

The University of Chicago

**“Twin Aims”:
Values and Logics at Work in Illinois Parole Policy Implementation**
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Abstract

This paper develops a qualitative understanding of the values and logics that guide parole policy implementation in the state of Illinois. Using textual and ethnographic data, the paper shows that lawmakers, administrators, and on-the-ground policy implementers unanimously agree that *rehabilitation* and *public safety* are the “twin aims,” or values, that guide parole policy in the state. However, it finds that this façade of value alignment is undergirded by a diverse range of interpretations and implementation logics. In order to show this diversity of approaches, the paper develops an understanding of four implementation logics promoted by administrators at the Illinois Department of Corrections: service-orientation, risk-management, professionalism, and dignity. It then shows through ethnographic data that policy implementers sometimes adopt these logics, but often diverge from them and develop new logics of their own. It concludes that policy reform should improve administrative oversight and facilitate dialogue between parole agents and other implementation stakeholders in order to promote the deployment of effective implementation logics and facilitate the wellbeing of returning citizens and the public. It also suggests, based on ethnographic findings about skepticism toward the existing system, the need for a critical reevaluation of parole’s place in the criminal justice system and society at large.

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Introduction

In 2005, Roger E. Walker, Jr., then serving as Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), announced a series of bold parole initiatives to enhance public safety and reduce barriers to “successful reentry” for people exiting the state’s prison system. His announcement, delivered in the IDOC’s annual report to the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly, promised the establishment of reentry centers to provide social services to parolees, the formation of a Community Safety and Reentry Commission, and a new “aggressive supervision program” to manage “high-risk” parolees, among other resources (IDOC 2005, p. 3).

With a confident eye to the future, Walker declared:

“There is no silver bullet, but recidivism reform is here and it is front stage in everything we do. A journey like this can seem like a thousand miles, but you always have to take that first step to get there. The Illinois Department of Corrections has taken that first step and is fully committed to meeting the challenge.”

Walker was a talented rhetorician, but his message was hardly unique. His “first step” represents just one of many optimistic calls for parole reform in the recent history of IDOC. More recently, in 2018, IDOC Director John R. Baldwin reported that the Department’s staff was “driving transformational change” in the world of parole, through trauma-informed training, a renewed focus on mental health, and “innovative” solutions to risk management (IDOC 2018, p. 2). Though more modern and - at least superficially - progressive in tone than Walker’s, Baldwin’s message more or less mirrors his predecessor’s in its promise of “improving outcomes” for returning citizens and preventing “reoffending and recidivism” (Ibid). A decade and a half of monumental state- and nationwide debate about the role of criminal justice in our society lies between these two leaders, but their vision for parole remains, if not identical, at least similarly optimistic. Walker and Baldwin saw a better future ahead.

These visions for parole reform represent not only policy changes but also normative stances on the parts of Walker, Baldwin, and other stakeholders in the parole policy world. All policy reform movements rely on the belief that a policy *should* accomplish some outcome that existing policy regimes have failed to achieve. Thus, Walker's journey of "a thousand miles" entails not only a series of concrete policy reforms but also a renewed focus on the values of parole generally. His proposed policies can be measured and evaluated by an outcomes-based approach, but because of this normative element they may also be analyzed from a qualitative, interpretive perspective. Both approaches are important in developing our understanding of parole policy implementation, but they have not received equal attention. The policy literature on how parole policies influence outcomes for people on parole is robust. The literature on the values and logics that inform calls for reform and drive existing policies is far more meager.

This paper represents a preliminary investigation into the normative values encoded in written parole policy, espoused by administrators like Walker and Baldwin, and manifested by policy implementers on the ground. It aims to complement our robust, quantitative understanding of the outcomes of parole policy with a human-centered, qualitative look at how parole policy is implemented on the ground. The task of joining these two perspectives is not a simple one. The research presented here is intended as the first step in a much larger project of understanding how normative values drive the implementation of parole policy in Illinois.

Challenges of Studying Parole

Parole is a notoriously complex policy area to understand and evaluate. Statutory policies roughly outline the nature of parole and other forms of supervised release, but leave an enormous amount of ambiguity. In Illinois, the sparse, 7 page-long Consolidated Conditions of Parole statute governs the daily lives of the tens of thousands of men and women under the state's

supervision (Illinois General Assembly 2019). Under this policy, the Prisoner Review Board (PRB) is privileged with extensive discretionary power over the lives of parolees; historically, it has used this power to keep them under the state's supervision for as long as possible (Hoerner and Kuang 2018). The parole agents who are ultimately responsible for parolees have enormous discretion in how they do their jobs, and they use that discretion liberally. Agents are extraordinarily resistant to giving up their discretion, and do whatever they can to maintain their autonomy in the process of implementing parole policy (Lynch 1998; Steiner et. al. 2011). For these and myriad other reasons, the relationships between the values and logics of policy initiatives, like those proposed by Walker and Baldwin, and those of policy implementation, as it is handled by parole agents and service providers on the ground, are imperfect, inconsistent, and difficult to evaluate.

In spite of the challenges, understanding these links is especially important because a staggering number of people in Illinois are governed by parole and other forms of conditional, supervised release. In 2005, when Walker released his visionary announcement, there were about 33,000 Illinoisians on parole on an average day (IDOC 2005, p. 29). Though that figure has shrunk substantially over the past decade and a half, it remains significant: in 2018, the average daily parole population was almost 26,000, accounting for more than a third of the state's total justice-involved population (IDOC 2018, p. 81). Over 50% of these parolees - about 12,500 people - live in Cook County, the region that includes Chicago. If anything, these numbers don't stretch far enough in capturing the reach of parole in the state. With combined jail and prison times averaging less than three years for a given inmate, tens of thousands of people are cycling in and out of this parole system every year (Ibid). Every one of these returning citizens is subject to parole policy and the supervision of its implementers. As a result, their lives are profoundly

impacted by the interplay between parole policy, as it is written in statutes and interpreted in IDOC documents, and parole implementation as it is undertaken by parole agents on the street.

Framing the Research

This paper develops a preliminary understanding of the relationships between parole policy and its implementation by exploring the *values* that guide written policy and implementation and the *logics* that stakeholders deploy in pursuit of those values. I define these two terms in the context of parole policy as follows:

1. *Values*: the general, guiding beliefs that a parole stakeholder - whether a lawmaker, administrator, policy implementer, or service provider - holds as relevant to doing the work of parole. Values tell a stakeholder what parole *should* be about, but they do not concretely prescribe how to behave.
2. *Logics*: the specific, operational beliefs that a parole stakeholder cites, endorses, or otherwise relies on in order to accomplish the work of parole. These logics are “taken-for-granted social prescriptions that define goals and expectations, legitimate activity, and become embodied in organizational structures and practices” (McPherson and Sauder 2014, p.167). Unlike values, logics do not tell a stakeholder what parole should be about in the broadest sense, but instead inform *how* they can realize their values in parole work.

By focusing on values and their supporting logics, this paper elucidates not only the differences between written and implemented policy but also the motives and beliefs that undergird those differences. The research presented here is not expansive enough to exhaustively catalogue divergences between policy and its implementation, but it does represent an important

first step in understanding how and why these differences emerge. The research is guided by the following questions.

1. Which social, cultural, and criminal justice system values are encoded in Illinois' parole statutes and Illinois Department of Corrections' statements on parole?
2. Which social, cultural, and criminal justice system values guide the work of the Illinois parole agents who implement these written policies on the street level? What logics guide their pursuit of those values?
3. How do these two sets of value systems differ from each other?
4. What are the policy implications of these differences?

I rely on textual and ethnographic data to answer these questions. I use the Illinois Consolidated Conditions of Parole as the primary sources for understanding the values encoded in statutory law. I examine IDOC annual reports to explore interpretations of these values at the administrative level. Finally, I conducted five interviews with policy implementers, service providers, and other stakeholders who work with parolees in Illinois to understand the values and logics that policy implementers are using at the street level. By comparing my findings across these datasets, I am able to draw preliminary conclusions about the differences between written and implemented policy and the import of those differences.

Thesis

My findings indicate that at every level - written policy, administrative interpretation, and on-the-ground implementation - there are two clear, guiding values of parole: *rehabilitation* and *public safety*. Statutory law, administrative perspective, and implementation values all cohere around these "twin aims" of the parole system in Illinois. However, surface-level uniformity obfuscates extraordinary heterogeneity in terms of the logics of policy implementation. All

parole stakeholders agree that rehabilitation and public safety are the twin aims of parole, but they have divergent understandings of what these values mean and which logics can be deployed to achieve them. This heterogeneity in understanding may in part cause disparate outcomes for people governed by parole policy in Illinois. I argue based on these findings that tighter administrative oversight could hold policy implementers to more uniform standards while still leaving them enough discretion to respond to the individual needs of their caseloads. I suggest that parole agents can learn from other service providers who work with returning citizens, many of whom deploy different logics than they do, and to different effects. Finally, and most broadly, I argue that the data suggest an urgent need to critically reevaluate the place and function of parole in the criminal justice system and society at large.

Policy Background

What is Parole?

The term “parole” does not refer to any specific policy. Rather, it is an umbrella term used to describe the practice of releasing inmates from prisons to their communities on conditional, supervisory status. Usually, this status entails check-in requirements, restrictions on movement, residence, and employment, and other rules determined on a case-by-case basis. The details of this status - who is paroled, when, under what conditions, and for how long - vary enormously from state to state and from parolee to parolee. It is important to keep sight of this variation, since the term “parole” may refer to radically different policy regimes depending on where it is used.

In the United States, there are two broad types of parole: discretionary and mandatory (Restore Justice Illinois 2018). In *discretionary* parole systems, prisoners can be released to

supervised community living before the completion of their prison terms if they are approved by a parole board. In *mandatory* parole systems, prisoners are automatically released to supervised community living after fixed conditions are met - most often, the completion of their entire prison term (Ibid). Whereas discretionary systems allow prisoners the opportunity to get out early, mandatory systems compel returning citizens to be supervised by the state after the completion of their prison sentence. Most states use both types of parole, such that some incarcerated people get out early on discretionary parole and some are ordered to move onto parole after the completion of their full prison term (Solomon et. al. 2005).

Parole in the United States

In 2015, more than 475,000 Americans exited prisons and came under the supervision of their states' parole systems (BJS 2016, p. 2). About the same number left these parole systems, either by returning to their communities or being reincarcerated. By the end of 2016, there were nearly 875,000 people on parole in the United States (BJS 2018, p. 1). Over 80% of prisoners in US facilities are released on some form of community supervision (Solomon et. al. 2005). Accounting for in- and outflow of people in these systems, millions of people come under the supervision of parole in a given year in the United States.

Whether parole supervision has any impact on outcomes for formerly incarcerated people or for public safety is a topic of debate among criminologists. A 2005 study by the Urban Institute found that parole supervision has "little effect" on rearrest outcomes for people who have been released from prison. In some cases, people on mandatory supervision actually fare worse, since they are frequently returned to prison for technical violations of their parole conditions rather than actual crimes (Solomon et. al. 2005). Furthermore, when parolees are arrested for new criminal activity, they are almost always arrested by police, not parole agents; in

other words, the person responsible for supervising them is typically not the person who actually catches problems (Ibid; John Howard Association 2019).

But these conclusions, based on national data, may not capture the impact of parole regimes in individual states. The authors of the Urban Institute study concede that “release mechanism” may significantly impact outcomes. They argue that, in order to understand the impact of parole, one must consider “not only whether a person is supervised after release, but also how they were released” (Solomon et. al. 2005, p. 2). These considerations include how parole supervision is structured, what parolees are and are not allowed to do, and whether they are released on mandatory or discretionary terms. Accounting for these different “release mechanisms” paints a more complex picture of parole’s effectiveness. For example, a 2013 study of parole in New Jersey found that people who were paroled were “less likely to be rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated for new crimes” than their peers who served their entire prison sentences and were subsequently released without any form of supervision (Pew 2013). This result does not necessarily contradict the conclusion that parole in the US is ineffective *on average*, but it does suggest that state-level differences in parole policy can have a significant impact on outcomes.

Parole in Illinois

Parole policy in Illinois is unusual in that almost all parolees in the state are on mandatory, rather than discretionary, release. In Illinois, the legal term for this status is “mandatory supervised release,” often abbreviated as “MSR” (Illinois General Assembly 2019). MSR has not always been the dominant form of parole in the state; up until the late 1970s, many Illinois prisoners were able to earn early release contingent on the approval of the state’s Prisoner Review Board. However, in 1978, the state disbanded its discretionary parole system,

removing the opportunity for parole (Aagard et. al.). This decision was not an anomaly; it came at the beginning of a national wave of parole reform in the 1980s and 1990s as discretionary parole fell to the wayside and policymakers advocated harsher and more incapacitating criminal justice methods (Solomon et. al. 2005). But most states kept discretionary parole as an option. Illinois is one of only 16 states to have banned discretionary parole altogether (Restore Justice Illinois 2018).

As a result, almost all of the parolees in Illinois are on MSR and have already served their complete sentence in prison (Ibid). The small handful of parolees from the discretionary system were convicted before 1978. Most of these men and women are now serving “life sentences or de facto life sentences” without any hope of early release (Aagard et. al.). The state’s Prisoner Review Board has historically been unforgiving with these prisoners; the most pro-parolee member of the board votes against parole in almost 70% of cases. The harshest board member has voted in favor of a would-be parolee in just 1.6% of cases (Hoerner and Kuang 2018). Barring major changes in the Board’s approach, the vast majority of the eligible prisoners convicted before 1978, who have spent years awaiting the possibility of release, will die in prison (Hoerner and Kuang 2017).

Because there are so few people on discretionary parole, the term “parole” is used interchangeably with the term “mandatory supervised release.” With respect to restrictions on the parolee experience, the distinction is not especially important; the few parolees who were convicted before 1978 are subject to the same conditions and are supervised by the same officers as parolees on mandatory supervised release (Illinois General Assembly 2019). These conditions are largely determined on a case-by-case basis by the supervising parole agent. There are extensive statutory restrictions for parolees convicted of a sex offense, but those parolees make

up only 3.6% of the state's parole population (IDOC 2018). For everyone else, restrictions are largely determined by the supervising agent.

Literature Review

Overview

Parole policy has emerged as a central focus of both policy reform and scholarly literature since the 1990s (Byrd 2016). Renewed interest in parole came in part as a response to the explosive growth of the American prison population that began in the 1970s, when sweeping legislation changes drove higher arrest rates and harsher sentencing (Smith et. al. 2012). As discussed in the previous section, the average incarcerated person will spend less than three years in jails and prisons (IDOC 2019). This quick turnover, combined with the burgeoning prison population, has caused a rapid - though not always steady - expansion of the parole population over the course of the past 50 years (LaCourse et. al. 2019). When people are paroled - or, in some cases, released unconditionally - they almost always return to their pre-prison communities, usually within a few years (Listwan 2009; Baillargeon et. al. 2010). Parole reform and scholarship are focused on the lives of this enormous group of formerly incarcerated people.

Outcomes Research (and its Discontents)

An expansive body of scholarly literature explores the impact of parole on public safety and on the lives of returning citizens. Most research focuses on quantitative analyses of crime, recidivism, and reentry outcomes. Several major studies have investigated whether parole actually prevents crime and recidivism, with mixed results. The conventional scholarly logic in the 1990s was that parole is ineffective in preventing recidivism (Aagard et. al.). Recent

scholarship has produced a more complicated picture. A study by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that parolees in New Jersey were less likely to commit crimes than those released without supervision, but they were more likely to be returned to prison for technical violations (Pew 2013). Another major study by the Urban Institute concluded that returning citizens paroled on mandatory terms are no better off than their counterparts with no supervision in terms of crime rates and recidivism (Solomon et. al. 2005). Some scholars suggest that this ambiguous impact is a result of conceptual incongruity between the traditional American approach to parole and the challenges faced by returning citizens on parole (Solomon et. al. 2005; Gaskew 2014; Yu and Hope House 2018). Others hold that parole is an extension of a punitive carceral system, and thus cannot be uncritically expected to produce anything other than continued punishment (Byrd 2016).

Other research has focused on social service provision and socioeconomic outcomes for returning citizens. Returning citizens face a multitude of barriers to successful reentry (Bushway et. al. 2007). These barriers include a hostile labor market, housing insecurity and homelessness, physical and mental health problems, and lack of stable relationships in their communities (Listwan 2009; LaCourse et. al. 2019). Many returning citizens, particularly those with marginalized identities, return to high-poverty neighborhoods where concentrated disadvantage and weak formal social and professional networks can compound these already daunting challenges (Yu and Hope House 2018; Wilson 1996). Many of these challenges are exacerbated for parolees with specific types of convictions. People convicted of violent crimes experience elevated barriers to stability, as they are more likely to deal with physical disability and poor mental health, to be excluded from jobs by formal restrictions and informal discrimination, and to be denied social services that are reserved for supposedly lower-risk returning citizens

(Baillargeon et. al. 2010; Bushway et. al. 2007; Watson et. al. 2019). People convicted of sex offenses likewise face more serious challenges in reentry, since restrictions on where they can live are so severe that it is practically impossible for them to meet the conditions of their parole (Green 2019).

Implementation Research

Compared to this mass of outcomes-based research, scholarly literature on the process of parole policy implementation is more limited. This gap is troubling, since one major function of parole policy implementation is to address the problems that the outcomes-based research has identified. This problem-solving role can be difficult to fulfill, since parole boards and parole officers are often expected to serve at once as surveillance-oriented risk managers and service-oriented providers (Lynch 1998; Steiner et. al. 2011). Understanding how implementers balance these roles - and, in particular, how values and logics guide them in the balancing act - is important, but not as thoroughly explored in the literature as the outcomes of their work.

The scholarly literature on parole implementation that does exist has provided fruitful insight into the implementation of reentry policy and its challenges. Public policy scholar Angel Hawken has shown in a case study of parole reform in Hawaii that parole officers' divergent interpretation of policy changes leads to radically different work, with some officers readily adopting new policies while others resist changes - perceived as undermining their own autonomy and discretion - at all costs (Hawken 2016). A 2012 study of California's Earned Discharge Project found that parole officers resisted deploying risk-management paradigms that gave them only a "surface level" understanding of a parolee's situation (Smith et. al. 2012). Survey-based research on parole in Ohio found that parole agents believed that their "close

contact” with parolees led them to resist “aggregate risk management strategies” promoted by the state (Steiner et. al. 2011).

The two most important scholarly works on parole implementation, at least in the context of this paper, are Malcom Feeley and Jonathan Simon’s theoretical paper, “The New Penology” (1992), and Mona Lynch’s ethnographic study, “Waste Managers” (1998). Feeley and Simon argue that, beginning in the 1970s, the American criminal justice system began to adopt new discourses, new objectives, and new techniques that focused on “aggregate risk management” instead of individual punishment and rehabilitation. They hold that these new discourses, objectives, and techniques shifted focus away from “individuals” and toward “populations” at every level of the criminal justice world, from court systems to prisons to parole offices. Lynch, a sociologist, tested Feeley and Simon’s theoretical framework by conducting 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a California parole field office in the late 1990s. Lynch offered a more complicated portrait of new modes of thinking. Specifically, she showed that “ field agents may be a source of strong resistance to the "waste management" [i.e., risk management] model, due to their intimate involvement in parolees' lives" (Lynch 1998, p. 842). Generally, she argued that “the front-line crime control worker” - in other words, policy implementers - is just as essential as written policy in determining the “mechanisms or strategies at work in criminal justice institutions” like parole (Ibid, p. 844). Her work definitively demonstrates the importance of understanding the complexities of the implementation process in any study of criminal justice policy broadly and parole policy specifically.

Finally, it is important here to introduce one landmark paper outside of the world of parole that guides the research undertaken in this paper. In “Logics in Action: Managing Institutional Complexity in a Drug Court,” sociologists Chad Michael McPherson and Michael

Sauder show that criminal justice professionals in a drug court - specifically, probation officers, public defenders, service providers, and state attorneys - use a diverse range of professional values and logics to “get the work of the court done” (2014). Arguing against the prevailing assumptions in their field of administrative studies, McPherson and Sauder demonstrate that policy implementers do not simply “adhere to the dictates of their home group’s dominant logic.” Instead, they view logics as “tools” that they use, under constrained conditions, to build coalitions and achieve their professional goals (Ibid, p. 167). Their ethnographic and theoretical work inspires the focus on logics in this paper, and serves as a model for understanding how policy implementers engage with diverse values and logics in getting their work done.

Filling the Gap

Expanding the body of qualitative research could greatly enrich our understanding of the implementation of parole policy. Fieldwork is especially important because although survey research is common, there is still a dearth of ethnographic and interview-based literature on parole implementation. In the broader field of reentry and reentry policy in Illinois, scholars have used qualitative methods to produce insights into the experience of disability among so-called violent offenders (Ralph 2014), develop new grounded theories of reentry and identity-based challenges (Yu and Hope House 2018), and shown the value of reentry services that emphasize humility over humiliation (Gaskew 2014). Further qualitative work on parole policy specifically, and on the people who implement it, can enrich our understanding of the challenges of parole implementation and bring the perspectives of experienced policy implementers and service providers into the development of more effective and humane parole policy.

Methods

Overview

This paper presents the results of a mixed-methods, qualitative study of the values and logics at work in different stages of the parole policy implementation process. The mixed-methods approach allows me to process and systematically compare a diverse range of textual and ethnographic data. I rely on a flexible *content analysis* strategy to process and interpret the text-based data, and *semi-structured interviews* to gather ethnographic data. Flexible content analysis enables me to identify and describe the values and logics that emerge from textual data sources. Semi-structured interviews allow me to glean the values and logics used by a diverse group of implementation stakeholders, ranging from service providers to Prisoner Review Board members to parole officials themselves. Used in tandem, these two approaches enable me to tease out the similarities and differences between diverse implementation values and logics and remain flexible enough to allow themes to emerge from different data sources rather than impose them through a rigid coding scheme. However, this qualitative approach demands significant interpretive work from me as the researcher. This extensive interpretive discretion, combined with the relatively low volume of data available, may limit the generalizability of the research presented. As a result, further work is needed to validate my methodology and confirm my findings.

Methodological Assumption

The choice of these two methodologies depends on the assumption that values and logics are encoded in textual data sources and emergent in ethnographic data. The methods are designed to collect and analyze qualitative data that speak to value systems and their supporting

logics. If values and logics were not encoded in these types of sources, the methods and frame of analysis would be inappropriate to address my research question. This assumption is robustly supported by both formal literature and informal discourse. Existing literature on reentry has consistently identified explicit value promotion as central to the work of parole policy implementation and social service provision (e.g. Gaskew 2014, Byrd 2016, Ralph 2019). Informally, any observer of American national and local politics can readily identify criminal justice policy as a major hot-button issue that frequently divides policymakers and ordinary citizens on lines of identity, belief, and party.

Flexible Content Analysis

The data sources used in this research are suited to a flexible content analysis scheme because of the disparate themes that appear in them and the diverse on-the-ground perspective that they influence. Although I initially intended to use a rigid, formal scheme to systematically analyze the similarities and differences between policy and implementation values, I quickly rejected this approach because it risks imposing themes onto different types of data. Although the three most important groups of data - statutory law, IDOC annual reports, and interview transcripts - share parole as a primary topic, they have different purposes, structures, and authors. The Consolidated Conditions of Parole is a legal statute compiled by the Illinois legislature, the IDOC annual reports are a publication covering a wide range of criminal justice topics (parole and others) in the state, and the interviews come from the voices of stakeholders from different positions in the world of parole. As a result, a rigid analytical scheme would risk imposing a fixed set of codes that might be appropriate for one category of data, but fail to capture important and distinct themes that emerge in another category.

Instead, I used an open-coding approach to analyze the Illinois Consolidated Conditions of Parole and IDOC annual reports. I allowed themes to emerge in each text, rather than using the same thematic framework for each. After coding, I reviewed the data and identified a shortlist of value- and logic-oriented themes that emerged in each text. I use these emergent themes (Figure 1) to guide my analysis.

Figure 1: Content Analysis Codes

Code/Theme	Explanation	Examples
Rehabilitation	Language referring to parole as a mechanism to rehabilitate or change the behavior of parolees	“Reintegrate” “Change Offender Behavior”
Public Safety	Language referring to parole as a mechanism to protect the public	“Protect” “Deter” “Stop Crime”
Service-Orientation	Language referring to treatment and support of parolees	“Service” “Transitional” “Community Programs”
Risk Assessment and Management	Language referring to parolees as risks to be understood, monitored, and managed	“Population Risk” “Assessment” “Supervised”
Professionalism	Language referring to the duties, competencies, and powers of parole implementers	“Discretion” “Decision” “Up to Them”
Dignity	Language that emphasizes the humanity and dignity of parolees	“Community Members” “Neighbors” “Citizens”

It is important to acknowledge that I have done a great deal of interpretive work in establishing these codes as the most important, emergent themes in the data. These themes are empirically well-founded - that is, they can be easily identified and tallied up in the textual data

sources - but the decision to mark these themes as the most significant of all those that I found in the data was ultimately my own. Furthermore, although each of these codes represents a distinct logic or value, some overlap or are at least closely related to each other (more on this in the analysis section). I reproduce these codes here not only to provide context for the analysis that follows, but also to present my approach so that others may follow or diverge from it in future research.¹

Ultimately, interpretive discretion is necessary to capture a broader swath of the thematic data than a more rigid approach could. Traditional content analysis can be reductive in its focus on specific trends, and it is often characterized by “inattention to the broader meaning present in the data” (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The goal of the flexible open-coding approach is to capture not only trends but also “broader meanings.” Though I lean heavily on the emergent patterns listed above to guide my analysis, it is important to emphasize that the data cannot be reduced to these trends alone.

Semi-Structured Interviews

My semi-structured interview approach follows previous qualitative scholarship in the realm of criminology and criminal justice reentry. As discussed in the literature review above, qualitative researchers of reentry have studied disability (Ralph 2014), developed grounded theory (Yu and Hope House 2019), and shown the value of humility in reentry services (Gaskew 2014). Ethnographic methods in particular have allowed researchers to greatly enrich our understanding of policy implementation logics generally (McPherson and Sauder 2014) and the

¹See also the end of this section (*Methodological Limitations*) for further discussion of interpretive discretion in this study.

role of values and logics in parole policy specifically (Lynch 1998). These techniques are well-established in the study of reentry and reentry policy. My research continues in this tradition, with the aim of collecting street-level ethnographic data that can be compared and contrasted with administration- and policy-level textual data.

I conducted five interviews over the course of my research. Though I reached out to over 30 stakeholders in the parole world - ranging from PRB members, to parole agents, to policy leaders, and more - only a small handful responded, and of those even fewer agreed to interview with me. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Although I used a list of potential questions, the format was open-ended. In each interview, I began by asking the participant to tell me how they got involved in parole work. Almost always, this question was enough to get the conversation going, and I followed up on points they brought up that lead them to think and talk about the values and logics that guide their work. I reproduce a full list of interviewees in the table below (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Interviewees

Name	Affiliation/Title	Date
Philip Whittington	Corrections Policy Analyst, John Howard Association of Illinois	December 5th, 2019
Emily Hoerner	Journalist, Injustice Watch	December 10th, 2019
Carlos Rodriguez	Program Director, Westcare Illinois	January 17th, 2020
Lisa Daniels	Member, Illinois Prisoner Review Board; Founder, Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices	January 31st, 2020
Alex Boutros	Legislative Director, Parole Illinois; Organizing Manager, Chicago Votes	March 31st, 2020

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to overcome the priming problems and limited attention to context that characterize other qualitative data collection methods. Surveys, for example, are frequently used to study value systems among professional groups. However, in this case survey methods would pose a significant priming problem; if policy implementers are asked to describe their personal value systems with respect to the policies they implement, they are likely to reconsider their response in light of their understanding of the formal rules of their work. In a more open-ended interview, it is easier to ask policy implementers about the nature of their work and their attitudes toward it without explicitly priming them to address values.

Moreover, interviews provide a much more complete context for the data than a survey. A survey might allow me to quantify the prevalence of certain value systems in parole policy implementation, but it could not capture the lived experience of people working in that field with much depth. Semi-structured interviews allow me to situate this data in the context of the interviewees' attitudes, affects, and perspectives on their own personal and professional experience.

Methodological Limitations

The methodological approach used in this paper presents limitations and concerns on two related dimensions: generalizability and interpretive discretion. Generalizability is of concern because the sample sizes of the data sets I use in this paper are quite small. The low volume of data is a consequence of the limited availability of written statements on parole lawmaking and limited access to administrators and implementers. Publicly available textual data is sparse, and interviews with IDOC staff and parole agents are exceptionally hard to come by, as I learned the hard way. As a result, I cannot show that my results are *externally valid*; it is impossible to know at this stage if my conclusions are representative of all parole stakeholders. The arguments that

follow represent a first step in understanding values and logics at work, but further work is needed to determine if they exhaustively capture the qualitative reality of parole policy implementation in Illinois more broadly.

Interpretive discretion is of concern because it necessarily enlarges my own role as the researcher in the conclusions that emerge from the data. While interpretation is always involved in research, qualitative or quantitative, this particular study requires extensive mapping of my thinking about the data onto the arguments that follow. Without a formal coding scheme, it was up to me to decide how to organize codes and themes for textual data and to highlight those that emerged as the most important. Without a rigid interview structure, it was up to me to decide which questions to ask of which participants and how to consider their answers in light of the textual data. Thus, readers who disagree with my initial coding decisions and use of interview data may question whether the study presented here is *internally valid*. As I noted above, the conclusions I reach are empirically well-founded, but they are, of course, “essentially contestable” (Weber 1904).

In order to address these concerns, I have focused on making the work presented here as reproducible as possible. My coding decisions and interview breakdown are readily available above. My three-tiered approach is laid out in detail. Only further research can show if the work of this paper has enduring value.

Data and Analysis: Twin Aims, Many Logics

My findings are drawn from a wide range of textual and ethnographic data on statutory and administrative parole policy and its on-the-ground implementation in Illinois. I discuss these data at three thematic levels that represent the most important steps in interpreting and realizing

parole policy: *lawmaking, administrative interpretation, and on-the-ground implementation*. I understand lawmaking through the analysis of statutory policy, administrative interpretation through IDOC documents like annual reports and press releases, and on-the-ground implementation through interviews with service providers and implementation experts. Each group of data in turn corresponds to three different groups of stakeholders: policymakers, IDOC administrators, and on-the-ground implementers and providers, respectively.

Of course, these three thematic categories are more fluid than they first appear, since each group of stakeholders exerts considerable influence on the others. Still, they are helpful lines to draw because the values and logics that appear in each thematic area sometimes overlap, but often diverge greatly within and across categorical boundaries. Furthermore, even when these values and logics seem to overlap on the surface, closer examination reveals that different stakeholders interpret them in significantly different ways. The data show that, at all three levels, parole policy is understood to be guided by the “twin aims” of rehabilitation and public safety. But lawmakers, administrators, and on-the-ground implementers understand the twin aims differently and deploy different logics to achieve them.

Lawmaking

The highest level of parole policy in Illinois is the state’s Consolidated Conditions of Parole (CCP). This brief, seven-page document governs the implementation of parole policy and the conditions placed on the many thousands of returning citizens on parole and mandatory supervised release in Illinois. Although the statute’s language is superficially dry and distant, close examination of the content reveals a value-oriented focus. Both the requirements of the policy itself and the language in which these requirements are couched demonstrate the goals of

parole policy in the state. Namely, the statute lays out *rehabilitation* and *public safety* as the two guiding values of parole policy.

These values are first established in the preamble of the statute, which claims that the purpose of “the conditions of parole or mandatory supervised release... [is] to assist the subject in leading a law-abiding life.” These conditions are *rehabilitative* in that they are designed, in some capacity, to “assist” returning citizens. They are oriented toward *public safety* in that this assistance is intended to promote a “law-abiding life” - that is, a life of compliance, free of further transgressions against the public. From the beginning, these two values are at the heart of parole policy in Illinois. Moreover, although different sections of the policy focus more on one value or the other, they are never completely separable from each other. Rehabilitation and public safety, “assistance” and “law-abiding life,” go hand in hand. They are distinct values - and for that reason I treat them one at a time - but it is important not to lose sight of the intimate relationship between them.

Rehabilitation

Much of the content and language of the Consolidated Conditions of Parole focuses on positive changes in the life of the parolee. These positive changes, which the preamble of the CCP identifies as steps towards a “law-abiding life,” are depicted as important in many aspects of the parolee’s life, ranging from basic needs like housing and employment to more sophisticated dimensions of wellbeing like mental health and participation in the community. The text of the Conditions both explicitly promotes and implicitly values positive change, or “rehabilitation,” in all of these aspect of life.

Explicitly, many of the conditions laid out in the statute are geared towards addressing the needs and challenges of people on parole. For example, all returning citizens are required to

“attend or reside in a facility established for the instruction or residence of persons on parole or mandatory supervised release” for the duration of their parole. This requirement may in part be viewed as a public safety or risk management strategy, but it is primarily directed towards the “instruction,” not the containment, of people on parole. Another condition that explicitly promotes rehabilitation is the requirement that “The Department [of Corrections] shall inform all offenders committed to the Department of the optional services available to them upon release and shall assist inmates in availing themselves of such optional services upon their release on a voluntary basis.” Again, although the language here (particularly the use of the term “offender”) may be viewed through a public safety lens, the policy itself promotes the provision of services for, not restrictions on, returning citizens. The Conditions leave out details as to how the Department disseminates information about service provision, but it does require that some effort be made to promote access to services for people on parole. This focus on access cannot be understood through a purely safety-oriented paradigm; it can only be explained by the value of rehabilitation.

Notably, some of the more safety-oriented restrictions on parolees are waived for the purposes of engaging in presumptively rehabilitative programs and behaviors. For example, the Conditions forbid parolees to “frequent” establishments that distribute controlled substances, unless they go to those places for “activities related to community programs, worship services, volunteering, engaging families, or some other pro-social activity in which there is no evidence of criminal intent.” This concession is almost directly opposed to the public safety paradigm, which would hold that exceptions to any restrictions on parolees would make it easy for them to engage in “criminal activity.” However, because such exceptions may promote activities that the

policy holds as personally and socially edifying, they are tolerable under the rehabilitative paradigm.

Implicitly, much of the language of the Consolidated Conditions of Parole suggests an orientation toward rehabilitation for parolees. Many of the provisions either mandate that parolees seek “treatment” or require that parole agents connect parolees to services like “transitional housing,” “human services,” “community programs,” and other resources geared toward the “achievement of the goals and objectives of his or her parole or mandatory supervised release.” These examples may seem minor, but they stand in stark contrast to other possible depictions of the same services as addressing “criminal behavior,” for example. I do not mean here to promote an uncritical view of this language - indeed, the term “rehabilitation” itself can and has been readily problematized (e.g. Byrd 2016). But the language does show an orientation towards parole that cannot be captured simply by a public safety paradigm. It suggests the prominence of rehabilitation as a guiding value in parole policy in Illinois.

Public Safety

In a similar fashion, the Consolidated Conditions of Parole both explicitly and implicitly establish public safety as a guiding value of parole policy. Safety is the other side of the “law-abiding life” mentioned in the statute’s preamble. Under this paradigm, parole is designed to prevent returning citizens from committing crimes and to quickly reincarcerate them if they do. The Conditions lay out explicit policy designed to achieve this purpose and deploy language that reflects the value of public safety.

Explicit promotion of public safety is the most obvious element of the entire CCP. The document is, first and foremost, about what parolees *cannot* do. It establishes, for example, that parolees must “refrain from possessing a firearm or other dangerous weapon” and “submit to

periodic unannounced examinations” of their personal property and data. If they are arrested, parolees must immediately report their arrest to an officer of the Department of Corrections. If the Prisoner Review Board or their parole agent deems necessary, they must “submit to any other appropriate restrictions concerning [their] use of or access to a computer or any other device with internet capability.” All of these restrictions are enforced at “the discretion of their supervising agent.” These restrictions are explicitly geared towards public safety. The statute posits that firearms and other weapons, unsupervised access to the internet, and any event leading to arrest represent potential threats to the public, and depicts parole as a mechanism to prevent and redress those threats. This may seem like an obvious point to make about a criminal justice statute, but it is a crucial one in establishing the guiding values of parole. Clearly, explicit dimensions of the policy are written with the goal of public safety in mind.

The language of the Consolidated Conditions of Parole also underscores the document’s orientation toward public safety. Some of the most frequent words that appear in the text are words geared toward criminal law and safety: “criminal,” “jurisdiction,” “authority,” “conviction,” “offender,” and so on. Many sections of the policy use only “Criminal Code” as justification for restrictions on parolees, unlike other sections which, as we saw in the last section, make explicit reference to the rehabilitation of the returning citizen. To some degree, this language is inherited from previous state law; the policymakers who wrote the Consolidated Conditions of Parole had no say in the language of criminal law that preceded them. But the language nevertheless shows a certain rhetorical focus on criminality and the threat that crime poses to public safety. Again, this conclusion may seem obvious, but it is non-trivial. Out of the many values that could conceivably guide parole policy, public safety emerges as the most prominent.

In the twin values of rehabilitation and public safety, we find an answer to the first research question posed at the beginning of this paper. These are the two principal values encoded in statutory parole policy in Illinois. Importantly, these values are an imperfect fit with the findings of earlier literature, which has suggested that criminal justice institutions like parole focus on “managing aggregates,” not individuals (Feeley and Simon 1992, p. 449). Although public safety may be understood as an aggregate phenomenon, rehabilitation surely levels its focus squarely on individuals. In the next subsection, I turn to identifying these values at the level of administrative perspective.

Administrative Interpretation

The IDOC releases annual reports each fiscal year, including a message from the director, parole agent of the year award, “success stories” of inmates and parolees, and reviews of the state of parole in Illinois. In this subsection, I discuss thematic data from annual reports from 2005 and 2015-2018. The former offers some historical context, while the latter group allows us to understand the contemporary work of the IDOC. 2015 is used as the cutoff year because of the inauguration of Bruce Rauner as Governor and the appointment of John Baldwin as Director of the IDOC. These reports offer a window into the IDOC administration’s own understanding of what parole is about (its values) and how it operates (its logics). The values that emerge in these reports are largely in keeping with the guiding principles laid out in the Consolidated Conditions of Parole. The logics, however, are novel; while statutory policy largely ignores details of implementation, the IDOC elaborates on those details at great length. I discuss the value alignment between the IDOC and the Consolidated Conditions of Parole and the logics that the IDOC lays out as means to realize those values.

Values

The IDOC lays out the twin values of rehabilitation and public safety in its mission statement at the beginning of each year's annual report:

“To serve justice in Illinois and increase public safety by promoting positive change in offender behavior, operating successful reentry programs, and reducing victimization” (IDOC 2018, p. 1).

The mission reemphasizes rehabilitation and public safety as the twin guiding values of paroles. Here, even more so than in the Conditions, the two are intimately related; in a sense, they seem to be presented as two sides of the same coin. “Promoting positive change in offender behavior” is both rehabilitative (“positive change”) and safety-oriented (“offender”). “Operating successful reentry programs” is a vague goal, but it can be understood through both paradigms, insofar as “successful” can mean productive from the point of view of the parolee and safe from the point of view of society. Finally, “reducing victimization” implies both rehabilitation (former “offenders” are not committing crimes against new victims) and public safety (no one else is harmed). These twin values are front and center in every aspect of the IDOC's work; though the language of the mission statement has changed over the past two decades, it has highlighted the IDOC's duty to “protect the public” and “enhance the success of offenders' reentry into society” since at least 2005 (IDOC 2005, p. 2).

In a similar fashion, the Parole Division's statement of purpose echoes these values in annual reports year after year. Every year since 2015, the Division has claimed that it “aims to promote public safety through offender supervision utilizing reentry resources, community partnerships and graduated sanctions. It is dedicated to identifying offenders with compliance issues and targeting supervision and resources to those with a high risk of returning to IDOC” (IDOC 2018, p. 70). For the Parole Division, there is no clear divide between “promoting public

safety” and providing “reentry resources.” This statement of purpose goes beyond the IDOC’s general mission statement in that it establishes some of the logics that can be used to realize these values, as I discuss in greater detail below. First and foremost, though, it reemphasizes the broader values of rehabilitation and public safety, placing them squarely in the center of parole work.

Logics

The IDOC goes further than the Consolidated Conditions of Parole by enumerating some of the logics that should guide the implementation of parole policy in the state. Holding the values of rehabilitation and public safety fixed, the Department argues for a particular understanding of how those values are to be understood and achieved. Unlike statutory law, the Department explicitly defines and advocates for the implementation logics that should guide the parole process. As predicted by Lynch’s seminal work on parole implementation, these logics do not always conform to or emerge directly from the policies that they nominally serve (Lynch 1998). Instead, they represent new interpretations of how the values of parole are to be understood and achieved. Although any number of these logics are worthy of discussion, I highlight here four logics that are particularly prominent in IDOC publications: service-orientation, risk management, professionalism, and dignity.

Service-orientation refers to the Department’s vision of parole as a mechanism to provide supportive services to returning citizens. Under this logic, the IDOC is not only a promoter of rehabilitation; the Department is itself the provider of rehabilitative services. In 2018, IDOC Director John Baldwin proudly claimed that “evidence-based programming, treatment services, and educational and vocational opportunities are improving outcomes for justice-involved men and women and their families” (IDOC 2018, p. 2). These programs are focused squarely on

serving the needs of people in prisons and on parole; although they are assumed to have a positive impact on public safety, Baldwin labels that as successful not because they are reducing crime but rather because they are “improving outcomes” for impacted people. In 2016, the Department announced its new Parole Reentry Group (PRG), a task force in the parole division “fully dedicated to housing and reentry” for parolees and committed to providing “community resources” and “supportive services” to help parolees overcome barriers to reentry (IDOC 2016, p. 71).

The logic of service-orientation need not involve the promotion of specific service-oriented policy. For example, Baldwin wrote in his 2016 message, “We understand the nature of our business. We are the largest provider of mental health services in the state” (Ibid, p. 3). In 2015, the Department published a “success story” about a former parolee who “is attending college courses and working toward being a substance abuse counselor” (IDOC 2015, p. 69). These statements do promote specific aspects of parole policy; they instead represent visions of what parole already does and what success looks like in its current form. They show that the logic of providing service is simply part of “the nature” of the IDOC’s “business” in administering parole. Importantly, this logical approach goes beyond the simple rehabilitative paradigm. It suggests, in keeping with previous findings on professional logics, that IDOC administrators “do not strictly adhere to the dictates” of the policies that they implement when they develop “institutional prescriptions for what the organization should be” (McPherson and Sauder 2014, pp. 167-168). The administration instead develops a new approach to the “dictate” of rehabilitation, one in which service-orientation is part and parcel of the work of parole. Rehabilitation is not only something to be sought by people on parole through external sources, but also something that can be actively promoted through the direct provision of certain services.

Risk management refers to the Department's view of parole as a mechanism to identify potential risks to public safety, monitor those risks, and prevent them from being realized. This logic represents a specific approach to achieving the value of public safety. Under this logic, the parole population at large is understood as a risk to the public, and each parolee an element with a different risk level to be evaluated, surveilled, and managed. One policy initiative that demonstrates this logic is the Day Reporting Center (DRC) program. The DRC program "focuses on offenders who are vulnerable to drugs, crime, gangs, violence, unemployment, poverty and family dissolution" (IDOC 2018, p. 70). These centers are designed to monitor "offenders" who are identified under the risk management paradigm to be especially risky and thus worthy of special attention and supervision.

Another, more extreme policy initiative operating under the same logic is Operation Safe Spirits. Under this initiative, the Department sends agents "to make contact and check all paroled sex offenders on Halloween night and in some cases the days leading up to or following Halloween" (IDOC 2017, p. 77). People labeled as "sex offenders" are not allowed to participate in Halloween activities at all; they "are not allowed to have their porch lights on, are not allowed to pass out candy to trick-or-treaters and are not allowed to dress up in costume" (Ibid). These severe restrictions demonstrate that the Department views "sex offenders" as representing a particular risk. That risk mandates what recent annual reports have described as "unique supervision conditions and surveillance opportunities." Policies like the DRC program and Operation Safe Spirits cannot be explained by the value of public safety alone; they make sense only under a particular risk-management logic designed to realize that value.

The logic of risk management is also on display in some IDOC documents' tone towards mundane parole functions. One striking example of this comes from the award description for 2018's "Parole Agent of the Year Award." It reads:

"On March 2, 2018, Senior Parole Agent Matthew Roadman went to an address in East Alton to meet with a parolee and conduct a host site investigation. While following the procedures of the investigation, Agent Roadman requested to view the parolee's cell phone to check for any violations of social media restrictions. Agent Roadman noticed the parolee had become nervous and his cell phone continued to receive constant calls and messages during the visit. During the check of the parolee's cell phone, Agent Roadman noticed several references to illegal drug sells, numerous photos of guns, a photo of the parolee holding guns and large amounts of currency, and photos of illegal drugs. Agent Roadman proceeded with the host site investigation, which included a property search of the parolee's living area. During the search, a significant amount of illegal drugs and drug distribution supplies were discovered. Local police were notified and the parolee was arrested. The parolee was charged with three counts of Possession with the Intent to Distribute. The parolee is currently in custody at Madison County Jail with a \$100,000 bond. Agent Roadman's diligence, attention to detail and procedure, and excellent work ethic is a contributing factor in the effort to keep Illinois communities safe" (IDOC 2018, p. 7).

In this example, the parole agent is congratulated for his effective deployment of parole's risk management logic. When he notices that the parolee appears "nervous," he identifies and assesses a potential threat. When he verifies this threat, he conducts a thorough "host site investigation" to learn the full extent of the risk posed by it. Finally, he manages the threat by ensuring the arrest and impending reincarceration of that parolee. He won the Agent of the Year award not due to his ability to promote public safety broadly but because of his "diligence" and "attention to detail" in deploying the risk management logic specifically.

Professionalism refers to the Department's view that the values of parole are best realized by highly trained, intelligent, dedicated staff. As an implementation logic, this view suggests that it is professional capabilities, rather than personal or emotional capacities, that allow policy implementers to achieve the objectives of parole. This is not to say that the Department completely overlooks personal and emotional competencies like empathy and wellness; for

example, the most recent message from the director includes a call to “take care of the mental and emotional needs” of staff as they undertake challenging work (IDOC 2018, p. 2). But by and large the focus in IDOC publications is on the ability of these staff to perform professional tasks in a highly systematized and effective manner.

One way in which the Department promotes this logic in its documents is in a constant emphasis on training opportunities. In 2018, Director Baldwin hailed “evidence-based,” “gender-responsive,” and “trauma-informed” training for its staff as they engaged in new programming with returning citizens (Ibid). In 2016, he announced that the Department was taking new steps in “training staff” to communicate with “mentally ill offenders” and incorporate “data-driven decisionmaking” into their daily work (IDOC 2016, p. 3). A handful of times in the past several years, the Parole Agent of the Year award has been awarded to staff dedicated to taking advantage of and providing such training. In 2015, the agent who won the award was commended for “volunteer[ing] as class counselor for two parole agent classes” and “head[ing] up training for parole staff, both in large classroom settings and individual localized meetings throughout the state” (IDOC 2015, p. 7). In all of these examples, the emphasis is on professional capacity over and above personal or emotional capacities. They reinforce the belief that parole policy achieves its ends when staff are highly professionalized and highly trained. This observation may seem obvious at this stage, but we shall see in the discussion on policy implementers that there are other imaginable logics that value other capacities in parole policy implementers.

Dignity, the last of the four, refers to the Department’s view of parole as a process that enhances the dignity and humanity of returning citizens on parole. This logic appears less frequently than the other three, but it is a prominent theme in IDOC rhetoric - particularly in

messages from the director - and is notable in that it is sometimes difficult to square with the other logics found in department documents. Though often paired with other logics in combination, the logic of dignity emerges on multiple dimensions as an important, if understated, component of the parole process.

Often, the logic of dignity appears when IDOC documents describe returning citizens in terms that deemphasize their identities as parolees and reinforce their identities as social human beings. Baldwin often frames this dignity in the language of participation. In 2018, he wrote of parolees, “when these men return to their communities, they will be better parents, better neighbors and better citizens overall” (IDOC 2018, p. 2). Certain programs are described as preparing returning citizens to “become contributing members of society upon their release” (IDOC 2016, p. 3). Sometimes, this dignity is encoded in references to empathic and just behavior. In other messages, Baldwin has described the role of corrections generally and parole specifically as “serving” parolees “with compassion and fairness” (Ibid). In each of these examples, the language does not fit into service, risk, or professional paradigms. Instead, these depictions are infrequent but clear examples of a logic that promotes dignity among returning citizens.

In summary, the value alignment and logic promotion that appear in IDOC annual reports round out our answer to the first research question presented at the beginning of this paper. At the level of administration, rehabilitation and public safety are reemphasized as guiding values, and service-orientation, risk-management, professionalism, and dignity are introduced as logics for achieving those values. These logics do not contradict the guiding values of rehabilitation and parole, but they do represent “translations” of those values that enable IDOC to think about and respond to the “demands” of administrative parole work (McPherson and Sauder 2014, pp. 179-

180). In the final subsection, I turn to the question of whether these values and “translations” are actually mirrored in the work of policy implementation.

On the Ground

On the ground, the story of values and logics turns out to be far messier than it is in lawmaking or administrative interpretation. Virtually all policy implementers and service providers agree that rehabilitation and public safety are the twin aims of parole. But different people offer different views undergirding that basic shared belief. In some instances, policy implementers and service providers follow the IDOC status quo in its interpretation of rehabilitation and public safety, and they deploy its prescribed logics in pursuit of those values. In others, they eschew established logics in favor of completely different ones.

More often, though, the reality of on-the-ground interpretation lies somewhere in between. Policy implementers and service providers alike hold diverse and sometimes contradictory views, emphasizing one value more or less, citing some IDOC logics and not others, and occasionally bringing in novel ways of thought. Much like the stakeholders in McPherson and Sauder’s drug court, they “pragmatically and creatively invoke logics in order to manage everyday work” (2014, p. 180). Though they share a common value system, at least in the broadest sense, they “mediate” the values and logics of lawmakers and administrators in diverse ways. In this subsection, I outline the value alignment that emerged in interviews with implementation stakeholders, then discuss the myriad ways in which the perspectives of these stakeholders diverged both from the administrative status quo and among each other.

Value Alignment

All of my interviewees shared the lawmaking and administrative vision of parole as a process guided by the twin aims of rehabilitation and public safety. They did not always use the

same language, but the implementation stakeholders I spoke to unfailingly identified these values as the guiding forces behind the work of parole policy implementation. They sometimes disagreed about whether these values are being achieved, but they never questioned their centrality to the work of parole in Illinois.

Phil Whittington, a parole expert at the John Howard Association who works with parole officers and parolees, laid these values out for me - without much prompting - early on in our interview. When I asked him what parole is supposed to accomplish, he quickly turned to the twin aims. Throughout our conversation, he returned to them again and again. He told me:

“There's two aims to mandatory supervised release... The first is obviously public safety. So supervision of people after they're released from prison, so they're not dangerous to society... And [then] the rehabilitative part.”

Whittington is no lackey; he can be highly critical of how these values are pursued. A longtime employee of the John Howard Association, which he proudly described to me as “the only independent monitor of Illinois prisons” in a field of partisan and private groups, he takes his work seriously and is not shy about the problems that he sees. He is soft-spoken and deliberate in his manner, sometimes pausing for long, empty seconds before completing a thought. It is this careful way of speaking that makes his criticisms feel so emphatic.

Gently put, Whittington agrees with the values of rehabilitation and public safety but does not believe that the IDOC lives up to them in its parole system. He told me bluntly, “I think that both [goals] are failures... I don't think it [parole] stops crime... and it's not very rehabilitative in nature at all.” But he does not question the values themselves nor their importance in the world of reentry. In his daily work with officers and returning citizens, he sees “public safety” at work in the form of “supervision” and “rehabilitation” at work in the form of “support services.” The values are not always functional, and their implementation is not always

effective, but they are always there. Despite his reservations about outcomes, he agrees that at root parole is, or at least ought to be, about rehabilitation and public safety.

Carlos Rodriguez, a substance abuse counselor and program director at a reentry nonprofit in Chicago, echoed this understanding of parole's two guiding values. He told me that the parole officers he works with view their role as "almost having a dual path; On the one end, I have to enforce, right? But on the other hand, I'm there to support you." Rodriguez, like Whittington, is not convinced that parole officers and agency administrators are always on the ball in terms of achieving these goals. Rodriguez, a bubbly optimist, was quick to point out that many parole agents and administrators are "working their butts off" to achieve these values and make a difference for parolees and their communities. But he admits that "like anything in life, not everybody who is charged with supervising people is invested." This failure to invest eats away at him. Rodriguez has worked with justice-involved people since his time as a wilderness therapist for justice-involved juveniles in the 1990s; he knows what serious work can do for people, and he is frustrated to see policy implementers dropping the ball. Still, when he questions the effectiveness of the parole system, he always turns to administrative and personnel failures, never denying rehabilitation and public safety as the values at parole's heart. In his view, the "ideal parole officer" has a lot of work to do but always needs to keep the "dual path" of enforcement and "support" at the center of their work.

Lisa Daniels, a newly appointed member of the Prisoner Review Board, offered the same dual-purpose view. Daniels, who became involved in reentry policy after the death of her son, comes at parole work from a restorative justice background. Long before she was a PRB member, she was a grieving mother and an advocate. She always cites this "wealth of experience" as shaping her understanding of parole work, and she thinks she recognizes better

than most of her colleagues that work with parolees must be guided by restorative principles. But Daniels undoubtedly still sees an imperative to keep the community - including the returning citizen him- or herself - "safe." She tries to give parolees second chances whenever she deems reasonable, but she believes that certain "violations" are too serious to be ignored, and she will remand parolees back to IDOC custody in such cases.

In a similar vein, Emily Hoerner, a journalist and parole expert at Injustice Watch, is critical of unjust and non-restorative practices but generally amenable to the goals of rehabilitation and public safety. She has argued in her work on the Prisoner Review Board's frequent refusal of discretionary parole for people convicted before 1978 that harsh practices are mistaken because they ignore these values. She told me that negative PRB decisions "focus on what happened and the crime itself versus looking more at... the time after." For Hoerner, the values of rehabilitation are lived by incarcerated people over the course of their lives. The PRB fails not because its values are misaligned but because it does not recognize that candidates for parole who were convicted before 1978 have spent decades "rehabilitating" and are no longer threats to public safety. Thus, rehabilitation and public safety emerge as central even for those implementation stakeholders who might be expected to differ radically from the status quo.

Only Alex Boutros problematized the twin values of rehabilitation and public safety. Boutros, a community organizer and policy advocate at Parole Illinois, became involved in parole advocacy when she took an "Inside-Outside" class with incarcerated people from Stateville Prison during her time as a student at DePaul University. The class, "Law and Politics in the United States," evolved into a legislative think tank run by DePaul students and their incarcerated peers. Boutros drew on her experience as a classmate and colleague of incarcerated people to suggest that criminal justice in Illinois and the United States is built around something

else: a long history of racism. She told me that the elimination of discretionary parole in 1978 was not guided by rehabilitation or public safety:

“I also think that parole has a lot of stigma because one of the reasons for abolishing the parole system was because of, you know, a lot of racism... The racism in the parole system wasn’t because we were giving people earned discretionary release, it was literally because of racism in the parole system. I think you have to have more institutional and systematic change.”

For Boutros, parole in Illinois is simply another iteration of a system of “institutional racism” that has evolved in the United States since the time of chattel slavery. Parole is not about rehabilitating people who need help or keeping communities safe. It is about controlling black and brown people.

But even Boutros thinks that rehabilitation and public safety are the values that lawmakers, administrators, and policymakers *believe* to be central to their work. When she criticizes the state’s parole system, she does so on its own terms, suggesting that the current state of parole does not help people rehabilitate, nor does it make communities safer. She argued passionately, “Reentry needs to start the minute someone is incarcerated... If this person is [going to do] what we say, is being rehabilitated eventually to go back to society, we need to begin immediately.” Boutros does not believe that these twin values are actually guiding parole work, but she acknowledges that they are the status quo assumption. Rehabilitation and public safety do not represent the real foundations of parole for her, but they are without doubt “what we say” parole is about.

Divergent Interpretations and Logics

When we dig beyond value alignment, the story of what policy implementers and service providers believe in becomes a great deal more complex. No two of my interviewees agreed on what exactly “rehabilitation” and “public safety” mean as guiding values. Most cited experience

with parole implementers of many stripes, some who played by the IDOC playbook, some who brought their own ideas to the table, and some who simply didn't much care. The reasons for these differences in expressed and enacted values and logics was a matter of some speculation among my interviewees (and, of course, myself). I highlight those speculations, but ultimately this study cannot show precisely why some on-the-ground implementers differ from others. What it does show is that the only constant was difference.

Whittington, for example, told me that the parole officers he works with communicate radically different understandings of their job. Some officers view themselves as service providers primarily, at the expense of being safety officers. For these officers, parole work is much closer to "casework" than it is to policing or what Whittington calls the "law-enforcement/sentinel function." Like an adept social worker, they listen well, understand the needs of each individual on their caseload, and respond quickly to emergent needs. But plenty of other officers exhibit the opposite orientation. For them, parole work really is about being a "sentinel" and tracking down misbehaving parolees. Still others - and it becomes clear in Whittington's tone as he speaks to me that these are the ones who most disappoint him - are not particularly interested in rehabilitation *or* public safety. For them, parole work is just a job, to be completed with as little effort as possible. Citing the example of geographic movement restrictions, Whittington told me:

"People's difficulty with this issue varies on parole officer, so some parole officers are very responsive. Some, not so much. So, say if somebody is released, and the only work available to them is through a temp agency: they're not gonna know until the morning, they call the temp agency [and say], 'Hey, any jobs available today?' Like, 'Yeah, this afternoon, you can go wash dishes at this place.' And then they have to call their parole officer and get permission to be out during those times. And if the parole officer doesn't give it to them, they can't go to work."

In this example, different policy implementers adhere to different logics. Some take seriously the IDOC's apparent commitment to a service-orientation logic. They understand that parolees have trouble accessing employment and that many rely on temp agencies. Recognizing this challenge, they go out of their way to respond quickly and relax movement restrictions. Others deploy the risk management paradigm, defaulting to maximum restriction in order to prevent parolees, particularly those convicted of serious offenses, from "doing something." Still others are simply "not responsive," and they flat-out ignore special requests from parolees because, for them, parole work is "just a job."

Of course, Whittington's account does not tell us about the reasons for these discrepancies in perspective. He personally believes that "it comes down to values" first and foremost, but acknowledges that other factors might be in play. For example, some might fear for their job safety if they make what could be perceived as a wrong move. Whittington suggested:

"One thing that you have to consider is political liability, so you're supervising somebody, they do something bad. Whose head has to go on a platter?... If something goes wrong, it's gonna come back to them [i.e., their parole officer]... You should have known better" (10:18).

Political liability, in Whittington's account, might cause a parole officer to take action against his or her own personal values and logical approaches. She may, for example, be a strong proponent of service provision, but unwilling to risk relaxing movement restrictions if one wrong turn could cost her job. This factor is one among many that complicated the idea of value and logic alignment; even when some policy implementers appear to be following the IDOC mainstream, they may do so out of fear of repercussions rather than personal or professional commitment.

Most of the accounts I heard were more multidimensional than Whittington's triad of service, risk, and apathy. Many policy implementers supplemented existing values and logics

with their own personal approaches to the execution of their jobs. Rodriguez was impressed by officers who went out of their way to develop novel strategies to help their parolees reenter successfully. These strategies shared elements with existing logics - in particular, with service-orientation and dignity, which Rodriguez is naturally drawn to himself - but they were expanded to include completely new ideas. He told me one story of an officer taking initiative without any inspiration or guidance from policy or his supervisors:

“I know another guy who’s got a system he developed himself, and I don’t think he developed it with his supervisor. And he knows which ones [parolees] are the priority ones. Like, ‘This guy, Carlos, I have to visit [him] twice a week cause; you know, I’m worried about him.’ Sometimes [with] another one he’s like, ‘I don’t need to see this guy but once a month, he does everything I ask him to do, but I wanna check in. Even if it’s just a phone call to know that I’m thinking about him.’ So that’s like an ideal parole officer.”

This approach to parole work takes the risk management logic and turns it on its head in a way that emphasizes rehabilitation rather than public safety. The officer’s system is novel in the sense that he identifies certain parolees not because they are high risk but because they are high need. The officer does not label parolees as “priority ones” because he views them as extraordinary risks to public safety. He is instead “thinking about” them more, displaying greater concern in response to the greater challenges that they seem to face. This logic shares elements with status quo thinking, but it is not easily captured by the views set forth in statutory and administrative policy. It is an inventive new way of thinking about parole that emerges only at the level of policy implementation.

Lisa Daniels brought a different novel logic to the work of parole implementation: narrative. She knows from experience that the stories we tell about returning citizens, and the stories they tell about themselves, are enormously powerful. Daniels lost her son, Darren, to gun violence when he was on MSR status. She turned to grieving mother’s groups for support, but

found they didn't value her story. Daniels told me about this experience when describing a new support group for grieving women of color which she plans to create so that others can share their stories more easily. Struggling to capture the feeling in words, she said:

“I found in my personal experience of trying to find a place of support, um, after, immediately after my loss, I did not – I did not find that group, that place of support for myself. There are a lot of recent mothers groups but not, not – I was not able to connect with one that would support the idea of – support me without feeling judged in the space. That my son was a victim, but was also a perpetrator. It was difficult. He wasn't that innocent victim, he wasn't that, that model victim. And that presented problems for me in seeking the support that I needed.”

Her own story, and the story of her son, was distorted by other mothers' pejorative views of parole and criminality. Press and television were likewise diminishing; instead of portraying his death as a horrific tragedy, the “media narrative” largely ignored his plight. Because he was “both a perpetrator and a victim” of violence, his death was labeled as predictable, not tragic.

In response to this personal loss, Daniels has come to view her work as “rewriting the narrative” for people on parole. When she offers returning citizens second chances after they have violated conditions of their release, she tries to allow them to take control of their own “narratives” rather than be ruined by one mistake. To some extent, this approach to parole implementation makes sense under the logic of dignity, but the narrative component is unique to Daniels's thinking. It allows her to be more personal in her approach than many of her colleagues. When I asked her how her work on PRB differs from her old speaking job at the Violence Reduction Strategy, she said:

“It's more intimate but it's actually more – it has a tendency to, to be the same experience, meaning: there are many opportunities that I get to share, um, from the wealth of my experience and with, you know, the gentlemen sitting across from me, depending on the age, depending on the circumstances. But I often get an opportunity to say, I need you to try something different. My son led this lifestyle, he sat in this seat, this very seat that you're sitting in, with another member maybe ten years ago. He sat in this very seat and he died as a result of coming out of here thinking that he could do

something different... and that never happened. And it's not gonna happen for you. So, you know, I get to be more intimate in that space"

By sharing her own story, and that of her son, Daniels is able use her work as a PRB member to influence the stories that people on parole tell about themselves. In her words, she gets to ask them to come "out of here thinking" something healthier, safer, and more dignified than what they might have told themselves coming in.

Her narrative approach is unique on the Prisoner Review Board. Some of her colleagues do not endorse restorative, narrative, or otherwise supportive practices at all. Emily Hoerner, the Injustice Watch journalist, emphasized that when considering pre-1978 prisoners for parole, new stories go out the window. She said:

"On these really difficult cases – and this is a complaint that we heard a lot from people – it's that they never look beyond the seriousness of the offense. So the line that they use in denying parole is... the seriousness of the offense.... And so I think that's probably referring to, kind of, you know, focusing on what happened and the crime itself versus looking more at, um, kind of the time after."

The members of the PRB who always turn to "the seriousness of the offense" are not in the business of helping people reshape their stories; to the contrary, the story of those would-be parolees is fixed from the moment of their first offense. But even the more progressive members of the group do not always share Daniels' narrative approach. She noted in an almost self-effacing aside, "I'm not the only one on the board that is willing to be open and restorative and offer second chances. I just have a different story, in and as it relates to my backstory. I gained this perspective, you know, from a different place." She is, in sum, bringing a new logic to the table.

Whittington, Rodriguez, Daniels and Boutros stand as clear examples of the extraordinary diversity of thought that underlies a facade of value alignment in Illinois parole policy. They do not tell a story of total abandonment; the twin pillars of rehabilitation and public

safety and the guiding logics of the IDOC status quo are present throughout. But they do show that, on the ground, policy implementers and service providers are not robots rigidly following the ideas laid out for them. Like the player in McPherson and Sauder's drug court, they use their own interpretations and logics to "mediate institutional demands and the requirements of day-to-day organizational activity" (2014, p. 166). They bring a host of new modes of thought to the process of parole work.

Policy Discussion and Conclusions

My findings on the diversity and complexity of values and logics in parole policy implementation suggest possible avenues for meaningful reform. Values and logics impact not only policy implementers but also the experiences of people on parole. As McPherson and Sauder have argued, the deployment of logics in the criminal justice world "matter[s] greatly for participants," often determining whether a returning citizen will find wholeness and stability on the outside or be swiftly returned to prison (2014, p. 177). Although this paper does *not* elucidate the mechanisms that link values and logics to outcomes, there can be no doubt that such a link exists. Previous scholars of parole have demonstrated in different settings that the decisions of policy implementers have a significant impact on the experience of parolees under their supervision (e.g. Hawken 2016). More research is needed to empirically verify and describe the link between the values and logics of implementation and the experiences of parolees in the case of Illinois. For now, I set aside that empirical work and turn to a discussion of how values and logics as understood in this paper can inform the work of parole in Illinois.

I submit that there are two key policy implications of our newly enhanced understanding of values and logics in lawmaking, administrative interpretation, and on-the-ground

implementation. The first is practical. Faced with heterogeneous implementation practices that cause disparate outcomes, policy should increase oversight of parole agents and facilitate dialogue between agents and service providers to ensure the use of effective logics and thus the success and well-being of all people on parole. The second is broad and future-oriented. Faced with a disparate and sometimes incoherent set of policy-guiding values and logics, it is incumbent on policymakers to critically evaluate the values and effectiveness of parole through the lens of policy implementers' insights.

Practical Parole Reform

The most clear policy response to divergent values is to impose some degree of homogeneity from the top down. In its current form, Illinois parole policy leaves policy implementers enormous discretion to choose their own logics and approaches to the job. Phil Whittington, the parole expert at John Howard Association, responded thus to my question about parole agent discretion: "As far as what they can do? That's a very long list... There's not much they can't do." Near-unlimited discretion allows agents to adopt administrative logics or diverge from their as they please. Depending on the effectiveness of these logics, this enormous discretion may be good or bad for parolee outcomes. In either case, though, this discretion would have to be curbed if the parole experience were to be made more or less uniformly effective and supportive for all parolees.

The most straightforward way to curb discretion is to increase the power of supervising agents in the parole system. According to some of my interviews, current leadership is often ineffective. Carlos Rodriguez, the service provider at WestCare, told me,

"There's some parole officers that are, um, like I said, really dedicated. And recognize that, hey, you know, I really don't like this, I really wanna help out, a lot. And those are the ones that are, that end up moving up the ranks, sometimes, and become supervisors.

And there's others that don't do anything, but they also move up the ranks. You go, what? What's going on here?"

According to Rodriguez, when parole officers who don't care are promoted to leadership, they are less likely to advocate for effective values and logics among the parole agents they supervise. By contrast, when agents who "really care" become supervisors, they are likely to pay close attention to their agents and make sure that they "really know their network" for connecting their caseloads to resources. This strong leadership tends to promote value and logic alignment in the ranks of parole agents and ensure cohesion in the implementation experience. When officers adhere to certain logics closely, they may be more likely to achieve parolee goals. For example, Rodriguez offered an example of how officers who closely follow the logic of service can improve outcomes for returning citizens on their caseload.

"Like I've got this one parole officer, who, um, will check in like, hey, Carlos, thanks for sending the facts about the times that he's supposed to be at counseling. We got him in our office, um, I checked with him, I let him know that I'm gonna give him an hour before and an hour after group to get there for movement. And you can see those people thrive."

Achieving this logic alignment through leadership is easier said than done. Whittington noted, "[When you are] trying to touch someone's discretion, they tend to, if it's IDOC or the Prisoner Review Board, they're very much against it. So it's nearly impossible to do." Officers resist limitations to their discretion at all costs. Even when policy initiatives are designed to curb this discretion, officers often find new ways to resist. Whittington told me that policy change "doesn't stop the parole officer from telling somebody that they can or can't be somewhere and imposing whatever sanctions they can... They can always change the thing that they're saying that you're in trouble for. It's like the saying in baseball: 'the League always adjusts.'" Thus, the project of imposing value and logic alignment through leadership may pose significant challenges.

In addition to enhancing oversight, parole policy implementation can be improved if IDOC leaders and parole agents tap the insights of service providers and other outside stakeholders. The majority of my interviewees came from outside the parole system, and they brought their own sets of logics to working with returning citizens. Their approaches could greatly supplement the existing body of logics used by IDOC leaders and parole agents and offer new - and, perhaps, more effective - ways of thinking about how to get the work of parole done.

Rodriguez and Whittington, for example, advocate for “warm handoffs” and gentler restrictions. Warm handoffs, according to Rodriguez, occur when a returning citizen knows who their parole officer and important service providers are before they even leave prison. By the time they are on the outside, they have resources to connect with when they need something, rather than scrambling to find someone. Gentler restrictions, according to Whittington, allow returning citizens to reintegrate into their communities more seamlessly. For example, laxer geographic restrictions would facilitate reentry for parolees living in border areas. Whittington told me:

“They can’t leave the state... say you’re on MSR in Kane county, you can only be in Kane and DuPage County, you need permission to leave. But you’re almost never gonna get permission to leave the state. But what if you have a family member that lives in Tennessee that can get you a good job and is willing to give you a place to stay for a couple months. Why would the state keep you and get in the way of that?”

Boutros and Daniels add the idea of forgiving policy responses as a potential improvement over the existing parole system. Boutros frames this policy approach around the idea of “hope.” She told me that, under the best of circumstances, parole can represent a promise to desperate people that they “shouldn’t die in prison.” Daniels frames this approach around the idea of a “second chance.” She told me that “second chance” thinking

“Typically shows up in a willingness to give another – to give a second chance. Because that’s a part of what restorative practices is: a willingness to hold a person accountable but also – and hold them accountable for the harm that they’ve done – but also, um, to be willing to restore and offer a second chance. And that’s not just something that I do – it’s who I am... There are violations that do require a remanding to IDOC custody. But when there is a space where leniency can be considered and where there’s mitigating evidence, extenuating circumstances, there is always, for me, an opportunity for that person to be resumed, and to be resumed with resources and information that can help support them in that process.”

For both of these thinkers, forgiving policy approaches represent an opportunity to support people in need and allow them to successfully complete their MSR terms. Their ways of thinking are necessarily unavailable to many policy implementers in the world of parole. Boutros draws her insights from her academic and think tank work with incarcerated people. Daniels draws her insights from the experience of losing her son and advocating for his legacy. Parole agents do not share those experiences.

These insights could make an enormous difference in the lives of people on parole, but they are not necessarily available to parole officers. They emerge from different resources and different logical approaches than those that are found within IDOC and among parole agents. Tapping the knowledge of outside service providers could greatly improve policy implementers’ ability to do the day to day work of parole in a way that actually improves outcomes for returning citizens.

Critically Rethinking Parole

In addition to practical reform measures, my data on lawmaking, on administrative interpretation, and especially on policy implementation suggests an urgent need to rethink what parole is about and how it is to be achieved. Each and every one of my interviewees expressed, without being prompted, a simple and tragic observation about parole in Illinois: it is failing. On

its own terms, some of the interviewees argued, it produces lackluster results in terms of rehabilitation and public safety. On different dimensions, others suggested, it betrays social values and does disservice to the people it supervises.

Rodriguez told me that parole often treats returning citizens as if they are still incarcerated. Taking on the perspective of a parolee, he said, “I’m out of jail, but I still *feel* like I’m in prison.” Whittington questioned why we impose this feeling on those returning citizens in the first place. He wondered aloud, “You sent them to IDOC, and they’re letting them out to go to work and they’re getting day passes to go visit their families on the weekends after a while... Well just how bad were they that they had to get sent to prison in the first place? Prison is a place of incapacitation. So did those people really need to be incapacitated?”

Hoerner, Boutros, and Daniels added questions of stigma to the mix. Hoerner told me that, whenever someone convicted of killing a police officer appears before the PRB, the police union buses dozens of officers to the hearing to protest that person’s right to walk free. She asked if this practice really belonged in a merciful society. Boutros confided that she does not think the parole reform she advocates for will remove racism from the system. She told me, “If we pass this [discretionary parole reform] bill, some people will get out, but it will still be a system that is grounded in institutional racism... I don’t expect in my lifetime I’m going to solve institutional racism or eradicate it.” Most striking of all, Daniels told a story of a parole world so black and white that the gray areas of human experience cannot fit into it. No one could accept or empathize with the fact that her son, the returning citizen, “was a victim, but was also a perpetrator. It was difficult. He wasn’t that innocent victim, he wasn’t that, that model victim. And that presented problems for me in seeking the support that I needed.”

These are deeply troubling words from a wide range of stakeholders who spend their lives caught up in the world of parole. They express what a recent report by the John Howard Association characterizes as a “profound skepticism at the ability of the existing reentry framework” and a concern that “both conceptually and in execution, reentry as a societal project – at least in its current incarnation – does not begin to adequately address even the most basic human needs” (John Howard Association 2019, p. 4). These concerns cannot be addressed by piecemeal reform or clever policy solutions. They beg a reckoning, one in which we begin to question the undergirding values and logics of the parole system, as I have discussed in this paper, and ask if those values are really being accomplished by the state’s parole system. They echo the words of the social theorist and prison abolitionist Renee Byrd, who has argued, “We should be wary of the seemingly benign notions of prisoner reentry... Reentry is remaking the carceral landscape and expanding the punishment system, even as it is deployed in such a way as to mimic a critique of mass imprisonment” (2016, p. 16).

But these concerns from my interviewees do not foreclose the possibility of hope. The same John Howard Association report argues movingly:

“If we are really serious about promoting reentry success and reducing incarceration, we cannot continue to tinker around the edges of reform. Sweeping changes are needed. And, as part and parcel of such changes, we must finally come to terms with the reality that reentry and criminal justice reform cannot be accomplished without taking bold corrective action to fix a system that falls woefully short of meeting the needs of the individuals and communities most impacted by criminal justice system involvement” (2019, p. 3).

We need not throw up our hands in despair simply because “sweeping changes” are due to make a meaningful difference in the world of parole. Byrd suggests that “despite all this” despair, “reentry also represents an opportunity” (2016, p. 16). The parole system in Illinois is not serving its charges or the public as it should. But, knowing that, we find ourselves in a

moment of extraordinary potential. It may finally be time to “come to terms” with the reality of parole in Illinois and rethink what it can and should mean for the people it impacts. Indeed, the diverse on-the-ground interpretations of parole’s twin aims may already encompass the values and logics needed to make this change real. In any case, the future promises the possibility of a new and better policy regime - if we make it. As scholars of public policy, we find ourselves - alongside lawmakers, administrators, implementation stakeholders, and returning citizens - at a moment of opportunity in the history of parole in Illinois. By understanding the values and logics at play in this world, we are better positioned to think and to act on that opportunity.

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