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Rejection, Humiliation, and Parole: A Study of Parolees' Perspectives

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Rejection, Humiliation, and Parole: A Study of Parolees' Perspectives

Research on status rejection has developed considerably over the past two decades and is applied in a number of different settings to better understand criminal and deviant behavior. Our research contributes to that body of work by examining the ways in which status rejection may create a potentially humiliating dynamic for individuals on parole. Specifically, we use in-depth interviews with parolees to illustrate how the parolee identity can promote the experience of status rejection and simultaneously foster conditions for humiliation—an emotional state that may impede one's ability to both (re) construct a conventional identity and reintegrate back into one's community.

Key Words: Identity Work; Stigma; Status Rejection; Community Corrections; Desistance

Words = 8,129

Introduction

Ideally, parole encourages desistance and helps former inmates integrate back into society by promoting a conventional lifestyle. The purpose of this research is to examine a crucial feature of the parole experience we refer to as the parole paradox.[i] The parole paradox suggests that while parole encourages integration and desistance, it can actually place individuals on parole in a position where they face humiliating dynamics that can complicate efforts to attain a conventional lifestyle. This work contributes to desistence and reintegration theory by illustrating how parolees make sense of daily interactions with institutional actors such as parole officers and potential employers, and with intimate others like parents, siblings, and romantic partners, which complicate their efforts to craft new conventional identities.

Scholars across a variety of disciplines now recognize the importance of humiliation.[ii] However, researchers have not yet examined how it may be a relevant concept for individuals on parole. We are not the first researchers to think about the concept of humiliation in reference to punishment, reintegration, or desistance (e.g., Braithwaite 1989; Cohen 1985; Goffman 1961; Maruna 2001). Braithwaite (2000:282) observes that "societies that degrade and *humiliate* criminals have higher crime rates" (emphasis added). Nevertheless, these general observations about humiliation in the context of punishment and reintegration tend to be interchanged with the concepts of degradation, stigmatization, and shaming. Still, scholars of humiliation suggest that it is important to treat it as a distinct and unique concept (Lindner 2001). For instance, Hartling and Luchetta (1999:262) point out that "shame and humiliation are often used interchangeably [but are] two different constructs."

What social processes have the potential to produce humiliating dynamics for parolees? We suggest this question is important because it may help identify, and therefore prevent,

conditions that cause humiliation. Humiliation can disrupt a parolee's development of a conventional sense of self and therefore impact his or her psyche. For example, researchers have found that humiliation is correlated with helplessness, depression, antisocial behavior, and even various forms of violence such as suicide, assault, and murder (Hale 1994; Lindner 2000; Nisbett and Cohen 1996; Torres and Bergner 2010; Walker and Knauer 2011). As a result, parole may not provide sufficient opportunities for identity transformation and serve as a legitimate turning point away from deviance (Sampson and Laub 2005).

We begin our analysis by defining the concept of humiliation to demonstrate how parole structures interactions to create a humiliation dynamic. Then, we briefly review existing research on desistance as well as the experience of (former) felons in the U.S. context to illuminate the connection between potentially humiliating dynamics and parolees' efforts to reintegrate and reform. Finally, we draw on narratives from individuals on parole to illustrate how day-to-day interactions carry the potential of producing humiliating dynamics that systematically disrupt their attempts to "go straight."

Desistance, Identity Work, and the Emotion of Humiliation

Leask (2013:131) explains that humiliation is a "demonstrative exercise of power against one or more persons, which consistently involves a number of elements: stripping of status; rejection or exclusion; unpredictability or arbitrariness; and a personal sense of injustice matched by the lack of any remedy for the injustice suffered" (see also Torres and Bergner 2010:199). Importantly, Leask suggests that studies of humiliation need not only focus on the emotion itself, but on conditions that may lead to that emotion. Therefore, in this paper we focus on the parole humiliation dynamic and define it as *relations that can impede the production of a transformed self by continually rooting a parolee's present self in his/her past status*. Thus, our focus is not

on the emotion of humiliation itself, but rather on the structure of parole that sets the stage for conditions that give rise to this dynamic.

Research on the structural obstacles that parolees face is nothing new (Petersilia 2003)[iii]. Moreover, general desistance literature suggests that there are two processes parolees employ in order to break away from past criminal lifestyles. First, they may "knife off" from relationships or institutions that contribute to criminal activity (Maruna and Roy 2007).[iv] Second, they may work to shift to conventional identities (Giordano et al. 2002; Maruna 2001; Paternoster and Bushway 2009). "Hooks for change" provide these opportunities and help reinforce new pro-social identities (Giordano et al. 2002). In either case, parole can function as a turning point in the trajectory of offending (Laub and Sampson 1993; Uggen 2000).

Within identity-based desistance theories the role of 'self' and 'change' varies (see Paternoster and Bushway [2009] for an excellent review). However nearly all research on desistence suggests that parole is rife with structural impediments and cultural ideals that consistently challenge (former) felons' and parolees' claims to a conventional status (Austin 2001; Graffam et al. 2004; Hammett, Roberts, and Kennedy 2001; LeBel 2012; Petersilia 2003). [v] For example, cultural narratives about criminal offenders publicly jeopardize a parolee's status claims and set the stage for humiliating dynamics. After all, "a single deviant event or episode can be enough to stigmatize a person indefinitely" (Maruna et al. 2004:272), casting them as criminal, deviant, and morally suspect. Boshier and Johnson (1974) point out that employers are reluctant to hire former prison inmates because they believe they are "dishonest" and "untrustworthy" with business property and money (see also Harding 2003; Holzer, Raphael and Stoll 2006). As Pager (2007:4–5) suggests, "The 'credential' of a criminal record, like educational or professional credentials, constitutes a formal and enduring classification of social

status, which can be used to regulate access and opportunity across numerous social, economic, and political domains [and is therefore] an official and legitimate means of evaluating and classifying individuals." Thus, the humiliation dynamic is an ever-present threat for parolees.

The system of parole itself also structures the humiliation dynamic because "the criminal processing system understands parolees' potential future behavior in the context of their past criminal behavior" (Opsal 2011:149). Thus, parole and the identity of "parolee" challenge (sometimes publically) or delegitimize claims of identity change (Torres and Bergner 2010:199). These rejections of conventionality have important implications for identity-based desistance theories. We therefore focus on the day-to-day interactions that give rise to the conditions that set the stage for the humiliation dynamic by relying on qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews with individuals on parole.

Methods

Our research was based on the qualitative study of parolees. Study participants were paroled from six different prisons in a Western state (USA). The parole program was sponsored by the state's Department of Corrections, and our study was part of a larger mixed-methods evaluation of the state's reentry curriculum that focused on the experiences of former prisoners and their perceptions about reentry during their first few months on parole. It was during these qualitative interviews with parolees that the researchers began to notice the theme of a humiliation dynamic.

The parolees we interviewed were randomly selected from a list of all parolees released from custody. The study conformed to institutional review board requirements (IRB). All parolees were informed about the purpose of the study, volunteered to participate, and were guaranteed confidentiality. Seventy-five parolees (n = 75) were interviewed during a nine-month

period in 2010 and 2011. Parolees were between twenty-two to fifty-six years old (median = 36) and had finished serving between eighteen months and twenty years in prison (median= 4.4 years). Fifty-three males and twenty-two females completed the study. The ethnic and racial composition of the paroled population in this study was Whites (45.6 percent), Hispanics (31.5 percent), and African-Americans (18.4 percent).[vi]

Interviews were conducted at four different parole offices—two urban and two suburban. Each interview was conducted in a private office and lasted approximately sixty minutes. Researchers recorded interviews with the consent of each participant and then transcribed them for analysis. We used a semi-structured interview format that relied on sequential probes to pursue leads provided by the subjects (Lofland and Lofland 1995) which allowed the participants to identify and elaborate on domains they perceived to characterize their reentry experiences. The role and consequence of humiliating dynamics emerged through this interview structure.

We analyzed data by searching for general relationships among categories of observation and employing grounded theory techniques (Glaser and Strauss 1967). We categorized data into conceptual domains of the experiences of the parolees participants identified. The experiences of the sample might not be reflective of all men and women's post-incarceration lives, but their narratives add voice and depth to the issues they faced once they returned to the community (Ragin 1994; Seidman 2012). Importantly, all of the participants were cooperative and willing to discuss their past and current challenges related to reintegration and education in the reentry program. At times the process was emotional—though, according to Linn (1997), relating their stories may have allowed participants to better comprehend their feelings. As Lindner (2000) notes, studying humiliation is difficult as it can deepen that emotion among research participants. The interviewers were aware of this potential harm when conducting interviews among parolees

and therefore engaged participants in an affirming way, allowing open dialogue so that the research participants dictated the flow of the interviews and indicated what was important about their respective situations.

The Dynamics of Humiliation

Participants report that they are working toward an emerging sense of self that is capable, independent and law-abiding. In this section we draw the reader's attention to various day-to-day situations and interactions that participants reported can put them on the receiving end of a humiliating dynamic that may impede identity work. Findings are organized according to two sets of actors that can set up a humiliating dynamic because they call attention to the participant's past stigmatized identity. We focus first on intimate actors such as parents, siblings, ex-spouses, and potential romantic partners and then examine institutional actors such as potential employers and parole officers.

Intimate Interactions

Participants reported that intimate relationships with parents, siblings, (ex)-partners, and children had the potential to be either helpful or hurtful as they returned to the community and worked towards being understood as different. Many participants wanted to use relationships with intimate others as an opportunity to explore the boundaries of their new selves; however, in this section we illustrate how the parolee's past self makes these kinds of interactions complicated. Indeed, these interactions are often premised on a tension between participants' past and future selves thus setting the stage for a humiliating dynamic.

Parents and Siblings Consistent with other research, participants often left prison with few resources and, thus, family provided them with important sources of emotional, financial, and logistical support (Kushel et al. 2005; Naser and LaVigne 2006). About this, Peter stated,

"My family helps me out quite a lot. If I need something, they will help me. All my support comes from my family…If I didn't have my family around, I would probably be sleeping on the streets right now."

While the family was a support system for many, it was also a central proving ground for emerging identity work that participants were *changed*, capable, law-abiding adults. For example, Lloyd explained that showing his independence was central to his interactions with his family. His mother provided him with a support system, but only for a limited amount of time. Lloyd understood that the agreement to stay with his mother was temporary but necessary and that he had to work hard to be independent:

> I definitely think having that support system in place is really a big help.
> But at the same time, as far as my finances go, I still have to pay her rent,
> and if I would squander my money, she's not there to step up and make
> sure I can pay for UAs [urinalyses] or anything else. While she helped me,
> she definitely didn't enable me. I'm getting ready to move out right now. I
> had to save up three grand to get set up.

The family, then, provided significant support to participants post-incarceration and, thus, strengthened the ability of parole to function as a turning point. Additionally, families often provided an important social context to both practice and prove a move from dependence to independence which allowed some participants in the study to express their genuine desire to become recognized as different than what they were. Notably, however, precisely because the family served this function, it also became a social context that set the stage for status claim rejections and, thus, humiliation, fear, and shame. For example, Mary began to cry when she recounted how she was earning back the trust that she lost so long ago:

I've even got a house key, and I never had that before. I did a lot of work

before, trying to stay on parole and faking them out. Now I'm trying to do

the right thing. They don't trust you know. Because of what you did in the

past. And I don't blame them. But now I'm really, really doing the right

thing and it's scary.

In his ethnographic work on families of the incarcerated, Braman (2005) explains that

while families are likely to be an important source of support to the parolee, family members

often have an intense fear that their loved one will return to a deviant and criminal lifestyle. In

our own project we saw how this fear prompted some family members to question or deny that

participants had experienced any real progress or change. This failure by the family to recognize

the developing identity of the parolee could create an especially humiliating dynamic for the

parolees. That is, they may question whether they will ever be recognized as different person.

For example, Chris states:

Every time my mom knows I'm going to see my parole officer, she starts

crying because she's scared I'm not going to come out of the office. It's

like the day I went over there the last time. I came out and she was crying

and I like, 'What's wrong Mom'? And she's like, 'I didn't think you were

coming back'. She is always like that. I don't know why. I guess it was

because I've been gone so long and she don't want this to happen again,

ya know?

Additionally, participants like Chris reported that even while (or perhaps because) family

members were deeply invested in their successful integration into society, they often created

strict rules that monitored their behavior. About this Mike explained, "My situation was, and I

have family out there, but I wasn't comfortable living with them, because you have to live by their rules, plus the rules of parole, and it was too much." Similarly Allan—who resided with his brother post-incarceration—explained, "My brother is my sponsor. So when I got paroled, I put in my parole plan to live in his house and they okayed it. But right now we aren't getting along. It's his house, and it's his rules, and it's this, that, you know?" Despite the ex-offenders' wish to be perceived as a new person, with acceptable social values, they are in a position where they are often viewed as unable to earn the status they feel they deserve.

The narratives we have presented so far illustrate how participants' identity claims of difference were simultaneously supported *and* called into question by parents and siblings. While participants hoped to (re)gain the trust of their families, it was not uncommon for participants to feel that family members viewed their ability to accomplish change with serious doubt setting the stage for feelings of humiliation (more generally see Torres and Bergner 2010).[vii]

Partners and Children. Notably, some participants experienced similar kinds of challenges to their claims of differences from ex-partners as well as potential partners. For example, participants in our study who were parents of minor children faced significant challenges assuming a parental identity post-incarceration. Such participants indicated a strong desire to participate in their children's lives and "become" parents but were often restricted from contact with their children by the primary custodial parent. That is, while study participants wished to reconnect with their children (and sometimes expressed the desire to make amends for past poor parenting behavior), they also claimed they were denied the opportunity to have (another) chance to become good parents.

For example, Richard—like other men in the study—was frustrated by the fact that his spouse initiated divorce proceedings while he was incarcerated and, upon his release, restricted his contact with his son. He explained how he felt he deserved to be a part of his son's life because of his desire to become a good parent:

> I talked to her when I first got out. I talked to her and she said she don't want me to have nothin' to do with him [his son]. I don't think it is fair. But I mean, I don't want to call her and bother her, 'cause she's happy with somebody. I don't want to call her and mess nothin' between them because I'm callin' to try and see my son, ya know?

Although there are likely a variety of reasons why mothers wished to limit contact between children and fathers post-incarceration, men most often indicated that they believed it was because the quality of the familial relationships was less than ideal prior to and during incarceration. The vast majority of men said they owed substantial back child support payments even prior to their last conviction while still living in the community. Indeed, few of these families or partnerships were intact prior to incarceration.

Male participants were significantly more likely to say that their ex-partners (or the mothers of their children) would not permit visitation. This gender difference makes sense given what research indicates about gender, parenting, and incarceration. Specifically, when women are incarcerated, their children most often end up in the care of other (maternal) family members because it is unlikely that the fathers are playing an active caregiving role (Mumola 2000). On the other hand, when fathers are incarcerated, mothers are often *already* the primary caretakers of the children. This is not to say, however, that women's attempts to reconnect with their children post-incarceration were successful. Most frequently, a woman's status as a felon directly

challenged her connection to motherhood and aided in emphasizing her failure as a parent. For example, Angela explained that she was unable to see her stepchildren because of a child abuse charge related to her incarceration:

> I have a child abuse charge, so I can't be around any of the kids in the
> family. That narrows it down to, like, nobody. I can't be around my
> stepchildren. They ask about me every day. It's killing them. It's literally
> killing them inside. They ask their dad every day if I do not love them
> anymore. I mean, it makes me feel like fuckin' shit! I was away from them
> for ten months and then I get out and I still can't see them. Really?

Angela believes that she is still being judged by others based on her past behavior. She notes specifically that her children want to see her, but the situation is slowly destroying her children's love for her, making her "feel like fuckin' shit." These humiliating dynamics could impede the production of a transformed self because Angela's past behavior and the felon label impede her ability to actively mother.

A few participants explained that their claims of difference were also called into question by individuals who were new in their life and discovered participants' past selves. While family members drew upon their experiences with participant's past behavior to question reformation projects, these other individuals drew upon cultural stereotypes of felons to reject participant's claims of difference. John, for example, explained that he "came out" as a felon to a woman he had started dating; she found his past self so disconcerting that she would not go on another date with him. About this John explained:

> Sometimes you have to force their mind to open a little bit. Because a lot
> of people are like, "Oh, you were in prison?" I dated a girl. We went out

for dinner, had a good time, and we didn't go out again because she said,

"It's just too weird, knowing you were in prison and you're on parole." I

said, "Okay, you're too judgmental of a person." I've had that thrown at

me enough times with jobs since getting out of prison. That's one of the

first real obstacles you run into, trying to sell yourself past your felony

record.

Goffman (1963:497) suggests, "[T]he self is a part of a ceremonial thing, a sacred object

which must be treated with proper ritual care and in turn must be presented in a proper light to

others." As Goffman might suggest, John tried to present his case in a proper light when dating.

He thought that by being honest (undoubtedly his background would eventually be discovered)

he could also demonstrate he was now conventional. However, John suggests his date did not

overlook his spoiled past. This interaction creates the potential humiliation dynamic that is

counterproductive to reintegration.

Thus, as illustrated in this section, support from family members and other intimates is

central to reentry success. But close relationships also have the potential to bring about a

humiliation dynamic through the rejection of a parolee's claims that they are not what the other

fears they are. While criminologists often point to the role of pro-social others as a central

variable in the desistance process (Laub and Sampson 2003; Patternoster and Bushway 2009), in

the case of the current study, it becomes clear that parolees may work hard to embed themselves

in pro-social networks but remain objects of distrust and suspicion by those same individuals.

This is a similar point made by other research on humiliation (e.g., Kendler et al. 2003:790 notes

that "upsetting behavior by a close tie or biological family member could be humiliating if it

threatens a core role").

Institutional Interactions

Employers. Work is also central to parolee identity claims (see also Opsal 2012). Parole officers, the public, and parolees themselves see being an employee in the paid, legal labor market as a signifier of conventionality. Indeed, as ex-offenders seek employment, they project themselves as transformed people (Goffman 1963). As a result, obtaining conventional employment is important for individuals working to desist from crime. However, as a great deal of research illustrates, finding employment is often a difficult and frustrating endeavor (Flower 2010; Pager 2007). Participants in the current study sought employment but potential employers consistently and repeatedly called participants' status claims into question. Indeed, as we illustrate in this section, employment-seeking encounters can create a humiliation dynamic.

Parole officers typically stressed employment as critical to successful community reintegration; as a result, parole-reentry staff often connected parolees with employers seeking new employees. However, parolees reported that job setups rarely led to employment because employers reported they could not hire someone with a felony record. Participants described these encounters in particular as degrading because they were stark reminders that they were inferior to job-seekers unencumbered by the stigma of a criminal record. Moreover, many attested that these rejections made them hyperaware of their status as felons. Rod was typical of those who made this point:

> I've noticed that when you hand an employer your application, the first
>
> thing they say is, "Have you been convicted of a felony?" And they look
>
> at you like, "Oh, you've been convicted of a felony. We don't hire felons."
>
> Or they say, "What was it for?" And you say "Theft" and they say, "Oh
>
> no, we don't want you stealing from us."

Similarly, Brian described his initial feeling of hope for employment as a janitor when he was approved for the position. However, the company soon discovered his felony record and confronted him when he arrived to fill out the final paperwork. Thus, his status as a conventional member of society was first affirmed and then rejected by this potential employer. He explained his frustration with this:

> I've been having a hard time trying to get a job. I'm unemployed right now. I have had some darn close calls to get a job. Staffing agencies called me in: "Oh, we got this job for you, twelve to fourteen dollars an hour, come on let's do the paperwork, and you're going to be on your way." Then when I get in there they say, "You have a felony." "Yeah, I put it on the job application." "Oh, we should have screened better."

Brian's story is not uncommon. Most parolees explained employers and employment agencies were initially positive about a particular job prospect but employers, once they discovered participants' histories, turned them down.

Finally, underemployment can also function to delegitimize claims of change and difference. That is, participants who were educated and held professional positions prior to incarceration experienced acute reminders that it would be difficult for them to prove their reformation to others or to themselves. George, formerly a psychotherapist in private practice, spoke of his damaged sense of self:

> I'm struggling with issues of self-esteem, because now I'm working at Chipotle's doing busboy work. Sometimes I look at myself like, Oh my God, who are you? How has it come to this? It is hard to put that aside. I

start to despise myself, and I blame myself. I can't forgive myself, and I

blame myself. It's hard to move on and believe this isn't a life sentence.

As this illustrates, George's diminished employment opportunities hinder the development of his

new definition of self. These kinds of repeated public denials over time through the employment

process often lead to feelings of hopelessness for participants—an emotion common among

individuals who feel humiliated (Torres and Bergner 2010). Moreover, these (repeated)

interactions could clearly dissuade individuals with a felony record from remaining in the job

market given that some are subjected to interactions where they feel judged, unrecognized as

having changed, and disrespected (Goffman 1967). Thus, when employers are unwilling to hire

former felons they not only reject their status claims of difference but also impede their ability to

transform the material conditions of their lives through gainful employment. Both of these limit

their desistance efforts in significant ways.

Parole Officers. As addressed at the outset of this paper, the parolee identity is conflated

with culpability; thus, being labeled with that identity automatically limits claims of reformation,

capability, and lawfulness. Indeed, through the institution of parole, the state surveils and limits

parolees' behavior because they are understood—primarily—as potential risks to public safety

rather than as transformed subjects. The primary way the state achieves this is by requiring

parolees to adhere to a set of conditions whose violation can result in a return to jail or prison

(Steen et al. 2013). While former prisoners often experience parole as a continued form of

punishment and an extension of the punitive nature of the penitentiary (Opsal 2009), the

participants in the current study reported that parole also had a positive impact on their lives via

interactions with parole officers. Here, we argue that the positive interactions with parole

officers have the potential to attenuate the potential humiliation dynamic that may emerge through this important social interaction (Morash et al 2014).

For example, Ken told us that his parole officer was a caring person who treated him with respect: "She's working with me. That's a blessing. I thank God for that every day. She just keeps working with me. Not everybody does that. Not everybody gets the opportunity. She's someone that's giving help, not just on them or just looking at them as a piece of paper." Jason also pointed to his parole officer as a supervisor who maintained a good and helpful relationship with him: "My parole officer has been very understanding with me. I think communication is the biggest thing. The parole officers, I've dealt with a couple different ones, and they all seem to be pretty receptive, so that's definitely a big help as well."

In addition to communication style, other participants noted that parole officers assisted them in important ways. For example, Sandy noted her parole officer helped her get her driver's license, which was necessary for maintaining employment:

> I got with my parole officer. He is a very good parole officer. He okayed
>
> me to go ahead and get my driver's license back. I have to pay the fines
>
> and everything that I owe back to get my license and then get insurance
>
> and all that. That's what I'm in the process of doing right now.

In short, several parolees told interviewers that their parole officers were nonthreatening, sincere, provided resources, and that through these qualities, the officers helped them recover their conventional status. Thus, parole officer support is important in minimizing the constant threat of social rejection that may lead to humiliating dynamics. Notably, for those parolees who were lucky enough to have a supportive parole officer, the potential for humiliation was

minimized. That is, several participants felt that parole officers were treating them as conventional individuals.

While a number of participants pointed to positive interactions with parole officers and useful aspects of parole, they spent significantly more time talking about the challenges that arose because of their connection to the institution. In particular, the majority of participants said that being on parole was challenging because it limited freedom and positioned them as clear subordinates to their parole officers, which directly challenged their claims of independence, self-sufficiency, and conventionality. For example, because parole required adherence to a variety of rules, many participants felt as though they were being treated like children and had lost their status as adults. Again, this set the stage for a potentially humiliating dynamic to develop. Mason described his frustration with this:

> Like I say, it was being frustrated over somebody telling me, "You can't drive. You go here, you can't go there. You've got to come see me, and if you don't I will make your life a living hell." I'm like, why is that? I'm grown. But even though I'm grown and this has been going on for many years now, it just lingers on.

Similarly, Nick told us, "I have been on parole for two years. I'm tired of people telling me what to do. I've done it for twenty-four months and continue to do it [parole]. I'm a thirty-year-old grown man. I'm tired of it all. It's just frustrating."

Limited autonomy was a central complaint among participants in this study of parole. Not only did they believe that post-incarceration they were entitled to a greater capacity to make decisions about their daily lives, but they also maintained that their continued loss of freedom on the outside was counterproductive to their attempts to go

straight. That is, for those former inmates who viewed their parole officers and parole as

limiting, we argue that parole failed to be an important turning point in their life. Todd,

for example, said he became quickly frustrated finding employment given the constraints

of parole:

> You catch several buses to get to a certain location, and by the time you
>
> get there, they are at lunch and you have to wait until one-thirty p.m. for
>
> them to come back. You sit there, you fill out the application, and you
>
> worry about trying to make it back for your curfew so you don't get
>
> violated or get in trouble. It definitely wasn't enough time.

Being a worker and meeting the expectations of parole are both central to proving one's

reformed status. However, as Todd observes, these two roles were not necessarily

compatible. In fact, Bruce described how his parole was revoked and he was returned to

prison when he prioritized his work responsibilities over his parole conditions: "I was in

the halfway house for ten months. I worked for a moving company and all the drivers

didn't show up. The boss says he will pay us guys double if we would drive today. So we

drove and I got pulled over. So they sent me back."

Being on parole, then, limited our participants' ability to claim and manifest their

new self-concepts through its system of rules and its treatment of parolees as subordinate,

setting the stage for the emotion of humiliation by their being treated like children by

parole officers who were, in many instances, younger than the parolees. These

circumstances, in particular, created intense feelings of marginalization, frustration, and

hopelessness—that is, participants felt of little social value and as though they would

never have the opportunity to really become members of society. Mack articulated his

frustration with being a parolee when he stated, "I feel like, honestly, I feel like giving up sometimes. Sometimes when I go to see my parole officer, I feel like everything's just going bad for me. I feel like telling him to just send me back to prison. It would be easier just to sit there."

Conclusion

Despite their wide resurgence as a subject of notable interest within sociology, emotions have remained understudied within criminology with few exceptions (Agnew 1992; Braithwaite 1989; Giordano et al. 2007). Because of this, the current analysis seeks to explore the connections between status rejection of individuals on parole and the potential for that status rejection to create conditions that can foster humiliation. That is, humiliation may occur when individuals feel "devalued in relation to others or to a core sense of self" and, as a consequence, experience rejection or role failure (Kendler et al. 2003:791).

Our focus on humiliating dynamics contributes to the growing body of research that examines the role of identity work (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996) in desistance efforts (Giordano et al. 2002; Maruna 2001; Opsal 2012; Paternoster and Bushway 2009). In our analysis we highlighted how, in different life spheres, participants have their claims of difference called into question, challenged, or delegitimized. Specifically, participants identified experiencing status rejections in the context of intimate relationships as well as via potential employers and parole officers. While participants believed that "doing their time" should qualify them as redeemable the larger structural and cultural milieu that stigmatized them for being felons made them feel that recasting their identity was a fruitless endeavor.

It is important to point out that while experiences of status rejections among parolees are sometimes varied, there are commonalities that they face in their interactions with others that may set the stage for humiliation. First, even when parolees' experiences with their parole

officers were viewed as "helpful," there was still the potential for a humiliation dynamic to develop. In short, rules about parole conditions shape officer-parolee interactions. Additionally, the consequences of being formally understood as "unrepaired" by either parole or an employer held serious consequences for parolees: a return to prison or (continued) unemployment. Parolees also suggested that employers relied too heavily on information about past criminal status rather than current skills and motivations. Again, from the parolee standpoint, there is the potential for a humiliating dynamic in every formal interaction precisely because past criminal status drives interactions.

In contrast, family members' challenges to participants' claims of change did not impact parolees' material lives – except where the family was instrumental in jobs and housing. That is, the humiliating dynamic in the context of intimate relationships came in the form of "more of the same." These humiliating dynamics were emotionally distressing to many of our participants. Nevertheless, frequent and emotional interactions with family also provided parolees with an opportunity to demonstrate that they were "no longer a criminal."

An important weakness of this study is that we do not have systematic data on the extent to which humiliating conditions prompt a return to delinquent or criminal activity. Data on recidivism were not collected for this sample and could not be matched back to interviews because of confidentiality. However, desistance research couched within a symbolic interactionist tradition focusing on identity highlights that various obstacles could impede one's fulfillment of, or commitment to, a new self. Thus, there is strong theoretical reason to believe that those parolees who are most likely to face humiliating conditions are also the most likely to recidivate. Giordano and colleagues (2002), for example, observe that identity shifts are more likely to fail if they are largely cerebral (i.e., if there is no specific plan for living one's change)

or if the individual lives in a social environment of significant disadvantage (see also Patternoster and Bushway [2009]). Relatedly, Opsal (2011) illustrates how desisting participants in her research drew on conventional scripts and storylines to create socially valued pro-social selves; however, over time, repeated structural and interactional challenges to these emerging self-concepts corresponded with a reemergence into criminal activity (2011, 2012). Finally, Maruna (2001:158) reminds us of the relational component of successful identity work and explains that, in the end:

> Reformation is not something that is visible or objective. . . . It is, instead, a construct that is negotiated through interaction between an individual and significant others. . . . Until ex-offenders are formally and symbolically recognized as 'success stories,' their conversion may remain suspect to significant others, and most importantly to themselves.

The current project adds to this body of work and illustrates how day-to-day interactions repeatedly challenge identity claims and simultaneously lay the groundwork for humiliation. As a result, future research on desistance should examine the extent to which individuals desisting from crime experience status rejections and the specific emotions that manifest as a result. That is, criminologists should explore emotions as a social process that can impede (or facilitate) desistance.

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[i] We thank an anonymous reviewer for helping us think about framing this issue as the "parole paradox."

[ii] See, for example, Brown, Harris, and Hepworth 1995; Fangen 2006; Fisk 2001, 2005; Gilbert 1997; Kaufmann et al. 2011; Kendler et al. 2003; Lazare 1987; Lindner 2000; 2001; Malterud and Hollnagel 2007; Miller 1995; Sanders, Pattison, and Hurwitz 2011; Statman 2000.

[iii] It is important to note that parole and re-entry are not the same thing. Travis (2005) for instance favors the use of reentry to describe the situation where inmates are being released from custody. That is, people are sometimes released from custody directly into the population (see Travis 2005).

[iv] Maruna and Roy (2007:104) note that "knifing off" is an underdeveloped term that but that it generally refers to removing oneself "from harmful environments, undesirable companions, or even the past itself."

[v] For example, as is well documented individuals with criminal felony records face a number of legal restrictions that directly deny their access to full citizenship (Travis 2005). Indeed, the US federal government and state governments obstruct civic reintegration by limiting or denying (even ex-) felons' right to vote, hold public office, or serve on juries. Moreover, other "invisible punishments" temporarily limit or permanently revoke a number of rights or privileges, such as education loans, public assistance, public housing, and parental custody, granted to citizens unencumbered by a criminal record (Travis 2005).

[vi] The race/ethnicity of 3.5 percent of the participants is unknown.

[vii] This work is similar to that of Mutran and Reitzes (1984) who study both positive and negative self-feelings among adult children and their parents. That is, expectations can shape interactions with adult children in ways that lead parents who are losing their independence to feel better or worse about themselves. In intimate care there is also empirical evidence that a loss of independence promotes feelings of humiliation within families (see Rhodes and Shaw 1999).