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Joan Petersilia: A Life and Legacy of Academic and Practical Impact

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Keywords

Joan Petersilia, biography, criminal careers, community corrections, parole and reentry, crime policy, lessons learned

Abstract

This review focuses on the life and career of Joan Petersilia, one of the most important corrections scholars of the past fifty years. The article discusses her formative years, her career spanning from college through her final appointment at Stanford Law School, her major research projects, and her impact on policy, practice, and the academic field of criminology. For more than forty years, Joan chose to do research that affected the real world, treating policymakers and practitioners as equal partners in efforts to improve the implementation of justice, especially that occurring postconviction. Her unique style allowed her to easily communicate the ideas and research from academe to a wide range of audiences, including the general public, policymakers, and practitioners. By doing so, Joan made a significant impact on the criminal justice system and was recognized for her body of work by receiving the 2014 Stockholm Prize, arguably the most prestigious recognition in criminology.

WHO WAS JOAN PETERSILIA?

Joan Petersilia (1951–2019) was one of the most influential criminologists of all time, and she died of cancer much too young at the age of 68. She was also one of the inaugural editors, along with Robert Sampson, of this publication, the *Annual Review of Criminology*. Her studies spanned an array of topics over more than 45 years in the field that manifests as a body of work that consistently focused on real-world, practical problems facing the criminal justice system, especially events that occur postconviction. When I interviewed her for the American Society of Criminology's (ASC) Oral History Project in 2012, she noted that she was proud that she had never done a project without practitioners as partners at the table. Joan believed that this aspect of her work gained her both the most praise (treating practitioners as relevant experts) and the most criticism (getting "too close" to those who work in the field). I asked her then what she most wanted to be remembered for, and she replied that you can both be a rigorous experimental criminologist and do research that is practically relevant (Lane 2012). This essay discusses her as a person and as a researcher, illustrating that her impact exceeds that expectation and merited the field's highest recognition in the form of the 2014 Stockholm Prize.

Joan's family of origin was borne out of World War II, when her dad, an Air Force general, met her mother, an Army nurse, while overseas. They married before the war ended, and after raised four daughters while moving across the United States as her father continued to pursue his Air Force career. When Joan was in high school, the family landed in Annandale, Virginia, for a few years, where Joan was a cheerleader and the football star's girlfriend. After her father retired, the family moved to Pacific Palisades, California, where Joan was less integrated socially and focused more on academic endeavors to occupy her time. Her parents expected their daughters to get an education and become financially independent, and they all eventually earned advanced degrees. She credited her parents for much of her eventual career success because they emphasized a strong work ethic and helping others who were less fortunate (Lane 2006).

WHAT DID JOAN DO?

Career Events: From College Student to Stanford Law School Professor

Joan married her high school football star from Virginia, who resided in Los Angeles at the time, after her sophomore year at Loyola Marymount University. After they graduated, they moved to Ohio State University, where her husband had been accepted into graduate school. Although Joan was interested in social work, and helping others, serendipity at this point brought her into the field of criminology. She had planned to wait a year to go to graduate school but was able to explore the possibility earlier. When she visited the sociology department to explore her options there, she met Simon Dinitz, a famous criminologist and 1971 president of the ASC. While taking this course and while working as Dinitz's research assistant, Joan became passionate about criminology as she worked on a study of a halfway house for women on parole. This experience was the start of her career-long interest in examining the effectiveness of correctional efforts. After earning her master's degree in 1974, Joan returned to Los Angeles hoping to become a probation officer, but another serendipitous event occurred. In 1974, Peter Greenwood was starting a criminal justice program at RAND and offered her a job as a researcher, and then taught her how to conduct practical research. She worked for RAND for about eighteen years, eventually directing the criminal justice program from 1989 until 1992, when she became a professor at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). During her time at RAND, Joan had two boys and later got divorced, worked on her PhD, and became the 1990 president of the ASC, only the second woman to do so. She was elected President of the ASC prior to finishing her PhD (Lane 2006). After returning to UCI in 1992 as a professor, Joan mentored many graduate students, including me. She also

soon remarried and moved with her new husband, Steve Thomas, to Santa Barbara, California, which commenced a 2-hour commute to work each way for much of her UCI career. She was the founding director of UCI's Center for Evidence-Based Corrections, handing the leadership of that Center over to her longtime RAND and current UCI colleague and collaborator, Susan Turner, in 2009 when Joan became the Adelbert H. Sweet Professor of Law and codirector of the Stanford Criminal Justice Center. She ended her academic career at Stanford at the end of 2018, less than a year before her death (Lane & Garcia 2014).

Important Policy Appointments and Activities

During her career, Joan also held several important policy appointments, which illustrated her impact on real-world justice system policy. Her most influential position in terms of impact on the daily operations of the justice system likely was her four years as an embedded criminologist helping to reform the California corrections system (2004–2008). At the time, the California prison system was in crisis with consent decrees and malfeasance, and then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was focused on change. Her participation during this period included appointments as Special Advisor for Policy, Planning and Research, cochair of the Expert Panel on Adult Offender Programming, and Chair of the Rehabilitation Strike Team, which was to help implement the AB900 prison reform legislation (Petersilia 2008b, p. 335). Joan helped the state with three efforts—reorganization of the correctional system, growth of rehabilitation programming inside prisons, and restructuring parole supervision policies. Although the system did not reach all the goals, the reform efforts included moving those who committed low-level, nonviolent crimes from state to county control, which helped downsize and reduce overcrowding and presumably moved them closer to needed community services. In addition, California stopped supervised parole for nonviolent, nonserious releases and diverted some parole violators away from prison based on risk, which was a major policy shift in the state with the largest parole system in the country. In the mid-2000s in California, most new prison admissions were parole violators, and 66% of parolees returned to prison within three years (Grattet et al. 2009). Joan's influential book *When Prisoners Come Home*: *Parole and Prisoner Reentry* (Petersilia 2003) served as a catalyst for discussion and reform, as implementation efforts included distributing the book to people in the California policy and practitioner world. Unlike many academic books, this one included specific, policy-related recommendations that realistically could be implemented in the field by those working in parole and reentry. For example, Joan recommended that rather than focusing solely on facility management, prison administrators should consider public safety and prisoner reintegration as part of their mission. She also emphasized the importance of providing treatment and work opportunities inside prisons like those outside prisons, prerelease planning, and reinstituting risk-based, discretionary parole release and better monitoring of high-risk, violent releasees (Petersilia 2003). While she was embedded during this time, Joan also helped ensure the newly named California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation brought back their research arm, which it had recently shuttered (Petersilia 2010). Upon reflection, Joan said, "The bottom line is that I think I made a difference" (Petersilia 2008b, p. 339).

Joan served in several other important policy capacities during her career. She was the cochair (with Rick Rosenfeld) of the Committee on Community Supervision and Desistance from Crime for the National Research Council (NRC), which produced a report summarizing the research on the effects of supervision on desistance (Natl. Res. Counc. 2008). She was the study coordinator for the earlier NRC workshop on Crime Victims with Disabilities (Natl. Res. Counc. 2001), which was especially important to her because she had two sons with Fragile X Syndrome, a genetic condition that causes developmental disabilities. Joan was one of the first criminologists to consider the impacts of justice on people with disabilities (Petersilia 1997, 2001a). As with all her work, this

was not just an academic or personal interest for her; it was motivated by a genuine desire to improve people's lives and that meant improving the systems with which they had contact. Joan was a member of the California Task Force for Persons with Developmental Disabilities for six years and founded a local Tri-Counties Justice and Disabilities Task Force near her home in Santa Barbara. During her career, Joan was on the advisory boards or a consultant for the US Office of the Attorney General, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the National Institute of Corrections, the American Probation and Parole Association, the US Sentencing Commission, and many state and local justice agencies. Some of these state and local agencies included California's Administrative Office of the Courts, California Youth Authority, Minnesota's Department of Corrections, Los Angeles County Probation and Sheriff's Departments, Ventura (CA) Corrections Services Agency, Orange County (CA) Probation Department, the Santa Barbara (CA) Blue Ribbon Commission on Jail Overcrowding, and the Steering Committee for the Santa Barbara Re-Entry Project.

Joan was valued by the policymaker and practitioner community as someone who understood real-world problems, and her efforts earned her awards from policymaker and practitioner organizations. In 1987, the California Probation, Parole, and Correctional Association gave her the University Award, which honors researchers who make an impact on California corrections. In 2001, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction fittingly honored her with the Simon Dinitz Award, named after the professor who sparked her passion. And, in 2005, the American Correctional Association gave her the Peter Lejins Award, named after a University of Maryland professor who influenced the field of corrections, honoring her for her own corrections research.

Major Research Projects and Writings

Joan primarily focused her policy-based research on events occurring postconviction. Her major works were in the areas of criminal careers, community corrections, rising crime and mass incarceration, and parole and reentry. She also published articles sharing lessons she learned through these research efforts to help both academics and practitioners involved in similar projects.

Research on criminal careers. Many of Joan's research projects are considered firsts in the field. After Joan joined RAND in the early mid-1970s, much of her initial work and grant funding was to study career criminals. One of her first major research projects with her colleagues at RAND was the *Criminal Careers of Habitual Felons* study. This was one of the first life-course studies that followed people who repeatedly committed crime to measure their individual offense rates (rates known later as lambdas). Based on interviews with 49 people who were imprisoned for armed robbery and had multiple incarceration experiences, this research found that people involved in crime often did not specialize and that offense rates varied considerably by type of offense, with violence being the least common. Joan and her colleagues at RAND also found that offense rates declined with age. Finally, they identified two distinct groups: intensives and intermittents. Intensives were more active in the criminal lifestyle and committed about ten times as many crimes as intermittents, who were more opportunistic and less consistently active (Petersilia et al. 1977). This study later expanded into the well-regarded RAND Survey of Prison and Jail Inmates, in which RAND researchers interviewed approximately 2,200 inmates across California, Texas, and Michigan to continue to examine criminal careers (e.g., Chaiken & Chaiken 1982). Joan's work on this follow-up project focused analytic attention on the prison experience of around 1,300 of these incarcerated people using interview data and official records. She and her colleagues found that experiences varied across states, especially in terms of participation in treatment and the number of institutionally documented misconduct infractions. They also found that among both the

general inmate population and career criminals in particular, more people needed treatment (e.g., education, vocational training, alcohol and/or drug help) than received it, often because people who were incarcerated did not think they needed the help. Those who participated in treatment often hoped it would help them secure parole. Joan and her colleagues also found that younger people and those not participating in treatment were more likely to have more serious infractions. The team did not find much difference in these factors between career criminals and the rest of the population (Petersilia et al. 1980).

Joan used the data collected on this project to more closely examine the characteristics of people who participated in treatment. She found that those who had longer sentences were more likely to participate in treatment than those with shorter ones. Moreover, older incarcerated people and Whites were more likely to receive alcohol treatment, Blacks were more likely to receive drug treatment, and younger incarcerated people were more likely to participate in education and job programs. Commitment offense and prior incarceration experiences did not matter (Petersilia 1980b). Joan synthesized the criminal career research at the time in *Crime and Justice*, which continues to be one of the most respected annual outlets for summarizing the current state of knowledge (Petersilia 1980a). Indeed, much of this early work done by Joan is foundational to the field, as is her work on community corrections.

Community corrections. Much of Joan's work during the 1980s and 1990s focused on community corrections. In collaboration with her colleagues at RAND, Joan published *Granting Felons Probation*: *Public Risks and Alternatives* in 1985. This important work came out at a time when prisons were overcrowded, and probation was basically the only prison alternative in most areas (Petersilia et al. 1985b). At the time, there was very little research on probation generally or the costs and benefits of supervising people who committed felonies in the community rather than placing them in prison. In fact, the authors noted that felony probation was a new term then (Petersilia et al. 1985b, p. v). This study found that putting people who committed felonies on probation presented real dangers for the community because the majority were rearrested, about half were reconvicted (nearly 20% for serious violence), and about a third were reincarcerated. Those who were more likely to recidivate were those with property offenses, more prior convictions, lower incomes, and living arrangements with people other than spouses and children. There were other findings that current scholars will recognize, including that those who had more priors, tougher histories, and more serious offenses were more likely to go to prison rather than receive probation. For most offenses, having a private attorney and being released prior to trial decreased the likelihood of going to prison. Because of the heightened risk of putting people with more serious crimes on community supervision, Joan and her colleagues recommended putting more of them on intensive supervision. At the time of this report, intensive probation was being tried only in a few jurisdictions. They also recommended reconsidering the mission of probation and the responsibilities of probation agencies and officers, improving risk and needs assessment efforts, and implementing tougher, intermediate community-based responses to reduce the reliance on prison (Petersilia et al. 1985b; see also Petersilia et al. 1985a). Although Joan later saw this study as simplistic compared to more recent research, she noted that it was the first study to look at the impact of placing serious offenders in the community and to consider recidivism among felony probationers (Lane 2006).

Next, Joan collaborated with Susan Turner and Joyce Peterson (Petersilia et al. 1986) to systematically compare recidivism rates from a matched sample of those who were on felony probation to those who were returning to the community from prison. Their sample included males sentenced in 1980 and matched on county of conviction, conviction crime, and a probability of conviction score. They followed them for two years postrelease, finding that most people in both groups were

rearrested, more often for property crimes than violence or drugs. Overall, people released from prison were more likely to be arrested, have charges filed, and be reincarcerated, even though their crimes were not necessarily more serious. However, this association was significant only for property offenses. Joan and her colleagues estimated that although probationers likely committed slightly more crimes in the follow-up period, in part because prisoners were locked up part of the time, the costs of prison were nearly double that of probation supervision. They concluded that incapacitation in prison was important but that communities also needed effective ways to manage people with felonies outside of incarceration facilities (Petersilia et al. 1986).

Shortly thereafter, Joan wrote "Expanding Options for Criminal Sentencing" (Petersilia 1987a). In this work, she described multiple efforts across the country to develop alternatives to incarceration as states struggled with both financial limitations and court orders to reduce their jail and prison populations. In this report aimed at policymakers and practitioners, Joan described intensive supervision probation, house arrest, electronic monitoring, shock and intermittent incarceration, split sentences, and other newly implemented approaches. She reported that preliminary evidence indicated that some efforts could keep people out of prison while keeping rearrests lower than routine probation or parole.

In the scholarly community, one of her most remembered studies is the Bureau of Justice Assistance–funded randomized field experiment that she and Susan Turner supervised. It examined the impact of intensive probation and parole (ISP) in fourteen locations across nine states from 1986 to 1991. At the time, this was the largest randomized field experiment ever conducted in corrections, including approximately 2,000 subjects. Location details varied, but the study looked at prison diversion, enhanced probation, and enhanced parole programs that generally had smaller caseloads, more contacts, and more surveillance than was typical for the jurisdiction as well as treatment and employment. The research team reported results in multiple outlets that generally showed that ISP was not usually used as a prison diversion and that ISP was difficult to implement when prison diversion was the primary goal (e.g., Petersilia & Turner 1990b). Because people on ISP were watched more closely, they were more likely to get caught for technical violations and committed to jail or prison than those people who were supervised on regular caseloads. This meant ISP cost more than routine supervision but cost less than sending people to prison. Although the study concluded that the programs were generally implemented well, sites struggled to deliver as much treatment as they hoped. There were no significant differences between ISP and routine supervision on recidivism measures, which meant that those who were subject to ISPs were not a larger risk to public safety compared to regular approaches. Joan and her colleagues, therefore, concluded that ISP was effective as an intermediate sanction (Petersilia & Turner 1993b, Turner 2020; see also Petersilia & Turner 1990a,c, 1993a; Turner et al. 1992; for follow-up study, see Deschenes et al. 1995). Joan's work on this study led Frank Cullen to name her as one of the twelve people who saved rehabilitation because the evaluation science showing that ISP did not reduce recidivism likely reduced ISP's future use (Cullen 2005).

The ISP study also showed that some of those who were subject to ISP believed it was as tough or tougher than a short prison sentence because of the restrictions on their lives and freedom (Petersilia 1990b). Joan and her colleague Libby Deschenes later examined this idea in more detail with a small sample of people in prison in Minnesota, asking them to rank the severity of 15 sanctions. They again found that sometimes intensive supervision was seen as harsher than prison. For example, their respondents ranked three years of ISP as equivalent to one year in prison, and five years of ISP as harder than one year in prison (Petersilia & Deschenes 1994a,b). This line of research was influential in policy discussions, as those charged with managing caseloads and attendant populations sought to find the right balance between cost and effectiveness, using evidence as their guide.

Responding to Concern about Rising Crime and Mass Incarceration

In the early to mid-1990s, concern about crime continued among the public and policymakers, despite the fact that violence declined throughout the 1990s, and crime control seemed an urgent policy concern (see Blumstein & Wallman 2000, Zimring 2007). Around this time, Joan published works focused on helping policymakers understand what might work to reduce crime other than harsh crime control strategies, which were popular approaches at the time. For example, she published an article entitled, "A Crime Control Rationale for Reinvesting in Community Corrections," which ran counter to the political arguments positing that only prison was tough enough on crime (Petersilia 1995). Joan also worked with James Q. Wilson to edit *Crime*, a compilation of essays written by what they considered to be the best criminological experts on hot policy topics to "show how social science research might help us understand and control crime" (Wilson 1983; Wilson & Petersilia 1995, p. 3). This compilation covered research on people involved in crime, the social context of crime, and crime control strategies. Joan and James revised this book twice, in 2002 and 2011, renaming it each time and adding some chapters, changing some experts, and updating research findings (Wilson & Petersilia 2002, 2011). When this book collaboration began, I remarked that it was interesting that she was working with someone who had such a different take on policy approaches than she did. Conveying an important lesson, Joan explained that she learned the most from working with people who had different perspectives.

As crime rates and consequently imprisonment continued to decline, Joan and Frank Cullen (Petersilia & Cullen 2015) advanced some ideas about how to be smart about downsizing prisons. Prior research had shown that community corrections options and intensive supervision efforts had not reduced prison populations. Joan and Frank identified five reasons that prison downsizing could fail, including the still large number of people in prison, the fact that the largest part of the decline was due to a court order to do so in California, the removal of parole board and discretionary release in many states, which had served to manage populations in the past, the high cost of rehabilitation programs and the possibility that cheaper technology will be more attractive to policymakers, and the remaining shortage of services coupled with tougher circumstances faced by people returning from prison. They also provided five reasons downsizing could work, including the fact that mass imprisonment as a strategy is unmanageable due to cost, improvement in the effectiveness of risk-prediction instruments and knowledge about evidence-based programming, the willingness of those making corrections decisions to consider the scientific evidence, some state efforts to close prisons, and data showing that the public is willing to support options other than punishment (Petersilia & Cullen 2015). In some ways, these arguments remain as applicable now as they were a decade ago.

Parole and Reentry from Prison

Much of the remainder of her career from the late 1990s until her death was focused on reentry from prison, part of this time spent in the field working on the ground with those trying to make major changes in California. This California experience was the culmination of years of work on the topic of prisons and reentry and allowed her to try to put evidence to work and effect the changes she had been recommending for years (or, in some cases, to revise her recommendations based on evidence).

Joan had an uncanny ability to anticipate the upcoming policy and practitioner problems and use her scholarly skills to inform the debate early. In the mid-1990s she understood that mass incarceration would have large impacts on communities as more people started returning from prison, especially with less preparation for life outside than in years past because of reductions in treatment and work programs both inside institutions and outside prisons during parole (see

Petersilia 2003, Travis & Petersilia 2001). I remember a conversation with her and Jeremy Travis in the late 1990s when she said to him something to the effect of "reentry will be the next big thing," accurately foreshadowing what was to come. Both Joan and Jeremy were instrumental in setting a national agenda on reentry and studying the problems related to and the impacts of reentry; they raised important policy issues and published agenda-setting research on the topic over the next decade or more (e.g., Petersilia 1999, 2000, 2003; Travis 2005; Travis et al. 2001). From 2001 to 2005, Joan and Jeremy cochaired the Urban Institute Reentry Roundtable to enable multiple stakeholders to come together to discuss the most pressing reentry questions at the time, producing a 2001 special issue (Volume 47, Issue 3) of *Crime & Delinquency* focused on reentry (see Travis 2020, Travis & Petersilia 2001).

In 1999, Joan published a review of the research on parole and reentry in *Crime and Justice*. Here, she argued for a strategy to reinvest in and reinvent parole, including the need to move back to discretionary rather than mandatory release. She discussed a severe need to reduce parole recidivism by using better technology and risk prediction, implementing effective treatment and work efforts, and using a broader approach to supervision that involved more than just deploying a parole officer, rather using what is sometimes called neighborhood parole, involving personal, family, and community interventions (Petersilia 1999). Joan also wrote a Research in Brief for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) on the topic, which focused on the impacts of people returning from prison and discussed the effects of a broken prison and parole system releasing people back into the community. She pointed to the collateral consequences on community cohesion and social disorganization, the economic impacts on those returning (such as unemployment and trouble finding housing), the struggles parolees faced related to physical and mental health, and the effects of parole on families and children (Petersilia 2000; see also Petersilia 2001b,c).

At around the same time, Joan was publishing in other practitioner outlets to inform the conversation over the next few years (e.g., Petersilia 2002, 2004, 2005; Rosenfeld et al. 2008). For example, in 2005, she gave specific guidance in *Corrections Today*, the publication sent to members of the American Correctional Association, for how to reform parole. Consistent with her overall approach to her work, which included being in conversation with diverse stakeholders, she published in an outlet that had wide dissemination to those working in the field, and she gave jurisdictions concrete tasks they could tackle to improve the problems related to the increasing number of people returning home from prison. Joan argued for reinvesting in prison work, education, and substance abuse programs, reinstituting risk-based discretionary release, giving more intensive services immediately after release, allowing parolees to earn time off (like "good time" in prison) for meeting goals, and finding ways to effectively allow those doing well to officially let go of their pasts (Petersilia 2005). She discussed these and other recommendations (such as the use of prerelease planning and allowing victims to request notification of release) in more detail in her 2003 book, which also made it into the hands of many policymakers and practitioners (Petersilia 2003; see also Petersilia 2007).

Joan also published articles informed by her work with California during the mid-2000s. She described her work, its impact, and the lessons she learned working as an "embedded criminologist" in her speech and subsequent article after she won the Academy of Experimental Criminology's 2007 Joan McCord Prize (Petersilia 2008b) as well as in an article in the *Federal Sentencing Reporter* (Petersilia 2010). In one article, she described and lamented the problems that California's prison system continued to face despite then-Governor Schwarzenegger's vow to improve it and the high cost to the state budget. Arguing for more changes to realign correctional resources based on risk and improve the chances for success upon release, Joan outlined a four-part plan that would involve developing an independent sentencing commission; implementing evidence-based educational, vocational, and treatment programs; applying intermediate sanctions

for parole violations; and investing in partnerships with local communities to help with transitions home (Petersilia 2008a), which she had recommended for parole generally for years (e.g., Petersilia 2002, 2003).

California eventually passed the Public Safety Realignment Act (AB 109) in 2011, after the US Supreme Court ordered the state to reduce the prison population by twenty-five percent (*Brown v. Plata* 2011). This law allowed people who committed low-level offenses with no history of serious or violent crimes, including parole violators, to serve their sentences in local jails rather than prison and/or to be supervised postrelease by county probation departments. Moreover, it prevented the return to prison for technical violations for those convicted of so-called nonviolent, nonserious, nonsexual offenses. This law was supported by legislation that ensured these activities were funded (Calif. Dep. Correct. Rehabil. 2013; see also Petersilia 2014). Soon after this law passed, Joan and one of her law students pointed out ten important questions that needed to be answered to determine whether realignment was working (Petersilia & Snyder 2013).

Beyond reducing overcrowding, the effort hoped to reduce the high recidivism rate through the delivery of rehabilitation at the local level, as Joan had long recommended. This required individual counties to develop community corrections partnerships to determine how these new mandates to serve people locally would occur. With this concern in mind, Joan and her research team interviewed 125 local actors involved in implementing this "titanic policy shift" (Petersilia 2014, p. 339). Interviewees in this research commented that stakeholders were collaborating well and working hard to meet expectations and create new programs and generally supported the realignment policy. However, they also noted that they faced struggles with implementation as jail and probation populations increased quicker than expected, and some people who committed more serious crimes remained in the community, despite intentions that they would not (Petersilia 2014). Some stakeholders worried that they did not have enough resources to accomplish the hefty goals, public safety could be at risk as some parolees with serious priors stayed in the county, jails faced more overcrowding and the resulting poorer conditions, postcustody supervision was limited, judges lost discretion rather than gained it, and crime started to increase again after realignment. The researchers found that many of the people they interviewed agreed that the entire criminal history was relevant to decision-making and that county jail sentences should not last more than three years, some who had repeated technical violations should be returned to prison, there should be a statewide tracking database for those who were supervised in the community, data should be collected to inform future decisions, and all parolees should have split sentences so that there was some time after jail in the community when these folks were under supervision (Petersilia 2014).

Joan and colleagues also published results from the California Parole Study during the mid-2000s (Grattet et al. 2008). In two *Criminology* articles, they examined predictors of parole violations and reimprisonment for those released by the parole board during 2003 and 2004. In part, they examined the individual and supervision factors that predicted parole violations. The team found that about three-fourths of the parolees violated parole, and those who committed property and drug offenses were more likely to violate than others, including those who were imprisoned originally for violence. They also found that those who began to engage in criminal behavior later in life were more likely to violate, counter to some research indicating that earlier onset means more trouble in the future. African Americans, males, and younger people violated more. Also, Joan and her colleagues' research revealed that supervision characteristics were important. Specifically, those who were supervised heavily had more violations, and those with parole officers who were Black or who had more than three years of experience had slightly lower violation rates. They also found that when the parole policy changed, violations increased a lot. Because most had high caseloads, caseload size did not mean much for case outcomes (Grattet et al. 2011).

In terms of reincarceration, the research team found that the majority went back to prison. Those with more serious cases and prior histories were more likely to be sent back, including serious, violent, and registered sex offenders. For new crimes, African Americans, Hispanics, and others were more likely to be returned than Whites were. Males were more likely reincarcerated for criminal violations, but females were more likely to be returned for absconding. Older parolees faced a higher likelihood of return for new crimes, but age did not matter for technical or absconding violations. Moreover, they found that in more punitive counties, those with more serious histories and violations and those who absconded or had technical violations were more likely to go back. However, overcrowded reception centers often meant lower likelihood of returning (Lin et al. 2010).

Taking a look at a different group of California parolees, Joan and other colleagues examined whether characteristics of the area to which parolees returned, including neighborhood and near-neighborhood census characteristics and the presence of social service providers, affected return to prison (Hipp et al. 2010). They found that African Americans, younger people, those who committed sex offenses, and those who had more time in prison were more likely to recidivate, whereas those who committed more property and violent offenses were less likely to do so. Moreover, in areas where there were more social services close by, recidivism decreased, especially for African Americans, although local demand for services mattered. Those who returned to areas with more disadvantage and social disorder (e.g., bars and liquor stores) were more likely to return to prison (Hipp et al. 2010).

Near the end of her career, Joan and her colleagues published an article in *Crime and Justice* addressing the future of parole release. They presented a 10-part approach to revise discretionary parole release, a list they acknowledged was bold in its goals. They recommended specific qualifications and appointment approaches for parole board members as well as limits on their discretion. They also recommended assuming that people should be released when they were first eligible, unless they presented risk to the community, and examining and improving the use of risk assessments for release. Specifically, they suggested establishing parole guidelines with presumptive release dates based on risk level and reentry readiness. Still, they noted the importance of ensuring prisoner rights and allowing victims to participate but only related to risk and conditions of release, not the decision itself. In terms of postrelease supervision, they recommended using it only for those with serious offenses or high risk of recommitting crime, restricting conditions to those most relevant and focusing them on the time period right after release, and limiting the supervision term to twelve months for those at lower risk of offending and to a maximum of five years for those at most risk of recidivism or who committed very serious offenses (Rhine et al. 2017). As with most of her work, this article provided specificity on how these efforts might work in the real world.

Notes for the Field: Calls for More Practice-Based Research and Enumerating Lessons Learned

Given the relevance of criminology to the practice of real-world justice, Joan felt it was critical for scholars to do work that could make a difference beyond academe, and she shared this vision with criminologists at large. She said, "I believe we have a strong obligation to place our best scientific information into the hands of those who make justice-related decisions" (Petersilia 1993, p. 504). In her 1987 RAND report on *The Influence of Criminal Justice Research* (Petersilia 1987b), Joan discussed the impact of NIJ-funded research on policy and practice, concluding that the research had a strong impact in the areas of policing, prosecution, and sentencing and corrections. She concluded that it had affected how policymakers thought about issues and how to address them and

how much impact they thought they could have. Yet she did not think this was enough, and in her 1990 presidential address to the ASC, she bemoaned the reduced impact of criminology broadly on policy over time. She blamed this predicament in part on researchers' focus on problems rather than concrete, practical solutions, lack of partnerships with practitioners and policymakers, use of complex scientific writing rather than simple prose, and the absence of academic accolades and incentives for this type of work (Lane 2020a, Petersilia 1991). As she explained, "I believe research would have more utility and benefit for the system if we had the interest, funds, and incentives to provide hands-on assistance in the field" (Petersilia 1991, p. 14). This worked out in her own career when she was embedded with the state of California making a day-to-day impact. Yet the opportunity for this type of work remains rare, often for the reasons she indicated more than thirty years ago (see Lane 2020b). Moreover, in person, she often lamented that academics who do practical research must publish in both academic journals to ensure they meet the standards of their university for promotion and practitioner outlets where their work can have an impact on real-world justice. That is, academics who do this work often must publish much more and in multiple ways because they speak to two different worlds, meaning they have to work harder when the regularly expected workload to get promoted is already hard.

Another hallmark of Joan's work was a series of "lessons" papers in which she shared with the field what she had learned about the implementation and evaluation of field projects. When she and Susan Turner were conducting the large-scale experimental evaluation of intensive supervision in the field, she published an article on the lessons they had learned about implementing a random assignment study across multiple sites throughout the country (Petersilia 1989). This article addressed, for example, how they overcame resistance to random assignment, addressed legal and ethical issues, took steps to lower attrition, managed the desire by folks in the field to force some people into the experimental group, and tried to keep the experimental and control group treatments from affecting each other as well as how they managed some of the problems that crept up along the way (Petersilia 1989). She published another paper focused more on the programs themselves, specifically identifying nine conditions that helped the programs succeed. Some of these conditions were, for example, that the program addressed an important local issue rather than it being forced on the jurisdiction by others; had clearly defined goals with buy-in from key actors such as judges, administrators, and staff; attempted to make incremental rather than multiple, wide-ranging changes; had a strong, persuasive leader; and secured enough resources with leader and staff stability (Petersilia 1990a).

Joan also wrote papers focusing on lessons from her work on prison and parole reform in California as she moved toward the end of her career. In her discussion of her experience as an embedded criminologist, she enumerated seven lessons that she thought "might help in bridging the gap between 'those who study' and 'those who do'" (Petersilia 2008b, p. 347). One of these, which she had emphasized throughout her career, was that research topics must be clearly relevant to current policy and that our findings and recommendations must be disseminated in outlets and in language that is clearly understandable to those working in the field. She also discussed the importance of understanding the multiple constraints that people designing and implementing justice interventions face. That is, she called for researchers to make a concerted effort to understand the people and agencies they are trying to help and to try to make a difference within those constraints. Relatedly, she maintained that the timing of research–policy partnerships was critical because of changes in political, legal, resource, and other contextual constraints. She called for studies on both outcomes and implementation, noting that randomized experiments were more likely to be respected by policymakers who are more versed in experimental design than in decades past. However, she cautioned that study results are only one of many considerations policymakers

must weigh as they face competing demands. Moreover, she shared that this type of entrenched policy work is incredibly demanding for researchers, requiring much personal and professional sacrifice and thereby limiting the number of people who might do it (Petersilia 2008b).

In another article coauthored with Cullen on downsizing prisons, they listed several lessons learned from California's realignment efforts that moved many people who were convicted of felonies from state to county control and recommended five principles that could guide efforts to reduce reliance on prisons. These five principles included setting a "hard limit" on prison capacity; concentrating efforts to determine and manage risk and thereby reduce recidivism; prioritizing evidence-based rehabilitation programs; including technical assistance for those implementing these efforts; and conducting more research or developing what they called "a criminology of downsizing" (Petersilia & Cullen 2015, pp. 38, 41).

In summary, Joan's work spanned multiple topics over her lengthy career, including but not limited to big projects on criminal careers, community corrections, parole and reentry, and general crime policy. She also worked hard to encourage criminologists to do work that mattered to those implementing and experiencing the justice process and provided lessons and guidelines to help them do so.

WHAT WAS JOAN'S IMPACT ON CRIMINOLOGY?

Joan designed her career to pursue one goal: make an impact. Most of her research provided real-time results for people trying to deliver justice, effectively allowing her to have direct effects on how justice was delivered. She also had a long-lasting impact on the scholarly world. There are many ways to examine impact on the field, and many of her direct and indirect effects are hard to measure. Her broad reach across multiple publication outlets likely means her reach is more wide-ranging than is the case for many academics. Her legacy survives in the guidance she provided to her graduate students as it continues to shape our careers and the careers of our own students. We do policy and evaluation work because Joan shared her passion, encouraged us, and taught us how to do good work that makes a difference in the world; we use these lessons in our daily work as we develop our own partnerships and research teams. As Crystal Garcia, one of her former graduate students and a former professor, told me when I wrote about Joan years ago, she learned from Joan that "'one must work hard to build trusting relationships with practitioners and always be cognizant of the questions they need answered as you fulfill your own academic research agenda"' (Lane 2006, p. 11). Her former graduate students have had many discussions over the years about striving to be like her, and informal conversations at conferences indicate that many others do also. Joan also provided impactful mentoring to her colleagues, especially those who were "more junior" to her. For example, Valerie Jenness, one of Joan's UCI colleagues and now the ASC President, has often credited Joan with teaching her how to think about and navigate the research–policy nexus, encouraging her to be an honest broker when it comes to what the data reveal, and, most importantly, demonstrating in real-time how the work can be serious, important, and fun.

Citations

There are also objective ways of measuring the impact of Joan's work. One of these is in citations, which for Joan, I believe are a conservative estimate of her impact. I expect that her guidance on how to do evaluation and policy research has affected research practice in a broad way that has not resulted in citations. Still, one analysis, which has not been updated, found that as of 1999, she was the second most cited corrections scholar, behind only Frank Cullen, and her publication *Granting Felons Probation*: *Public Risks and Alternatives* (Petersilia et al. 1985b) was among the twenty-five

most-cited works (Wright & Miller 1999). Citation analyses of the field more broadly reveal that she was among the top-cited scholars in the top journals (Cohn & Farrington 1994, 1998, 1999) and textbooks (Wright 1995, 2000, 2002; Wright & Cohn 1996), lists often dominated by men. Joan does not have a Google Scholar page, but the more limited analysis provided by Web of Science analyzes fifty-three of her publications showing they have been cited 1,244 times with an H-index of 24. Yet, Google indicates that *When Prisoners Come Home* (Petersilia 2003) alone has been cited almost 3,000 (2,957) times and her *Crime and Justice* piece with Susan Turner on ISP has been cited 680 times. Most of her other publications have hundreds of citations as well, and her work continues to be cited in recent publications through early 2023. Yet those who know Joan best would probably agree that she would be more interested in the fact that her *When Prisoners Come Home* book could be found on the bookshelves in wardens' offices than her citation count.

Academic Recognitions and Tributes

Joan also received many academic recognitions during her career, illustrating her importance to the field. One of the most prestigious is the 2014 Stockholm Prize in Criminology, which she shared with Daniel Nagin. This award is given "for outstanding achievements in criminological research or for the application of research results by practitioners for the reduction of crime and the advancement of human rights" (Stockholm Univ. 2023). The ASC has also honored her in multiple ways, including her election as the 1990 President and Fellow of the organization and as the 1994 August Vollmer Award Recipient, which recognizes "outstanding contributions to justice and/or to the treatment or prevention of criminal or delinquent behavior" (Am. Soc. Criminol. 2023). The ASC Division of Corrections and Sentencing honored her with its 2002 Senior Scholar Award, and the ASC Division of Experimental Criminology named her its 2011 Jerry Lee Lifetime Achievement Award winner. In 2019, soon after she passed away, ASC memorialized her by renaming the Outstanding Paper Award in her honor.

Joan was also honored by other organizations, including receiving the Western Society of Criminology's 1997 Paul Tappan Award for "outstanding contributions to criminology" and the 2008 Founder's Award (now the June Morrison-Tom Gitchoff Founder's Award) for "significant improvement of the quality of justice" (West. Soc. Criminol. 2023a,b). The Academy of Experimental Criminology named her a fellow and presented her with the 2007 Joan McCord Research Award, which "recognizes distinguished experimental contributions to criminology and criminal justice" (Acad. Exp. Criminol. 2023). She was also honored with the 2011 Distinguished Achievement Award in Evidence-Based Crime Policy from the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University, which honors people "who are committed to a leadership role in advancing the use of scientific research evidence in decisions about crime and justice policies" (Cent. Evid.-Based Crime Policy 2023). She was also given the 2006 Donald Cressey Award from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (now called Evident Change) and became a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and the 2018 Thorsten Sellin Fellow of the American Academy of Political & Social Science as well as earning several other university-level and other awards.

Joan's impact can also be viewed through the tributes written and bestowed upon her death. The 2020 *Annual Review of Criminology* and the 2020 ASC Division on Corrections and Sentencing *Handbook on Moving Corrections and Sentencing Forward* were dedicated to her. Moreover, the December 2020 special issue of *Justice Quarterly*, which was titled "Successful Research-Practitioner Partnerships: Empirical Research in Honor of Joan Petersilia," published work that aimed to report on research like that she so valued, thirty years after her ASC presidential address asking researchers to concentrate on these efforts. In addition, the April 2020 issue of the *Federal*

Sentencing Reporter contained three articles written about her by her esteemed colleagues Susan Turner, Jeremy Travis, and Edward E. Rhine, each of them commenting on her influence on the field. Susan Turner noted that "we remember Joan Petersilia as a champion in bringing together policy makers, practitioners and researchers" (Turner 2020, p. 250). Jeremy Travis summarized her effect by saying, "When the story of our time is told, one of the key figures in the narrative of the modern criminal justice reform era will be Joan Petersilia," and calling her "the intellectual leader" in the field's revived interest in the struggles faced by those returning from prison (Travis 2020, pp. 251–52). Edward E. Rhine, who spent much of his career in Ohio, noted her substantial impact on both the academic and policy fields, indicating, for example, that her work had a "lasting legacy of change" in Ohio and that her work "will forever inform criminology and an interdisciplinary approach to its subject matter" (Rhine 2020, p. 255). In Stanford's tribute after her loss, Jenny Martinez, dean of the law school, said, "For all her brilliance and achievements, she stood out most of all for her genuineness, warmth, and generosity of spirit" (Stanf. Law Sch. 2019). Her obituary in *The Criminologist* called her a "distinguished scholar, policy advisor, President of the ASC, and cherished colleague and mentor to too many people to count" (Criminologist 2019, p. 43). I can think of no better way to succinctly summarize who she was, other than to add she was, to many, a dear friend.

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