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2020

## Security Culture: Surveillance and Responsibilization in a Prisoner Reentry Organization

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### Recommended Citation

Prior, F. B. (2020). Security Culture: Surveillance and Responsibilization in a Prisoner Reentry Organization. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 49(3): 390-413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241620908651>

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## Security Culture: Surveillance and Responsibilization in a Prisoner Reentry Organization

### Abstract

As they have become increasingly common prisoner reentry organizations have become a topic of interest to ethnographers, particularly those focused on race crime and justice. Reentry organizations are typically understood in terms of the social services they provide with the purpose of easing their clients social reintegration after incarceration. However, ethnographers of non-profit prisoner reentry organizations have interpreted them as linked to a broader project of disciplinary poverty governance. Based on participant observation and interview evidence of a government-run prisoner reentry organization in a large northeastern city, I argue that an overarching security culture structured not only the organization's security and surveillance practices, but also its disciplinary service provision. I argue that security culture also helps explain staff attitudes towards clients, and clients response to the organization as an extension of their experience of punishment. This ethnography builds on previous work through its specific examination of frequently taken for granted concrete security practices in conjunction with social service programming in order to highlight the overall effects of a government-run prisoner reentry organization's security culture.

## Security Culture: Surveillance and Responsibilization in a Prisoner Reentry Organization

### **Introduction**

Prisoner reentry is a framing of the provision of social services specifically to people who are or have been incarcerated. With the rollback of funding for the social service side of parole and the expanding prison population, prisoner reentry organizations began to fill the void (Mijs 2016). Ethnographers of prisoner reentry organizations have argued that as a social welfare and punishment hybrid, prisoner reentry organizations fit within the dominant paradigm of urban poverty governance (Halushka 2016a; Miller 2014). This paper extends poverty governance arguments into an analysis of the security and service provision of a government-run prisoner reentry organization that I refer to as Afterward, in a large northeastern city in the United States.

In particular, I argue for the significance of an overarching security culture that had consequences not only for Afterward's concrete security practices, but also for its disciplinary service provision. Clients were subjected to strict security procedures, including checkpoints, searches, and rules for moving around Afterward's office. Clients and staff were also subject direct CCTV surveillance as a part of their participation. While the extent to which clients participation was voluntary varied, given that most were on parole or probation, their participation in Afterward's programming often came with important stakes for their freedom. It was not uncommon for clients to experience Afterward as the day-time service component of their night-time incarceration, e.g., halfway house, work release, or house arrest. Security culture as a concept helps to build on the work of other scholars that have conceptualized prisoner reentry organizations as a form of disciplinary surveillance, and this work has similar findings with respect to the responsabilizing aspects of both reentry programming and staff attitudes towards clients.

## **Prisoner Reentry in Brief**

Prisoner reentry is a criminal justice policy agenda that is organized around providing services to people who are leaving both prison and jail as they engage in a process of social reintegration (Petersilia 2004). As a policy agenda, prisoner reentry emerged in the early 2000s in response to the effects of mass incarceration which include over half a million people leaving prison and jail annually in the United States (Petersilia 2003). Recent research from the Bureau of Justice Statistics finds that from a representative sample of people released from state prisons in 2005, 68% would return to prison within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years (Alper, Durose, and Joshua 2018). People with histories of incarceration tend to have numerous issues that both heighten the difficulty of everyday life and the likelihood of recidivism (Visher and Travis 2003). For instance, they are often dealing with deep poverty and socioeconomic instability (Wacquant 2009; Western 2018). Moreover, the earning power of people with histories of incarceration is constrained by low levels of education, spotty work histories, and the discrimination they receive on the labor market (Pager 2009; Thompson 2009). Moreover, they are more likely to be dealing with psychological trauma, mental health issues, and drug addiction than the wider population (Anakwenze and Zuberi 2013; Western 2007).

The goal of prisoner reentry policy is to prevent people from returning to prison or jail, and this goal is often framed as desirable on the grounds of public safety (crime prevention) and cost savings (fewer people incarcerated) in contrast to earlier models of rehabilitation (Steen, Lacock, and McKinzey 2012). Nevertheless, the mechanisms employed in prisoner reentry policy are typically social service oriented, the type that would have been employed under the label of rehabilitation. Different organizations/programs may provide different emphases, but some typical areas of social service mechanisms for reentry include employment, housing,

education, cognitive behavioral therapy [CBT], and drug treatment. There is a great deal of academic research on program effectiveness, i.e., what programming works to reduce recidivism (Lipsey and Cullen 2007). This present study focuses on a prisoner reentry organization that provided services related to employment and CBT, and as such is indicative of programming in many reentry organizations.

### **Ethnographic Sociology of Reentry, Race, and Criminal Justice**

As they have become increasingly common, prisoner reentry organizations have become a topic of ethnographic sociological inquiry in their own right. Rather than evaluating reentry program effectiveness, much of this scholarship, including this current research, has an explicitly critical perspective on the policy agenda of prisoner reentry. In his ethnographic analysis of a prisoner reentry organization, Miller links prisoner reentry to a long history of racial control in the United States that has been enacted both through criminal justice and social welfare institutions, i.e., urban poverty governance (Miller 2014:308). Miller in particular also highlighted the “responsibilizing” or disciplinary nature of the way that these organizations relate to their clients, which is conceptually linked to racial control (2014:314). His work builds on scholars who, using a combination of ethnographic and interview methods have made similar arguments about responsibilizing or disciplinary discourse in other criminal justice bureaucracies including prisons, parole, probation, and strong arm drug rehabilitation programs (Clear and Latessa 1993; Gowan and Whetstone 2012; Lynch 2000; McCorkel 2013; Werth 2013). Similarly, other ethnographers have focused on organizational dynamics around workforce development and other types of programming in prisoner reentry organizations from a critical perspective (Halushka 2016a, 2016b; Mijs 2016).

Prisoner reentry organizations provide an institutional site for the intensive monitoring of a particular slice of the urban poor who are predominately black and latinx. In general, the urban poor are subjected to increased scrutiny from numerous street-level bureaucracies, including schools, the criminal justice system, police departments, welfare offices, and homeless shelters (Gilliom 2001; Lipskey 1980; Stuart 2016; Wacquant 2009). To the extent that these bureaucracies are monitoring the urban poor, they do so in service of responsabilizing discourses and practices at the center of urban poverty governance (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). In general, the urban poor face a greater degree of monitoring than everyone else, and specific mechanisms of surveillance of the urban poor include public CCTV, zero tolerance policing, digital scrutiny of welfare recipients consumer behavior, and even social media monitoring by law enforcement (Chambliss 1994; Eubanks 2018; Fiske 1998; Lane 2018).

There are long standing historical and conceptual linkages when it comes to surveillance and race (Browne 2015). The U.S. criminal justice system in particular has been highlighted by academics with respect to its racialized impact on society both historically, i.e., enforcement of Jim Crow and vagrancy laws, and today, with mass incarceration's disproportionate impact on young black men (Alexander 2010; Muhammad 2010; Oshinsky 1997; Wacquant 2000; Western 2007). Recent scholarship suggests that among young black men with criminal histories, typically members of the urban poor, there is a practice of system avoidance, e.g., hospitals, workplaces, schools, etc., in order to preclude the extent to which they are surveilled and subjected to formal sanctions (Brayne 2014; Goffman 2009).

Mechanisms of racialized surveillance go hand in hand with disciplinary discourses and practices that the urban poor encounter through their interactions with the state in the context of poverty governance. Scholars have pointed to neoliberal welfare reform as having its historical

antecedent in the turn of the century “moral reform” approach to poverty, by putting the focus of poverty governance on the behavior of individuals rather than structural economic dislocation (Gilliom 2001; Peck 2001; Soss et al. 2011; Stuart 2016; Wacquant 2009). This neoliberal responsabilizing supply-side model of poverty governance (Woolford and Curran 2012) has been utilized in prisoner reentry programs, particularly those that focus on corrections style CBT and workforce development (Bush, Glick, and Taymans 2011). In this current study of an urban government run prisoner reentry organization, I use the concept of security culture to build on previous analyses of poverty governance by explicitly embedding disciplinary service provision in the context of concrete security and surveillance practices and staff concerns about clients as a violent threat.

### **Methods and Role in the Field**

From May 2013 to July 2014, I conducted participant observation research at a prisoner reentry organization which I refer to using the pseudonym “Afterward.” I accumulated 1400 hours of participant observation, and took on the role of a volunteer intern. In the summer of 2012, before I began my formal participant observation research, I was a volunteer intern at Afterward in a roughly full time capacity. The time that I spent at Afterward in the summer of 2012 as a volunteer intern was crucial for establishing rapport with the staff of the organization. The rapport that I built initially as a volunteer intern was a crucial component of how I was recognized as a good faith actor, and therefore able to gain access to the organization. When I began my formal participant observation, I was assigned by the organization’s chief of staff to work under the head of case management staff. While not responsible for my entry into the field per se, Sharon was in many ways what “Doc” was to Whyte because she would operate as my go to person for my ongoing participant observation research and provide direction (Whyte 1943).

Having previously been a volunteer intern made it very easy for me to assume that role again, even as I was conducting participant observation. My volunteer duties included performing mock job interviews, assisting clients with their resume building, and following up with clients for case managers. These types of activities allowed me to sit in on classes and engage in informal interaction with both clients and staff. I was also able to sit in on staff meetings, which provided insights on the dynamics of the organization. This study relies on ethnographic fieldnotes, for which I followed the guidelines by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, guidelines that emerge out of a Chicago school and grounded theoretical tradition of ethnographic practice (Charmaz 2014; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I took jottings whenever possible. After leaving the field for the day, I used the jottings as the basis for long-form narrative fieldnotes. I followed open coding procedures when analyzing qualitative data, going line-by-line and coding phrases using words that were summary and analytical in nature. Later I would recode this data in a more thematic fashion, driven by theoretical questions that emerged out of direct engagement with my fieldnotes as well as my overall experience of the field site. I used both summary and thematic coding to generate analytical and thematic memos that acted as a bridge between raw fieldnotes and the genre of formal academic ethnography.

I supplemented my participant observation by conducting digitally recorded in-depth semi-structured interviews of both clients and staff. I interviewed 57 clients and 10 staff. Typically, I conducted interviews during clients lunch break in a nearby diner. As a small incentive, I paid for lunch. For the interview data, I followed the same coding protocols as I did for my fieldnotes, i.e., open coding, thematic coding, and memoing, following grounded theoretical methodology. I use a combination of both interview data and fieldnotes to create a



more comprehensive picture of the organization's security culture and how both clients and staff understood and responded to it.

I went into the field with broad interest in mass incarceration and its consequences particularly with respect to race and urban poverty. In this way, this current research follows in the tradition of ethnographies of race, crime, and justice, as described by Rios, Carney, and Kelekay in their annual review article (Rios, Carney, and Kelekay 2017). In the article, they put forward a reflexive sociology of double-consciousness as a methodological orientation that is explicitly derived from the accumulated practice and scholarship of ethnographic research on race, crime, and justice. Rios, Carney, and Kelekay mention that while double-consciousness was a concept that Du Bois used to make sense of the oppressive and phenomenologically disorienting experience of living in a racist society, they utilize the concept of double consciousness in order to “develop a reflexive approach in our research and writing” specifically in the field of ethnographies of race, crime, and justice (495). While my ethnographic practice derives from work that is influenced by Chicago School and grounded theoretical commitments, my methodological (epistemological) stance was very much in the vein of this reflexive approach to ethnographic research specifically derived from the accumulated empirical research in the area of race, crime, and justice. My research was not based on a mechanistic hypothesis testing model, and while I was broadly informed by my substantive interests in the effects of mass incarceration, I kept an open mind while conducting my research.

### **Fieldsite and Positionality**

I selected Afterward for study because its focus on prisoner reentry was an inroad to studying the effects of mass incarceration. Before I started my formal participant observation, Afterward, while appearing to be a direct part of the city government, was actually contained

within a larger non-profit umbrella organization. However, by the time I began my participant observation in 2013, Afterward became a city government agency with funding allocated to Afterward as a part of the municipal budget. In spite of being allocated money via the city government, the director of Afterward disclosed to me how the organization was perennially subjected to a shrinking budget, and a common refrain of meetings was “doing more with less.”

The staff of 10 people included case managers, life skills instructors, and upper level management including a director and chief of staff. Most of the staff was black, with the exception of two white staff members. The racial background of the staff is important because it is a reflection of long standing trends in street level bureaucracies that have staff and clients being both socially and economically proximate (Soss et al. 2011:233). It is also important because simply having black staff does not eliminate the significance of structural racism in poverty governance (Soss et al. 2011:257). As a street-level bureaucracy with demand for its services outstripping its supply (Lipskey 1980:27), Afterward was limited in resources, with life skills (CBT and workforce development) classes filled to capacity and case managers frequently having overloaded caseloads. About 40-60 people with records came in on a daily basis for workforce development and CBT classes. Clients’ supervision status varied, but they were usually either on parole or probation. Most clients came to Afterward at the behest of a criminal justice bureaucracy—sometimes staff complained that agencies would sometimes refer people to them that could not participate in the program. While some clients might be court stipulated to participate, this was not typical. Other clients would simply come of their own volition, primarily in search of employment after failing to obtain it on their own. A snapshot of Afterward’s client rolls shows that 86% of clients were black men. Afterward’s clients tended to have low socioeconomic status, no greater than a high school education, and docket sheets with

multiple arrests and convictions. According to case management data, clients' convictions were divided roughly equally among drug crimes, property crimes, and violent crimes.

Ethnographers of race, crime, and justice have been concerned about the significance that the social identity of ethnographers has for the kind of work they produce (Rios et al. 2017). The primary concern is that when an ethnographer who is an outsider observes a group of people that is socially marginalized, that their interpretive framework is likely to be prejudiced and wrongheaded in a manner similar to a colonialist 18<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist with distinctions between primitive and civilized peoples (Steinberg 2007). Additionally, there is concern that outcomes of this kind of ethnographic work are likely to produce actual harm to those groups, at a minimum, by reinforcing dominant negative conceptions about marginalized groups being studied, for which Alice Goffman's work was recently criticized (Lewis-Kraus 2016; Rios 2015). Debates on the politics of representation go back to the ethnographic work of Oscar Lewis and his culture of poverty arguments, arguments that went beyond ethnography with the public debate over the Moynihan report's pathologizing of poor black families (Greenbaum 2015; Lewis 1968).

As a white male graduate student from a privileged economic background studying a street-level bureaucracy inhabited primarily by black middle class social service professionals that provided reentry services to people with criminal records, about 86% percent of whom were black men, my social status was substantially different from those with whom I interacted and observed. Therefore, I would be at risk of perpetuating the racist notion of black men as inherently dangerous and violent, a racist notion which I obviously reject. Most black men do not commit violent crime, and two thirds of Afterward's client population had records for non-violent drug and property crimes.

Having said that, I readily concede that as a privileged white outsider to the organization and its clients, I may have blind spots. In general, I reject a strictly positivistic view of the ethnographic enterprise, while I am also wary of a subjectivism that argues that all observations are solely a product of the observer's social background. Recently, Rios, Carney, and Kelekay offered in their reflexive sociological double-consciousness approach a discussion of white sociologists conducting ethnographic research on vulnerable populations, based on the premise that white researchers are racialized subjects (Rios 2015:497). Rios, Carney, and Kelekay specifically mention Fader's acknowledgement of her white privilege as a model that could be emulated, specifically how her privilege affected her research on young people of color transitioning into adulthood and out of juvenile custody simultaneously (Fader 2013; Rios et al. 2017:507).

Following in this vein, while I was not the only white person at Afterward, certainly, my white middle class mannerisms and presentation of self may have had consequences for the willingness of some of Afterward's clients to participate in the interview portion of this study, though both client and staff interviewees were typically quite forthcoming. Even though I was a volunteer at Afterward, it was not unusual because of my age at the time of the study (28), and my whiteness, my business casual attire, and frequent presence at Afterward, for people, mainly clients, to assume that I was a staff member, and I was frequently treated as such. Insofar as I was granted unearned status and access within Afterward, I believe this is par for the course on how whiteness works (McDermott and Samson 2005).

### **Security and Surveillance at Afterward**

Afterward was a secure non-residential city government-run prisoner reentry organization. Security procedures included a security checkpoint where 40-60 clients were

stopped and searched before they came for reentry services every morning, typically cognitive behavioral therapy/training and workforce development classes. Clients were required to wear adhesive badges printed by the security staff at the first floor checkpoint for identification purposes. Clients' attendance was also regularly kept by both first floor security and office floor social service staff. Clients' behavior and movement throughout Afterward's office was monitored by security staff, who frequently enforced rules regarding cell phone use and hat wearing in Afterward's waiting room. Clients who had meetings with case management were required by Afterward's rules to be escorted from the waiting room to case managers offices by case management staff, rather than simply walking back by themselves when the case manager was ready. In addition to these security measures, Afterward had 18 CCTV cameras throughout its office and the hallway leading up to its office entrance. These CCTV feeds went to Afterward's Chief of Staff's office.

Upon entering Afterward's office, these procedures send a message to clients that they are being watched and that they should behave accordingly. These mechanisms can take on disciplinary significance when they are a record of non-compliant behavior, the most frequent among these being a lack of attendance, which can result in being dropped from the program. Lack of attendance was common. The employment specialist, Matt, who was white and in his early thirties, told me he assumed a 50% attrition rate for any program cohort. Sometimes clients living in halfway houses while on parole would face "holds" from halfway houses that precluded them from attending Afterward. About a third of my interview sample was either on work release, house arrest, or living in a halfway house. I interviewed at least five Afterward clients only to find later they had been placed on hold by the halfway house or work release, and therefore would need to start at the beginning of Afterward's life skills classes if they wished to

complete the program. It was also possible for clients to be subjected to violations from either parole or probation, which in the most serious of cases could result in having a warrant issued for their arrest and their return to prison or jail.

I watched clients' behavior regularly to see how they responded to these security and surveillance measures. In general, the behavior of clients that I saw conveyed the sentiment that they did not want to be there, but were doing what they could to adapt to their circumstances. With respect to lining up in the morning at the security checkpoint, clients would wait outside, even when it was quite cold, until the last possible minute before lining up inside, to spend as little time as possible in the building where Afterward was housed. Clients usually exited the building completely during 15-minute breaks regardless of whether they smoked or not. Clients also typically established rapport with the security guards, engaging in banter, e.g., debating about the latest sporting event, typically basketball, football, or boxing. They might also engage in informal material exchange, e.g., a client slipping a guard a loose cigarette. The way that I understood it, this behavior was intended to mitigate clients' interactions with the security culture of the Afterward organization.

Staff perspectives on security measures tended to vary based on their position within the organization, with leadership being more supportive, and the rest of the staff being more skeptical. During my participant observation in a meeting at Afterward, the director of the organization, Edward, who was black and in his late fifties, asked me what I thought about efforts to tighten up their security procedures regarding the movement of clients around the office. When I responded I said, "Well... is it possible that you'll be creating an anxious or potentially hostile environment with some of these rules? Could the client feel uncomfortable? I just wonder if this stuff will get in the way of you doing what you want to do..." Edward

responded “I hear what you are saying, but I’m going to have to cut you off right there. The safety of my staff is the most important thing. With all due respect, I don’t give a goddamn if the client is upset.” His chief of staff Sidney, the person who was responsible for the maintenance of the security procedures who was black and in his late fifties, also stressed the issue of legal liability. Sidney showed me pictures of scissors and packing knives that he had confiscated, from clients, saying that he did so on the grounds that they could be used as weapons. Sidney also put up numerous signs around the office with messages for clients like “You are being watched” and signs for the staff by the office back door reading “Do not Prop,” in what I observed to be failed effort to stop male staff from using the automatically locking back door as a shortcut to the restroom that clients also used. Edward and Sidney also proposed having Afterward’s staff wear body alarms. The use of body alarms did not come to pass because the body alarms that the office purchased were not particularly loud, and one of the case managers, Cedric, even set one off as a practical joke. Case managers also bristled at having to escort clients back to their offices in what they felt was needless security theater. Towards the end of my participant observation, Afterward had plans to move its office to a different building, where the owner had apparently suggested a separate back entrance for Afterward’s clients with a security checkpoint that the building’s other tenants would not have to go through. I asked Sharon about this and in addition to pointing out the racist undertones of such a policy, she replied, “You know, it would not have been such a big deal if Sidney wasn’t so [Sharon scrunches up her face, frowns and clenches her raised fist with her arm flexed in front of her, mimicking the posture of someone who is angry]. She continues, “People get scared because they see the security and they say ‘what are these guys like?’ Also, if our clients wanted to, they

could do anything to us. There's no security after 4:00, you can pretty much walk right in and just do whatever. It's a farce."

In general, the clients at Afterward were viewed as a security risk. While not a residential facility, as a public street level bureaucracy, Afterward needed to take steps to ensure that they had a secure environment. In spite of some staff skepticism, Afterward's security framework remained largely intact and unchallenged. I argue that these security and surveillance measures were crucial for understanding the overall organizational culture of Afterward because they provided the context in which disciplinary service provision is embedded. The term security culture captures the extent to which these measures were central to everyday staff practices and attitudes, as well as clients responses.

### **Responsibilizing the Client: Service Provision Embedded in Security Culture**

In spite of skepticism from Afterward's case management staff regarding some of these procedures, e.g., body alarms, I argue that the security framework of Afterward cannot be viewed separately from the services that it provides. Just as the security procedures are designed to keep Afterward's staff safe from their clients, the administration of social services, i.e., CBT, workforce development, and interview referrals, while intended to help out the client directly, are justified by the organizations staff in terms of their public safety outcomes by way of recidivism reduction. By way of illustration, from my interview with Edward, the program director:

A guy returning from detention crime free, making the commitment to reunite and be a part of his family, making the commitment to be a part of the community in very productive ways, making the commitment to be employed and pay taxes, we want that to happen. However, it's not all about that. What it's about, in my opinion, in the rooms that



I'm in, number one, it's about public safety. It's about no more victims and that's the way it should be.

If Afterward's clients are considered a threat to the broader public, why wouldn't they be an even greater threat to Afterward's staff? The security culture at Afterward as it was implemented was the practical way in which Afterward dealt with the fact that its clients were considered to be a threat to public safety. In addition, Afterward's services, very much like other criminal justice and social welfare bureaucracies, were heavily responsabilizing. A two-week block of CBT classes called "Community and Personal Responsibility" was designed to both get clients to accept responsibility for their actions and an attempt to change their behavior. A three-week block of workforce development classes focused on the development of "soft skills" and presentation of self (Halushka 2016b). The classes are also specifically designed as an intervention, not only to ease the transition from prison or jail, which is highly routinized, but also make it so that the bulk of any Afterward client's day has been accounted for by programmed activity.

Afterward's clients tended to be distrustful of the criminal justice system. Afterward tried to mitigate this by employing facilitators with criminal records, and the director of the program himself, Edward, had also experienced incarceration. Reggie, a life skills instructor who was black and in his mid 40s, was a "professional ex" (Brown 1991), i.e., an individual whose criminal record and social background serves as a positive credential with respect to obtaining employment in organizations that provide services to people with criminal records. Like many of the clients, Reggie had grown up from a young age engaging in crime, and he claimed to have first carried a gun at age 11. Court records show that Reggie had been in and out of jail from the late 1970's to the late 1990's. Several of my interviewees found Reggie's

biography compelling as an example of, “If I can do it, so can you” type of role modeling. Additionally, Reggie enacted a direct and confrontational facilitation style, partially rooted in aspects of a hyper-masculine “street” presentation of self (Anderson 2000).

The following example helps illustrate the significance of responsabilizing discourse in CBT courses as implemented by Afterward. I sat in on meetings of a CBT course facilitated by Reggie composed of young men Afterward had identified as high risk for returning to prison or jail. By way of illustration, during one meeting, Reggie was attempting to convince clients that it was okay to go to the police in life threatening situations, and that family ties needed to be more important than street ties. When clients argued that they would never snitch, Reggie countered that clients needed to consider their family ties to be of primary importance. In an attempt to critique hyper-masculinity based on honor or reciprocal violence, Reggie presented clients with a scenario where they had been raped while incarcerated, and then later had the opportunity to retaliate violently. However, as a result of this hypothetical violent retaliation, they would face a lengthier prison stay, which would not allow them to be there for their families. Reggie loudly punctuated this story by aggressively repeating throughout, “What would you sacrifice?” The implication was if a client acts out of anger that it could be self-sabotaging and sabotaging of family as well, even if understandable and satisfying in the moment. While most of the clients sat silently through Reggie’s repetition of a rhetorical question, one of the clients replied wearily with tears welling up in his eyes, “Why are you yelling at me?” This response gave Reggie pause; he apologized and explained that he was not trying to attack the client personally, and was only trying to offer perspective.

The emotional stakes for this particular meeting of the course were heightened because of both the content of Reggie’s scenario and his presentation style. Still, this particular example

highlights the role that responsabilization played in the implementation of the course. The responsabilizing discourse of the CBT program as it was implemented was a core feature of the overall experience of Afterward, and so it is important to consider the program in context of how it is experienced by some of its clients.

As a practical matter for clients with supervised housing, attending Afterward for five weeks of programming is compulsory daytime service provision to complement their nighttime incarceration. From a white male client in his late 40s on work release:

Client: We have a counselor that's not real up on her job.

Me: Work release.

Client: Yeah. She doesn't really like to do much for her people. Just throw them in Afterward and forget about them.

Me: Really?

Client: Yeah. Everybody in [work release section of jail] goes to Afterward

Later he clarified:

Client: I think a lot of the other guys just don't care. Don't want to—they're just doing it for parole or for the halfway house.

Me: So they can get out.

Client: I do it because—well, first I did it because I was pretty much forced into it—

Me: Right, from your counselor.

Client: And then I got into it. You got to make the best of every situation. It's not easy sometimes, but you have to do it.

From a black female client in her early 20s, also on work release:

But then you got somebody like me who comes in, who is used to being around her kids and her family, and don't like the environment, don't like being told what to do, how to do it, when to eat. I don't even like Afterward. I have no choice but to eat it because that's the only thing that you all are serving. To be away from my family, to be stuck around a bunch of women that I don't know. You have to adapt to your situation, you adapt to your environment.

Both interviewees saw their attendance at Afterward as being directly linked to their overall criminal justice involvement, and also occurring under threat of sanction. They also both stressed that they were trying to manage this situation to the best of their abilities. For these clients on work release and others attending under compulsory circumstances, being subjected to the security culture at Afterward takes on the same heightened level of significance as what they would encounter in prison or jail. Under somewhat less compulsory circumstances, I had interviewees living in secure halfway houses explain to me that it was substantially easier to get permission to leave halfway houses to go to a reentry organization like Afterward than it was to get multiple passes to look for employment on their own. Even Afterward clients who did not live in secure housing were typically on parole or probation, and therefore needed to obtain employment or demonstrate initiative in doing so in order to remain in good standing with their supervisory agency, if they were not referred outright by the agency in question. The variations in formal criminal justice supervision of Afterward's clients heighten the significance of Afterward's security culture as clients come in for disciplinary service provision.

### **Delayed Employment and Disciplining Clients**

Afterward staff frequently cited a disconnect between the clients' desire for employment and the way that they framed Afterward to them. During orientation, at the beginning of any

five-week period for a particular program cohort, Matt the employment specialist repeatedly stressed “We are not a job shop. We are a full program, and it is on you to complete it. We can give you opportunities, but it is on you take them.” This was a sentiment frequently echoed by the program director and other staff. It is somewhat ironic that Matt would say this given that it was his charge to forward clients to job interviews. However, the staff in general frequently led with responsabilizing rhetoric to telegraph to clients that they would need to earn this opportunity. Afterward’s staff felt that the five-week program served as a kind of practical trial period in which clients were able to demonstrate their commitment to changing their behavior. Given Afterward’s limited resources and conditions of the local labor market, handing out job opportunities to clients without vetting them would be impractical. Still the deployment of this responsabilizing rhetoric was a key feature of Afterward’s disciplinary service provision.

Sometimes clients voiced frustration with the process of going through the five week program before obtaining employment, indicative of the disconnect pointed out by Afterward’s staff. One day I was asked to “pinch hit” for a life skills class because one of the instructors was late. Reggie explained that they were filling out sample resumes, and that I should go around and help people until the instructor shows up. From my fieldnotes:

While I was going around working with clients one on one, one client, a black man in his mid 30s, said that he felt “irked” by what was going on in the class. He went on and said that he was trying to do what he needed to do, that everyone in the room was showing up, and that they weren’t being treated well, potentially alluding to their late instructor. He said that everyone there needed to get a job to feed their families. I tried to engage him, and reassure him that his critiques were valid. I explained to him that my experience with the staff was that they were pretty well intentioned, but I agreed that it was

frustrating when you're being asked to "wait" for something and it's not obvious that the staff is doing anything to provide you with what you need. He replied that "We lie and we tell people that we're going to school, but we show up and we can't even get a hamburger or nothing, everyone is telling us something different." The instructor showed up soon after this remark.

Sometimes clients also groused about ad-hoc employment opportunities being distributed to clients before the completion of the five week program at the discretion of Matt and case managers, in ways that appeared arbitrary. In street-level bureaucrat fashion, where a bureaucrat's discretion in the context of limited resources effectively becomes social policy, case managers would sometimes lobby Matt behind the scenes on behalf of specific clients in order to secure them opportunities for employment. Even as clients did what they could to adapt to their situations and make the best out of going through the program, they faced the issue of having to explain what they were doing to other people in their lives. Both clients and Afterward staff confirmed for me that it was in fact common for clients to refer to Afterward's programming as "school" so that family members and romantic partners would see their attendance as something related to obtaining gainful employment. In this instance, frustrations of a particular instance of a late instructor reveals a broader critique of the disciplinary character of the organization, in which a client believes he is being forced to wait for an employment opportunity for reasons that are ultimately unclear, arbitrary, or disciplinary. My presence also served the purposes of security culture, since I was implicitly responsible for supervising clients in this moment.

### **Trust But Verify: Staff Responsibilizing Attitudes Towards Clients**

Importantly, the implementation of disciplinary service provision has its consequences for staff as well as clients. Multiple staff cited difficult emotions, personal transformation, and

limited resources leading them to have responsabilizing attitudes towards clients. Afterward's staff's use of responsabilizing rhetoric was in part motivated by skepticism of client motives.

From a fieldnote of a conversation I had with Eric a case manager who was black and in his mid thirties:

Eric said that he used to give people the benefit of the doubt when they came into Afterward. However, after working for a while, he said that he stopped giving people the benefit of the doubt, and said that they now had to "prove themselves." He commented then on a client we both knew of saying that he was one of the nicest guys, but "Do I think he would be capable of something?" Eric nodded his head in the affirmative. He added "It's always the nice ones that get you." He went onto elaborate how the nice ones are the ones who were able to "get over" on staff at Afterward. He recounted how clients would be very nice, very complimentary to everyone. He said one client was very nice who did those things, and then got fired for coming to work drunk. A lot of people, he explained have been through several social service agencies and "know the game" of "what to say, how to act" so that they stay in good graces or at the very least under the radar. "Trust, but verify" Eric said, a mantra that he would often repeat.

In another office interaction, Matt specifically explained to me, "I don't interact with the clients a lot, and I don't want to because I don't want emotions involved in my judgement. If I place a client somewhere, and they don't behave, I might never be able to get another client there again. I had one client who was fired for selling drugs at a work placement, I was so angry." Similarly, from my interview with a case manager Cedric, who was black and in his late 40s:

Cedric: I got two guys now. Gave them a chance. There in job readiness training, two of these guys, and they came and they're 'Mr. Cedric, I got family responsibility,

really need employment.’ Against my best judgment, I said, ‘You know what, I’m going to give you guys a chance.’ So when this opportunity became available for them to work, I guess this convention that’s in town and then January the next convention, I gave them a chance. Do you know these guys—and the question was, ‘Can you pass the drug test.’ ‘Oh, Mr. Cedric, no problem. No problem.’ They failed. Actually, not even they failed; they put water in the cup. I haven’t addressed it yet with them, I will, before the weeks out. Probably Friday.

Me: So they’re still coming in for class?

Cedric: Mm-hm. I will continue to work with them. I guess what I’ve been deciding is how am I going to address it. I’ll be ready for it come Friday. But it’s like situations like that, come on. If you can’t pass it, it’s okay, because come January there will be some more opportunities. Not only did you mess it up for these three days, four days’ work, but when January comes, I doubt I’ll even refer you there, because you lied to me. So you get situations like that, but again for me, case management is not being judgmental, but again, trying to get guys to see that you have choices and you have decisions.

In all three instances, Afterward’s staff indicated where they had been disappointed previously by clients, and in Matt’s case, it was costly to the organization itself. In our interview, Cedric connects clients’ failure to admit that they cannot pass a drug test with the concept of personal responsibility, that led Cedric to change how he distributes resources to those clients. While Eric doesn’t discuss distributing resources to clients specifically, like Cedric, he refers directly to a change in attitude, in his case, from giving the benefit of the doubt, to starting off with skepticism. These remarks point to the emotional toll of working in a street-level bureaucracy



that is tasked with the implementation of disciplinary service provision. Their remarks are also indicative of responsabilizing attitudes that staff maintain regarding the clients as a type of coping mechanism.

### **Stay In Your Lane: Organizational Culture at Afterward**

As a city agency, Afterward was a street level bureaucracy, which are known for their limited resources and as an organization of last resort for the poor. As a result, the experience of being a client of one of these organizations can be frustrating. One client, a black woman in her forties commented on Afterward's overall environment,

We should have a table because Afterward's downtown, and if you have nothing coming out of a halfway house, it's difficult. I don't eat outside, I'm used to eating at a table.

They could have somewhere for you to sit, have a break. Just a place to use the information they give you, so you can gather the parts and use that information. Just a table and chair environment. I really think they should offer you a lunch, because at first you don't have [money].

Indeed, clients had to leave Afterward's building to get lunch, often purchased from an inexpensive food truck and eaten standing up outside of the building or sitting on the curb. With limited resources, it could be difficult for Afterward to provide lunches to its clients. Still, the lack of an inviting environment did not go unnoticed by Sharon the head of case management, who was black and in her mid 50s. In an interview, Sharon described her work environment at a different reentry organization, relating a story about how they provided coffee, "So every client coming in, they could expect we provide this relief. We had clients who slept on trains, clients who lived in shelters, clients who had nothing." She went on saying "And that was a chore that

they looked forward to, and everybody wanted to say ‘No, I’m the *best* coffee person.’ They’d make sure everybody in the group had a cup of coffee before they started classes. So, we got to them even before they started.” Sharon often talked to me about her experiences at this particular non-profit, and her coffee story illustrates how she believed organizations should get their clients to buy into their reentry programming by being very deliberate about the kind of social environment in which services were being provided. While she frequently discussed her views with me on reentry programming, like her belief in the importance of trauma-informed care as the optimal core of any reentry programming, her story about clients making coffee for each other helps to make clear her views on reentry as a kind of “holistic” process. She elaborates on how this applies to Afterward specifically, contrasting her holistic approach with Afterward’s organizational mandate to “stay in your lane”:

Sharon: One of the things that I was told when I first started here, and I see it: “Stay in your lane.” You know? And that, I’ve expressed that it’s kind of difficult because, to me, reentry is a holistic experience for not just the clients but also for the staff. We, you know, I’ve seen it work. So coming here and seeing, you know, the different channels that people have to stay in, or the different lanes that people have to stay in, it’s kind of one of the big differences, you know?

Me: Can you give me an example of staying in your lane?

Sharon: If a situation occurs with a client but it’s connected to something that happened in the classroom, or it’s connected to their training experience, because of staying in your lane, for case managers to get involved, it’s red tape that occurs, and then you probably have to go through an office manager who then will connect with the training facilitator who then would connect with me, and I then would connect to the case manager. But by the time

all these different stay-in-your-lane experiences occur, it's, like, could be a day later. It could be four emails later. It could be *whatever* later. I don't think it's really helpful for the client, or healthy for the client, because clients, they see what goes on... they obviously see that there are different lanes. But this is how it is – process, and procedure, and all these different terms that I'm still adjusting to.

Me: What do you suppose the reason is for the emphasis on “stay in your lane”?

Sharon: I think it's just the mindset of the leadership of Afterward. That's all I could think of that it is.

The “stay in your lane” organizational culture of Afterward described by Sharon fits in well with the organization's larger security culture. Sharon expresses some frustration that communication procedures at Afterward hinder the organization's ability to act nimbly when clients are dealing with urgent matters. The stay in your lane and security cultures of Afterward are also a direct contrast to the more holistic approach to reentry that she and her co-workers implemented at her previous job. The culture of the two organizations was dramatically different, and the disciplinary aspects of Afterward as a street-level bureaucracy have consequences for both clients and staff.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Previous ethnographic work on prisoner reentry, as well as the larger areas of poverty governance anticipate many of the themes present in my analysis. Miller's idea of “carceral devolution,” i.e., the shift from state run services to largely privately run social services for reentry, is interesting to consider in light of a government-run prisoner reentry organization (Miller 2014). Indeed, much of the organization's security culture may be due to the fact that it is run by the local government rather than a non-profit organization. Still, non-profit

organizations that do not rely on philanthropy or other private grants may compete for state dollars administered via block grant by the Council of State governments. In order to get this money, they must accept state standards of what constitutes acceptable evidence based reentry programming, which often constitutes corrections oriented CBT programming, which I have argued is heavily responsabilizing. Therefore, even as Afterward is a city agency, it functioned in ways that are likely similar to non-profit reentry organizations that operate on the basis of government grants. Afterward was also institutionally separate from other criminal justice bureaucracies, particularly parole and probation. The fact that it was also previously under a non-profit umbrella preceding my formal participant observation further supports the possibility it may not be different from non-profit reentry organizations.

One limitation of this study is that it is not a multi-sited ethnographic endeavor, and therefore, it is difficult for me to have a direct sense of how typical Afterward's security culture is among reentry organizations. Though it may be accepted that there will always be some elements of security culture in prisoner reentry organizations, given that these organizations are social work and criminal justice hybrids, my conversations with Sharon provide some insight into how organizational culture may vary. Still other ethnographic and interview studies can help provide clarity on this matter (Kaufman 2015). In the end, like many ethnographers, I chose to favor depth over breadth.

The related field of ethnographies of race, crime, and justice also anticipated many of the issues that were present at my fieldsite (Rios et al. 2017). At a minimum, the spatially concentrated and racially disproportionate effects of mass incarceration were readily apparent at my fieldsite given that 86% of Afterward's clientele was black. The differences in the application of both punishment and surveillance of blacks in the United States are practically a

truism in the field of sociology, and it should be no surprise that they are generally apparent in this current study. Additionally, as Miller and Stuart have pointed out, there is a long history of responsabilizing discourse being aimed at this particular group of people that goes back to at least the turn of the century in the United States, that interprets the poor, particularly poor black men, as pathologically violent and therefore in need of moral reform (Miller 2014; Stuart 2016). Staff concerns about security risks presented by clients as well as the responsabilizing attitudes of the staff towards the clients are in many ways a throwback to an earlier time period, with today's decision-making CBT, evidence based though it may be, having its ideological antecedent in turn of the century anti-poverty moralism.

Race is also significant with respect to the organization's staff, which was 80% black. Certainly, there may be numerous reasons why this is beneficial to Afterward from a managerial standpoint. Clients may relate better to people they perceive as having shared experience, and a predominantly white staff might have trouble relating to clients. In spite of differences of opinion between upper level and lower level staff on security, the presence of a primarily black staff did not impact the basic structure of Afterward's security culture, or responsabilizing "tough love" discourse within CBT programming. Adolph Reed has noted in his critique of the black professional managerial class that plays a large role in contemporary urban politics, that their politics of neoliberalism, which I argue are tied up with the disciplinary surveillance of poverty governance organizations, is not at all at odds with identity politics constructions like diversity or multiculturalism (Reed Jr. 1999). There is also a scholarly conversation on the historical role of black local politicians advocating for punitive criminal justice policy in sentencing (Forman Jr. 2017; Fortner 2015).

In general, I have argued on the basis of participant observation and interview evidence that Afterward, a government-run prisoner reentry organization, provided disciplinary social services embedded within the context of security culture. Key evidentiary points with respect to this security culture included specific measures like security checkpoints, CCTV cameras, and procedures governing movement of clients throughout the office. Additionally, Afterward's five weeks of programming are intentionally designed not just to deliver the curriculum, but as a kind of supervision to occupy the daily activities of people on parole and probation. Additionally, the responsabilizing character of Afterward's service provision was readily apparent in the implementation of its CBT programming, its orientation of clients towards the workforce, and staff attitudes towards clients. This paper builds on previous work that has analyzed prisoner reentry organizations as a form of disciplinary surveillance, with a specific focus on embedded context of security and surveillance measures. Moreover, the concept of security culture shows the overlap of responsabilizing service provision, aimed at public safety outcomes, with concrete security and surveillance practices, which were justified in terms of staff safety.

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