

Summer 1961

## Prediction of Parole Outcome from Summaries of Case Histories

Michael Hakeem

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Michael Hakeem, Prediction of Parole Outcome from Summaries of Case Histories, 52 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 145 (1961)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

**The Journal of**  
**CRIMINAL LAW, CRIMINOLOGY AND POLICE SCIENCE**

VOL. 52

JULY-AUGUST 1961

NO. 2

**PREDICTION OF PAROLE OUTCOME FROM SUMMARIES OF CASE HISTORIES**

MICHAEL HAKEEM

The author is Associate Professor of Sociology in the University of Wisconsin. He formerly served on the faculties of Ohio State University and the State University of Iowa. For four years, he held the position of Sociologist in the Illinois State Prison system. At the University of Wisconsin, Professor Hakeem teaches courses and seminars in corrections and is responsible for the Curriculum in Correctional Administration.

Can parole officers, if provided with case histories of the parolees under their supervision, make reasonably accurate predictions as to which of their charges will violate parole? By virtue of their special training and experience, do parole officers have a special competence for prediction not possessed by laymen? In an attempt to answer these questions, the author requested ten parole officers and ten laymen to make a series of predictions related to parole outcome on the basis of case summaries covering 200 parolees, half of whom actually had been returned to prison for parole violations. In this article, Professor Hakeem details the results of his study and offers some suggestions concerning future research.—EDITOR.

**THE PROBLEM**

This is a report on a research that investigated whether parole officers can make predictions of parole outcome and other predictions through the use of summaries of case histories.

It has been suggested that parole officers who supervise parolees in the field be provided with summaries of case histories regarding their charges. In some jurisdictions parole officers do get such summaries, the underlying assumption being that these can be helpful in parole work, particularly in individualizing supervision. The supposition has been made that on the basis of the information provided in these summaries the parole officers can make certain judgments—which ultimately must bear the form of predictions—regarding the chances that a parolee will or will not violate parole, the type of expected violation, the amount of time elapsing between release from the institution and expected violation, and the factors that enhance predictability.

It is generally assumed by correctional personnel that parole officers can make reasonably accurate predictions of the type just mentioned. It is further assumed that these correct predictions are made possible by the special training, or at least

the experience, of parole officers. At present, there is no scientifically creditable evidence that either of the above two propositions is valid, and the present study was undertaken to test them.

**CASES USED IN THE PRESENT RESEARCH**

Two hundred case records of parolees from a state prison are used in this research. These 200 cases were secured in serial order from the official record of the actions of the parole board. One hundred names of parolees who had been returned to prison as violators and 100 names of parolees who had been granted a "final release" were listed. Parolees granted a final release are those who, having made a satisfactory adjustment on parole, were released from parole supervision when the required parole period had elapsed. In short, the cases used include 100 parole violators and 100 nonviolators.

Suspicion is often expressed regarding the actual record of some of the parolees who are thought to have made a satisfactory adjustment on parole and who are therefore discharged as non-violators. The contention is made that it is possible that they may have committed violations that did not become known, or, if known, were not recorded,

for some reason or other.<sup>1</sup> It would not be possible, without elaborate investigation, to determine whether the group of nonviolators used in the present research includes some who actually had committed undetected or unrecorded violations. It is very likely that such violations did occur. But it is not likely that a significant number either of serious or of persistent petty violations go unnoticed, even when supervision is no more adequate than that received by the cases used in this research.

The problem under consideration is not the predictability of *any* violation whatsoever. Rather, the problem is the predictability of violations so serious or so flagrant as to lead to the revocation of the parole of the offenders and their return to prison as parole violators. And this is a realistic approach, for not every petty violation of parole, even when known to the officials, leads to a return to prison. In the actual practice of parole supervision, the officials do weigh the seriousness of violations, they are often willing to forgive and forget, and they use discretion in deciding when to revoke and when not to revoke parole.

Related to the foregoing problem is the relative leniency or strictness of parole officers. Certainly this has some bearing on parole outcome. Sometimes whether a parolee finds himself classified as a violator or a nonviolator depends upon the extent to which his parole officer is disposed to overlook certain behavior. With regard to the cases used in the present research, one gets the impression that the tendency was toward leniency in dealing with minor violations. Most of the time it was constructive leniency, the parole officers not penalizing petty infractions of the technical parole rules but attempting to help their charges and to explain the necessity of adherence to the rules. But there is no evidence that parole officers were inclined to overlook serious violations. The group of parole violators, then, consists of those who committed new crimes or whose violations of the technical parole rules were flagrant and intolerable.

The length of time different subjects had been on parole before being returned to prison as violators or before being released from parole as nonviolators varied. However, no subject was

released before he had been under supervision for at least one year. In most cases, parolees who had made a good adjustment were released after being under supervision for one year; in a few instances, because of the nature of the sentence, parolees making a satisfactory adjustment nevertheless remained on parole for longer than one year before being released.

The length of time those who became violators were on parole before violating ranged from one day to several years, although the largest proportion of violations occurred within a few months after release from prison.

#### SUMMARIES OF CASE HISTORIES

The next step after the selection of cases was the preparation of summaries of the material available on each of the 200 cases. Two files, one kept in the prison and the other in the office of the parole board, were used to prepare the summaries.

A large number of the files were studied in order to become familiar with the type of information available and to devise some scheme for the rough classification of the information. The fourteen headings which finally emerged and under which the essential information was recorded are as follows: (1) crime, plea, type of trial, sentence; (2) official details of the crime and the prisoner's version; (3) age and date when subject was committed to prison; (4) race; (5) criminal record; (6) home background and siblings; (7) marital history and adjustment; (8) work record; (9) education, intelligence, religion; (10) health; (11) recommendations of the prison's personnel working in classification; (12) psychiatric appraisal; (13) length of time served and record of institutional adjustment; and (14) statements of the judge and the prosecutor, special parole conditions, and special appeals to the parole board. In addition, the date of parole and the length of time each subject was required to remain on parole were included.

The summaries covered information available on the subjects up to the time of their release on parole. Not included was information regarding parole plans (destination of the parolee, with whom he planned to make his residence, and so on). The reason for this omission is that in very many cases the original plans are changed by the time the prisoner is actually put under supervision or shortly thereafter. Such plans were not regarded as sufficiently reliable to be made part of the basis

<sup>1</sup>The Gluecks, in their study of 500 paroled men, found that 25 of them had committed violations of parole which had not come to the attention of parole officials. See S. & E. T. GLUECK, *FIVE HUNDRED CRIMINAL CAREERS* 169 (1930)

for making judgments as to prospective parole outcome. This, of course, may not apply to other cases and to other jurisdictions.

In preparing the summaries, no rigid rules or schedules were followed. Only the list of headings given above was used as a guide. The summaries were put into narrative form. They were made as brief as possible. With few exceptions, they were one closely typewritten page in length. All the data available about each case were included. Care was taken to prevent the intrusion of bias into the selection of material and the form of its presentation.

The information on which the summaries of case histories were based should be regarded as more adequate than that which is at the disposal of parole authorities in those jurisdictions making the poorest provision for obtaining information about prospective parolees. On the other hand, it was poorer by far than the information available in those rare places which make the very best provisions for securing such information. In short, the summaries and the files on which they were based were of the type used in the average jurisdiction making any provision at all to put such material in the hands of its parole agents.<sup>2</sup>

#### PARTICIPANTS ASKED TO MAKE PREDICTIONS

Ten parole officers and ten laymen were requested to make predictions as to prospective parole outcome and other predictions on the basis of the summaries. It is necessary to explain the inclusion of judgments by laymen. In seeking to show the existence of a special competence, allegedly based on technical training and experience, to make accurate predictions of behavior, it is not sufficient to observe the performance of only those to whom such powers are ascribed. If persons not having the training and experience said to underlie the predictive skill can perform as adequately as trained persons, then the training may not be relevant to the function in question. When sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and others claim—or even demonstrate—an ability to make valid predictions of social behavior, it is still necessary to ask whether this ability

exceeds what the layman can accomplish through common sense to an extent sufficient to entitle it to special recognition.

It is instructive in this connection to take note of a comprehensive review of the experimental and other research done on the ability to judge people's emotions, abilities, personality traits, action tendencies, and motives.<sup>3</sup> This review of the literature revealed a fairly consistent lack of correlation between training in psychology and the ability to judge people correctly. In fact, laymen were often found to make more accurate judgments than do psychologists and other clinicians. In one of the studies cited, it was shown that physical scientists are superior to psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists in making judgments of people. Although there is some conflicting evidence, the general conclusion to emerge from this review is that laymen are better judges of people than are clinicians. At the very least, it certainly has not been proved that the clinicians are consistently better judges of people than are laymen.

The parole officers were all full-time staff members in a highly developed parole system which sets comparatively high qualifications for employment, has an in-service training program, and has supervisory personnel to oversee the work of the officers. Five were in supervisory positions. Each of the ten men had previous experience as parole officers, probation officers, prison guards, case-workers, or in some related employment. Their average age was slightly over forty-two years.

All parole officers, except one who had no formal schooling beyond high school, had four years of college training. With the exception of two, all had completed some work in graduate school, ranging from attendance for three months to the earning of the Master's degree. Two had the Master's degree and one had a graduate certificate in social work. Two attended graduate school for one semester, two for about one and one-half years, one for one year, and one for three months. The officer who had no college training had attended numerous institutes, training courses, conferences, and lecture courses. All parole officers, with the exception of the one who had not gone beyond high school, had courses in a variety of subjects related to social work, criminology, sociology, penology, and juvenile delinquency on the undergraduate or graduate levels, or both. The one who

<sup>2</sup> For examples of the types of summaries used, see RECKLESS, *THE CRIME PROBLEM* 471-73 (1950). These summaries compare favorably with two models that have been suggested. See LAROE, *PAROLE WITH HONOR* 117-18 (1939); and COMMITTEE ON CLASSIFICATION AND CASEWORK, *AMER. PRISON ASS'N, HANDBOOK ON PRE-RELEASE PREPARATION IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS* 24-25 (1955).

<sup>3</sup> Taft, *The Ability to Judge People*, 52 *PSYCH. BULL.* 1 (1955).

had not received such formal training did get considerable instruction in these subjects through his attendance at conferences and institutes.

The laymen used in this study represent a group of persons who would not be expected to have any special interest in or technical sophistication about parole procedures. They were chosen because their occupation was far removed from matters that are the daily professional concern of parole officers. They were all engaged in office work, mainly in accounting. One was an economist in a bureau of business research. None of the laymen ever had employment or experience which brought him into contact with prisoners, parolees, or probationers. None had experience in social work. They constitute a group of persons having neither special knowledge of, nor particular interest in, the central problem of the present research. They are neither personally nor professionally concerned with parole and cognate matters. They appear to be an adequate control group for this study, one of the objects of which, as has been mentioned, is to compare the accuracy and basis of parole predictions made by persons trained and employed in parole work with the accuracy and basis of predictions made by laymen.

As a group, the laymen were not as highly educated as the parole officers. One had a Ph.D. degree in economics. Another had an M.A. degree in business administration. Three were college graduates. One had attended college for three years; another had attended for one year. One had studied in a business college for one year. One had no formal schooling beyond high school; and one had earned some college credits in evening classes, after completing high school. In contrast to the academic work of the parole officers, the laymen's undergraduate and graduate work shows major concentration in business, economics, and accounting. The average age of the laymen was about thirty-three.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF SUMMARIES

For convenience, the parole officers are designated by the Roman numerals I to X and the laymen by the letters A to J. Each of the 20 participants was given a set of 20 summaries, 10 of which were on violators and 10 on nonviolators. The participants were paired so that one parole officer and one layman had duplicate sets. For example, Parole Officer I and Layman A had duplicate sets, Parole Officer II and Layman B had duplicate sets, and so on. Each pair had a different set. The

assignment of the 10 sets and the pairing of parole officers with laymen were done entirely at random.

Each participant was urged to work independently, and the parole officers and laymen had no contacts with each other. They cooperated in the study on a voluntary basis and received no compensation. They returned the material within one to two weeks after receiving it. Anonymity was assured the participants. It was pointed out that their cooperation would be of great help in exploring problems of concern to professional parole workers and in improving service to parolees.

#### ACCURACY OF PREDICTION

The participants were first asked to judge the probable parole outcome of each subject on whom a summary was provided. The problem was submitted in the following terms:

"Each of the twenty prisoners about whose cases you have been provided with information in summary form was paroled on the date shown. For each case, give your judgment (assume that you are making the judgment at the time the subject was paroled) as to whether the subject is likely to make a satisfactory adjustment on parole or is likely to make such a poor adjustment that his return to prison as a parole violator will be necessitated. Assume that the supervision received by the parolees is just average in quality and quantity. The length of time each subject is required to be on parole before release is shown in his case summary.

"You have been provided with a list of parole rules which is given to parolees. It should be understood that not every petty violation of a parole rule is followed by revocation of parole and the return of the parolee to prison. Minor violations are often overlooked, but constant and aggravated violation even of minor rules may result in the subject's return to prison. Major violations, such as the commission of a new crime or the disappearance of the subject, usually result in revocation of parole."

Participants in this research were not told that the actual parole outcome of the subjects was already known to the writer, and there was nothing in the summaries which would betray the actual parole outcome. Nor was any intimation given the participants that out of the set of 20 summaries, 10 pertained to violators and 10 to nonviolators.

Table I shows the number of correct and of incorrect predictions made by each participant for both types of cases. Also shown is the total number

of correct and of incorrect predictions made by the parole officers as a whole and by the laymen as a whole.

As an illustration, it can be seen from Table I that out of the 10 cases of actual parole violators, Parole Officer I made correct predictions (that the subjects would violate) in 7 cases and incorrect predictions (that is, he predicted nonviolation, whereas the subjects were actually violators) in 3. Using the same 10 cases of violators, Layman A made 8 correct and 2 incorrect predictions. With regard to the 10 cases of parolees who were actually nonviolators, Parole Officer I predicted 6 correctly (that is, he stated the subjects would be nonviolators which in fact they were) and 4 incorrectly (he judged that the subjects would violate, whereas they had turned out to be nonviolators). Layman A, reacting to the same 10 cases of nonviolators, made 5 correct and 5 incorrect predictions.

It is of interest to note that, with the exception of one parole officer who predicted 8 violators correctly, no parole officer predicted more than 7 cases correctly. The range (3-10) of correct predictions of violators for the ten laymen is greater than that for the ten parole officers. In contrast to the parole officers, of whom only one made correct predictions in more than 7 cases, 4 laymen made more than 7 correct predictions. The range of correct predictions made by parole officers in cases of

violators is 3-6; the range for laymen is 3-7. Parole officers excelled slightly in correct predictions of nonviolators; the laymen excelled by a like small margin in correct predictions of violators.

Examining the total numbers of correct predictions made by all parole officers and by all laymen, it is clear that the two types of participants did not differ significantly in their predictive efficiency. Although the number of correct predictions made by individuals varies, there is little difference in the total number of correct predictions between the two types of participants. Of the 100 cases of parole violators, the 10 parole officers and the 10 laymen were able to predict correctly 61 and 64 cases, respectively. Of the 100 cases of nonviolators, the parole officers and laymen predicted correctly 51 and 48 cases, respectively.

One question that must be answered is whether the number of correct predictions made in the cases of violators and in the cases of nonviolators is better than that which would be expected by chance. Computations of Chi-square were made in order to test this possibility. In the cases of violators, the parole officers and laymen combined, correctly made 125 out of a total of 200 possible predictions, so the proportion of correct predictions is 0.62. Making this many correct predictions by random choice (as in flipping a true coin) would happen less than once in a hundred times. Turning to the cases of nonviolators, a total of 99 correct

TABLE I  
NUMBER OF CORRECT AND OF INCORRECT PREDICTIONS OF PAROLE OUTCOME MADE BY PAROLE OFFICERS AND BY LAYMEN

Parole Officers	Predictions of Parole Outcome						Laymen	Predictions of Parole Outcome					
	Violators			Nonviolators				Violators			Nonviolators		
	Total	Correct Predictions	Incorrect Predictions	Total	Correct Predictions	Incorrect Predictions		Total	Correct Predictions	Incorrect Predictions	Total	Correct Predictions	Incorrect Predictions
I.....	10	7	3	10	6	4	A.....	10	8	2	10	5	5
II.....	10	7	3	10	5	5	B.....	10	7	3	10	4	6
III.....	10	6	4	10	6	4	C.....	10	6	4	10	3	7
IV.....	10	6	4	10	3	7	D.....	10	4	6	10	6	4
V.....	10	6	4	10	5	5	E.....	10	10	0	10	6	4
VI.....	10	4	6	10	6	4	F.....	10	5	5	10	5	5
VII.....	10	7	3	10	5	5	G.....	10	4	6	10	5	5
VIII.....	10	6	4	10	6	4	H.....	10	3	7	10	7	3
IX.....	10	4	6	10	4	6	I.....	10	8	2	10	3	7
X.....	10	8	2	10	5	5	J.....	10	9	1	10	4	6
Total....	100	61	39	100	51	49	Total..	100	64	36	100	48	52

predictions was made out of 200 possible predictions. This number is one less than the expected number of successes if random selections were made, and hence the method of prediction used by the participants in the cases of nonviolators does not yield results superior to those obtainable by flipping a coin.

It is important to note that the foregoing analyses do not throw light on the extent to which the two groups of participants were in agreement or in disagreement on their judgments of the outcome of the same cases. An analysis of this point is made in Table II.

The data set forth in this table reveal that in regard to violators, parole officers and laymen disagreed on the prediction in 35 out of 100 cases. In 25 cases, there was agreement on the prediction, but the prediction was incorrect. In 40 cases, there was agreement on the correct prediction. The two groups of participants agreed on the correct prediction in only 29 out of 100 cases of nonviolators; they agreed on the incorrect prediction in 36 cases; and there was disagreement in 35 cases.

Another approach to the problem of prediction was made. This time, participants were directed to designate a case that would represent their very best—their most certain—judgment on parole outcome. Each participant was requested to indicate which one of his 20 cases he thought was most likely and which one least likely to violate parole. In response to this question, 4 out of the 10 parole officers and 5 out of the 10 laymen correctly picked out cases of violators as those most likely to violate.

The remaining participants picked out actual non-violators as cases most likely to violate. Only 5 parole officers and 4 laymen designated cases of nonviolators as those least likely to violate, the other 5 parole officers and 6 laymen designating as least likely to become violators subjects who actually had turned out to be violators. What is more significant, only in 2 instances did a parole officer and the corresponding layman single out the same case in answer to this question. Of course, there is no way of testing the validity of the participants' choice of subjects *most* likely and those *least* likely to violate parole. The point is that some subjects who turned out to be nonviolators were regarded by some participants as the poorest parole risks; and some violators were designated as the very persons showing greatest promise for making a satisfactory parole adjustment.

What can be said regarding the prophetic acumen of parole officers? Despite the fact that the number of correct predictions made in the cases of violators—61 out of 100—exceeded chance expectancy, it is still a debatable matter how favorably impressed one should be with this performance. Some would be greatly satisfied with the results. Others would be less pleased and would insist that a far better showing should have been made. There is no statistical resolution possible for this kind of interpretational quandary. In the cases of violators, interpretation is more simple: neither parole officers nor laymen could predict better than what would be expected on the basis of chance.

Whatever interpretation is finally made, it is clear that the parole officers, who represent a highly schooled and professionally trained group of persons, did not make a significantly larger proportion of correct predictions than did the laymen. Apparently, training and experience in economics and accounting just as much as training and experience in social work, criminology, and corrections enables a person to make correct predictions of parole outcome from case summaries of the type used in this study. Many persons are ready to hypothesize that persons extensively trained and experienced in parole work can make better predictions of parole outcome than can completely untrained persons. Such a hypothesis is not supported by this study.

The preceding observations do not mean that special training is not relevant to parole work. They merely mean that the training and experience

TABLE II  
AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN PAROLE OFFICERS AND LAYMEN ON PREDICTION OF PAROLE OUTCOME

Agreement and Prediction	Number of Cases					
	Violators		Non-violators		Total	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Agreement on correct prediction . . . . .	40	40.0	29	29.0	69	34.5
Agreement on incorrect prediction . . . . .	25	25.0	36	36.0	61	30.5
Disagreement on prediction . . . . .	35	35.0	35	35.0	70	35.0
Total . . . . .	100	100.0	100	100.0	200	100.0

possessed by the parole officers who participated in this study did not result in their making a higher proportion of correct predictions of parole outcome from average case summaries. It must not be assumed that an argument is being made against the desirability of supplying parole officers with summaries of case histories regarding their charges. Such summaries are important in a number of ways, only one of which is the appraisal of the relative risk of success or failure on parole.

#### BASIS OF PREDICTION

After making predictions, the participants were requested to record what bases they had for them. That is, they were asked what factors appearing in the summaries of case histories led them to decide that subjects would turn out to be violators or nonviolators.<sup>4</sup> This was left as a completely open question. No hints or leads were given. No form was suggested for the recording of the responses, and no sample answers were supplied. The aim was to get spontaneous reactions which would not be structured for the participants in any way other than by the restrictions inherent in the requirement that they confine themselves to the material in the summaries.

As a result of a painstaking analysis of the answers to this question, it was possible to classify them under a relatively few headings. Tables III and IV show, the former for violators predicted correctly and nonviolators predicted incorrectly and the latter for nonviolators predicted correctly and violators predicted incorrectly, the number of times a factor was cited by the ten parole officers and the ten laymen. It can be seen from Table III that the participants dealt with cases of actual

nonviolators predicted incorrectly as violators in the same way as they dealt with cases of actual violators predicted correctly. They cited the same factors for the former as they did for the latter. Likewise, they cited the same factors for nonviolators predicted correctly as they cited for violators predicted incorrectly, as Table IV shows.

The factors on which the participants based their predictions are those which, generally speaking statistical research has found to be related to parole outcome. These are the factors also which have been frequently pointed to in this connection on the basis of common sense as well as on the basis of so-called clinical observation.<sup>5</sup>

Although the factors cited by the participants are those which research has discovered to be related to parole outcome, it appears that they found it no easy matter to apply them properly in making predictions. One cannot determine from the responses given just how the factors were defined. It is certain that different participants did not define the factors in the same way. It is also certain that very frequently participants were not consistent in their own definition of a particular factor from one case to another. Even a cursory examination of a sample of the summaries and the factors cited in reference thereto shows this.

Tables III and IV make obvious some of the inconsistencies. It can be seen from Table III, for example, that in 54 or 88.5 percent of the 61 cases of violators that parole officers predicted correctly, they cited "lengthy criminal record," among other factors, as the basis for their prediction. But they cited this factor only with moderately less frequency in cases of actual nonviolators whom they expected to violate—in 48 or 98.0 percent of the 49 such cases, to be exact. Similarly, "lengthy criminal record" was cited by the laymen in 43.8 percent of the cases in which they correctly predicted violation, but they also cited this factor as one reason for expecting violation in 40.4 percent of the cases of actual nonviolators. To use another illustration drawn from Table III, both parole officers and laymen cited "low intelligence" as a factor making for poor parole adjustment considerably more frequently in cases which actually did not turn out to have a poor adjustment than in cases which did so turn out. Similar results can be observed in Table IV.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Lottier, *Predicting Criminal Behavior*, 7 Fed. Prob., Oct.-Dec. 1943, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Although both types of participants cited the same factors, the parole officers cited them more frequently.

<sup>4</sup>Many researches have been undertaken to determine what factors differentiate between parole violators and nonviolators and then to apply the findings to the prediction of parole outcome. For an extensive bibliography of such researches, see Hakeem, *Prediction of Criminality*, 9 Fed. Prob., July-Sept. 1945, p. 36.

Success in prediction, whether through the use of case histories or statistical devices, depends in no small measure on the proper use of factors that are significantly correlated with the phenomenon it is desired to predict. For a discussion of one procedure used in determining the factors useful in the construction of a parole prediction table, see OHLIN, *SELECTION FOR PAROLE: A MANUAL OF PAROLE PREDICTION* c. 4, 109-12 (1951). The following is the only study which has investigated the factors on which those making predictions, in this instance prison inmates, base their judgments of prospective parole outcome: Laune, *Predicting Criminality: Forecasting Behavior on Parole*, in *NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES*, No. I (1936).

TABLE III  
 NUMBER OF CASES OF VIOLATORS PREDICTED CORRECTLY AND NONVIOLATORS PREDICTED INCORRECTLY  
 IN WHICH CERTAIN FACTORS WERE CITED AS BASIS OF PREDICTION BY PAROLE OFFICERS  
 AND LAYMEN

Factor Cited as Basis of Prediction	Number of Cases in Which Factor Was Cited											
	Parole Officers				Laymen				Total			
	Violators Predicted Correctly (N = 61)		Nonviolators Predicted Incorrectly (N = 49)		Violators Predicted Correctly (N = 64)		Nonviolators Predicted Incorrectly (N = 52)		Violators Predicted Correctly (N = 125)		Nonviolators Predicted Incorrectly (N = 101)	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Lengthy criminal record	54	88.5	48	98.0	28	43.8	21	40.4	82	65.6	69	68.3
Poor precommitment work record	49	80.3	40	81.6	17	26.6	19	36.5	66	52.8	59	58.4
Poor social background	48	78.7	42	85.7	18	28.1	22	34.4	66	52.8	64	63.4
Alcoholism	38	62.3	31	63.3	15	23.4	25	48.1	53	42.4	56	55.4
Shiftlessness	31	50.8	22	44.9	10	15.6	14	26.9	41	32.8	36	35.6
Aggravation of instant crime <sup>a</sup>	23	37.7	18	36.7	23	35.9	26	50.0	46	36.8	44	43.6
Unfavorable psychiatric appraisal	22	36.1	27	55.0	11	17.2	8	15.4	33	26.4	35	34.7
Absence of family ties	20	32.8	25	51.0	12	18.8	16	30.8	32	25.6	41	40.6
Poor prison adjustment	19	31.1	24	49.0	20	31.3	15	28.8	39	31.2	39	38.6
Low intelligence	16	26.2	29	59.2	13	20.3	20	38.5	29	23.2	49	48.5
Poor physical condition	16	26.2	10	20.4	18	28.1	18	34.6	34	27.2	28	27.7
Miscellaneous <sup>b</sup>	46	75.4	41	83.7	36	56.3	35	67.3	82	65.6	76	75.2
Total	382		357		221		239		603		596	

<sup>a</sup> Refers to any factor in the case making the crime appear particularly reprehensible to the participants.

<sup>b</sup> Factors cited less than 5 times by all participants combined.

Coefficients of rank order correlation were next computed to determine the extent to which parole officers and laymen tended to cite the same factors with comparable frequency or infrequency. Such computations were also made to learn the extent to which each group of participants cited the factors in the same order of frequency for cases dealt with in the same manner. Comparison between parole officers and laymen for their relative rank order of the factors listed for the different types of cases yields the following coefficients: for violators predicted correctly, .23; for nonviolators predicted incorrectly, .33; for nonviolators predicted correctly, .26; and for violators predicted incorrectly, .10.

These coefficients mean that the parole officers

For the combined cases of violators predicted correctly and nonviolators predicted incorrectly, the average number of factors cited per case by the parole officers and the laymen is about 7.1 and about 4.3, respectively. For the combined cases of nonviolators predicted correctly and violators predicted incorrectly, the approximate average is 4.2 for parole officers and 3.0 for laymen.

and the laymen show on the average a low degree of correspondence in the relative importance they attach to the different factors they list as the basis for prediction in the same cases. The two groups have essentially the same ability to predict parole outcome, but they arrive at their predictions through different routes. They do not place equal stress on, or at least they do not detect with equal frequency, the same factors which they cite as the basis for their predictions. It may be, too, that the participants do not make known all the grounds on which they base their evaluation.

As to the factors cited for cases of violators predicted correctly and nonviolators predicted incorrectly, the correlation for the parole officers is .69; for the laymen it is .58. For the factors cited for nonviolators predicted correctly and violators predicted incorrectly, the correlation is .43 for parole officers and .81 for laymen. Thus the least consistency is found among parole officers when citing factors in support of their correct predictions in cases of nonviolators and in cases of viola-

TABLE IV  
 NUMBER OF CASES OF NONVIOLATORS PREDICTED CORRECTLY AND VIOLATORS PREDICTED INCORRECTLY  
 IN WHICH CERTAIN FACTORS WERE CITED AS BASES OF PREDICTION BY PAROLE OFFICERS  
 AND LAYMEN

Factor Cited as Basis of Prediction	Number of Cases in Which Factor Was Cited											
	Parole Officers				Laymen				Total			
	Nonviolators Predicted Correctly (N = 51)		Violators Predicted Incorrectly (N = 39)		Nonviolators Predicted Correctly (N = 48)		Violators Predicted Incorrectly (N = 36)		Nonviolators Predicted Correctly (N = 99)		Violators Predicted Incorrectly (N = 75)	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Limited or no previous criminal record . . . . .	35	68.6	27	69.2	20	41.7	23	63.9	55	55.6	50	66.7
Presence of family ties . . . . .	27	52.9	21	53.8	12	25.0	16	44.4	39	39.4	37	49.3
Good precommitment work record . . . . .	26	51.0	19	48.7	16	33.3	18	50.0	42	42.4	37	49.3
Shortness of parole period . . . . .	23	45.1	29	74.4	8	16.7	10	27.8	31	31.3	39	52.0
Good prison adjustment . . . . .	20	39.2	14	36.9	10	20.8	7	19.4	30	30.3	21	28.0
Lengthy imprisonment . . . . .	19	37.3	15	38.5	25	52.1	21	58.3	44	44.4	36	48.0
Mitigation of instant crime <sup>a</sup> . . . . .	18	35.3	22	56.4	14	29.2	11	30.6	32	32.3	33	44.0
Average or above average intelligence . . . . .	12	23.5	17	43.6	9	18.8	14	38.9	21	21.2	31	41.3
Miscellaneous <sup>b</sup> . . . . .	39	76.5	26	66.7	24	50.0	22	61.1	63	63.6	48	64.0
Total . . . . .	219		190		138		142		357		332	

<sup>a</sup> Refers to any factor in the case making the crime appear less particularly reprehensible to the participants.  
<sup>b</sup> Factors cited less than 5 times by all participants combined.

tors for whom they incorrectly predicted nonviolation. The highest degree of consistency is found in the laymen's handling of these two types of cases. The parole officers are more consistent than the laymen when dealing with cases of violators predicted correctly and nonviolators predicted incorrectly, but both show a fairly high degree of consistency in citing factors in these two types of cases.

DIFFICULTIES IN CASE-STUDY PREDICTION

The prediction of parole outcome through the use of summaries of case histories such as are used in the present research is beset with difficulties. It is very difficult to keep in mind all the relevant factors in a case. The problem of apportioning to each factor the weight it properly should have cannot be satisfactorily solved without statistical techniques. Some factors may be unduly over-emphasized or underemphasized. There may be a tendency to base predictions on one factor to the exclusion of others. The necessity of rigidly defining predictive factors and of adhering consistently to the definitions may be overlooked. There may be a tendency to inject one's biases and to allow

one's theoretical position to interfere with a more complete and objective appraisal of cases.

Even if correct predictions are made and this is attributable to the use of the right predictive factors, there is no assurance that the use of the same factors will result in correct predictions for another series of comparable cases at another time. For the factors which may be highly predictive at one time may not be at another. Take, for example, a prisoner's criminal record. It is almost universally contended that this is a most important factor in the prediction of parole outcome. There is evidence that the participants in the present study generally regarded it as the most significant predictive factor. Yet a recent study finds that the predictive value even of this factor "varies considerably over the years. For example, repeated offenders . . . show violation rates decreasing as much as 55 per cent from one time period to another."<sup>7</sup>

Continuous research is needed to isolate and measure the factors most predictive of parole outcome for various groups of cases at different times. For, as Monachesi says: "Obviously, if it can be demonstrated that factors which are utilized for

<sup>7</sup> OHLIN, *op. cit. supra* note 4, at 85-86.

prediction purposes lose their prognostic ability over a period of time, any prediction device which is based upon such unstable predictors will be found inadequate.”<sup>8</sup>

OTHER PREDICTIONS

The participants were asked to make a judgment as to the length of time that would elapse before the violation of those whom they expected to violate would occur. They were asked in which of the following periods they thought the violation would occur: (1) less than 6 months after release on parole, (2) after 6 months but less than 1 year after release, (3) after 1 year but less than 2 years after release, and (4) 2 years or more after release.

Neither the parole officers nor the laymen were able to make a significant number of correct predictions on this item. Only in 21 out of the 54 cases in which parole officers correctly predicted

<sup>8</sup> Monachesi, *American Studies in the Prediction of Recidivism*, 41 J. CRIM L. & C. 268 (1950).

violation could they designate the period when violation actually occurred. Of the remaining 33 cases, they overestimated the time lapse in 22 and underestimated it in 11 cases. The performance of the laymen was similar. They designated the period correctly only in 18 of the 56 cases which they had predicted correctly as violators. Of the remaining 38 cases, they overestimated in 26 and underestimated in 12 cases.

It is generally agreed by authorities on parole that the majority of offenders who violate parole tend to do so relatively early in the parole period—perhaps during the first six months after release from the institution. But this knowledge was apparently not taken into account by the participants. Of the 22 cases in which the parole officers overestimated the time lapse before violation, 16 violated within six months after release on parole. Such was true also in 19 of the 26 cases in which the laymen overestimated the lapse of time before violation. These results become more signifi-

TABLE V  
NUMBER OF TIMES PAROLE OFFICERS AND LAYMEN SUGGESTED CERTAIN INFORMATION AS NECESSARY FOR PREDICTION OF PAROLE OUTCOME

Topic on Which Information Was Suggested	Number of Times Information Was Suggested								Total
	Parole Officers				Laymen				
	Cases of Violators		Cases of Non-Violators		Cases of Violators		Cases of Non-Violators		
	Predicted Correctly	Predicted Incorrectly	Predicted Correctly	Predicted Incorrectly	Predicted Correctly	Predicted Incorrectly	Predicted Correctly	Predicted Incorrectly	
Personal and social history.....	27	21	21	25	5	2	6	6	113
Parole program.....	21	19	25	21	2	3	3	3	97
Psychiatric appraisal.....	20	20	25	13	1	—	2	1	82
Employment history.....	18	16	14	13	—	2	4	7	74
Family background.....	17	8	14	14	3	2	5	2	65
Marital history.....	15	8	17	12	1	2	2	4	61
Last crime committed.....	12	11	20	8	—	—	3	—	54
Criminal record.....	9	9	3	8	—	1	2	—	32
Attitude at time of parole.....	7	4	4	6	—	—	—	—	21
Interests and abilities.....	6	5	4	5	—	—	—	1	21
Accomplices.....	6	3	4	3	—	—	—	1	17
Military service.....	6	3	1	6	1	—	—	1	18
Relations with parents.....	6	2	3	5	—	—	—	—	16
Previous paroles.....	5	1	1	5	1	—	1	—	14
Cause of criminality.....	2	2	2	5	—	—	—	—	11
Alcoholism.....	2	4	2	1	1	1	—	—	11
Associates in prison.....	2	4	2	1	—	1	1	—	11
Total.....	181	140	162	151	15	14	29	26	718

cant when it is realized that even in a considerable proportion of the cases in which the participants expressed great pessimism regarding the subjects' chances for making a good parole adjustment they still were willing to venture the guess that they would not violate until after one year had elapsed.<sup>9</sup>

The final opinion the participants were asked to give was whether the subjects whom they correctly designated as violators would violate by the commission of a new crime or by the technical violation of parole rules. The judgments of the parole officers and laymen on this point were inaccurate in the vast majority of cases. Both highly overestimated the proportion who would violate by the commission of crime.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUGGESTED

Participants were asked to record any information that they thought should have been included in the summaries because of the help it might have provided them in making judgments. Table V presents a tabulation of the topics on which information was suggested. The number of times information on the specified topics was suggested by the participants in the different types of cases is shown.

The parole officers were much more prolific than the laymen in making suggestions. Table V presents only those suggestions which were recorded a total of five or more times by all participants combined. Such suggestions totaled 718. Of these, the parole officers made 634 or 88.3 percent; the laymen, 84 or 11.7 percent.

Suggestions for additional information were made about as frequently in cases predicted correctly as in cases predicted incorrectly. From one point of view this appears to be paradoxical, for the participants are stating, in effect, that other information is needed to make predictions possible in those cases in which they made correct predictions in the absence of the suggested information.

In the main, the suggestions of the parole officers reflect their training and sophistication in parole work and casework. They want thorough case histories. They insist on refined details. They want intensive analyses of social background. They are

<sup>9</sup> Not much attention has been given to the problem of the lapse of time between release on parole and violation. One study attempted to determine what factors differentiate between those who violate relatively early and those who violate relatively late in the parole period. See Hakeem, *Parole Prediction Variables and the Time Factor in Violations by Burglars*, 35 J. CRIM. L. & C. 157 (1944).

impatient with partial information. They ask questions about the most intricate subtleties of personality and behavior. They even ask for information that social science cannot yet provide. The laymen, on the other hand, seem to be content with the information provided them and make few suggestions.

#### CONCLUSION

As work in parole becomes more professionalized, increasing use is made of case histories of varying comprehensiveness. The work of interviewing, of collecting and verifying data, and of preparing and transcribing case histories can occupy a substantial part of the time and energy of parole officers. In fact, it has been said that a very sizable part of the budget of some agencies administering parole supervision is expended on this phase of parole work.

It is not likely that anyone will argue against the proposition that if increasing resources of time and money are going to be devoted to the case histories of parolees, an extensive program of systematic research should accompany such a trend. To date, there has been little in the way of organized research concerning the use of case histories in the supervision of parolees. Very often, positive assertions, completely unsupported by evidence, are made regarding one or another aspect of the use of case histories in this connection. The present study, which represents only a modest beginning in the direction urged here, sought to examine one of those points on which there has been more loose talk than data.

It certainly should be possible to design studies that will throw light on the most effective use that can be made of case histories in parole work, on the reliability and validity of case histories, on the type and amount of data needed for making the kinds of judgments that parole officers are called upon to make, on the comparative merits of case-study and statistical methods of prediction in parole supervision, on the relative usefulness of full case histories as compared with summaries, and on scores of other issues.

The point is that there now exist ways to get answers to the multifarious questions and puzzlements which beset parole work that will yield extraordinarily more fruitful results than will habit, tradition, and guesswork, which today constitute the most common rationale behind so many widespread practices.