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STUDYING THE COED JOINT: A CASE STUDY IN THE NEP PROCESS FOR SYNTHESIZING EVALUATIONS AND ASSESSING EVALUABILITY [1/]

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For nearly five years, LEAA has operated the National Evaluation Program--also known as the NEP--as a way of systematically synthesizing prior evaluations and assessing evaluability in carefully selected topic areas. So far, 27 Phase One NEP studies have been completed. Another eight, all recently funded, are currently underway. The approach represented by the NEP has shown it can be effective not only for synthesizing prior evaluations, but also for assessing whether evaluation is feasible and for generating evaluation designs that can produce information bearing on the issues. First, to provide a setting, I will briefly outline the assumptions behind the NEP approach and describe the generic NEP process. After that, I will dramatize this process by detailing the procedures and findings from the NEP Phase One Assessment of Coeducational Corrections[3/]--which happened to be the first national study of coed prisons and, I might add, an unusual NEP topic.

A. The NEP Approach

1. Assumptions behind the NEP

The principles behind the NEP approach are reasonably clear. It is assumed that nearly any type of program will, at any point in time, be in a

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state of only partial implementation. Throughout implementation, the program's operators will generally experience ambiguity in expectations and in direction from those up above. To make policy and funding decisions leading to effective program management, it often becomes necessary to undertake program evaluations. For a program to be amenable to evaluation, there must be a match or commonality between what those in charge of the program believe it to be and what actually exists in reality. Because the evaluator can not ordinarily know in advance the degree of program implementation and the level of correspondence between the rhetorical program expectations shaped in the political world and actual day-to-day operations, it is often fitting to adopt a phased approach to evaluation. The evaluator has the task of determining whether the expectations held and the questions being asked coincide with the day-to-day realities in the field.

The NEP builds on these assumptions and focuses on first testing expectations against the actual program as it operates on a mundane, everyday level, and then determining whether and how to evaluate. Its assumption is that if we rush headlong into evaluation and fail to first assess program evaluability, we run the risk of evaluating a rhetorical program that does not exist in reality, and may end up generating information of little or no use to those making policy decisions. On the other hand, if we do assess evaluability, we often find that we do not need, and it is not feasible to do, a full-scale evaluation. But we may already have found enough information to answer our initial questions. As a result, we may want to redesign the program, or change program objectives. Or we may decide to first set up a monitoring system before plunging into a full evaluation. Or we may be able to proceed with evaluation, with a clearer notion of what it ought to involve.

2. The NEP Process

The NEP process allows the evaluator to efficiently synthesize evaluation knowledge, assess whether evaluation is feasible, and generate information that is of value to those making policy decisions. It entails the following steps.

- Step One. Find out what the prevailing expectations are for the program. Do this by review of enabling legislation, program descriptions, master plans, grant applications, evaluation reports, and speeches by program officials; by consultation with experts; and by conducting surveys of program administrators. Do not expect a single set of well-integrated expectations to emerge.

- Step Two. After trying to sort out these diverse expectations, get on a bus and see the world. Observe typical examples of the actual intervention in all its complexity. Talk to people at every level of the organization--top management, mid-management, line staff, clients, even outside agencies involved with program operations. It is important to tap many sources, because difference sources can have drastically different views of what program objectives are and of what the program is doing to achieve its objectives. Carefully record this information in narrative and graphic form.

- Step Three. From the activities observed in the field and discussions with those having responsibility for program implementation, extract the discrete chains-of-assumptions that link inputs to processes and processes to outcomes and impacts. Through an empirical or inductive process, derive these operational models of the actual intervention, often called logic models.

- Step Four. Integrate all the variables found in the logic models within a single measurement model. Synthesize all the system-level inputs that feed into the intervention, all the program-level inputs, all the processes, all the outcomes, all the impacts, and all the exogenous factors that affect the intervention. This synthesized measurement model thus displays all the variables of relevance to the intervention, regardless of the operating model. It also visually links each variable with those other variables to which it is presumed to be causally related. At each measurement point, it shows one or more

measures that could be taken for purposes of program monitoring or evaluation.

- Step Five. Use the synthesized measurement model as the basis for hypothesis testing. Use each measurement point like an envelope for holding relevant data. Determine at each point what data exist to support the contentions behind the individual logic models. Assess the level of confidence that can be attributed to the program's outcomes and impacts, based on the quality of available data.

Once Step Five has been completed, we have already synthesized the existing evaluation literature and assessed the state-of-knowledge in the area. The NEP also generally takes several additional steps that are not of central concern to us. These are:

- Step Six. Adapt the synthesized measurement model into a simple program monitoring and evaluation design suitable for local use.

- Step Seven. Identify problems in filling gaps in the state-of-knowledge about the program.

- Step Eight. Develop alternate evaluation designs for filling knowledge gaps revealed by the synthesis of prior evaluations.

Another step was recently added for the eight ongoing NEP studies, but it has yet to be tried. This is:

- Step Nine. Pretest the feasibility of the monitoring and evaluation designs for use by local programs, and the other designs for filling gaps in knowledge. Feed the results of the pretest back into the earlier steps.

What I have described constitutes the basic NEP process. If these steps are not fully clear, they will hopefully become clearer through illustration.

Before discussing the NEP on coeducational corrections, however, I should note that one aspect of the NEP I have deliberately downplayed is the iterative nature of the process; in other words, the fact that the NEP investigator cannot effectively operate in a linear, sequential fashion. He cannot move in a smooth, predictable trajectory like a bullet. Instead, he continually finds himself back at places he had visited before. His movement patterns are more like that of the bumblebee, going back again and again to reexamine ground that has already been covered: redefining concepts, adjusting the limits of the universe, refining measures of effectiveness, and so on.

B. Application of the NEP Process to Coeducational Corrections

When we tried to apply this NEP structure to the topic of coeducational corrections, there was some uncertainty about our being able to move through all eight prescribed steps. We had in mind that several prior NEP studies had been able to dispel major myths about a type of program, and we, of course, aspired to do the same. But it was unclear what major myths were available to be dispelled. The principal fact contributing to our situation was this: unlike most programs examined through the NEP approach, coed prisons were not started when LEAA pumped in block grant funds. In fact, no institution ever completed a grant application to start or convert to co-corrections. Just one institution had received LEAA funds to support co-correctional activity, for a grand total of $30,000. Coed prisons had, to a large degree, seemingly just happened. While implementation of each institution had generally been preceeded by a period of planning and debate, the actual move into co-corrections was generally precipitated by a situation unrelated to the positive effects integrating male and female might offer. Consequently, institutions were not required to clarify objectives or, as in most LEAA programs, develop an evaluation component. We knew we had an unusual NEP topic and that the study would be exploratory. We intended, in part, to see what people operating and living in coed institutions thought co-corrections was all about. As it turned out, we did complete all eight basic NEP steps, and we were able to discount several major expectations behind the co-correctional concept. Let me trace through the first five steps, and show how we learned and what we learned.

First, I should make clear that, for our study, we defined the term coeducational correctional institution--after about two months of iteratively redefining the concept--as having four characteristics. To qualify, an institution had to be:

1. An adult institution. This excluded juvenile institutions.

2. The major purpose of which is the custody of sentenced felons. Here we excluded jails, camps, halfway houses, diagnostic centers, and other specialized institutions. .

3. Under a single institutional administration. By this, we excluded brother-sister institutions.

4. Having one or more programs or areas in which male and female inmates are both present and in interaction. Here we excluded situations where both sexes were present, but were not in interaction.

1. <u>Step One: Identification of Expectations about Co-corrections</u>

Step One. The first step was to identify the range of positive and negative expectations associated with having male and female inmates in the same institution. Since coed institutions had not come into being on the wings of enabling legislation, we instead consulted the Standards and Goals Commission's Report on Corrections. In a short section on the female offender, the Commission briefly discussed the subject. It mentioned certain potential benefits for coed institutions, and called them "an invaluable tool for exploring and dealing with social and emotional problems related to identity conflicts that many offenders experience." The Commission strongly endorsed co-corrections, but mainly as a way to achieve two economic purposes: first, to diversify program offerings and provide equal program access to male and female inmates; and, second, to expand career ladders for women as correctional staff. In other words, the Commission's expectations focused on outcomes unrelated to the presence and interaction of males and females within the same institution. We went on to

other sources to identify other expectations. We reviewed the limited descriptive and evaluative literature. The major evaluation in the area happened to have been directed by Esther Heffernan, of our project staff. These sources helped clarify some of the programmatic expectations in the area. We discussed the subject by phone with nearly every State Commissioner of Corrections and with the Wardens of existing coed institutions. As a result, we were able to catalog a number of outcomes expected to flow from the presence of male and female inmates in the same institution. Coed institutions were expected to do the following:

1. Reduce the destructive and dehumanizing aspects of confinement by allowing continuity or resumption of heterosexual relationships;

2. Reduce institutional control problems by weakening disruptive homosexual systems, reducing predatory homosexual activity, lessening assaultive behavior and diverting inmate interests and activities;

3. Protect inmates likely to be involved in "trouble" were they in a predominantly same-sex institution;

4. Provide an additional tool for creating a more normal, less institutional atmosphere;

5. Cushion the shock of adjustment for releasees, by reducing the number and intensity of adjustments to be made;

6. Realize economies of scale, in terms of more efficient utilization of available space, staff, and programs;

7. Reduce the need for civilian labor, by provision of both light and heavy inmate work forces;

8. Increase diversification and flexibility of program offerings, and provide equal program access to male and female inmates;

9. Expand treatment potentials for working with inmates having "sexual problems," and for developing positive heterosexual relationships and coping skills;

10. Relieve immediate or anticipated legal pressure to provide equal access to programs and services to both sexes;

11. Expand career ladders in corrections for women, who have often been "boxed into" the single State women's institution.

Aside from these positive expectations, a level of concern also became apparent about potential adverse consequences of co-corrections. These concerns centered around women, those "already there," and on community relationships.

In regard to women, some people asked:

- Are women generally introduced for purposes of institutional control?

- Do women necessarily become the focus of control, because of fears over possible pregnancy?

- Are women moved back into passive, dependency-oriented roles, while in single-sex institutions women assume a fuller range of roles?

In regard to those "already there" in a single-sex institution when co-corrections is introduced, some people asked:

- Does control increase and are security levels modified or redefined?

- Is movement restricted, and access to programs reduced?

- Does either the minority sex or the entering population necessarily become the focus of control?

- Is the entering population perceived as the cause of increased security measures?

- Are the sexes further polarized?

- Do certain costs increase along with the intensification of security?

Finally, in regard to community relationships, some people asked:

- Does co-corrections damage relationships between inmates and their spouses and families on the outside?

- Does co-corrections lead to a loss of community support, due to the perception that the deprivation of heterosexual relationships is a necessary aspect of imprisonment, or the perception that uncontrolled sexual activity is prevalent in prison?

Even at this early point in the study, we observed, based on limited data, that different correctional philosophies engendered different sets of assumptions about the functions to be served by co-corrections, and the processes by which desired outcomes are achieved. We also suspected that the presence and interaction of the sexes was not always seen as having a programmatic role; in other words, as having a positive effect on institutional functioning or the inmates' lives. Instead, co-corrections was often, we suspected, seen in a nonprogrammatic role-as a mean to economic ends.

2. Step Two: Observation and Description of the Actual Intervention

Step Two. We went out into the field to see what we could see. In one sense, we wanted to observe when, where, and how inmates interacted--especially those of the opposite sex; how and where they moved over the compound; how long they could interact before they were told to move on; what kinds of physical contact were tolerated; what sort of security measures were used to keep male and female inmates apart; and so on. Much of this we would

be able to see, and what we could not see, we could learn from casual conversation that would let us at least part way into the co-correctional world. In another sense, we wanted to see if the theoretical models of co-corrections we had vaguely intimated were actually operational, if goal priorities had shifted over time, and how the simultaneous presence of diverse expectations would affect institutional processes.

So with a 92 question open-ended site visit guide in hand, we made extended visits to ten coed institutions then in existence for at least a year. There was only one such institution we did not visit. On site, our research procedures remained flexible. Administration and staff ordinarily "oriented" the project team through early interviews and a tour of the facility. Interviews usually started with administration, and progressed through staff, line-staff, and inmates. We made special efforts, where possible, to select male and female inmates for interviews based mainly on comparative institutional experience and a range of heterosexual contact levels. Ordinarily we did not begin inmate interviews until the second day, and on the third day key members of the administration and staff were reinterviewed in close-out sessions. On the average, we interviewed 28 persons at each site. For each institution, we developed detailed narrative and graphic descriptions to represent available resources, program activities, intended outcomes, and the environment in which all this took place. As we began to generate these complex descriptions, we questioned what function this exercise might serve. Our flow diagrams were complete, and captured every expectation we heard, positive and negative, intended and unintended, and every input and activity related to these expectations. Often there were so many connections among variables as to make the diagrams all but unintelligible. But we knew we were representing reality, so we went on.

As we began to round out our site visits, we looked to see what our descriptions told us. On a purely descriptive level, no set of characteristics emerged as indispensable for the operation of a coed institution. Four were Federal and six were State facilities. They displayed great variation in: size of inmate population; the number of male inmates; the number of female inmates;

inmate sex ratio; staff size; staff-inmate ratio; custody staff size; custody-inmate ratio; budget; per capita costs; selection criteria; the level of structured interaction permitted between the sexes in educational programs and work details; the level of unstructured interaction permitted between the sexes in recreation, dining, inmate organizations, chapel, and leisure time; community linkages; medical services; physical contact policies; and dating behavior, among other factors. In addition, it became clear that all co-correctional institutions had undergone changes over time along what can be called "critical dimensions." These include changes in sex ratios, community linkages, physical contact policies, and the sanctions for physical contact. Of course, administrators were quick to note that these changes had not occurred because the co-correctional situation was necessarily "out of control." Rather, changes stemmed primarily from system-level decisions to either "increase accountability," or to "catch up with good correctional practice." In contrast, inmates often made remarks like, "It's haphazard, and has no direction," and, "It's coed in name only."

3. Step Three: Induction of Logic Models

Step Three. The third step involved extracting from the complex morass of activites and expectations the logical chains-of-assumptions that hold models together and steer day-to-day operations. Site visits made it clear that we had underplayed the importance of nonprogrammatic models of co-corrections. Clearly, within programmatic models, the integration of the sexes and the nature of the heterosexual interaction perform a positive function in terms of inmate needs and institutional control. Within non-programmatic models, the presence of males and females in the same institution serves system-level needs only, and efforts are made to minimize the impacts of this circumstance upon normal institutional operations.

In the context of three general models of correctional practice found within the institutions, co-corrections is seen as performing a positive function. These general models focus on reintegration into the community, institutional control, and therapy or treatment. Where co-corrections is not viewed as an integral dimension of the institutional program but as a management problem, two other

nonprogrammatic models take hold. These five models-three programmatic and two nonprogrammatic--involve not only diverse expectations, but also varying selection practices, control measures, policies toward physical contact, areas of sexual integration, and so on. The differences are important in terms of how programs are managed, and what can and should be measured in an evaluation. I will briefly sketch the five models.

- The Reintegration Model uses the male-female interaction as one means to "normalize" the institutional environment and minimize the destructive aspects of confinement. Co-corrections maintains or restores the option of interaction with the opposite sex and, thereby, effects personal growth and prevents deterioration. Co-corrections here occurs in a context that stresses other "normalizing" aspects of institutional life, such as regular currency, street dress, and so on, and is bolstered by a focus on community programming. This model anticipates four outcomes: (1) reduced pressures for situational homosexuality; (2) the resumption of heterosexual options and the redevelopment of heterosexual relational skills before release; (3) support for the continuation of marital bonds between incarcerated couples; and (4) protection of the sexual options of protection cases. These outcomes are in turn expected to lead to reduced adjustment problems after release, which in turn presumably reduces criminality.

- The Institutional Control Model focuses on the power of the male-female interaction as a management tool in the reduction of institutional violence. This model is often found together with the Reintegration Model, because they both use the interaction to shape the institutional environment. The models differ markedly, however, in many input, process, and outcome elements. This model aims at low emotional involvement, a noninstitutional atmosphere, and the availability of heterosexual options to yield a safe and manageable environment that is relatively free of sexual and sex-related violence. To achieve these ends, it exercises strict population control, liberally transfers for

institutional violence, heterosexual intercourse and institutional pregnancy, and it even restricts program participation together by couples that are too "serious."

- <u>The Therapy Model</u> also uses the male-female interaction to "normalize" the institutional atmosphere. It focuses on developing an atmosphere that limits the necessity and frequency of exploitive behavior, and on reducing evident or presumed "sexual abnormalities" that are thought to be a direct or indirect cause of criminal behavior. The Therapy Model is often found alongside the Reintegration Model, but they too differ in selection practices, means of population control, levels of control, function of program restrictions, and in primary intended outcomes. This model aims at changing appearances and roles, developing heterosexual coping skills, increasing self-acceptance, and reducing sex-role stereotypes to reduce post-release adjustment problems and thereby reduce criminal behavior.

We talked earlier about nonprogrammatic models. The two nonprogrammatic models of co-corrections both focus intensely on the presence of the male-female interaction and attempt to minimize its effects on institutional life. But these two models vary in their approach to its control.

- <u>The Surveillance and Sanction Model</u> accomplishes control and limits interaction through a combination of restrictions on contact, high levels of supervision or surveillance, and strict and severe disciplinary action. Certain outcomes are shared by the programmatic Institutional Control Model and the nonprogrammatic Surveillance and Sanction Model: low rates of pregnancy, low sexual and sex-related assault, and low emotional involvement. But in the one model the interaction provides the leverage for control, and in the other it is an obstacle. The methods of population control are similarly much stricter here than in the programmatic models. Generally, institutional energies are marshalled toward these outcomes on the expectation that, if problem behaviors can be minimized, the institution will

have effectively served as a "depository." In result, the system needs that triggered the co-correctional situation will be served.

- The Alternate Choice Model also emerges when an institution sees itself as thrust into co-corrections in the interest of system-level needs. It generally arises in the context of, and in reaction to, the Surveillance and Sanction Model. It generally contends that the same goals can be reached without sustaining the costs of high surveillance. The Choice Model arises as an alternate route for achieving system goals that inmates and line-staff urge highly controlled institutions to adopt. It reflects the assumption that full contact is manageable, given sufficient options, without surveillance and heavy sanctions. It minimizes the male-female interaction through alternate uses of time and attention, such as work, education, and recreation, and through alternate relationships with staff, with local community, and with family on the outside.

The curious outcome of Step Three was seeing that each of these models was present and operative, in varying degrees, in each coed institution. In other words, multiple co-correctional programs functioned in the same setting. As a function of different conceptions of co-corrections, day-to-day operations were often seen differently and were different. The division of labor and one's institutional role may influence the functions co-corrections is seen to serve. But beyond this, within each level of an institution, and within each person taking part in an institution's life, it became evident that ambivalence existed about the model, or the models, within which the institution was addressing operational issues and formulating expectations. From this ambiguity emerged divergent policies, wide ranges in the level of policy implementation, inconsistent modes of action, and heated debates about both actual and ideal policies, programs and objectives. We heard the people operating coed institutions asking questions that highlighted this ambiguity, such questions as:

- Do we actually have a highly selected inmate population, or a typical one?

- Are we selecting inmates with specific characteristics, and if so, how uniformly?

- How long do we work with someone who finds it difficult to abide by "the rule" of co-corrections? How long should we?

- Do we tolerate acting out behavior? Should we?

- Are we duplicating programs because of program demands or to reduce security problems?

- Are we offering women birth control pills because this is acceptable in the outside world, or because we simply cannot live with institutional pregnancies?

- Do we restrict "serious" couples from taking part in programs together? Should we? If so, when?

- Are we trying to reinforce traditional sex roles by program integration, or are we encouraging inmates to work through the implications of sex roles?

- Are we more concerned with the special requirements of a population in need of rehabilitation, the reduction of destructive aspects of incarceration, or neither of these?

The list of questions goes on. In practice, this interplay between divergent policies and expectations seemed to "wreak havoc" with institutional life in an almost imperceptible way. Occasionally, this coexistence of diverse models surfaced dramtically.

4. Step Four: Synthesis of Logic Models within a Measurement Model

Step Four. Step Four integrates the elements from the logic models that need to be considered in any evaluation of co-corrections. The resultant measurement model outlines potential system inputs, institutional inputs, processes, outcomes and impacts that might be appropriate to a given evaluation. One of the functions of the measurement model is to indicate apparent causal chains involved in the functioning of coed institutions, and to let us trace the effects of changes in a given variable on other variables represented in the model. Without going into detail, our measurement model reflected:

- Nine system-level inputs affecting introduction, continuation, modification, or withdrawl from co-corrections;
- Seven institutional input variables, some of them as complex as "available program resources;"
- Five key institutional processes, each divided into three major areas, designated inmate, staff and program flow;
- Eleven institutional and system outcomes; and
- Three major exogenous factors.

For each of the elements in this complex model, we indicated one or more potential measurements. These later provide the basis for the single-institution and large-scale evaluation designs to Steps Six, Seven, and Eight, which are not of concern here.

5. Step Five: Arraying Evaluation Results on the Measurement Model

Step Five. By the time we reached Step Five, we had already answered many of our questions. From the interplay of diverse logic models within single

institutions, it became clear that for co-corrections to be evaluable or manageable, the models upon which a given institution operates need to be more explicitly articulated and consistently put in force. From the diversity of models that are simultaneously operative, it became obvious why there could be so many conflicting positive and negative expectations. As we approach Step Five, which asks us, "Is there evidence co-corrections works?", we can therefore ask in reply, "Is there much evidence it has been tried?"

Step Five involves arraying evaluation results on the measurement model at appropriate measurement points, and then assessing the state-of-knowledge about the intervention. Little evaluation had occurred in the area of co-corrections. This was largely due to the lack of clear programmatic intent for implementation. The lack of programmatic intent has inhibited interest in documenting not only programmatic outcomes, but even the impacts of co-corrections on institutional operations and, in turn, changes in institutional operations on fulfillment of system-level needs. Those evaluations that were available generally lacked adequate comparative data. Some data were available in relation to effects on institutional atmosphere, but comparative data were weak. Recidivism data from a few institutions suggested that co-corrections might have an impact on post-release behavior. But even were convincing recidivism data available, this would not allow us to reach firm conclusions about which aspects of post-release adjustment have been improved, which institutional outcomes contributed to changes in post-release adjustment, and how post-release adjustment affected recidivism.

In short, there was little evaluation data for us to synthesize. One Bureau of Prisons study initiated at the time our study was winding down was to have examined a wide range of institutional and post-release variables associated with co-corrections. The plan was to involve all four Federal coed institutions and five Federal single-sex institutions in the study. The wide differences among the coed institutions and among their selected comparison institutions were expected to yield a high level of generalizability in results. Unfortunately for the state-of-knowledge about co-corrections, two of the four coed

institutions were precipitously converted to single-sex occupancy. The resultant revised study of two coed and two single-sex institutions could not allow the investigators to separate dimensions as the original study would have, nor could the results be highly generalizable.

6. Conclusion

The later steps in the NEP on co-corrections are not of immediate interest to us here. The process already described fulfills the basic requirements of an evaluability assessment. It has sharpened the policy decisions confronting program operators, underscored the need for implementing sound program monitoring procedures, and provided a framework for eventual program evaluation. In an area like co-corrections, where the evaluation base is thin, the NEP structure cannot be effectively used to synthesize what does not exist. Still, the NEP approach offers an effective means for assessing when evaluation is feasible and for generating evaluation designs that address the questions really being asked.