

RICHARD E. WENER

The Environmental Psychology of PRISONS AND JAILS

Creating Humane Spaces
in Secure Settings

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Polytechnic Institute of New York University



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THE ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY OF PRISONS AND JAILS

This book distills 30 years of research on the impacts of jail and prison environments. The research program began with evaluations that documented the stunning success in reducing tension and violence of new jails created by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, which had a novel design intended to provide a nontraditional and safe environment for pretrial inmates. This book uses assessments of this new model as a basis for considering the nature of environment and behavior in correctional settings, and more broadly in all human settings. It provides a critical review of research on jail environments and of specific issues critical to the way they are experienced and places them in historical and theoretical context. It presents a contextual model for the way environment influences the chance of violence.

Richard E. Wener is Professor of Environmental Psychology in the Department of Technology, Culture and Society at the Polytechnic Institute of New York University, where he codirects the Sustainable Urban Environments program, and is a faculty affiliate of the Rutgers University Center for Green Building. He is a Fellow of Division 34 of the American Psychological Association and has served as President of Division 34. In 2010, Professor Wener was a Fulbright Fellow at the Vienna University of Technology.

For more than 30 years, Professor Wener has studied the way correctional architecture affects facility operations and the behavior of staff and inmates. This work began in 1975 with evaluations of the first “new-generation jails” – federal Metropolitan Correctional Centers in Chicago and New York. He has since conducted evaluations of dozens of prisons and jails and several large nationwide surveys of correctional facilities. He has consulted in the area of facility design and planning for adult and juvenile detention and corrections facilities. He was also part of a team that studied conditions of confinement to support revisions of American Correctional Association standards for the design of jails and prisons. His writing has addressed design and management features that serve to reduce violence, vandalism, and stress in correctional settings by understanding the lessons of successful direct supervision facilities.

Professor Wener’s articles have appeared in journals such as *Environment and Behavior*, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *Corrections Compendium*, *American Jails*, *Transportation Research (Part F)*, *Transportation*, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, and *Psychology Today*. He has served on the editorial boards of *Environment and Behavior*, *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, and *Journal of Environmental Systems*.

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Series Foreword

This book series was conceived at a time when the complex relations between human behavior and the sociophysical environment began to attract the attention of many people working in the social sciences and environmental design professions. The field of environment and behavior studies emerged from innovative conceptual and methodological approaches that directly addressed limitations in the ways that human-environment relations were previously understood. This multidisciplinary field brings together people working in psychology, sociology, geography, anthropology, and other academic disciplines with people active in architecture, landscape architecture, urban and regional planning, and other design professions. Although their combined efforts can yield valuable new insights on a great range of problems, they also entail challenges in communication and cooperation that stem from a diversity of intellectual styles and worldviews. Goals also differ. For some participants in the environment-behavior field, the primary goal is the resolution of a basic or theoretical problem, while for others the primary goal is the resolution of some real-world practical problem.

For almost 40 years, the Environment and Behavior series has offered a common meeting ground for those working in this important, exciting, and complex field. Coming from a variety of disciplines and so representing diverse perspectives, contributing authors have taken on problems of standing concern, the study of which had become relatively well established. These authors were asked to do more than simply summarize the work already done on the given problem; they were encouraged to advance the field intellectually by setting forth a particular point of view or theoretical standpoint. A key goal of the series was to make available books that would be useful to a broad range of students and other readers from different disciplines and with different levels of formal professional training, in hopes of providing points of entry into the field and facilitating its further development.

The present book is a fitting contribution to the Environment and Behavior series. Beyond summarizing the work done on a specific problem of lasting societal concern and putting forward a particular point of view about how to address that problem, it shares the humanitarian values and high aspirations that run through all of the previous contributions to this series. Like earlier books in the series, this volume by Professor Richard E. Wener expresses a strong conviction that the good of individuals and the public can be served by using the results of scientific inquiry to guide sensitive environmental design. More directly than any of the earlier books, though, it speaks to the unwarranted suffering that can follow when people are captive in poorly designed environments.

The present book brings to a dignified conclusion the long tenure of this series with Cambridge University Press. Research, environmental design, and publishing proceed together in a dynamic societal context that not only opens new possibilities but also presents challenges to long-standing practices. The challenges that the Press now face have led its representatives to decide not to extend this series further. Their decision saddens us, but we understand the reasons for it. We thank the Press for the generous support provided over the many years that it has served as publisher for the series. Our respect for the mission and espoused values of the Press remain undiminished, and we are confident that its reputation will continue to be well served by the excellent books that it has already published in the Environment and Behavior series, including the present one.

Conclusion of this book series, of course, does not signal the end of the field of environment-behavior studies, nor does it mean that there will no longer be a book series dedicated to environment and behavior studies. It remains to be seen whether a series like this one will be launched with a different publisher. In any case, we see no end to the need for creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge about problems involving human behavior and the environment.

Guest Editor
Terry Hartig

Founding Editors
Irwin Altman and Daniel Stokols

Foreword

If you expect to participate in the planning or design of a new correctional facility, this book is a gold mine of applied research findings about “what works” to create successful correctional facility environments. “Success” in this case is concerned with those physical environment conditions associated with positive behavior by inmates. Dr. Rich Wener wrote this career-long compendium of his findings and those of many others in search of the physical attributes and conditions of confinement that can make a correctional facility more than a human warehouse. Whether you are a corrections director, a planner, an architect, or another psychologist, this book will give you a wealth of hard evidence about how the physical environment can affect inmate behavior and staff–inmate interaction.

Dr. Wener’s book looks beyond the usual focus on physical security to other factors in the physical environment supportive of desired behavioral change. He has given those who will be involved in developing the next generation of jails and prisons in the twenty-first century a tremendous variety of findings about how the built environment can support or inhibit human change.

When elected officials and the public get involved in the decision process about a new jail or prison project, this book may also prove to be valuable beyond the professions. The public image of the jail or prison is usually the old punishment fortress, which is assumed to be what corrections is about, the human warehouse. If we expect our correctional institutions to help reduce criminality, that old image must change. This first major collection of objective research and analysis demonstrates for politicians and the public that correctional institutions can be much more successful when their designers focus on the interaction of environment and behavior.

Although the work is primarily focused on the North American experience, its findings include principles with universal application that can be seen in correctional institutions in other regions. The first part gives an interesting

history short course on corrections, which is a good lead-up to Wener's own candid history of his involvement, findings, and beliefs that "direct supervision" is a more successful model than "indirect" or "intermittent inmate supervision." The totality of results in all twelve chapters explain that supporting behavioral change through direct supervision principles and practices requires that the facility's design and staff's methods of inmate management work together consistently.

Having worked in the field of correctional facility planning since the 1970s, Professor Wener, through this book, gives us all a long-awaited solid evidence base for correctional planning and design that gives high priority to environment-behavior relationships.

Bob Goble,
Carter Goble Lee Companies
Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Acknowledgments

There are many people to whom I owe acknowledgment and thanks for providing support that led to this volume.

First, I would not have been able to finish this work without the help of several libraries and numerous librarians – both for the comfort of their space that allowed reflective and quiet writing time, and for their aid in finding resources. The former category includes the skilled and friendly though overworked and undercompensated librarians of the Maplewood Memorial Library in my hometown.

For resources, university libraries were, of course, critical. The librarians at Polytechnic University of NYU, in particular Nancy Byrne, were unfailingly supportive and helpful in digging up the many articles and books that I requested, and I very much appreciate their help. A special thanks, though, has to go to Phyllis Schultze, the Criminal Justice Librarian of the Don M. Gottfredson Library of Criminal Justice at the Rutgers School of Criminal Justice. She went far out of her way to help out with no obligation other than her personal desire to serve scholarship. She manages an incredible collection with grace and ease. I am only one of many whose work would be impossible without her support.

I would like to note several extraordinary people I have met who worked as administrators of some of the institutions we have studied, including W. R. (Ray) Nelson, Tom Barry, Larry Ard, Mike O'Toole, and Tom Allison. They are dedicated and intelligent men who have served their profession well. Because of this book, I have been able to be in touch with Ray Nelson and Mike O'Toole, after many years, and it has been a pleasure talking with them again.

I need to thank the many colleagues – architects and researchers – with whom I have worked on corrections research over the years and who have brought insight and creativity to many projects. These include Rod Miller,

Steve Carter, Craig Zimring, Rich Olsen, David Bogard, Chris Keys, Carol Knapel-Sanchez, Lisa Vigorita, Knut Rostat, Nate Clark, Melissa Farling, Bill Frazier, and Frank Schneider. I have to save a particularly appreciative note for Jay Farbstein, who sought me out for a conversation about jail evaluations at an EDRA conference 35 years ago for what was the start of my longest continual working relationship. Jay has been a friend and most valued partner in much of this work. He, and many of the others, put up with my occasionally disorganized style and were invariably helpful and creative.

I also want to offer special thanks to Bob Goble, who has provided incredible moral support in past year, telling people about the book and encouraging me to finish it with the suggestion that architects were eagerly waiting for it.

I am lucky that a number of people with significant expertise in environmental psychology have been kind enough to read and comment on chapters, including Barbara Brown, Jennifer Veitch, Paul Paulus, Gary Evans, Dan Stokols, Arline Bronzaft, and Jay Farbstein.

Terry Hartig has served as guest editor for the Environment and Behavior series for this book, and I am lucky to have been able to work with him. His suggestions on the scope of this book, as well as on many details, have been invaluable, and he provided tremendously insightful, useful, and detailed comments. The blind reviewer provided by Terry and the Cambridge editors also offered a number of thoughtful comments, which I have tried to integrate into the final text.

There is no one to whom I owe as much as I do to my wife, and to say she was supportive does not cover it. She knows what she has meant to all this work, and that's all that really counts. And, on top of it all, when we first met, I didn't realize what a great copy editor she is. Thank you.

This book is dedicated to those I love, none of whom (I think) have ever seen the inside of the kind of places written about in this book, with special thoughts for Dor, Irv, Sam, Helen, Abe, and Rose, who aren't here to read it, and for Ginny, Rachel, Leah, and Rebecca, who are.

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SECTION ONE

OVERVIEW

*History of Correctional Design, Development, and
Implementation of Direct Supervision as an Innovation*

Introduction

It is often a curious experience for me to lecture about design and behavior in correctional settings because of the different groups of people with different kinds of expertise who may be in the audience. When I am speaking to criminal justice and corrections professionals, some of the concepts I discuss are well known (such as the history of prisons, the direct supervision system of design and management, the nature of prison crowding and isolation) but much of the psychology, especially environmental psychology – including research methodology, stress, post occupancy evaluation, personal space and territoriality, and psychology of crowding – is not. If I speak to psychologists just the opposite is true, and a meeting of architects presents a different set of competencies entirely. So it is with this book. Some topics will be well known to corrections people, others to psychologists, and still different ones to designers. The hard part is always in figuring out which elements of familiarity can be assumed and which need deeper background. I hope that parts of this book will be of interest to all of those groups – as well as others such as policy makers.

Put another way, I hope that criminal justice and corrections professionals will find the research on how correctional design affects staff and inmate behavior interesting. In particular, I think the perspective here on the nature of violence in institutions may be different from that usually encountered, as is the explanation of how and why direct supervision actually works. I hope psychologists can come away with a sense of these institutions as magnifiers of environmental impacts and, as such, as laboratories that can tell us things about human response to stress difficult to discern in other places. The message for architects is more value laden – correctional types and models are not the same and choosing one over another has significant and long-term consequences. It cannot be the role of the professional designer to simply build

whatever the client requests (“and you want that torture chamber where?”), certainly not without exploring options and impacts. Most of the architects I know and with whom I have worked come to their clients with a strong set of values and ethics and have undoubtedly given up lucrative projects along the way because of their values. I hope the work herein can serve to support their discussions with clients. In the same way, I would hope this work would support correctional professionals, from administrators to unit officers, who, in my experience and contrary to media stereotypes, care deeply about doing a competent, ethical and humane job.

A JAIL OR PRISON BY ANY OTHER NAME

The names we use to label jails and prisons tell much about what those in charge are trying to do with them, or at least the image they want to portray. Prisons were called penitentiaries when the intent was to provide for solitary reflection and opportunities for penitence. Detention facilities are often called correctional centers, suggesting – at least at some point in time, or in some planner’s mind – a goal to create change in behavior, correcting personality and behavioral problems. They may be simply called detention centers, jail (from the Latin for cave or hollow), or prison (from the Latin for to seize or arrest) when there is no overriding philosophic or ideological model other than detaining people, that is, keeping them off the streets.

Most, maybe all of these institutions are unpleasant places to spend a night, or many nights, even under the best conditions. That airplane coach seat that is tolerable for a 1-hour flight becomes claustrophobically tight when delayed on the tarmac for many uncertain hours. The jail tier or pod starts out measurably worse than the airplane, or than the institution itself looks in drawings or photos, and becomes even more so once the door slams closed for what may be an indeterminate amount of time.

The best of conditions are rare enough. I have been fortunate to observe and help document many jails that rate among the best environments of their kind, but I have never seen one that I wanted to study so closely as to stay overnight. Even where the inmates are unthreatening, the staff professional, and when designers have strived for “normalization” of the setting, the noise levels; odors; lack of access to light, air, and nature; the uncertain temperature control; and lack of privacy – for sleeping, sitting, using the toilet or shower – make these the kind of settings that few go to willingly. In 1974, during my first study of the brand-new Metropolitan Correctional Center in Chicago, Illinois, then clearly the top of the line in innovative, safe, and clean jails, an inmate said to me “sure this place looks nice, maybe like a motel, but how