

THE RELATIONSHIP OF PRISONIZATION AND PAROLE
INTERACTION TO SUCCESS ON PAROLE*

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This is a study of certain types of pre-prison, prison, and post-prison experiences of a sample of sixty men who have been paroled to the Dallas District Office of Parole Supervision, thirty of whom were considered successful on parole, not having had parole revoked within a minimum of one year on parole, and thirty who have had parole revoked and are now inmates for at least a second time in the Texas Department of Corrections. These two groups are hereafter in this paper called successful and unsuccessful parolees. The study had two hypotheses: (1) the higher the degree of an inmate's prisonization, the more likely he is to fail on parole, and (2) unsuccessful parolees would have had while on parole fewer intimate contacts with people who encouraged and helped them to "go straight" and more intimate contacts with those who encouraged them in behavior which would violate parole regulations, than did the successful parolees.

In order to test the hypothesis that prison inmates who are highly prisonized are more likely to fail on parole than inmates with a low degree of prisonization, a quantitative system was devised by which an inmate would receive from one to five points on each of the following factors, said by Donald Clemmer¹ to be related to high acceptance of the prison culture: (1) a sentence of many years, thus a long subjection to the universal factors of prisonization, (2) a somewhat unstable personality made unstable by an inadequacy of "socialized" relations before commitment, but possessing, none the less, a capacity for strong convictions and a particular kind of loyalty, (3) a dearth of positive relations with persons outside the walls, (4) a readiness and a capacity for integration into a prison-primary group, (5) a blind, or almost blind, acceptance of the dogmas and mores of the primary group and the general penal population, (6) a chance placement with other persons of a similar orientation, and (7) a readiness to participate in gambling and abnormal sex behavior. Therefore, one who had all the characteristics associated by Clemmer with a high degree of acculturation into the prison culture would have a maximum prisonization rating of thirty-five, and one with none of the characteristics would have a prisonization rating of zero. After rating each man in the two groups, the following distribution of ratings was obtained:

Table I

Prisonization Rating	Successful Parolees	Unsuccessful Parolees
6 - 8	3	0
9 - 11	5	4
12 - 14	7	7
15 - 17	10	2
18 - 20	4	8
21 - 23	0	6
24 - 26	2	1
27 - 29	1	1
30 - 32	0	1

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The range of ratings for unsuccessful parolees was from 9 to 31.5, with a mean of 17.7. The range of ratings for successful parolees was from 7.3 to 23.4, with a mean of 15.2. The small difference indicated between the two groups could mean (1) that there is a greater difference between the two groups than is shown, the greater difference not revealed because the rating scheme was inadequate or invalid, or (2) that high prisonization is only slightly related to parole failure. A look at the data in another form, Table II, has induced the writer to conclude that the device used for measuring prisonization is inadequate, for the data show fairly consistently a difference between successful and unsuccessful parolees, although the amount of the difference varies considerably from one factor to another:

Table II

Factors Related to Prisonization	Successful Parolees	Unsuccessful Parolees
1. Mean Length of Sentence (Years)	23.6	36.4
2. Positive and Socialized Relations in Pre-Penal Life		
% who had close friend who was criminal	33	50
% who attended church at least twice monthly	30	15
% who had voluntary association membership other than church	13	3
Mean number of close friends	4.8	3.2
% who had good relationship with father	6	35
% who had good relationship with mother	50	54
3. Continuation while in Prison of Positive Relationships with outside		
Mean number of letters received monthly	8.9	9.5
Mean number of visits received annually	17.8	9.7
4. Percentage belonging to Prison Primary Group	60	63
5. Acceptance of Dogmas and Codes of Prison Population		
% who would aid official in stated situation	80	37
% who would help in stated project	40	33
% who would encourage others to help in stated project	7	13
% who condemned other inmates' homosexual activities	40	17

	Successful	Unsuccessful
6. % who had cellmate or workmate with leadership qualities and who is highly integrated into prison culture	3	33
7. % having no homosexual experience in prison	73	67
% who did not gamble in prison	43	47
% who did not drink in prison	90	83
% who wanted prison job	90	40
% who participated in prison recreational program	37	23

Let us now look at these findings in relation to hypothesis one, namely that high prisonization is more characteristic of parole failures than of successful parolees. Factor one, length of sentence, shows a shorter mean sentence for successful parolees than for unsuccessful ones. The data substantiate the hypothesis. Factor two, positive and socialized relations in pre-penal life, was checked by the items indicated in Table II. These data indicate that successful parolees were less likely to have a criminal friend before going to prison, were more likely to attend church at least twice a month, were more likely to have membership and participation in voluntary associations other than church, and had more close friends, than unsuccessful parolees. However, the parolees' own evaluations of the closeness of their relationships with their parents do not substantiate the hypothesis. In the successful group, of the 57% who had fathers alive at the time of imprisonment, only 6% thought that they had a close relationship with their fathers. In the unsuccessful group, of the 67% who had fathers alive at the time of imprisonment, 35% thought that they had a close relationship with their fathers. The difference between the percentage of each group believing that it had a close relationship with the mother is not great, 50 for the successful and 54 for the unsuccessful, but the difference is in a direction which does not substantiate the hypothesis. It is to be remembered, however, that we are comparing not actual relationships between parolees and parent, but the parolees' concepts of these relationships. It may well be that the greater number of close relationships defined by those who had parole revoked and who are in prison again is the result of a nostalgia and fantasy which comfort them but for which the successful parolees have no need.

The continuation of positive relations with the outside: the average number of visitors from the free world is shown to be much greater for those who were successful on parole; the difference in letters received is negligible.

The percentages of the two groups which affirmed primary group involvement are very nearly the same, with the small difference being in the direction of supporting the hypothesis.

Refusal to accept prison dogmas and codes was checked by reactions to four situations: (1) what one would do if in his presence another inmate attacked a guard and was succeeding in disarming or overcoming him, (2) what one would do if prison authorities asked for volunteers to paint their cell block, (3) whether

one would encourage or discourage others or say nothing toward enlistment of other to paint the cell block, and (4) what one's reaction was to homosexual activity among other inmates. Responses from the two groups were similar in situations 2 and 3; but the responses to situations 1 and 4 show great differences in attitudes toward aiding an official and disapproving of others' homosexual activity. Eighty percent of successful parolees said they would have gone to the aid of the official but only 37% of the unsuccessful so replied. Forty percent of the successful disapproved of other inmates' homosexuality, but only 17% of the unsuccessful disapproved.

There is admittedly a disturbing subjectiveness about the manner in which the figures shown for percentage of each group which had a cellmate or workmate as described in Table II were determined. The interviewer simply asked open-ended questions about the type of inmate the interviewee had worked with or celled with. One can only hope that pre-conceived notions about what he should find did not influence what he did find, namely, that 33% of the unsuccessful parolees either celled with or worked with an inmate with leadership qualities and who was fairly well integrated into the prison culture, whereas, the percentage for the successful parolees was only 3%.

Refraining from homosexual experience and willingness to work and take part in the institution's recreational program were more characteristic of successful than unsuccessful parolees, consistent with the hypothesis. However, most inmates do not drink in prison and slightly more than half of each group gambled fairly often, using primarily commissary products to bet on a large variety of chances, from the outcome of games to the likelihood of rain.

In summary, the data collected indicate that, in general, failure on parole is more closely associated with the seven factors which Clemmer related to high degree of prisonization than is success on parole. The relationship is not consistent for all factors, however, and the data on gambling (and the interviewees' explanations for why they gambled) suggest that gambling is not a significant item for consideration. The other four items for which the data refute the hypothesis suggest to the writer not the abandonment or even re-formulation of the hypothesis but rather the need to repeat the study on these items, using means which rely more on objective reality and less on subjective reality as chronicled by the inmate or parolee. The data certainly do not enable one to explain parole failure etiology in terms of "When ... (condition given, such as degree of prisonization), then parole failure." Other data gathered, but not used in this paper, on pre-prison experiences and characteristics of successful and unsuccessful parolees show relationships to success and failure on parole, but these also provide an inadequate basis for prediction of parole success and most of them have already been reported in the literature on the topic.

To test the second hypothesis, that men who failed on parole would have had, while on parole, fewer intimate contacts with people who encouraged and helped them to succeed on parole and more intimate contacts with those who encouraged them in behavior in violation of parole regulations, than parolees who were successful on parole, the following information was obtained about the two groups' experiences while on parole:

Table III

	Successful Parolees	Unsuccessful Parolees
Mean number of close friends while on parole	4.3	2.3
Percent who said they lived with or had intimate relationship with one who encouraged them to "go straight"	77	30
Percent who visited, worked with, or intimately associated with one who had been in prison	17	40
Percent who lived with or intimately associated with one who was committing crime	3	37
Percent who intimately associated with one who encouraged or tempted them to violate parole rule other than commission of new crime	23	67
Percent who had other solicit them to participate in crime	20	60
Percent who did participate following suggestion	3	50

The rather great differences in exposure to inducements to criminal or non-criminal behavior (or definitions favorable or unfavorable to violation of the law) show that the nature of the exposure is more closely related to parole success or failure than are most of the factors which Clemmer related to prisonization. The practical value of these data would be limited to cases in which early detection by the parole officer of social interaction closely associated with parole failure enabled the parole officer to assist the parolee in avoiding such contacts and in establishing relationships which provide social interaction that reinforces or supports law abiding behavior. Until we can find a way of using the nature of a person's pre-prison and prison social interaction to predict the nature of his post-prison social interaction in specific situations (which with present knowledge, constitute an unknown and unpredictable variable), there will be no way of predicting parole success except in terms of chance. The relevance of this material for sociological theory is that parole failure, which in most cases means recidivism in crime, is at present best explained in terms of the nature of one's social interaction while on parole and the situations in which that interaction occurs, rather than in terms of his pre-parole experiences. The scientific ideal would be the statement of an invariable sequence of specified necessary and sufficient conditions (interaction in situation) for parole failure. Present knowledge does not enable us to do this.

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¹Clemmer, Donald, The Prison Community, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1940; pages 301-302.



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