The Relationship between Officer Orientation and Supervision Strategies in Community Corrections

Elijah P. Ricks and Jennifer Eno Louden

The University of Texas at El Paso

©American Psychological Association, 2014. This paper is not the copy of record and may not exactly replicate the authoritative document published in the APA journal. Please do not copy or cite without author's permission. The final article is available, upon publication, at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000098

Author Note

Elijah P. Ricks and Jennifer Eno Louden, Department of Psychology, The University of Texas at El Paso.

This research was supported in part by funds from The University of Texas at El Paso, Department of Psychology. We appreciate the cooperation from the community corrections organizations in the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada, as well as Bexar County, Texas. Portions of this article were presented at the annual conference for the American Psychology-Law Society in March, 2013.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jennifer Eno Louden, Department of Psychology, The University of Texas at El Paso, 500 West University Avenue, El Paso, TX 79968.

E-mail: jlenolouden@utep.edu
Abstract

Community corrections (i.e., probation and parole) officers play a crucial role within criminal justice agencies: They have the onerous task to balance the competing demands of rehabilitating offenders while protecting the community. Field studies have suggested that officers’ effectiveness depends, in part, on the relative emphasis they place on these demands (i.e., their orientation toward their role). However, the extent to which officers’ orientations towards rehabilitation versus community safety affect their decisions for individual offenders is not clear. We examined the relationship between officer attitudes and supervisory decisions using a quasi-experimental design. In the first stage of the study, we revised a promising measure of officers’ role orientation. In the second stage, we examined the revised scale’s psychometric properties, and tested how officers’ self-reported orientations related to the strategies they used in hypothetical supervision scenarios. The majority of officers reported a balanced approach of control and support, whereas 29.7% reported a preference for one over the other. Regardless of self-reported orientation, officers approached supervision with similar strategies for an offender’s first incident of noncompliance, but when an offender showed continued noncompliance, both officers who emphasized control and those who emphasized a balanced approach toward supervision were more likely to use punitive methods to gain compliance than officers who reported emphasizing rehabilitation. This research furthers our understanding of the relationship between self-reported orientation and supervision strategy. Findings will inform agencies’ selection and training of community corrections officers.

Keywords: community corrections, probation, parole, role orientation, decision-making
The Relationship Between Officer Orientation and Supervision Strategies in Community Corrections

Approximately one in 35 United States residents has some involvement with the criminal justice system (Glaze & Herberman, 2013). The majority of offenders are not behind bars, however: The most recent estimate is that 69% of U.S. offenders are supervised through the community corrections system, either on probation or parole (Glaze & Herberman, 2013). Probationers and parolees live in the community, but must comply with the rules of correctional supervision (e.g., curfews, sobriety, maintaining employment, and others). Thus, they are neither in prison, nor do they enjoy the freedom of other citizens—they are somewhere in between.

Community corrections officers are the main point of contact between these offenders and the correctional system, and are thus in a critical position, holding authority to make decisions that can have large consequences for offenders (e.g, Burke, 2004; Clear, Harris, & Baird, 1992; Jones & Kerbs, 2007). For example, an officer may place burdensome expectations on an offender, such as more frequent reporting requirements or stricter curfews. In more severe cases, officers may use their authority to seek jail time for noncompliance. With the range of options available to officers and the potential impact of their decisions, it is important to understand how officers choose to exercise their authority.

Due to their influential position, community corrections officers have been a topic of research for the past several decades. Ohlin, Piven, and Pappenfort (1956) were the first to identify an officer typology, suggesting that officers could be categorized based on their relative emphasis toward punishment or offenders’ welfare. Their general conception of officer types has been revisited many times—although the terminology has varied among studies, the most consistent findings have been that some officers are more oriented toward a supervision style of rule enforcement and exercise of authority (law enforcers), others are oriented toward guidance and support (social workers), and a third group uses a balance of both approaches (synthetic;
Prior research has highlighted the impact of officer typologies. Perhaps the most important finding is that how an officer views his or her role may affect how supervisees fare on probation or parole. Paparozzi and Gendreau (2005) found that officers oriented as a law enforcer or a social worker have more supervision revocations or re-offenses among offenders on their caseloads, whereas the caseloads of officers with synthetic orientations generally had better supervision outcomes and less recidivism (see also Skeem & Manchak, 2008). Why this relationship exists is still unclear, but the key may be the manner by which the officer exercises authority. In general, officers have the same tools available to them—they may use random drug checks, home visits, curfews, and other methods to ensure that an offender complies with supervision rules. If those tools do not vary greatly among officers, perhaps of more importance is how the officer chooses to use them in his or her approach.

If an officer emphasizes rule enforcement and rehabilitation differently, that will affect how he or she uses the tools of supervision (e.g., rigidly applying restrictions to ensure compliance with rules, rather than individualizing the rules to encourage compliance). Indeed, officers have a great deal of flexibility in how they choose to apply supervisory tools (Clear et al., 1992; Jones & Kerbs, 2007). Such discretion has the advantage of allowing officers to take context and the offender’s needs and risk factors into account (see Millard, 1982), but some (see Schneider, Ervin, & Snyder-Joy, 1996, for discussion) have argued that discretion may introduce bias, with officers arbitrarily placing restrictions on some offenders but not others. In the context of officer typology, one possibility is that the law enforcer may use his or her discretion to place unnecessarily burdensome or belittling restrictions on an offender while missing teaching opportunities. For example, the archetypal law enforcer may respond to noncompliance with: “You knew the rules of supervision, and you broke them. Now I will make it harder for you to
break them again by giving you an earlier curfew.” In contrast, the archetypal social worker may overlook problematic behaviors for the sake of support and guidance, responding to noncompliance with: “Yes, these rules can be difficult to follow, but it is important that you keep trying. I believe that you can do this, but you need to believe it too.” Balancing these seemingly competing approaches, the archetypal synthetic officer may approach noncompliance with both support and structure, perhaps responding with: “You have run into some obstacles with the supervision rules. The rules exist to help you stay out of trouble. Let’s talk about the obstacles and discuss solutions so that we can prevent any other problems” (see Klockars, 1972, for more discussion of typology).

Although there has been some movement toward the use of empirically supported decision models (where consequences for violations are determined quantitatively rather than with human judgment; e.g., Schneider et al., 1996), many correctional agencies lack clear, written guidelines for officers when faced with noncompliance (e.g., Eno Louden, Skeem, Camp, & Christensen, 2008). The reality is that officers continue to have a great deal of discretion in their daily decisions (Clear et al., 1992; Jones & Kerbs, 2007).

With the apparent variability in the steps of supervision (i.e., the interventions and goals available), it has become clearer that the approach toward supervision matters (i.e. the attitudes about offenders and supervision). The importance of the approach toward supervision is highlighted in the empirically-supported Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model of correctional supervision, which advocates for individualized considerations in service delivery (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990). The RNR model focuses not only on the content of correctional service, but also the manner by which it is delivered, in a set of principles referred to as Core Correctional Practices (CCP; Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Components of CCP (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980) emphasize the importance of an officer’s attitude toward his or her role. Dowden and Andrews (2004) listed five dimensions of CCP, which generally reflect the concept
of a synthetic officer. These dimensions are (a) the effective use of authority as a teaching tool—making rules and expectations clear, (b) modeling appropriate behavior and encouraging compliance through positive reinforcement, (c) the use of problem solving to devise a plan and weigh options, (d) using community resources effectively, and (e) open, warm, enthusiastic, and solution-focused communication between staff and offenders. This “firm but fair” approach stresses the manner in which supervision is carried out, rather than the tools available to officers.

Past meta-analyses regarding effective interventions have demonstrated that the approach toward supervision is important (Andrews, Bonta, et al., 1990; Gendreau & Andrews, 1990; Gendreau & Ross, 1987; see also Kennealy, Skeem, Manchak, & Eno Louden, 2012), and other research found enhanced improvements in offender outcomes when CCP were used within the RNR framework (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). In other words, it appears that the most effective correctional practices implement clear, individualized expectations, and approach supervision with appropriate modeling and positive reinforcement to encourage compliance.

In practice, the relationship between approach to supervision and offender outcomes still leaves much to be understood. To make lasting improvements in community corrections training and policies, we must understand the mechanisms through which officer orientation influences how officers supervise offenders, and by extension, offender outcome. A notable gap in the literature is that nearly all previous research has relied on field-based observational methods to infer an officer’s approach toward supervision (see Katz, 1982, for a more in-depth review of the problem). These observations account for the steps of supervision, but may fail to account for the manner by which supervision is delivered. Because previous research provides evidence that a model of supervision may be only as effective as its delivery (Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Taxman, 2002), it is important to understand how officers perceive their own approach toward the offenders they supervise.
A few relevant self-report measures of officer orientation exist (e.g., Glaser, 1969; Klofas & Toch, 1982; Tomaino, 1975; and several variations of each), and each offers strengths and weaknesses. Although they were each designed to examine officer typology, they differ in their precise definitions of the types, and often use formats that complicate interpretability. For example, Glaser’s (1969) scale defines the constructs as control- or treatment-oriented, and approaches them as unrelated to each other. The Klofas and Toch (1982) measure was designed to assess maximum-security officers’ interest in doing more for inmates than just custody-related work, as well as the amount of social distance they keep from them, which is related to CCP, but with prison guards rather than community corrections officers. Whereas Tomaino’s (1975) measure addresses the constructs in line with CCP, it focuses on an officer’s concern for the different values, rather than the officer’s own stance on the values. The measure also treats the two constructs as unrelated to each other. We find treatment of the two emphases as unrelated problematic, as role conflict implies incompatibility between different values.

The Parole Officer Punishment and Reintegrative Orientation Questionnaire (Dembo, 1972) more accurately reflects the emphases relating to the “firm but fair” officer described by Dowden and Andrews (2004). This scale assesses the contrasts of control, authority, and punishment, versus rehabilitation and reintegration. In addition, it recognizes the reality of role conflict by offering a semantic differential format. This format allows respondents to mark their orientation as some point between two conceptually opposite statements relevant to an officer’s duty. One statement is control-, authority-, or punishment-oriented, and the other is reintegration- or rehabilitation-oriented. For example, for one item, one statement is “The causes of crime are located in factors internal to the offender,” and the opposite statement reads, “The causes of crime are to be found in factors external to the offender.” Officers weigh both opposing statements simultaneously before indicating their level of agreement between the two. The officer may mark complete agreement with one and no agreement with the other, or may
partially agree with both statements. This format directly assesses where officers report themselves to be on the spectrum of law-enforcement, synthesis, and social work approaches toward supervision. The primary weakness with this measure is in the wording of the items—high level vocabulary and complex wording may limit officers’ comprehension, possibly affecting the measure’s validity.

Present Study

With the difficulty in accurately measuring officer orientation, the first step of our study was to establish a conceptually and psychometrically sound instrument. The ideal measure should capture an officer’s emphasis on rehabilitation and community protection simultaneously, as officers must consider both roles in practice. The instrument should also gather attitudes about offenders in general, be relatively brief, and simple to use and interpret. The first step of our study was to revise Dembo’s (1972) measure of officer orientation to make it more user-friendly. We hypothesized that our revisions would make the scale more easily understandable and usable than the original, as judged by both computer measures of readability and subjective ratings from active community corrections officers.

The second step of our study had two general aims: to establish the revised scale’s psychometric properties, and to determine if self-reported attitudes from the revised instrument predicted officers’ decisions in supervision. To address the first aim, we hypothesized that the revised measure would demonstrate Guttman-Cronbach’s alpha of .70 or above, indicating acceptable inter-item association. Regarding validity, we hypothesized that the revised measure would correlate positively with rehabilitation orientation, negatively with legal authoritarianism, and not correlate with a measure of social desirability. To accomplish the second aim, we used a quasi-experimental design to present all officers with the same pair of vignettes. We sought to determine if their self-reported orientation predicted how they responded to situations that are likely to occur in supervision. We hypothesized that officers oriented toward the social worker
role would be more inclined to use supervision styles offering rewards for appropriate behavior (reinforcement), whereas law enforcers would be more likely to inflict restrictions or burdens (punishment) for inappropriate behavior. We hypothesized that synthetic officers would use neutral strategies with neither rewards nor punishments.

**Step 1: Measure Revision**

The first stage of our study revised the Parole Officer Punishment and Reintegrative Orientation Questionnaire (Dembo, 1972). As described earlier, we selected this scale because it assesses constructs consistent with Core Correctional Practices (Dowden & Andrews, 2004)—rehabilitation of offenders and protection of the community. Further, it measures these constructs in a manner that acknowledges that officers must balance these competing demands. We retained the measure’s semantic differential format. The semantic differential technique has generally been supported as valid and reliable for assessing attitudes (see Heise, 1970, 2010).

Our revisions focused primarily on the wording of the scale’s items; the original scale’s wording is complicated and perhaps needlessly difficult to understand. For example, a computer analysis of Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade Level revealed that some of the original items use as high as a 20th grade reading level (suggesting 20 years of education are required to understand it), whereas officers typically range from 12 to 18 years of formal education. To avoid any inherent bias in the scale for varied abilities in reading and English fluency among officers, we revised the introduction, the instructions, and each of the 24 item pairs to reflect a more universally usable scale. Additionally, the original questionnaire uses a 7-point scale, with 4 as the midpoint. For a more intuitive numerical system, we instead used a range of -3 to 3, with 0 as the midpoint. The revised scale is hereafter referred to as the Revised Community Corrections Officer Orientation Scale (RCC).

**Method**
We made our scale revisions in several steps. We first analyzed each statement using computerized measures. The Reading Grade Level (RGL) and the Flesch Reading Ease (RE) tools available with Microsoft® Word 2010 provided ratings for each statement. Both rating systems assign a score to any given statement, weighting sentence and word length differently (Flesch, 1948; Kincaid, Fishburne, Rogers, & Chissom, 1975). The RGL score estimates how advanced a statement is, using a scale that corresponds to years of education in the U.S. system (e.g., a statement at a Reading Grade Level of 12 supposedly requires a high school education to easily understand.). Reading Ease (RE) is a 100-point scale that evaluates a statement by how easy it is to read, where higher scores correspond to greater ease. For example, an RE score of 30 or below indicates a selection is “very difficult” and 70 or above is “easy.”

After obtaining both RGL and RE scores for each statement in the original scale, we revised each statement, attempting to retain meaning while simplifying the language. For example, one original item reads: “Initial contacts with the parolee should be concerned with expression of confidence in his adjustment potential, and trying to establish some realistic concrete goals. There should be a minimum necessary review of subject's past behavior.” We revised it to read: “The first meeting with an offender should focus on confidence that he can adjust, while making realistic, clear goals. You should avoid talking about the past.” We adjusted each item until its RGL score was equal to or below a 12th grade reading level.

In addition to the computer analyses, we presented the revised and original statements to community corrections officers so that we could gain their subjective opinions of the items’ ease of understanding and meaning retention. Officers read an original statement and its revision (without knowing which was which), chose which version was easier to understand, and indicated how much they mean the same thing.

Participants. We distributed the survey to 39 officers from a corrections department in the southwestern United States. Twenty-two officers gave responses to the first round of
revisions, and 17 rated the final revisions. All respondents reported supervising adult caseloads; Twenty-seven (69.2%) supervised both probationers and parolees (the remainder indicated supervising only one of those categories), and 35 (89.7%) reported their first language as English. As we asked them only to compare the revised and original items, we collected no other demographic data at this stage of the research.

**Results**

We compared the revised scale to the original in several ways. We first calculated readability scores, and then analyzed the community corrections officers’ ratings of our revisions compared to the originals. We report the results from only the final revisions.

The original items (including the introduction and instructions) have a mean Reading Grade Level (RGL) of 14.96 (SD = 3.29; requiring about 3 years of college education to easily understand). The final revisions have a mean RGL of 9.67 (SD = 1.42; requiring about a high school sophomore education to easily understand). A paired samples t-test indicated that our final revisions significantly reduced the mean RGL, t(49) = 11.84, p < .001, d = 1.90, 95% CI for mean difference [4.41, 6.11]. None of the revisions increased an item’s RGL score. According to the RGL ratings, each of the revised items should be as easily or more easily understood than its corresponding original version.

We intended for our revisions to also increase each item’s Reading Ease (RE) score. Computations showed that the original items have a mean RE score of 29.79 (SD = 18.02; or “very difficult”), and the final revisions yielded a mean RE score of 52.81 (SD = 8.99; or moderate difficulty). A paired samples t-test revealed that the final revisions led to overall significantly higher RE scores (i.e., they were easier to read) than the original items’ scores, t(49) = 10.95, p < .001, d = 1.84, 95% CI for mean difference [18.79, 27.24]. One of our revised items had a lower RE score than the original version by 8.10 points on the 100-point scale, indicating that the revision was calculated as slightly more difficult to read than the original. We retained
the revision, however, as the RE score decrease was relatively small, and the revision performed well when rated by participants (32 [82.1%] participants chose it as easier to read than the original, 6 indicated that neither was easier, and only 1 chose the original as easier than the revision.).

Following the computer-guided revisions, we analyzed the subjective ratings of the items from officers. Based on the first round of responses ($n = 22$), we revised a final time ($n = 17$). For the final versions, most officers chose 42 out of the 48 revised items as “easier to understand” than their corresponding original items, when presented side by side and not knowing which was which. For the remaining six, neither the original nor revised item was chosen more frequently. In such instances, we used the revised items in our final version of the measure because of their improved RGL and RE scores.

Because we reworded each statement, we also needed to ensure we did not significantly change its meaning. We asked the officers to rate how much meaning was shared between the original and revised items (without knowing which was which), using a 4-point scale with 1 indicating “completely different” meaning and 4 indicating “exact same meaning.” We defined a “good” item as having an average rating of 2.5 or above. For item comparisons of the second revisions, officers rated the average meaning retention as 2.82 ($SD = .29$), indicating more meaning similarity than not. With satisfactory items for our measure, we continued to the second stage of the study.

**Step 2: Psychometrics of Revised Scale and Predicting Officers’ Decisions**

The second part of our study had two aims: to examine the psychometric properties of the Revised Community Corrections Officer Orientation Scale (RCC), and to test its utility in predicting officers’ supervision strategies.

**Method**
Community corrections officers received an invitation via email to complete a web-based survey. The survey consisted of the RCC with three additional psychological measures to establish construct validity (see Campbell & Fiske, 1959). To provide evidence of convergent validity, we chose measures of legal authoritarianism and rehabilitation orientation. We hypothesized that officers who placed a greater emphasis on their legal authority in supervision would also score as having more rigid attitudes where legal matters are concerned (legal authoritarianism), and place less emphasis on efforts to rehabilitate offenders into productive members of society (rehabilitation orientation). We hypothesized that the reverse would also be true: that officers who emphasize rehabilitation would have less rigid attitudes regarding legal matters. To address discriminant validity, we included a measure of social desirability. We suspected that an officer’s desire to appear socially appropriate would be unrelated to his or her attitudes about rehabilitation and exercise of authority (see Kravitz, Cutler, & Brock, 1993). We calculated a measure of average inter-item correlation (Guttman-Cronbach α) as an index of the RCC’s reliability. Regarding the measure’s predictive utility, we presented officers with a pair of vignettes (Appendix) to examine whether and how their orientation as measured by the RCC affected their decisions for a hypothetical offender.

Participants. We obtained permission from four corrections departments in the southwestern United States to recruit their probation and parole officers for this study. Approximately 649 officers received the invitation and link to our internet-based survey via email, of which 294 (45.3%) responded (response rates from the different states ranged from 29.3% to 60.0%). Depending on each department’s policy, we compensated participants with either a pen with the researchers’ university logo and a certificate of appreciation for their participation, or a $10 gift code they could redeem from a popular online retailer. We collected personal information to deliver the incentives through a secure internet site that could not be connected to officers’ individual responses to the study materials.
Respondents were an average of 40.17 \((SD = 10.0)\) years old, with 12.2 \((SD = 8.7)\) years of experience in any form of law enforcement. The majority (44.2\%) were European American, with Latinos making the next most prevalent group (37.7\%). Approximately half were male (51.5\%). The majority (70.7\%) had completed a 4-year college degree, with 13.3\% having completed a master’s degree or higher. We attempted to compare our sample with each agency’s officer population on these demographics, but none of the sites regularly keeps or was willing to share such data. However, these proportions are well within our expectations for the areas sampled, and we have no reason to believe that non-responders differed from responders.

There were some differences in participants between sites. Indicating which sort of community corrections they perform, 101 officers stated that they supervise probationers only, 46 stated that they supervise parolees only, and 120 reported supervising both. Three states’ officers were comparable in education levels (majority having completed 4-year degree), whereas the fourth’s were more varied. Three states’ officers were comparable in having specialized in certain types of cases (e.g., domestic violence, gangs, etc.), whereas the fourth’s state had a larger proportion (45.7\%) of officers who specialize in mental health cases.

**Materials.** The Legal Attitudes Questionnaire (Kravitz et al., 1993) is a 30-item measure that was later reduced to 23 items using a sample of jury-eligible adults. We used all 30 of the original items as our sample was from a different population than the original, and our data revealed no reason to reduce the number of items. It was intended to assist in understanding the role of authoritarianism in jury decision-making. In the original study, the authors obtained Guttman-Cronbach alpha of .83. For those in our sample responded to each scale item \((n = 187)\), we yielded an alpha value of .61, 95\% CI [.53, .69], using all 30 items. The questionnaire uses a 6-point Likert scale, asking respondents to mark their level of agreement with statements about legal authority. For example, one item states, “Too many obviously guilty persons escape punishment because of legal technicalities.” Its validity was established through acceptable
correlations with scales of social desirability, boredom susceptibility, authoritarian personality, and belief in a just world.

The Rehabilitation Orientation Scale (Cullen, Lutze, Link, & Wolfe, 1989) was developed to measure corrections officers’ support for rehabilitat ing inmates. For example, one item states, “Rehabilitating a criminal is just as important as making a criminal pay for his or her crime.” In its original form, it is a 7-point Likert-type scale asking respondents’ level of agreement with nine items. For those who responded to each question in our sample (<i>n</i> = 200), alpha was calculated at .83, 95% CI [.79, .86]. The scale was formed from items that had been used previously to test public attitudes (Cullen et al., 1989). The researchers compared it to a scale measuring support for custody (Poole and Regoli, 1980), after adding three additional items.

The Social Desirability Scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) was designed to measure how much one attempts to appear socially appropriate. For example, one item reads, “I never resent being asked to return a favor.” The form we used has 20 items, allowing the participant to answer “true” or “false” to each statement. It also includes reversed scoring to avoid acquiescence. Strahan and Gerbasi (1972) supported its validity through cross-validation with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). We obtained an alpha of .79, 95% CI [.74, .83], with those who responded to each scale item (<i>n</i> = 217).

**Vignettes.** We wrote two brief vignettes (Appendix), each describing a scenario officers commonly face in their duties with offenders. The first describes an offender who misses work, which we designed to be a relatively minor incident of noncompliance, based on Eno Louden and colleagues’ (2008) previous research. The second vignette describes the same offender with a somewhat more serious violation of his supervision: a urine test positive for a small amount of alcohol. We instructed officers to select their most likely response from seven options, which fit into one of three pressure strategies derived from prior research on officer decision making:
positive, negative, and neutral pressure. Positive pressure involves a strategy where a reward or incentive is offered for compliance. Negative pressure involves a punishment, or the threat of punishment for noncompliance. A neutral pressure strategy uses neither punishments nor rewards, and may range from doing nothing to talking through problem solving techniques with the offender (see Eno Louden et al., 2008; Eno Louden, Skeem, Camp, Vidal, & Peterson, 2012). We included response options that were found to be the most frequent types of responses from officers in these past studies.

**Results**

Our analyses served two purposes: We first examined the revised scale’s psychometric properties, and then explored how officers’ responses on the revised instrument related to their chosen pressure strategies. We calculated Guttman-Cronbach alpha as an indication of average inter-item association (reliability), and correlation coefficients between the Revised Community Corrections Officer Orientation Scale (RCC) and the other above-mentioned measures to find evidence that the scale is valid.

**Psychometric properties.** Possible scores on the RCC range from 24 (total emphasis on authoritarian role; law enforcers) and 168 (total emphasis on supportive, guiding role; social workers). Respondents’ actual scores ranged from 46 to 146 (Figure 1). Our sample’s mean RCC score was 93.44 ($SD = 17.46$). Tests of skewness and kurtosis indicate that the distribution was not significantly different from normal, but came close in its kurtosis, $KS(222) = .059$, $p = .06$, 95% CI for skewness and kurtosis [-.32, .01], and [-.22, .43], respectively. We identified outliers at both ends of the distribution, and retained them in the analyses. These tests indicated that the majority of officers self-reported as using a synthesis of authority and guidance in their approaches toward offenders, but that there were still many officers who had strong opinions in either the law enforcer or social worker directions.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]
Of the 294 total respondents, 72 either left items blank or ended the survey before completing the RCC, thus no scale score could be computed for them. For the remaining 222 respondents who completed the RCC, we obtained Guttman-Cronbach alpha of .85, 95% CIs [.82, .88], for all 24 item pairs. Removing any of the item pairs would not have significantly improved the rating, so all were retained for the remaining analyses.

We calculated Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficients between the RCC and each of the other scales we included in questionnaires. As hypothesized, the RCC correlated positively with the rehabilitation orientation scale, $r = .49$, $n = 194$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.38, .59], and negatively with the legal authoritarianism scale, $r = -.38$, $n = 182$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.50, -.25]. In other words, high scores on the RCC were related to an orientation toward rehabilitation, and low scores on the RCC were related to views favoring legal authority. An unexpected result was that the RCC correlated positively with the social desirability scale, $r = .14$, $n = 209$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.004, .27]. We address this in the discussion section.

**Trichotomization of officers.** The RCC is intended to separate officers into three categories: law-enforcers, social workers, and synthetic officers. We categorized our sample by placing those officers with scores more than 1 standard deviation from the mean into their respective categories based on methods from a previous study (Gillig, Manchak, Eno Louden, Vidal, & Skeem, 2009; see also Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005). Officers with RCC scores of 111 and above ($n = 30$, 13.5%) were categorized as social workers, and officers with RCC scores of 76 or lower ($n = 36$, 16.2%) were categorized as law enforcers. The remainder ($n = 156$, 70.3%) were categorized as synthetic. We used this categorization for our analyses of the officers’ responses on the vignettes.

Notably, officers who supervise both probationers and parolees had significantly lower RCC scores ($F[2, 219] = 13.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$) than those supervising only one type (who did not differ from one another). They also had lower rehabilitation orientation scores than those
supervising probationers only \(F[2, 197] = 10.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09\), but those supervising only parolees did not differ from those supervising only probationers or both. As the agencies also determine which type of offender officers supervise, it is not (nor was it intended to be) possible with these data to determine whether the difference in orientations is due to offender type or agency’s emphases. This may be a topic for future examination, but the focal question of this study was how officer orientation influences approach toward supervision.

Because the RCC is a continuous variable, we also computed regressions to determine if categorization would lead to different conclusions than if we had left the RCC score as a continuous variable. Results of the regression analyses generally supported our findings when using the categories (see below).

**Officer typology and strategy.** We next examined whether RCC scores are related to how community corrections officers respond to scenarios of noncompliance. There were so few positive pressure responses to either scenario (see Tables 1 and 2) that they were excluded from analyses, thus leaving only the negative pressure or neutral pressure responses. For both vignettes, the majority of officers endorsed a neutral pressure strategy—178 officers (88.6%) for the initial noncompliance scenario, and 125 officers (62.2%) for the continued noncompliance scenario. Virtually all of the remaining officers endorsed negative pressure strategies. We next sought to answer the question of whether an officer’s self-reported approach toward supervision was related to any change in pressure strategy between the initial noncompliance scenario and the continued noncompliance scenario.

We intended to categorize officers based on their RCC scores. However, as mentioned above, we first used regression methods to ensure our categorization of officers did not lead to different conclusions. Using the RCC score as the only predictor in two binary logistic regressions, high scoring officers were more likely to choose a neutral than negative response regardless of compliance scenario. However, there was a notable increase in the chi-square
statistic ($\Delta \chi^2 = 12.74$), and a notable decrease in the Hosmer and Lemeshow test ($\Delta \chi^2 = 6.29$) from the initial noncompliance scenario to the continued noncompliance scenario. In other words, the second scenario was a better predictor than the first. Because the use of categories allows for more intuitive interpretation, we use the categories of officers for the remainder of the results and in our interpretation.

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

A two-way contingency analysis of officer type (i.e., law enforcer, synthetic, social worker) by pressure strategy (i.e., negative, neutral) revealed no association for the initial noncompliance scenario, but a significant association for the continued noncompliance scenario, $\chi^2(2) = 20.99, p < .001, \phi = .32$ (see Figure 2 for a graphical representation). In other words, officer type had no relationship to the officer’s response to an offender’s first instance of noncompliance, but officer type did have a significant relationship to the response to continued noncompliance. The overall change in chi-square between the vignettes was 20.58, again indicating a large contribution of the scenario to strategy.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Indeed, we found that many officers changed their strategy between scenarios. The majority of strategy changes were from neutral to negative pressure strategies. In this sample, 65 officers responded to the initial noncompliance scenario with a neutral pressure strategy and then changed to a negative pressure strategy for the continued noncompliance scenario (Table 3).

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Discussion

Community corrections officers play a critical role in the supervision of probationers and parolees. They have a great deal of discretion in their supervision strategies, but more importantly, how they make decisions during supervision may directly influence offenders’ success. Understanding the relation between an officer’s attitudes toward his or her role and the
actual supervision strategies he or she chooses is an important step toward effective correctional practices. In the present studies, we note three key findings. First, we successfully revised a promising scale of officer orientation (Dembo, 1972), making it easier to understand and more consistent in its readability. Second, the majority of officers in our sample reported a synthetic approach toward supervision, indicating that they use a balance of authority/structure with support/guidance. Lastly, we discovered that officers’ self-reported role orientation predicted their responses to continued, but not necessarily initial, noncompliance. After weighing the limitations of this research, we discuss these findings in more detail below.

Limitations. We sought to avoid using observational data to infer officers’ attitudes toward their role, and instead addressed the constructs of interest in a more direct fashion through self-report. This approach has the advantage of avoiding some extraneous variables that may explain the observed relationships, but carries with it potential biases. We acknowledge four possibilities. First, self-reports have been criticized because respondents may over-report behaviors or attitudes they believe are seen as appropriate (e.g., Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992). Second, we assessed attitudes before officers read the scenarios, which may have made their role duality more salient as they were weighing responses to the scenarios. Third, asking officers to make a decision for an offender based on only a paragraph of information is certainly an oversimplification of the process. In practice, officers weigh many factors. Fourth, approximately 45% of the officers we invited to take the survey actually responded. It is possible that those who did not respond systematically differ from those who did respond (e.g., responders had less demanding caseloads). Due to the variability with which officers answered about their attitudes, and because our RCC score distribution was not different from normal (Figure 1), we do not suspect that any of these potential biases meaningfully impacted our findings. Additionally, wherever possible we took each of the steps recommended by Roth and BeVier (1998) to encourage high response rates.
Another possible limitation that future research may address is that there were unequal response options for each compliance scenario. It may be that this unintentionally limited officers’ responses, leading to bias. We do not believe that this is the case, however, for the following reasons: (a) the response options were based on tactics common to officers, (b) most officers chose responses that appeared to be hypothetically in line with their self-reports, (c) there were very few selections of positive responses even when more options were available in the continued noncompliance scenario, and (d) the types of rewards and punishments officers have at their disposal are similar so that the specific reward or punishment should not have impacted the officers’ choice. In other words, virtually all rewards available involve the reduction of supervision requirements, whereas punishments involve the increase of supervision and loss of freedom. We do not suspect that the number available would change an officer’s chosen action, but rather, they would choose the one most similar to how they would respond. With these limitations noted, we next discuss our interpretations of our findings.

A promising measure of officer orientation. We significantly improved the understandability of the Parole Officer Punishment and Reintegrative Orientation Questionnaire (Dembo, 1972). The revised scale (RCC) showed evidence of reliability, and it demonstrated the expected relationships to measures assessing convergent and discriminant validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). The RCC did have a small but significant correlation with a measure of social desirability, which did not support our hypothesis that there would be none. Although the correlation was weak ($r = .14$), it may be that officers viewed an orientation that leans more toward rehabilitation as more socially desirable (see Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992, for a meta-analysis of how many organizational behavior constructs often relate to social desirability). However, based on their responses to the vignettes, officers did not appear to predict using positive pressure in practice, which would likely correspond to social desirability. The
relationship between social desirability and officer role should be further explored in future studies.

From the current findings, the RCC appears to be superior to the original, if only because of its improved wording. It is difficult to fully compare our revisions to Dembo’s (1972) original scale, as he did not report reliability coefficients, nor did Paparozzi and Gendreau (2005) when using Dembo’s measure. However, both uses of the original scale offered evidence of validity, either through intercorrelations of the hypothesized dimensions, or correlations between officers’ scale scores and their behaviors in practice. The present study went a step further to provide evidence of validity as a measure of attitudes.

Compared to other, similar scales, the RCC demonstrated comparable psychometric properties. Revisions of Glaser’s (1969) scale produced reliability coefficients ranging from .65 to .94 (Clear & Latessa, 1993), and the professional orientation portion of the Klofas-Toch measure (1982) originally produced a reliability coefficient of .85, just as the RCC did in this study. Tomaino (1975) did not report the psychometric properties of his scale. Indications of validity are difficult to compare between measures, especially as we suspect that our focal constructs differ somewhat from those noted here. In any case, our assessment of the RCC’s validity was encouraging.

Given our promising findings, the RCC may be appropriate for agencies’ use when considering new employees, or during trainings. Understanding how an individual views the role of a probation or parole officer on the dimensions of rehabilitation and exercise of authority may give valuable insight for employers into what the interviewee expects, or may at least provide useful discussion points during an interview or training. We must emphasize here that, as we found in this research, a person’s self-reported attitude does not determine supervision strategy, but appears to have some influence thereon. For this reason, a person’s responses to the RCC provide only one source of information about officers’ behavior, whereas others may exist.
The RCC may also be useful for future research about officer attitudes. For example, it is not yet known what causes officer orientations (Robinson, Porporino, & Simourd, 1993; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1992) and the extent to which they are malleable (i.e., after training or experience). Recent research indicates that training may improve officers’ interactions with offenders (Bonta et al., 2011), but it is not yet known if and how an officer’s orientation per se can be shaped, or how permanent the effects of training may be. The RCC may assist with answering such questions.

**Majority of officers report synthetic orientation.** The majority (70.3%) of officers in our sample viewed their role as a synthesis of law enforcement- and social work-type methods. This finding is in line with observational research on officers’ orientation (Klockars, 1972; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005), and thus offers support to the validity of the RCC. At the same time, it is encouraging as synthetic officers appear to be most effective in promoting offender success (Klockars, 1972; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005; Skeem & Manchak, 2008). Synthetic officers’ techniques may be most effective in preventing recidivism due to their approach toward supervision. Researchers describe the synthetic approach as more caring, trusting, fair, and authoritative than the law enforcer approach (Skeem, Eno Louden, Polaschek, & Camp, 2007; Skeem & Manchak, 2008), which is consistent with the empirically supported RNR and CCP approaches toward corrections. Thus, the “firm but fair” (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980) officer appears to most effectively illicit compliance in supervision, and it is encouraging that our research demonstrates that type of officer describes the majority of those who were in our sample.

The variability among our sample is also noteworthy considering a recent report in which Miller (2013) found no evidence for the officer types we examined. His study concluded that modern officers are virtually all synthetic. We found this not to be the case, as there was considerable variability in officers’ orientation in our study, with many scores far from the mean.
One possible explanation for the discrepancy between our sample and Miller’s is that his data focused on the practices of officers, rather than how they perceive their roles. As was noted above, the steps of supervision have relatively little variation between officers, which may account for why Miller (2013) did not find great variation. We offer the position that the manner in which these steps are carried out may vary considerably, and has important implications for offenders.

**Officer orientation relates to supervision strategies for noncompliant offenders.**

Most importantly, we found that officer orientation was related, to some extent, to officers’ case decisions. Although the majority of officers initially approached supervision with a neutral pressure strategy (e.g., remind offender of supervision requirements, and discuss consequences of his choices), many of the self-reported law enforcers and synthetic officers shifted to a negative pressure strategy (e.g., requiring more frequent reporting) when the offender was repeatedly noncompliant. It may be that some officers use a method of graduated sanctions, where relatively minor sanctions are used to respond to initial instances of noncompliance, but more restrictive sanctions (i.e., negative pressures) are used to respond to continued or more serious noncompliance (Taxman, Soule, & Gelb, 1999). Graduated sanctions are engaged as a method of deterrence that is used before revoking the probation or parole agreement. Although they have become somewhat common in correctional practice, research has found mixed evidence of their effectiveness, particularly among different populations (i.e., drug offenders, juveniles; Guastaferro & Daigle, 2012; Johnson, Lanza-Kaduce, & Woolard, 2011; see also Wodahl, Ogle, Kadleck, & Gerow, 2009). It would be important in future studies to discover where officers learn the method of graduated sanctions—they may be trained to use it, it may be in their agency policies, or it may be an implicit strategy they have found to be effective through experience.
It is noteworthy that even among officers who responded to continued noncompliance with a negative pressure response, the majority who changed their strategy between compliance scenarios chose the response, “Require him to report to you more frequently”, which is arguably less punishment-oriented than the other two options: “Threaten him with jail time,” and “Ask for a court date to have a judge speak to him and/or request that his supervision be revoked.” The response is, by definition, a negative pressure strategy, as more frequent reporting adds stricter requirements (more supervision, more frequent urinalyses, and overall inconvenience and restriction to the offender). Even many of the synthetic officers responded with this negative pressure strategy to the scenario of continued noncompliance. Considering this with the lack of positive pressure strategies endorsed, it may be that the way officers report their view of offenders does not always translate into practice. That is, synthetic officers may not have realized that they changed from a neutral pressure to a negative pressure response. Alternatively, it may be that officers perceived increased reporting more as an opportunity for contact and, therefore, support for the offender. Indeed, principles of the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model of corrections (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990) state that the greatest attention should be given to the offenders with the highest needs. However, we find it unlikely that officers viewed the negative pressure strategies as opportunities to use more resources for high need offenders. If officers selected the negative strategies for reasons other than punishment—such as desiring to give more attention to the offender—we likely would have also seen more endorsements of the problem solving (neutral; e.g., “Discuss strategies to avoid future use”) or positive pressure strategies. Requiring more frequent reporting necessarily implies more supervision and restriction, but not necessarily the use of problem solving techniques.

The infrequency with which officers chose positive pressure strategies was notable, given the emphasis in the correctional literature on using such strategies. Generally, Core Correctional Practices (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980) emphasize the use of positive reinforcement to bring
about behavior change, in a manner similar to behavioral therapy. Additionally, reviews of programs that successfully reduced recidivism found it necessary that positive reinforcement was used far more often than punishments (Andrews, Zinger, et al., 1990; Gendreau & Ross, 1981). Thus, it is concerning that so few officers in our sample chose a positive reinforcement method in either noncompliance scenario.

Even if officers generally did not endorse positive pressures, we expected the social worker type to do so with more frequency than others. Dembo (1972) hypothesized that the reintegrative orientation (i.e., social workers in our study) would be related to “positive response” to offenders. In our sample, although 13.5% of officers self-reported as having a social worker orientation, only one of them chose a positive pressure strategy in one of the noncompliance scenarios. The two other officers who chose a positive pressure strategy at some point self-reported as synthetic. It is conceivable that officers in this sample viewed the positive pressure options as overly rewarding, but we based the response options on past research of common strategies (Eno Louden et al., 2008, 2012). It may be that, had the scenarios contained more information about the offender, more officers would have chosen the positive pressure scenario. Subsequent research should explore this possibility.

Conclusions and Implications

These studies added two unique and important elements to the present knowledge of community corrections role orientation and how it influences supervision strategies. The first is that the use of the same vignettes for all officers provided the opportunity to compare officer types by decisions, whereas past research has been primarily concerned with actual offender outcomes, which are less comparable, as their causes are not always clear. The second is that this was the first research that directly examined how officers make decisions based on their role orientation: a valuable aspect that provides a foundation for improvements in screenings and trainings for new and seasoned officers. Improving community
corrections’ effectiveness has far-reaching implications. Perhaps most promising is that the necessary result of lower recidivism is fewer victims in, and lower costs to, the community.
### Categorization and Frequency of Response Options to Initial Noncompliance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Option</th>
<th>Pressure</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>RCC mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask Offender J. how he plans to deal with the situation, and offer feedback.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>95.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind him of his requirement to hold a job, and review the possible outcomes of his choices.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>90.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to Offender J.’s explanation, then make a plan with him to overcome the obstacle.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>101.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell Offender J. that if he does not comply with the conditions of his supervision, you will ask the judge to put him in jail.</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>85.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow the natural consequences to follow, knowing that Offender J. might lose his job.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>80.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer to decrease the number of times he must report to you if he can go without missing work for a time you set.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer to meet with him and his boss together to discuss the problem.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>101.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Categorization and Frequency of Response Options to Continued Noncompliance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Option</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>RCC mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Come up with a clear plan both of you agree on that will help him stay sober.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>97.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss strategies to avoid future use.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require him to report to you more frequently.</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>85.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threaten him with jail time.</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>83.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for a court date to have a judge speak to him and/or request that his supervision be revoked.</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>87.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage him to call you to talk about it the next time he is tempted to use drugs or drink.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>94.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer to let him report to you less frequently if he can stay sober for a length of time you set.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Change in Strategy between Scenarios Including All Officer Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Non-compliance Response</th>
<th>Pressure Strategy</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2(1)$ with McNemar's test of marginal homogeneity, excluding all positive responses due to low cell counts, $= 1.11$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = .075$. What is of interest is those cases that do not fall on the diagonal, indicating that they changed their strategy between vignettes. Differences among officer types are given in Figure 2.
Figure 1. Dispersion and categorization of scores on RCC ($N = 222$). Scores more than 1 standard deviation from the mean were categorized as either law enforcer-type officers or social worker-type.
**Figure 2.** Officer types’ changes in pressure strategy with the offender’s compliance. This is a graphical representation only, as positive pressures were not used in statistical analyses, and pressure strategies were categorized in analyses rather than treated as continuous. Statistically stated, for law enforcers, McNemar’s test of marginal homogeneity resulted in $\chi^2(1) = .963, p < .001$. For synthetic officers, $\chi^2(1)$ with McNemar’s test of marginal homogeneity = .671, $p < .001$. In the same test for social workers, $\chi^2(1) = .236, p = .219$. 
References


discretion: The role of risk/need instruments in probation supervision decisions. *Journal of
Criminal Justice, 24*(2), 109-121. doi:10.1016/0047-2352(95)00059-3

in mandated community treatment: Blending care with control. *Psychological Assessment, 19*,
397-410. doi:0.1037/1040-3590.19.4.397

supervision to evidence-based practice in probation. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 47*,
220-247. doi:10.1080/10509670802134069

Strahan, R., & Gerbasi, K. C. (1972). Short, homogeneous versions of the Marlowe-Crowne
4679(197204)28:2<191::AID-JCLP2270280220>3.0.CO;2-G

Takagi, P. T. (1967). Evaluation systems and adaptations in a formal organization: A case study
of a parole agency (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from National Criminal Justice
Reference Service. (NCJ Number 007348)


doi:10.1177/0032885599079002004


2352(92)90031-4
Appendix

Vignette 1 Text (Initial Noncompliance)

Offender J. is a 31-year-old male probationer who pleaded guilty to methamphetamine manufacturing. Seven years earlier, he had completed a substance abuse program as part of another probation agreement, and had no more arrests until this most recent. He is required to hold a job, and has been working for a landscaping company for 6 weeks.

You learn from his boss that Offender J. has not reported to work for 2 days. How are you most likely to react?

Vignette 2 Text (Continued Noncompliance)

You still supervise Offender J. from the first scenario. After resolving the first issue with his job, he is now 4 months in to his probation. His latest urinalysis comes back positive for a small amount of alcohol. As his probation officer, how would you most likely react?