

“Not In My Backyard”: Examining the Influence of Offender Program Participation, Release Plan, and Personal Proximity on Mock Parole Decisions and Comfort Levels

by

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An oral defense of this thesis took place on June 23, 2025, in front of the following examining committee:

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The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

ABSTRACT

Almost three-quarters of incarcerated individuals in Canada will eventually return to the community. Upon release, many face significant reintegration challenges, with public stigmatization being among the most notable. The current study examined the influence of offender program participation, release plan, and personal proximity on participants' ratings of likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with that offender being granted parole.

Successful completion of a correctional program and having a release plan in place for work and housing resulted in increased likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with parole release. Participants were also more comfortable with the offender being granted parole when they were not going to live next-door, which indicates the presence of the Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) effect. Addressing barriers such as the NIMBY effect and identifying factors that promote community acceptance are crucial for fostering compassionate, evidence-informed attitudes and stronger support for reintegration efforts.

Keywords: Parolee Public Perception; Program Participation; Release Plan; Parole Decision-Making; Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) effect

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

NIMBY	Not In My Backyard
ATO	Attitudes Towards Offenders
ATP	Attitudes Towards Prisoners
MICPM	Integrated Correctional Program Model

“Not In My Backyard”: Examining the Influence of Offender Program Participation, Release Plan, and Personal Proximity on Mock Parole Decisions and Comfort Levels

How comfortable would you feel if you discovered that your neighbour had a criminal record? Would your comfort level be influenced by how your neighbour spent their time within the correctional institution? How would your attitude towards the correctional system shift if you had personal contact with an individual with a criminal record? The world of corrections is often a hidden one that remains largely unseen by, and inaccessible to, the general public despite the fact that 73.2% ($n = 15,757$) of incarcerated individuals in Canada have a determinate sentence and will eventually be released from a correctional institution (Public Safety Canada, 2023). With the majority of incarcerated individuals transitioning back into the community at some point, it is vital to examine the many barriers to successful re-entry to better prepare offenders for community reintegration for a variety of reasons, including reduced recidivism (Cerda et al., 2018).

One barrier to successful integration is public opinion. This barrier can be direct, such as a person being nervous about hiring a parolee, as well as indirect, such as public discourse regarding government policy and legislation. Much power exists in the court of public opinion, where offenders can continue to face judgements and prejudices long after their sentence is served. Public perception slants in the direction that offenders are not prepared for the challenges of living outside of prison, which can negatively impact a smooth re-integration through many overt factors as well as many factors that are less obvious (e.g. Rade et al., 2016). The current thesis examined how public perceptions of offenders are influenced by personal proximity and whether the factors of program participation and release plan in particular could impact their likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with an offender being granted parole.

Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) Effect

The Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) effect can be defined as “social rejection of facilities, infrastructure and services location, which are socially necessary but have a negative connotation” (Pol et al., 2006, p. 44). The definition by Pol et al., (2006) is applicable to social rejection of a concept when in close proximity to where someone lives. An individual may support the idea in general but would be more uncomfortable when directly impacted. The NIMBY effect can certainly be applied to aspects of the criminal justice system, with the most prevalent example being the reluctance of a community to accept or exhibit positive attitudes towards the establishment of community correctional centres, such as halfway houses, within their neighbourhood. Individuals can often be supportive of correctional reform or a rehabilitative-focused strategy for offenders in general, but their reluctance to accept offenders into their community grows more prevalent when personal proximity is included in the conversation.

Research conducted by van Alphen et al. (2011) explored the NIMBY effect across different marginalized social groups. In the study, 555 participants were asked to imagine that individuals of a particular social group would become their next-door neighbour. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five different social groups – elderly persons, individuals with a mild intellectual disability, individuals with a severe intellectual disability, economic refugees, and young offenders. Results indicated that young offenders were the least accepted as new next-door neighbours in comparison to elderly persons, individuals with a mild or severe intellectual disability, and economic refugees. Further, compared to the other four groups examined, young offenders were seen as the most dangerous and evoked angry and anxiety-based emotional reactions when participants imagined these individuals as a new neighbour. In addition,

participants rated having the lowest levels of personal contact with young offenders in comparison to the other social groups involved in this study.

Overall, the results from van Alphen et al.'s (2011) study suggest that the NIMBY effect impacts offenders more negatively compared to other social groups. Thus, the label 'offender, prisoner or ex-con' seems to be highly stigmatizing with offenders being classified as dangerous and dishonest. Such labels place a heavy weight on an individual with a criminal record (Aala et al., 2017; Hirshfield & Piquero, 2011). The public is often quick to make assumptions based on their fears associated with the label of offender. However, not all individuals with a criminal record are the same.

Typically, the general public is not privy to the realities of the correctional system instead basing their attitudes towards offenders on media consumption such as TV documentaries or fear mongering news articles that focus on the most heinous and violent types of offenders (Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007). However, only 22.4% of crimes in Canada are violent (Public Safety Canada, 2022). This misinformation regarding all those with a criminal record can lead to stigmatization and many barriers to successful reintegration back into the community. Therefore, understanding the factors which influence public perceptions of offenders being released on parole is vital to develop methods and policies which promote such factors and subsequent community reintegration.

Mitigating Factors

Many factors have been found to contribute to the decision-making process of Parole Board Members regarding whether an offender is adequately prepared for early conditional release into the community. Gobeil and Serin (2009), for example, examined how the information reviewed for each case influenced conditional release decision-making among

Parole Board Members. In general, a granting parole decision was associated with accessing greater information than denying parole decisions. No specific type of information was related to the making of a release decision. However, of the offender information, release plan information and program information were accessed most often.

Although much variation within jurisdictional policies and the use of evidence-based models can make it difficult to understand what influences the decision-making process on a wide scale, Rieger and Serin (2024) attempted to tackle this issue by exploring the many factors which influence the Parole Board decision-making process. The study received survey responses from 62 official Parole Board Members from the United States and Canada. Rieger and Serin found the following factors to be the most important to parole decisions (in order of reported importance): Program Participation, Personal Change, Criminal History, History on Supervision, Release Plan, Institutional Behaviour, Mental Illness, Severity of Index Offense, Substance Abuse History, Type of Index Offense, Victim Information, Presence or Absence of Remorse, Victim Input, Time Served, and Police Information. Factors of Remorse, Victim Input, and Police Information, however, were not empirically supported in relation to release suitability and recidivism. The remaining empirically supported factors within this study can be further divided into static characteristics that cannot be changed during an offender's incarceration and dynamic characteristics that are changeable and could be influenced within the institution. For instance, criminal history of an offender cannot be changed but having a release plan can be altered through interventions provided within an institution.

Static Factors

Type of Offender. Offender type is a broad category used to differentiate between various demographic groups of offenders. A study conducted by Gobeil and Serin (2009)

examined whether offender type impacted real Parole Board Members' decisions to grant or deny parole. The specific types of offender groups examined within this study included female offenders, male Indigenous offenders, male sexual offenders, male violent offender, male domestic violence offender, and male nonviolent offenders. A series of six vignettes were shown to participants and they then decided to grant or deny parole based on the information provided. Results regarding offender type indicated that Parole Board Members were significantly more likely to grant conditional release when presented with a female offender scenario than the other five scenarios. Non-significant differences were found among the other offender types. A large portion of Parole Board Members granted the conditional release in the sex offender scenario, whereas a small portion granted the conditional release in the Indigenous offender and domestic violent offender scenarios. The lack of significant results could suggest that perceptions and decisions made are based on a multitude of factors that are not specific to these offender types.

Historical Factors. Various historical factors, including criminal, supervision, and substance abuse history, have been found to reliably predict an offender's suitability for conditional release (e.g., Goodley et al., 2021). In Rieger and Serin's (2024) study, Parole Board Members highlighted the importance and reliability of these factors by placing greater weight on their influence in the decision-making process. Other historical static factors, however, have been found to be less suitable for consideration in the parole board decision-making process, including time served, mental illness, and information specific to the index offence (Rieger & Serin, 2024).

Dynamic Factors

Program Participation. The Correctional Service of Canada provides educational, employment and social programs as well as correctional programs which address factors that are linked to criminal behaviour. Correctional program participation is considered to be an industry

gold standard for predicting improved offender outcomes upon release (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). In line with this, Parole Board Members in Rieger and Serin's (2024) study identified program participation as an important factor in parole decision-making. Furthermore, information on offender programming has been found to be one of the pieces of information accessed most often by Parole Board Members in comparison to other factors (Gobeil & Serin, 2009).

Public perceptions of offender employability were examined by Cedra et al. (2019) in a study where program participation and type of correctional facility were manipulated. The types of correctional facilities examined in the study included a state prison, county jail, and a community-based alternative to custody. The sample consisted of 197 participants from the community completing an online survey who were told to imagine that they are a hiring employer tasked with providing opinions regarding a potential job applicant. The potential job applicant was a 21-year-old high school graduate and a parolee who had been charged with a non-violent, non-serious, non-sexual offence. The respondents were either provided with information about the parolee's program participation while incarcerated or were not provided with any program participation-related information.

Cedra et al. (2019) found that participants who received information regarding the parolee's program participation while incarcerated provided significantly higher employability ratings compared to participants who did not receive any program participation-related information for parolees who had been in prison or jail. Furthermore, the study noted that across all three types of custody (i.e., prison, jail, and community placement), program participation increased participants' ratings of parolee employability. However, mean employability ratings never exceeded 60 on a scale from 0 to 100 across all custody types, which demonstrates the

unique concerns the public has regarding hiring former offenders. Overall, the findings suggest that providing meaningful programming and increasing program participation could increase employability beliefs of the general public and also provide additional support towards an offender's release plan.

Release Plan. An offender's ability to have an adequate and realistic release plan, one that encourages stability and prosocial support, is a key influence on successful reintegration (Dickson et al., 2013). In line with this, Parole Board Members in Reiger and Serin's (2024) study identified release plan as an important factor in parole decision-making. Furthermore, information on an offender's release plan is among the information accessed most often by Parole Board Members in comparison to other factors (Gobeil & Serin, 2009). Establishing a release plan for an offender is vital in terms of providing resilience against reoffending risk factors (Reiger & Serin, 2024). Despite its importance, limited research currently exists that has examined the influence of release plan on the public's attitudes towards offenders.

Attitudes Towards Offenders

Overall, attitudes towards offenders encompass the spectrum of perceptions, beliefs, and emotions that individuals hold towards those who have a criminal record. Attitudes can range from empathy, understanding, and support for rehabilitation to fear, stigma, and calls for punitive measures (Kjelsberg et al., 2007). Attitudes towards offenders can be assessed in a multitude of ways, such as likelihood to grant parole and comfort levels with parole release as well as direct scales measuring general attitudes. These attitudes play a pivotal role in shaping societal responses to crime, influencing not only policies and practices within the criminal justice system but also broader social interactions and community dynamics.

One initial inquiry into assessing attitudes towards offenders was undertaken by Melvin et al. (1985) through the creation of their Attitudes Toward Prisoners (ATP) scale. The research compared ATP scores amongst various sample groups in Alabama, including reform/rehabilitation group members, prisoners from three correctional facilities, university students, community members, correctional officers and law enforcement officers. The Prisoner reform group (activists) and the Prisoner group samples had the highest ATP scores, which means they held the most positive attitudes towards offenders. The Law Enforcement Officer group, however, held the lowest ATP scores, revealing they had the most negative attitudes towards offenders. The Student, Community, and Correctional Officer samples held slightly above average ATP scores, revealing these groups had a slightly positive attitude towards offenders. Thus, the researchers found that the student and community samples scored similarly to one another and did not have overly positive or negative attitudes. This finding suggests that student samples could potentially offer generalizability with community samples when examining attitudes towards offenders.

Non-Uniform Correctional Staff Attitudes

Research conducted by Gonzales et al. (2021) examined attitudes towards incarcerated individuals among a sample of non-uniform correctional staff, including educators, clinical staff, and administration, employed at approximately 100 correctional facilities across the United States. Participants completed semi-structured interviews regarding how their beliefs about incarcerated people influence the social climate of the prison. Staff who considered current offenders as past and potential future neighbours were more likely to create a safe and mutually respectful social environment within the prison. Further, participants communicated the need to expand program opportunities within facilities to ensure a wide variety of programs that promote

positive growth. Staff also spoke to the need to increase public awareness and support for rehabilitative measures that will better prepare an offender for their impending release. Finally, participants highlighted how engaging the community through events, such as a public graduation ceremony, provide increased transparency and community understanding of offender reintegration.

Correctional Officer Attitudes

Research conducted by Kjelsberg et al. (2007) utilized the Attitudes Toward Prisoners scale among 298 offenders and 387 employees within four Norwegian prisons, as well as 183 college students. Results indicated that prisoners held the most positive attitudes followed by college students and prison employees. Prison officers were found to hold lower attitude scores than other correctional employees. This finding suggests that the types of responsibilities and the specific roles of a correctional officer, such as supervising and controlling the behaviours and safety of offenders, could result in a hyper focus on the negative aspects of offenders. In contrast, other employees, such as teachers or program officers, focus more on rehabilitation and an offender's potential, which may shift the mindset to a more positive attitude towards offenders. Furthermore, a number of significant correlations were found between negative attitudes towards offenders and having more pessimistic and punitive responses regarding broad questions about prisoners, crime, and punishment. Such correlations demonstrate the importance of shifting attitudes towards offenders in a positive direction to create more a supportive and optimistic beliefs surrounding prisoners, crime, and punishment.

A study conducted by Johnston and Ricciardelli (2022) examined qualitative survey responses from 876 correctional employees working within Canadian provincial correctional services. Participant responses indicated a desire for more programming and rehabilitative

efforts, including mental health supports for offenders. However, opinions were also expressed that changes in reform lacked consistency with offering appropriate alternate measures for emerging issues. For instance, when the practice of segregation units was ended, institutions were provided with limited and reasonable alternatives for the de-escalation of situations and the protection for both staff and offenders. The research conducted by Johnston and Ricciardelli (2022) reveal correctional officers are often supportive of reforming policies that are believed to support rehabilitation of offenders but are also tasked with the operational duties of day-to-day management and the safety concerns that can often be impacted by reform changes without adequate solutions.

Public Attitudes

A meta-analysis conducted by Rade et al. (2016) examined 19 articles regarding public attitudes towards ex-offenders (i.e., post-release offenders). More specifically, the characteristics of the public, the offenders, and the community were examined in this meta-analysis. Political ideology and interpersonal contact with offenders were the only two public characteristics that had a small association with attitudes towards offenders. Individuals with politically conservative ideologies and those with no previous contact with offenders reported significantly more negative attitudes towards ex-offenders in comparison to members of the public with non-conservative beliefs and those with reported previous contact with a current or ex-offender. The only offender characteristic found to have a small correlation with public attitude towards ex-offenders was history of sexual offending. The public held significantly more negative views towards ex-offenders with histories of sexual offending than ex-offenders with no history of sexual offending. Regarding community characteristics, a small but non-significant correlation was found between community size and public attitudes towards offenders. Those living in

smaller, rural communities reported more negative attitudes towards ex-offenders than those living in larger, non-rural communities.

Limited research exists that has explored specific characteristics of offenders and how these factors potentially influence public perceptions. Rade et al. (2016) attempted to examine characteristics of ex-offenders in their meta-analysis, but they were unable to effectively assess the topic due to the small amount of previous research completed. They noted that further research was required to better assess how public perceptions are influenced by specific characteristics of offenders, such as criminal history, race/ethnicity, participation in rehabilitation programs, age, and history of mental illness. Previous research has focused primarily on public characteristics or sexual-based offending, while overlooking how offender characteristics impact public attitudes towards offenders.

The Current Study

Primary Focus

The current study fills a gap in the literature in terms of understanding factors that could influence public perceptions regarding an offender's parole eligibility, as well as how comfortable they might be with the offender being granted parole. More specifically, the current thesis primarily explored the influence of two dynamic factors – program participation while incarcerated and release plan – on how likely participants would be to grant parole and their level of comfort with that offender being granted parole. In addition, the current study used personal proximity to assess the Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) effect. The NIMBY effect suggests that individuals are less accepting of an offender when they will be in close proximity. The current research has operational implications for correctional institutions, policy advancement, and successful reintegration of parolees into the community.

Hypotheses 1 and 2

Based on previous literature in the area, two main hypotheses were developed:

1. Participants would have a higher likelihood to grant parole when the offender:
 - a. Has successfully completed programing
 - b. Has a plan upon release
 - c. Is not released with personal proximity to participant
2. Participants would have a higher level of comfort with parole release when the offender:
 - a. Has successfully completed programing
 - b. Has a plan upon release
 - c. Is not released with personal proximity to participant

Secondary Focus

Although the primary focus of this thesis was to examine the influence of program participation, release plan, and personal proximity on participants' likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with offender being released, the existing literature also suggests that attitudes towards offenders could impact these outcome measures as well. Thus, a secondary focus of the current study was to examine attitudes of offenders, alongside program participation, release plan, and personal proximity, as predictors of participants' likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with the offender being released. This secondary focus of the current study is more exploratory, as well as preliminary, in nature. That said, some hypotheses were still developed that are in line with Hypotheses 1 and 2, as well as a consideration of the overall regression model and the addition of attitudes towards offenders.

Hypotheses 3 and 4

3. In terms of the regression model examining participants' likelihood to grant parole, it was hypothesized that:

- a. Overall regression model consisting of program participation, release plan, personal proximity, and attitudes towards offenders as predictors would be significant
 - b. Program participation would be a significant predictor, with participation in a program while incarcerated being associated with a greater likelihood to grant parole
 - c. Release plan would be a significant predictor, with having a release plan being associated with greater likelihood to grant parole
 - d. Personal proximity would be a significant predictor, with close proximity being associated with lower likelihood to grant parole
 - e. Attitudes towards offenders would be a significant predictor, with more favourable attitudes being associated with greater likelihood to grant parole
4. In terms of the regression model examining participants' level of comfort with offender being released on parole, it was hypothesized that:

- a. Overall regression model consisting of program participation, release plan, personal proximity, and attitudes towards offenders as predictors would be significant
- b. Program participation would be a significant predictor, with participation in a program while incarcerated being associated with greater level of comfort with the offender being released on parole

- c. Release plan would be a significant predictor, with having a release plan being associated with greater level of comfort with the offender being released on parole
- d. Personal proximity would be a significant predictor, with close proximity being associated with lower level of comfort with the offender being released on parole
- e. Attitudes towards offenders would be a significant predictor, with more favourable attitudes being associated with greater level of comfort with the offender being released on parole

Method

Participants

The sample for the current study was obtained from Ontario Tech University via an online recruitment program (i.e., SONA). More specifically, the participants consisted of students enrolled in various undergraduate psychology courses (e.g., Introductory Psychology) who received course credit for their participation. Although a total of 321 participants completed the study, 69 (21.5%) participants were excluded from the analyses due to failing more than one of the three manipulation and attention check questions, not fully completing the survey, not agreeing to have their data used upon completion of the study, or taking an overly long time to complete the survey (i.e., more than 90 minutes). Therefore, the final sample consisted of 252 participants, with an average study completion time of 23.82 minutes ($SD = 13.85$).

Demographics

Within the final sample of 252 participants, 66.7% ($n = 168$) identified as female, 29.4% ($n = 74$) identified as male, 2.4% ($n = 6$) identified as non-binary, 0.8% ($n = 2$) identified as transgender, and 0.8% ($n = 2$) participants preferred not to disclose their gender. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 56 years ($M = 20.7$, $SD = 5.3$). In terms of year of study, 54.8% ($n =$

138) were in their first year, 21% ($n = 53$) were in their second year, 15.5% ($n = 39$) were in their third year, 7.1% ($n = 20$) were in their fourth year, and 1.6% ($n = 4$) preferred not to say. The breakdown by Faculty across participants was as follows: 34.9% ($n = 88$) were in the Faculty of Health Sciences, 26.2% ($n = 66$) were in the Faculty of Science, 15.9% ($n = 40$) were in Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, 9.5% ($n = 24$) were in the Faculty of Business and Information Technology, 9.1% ($n = 23$) were in the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, 2.8% ($n = 7$) were in the Faculty of Education, 1.2% ($n = 3$) preferred not to say, and 0.4% ($n = 1$) were in the Faculty of Energy Systems and Nuclear Science.

Participants identified their ethnic background as South Asian (31.7%, $n = 80$), White (28.6%, $n = 72$), Black (19.8%, $n = 50$), West Asian (8.3%, $n = 21$), East Asian (7.5%, $n = 19$), Southeast Asian (7.1%, $n = 18$), Latino/Latinx (2 %, $n = 5$), Mixed Race (1.6%, $n = 4$) Indigenous (0.4 %, $n = 1$), and preferred not to say (1.2%, $n = 3$). Note that participants were instructed to “select all that apply” for the ethnicity question, which is why the total adds up to more than 100%. Regarding political party, 39.7% ($n = 100$) participants did not identify with a political party, 24.2% ($n = 61$) participants identified with the Liberal party, 14.3% ($n = 36$) participants preferred not to say, 13.5% ($n = 34$) participants identified with the Conservative party, 7.5% ($n = 19$) of participants identified with the New Democratic Party, and 0.8% ($n = 2$) of participants identified with the Green party.

Relating to corrections, 15.1% ($n = 38$) of participants knew someone currently or previously incarcerated in either a provincial or federal correctional facility, 83% ($n = 211$) did not, and 1.2% ($n = 3$) preferred not to say. Only 2.8% ($n = 7$) of participants had personal experience with the Canadian correctional system, while 96% ($n = 242$) of participants did not and 1.2% ($n = 3$) preferred not to say. Regarding parole, 11.1% ($n = 28$) of participants knew

someone currently or previously on parole, 87.3% ($n = 220$) of participants did not, and 1.6% ($n = 4$) preferred not to say.

Regarding correctional reform, only 14.7% ($n = 37$) of participants were familiar with correctional reform policies, while 81.3% ($n = 205$) of participants were not familiar and 4% ($n = 10$) preferred not to say. Despite the vast majority of participants being unfamiliar with correctional reform, 72.6% ($n = 183$) of participants would be supportive of implementing new strategies within corrections, 10.7% ($n = 27$) would not be supportive, and 16.7% ($n = 42$) preferred not to say.

Design

The current study utilized a 2 (Program Participation: Yes versus No) x 2 (Release Plan: Yes versus No) x 2 (Personal Proximity (NIMBY): Yes versus No) between-subjects design. The study consisted of two outcome variables: (1) likelihood to grant parole measured continuously (i.e., on a scale from 0 to 100) and (2) level of comfort with release on parole measured continuously (i.e., on a scale from 0 to 100). The study manipulations and the two outcome measures will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Measures

Demographic Form

Basic demographic information, such as participants' gender, age, ethnicity, and program of study, was gathered through a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix B). A “Prefer not to answer” option was available for all demographic questions. Note that demographic variables were included for sample description purposes and not for additional analyses.

Attitudes Towards Offenders (ATO) Scale

The current study incorporated the Attitude to Prisoners scale originally developed by Melvin et al. (1985). Two minor adjustments were made to this scale for use in this study. First, the term “prisoner” has been updated to “offender” to reflect the currently accepted language according to offender-based research. As such, the scale was referred to as the Attitudes Towards Offenders (ATO) scale in this thesis. Second, he/him pronouns were changed to gender neutral they/them pronouns (See Appendix C).

The ATO scale consisted of 36 broad attitudinal statements, such as “Offenders are no better or worse than other people.” Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to each of the 36 statements using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Of the 36 questions, 19 were reverse coded before calculating a total ATO score for each participant. In addition, a constant of 36 was removed from the participants’ summed values, resulting in a total possible score ranging from 0 to 144. Importantly, all participants responded to all 36 statements (i.e., there were no missing values for the ATO scale items). Higher scores on the ATO indicated more positive attitudes towards offenders and lower scores indicate more negative attitudes towards offenders. Although this measure was found to be reliable and valid in Melvin et al. (1985), as well as in many additional studies (Craig, 2005; Harper & Hogue, 2015; Harper & Hogue, 2019; Hogue, 1993; Kleban & Jeglic, 2012), Cronbach’s alpha for the ATO scale was still assessed in the current study and was found to be strong with a value of .92.

Offender Vignettes

The offender vignettes consisted of a fictional report designed to emulate a briefer version of an Offender Case File, which is a document typically presented within parole board hearings conducted by the Parole Board of Canada. More specifically, a case file includes a

detailed record of the offender’s criminal history, personal history, and institutional progress. Participants were instructed to read through the fictional case file as though they were the ones making a parole decision for the offender. Each vignette was approximately 200 words in length about a fictional offender and included a mugshot of a White man in his 30s along with the name “JANES” (see Appendix D). This photo was provided to ensure that all participants pictured the same offender when reviewing the case file (i.e., to help minimize any confounding variables not being examined in the current study). Using a White offender will hopefully provide the least racial bias influence and will create a control study for potential future race characteristic research in this area.

Rieger and Serin (2024) identified many factors that are considered by members of parole boards in decision-making processes, including the two factors being examined in the current study (i.e., Program Participation and Release Plan). Some other factors noted by Rieger and Serin, such as criminal history, history on supervision, substance abuse history, type of index offence, severity of index offence, and history of mental illness, were included in the vignette to increase realism (i.e., this type of information would typically be included in an offender’s case file). These additional factors, however, were purposely held constant within the vignettes. While Rieger and Serin found these additional factors to be influential in the parole decision-making process, they are all historical in nature, which means they cannot be changed by the offender once incarcerated. The factors of Program Participation and Release Plan have the potential to be changed or influenced by the offender while in a correctional institution, which is why those two were chosen specifically for examination in the current study.

Manipulation of Program Participation, Release Plan, and Personal Proximity. The vignettes contained manipulations for two independent variables – Program Participation and

Release Plan. Program Participation consisted of two levels and was manipulated by simply stating whether the offender *did* or *did not* successfully complete participation in the Moderate Integrated Correctional Program Model (MICPM). The MICPM is a program the federal government provides in their facilities to target criminogenic risk factors. More specifically, the MICPM utilizes cognitive-behavioural strategies and social learning to target skills that reduce harmful behaviour, as well as changing anti-social attitudes, beliefs, and associates. The skills taught include goal setting, problem solving, interpersonal communication skills, coping skills, and self-management skills. This program was chosen because the MICPM is the main program provided to male offenders that addresses all criminal behaviour under one program umbrella (Correctional Service Canada, 2019).

Release Plan was the second independent variable manipulated in the current study. This variable was manipulated by including a statement in the presented vignette referring to whether the offender *has* or *does not have* a release plan ready in the event they are granted parole, such as finding employment, housing, and having the skills to avoid future criminal behaviour. The manipulation of Program Participation (yes versus no) and Release Plan (yes versus no) resulted in four different vignettes, with participants being randomly assigned to view only one of the four possible vignettes.

Personal Proximity to assess NIMBY was the third independent variable manipulated in the current study. This variable was manipulated by either including a statement indicating that the address of offender's release is next-door to the participant's current address or not including that statement. The manipulation of these three independent variables resulted in a total of eight possible study conditions (see Table 1).

Table 1*Study Conditions*

Study Condition	Personal Proximity	Program Participation	Release Plan
1	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	No	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	No	No
4	No	No	No
5	Yes	Yes	No
6	No	Yes	No
7	Yes	No	Yes
8	No	No	Yes

Outcome Measures

Mock Parole Decision. The first dependent variable in the current study involved participants indicating their likelihood to grant the offender parole on a continuous scale ranging from 0 to 100 (with higher scores indicating a greater likelihood to grant parole). The question about parole was phrased to participants as if they were the ones in charge of decision-making regarding if the offender should or should not be granted parole based on the information presented within the vignette. Participants were also asked an open-ended question regarding why they made the decision to either grant or deny parole. This qualitative data was not thoroughly examined in the current study (See Appendix F).

Level of Comfort with Parole Release Rating. After providing their own parole decision, participants were told the Parole Board of Canada had decided to grant parole to the

offender portrayed in the vignette. Participants were then asked to rate their comfort level with this decision on a continuous scale ranging from 0 to 100 (with higher scores indicating higher level of comfort). These level of comfort with parole ratings served as the second dependent variable in this study.

Participant Check Questions

Attention and Manipulation Check Questions. Participants answered three multiple-choice questions that assessed their retention of the information presented in the vignette that they read. Two of these questions directly assessed the manipulated independent variables of Program Participation and Release Plan, whereas the third question assessed attention by asking what offence the offender had committed (see Appendix E).

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. The Social Desirability Scale developed by Marlowe and Crowne (1960) aims to measure a participant's level of social desirability. Social desirability is recognized as behaviours that are culturally acceptable and approved that are relatively unlikely to occur, such as "I am always willing to admit it when I make a mistake." This scale was used to assess if participants are likely answering the questions not in accordance with their actual beliefs, but they are instead responding in a more socially acceptable way (see Appendix I). In other words, this scale was only included to help detect social desirability bias in the data and it was not included as part of the main analyses. Results from the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale indicated that participants were not responding to the survey in a socially desirable manner. Specifically, the mean result of the current sample was 16.78 ($SD = 4.77$), which is below the standard threshold of 21 (Marlowe & Crowne, 1960).

Additional Measures

A couple of additional measures were also completed by participants. These measures were not examined in the current study, but they are presented below for informational purposes.

Influence of Factors (Reiger & Serin, 2024). The online survey included applicable portions of the questionnaire developed by Reiger and Serin (2024), in which a 62-item survey asked Parole Board Members for information pertaining to the functioning of the Board and the information relied on within the parole decision-making process. Portions of the questionnaire were completed by participants, which will allow for a future comparison between two different sample groups. This will assist in increasing our understanding of which factors the public values most when making decisions regarding offenders compared to Parole Board Members (See Appendix H).

Attitudes to Corrections. Additional demographic questions were included in the online survey regarding participants' knowledge and attitudes towards the current correctional system. One factor included is participants' familiarity with the correctional system such as if they know individuals currently employed at or incarcerated in an institution. In addition, information was collected regarding participants' attitudes towards correctional reform policies such as if they are aware of restorative justice and if they believe restorative justice would be a suitable system. Furthermore, a "willingness to vote" Likert scale question was included where participants were asked to indicate their likelihood to vote for a politician who wants to increase funding correctional reform policies. Finally, participants were asked open-ended questions to gather additional qualitative information such as "What would make you feel comfortable living next to an individual on parole?" (See Appendix J)

Procedure

Participants were recruited online through the Ontario Tech University SONA system. The study was completed in one testing session, lasting approximately 30 minutes. After signing up for the study, participants were provided with the survey link. This link directed them to the online survey hosted on Qualtrics. Qualtrics randomly assigned participants to one of the eight experimental conditions (see Table 1). Participants completed the study materials in the order mentioned above.

Results

Primary Analyses

As a reminder, the current study followed a 2 (Program Participation: Yes versus No) x 2 (Release Plan: Yes versus No) x 2 (Personal Proximity: Yes versus No) between-subjects design. The study consisted of two continuous outcome measures (both rated on a scale from 0 to 100): (1) likelihood to grant parole and (2) level of comfort with parole release. Two three-way ANOVAs were run to examine the influence of the three independent variables on the two dependent variables. As outlined previously, the final sample consisted of 252 participants. All group means and standard deviations for likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with parole release are presented in Appendix L.

Likelihood to Grant Parole Ratings

Assumptions. A 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA was run in order to examine the effects of offender program participation (yes versus no), release plan (yes versus no), and personal proximity (yes versus no) on likelihood to grant parole ratings. The relevant data requirements and assumptions for a three-way ANOVA were assessed. The data met the requirements for this particular analysis in terms of the dependant variable being continuous, the independent variables being categorical,

and there being independence of observations. Unfortunately, Levene's test for equality of variances was significant, $F(7, 244) = 2.39, p = .02$, which means the homogeneity of variance assumption was not met. This should be noted as a limitation of the current study. The Shapiro-Wilk test for normality was significant for one of eight conditions, which indicates that the assumption of normality was not met for this group. However, the skewness and kurtosis z-scores were assessed for this group and both were within -1.96 and 1.96. Thus, normality is likely not an issue for this analysis.

Main Effects. The results indicated that the main effect of program participation on likelihood to grant parole was significant, $F(1, 244) = 80.34, p < .001$. Specifically, participants indicated a significantly greater likelihood to grant parole if the offender had completed a program ($M = 65.38, SD = 20.13$) than when he had not ($M = 43.15, SD = 23.47$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 22.23, 95% CI [17.29, 27.03]. Notably, this main effect was found to be strong in nature with a partial η^2 value of .25. Therefore, Hypothesis 1a was supported.

The main effect of release plan on likelihood to grant parole was also found to be significant, $F(1, 244) = 42.52, p < .001$. Specifically, participants indicated a significantly greater likelihood to grant parole when the offender had a plan upon release ($M = 62.75, SD = 19.90$) compared to when he did not have a plan upon release ($M = 45.72, SD = 25.83$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 17.03, 95% CI [11.25, 20.99]. This effect was also found to be fairly strong with a partial η^2 value of .15. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b was supported. The results, however, indicated no significant main effect of personal proximity on likelihood to grant parole $F(1, 244) = 0.59, p = .44$. The effect size for personal proximity was negligible with a partial η^2 value of .002. Therefore, Hypothesis 1c was not supported.

Interactions. It is important to note when interpreting the main effects that significant interactions were also found. More specifically, a significant two-way interaction was found between release plan and personal proximity, $F(1, 244) = 15.34, p < .001$. The effect size, however, was smaller than for both significant main effects, with a partial η^2 value of .06. The simple effects analysis found that release plan had a significant effect on likelihood to grant parole rating only when the offender was going to be released into the community in general, $F(1, 244) = 55.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$, and not when the offender was going to be released next-door to the participant, $F(1, 244) = 3.13, p = .01, \eta^2 = .01$. When the offender was going to be released into the community in general (i.e., no personal proximity present), participants indicated a significantly greater likelihood to grant parole when the offender had a plan upon release ($M = 65.99, SD = 19.70$) compared to when he did not have a plan upon release ($M = 39.73, SD = 25.63$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 17.03, 95% CI [19.00, 32.62]. Visualization of interaction can be found in Figure M1 of Appendix M.

An additional significant two-way interaction was found between program participation and release plan, $F(1, 244) = 5.22, p = .02$. The effect size was again smaller than for both significant main effects, with a partial η^2 value of .02. The simple effects analysis found that program participation had a significant effect on likelihood to grant parole both when the offender had a release plan, $F(1, 244) = 22.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$, and did not have a release plan $F(1, 244) = 62.06, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$. When the offender had a release plan, participants indicated a significantly greater likelihood to grant parole when the offender had participated in treatment ($M = 70.28, SD = 16.24$) compared to when he had not participated in treatment ($M = 54.36, SD = 20.35$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 15.92, 95% CI [9.69, 23.34]. Similar findings were found when the offender did not have a release plan, with participants indicating a significantly greater

likelihood to grant parole when the offender had participated in treatment ($M = 59.82$, $SD = 22.66$) compared to when he had not participated in treatment ($M = 32.29$, $SD = 21.18$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 27.53, 95% CI [20.86, 34.76]. Visualization of interaction can be found in Figure M2 of Appendix M.

The remaining two-way interaction between program participation and personal proximity did not reach significance, $F(1, 244) = .01$, $p = .93$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$. The three-way interaction was also non-significant, $F(1, 244) = 3.43$, $p = .07$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$.

Level of Comfort with Parole Release Ratings

Assumptions. A three-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of offender program participation (yes versus no), release plan (yes versus no), and personal proximity (yes versus no) on ratings of level of comfort with the offender being released on parole. The relevant data requirements and assumptions of the statistical analysis were assessed. The data met the requirements for this particular analysis in terms of the dependant variable being continuous, the independent variables being categorical, and there being independence of observations. Further, Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant, $F(7, 244) = .33$, $p = .94$, meaning the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The Shapiro-Wilk test for normality was significant for two of the eight conditions, which indicates that the assumption of normality was not met for those groups. When looking at the skewness and kurtosis z-scores for these two groups, only one z-score was outside of the acceptable range of -1.96 and 1.96. However, given that only one group was affected, the group sample sizes were all larger than 15, and the largest n divided by smallest n is less than < 1.5 ($27/36 = 0.75$), I decided to not transform the dependant variable and proceed with the ANOVA.

Main Effects. Results indicated that the main effect of program participation on comfort with release on parole was significant, $F(1, 244) = 45.15, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$. Specifically, participants indicated a significantly greater level of comfort with the offender being released on parole when he had successfully completed a program ($M = 58.77, SD = 23.19$) than when he had not ($M = 39.48, SD = 25.94$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 19.29, 95% CI [13.58, 24.85]. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was supported.

A significant main effect was also found for release plan, $F(1, 244) = 25.69, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Participants had significantly higher level of comfort scores when the offender had a plan upon release ($M = 57.09, SD = 23.6$) compared to when he did not have a plan upon release ($M = 41.08, SD = 26.7$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 16.01, 95% CI [8.86, 20.13]. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b was supported.

Finally, a significant main effect of personal proximity on comfort with the offender being released on parole was also found, $F(1, 244) = 13.90, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. Specifically, participants had significantly higher level of comfort scores when the offender was not released with personal proximity ($M = 54.89, SD = 26.29$) compared to the offender being released as their neighbour ($M = 43.39, SD = 25.23$), $p < .001$, mean difference = 11.50, 95% CI [5.03, 16.23]. Therefore, Hypothesis 1c was supported.

Interactions. Further, none of the two-way or three-way interactions were significant. This includes the two-way interactions for program participation by release plan, $F(1, 244) = 3.39, p = .07$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, program participation by personal proximity, $F(1, 244) = .26, p = .61$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$, and release plan by personal proximity, $F(1, 244) = 3.82, p = .052$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, as well as the three-way interaction, $F(1, 244) = .82, p = .37$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$.

Secondary Analyses

As a reminder, the current study has had a second focus examining attitudes of offenders, alongside program participation, release plan, and personal proximity, as predictors of participants' likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with the offender being released. This secondary focus of the current study was more exploratory and preliminary in nature. Thus, two regression analyses were carried out as secondary analyses.

Likelihood to Grant Parole Ratings

Assumptions. A standard multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to see if Attitude towards Offenders, Personal Proximity, Program Participation, and Release Plan predicted likelihood to grant parole. An examination of the assumptions for this particular analysis showed that all were met. Specifically, sample size is appropriate for multiple regression, with a sufficient sample size (i.e., over 82 and more than 15 participants per predictor). There were no outliers present in the data, as case wise diagnostics did not indicate the presence of univariate outliers and Mahal's Distance was less than 18.47, which indicates no multivariate outliers. The linearity assumption was also met, with the scatterplots indicating a reasonably straight diagonal line for all of the predictors. In addition, the standardized residuals were properly distributed, indicating that the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity were met. Finally, multicollinearity was not present in the data, with tolerance scores above .10 and VIF scores less than 10.

Regression Analysis Findings. It was found that the regression model consisting of Attitudes towards Offenders, Personal Proximity, Program Participation, and Release Plan explained a significant amount of the variance in likelihood to grant parole ratings, $F(4, 247) = 30.24, p < .001$. More specifically, 31.8% of the variation in likelihood to grant parole was being

accounted for by the four predictor variables. However, 69.2% of the variation in likelihood to grant parole was not being explained by the model. The regression equation for this model is:

$$Y' = 22.217 + 0.148X_1 + 1.792X_2 + 21.178X_3 + 16.972X_4$$

The analysis showed that Attitude towards Offenders ($t(247) = 1.99, p = .047$), Program Participation ($t(247) = 8.28, p < .001$), and Release Plan ($t(247) = 6.59, p < .001$) were all significant predictors of likelihood to grant parole. Personal Proximity ($\beta = .037, t(247) = 0.702, p = .483$), however, was not a significant predictor of likelihood to grant parole. Based on the standardized coefficients, Program Participation ($\beta = .433$) was the strongest predictor in the model followed by Release Plan ($\beta = .347$), and Attitude towards Offenders ($\beta = .105$). Similarly, Program Participation was also found to uniquely explain the highest amount of variation in level of comfort ratings (18.7%), followed by Release Plan (11.8%), and Attitudes towards Offenders (1.1%).

Level of Comfort with Parole Release Ratings

Assumptions. A standard multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to see if Attitude towards Offenders, Personal Proximity, Program Participation and Release Plan predicted level of comfort with release on parole. An examination of the assumptions for this particular analysis showed that all assumptions were met. Specifically, sample size is appropriate for multiple regression, with a sufficient sample size (i.e., over 82 and more than 15 participants per predictor). There were no outliers present in the data, as case wise diagnostics did not indicate the presence of univariate outliers and Mahal's Distance was less than 18.47, which indicates no multivariate outliers. The linearity assumption was also met, with the scatterplots indicating a reasonably straight diagonal line for all of the predictors. In addition, the standardized residuals were properly distributed, indicating that the assumptions of normality

and homoscedasticity were met. Finally, multicollinearity was not present in the data, with tolerance scores above .10 and VIF scores less than 10.

Regression Analysis Findings. It was found that the regression model consisting of Attitudes towards Offenders, Personal Proximity, Program Participation, and Release Plan explained a significant amount of the variance in level of comfort with the offender being released on parole, $F(4, 247) = 28.25, p < .001$. More specifically, 30.3% of the variation in level of comfort is being accounted for by the four predictor variables. However, 70.7% of the variation in level of comfort is not being explained by the model. The regression equation for this model is:

$$Y' = 8.446 + 0.356X_1 + -10.73X_2 + 17.842X_3 + 16.217X_4$$

The analysis showed that Attitude towards Offenders ($t(247) = 4.41, p < .001$), Personal Proximity ($t(247) = -3.86, p < .001$), Program Participation ($t(247) = 6.4, p < .001$), and Release Plan ($t(247) = 5.78, p < .001$) were all significant predictors of level of comfort ratings. Based on the standardized coefficients, Program Participation ($\beta = .339$) was the strongest predictor in the model followed by Release Plan ($\beta = .308$), Attitude towards Offenders ($\beta = .235$), and Personal Proximity ($\beta = -.204$). Similarly, Program Participation was also found to uniquely explain the highest amount of variation in level of comfort ratings (11.4%), followed by Release Plan (9.3%), Attitudes towards Offenders (5.4%), and Personal Proximity (4.1%).

Discussion

As previously highlighted, public opinion plays a powerful role in shaping discourse around government policy, mandates and legislation. Currently, the public often perceives offenders as ill prepared for the challenges of living outside of prison, which is not entirely inaccurate, as many offenders are unsuccessful in pro-social reintegration (Rade et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, such negative opinions can negatively impact successful re-integration by creating both overt and subtle barriers. This indicates identifying strategies to alleviate public stigma is vital for removing barriers and facilitating a smoother re-entry into the community. Thus, the current study examined two dynamic factors that may help mitigate negative public opinions of offenders – program participation and release plan.

The general public often lacks education regarding justice reform and the importance of fostering community acceptance for returning offenders. Offenders are reported to have the lowest levels of personal contact with the general public, compared to other marginalized groups (van Alphen et al., 2011). For instance, only 15% of participants in this study knew someone who had been incarcerated, and just 11% knew someone on parole. As such, public judgements about offenders are often shaped by fear driven by sensationalized media coverage focused on the most severe crimes (Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007). However, only 22.4% of crimes in Canada are violent (Public Safety Canada, 2022), and many offences are non-violent or minor, yet the stigma is often linked to the most extreme cases. The current study focused on the non-violent crime of theft with no individual victim, which may carry different social stigmas and concerns. This fear and lack of personal contact creates an environment in which the Not In My Backyard effect thrives. While apprehension about offenders in the community is valid, finding ways to reduce the heightened concern to personal proximity is vital for improving community acceptance. Therefore, the impact of personal proximity was also examined within the current study. The key findings from this thesis will now be discussed.

Program Participation and Release Plan

Likelihood to Grant Parole

Both offender participation in programming and the presence of a release plan were found to significantly increase participants' ratings of likelihood to grant parole. Thus, Hypothesis 1a

and 1b were supported in the current study. Previous research identified program participation and the presence of a release plan as two of the most influential factors and most frequently accessed information in parole decision-making among parole board members (Reiger & Serin, 2023). The findings from this thesis indicate that the public also considers these two factors as influential in parole decision-making.

It is important to note that a significant interaction effect was also found between program participation and the presence of a release plan in a similar direction to the main effects. More specifically, likelihood to grant parole ratings were found to be significantly higher when the offender had successfully completed a program, compared to when he had not, both when the offender had a release plan and when he did not. This finding emphasizes the importance of providing multiple forms of support for offenders, as more than one single factor is considered within parole decision-making (Reiger & Serin, 2023). The interaction between program participation and release planning demonstrates that positive outcomes across multiple factors can enhance the likelihood of being approved for parole. Further, offenders lacking both program participation and a release plan had the lowest likelihood to grant parole ratings, whereas offenders with both had the highest ratings. A significant interaction was also found between release plan and personal proximity, which will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

Overall, the likelihood to grant parole findings suggest that public judgement of offenders can shift in response to rehabilitation efforts made during incarceration and plans made in preparation for release. A rehabilitation-based approach emphasizes dynamic, changeable factors rather than static, unchangeable factors. This research provides evidence that the public

recognizes and values improvements in the dynamic factors of program participation and release plan, which is promising for offenders.

Level of Comfort with Parole Release

Participants were also found to report significantly higher levels of comfort with parole release when the offender had engaged in programming, which provides support for Hypothesis 2a. Support was also found for Hypothesis 2b, with significantly higher comfort with parole release ratings being found when the offender had a release plan than when he had not. These findings further reinforce the importance of both completing programming while incarcerated and preparing a release plan for the transition from institution to the community. These findings suggest that focusing on these factors not only improves parole outcomes for offenders (Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Dickson et al., 2013; Gobeil & Serin, 2009) but fosters more positive public perceptions on parole readiness as well.

Previous research has shown that participation in programming predicts improved outcomes upon release for offenders (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). Further, program participation has positively impacted employability ratings compared to offenders who did not engage in programming (Cedra et al., 2019). The findings in the current study suggests that these benefits could be reflected in public perceptions as well, as participants reported feeling more comfortable with the release of offenders who had successfully participated in a program than those who had not. The link between program participation and increased public comfort with the offender being released on parole demonstrates the importance of continued support for rehabilitative programming within correctional institutions. Not only does programming enhance an offender's capacity for successful reintegration, but the current study suggests that it could also contribute to a greater sense of comfort for the public regarding offenders being released on parole. The findings of this study are congruent with existing research advocating for policies,

mandates, and legislation that increase offender access to programing and reintegration support to not only better prepare them for release but to also help reduce public concerns surrounding parole decisions.

In addition, previous research has shown that successful reintegration is closely linked to an offender's ability to establish stability (e.g., plans for housing and employment) and maintain prosocial support (e.g., community engagement) through an adequate and realistic release plan (Dickson et al., 2013). Providing this support not only benefits the offender, but the findings in the current study suggest that it also enhances public comfort with an offender returning to the community. Specifically, participants reported a higher level of comfort with the offender being released on parole when he had a release plan in place than when he did not. These findings contribute to the growing body of evidence emphasizing the importance of supporting offenders throughout the incarceration process, with specific attention to developing structured release plans that promote public reassurance and successful reintegration.

Personal Proximity

As previously mentioned, the current study also examined public opinion as a significant barrier to offender reintegration into an accepting community. More specifically, this thesis examined the influence of personal proximity on participants' likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with the offender being released on parole. This helped test for the presence of the "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) effect.

Likelihood to Grant Parole

Hypothesis 1c was not supported in the current study, with no significant influence of participants' personal proximity to the offender on likelihood to grant parole being found. This suggests that the decision to grant parole was not affected by whether the offender would be living nearby, such as in the same neighbourhood or community. It is possible that the non-

violent crime presented in the current study (i.e., theft) resulted in the lack of support for Hypothesis 1c and that different findings would emerge with a violent offence. Perhaps participants had less fear of granting parole, even when the offender was going to live next-door, due to the non-violent nature of the crime presented. This possibility is discussed further in the next section.

In addition to the primary hypotheses examined in the current study for personal proximity, an interaction effect was also identified. Specifically, the presence of a release plan influenced participants' likelihood to grant parole only when personal proximity to the offender did not exist. Thus, when participants were informed that the offender would be living next door, the positive influence of having a job or a secure housing plan upon release was diminished. This suggests the presence of the NIMBY effect when considering the influence of release plan on participants' parole decisions. When personal proximity was not present, however, participants were more likely to grant parole when the offender had a release plan than when he did not. Thus, it seems that participants became less responsive to release plan as a mitigating factor when personal proximity was introduced. These findings suggest that the NIMBY effect could undermine the influence of some evidence-based reintegration strategies on public perceptions of granting parole, including the offender having a release plan.

Level of Comfort with Parole Release

Support for Hypothesis 2c was found, with participants reporting significantly higher levels of comfort with the offender being released on parole when he was not being released in close personal proximity to the participant. In other words, participants felt more at ease when the offender was *not* being released on parole to the participants' own neighbourhood. This suggests that stigma is still prevalent among individuals when the idea of living near someone with a criminal record is proposed. This finding aligns with previous research on the NIMBY

phenomenon as it relates offender reintegration. The NIMBY effect contributes substantially to the lack of community acceptance for both offenders and facilities designed to support their reintegration (Pol et al., 2006). While individuals may express general support of rehabilitation-based strategies for offenders, this support diminishes when personal proximity becomes a factor.

Interestingly, support was found for Hypothesis 2c only and not for Hypothesis 1c, which suggests that the NIMBY effect was present for level of comfort with parole release ratings but not for likelihood to grant parole ratings. This contrast offers a meaningful distinction between the two outcome measures examined in this study. While participants may experience discomfort with the idea of an offender living nearby, this discomfort does not necessarily translate into a belief that the offender should be denied parole. This suggests that these two measures are indeed distinct to some extent. Level of comfort likely reflects an internal emotional experience based on the participants' own perspective, whereas likelihood to grant parole involves an external decision-making process that directly impacts the offender.

It is worth noting that the non-violent nature of the theft charge presented in the vignette likely influenced the Hypothesis 1c and 2c findings. While participants may have felt discomfort with the offender being released in close proximity, they may not have believed furthering the offender's incarceration was the appropriate response to alleviate that discomfort given the non-violent nature of the crime. Further investigation is warranted to examine whether similar findings are found with an offender who had committed a violent crime. If the findings differ, this could suggest a potentially distinct public viewpoint toward non-violent offenders.

Secondary Analyses

Recall that in addition to the primary analyses, a couple of secondary analyses were also carried out. Specifically, the secondary focus of the current study was to examine attitudes

towards offenders, alongside program participation, release plan, and personal proximity, as predictors of participants' likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with the offender being released. These attitudes are crucial in shaping how society responds to crime. They influence not only the policies and practices of the criminal justice system but also affect broader social interactions and community dynamics. This involved running a standard multiple linear regression analysis for both outcome measures. Notably, these analyses were more exploratory and preliminary in nature.

Likelihood to Grant Parole

Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c were supported. The regression model which included program participation, release plan, personal proximity, and attitudes toward offenders as predictors, was significant for participants' ratings of likelihood to grant parole. Program participation and release plan were also identified as the two strongest predictors of the likelihood to grant parole. This finding is unsurprising given the main findings of the current study, which highlighted the significant influence of program participation and release planning on parole decision-making. In addition, the lack of support for Hypothesis 3d is consistent with the main analyses, which found no significant relationship between personal proximity and the likelihood of granting parole.

The new component of the secondary analyses was the inclusion of the Attitudes Towards Offender (ATO) scale (Melvin et al., 1985), which was thought to also influence participants' likelihood to grant parole ratings. Hypothesis 3e was supported, as participants' attitudes towards offenders significantly predicted their likelihood to grant parole. These findings suggest that preconceived attitudes toward offenders can influence parole decisions, indicating the

importance of addressing and mitigating such biases towards offenders to promote a more impartial and just parole decision-making process.

It is important to note, however, that ATO scores were not the strongest predictor in the model. This finding further supports the notion that parole outcome decisions could primarily be influenced by dynamic factors, such as program participant and the quality of the release plan. This outcome is encouraging, as it suggests that decision-making is driven more by tangible, results-based factors rather than by preconceived or biased attitudes. While preconceived attitudes toward offenders may still impact parole decisions, their influence appears to be less impactful than that of evidence-based factors. That said, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as the study design likely influenced the strength of ATO scores as a predictor and additional research is certainly warranted to build on these preliminary results.

Limited research has examined the use of the ATO scale as a predictor of parole decisions. The majority of existing research focuses either on characteristics that influence attitudes toward offenders or specifically targets attitudes toward sex offenders (Rade et al., 2016). The findings of the current study may suggest that attitudes toward offenders have less influence when considering individuals convicted of less controversial or fear-provoking crimes, such as non-violent theft. This is consistent with existing research related to perceived dangerousness which indicates that the public is less accepting of offenders entering their communities if they are viewed as dangerous, such as those convicted of murder and sex offences as opposed to nonviolent offenders (Hirshfield & Piquero, 2011).

Level of Comfort with Parole Release

The regression model including program participation, release plan, personal proximity, and attitudes toward offenders as predictors was also significant for participants' comfort level with offender release on parole, which supports Hypothesis 4a. In addition, support for

Hypotheses 4b and 4c was found, which is again consistent with the main analyses in the expected direction. Program participation and release plan were the two strongest predictors of level of comfort with parole release, which further emphasizes the importance of these dynamic factors in public perceptions of parole decisions. Hypothesis 4d was also supported, indicating that personal proximity significantly predicted level of comfort ratings; it was the fourth strongest predictor in the model. This again mirrors the findings from the main analyses and further supports the likelihood of granting parole and level of comfort with parole release as distinct outcome measures.

Regarding attitudes toward offenders as a predictor of comfort with parole release, Hypothesis 4e was supported. Preconceived attitudes toward offenders significantly influenced level of comfort ratings, with more positive views of offenders being associated with higher level of comfort with parole release. However, ATO scores were only the third strongest predictor of level of comfort ratings with parole release.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The findings from the current study are interesting and make an important contribution to the field; however, there are several limitations that need to be mentioned. First, the sample size may have impacted the findings, as some interaction effects approached significance but did not successfully meet significance. Although the effect sizes for those interactions are considered small, a somewhat larger sample would still have likely yielded more robust results. A larger sample may also result in fewer violations of assumptions. As noted previously, the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated for the likelihood to grant parole ANOVA. This should be noted as a limitation, as it may have limited the generalizability of those findings.

In addition, the current study relied on a sample of university students, which could have also impacted the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample beyond university students to include a broader community population will be vital for the continued assessment of NIMBY-related effects. In particular, students are often younger and may lack strong connections to a neighbourhood, such as home ownership or having children, which could influence their perceptions of living near someone with a criminal record who was released on parole. Including participants with greater community investment may offer more generalizable insights into public attitudes toward offender reintegration.

Further, the likelihood to grant scale used in this thesis was based on a rating from 0 to 100. However, parole decisions are typically made dichotomously (i.e., either yes or no). The current study did also collect dichotomous grant or deny parole decisions from participants, but the continuous responses were used in the analyses, as they are appropriate for an ANOVA. The collection of the grant or deny data, however, did allow for a comparison across the two measures. Participants who indicated that yes, they would grant the offender parole, had significantly higher likelihood to grant parole ratings ($M = 69.07$, $SD = 15.68$) than those who said no, they would not grant the offender parole ($M = 33.27$, $SD = 18.77$), $t(250) = 16.43$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, participants' likelihood to grant parole ratings did at least seem to match quite well with granting parole as a yes or no decision.

Previous research has determined that members of reform groups, offenders themselves, correctional officers, and police officers all have very different attitudes towards offenders and parole than student and community samples (Melvin et al., 1985). Thus, populations specific to corrections would be interesting to investigate further. Examining how these corrections-specific groups react to program participation, release plan, and personal proximity would provide further

information on how the findings could differ across these groups and compared to the general public.

A comparative study examining public perceptions of violent versus non-violent crime is also recommended. At this stage, violent crimes, specifically crimes involving a victim, should be considered separately from non-violent offences, as it is likely that differences in the findings will emerge. Gaining a deeper understanding of how the public differentiates violent and non-violent crime may support more tailored and effective approaches to rehabilitation. For instance, perhaps individuals convicted of non-violent crimes are viewed favourably in terms of parole when they have successfully completed a treatment program, but perhaps the same cannot be said of violent offenders. It is also worth noting that the current study only focused on an offender who had either “successfully completed” or “did not successfully complete” participation in a treatment program, specifically the Moderate Integrated Correctional Program Model (MICPM). Future research could examine whether differences are found for an offender who started but did not complete a treatment program. Different treatment programs could also be examined as well.

Future research could also examine additional offender- and offence-specific variables. Although the goal of the current study chose was to focus on two factors that are more under the control of the offender (i.e., program participation and release plan), as well as assess the NIMBY effect, future research could also include more static variables. This could include an examination of various crime types (even more specific than violent versus non-violent, which was previously mentioned), as well as victim or offender characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age). Examining the race-crime congruency effect in relation to NIMBY could provide further insights. Regarding juror decision-making, Jones and Kaplan (2003) found that when the

defendant's race matched common crime stereotypes (e.g., a Black defendant charged with auto theft), as opposed to when it did not (e.g., a Black defendant charged with embezzlement), verdicts and attributions were more negative, information search was more limited, and there was a greater focus on confirmatory evidence. This race and crime type interaction could also be present in NIMBY attitudes regarding level of comfort and racial biases.

The current study also included a preliminary examination of a participant factor as well with the secondary analyses (i.e., attitudes toward offenders). Future research could assess additional participant variables as well (e.g., political ideology, interpersonal contact with offenders), including a deeper consideration of attitudes toward offenders. This would build on the current research by providing a deeper understanding of how offender programming and release plan influence likelihood to grant parole and level of comfort with parole release across various conditions.

Finally, the cultural context in which an incarcerated individual is re-entering can greatly influence how they are perceived and the level of comfort others feel regarding their return. Expanding the current study design to examine different cultural justice-based practices would offer additional valuable insights. For instance, Healing Lodges have been incorporated into the Correctional Service of Canada to provide Indigenous offenders with access to culturally appropriate supports. A potential meaningful direction for future research would be exploring how Indigenous communities perceive formerly incarcerated individuals and whether their levels of community acceptance differ. Such an investigation could shed light on the role of culturally rooted rehabilitation models and the potential for more inclusive, community-based reintegration practices.

Conclusion

The current study demonstrated the importance of offenders having both successful program completion and an established plan upon release to both increase likelihood of parole being granted and reduce levels of discomfort with release on parole. Further, support regarding the Not In My Backyard Effect was established in terms of level of comfort with release on parole, in which participants were more comfortable when there was no personal proximity with where the parolee would be living. Interestingly, release plan was only found to have a significant influence on likelihood to grant parole when the offender was going to be released into the community in general and not next-door to the participant.

Although correctional systems and incarcerated populations are largely hidden from public view, 73.2% of individuals incarcerated in Canadian correctional facilities will ultimately return to their communities (Public Safety Canada, 2022). Upon release, they face major reintegration challenges, with public stigma being a significant barrier. The findings of the current study highlight the need for effective reintegration programs and public support to help ease societal discomfort and improve outcomes for parolees. Public attitudes play a key role in shaping criminal justice policies, social interactions, and community dynamics. Promoting positive perceptions of offenders in the community can help facilitate smoother transitions and better long-term outcomes. Addressing barriers such as the NIMBY effect and identifying factors that promote acceptance are crucial for fostering compassionate, evidence-informed attitudes and stronger support for offender reintegration efforts.

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Appendix A - Student Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Research Study: Should this Offender be Released?

Name of Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Karla Emeno

PI's email: karla.emeno@ontariotechu.ca

Student Lead: Emily Matthewson

Student Lead's email: emily.matthewson@ontariotechu.net

Departmental and institutional affiliation(s): Ontario Tech University Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Should this Offender be Released” You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read the information about the study presented in this form. The form includes details on study procedures, risks and benefits that you should know before you decide to participate. You should take as much time as you need to make your decision. You should ask the Principal Investigator (PI) or study team to explain anything that you do not understand and make sure that all of your questions have been answered before signing this consent form. Before you make your decision, feel free to talk about this study with anyone you wish, including your friends and family. Participation in this study is voluntary.

This study has been reviewed by the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (Ontario Tech University) Research Ethics Board [25054] on [insert date].

Purpose and Procedure:

This study aims to investigate individuals' perceptions of an offender eligible for parole in different contexts. This study is being conducted to develop a better understanding of what factors may affect perceptions of offenders. You have been invited to participate in this study because you meet the inclusion criteria of being 18 years or older. We are aiming to recruit a total of 300 participants for this study.

In this study, you will read a fictional case file regarding an offender that is eligible for parole and complete an anonymous online survey consisting of a series of seven questionnaires: a demographic questionnaire, three questionnaires pertaining to the scenarios you read, and three questionnaires pertaining to personal attitudes towards offenders and the correctional system.

The anonymized data will be aggregated and statistically analyzed for patterns and trends that will inform the research purpose. This study will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Potential Benefits:

Your participation in this study will contribute to new knowledge and facts relevant to many fields, including but not limited to psychology. Moreover, the results of this study will have beneficial implications for the research community, as the results of this study will be used to inform future research and have practical implications.

Potential Risks or Discomforts:

This study involves no more than minimal risks. The fictional case presented in this study involves brief details regarding criminal activity and could be mildly distressing for some people to read. If you anticipate that such material may cause you distress, you may choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate but experience anxiety or discomfort at any point during the study, you can withdraw at any point without consequence. After completing the study, you will be debriefed and provided with resources in the event that you feel distressed or anxious as a result of your participation.

In the event that you find your involvement in the study distressing, you can contact Ontario Tech's Student Mental Health Services at 905-721-3392, the Crisis Text Line at <https://www.crisistextline.org/> or the Canadian Mental Health Association's 24-hour crisis line at 1-833-456-4566.

Use and Storage of Data:

The information that you provide will be stored indefinitely on password-protected computers, external hard drives, and the University's secure cloud storage (e.g., Google Drive, G suite), accessible only to members of the research team and other researchers for valid research purposes, such as meta-analyses, replication, and publication (permission will be asked in an optional section at the end of this form). A separate REB application will be submitted for the secondary use of data for any future research purposes. All information collected during this study, including your personal information, will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside the study unless required by law. You will not be named in any reports, publications, or presentations that may come from this study.

You will be asked to provide basic demographic information about yourself (e.g., age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, etc.), but none of this information will be identifying in nature. This demographic data is being collected to determine if any personal characteristics may influence the outcomes in this study. If data is shared, the data will be aggregated to maintain anonymity. To protect the confidentiality of your responses further, only group results will be reported. Raw and processed data may be shared with other researchers as is standard practice in

psychology, but given that no identifying information will be collected, this will not/cannot be shared.

The survey software used to collect this data, Qualtrics, does not store any sensitive, identifiable, or confidential participant information, but it will save all survey responses, and it may store IP addresses. Thus, all study data will also be stored on Qualtrics' restricted firewall and DDOS-protected servers, which require authorization and are not accessible via web traffic. These servers are monitored 24/7, contained in environmentally controlled data centers, and are primarily located in Ireland (and subject to the data laws and regulations of the country where the servers are located).

Confidentiality:

Your privacy shall be respected. No information about your identity will be shared or published without your permission unless required by law. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law, professional practice, and ethical codes of conduct. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit over the Internet.

This research study includes the collection of demographic data, which will be aggregated (not individually presented) in an effort to protect your anonymity. Despite best efforts, it is possible that your identity can be determined even when data is aggregated.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may partake in only those aspects of the study in which you feel comfortable. You may also decide not to be in this study or to be in the study now and then change your mind later. You may leave the study at any time without affecting your research credit. You will be given information that is relevant to your decision to continue or withdraw from participation.

Right to Withdraw:

If you would like to withdraw, you must do so before data collection begins. After you begin, the study is anonymized, which means there is no way for us to determine which responses in the resulting dataset are yours to delete them. If you choose to exit the study by closing the browser window, severely incomplete data will not be analyzed, but all survey data—even incomplete responses—will be stored on Qualtrics' servers (located in secure, environmentally controlled data centers with 24/7 monitoring), and mostly complete surveys may still be analyzed. Thus, the only way to ensure that your responses are not included in this research is to choose not to participate.

Conflict of Interest:

Researchers have an interest in completing this study. Their interests should not influence your decision to participate in this study.

Compensation:

In exchange for completing this study, you will receive research credits toward your psychology course. Participants who wish to withdraw from the study for any reason will still receive course credit.

Debriefing and Dissemination of Results:

You may contact the researchers using the above contact information if you are interested in learning the results of this study or have any questions. However, you will not receive feedback about your individual participation because only aggregate results will be published. Please note that communication via e-mail is not absolutely secure. Thus, please do not communicate sensitive personal information via email. The data from this study may be presented in aggregate/group form through posters, presentations, or manuscripts.

Participant Rights and Concerns:

Please read this consent form carefully and feel free to ask the researcher any questions that you might have about the study. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, complaints, or adverse events, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 721-8668 ext. 3693 or at researchethics@ontariotechu.ca.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or experience any discomfort related to the study, please contact the researcher, Dr. Karla Emeno, at karla.emeno@ontariotechu.ca, or the student lead, Emily Matthewson, at emily.matthewson@ontariotechu.net

By signing this form, you do not give up any of your legal rights against the investigators, sponsor or involved institutions for compensation, nor does this form relieve the investigators, sponsor or involved institutions of their legal and professional responsibilities.

Consent to Participate:

1. I have read the consent form and understand the study being described.
2. [If applicable] I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I am free to ask questions about the study in the future.
3. I freely consent to participate in the research study, understanding that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. A copy of this Consent Form has been made available to me.

I agree

Optional Secondary Use of Research for Future Research Purposes

1. I understand the possible need for secondary research uses of my research data for future research use and provide consent for the use of my data to be used in future studies.
2. The research team has informed me that a separate REB application will be submitted for the secondary use of data for any future research purposes.

I agree

Appendix B

Demographic Form

What year of study are you currently in?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Other (please specify): _____
- Prefer not to say

What faculty are you in? ____

- Faculty of Business and Information Technology
- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Energy Systems and Nuclear Science
- Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science
- Faculty of Health Sciences
- Faculty of Science
- Faculty of Social Science and Humanities
- Other. Please specify: _____
- Prefer not to say

Please indicate your age (in years) using the slider below.

***Participants will respond by using a slider provided on the computer screen to indicate their age.*

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Transgender male
- Transgender female
- Other (please specify): _____
- Prefer not to say

Ethnicity: Please indicate which ethnic group you would consider yourself to belong to by checking all boxes that apply.

- White (e.g., European)
- Black (e.g., African, African American, African Canadian, Caribbean)
- East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Polynesian)
- South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi)
- Southeast Asian (e.g., Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Laotian, Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese)

- West Asian (e.g., Arabian, Armenian, Iranian, Israeli, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, Turkish)
- Latino/Latina/Latinx (e.g., Mexican, Indigenous Central and South American)
- Indigenous Canadian (i.e., First Nations, Metis, Inuit)
- Prefer not to say

Which political party do you most identify with?

- Conservative
- Green Party
- Liberal
- New Democratic Party (NDP)
- Other (please specify): _____
- None
- Prefer not to say

Are you fluent in English?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Appendix C

Attitudes Towards Offenders Scale

Below are statements regarding offenders in provincial and federal correctional facilities within Canada. There are no right or wrong answers, only opinions. You are asked to express your feelings by indicating whether you (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, or (5) Strongly Agree with each statement. Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

Rating Scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. Offenders are different from most people. * (* reverse coded)
2. Only a few offenders are really dangerous.
3. Offenders never change. *
4. Most offenders are victims of circumstance and deserve to be helped.
5. Offenders have feelings like the rest of us.
6. It is not wise to trust an offender too far. *
7. I think I would like a lot of offenders.
8. Bad prison conditions just make an offender more bitter.
9. Give an offender an inch and they will take a mile. *
10. Most offenders are stupid. *
11. Offenders need affection and praise just like anybody else.
12. You should not expect too much from an offender. *
13. Trying to rehabilitate offenders is a waste of time and money. *
14. You never know when an offender is telling the truth. *
15. Offenders are no better or worse than other people.
16. You have to be constantly on your guard with offenders. *
17. In general, offenders think and act alike. *
18. If you give an offender your respect, they will give you the same.
19. Offenders only think about themselves. *
20. There are some offenders I would trust with my life.
21. Offenders will listen to reason.
22. Most offenders are too lazy to earn an honest living. *
23. I wouldn't mind living next door to an ex-offender.
24. Offenders are just plain mean at heart. *
25. Offenders are always trying to get something out of somebody. *
26. The values of most offenders are about the same as the rest of us.
27. I would never want one of my family members dating an ex-offender. *
28. Most offenders have the capacity for love.
29. Offenders are just plain immoral. *
30. Offenders should be under strict, harsh discipline. *
31. In general, offenders are basically bad people. *
32. Most offenders can be rehabilitated.
33. Some offenders are pretty nice people.
34. I would like associating with some offenders.

35. Offenders respect only brute force. *

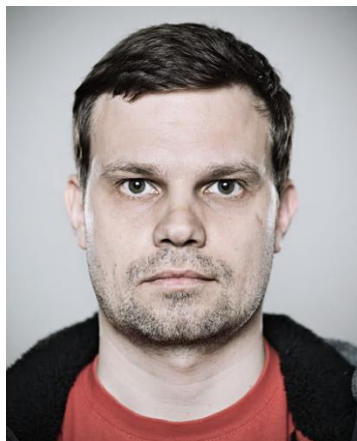
36. If a person does well in prison, they should be let out on parole.

Appendix D

Offender Parole Report Vignette

Parole is defined as a conditional release from a correctional institution. It permits an offender to serve the remainder of their sentence in the community under the supervision of a probation and parole officer.

You will now take on the role of parole decision maker. Please carefully review the case report below and use the information provided to decide if parole should be granted or denied.



Name: JANES, Peter
FPS: 495 678 924
Age: 32

This report summarizes key details of Offender JANES (Fingerprint Serial FPS: 495 678 924) in the context of parole eligibility. JANES is serving his first federal sentence of 3 years and 21 days for Theft over 5,000 under section 344(1)(b) of the Criminal Code of Canada. JANES committed a series of thefts from electronic stores which the total value was estimated to be 12,300 dollars. JANES has no history of substance abuse, mental illness or violent institutional misconduct.

While incarcerated, JANES **successfully completed / did not successfully complete** participation in the Moderate Integrated Correctional Program Model (MICPM). The MICPM utilizes cognitive-behavioural strategies and social learning to target skills that reduce harmful behaviour, as well as changing anti-social attitudes, beliefs, and associates. The skills taught include goal setting, problem solving, interpersonal communication skills, coping skills, and self-management skills.

While incarcerated, JANES **has/has not** developed a plan if released on parole. In particular, JANES **has/does not have** a job interview for a maintenance company and **has/does not have** a housing/ plan to live with his sister. **He has stated that his sister lives in a prosocial neighbourhood and would provide distance from previous criminal associates./ He has stated that he does not know if he could live with any family members.**

Appendix E

Manipulation Check

Please answer the following multiple-choice questions about the vignette you read.

1. Did Offender JANES successfully complete participation in the Moderate Integrated Correctional Program Model (MICPM) program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't remember
 - d. Prefer not to say

2. What offence was JANES convicted of?
 - a. Robbery
 - b. Assault
 - c. Drug Possession
 - d. I don't remember
 - e. Prefer not to say

3. Did JANES have a release plan prepared in case of release?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Not
 - c. I don't remember
 - d. Prefer not to say

Appendix F

Parole Decision Form

Upon further review of the file you discover the address where Peter Janes would be released is next door to your current residence. This means he would be your neighbour if released on parole. // OR nothing is shown

Please answer the following questions based on the parole report you have just read. Please check your answers.

1. Would you *grant or deny* the offender parole based on the parole report you just read? Please check your answer.

Grant Parole

Deny Parole

On a scale from 0-100 Please rate your likelihood to grant parole.

2. Please describe how you made your final parole decision (i.e., what factors did you consider in reaching your verdict to grant or deny).

Appendix G

Parole Location Form (vanAlphen et al., 2010)

Upon review of the case file, the Parole Board of Canda has determined that Peter Janes is to be granted parole and released to his sister in her community.

1. Rate your comfortability levels to have Peter Janes as a new next-door neighbour.

Very Uncomfortable (0)	Somewhat Uncomfortable (25)	Neutral (50)	Somewhat Comfortable (75)	Very Comfortable (100)
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2. Rate how well the traits below describes your new next-door neighbour Peter Janes.

Traits: Sociability (*friendly, outgoing, take advantage of others, antisocial, bossy*),
Dangerousness (*dangerous, unpredictable, and self-controlled*),

Not at all (1)	Weak (2)	Moderate (3)	Strong (4)	Very Strong (5)
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3. Rate the intensity of the emotions below while imagining Peter Janes as your new neighbour.

Emotions: Positive (*compassion, pleased, tenderness, calm, trust and sympathy*),
Negative (*worry, fear, disapproval, irritation, disgust, and anger*)

Not at all (1)	Weak (2)	Moderate (3)	Strong (4)	Very Strong (5)
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4. Do you agree with the Parole Board Decision to release JANES into your neighbourhood?
0 -100 scale and Open ended

Appendix H

Parole Decision-Making Factors (Reiger & Serin, 2024)

Decision Factors:

1. Criminal History
2. History on Supervision
3. Institutional Behaviour
4. Mental Illness
5. Offender Change
6. Police Information
7. Presence or Absence of Remorse
8. Program Participation
9. Release Plan
10. Severity of Index Offense
11. Substance Use History
12. Time Served
13. Type of Index Offense
14. Victim Information
15. Victim Input
16. Risk Assessment

1. From your perspective to what extent are the following factors important to inform an individual is suitable for release? (Rate each factor on below scale)

Not at all Important (1)	Slightly Important (2)	Moderately Important (3)	Fairly Important (4)	Extremely Important (5)	Not Considered (6)
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2. What factors, if problematic, could preclude release on parole? (select all that apply)
3. From your perspective, which of the following factors have been demonstrated by empirical research as important in release decision-making? (select all that apply)
4. From your perspective, which of the following factors have been demonstrated by empirical research as important in predicting recidivism outcome? (select all that apply)

Appendix I

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale

Listed below are a number of statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Read each item and decide whether the statement is true or false as it pertains to you personally.

1. Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates. (T)
2. I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble. (T)
3. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged. (F)
4. I have never intensely disliked anyone. (T)
5. On occasion I have had doubts about my ability to succeed in life. (F)
6. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way. (F)
7. I am always careful about my manner of dress. (T)
8. My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant. (T)
9. If I could get into a movie without paying and be sure I was not seen I would probably do it. (F) ,
10. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability. (F)
11. I like to gossip at times. (F)
12. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right. (F) ,
13. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener. (T)
14. I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something. (F)
15. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone. (F)
16. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake. (T)
17. I always try to practice what I preach. (T)
18. I don't find it particularly difficult to get along with loud mouthed, obnoxious people. (T)
19. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget. (F)
20. When I don't know something, I don't at all mind admitting it. (T)
21. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable. (T)
22. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way. (F)
23. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things. (F)
24. I would never think of letting someone else be punished for my wrongdoings. (T)
25. I never resent being asked to return a favour. (T)
26. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own. (T)
27. I never make a long trip without checking the safety of my car. (T)
28. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others. (F)
29. I have almost never felt the urge to tell someone off. (T)
30. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me. (F)
31. I have never felt that I was punished without cause. (T)
32. I sometimes think when people have a misfortune, they only got what they deserved. (F)
33. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings. (T)

Appendix J

Attitudes Towards Corrections Descriptives

1. Have you had any personal experience with the Canadian Correctional System? Y/N
2. Do you know anyone currently or previously incarcerated in either a Provincial or Federal Correctional Facility? Y/N
3. Do you know anyone currently or previously on parole? Y/N
4. Do you know anyone currently or previously working at a Provincial or Federal Correctional Facility? Y/N
5. Are you familiar with Correctional Reform Policies?
6. Would you be supportive of implementing new strategies within Corrections?
7. What is the likelihood that you would vote for a politician who supports reform practices for the Canadian Correctional System? very unlikely (0) – very likely (5)
8. What would make you feel comfortable living next to an individual on parole? _____
9. What information provided could increase comfort levels with residing near a parole? _____

Appendix K - Student Debriefing

The goal of our research is to explore how an offender case report is perceived in different contexts. This study was specifically interested in whether perceptions of offenders differ based on personal proximity and the presence of supportive measures such as program participation and release plan. The results of this study have several important implications, including understanding the influence of mitigative factors on public perceptions of offenders to further dissect how rehabilitative practices for offenders are perceived by the public. Rehabilitative efforts may have a potential influence on the very prevalent Not In My Backyard effect among perceptions of offenders.

We would like to remind you that your information will remain confidential, and submitted responses cannot be deleted (due to the anonymized nature of the data collected).

In the event that you found your involvement in the study distressing, you can contact Ontario Tech's Student Mental Health Services at 905-721-3392, the Crisis Text Line at <https://www.crisistextline.org/> or the Canadian Mental Health Association's 24-hour crisis line at 1-833-456-4566. For sexual violence support, you can also contact the Sexual Assault Centre's 24-hour support line at 905-525-4162.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or study findings, please contact the student researcher, Emily Matthewson, (emily.matthewson@ontariotecu.net), the principal investigator, Dr. Karla Emeno (karla.emeno@ontariotechu.ca). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, complaints, or experience adverse events, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 721-8668 ext. 3693 or at researchethics@ontariotechu.ca.

This study has been reviewed by the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (Ontario Tech University) Research Ethics Board [25054] on [insert date].

Thank you so much for taking part in our study!

Appendix L

Means and Standard Deviations for Outcome Measures

Table L1

Means and Standard Deviations for Likelihood to Grant Parole

Personal Proximity (NIMBY)	Successful Program Completion	Plan upon Release	Likelihood to Grant Parole		
			<i>M</i> [1-100]	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
No Personal Proximity	No Program Completion	No Release Plan	23.7	14.78	30
		Yes Release Plan	59.74	19.91	34
		Total	42.84	25.23	64
	Yes Program Completion	No Release Plan	56.31	23.97	29
		Yes Release Plan	71.89	17.81	36
		Total	64.94	22.04	65
	Total	No Release Plan	39.73	25.63	59
		Yes Release Plan	65.99	19.70	70
		Total	53.98	26.06	129
Yes Personal Proximity	No Program Completion	No Release Plan	40.09	23.21	33
		Yes Release Plan	47.59	19.15	27
		Total	43.47	21.64	60
	Yes Program Completion	No Release Plan	63.10	21.22	31
		Yes Release Plan	68.47	14.35	32
		Total	65.83	18.12	63
	Total	No Release Plan	51.23	24.95	64
		Yes Release Plan	58.92	19.61	59

		Total	54.92	22.78	123
Total	No Program Completion	No Release Plan	32.29	21.18	63
		Yes Release Plan	54.36	20.35	61
		Total	43.15	23.47	124
	Yes Program Completion	No Release Plan	59.82	22.66	60
		Yes Release Plan	70.28	16.24	68
		Total	65.38	20.13	128
Total	No Release Plan	45.72	25.83	123	
	Yes Release Plan	62.75	19.90	129	
	Total	54.44	24.47	252	

Table L2

Means and Standard Deviations for Level of Comfort with Parole Release

Personal Proximity (NIMBY)	Successful Program Completion	Plan upon Release	Level of Comfort with Parole Release		
			<i>M</i> [1-100]	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
No Personal Proximity	No Program Completion	No Release Plan	31.20	25.71	30
		Yes Release Plan	59.15	21.74	34
		Total	46.05	27.38	64
	Yes Program Completion	No Release Plan	56.83	23.08	29
		Yes Release Plan	69.06	19.99	36
		Total	63.60	22.12	65
Total	No Release Plan	43.80	27.48	59	
	Yes Release Plan	64.24	21.30	70	

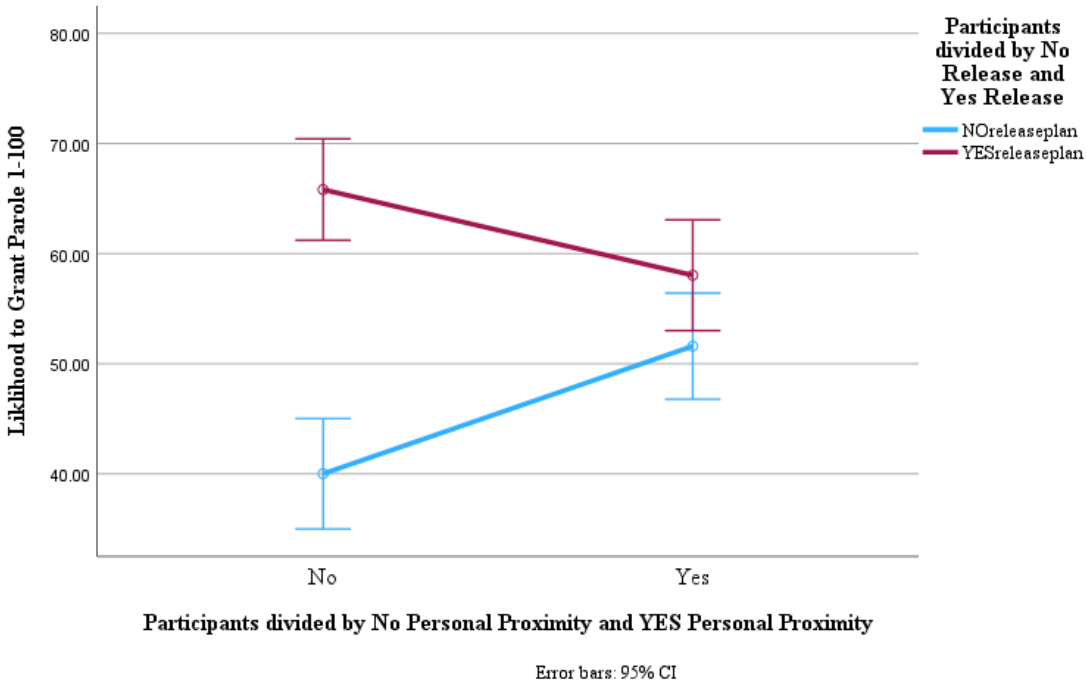
		Total	54.89	26.29	129
Yes Personal Proximity	No Program Completion	No Release Plan	27.27	22.37	33
		Yes Release Plan	38.85	21.33	27
		Total	32.48	22.49	60
	Yes Program Completion	No Release Plan	50.61	24.27	31
		Yes Release Plan	56.84	22.43	32
		Total	53.78	23.38	63
	Total	No Release Plan	38.58	25.94	64
		Yes Release Plan	48.61	23.55	59
		Total	43.39	25.23	123
Total	No Program Completion	No Release Plan	29.14	23.91	63
		Yes Release Plan	50.16	23.91	61
		Total	39.48	23.67	124
	Yes Program Completion	No Release Plan	53.62	23.71	60
		Yes Release Plan	63.31	21.89	68
		Total	58.77	23.19	128
	Total	No Release Plan	41.09	26.71	123
		Yes Release Plan	57.09	23.60	129
		Total	49.28	26.36	252

Appendix M

Graphs for Significant Interactions

Figure M1

Likelihood to Grant Parole Interaction: Release Plan and Personal Proximity



Note: Only No Personal Proximity Reached Significance

Figure M2

Likelihood to Grant Parole Interaction: Release Plan and Program Participation

