community Place Managers. Beyond those personally affiliated with offenders, officers might develop relationships with *place managers* in the community—from bartenders, to store owners, to parking lot attendants, to security guards, to police officers. These place managers could be used to contact probation and parole officers when offenders are entering locations where, in the past, trouble has emerged. The cooperation of place managers should be requested strategically, since many are unlikely to wish to be transformed into generalized informants. It might be possible, however, to secure their assistance to help monitor when a specific offender enters the place they are managing, especially if the goal is to head off trouble and make the managers’ task of guardianship easier.

Although designed to reduce gang-related violence, Boston’s “Operation Night Light” shows the potential impact of a probation-police model that is informed by environmental criminology and problem-solving principles (Corbett, Fitzgerald, and Jordan, 1998). In this intervention, judges imposed conditions of probation on specific offenders that included curfews and geographic restrictions on where youths could travel. Working in conjunction with police on a Youth Violence Strike Force, probation officers visit homes of targeted probationers in the evening hours and examine locations where juveniles “hang out” (e.g., playgrounds, street corners). There was suggestive evidence that the “Night Light” program reduced gang-related violence (see also, Morgan and Marrs, 1998).

In a similar vein, LEIN—the Law Enforcement Information Network—might be used to facilitate police assistance in opportunity reduction for supervisees. Each state has a

system that allows police to check automobile registration information as well as an operator’s license and criminal history when making a vehicle stop. Some jurisdictions have mandated that when a person is involved in a domestic crime, any “no contact” orders be entered into LEIN so that police can be aware of and enforce these orders. Other professions now advocate the entry of probation conditions into LEIN so that police know who is on community supervision, the nature of their conditions of probation/parole, and how to contact the supervising officer. Such a system would allow police to assist in the enforcement of curfews and restrictions on where offenders are allowed to travel or “hang out.”

Conclusion—What “Works” in Community Supervision?

Corrections is entering an era of accountability in which credibility and funding will hinge increasingly on the ability of agencies to show that its practices “work” or are effective. To

achieve reductions in offending, agencies would be wise to start with the realization that criminal acts are the product of offenders’ propensity for crime and of their access to opportunities for crime. There is now a sizable literature on “what works”—the principles of effective treatment intervention—to reduce criminogenic propensities (Cullen, 2002; Cullen and Gendreau, 2000). Equally salient, research is clear on what does *not* work with opportunity reduction: broad-based attempts to monitor offenders (even intensely), threaten them with punishment, and then “bust” the “bad ones” (Cullen et al., 2002).

Taken together, these findings suggest two conclusions. First, agencies should either provide or serve as brokers for programs based on the principles of effective intervention. Second, a new paradigm—a new way of thinking—is needed to replace the failed paradigm that, in large part, has tried to use scare tactics to keep offenders away from crime opportunities. The purpose of this paper has been to sketch the components of this new approach to community supervi-

TABLE 1
*Assessing Environmental Corrections:
Some Basic Questions for Research and Evaluation*

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- ✔ Can and will offenders provide useful accounts of their normal activities—including locations and situations with high crime opportunities and many temptations?

 - ✔ Can probation and parole authorities incorporate offender descriptions into their supervision strategies?

 - ✔ Can handlers, guardians, and place managers be identified prospectively and enlisted in the community supervision of offenders?

 - ✔ Under what circumstances can correctional authorities develop effective partners with police and community-based institutions?

 - ✔ Do offenders adjust their routine behaviors to circumvent environmental corrections-based supervision? If so, in what ways? Can these be anticipated and countered?

 - ✔ How effective are forms of environmental corrections compared to its alternatives?

 - ✔ With what types of offenders is environmental correction most effective? The least effective?

 - ✔ What is the cost of environmental corrections compared to its alternatives?

sion—a paradigm that we have called *environmental corrections*.

This name was carefully chosen, because it is rooted in the belief that sound correctional practices must be based on sound criminology—that is, based on viable theories and evidence on what causes crime. In this regard, environmental criminology has provided important insights into how opportunity is implicated in crime. It follows, we believe, that this knowledge can be used to establish an environmental corrections in which the key components of opportunity—offender thinking, routines, handlers, place management, and so on—are targeted for explicit intervention by probation and parole officers. A key aspect of this approach is that opportunity will be curtailed not only by threats of formal punishment for non-compliance, but more importantly by problem-solving officers who seek to expand informal control over offenders, to increase the effort offenders must exert to access crime opportunities, and to work with offenders to restructure and fill their lives with prosocial routines.

We recognize that translating theory into practice is fraught with a host of difficulties, not the least of which is that our ideas on reducing crime opportunities are likely to be labor intensive. In practical terms, this approach is likely to be cost effective primarily with high-risk offenders, who already often receive more intensive supervision. Furthermore, we have provided no hard data that our proposals will prove effective. Evaluation research will have to address a roster of issues—which we attempt to list in Table 1—before we can say that environmental corrections is a viable paradigm. Even with these qualifications, however, we are bold enough to suggest that environmental corrections holds considerable promise as a means to inspire new thinking and practice in the supervision of probationers and parolees.

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