

# Towards An Empirical and Theoretical Understanding of Offender Reinforcement and Punishment

*Charles Robinson, Chief Probation Officer*

*Travis County Adult Probation Department, Austin, Texas*

*Melanie S. Lowenkamp, Core Correctional Solutions, LLC, Hudson, Ohio*

*Christopher T. Lowenkamp, Administrative Office of U.S. Courts, Probation & Pretrial Services Office*

*Mikayla N. Lowenkamp, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio*

*Regina, a client in a specialty program, struggled early, but turned it around late and finished the program with a fresh perspective and new outlook. Early in the client's transition, the court rewarded positive behaviors with candy bars. One day, she explained to me, her supervising officer, that she didn't need or want the candy. She explained that the candy isn't and wasn't a reason to show up for, and participate in, group activities. Regina, now several months clean, shared that she typically gave the candy to another participant who was much more interested in chocolate. If not the chocolate, then why did she show up, try new things, and eventually learn a new way of responding to situations that would have normally led her to use drugs? Maybe it was the public praise that accompanied the chocolate. Perhaps it was the improved family relationships that grew with each passing day of sobriety. If we're guessing, it might have been any number of things that might come to mind. There is one way to find out for sure why she continued to replicate a behavior that led to lasting change—just ask! Imagine the impact we could've had and the timing of the impact if we'd just asked Regina what motivates her to do things differently.*

**COMMUNITY SUPERVISION** has undergone significant change in the past several years. Specifically, the role of the community supervision officer has evolved from a condition-driven brokerage and monitoring specialist to a risk-focused direct-service interventionist that uses behavioral change strategies to promote public safety

and reduced victimization (Bonta, Ruge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008; Robinson, Lowenkamp, VanBenschoten, Alexander, Oleson, & Holsinger, 2012; Bourgon, 2013). The shift in expectations now encourages the officer to score and make use of information derived from a validated risk and needs instrument. Beyond classification, the shift has pushed officers in this new paradigm to develop supervision plans that translate the assessment output into a meaningful plan for change, and asked officers to use a newly defined skill set to encourage compliance and influence change. The evidence of the shift can be easily seen in the training provided to community supervision officers. For example, Trotter (1996, 1999) provided five days of training on prosocial modeling, empathy, and problem solving to examine whether the use of these approaches relates to reduced recidivism. The change agent evolution can also be seen in other skill-training programs for probation officers. Bonta et al. (2008); Raynor, Ugwudike, and Vanstone (2013); Lowenkamp, Lowenkamp, and Robinson (2010); and Lowenkamp, Alexander, and Robinson (2013), for example, helped community supervision officers connect the risk assessment outcome to the content and style of client interactions using adaptations of core correctional practices.

Similarly, Taxman (2008) introduced the Maryland Proactive Community Supervision Model to help reengineer probation supervision by integrating five key supervision tenets derived from research. The same

trend can be seen in other programs that reinforce a changing landscape in community supervision. The National Institute of Corrections (Carter & Sankovitz, 2014), for example, recently partnered with the Center for Effective Public Policy to release a conceptual guide to risk-based supervision that articulates a prescription for service delivery that partners dosage hours delivered by a corrections professional (i.e., community supervision officer) with dosage hours delivered through referral services. The model purports that a client's face-to-face contact with an officer can impact criminal justice outcomes, and therefore that the new role of the community supervision officer is critical to the change process.

One interesting denominator for many of the training programs and the proposed dosage supervision model is the use of reinforcement and punishment. Wodahl, Garland, Culhane, and McCarty (2011), using a sample of 283 randomly selected criminal justice clients, investigated the impact of rewards and sanctions in an intensive supervision setting. More specifically, the group examined whether the rewards-to-sanctions ratio predicted program completion. The findings suggest that as the proportion of reinforcers-to-punishers widened, the odds of program success improved. These findings are good news for the many community corrections agencies that have designed and adopted behavioral response grids with the hope of creating credible alternative responses to non-compliance and revocations and acceptable

reinforcements for compliance and demonstrated behavioral change.

Community corrections professionals, however, still face a knowledge gap in the attempt to use operant conditioning to supervise clients. Specifically, with a few exceptions, the literature lacks an understanding of the way the offender perceives commonly used community supervision responses. The offender's thoughts and perceptions are important when we apply incentives and sanctions because they help us better understand the kinds and magnitude necessary to extinguish undesirable behaviors and encourage replication of more desirable replacement behaviors, and the client's likely reaction. That is, what one person might consider a strong reinforcement another might consider a weak reinforcement or even a punishment. The recipient's perception is important, and understanding that perception is critical when choosing reinforcements and punishments (Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003). For example, using a survey of 107 offenders, Wodahl, Ogle, Kadleck, and Gerow (2013) examined how offenders perceive commonly used sanctions. The survey data suggest that offenders viewed a three-page written assignment as roughly equal to a two-day jail sanction.

The point to take away from this discussion is that correctional staff might make assumptions about the impact and intensity of a response to offender behavior, whether that response is a reinforcement or punishment. Such an assumption might be completely right or completely wrong, although Bassett, Blanchard, and Koshland (1977) demonstrated that correctional staff erred in rank-ordering inmate reinforcements.

One method to learn how offenders perceive a particular action is to use group-level data to develop a list of general reinforcements and punishments. A second method is to ask a given offender what would be perceived as a reinforcement or punishment and how intense or potent a particular action is perceived by the recipient. Both of these methods can be achieved by the use of a survey. Reinforcement survey schedules have a long history in behavioral therapy (see Cautela & Kastenbaum, 1967 for an example of a reinforcement survey and Rimm & Masters, 1979, as well as Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003, for general discussions about their use). While we could not find an analogous punishment survey in the published literature, given corrections' penchant for punishment, it seems advantageous to begin to think about how

to use the intentional and tailored use of punishment to decelerate or eliminate risky behaviors of offenders under supervision. As such, it seems logical to begin developing an understanding of what might be used as a punishment and how to survey offenders to gather this information.

Given what is known about contingency management, it is important to develop an understanding of what *offenders* under supervision find, generally, to be reinforcing and what they find, generally, to be punishing. Moreover, we would argue, it is equally if not more important to survey what an *individual offender* finds reinforcing and punishing. Given the new goals of supervision (i.e., behavioral change), it is also important to understand the magnitude of reinforcements and punishments from the offender's perspective. Although many agencies have developed sanction grids and to a much lesser extent reinforcement grids,<sup>1</sup> we are unsure of the degree to which offenders were consulted in developing the general response list and the degree to which an individual offender is surveyed to determine what he or she, specifically, might find reinforcing or punishing and how much so. Further, although many of these grids vary in some way based on risk or a variant of risk (Hickert, Prince, Worwood, & Butters, 2014), it is unclear how those variances are developed and if they are based on data or just a good guess. These gaps are what led to the current research.

## Method

This study involved the development of a survey asking clients currently under community supervision to rate, on a scale of 1 to 7, how much they would like or dislike a particular action an officer might take in response to his or her behavior (1 = dislike a lot; 7 = like a lot). The survey contained a total of 45 actions that can conceptually be thought of as three types of actions: reinforcement, punishment, and referrals for service. We hypothesized that clients would indicate that they liked the reinforcements, disliked the punishments, and were neutral about referrals for services. We also believed that average responses would vary by risk level, race, and/or gender.

Table 1 lists the items included on the survey as well as the type of item (reinforcement,

punishment, or referral), based on assumptions regarding clients' perceptions of these items. For example, we believed that "sitting in the waiting room for 30 minutes before seeing your officer" would be perceived as a punishment by offenders. In contrast, we believed that "verbal praise/reinforcement" would be seen by clients as a reward or reinforcement. Finally, we believed that, on average, clients would be neutral when it came to service referrals like "job placement," "outpatient treatment," or "inpatient treatment."

Out of 496 clients newly ordered to serve a term of community supervision, 250 completed the survey. Of those 250 surveys, 8 were excluded from analysis due to missing data, incomplete surveys, or responses that were not usable. The final number of surveys included in these analyses is 242. Seventy-seven percent of the sample was classified as white and 31 percent of the sample was female. Data on risk category were available for 216 of the 242 offenders and indicated that 22 percent of the sample was low risk, 39 percent was moderate risk, and 39 percent was high risk. One quarter of the sample was under supervision for a felony offense.

## Results & Discussion

Table 2 presents the average ratings for each of the 45 items on the survey. The items are arranged in Table 2 in ascending order based on the average rating for the entire sample of offenders. Again, for reference, the scale ranged from "1" to "7" with the following anchors: 1 = dislike a lot; 2 = dislike; 3 = dislike a little; 4 = neither like nor dislike; 5 = like a little; 6 = like; and 7 = like a lot. We estimated the average scores for the sample overall, by offender sex, race, ethnicity, and (when available) offender risk. The average ratings for each item for the entire sample and all subgroups are contained in Table 2. Significant differences between groups are flagged with various symbols (see note to Table 2). Table 2 also contains a column labeled "Type" which represents our beliefs about how offenders would see the listed actions (R = reinforcement, S = service, and P = punishment) and therefore how they would rate the items.

Statistical tests were calculated to determine if the average ratings for each item were different across offender sex, offender race, offender ethnicity (Hispanic), and offender risk (low, moderate, or high). This process led to the calculation of 180 statistical tests. From this number 33 significant differences were identified and are flagged in Table 2.

<sup>1</sup> See Hickert, Prince, Worwood, and Butters (2014), which indicates that 37 states have formal graduated sanction policies. Of those 37 states, 29 have some sort of sanction grid, but only 7 states have an incentive grid.

**TABLE 1.**  
*List of Survey Items and Assumed Client Perception*

Item #	Item	Type
2	Sitting in waiting room for 30 minutes before seeing officer	Punishment
4	See officer more often	Punishment
5	Removal of driving privileges	Punishment
7	You have to pay for drug test confirmation	Punishment
8	Court hearing from judge because of violations	Punishment
9	Verbal reprimand from officer	Punishment
10	Prison	Punishment
17	No contact with peers	Punishment
19	Alcohol monitoring device	Punishment
21	Additional community service hours	Punishment
24	Electronic monitoring	Punishment
29	More days added to supervision	Punishment
30	Home visits	Punishment
36	Increase curfew hours (you have to be home earlier)	Punishment
41	Jail time	Punishment
1	Skip court cost payments around holidays	Reinforcement
6	Coupons for food	Reinforcement
11	Reduce curfew hours (you can stay out later)	Reinforcement
12	Remove from electronic monitoring	Reinforcement
13	Chance to share my story (with peers, officers, judges)	Reinforcement
14	Coupons to go to a movie	Reinforcement
15	Verbal praise/reinforcement	Reinforcement
16	Supervision fees removed	Reinforcement
18	Certificate of achievement	Reinforcement
22	Letter of recognition from judge	Reinforcement
23	Letter of recognition from supervising officer	Reinforcement
25	Bus passes	Reinforcement
26	Drug testing coupon to cover drug test fees	Reinforcement
27	Your story in agency newsletter	Reinforcement
28	Letter or recognition from chief probation officer	Reinforcement
31	Ceremonial court hearing in recognition of your achievements	Reinforcement
32	Day pass (from residential treatment center)	Reinforcement
33	Pick a day and time for office reporting	Reinforcement
34	Lunch with chief probation officer	Reinforcement
37	Officer tells someone important to you how well you are doing on supervision	Reinforcement
38	Ability to skip an appointment with your officer	Reinforcement
40	A pass to go out of state or jurisdiction	Reinforcement
42	Scholarship towards school	Reinforcement
43	Good time—get off supervision sooner	Reinforcement
45	Court hearing to recognize your achievements	Reinforcement
3	Job placement referrals	Services
20	Reporting to a day reporting center	Services
35	Outpatient treatment	Services
39	Halfway house	Services
44	Inpatient treatment	Services

Note that, based on chance alone, one would expect to identify nine statistically significant differences. Also note that without exception the differences are small and are always less than one point. Some of the differences are greater than one half of one point; while they do not lead to the conclusion that what one subgroup sees as a reinforcement another sees as a punishment, nevertheless, the observed differences might be helpful in developing policy and individual practice.

Before administering the survey, we hypothesized that clients would indicate that they generally disliked the items considered as punishments, view services as neutral, and generally like those things that were reinforcements. A second hypothesis was that average responses would vary by risk level, race, ethnicity, and/or sex.

There are several noteworthy findings in Table 2 that relate to the first hypothesis. First, all the items hypothesized to be sanctions in Table 1 do receive average ratings that would lead to the conclusion that they are aversive stimuli. Further, while the differing magnitude of the punishments is clear in some instances (for example, comparing going to prison to a court hearing with the judge for violations), some items are surprisingly similar in magnitude (for example, “sitting in the waiting room for 30 minutes prior to seeing officer” is rated the same as “electronic monitoring” and “additional community service hours”).

Review of sanctions and incentives grids from 18 states (see Table A-1) revealed that verbal reprimand was referenced 29 times as an appropriate response to negative behavior. Verbal reprimand, an item hypothesized to be a punishment and one that is often used by probation officers in response to noncompliance or negative behaviors, was rated on average a 3.4, which fell between the “dislike a little” and the “neither like or dislike” categories, indicating that the average offender is indifferent to this type of approach.

One might ask whether each of these sanctions represents similar or different goals on the part of the officer. In other words, are they primarily intended for behavior management or behavior modification? If the intended goal of the response is public safety, then increased sanctions such as electronic monitoring might be deemed appropriate. However, if our intention is to change or motivate behavior, is there an equally or more effective and cost-effective choice? One incentive and sanction grid that was reviewed for the study identified electronic monitoring as the appropriate response

**TABLE 2.***Average Ratings Overall, by Offender Sex, Race, Ethnicity, and Risk Category*

Item	Type	All	M	F	W	NW	H	NH	High	Mod	Low
Prison	P	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.2
Jail time‡	P	1.5	1.6	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.7	1.4	1.2
More days added to supervision±	P	1.8	1.9	1.7	1.7	2.1	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.9
Removal of driving privileges‡±	P	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.7	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.8	1.6
You have to pay for drug test confirmation	P	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.0	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.3
Additional community service hours*	P	2.1	2.3	1.8	2.1	2.3	2.0	2.2	2.2	2.0	2.3
Electronic monitoring‡	P	2.2	2.3	2.0	2.1	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.0	2.0
Sitting in waiting room for 30 minutes before seeing officer*	P	2.2	2.4	1.8	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.1	2.0
Increase curfew hours (you have to be home earlier)	P	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.6	2.2	2.1
See officer more often	P	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.8	2.4	2.3
Alcohol monitoring device‡±	P	2.6	2.7	2.3	2.4	3.2	2.4	2.7	2.9	2.4	2.1
Home visits‡	P	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.9	2.4	2.3
No contact with peers±†	P	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.5	3.0	3.1	2.4	3.0	2.4	2.3
Reporting to a day reporting center±	S	2.7	2.8	2.4	2.5	3.1	2.6	2.7	3.0	2.5	2.4
Halfway house±	S	2.9	3.0	2.7	2.8	3.3	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.8
Your story in agency newsletter†	R	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.2	2.8	3.2	3.3	3.1	2.5
Court hearing from judge because of violations	P	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.2
Inpatient treatment	S	3.3	3.4	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.6
Verbal reprimand from officer	P	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.4
Outpatient treatment	S	3.8	3.9	3.5	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.6	4.0
Ceremonial court hearing in recognition of your achievements‡	R	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.8	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.2	3.5	3.7
Lunch with chief probation officer	R	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.7	4.0	4.1
Day pass (from residential treatment center)‡	R	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.8	4.3	4.0
Court hearing to recognize your achievements‡	R	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.8	4.1	4.2
Chance to share my story (with peers, officers, judges)±†	R	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.1	4.2	4.6	4.4	4.7	4.3
Officer tells someone important to you how well you are doing†	R	4.6	4.5	4.7	4.6	4.3	4.8	4.4	4.8	4.5	4.5
Letter or recognition from chief probation officer	R	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.7	5.0	4.8	4.9	5.0

*(Continued on next page)*

to noncompliance behaviors, such as failure to complete community service. According to the ratings from the survey, both items (“additional community service hours” and “electronic monitoring”) carried equal weight (2.1 and 2.2, respectively) in terms of offender sentiment. Perhaps one solution is to identify and separate behavior management strategies for increasing public safety from behavior modification strategies for changing behavior.

Also of interest is the order of the punishments, aside from prison and jail time. For example, respondents disliked “more days added to supervision” to a greater degree than “see officer more often.” Although we could continue to point out interesting differences in how offenders perceive these punishments, the most important point for those developing policy or working with offenders is that offenders do judge

punishments differently than we might expect, and any *single offender* might judge an item differently than the average for the sample. For example, although 86 percent of the sample indicated they would “dislike a lot” going to prison, 7 percent indicated they would “dislike” it, while 6 percent indicated they would “neither like or dislike” it and 1 percent indicated they would “like it a little.” Although we have yet to determine how these differences might translate to outcomes, they may present an opportunity for officers to select the most effective responses for each offender. How offenders’ perceptions of punishment differ from those of practitioners, and how they differ on an individual basis, are both critical to developing individualized and effective contingency management schemes, sanction and incentive grids, or behavioral programming.

The five items that were categorized as services and therefore hypothesized to be perceived as neutral by offenders received average ratings ranging from 2.7 to 4.9 (dislike a little to like). Among these, only “job placement referrals” received an average rating that fell above the neutral range. Within treatment services, there was a distinguishable variation between two groups of items (“report to a day reporting center” and “halfway house”; and “inpatient treatment” and “outpatient treatment”). Average survey ratings for the first group (“report to a day reporting center” and “halfway house”) were 2.7 and 2.9, respectively, indicating that survey responders viewed these items in the range of “dislike” and “dislike a little.” The second group (“inpatient treatment” and “outpatient treatment”) was viewed more favorably, with ratings of 3.3



TABLE 2. *continued*

Item	Type	All	M	F	W	NW	H	NH	High	Mod	Low
Job placement referrals	S	4.9	4.9	4.9	4.8	5.1	4.7	5.0	4.9	5.0	4.6
Reduce curfew hours (you can stay out later)	R	5.0	4.9	5.1	5.1	4.7	4.9	5.0	4.9	5.1	5.0
Letter of recognition from judge	R	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.1	4.9	5.2
Remove from electronic monitoring	R	5.1	5.0	5.3	5.2	4.9	5.0	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.3
Letter of recognition from supervising officer	R	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.0	5.2	5.1	5.1	5.3
Bus passes‡	R	5.3	5.4	5.1	5.2	5.4	5.2	5.3	5.8	5.1	4.9
Verbal praise/reinforcement±†	R	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.4	5.0	4.8	5.5	5.1	5.4	5.5
Certificate of achievement	R	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.5	5.2	5.2
Coupons for food	R	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.4	5.5	5.2	5.0
Ability to skip an appointment with your officer*	R	5.5	5.4	5.8	5.6	5.3	5.3	5.6	5.4	5.6	5.6
Skip court cost payments around holidays*	R	5.5	5.4	5.9	5.6	5.3	5.5	5.6	5.6	5.3	5.7
Coupons to go to a movie	R	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.5	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.8	5.3
A pass to go out of state or jurisdiction†	R	5.7	5.7	5.8	5.8	5.5	5.5	5.9	5.7	5.8	5.7
Scholarship towards school	R	5.8	5.7	6.0	5.9	5.7	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.9	5.7
Pick a day and time for office reporting±	R	5.8	5.7	6.1	5.9	5.5	5.8	5.9	5.7	5.9	5.9
Drug testing coupon to cover drug test fees‡	R	5.9	5.8	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.7	5.9	5.9	6.1	5.5
Supervision fees removed±	R	6.3	6.3	6.4	6.4	6.0	6.2	6.4	6.2	6.5	6.3
Good time—get off supervision sooner±	R	6.5	6.4	6.6	6.5	6.2	6.4	6.5	6.4	6.5	6.5

Type of item: P = punishment; S = service; R = reinforcement

All = average ratings for entire sample

M = average ratings for male offenders; F = average ratings for female offenders

W = average ratings for White offenders; NW = average ratings for non-White offenders

H = average rating for Hispanic offenders; NH = average ratings for non-Hispanic offenders

High = average rating for high-risk offenders; Mod = average rating for moderate-risk offenders; Low = average rating for low-risk offenders

\*  $p < .05$  comparison based on sex

‡  $p < .05$  comparison based on risk category

±  $p < .05$  comparison based on race

†  $p < .05$  comparison based on ethnicity

and 3.8, respectively, falling between “dislike a little” and “neither like or dislike.” Services that could be perceived as more punitive and less helpful (such as day reporting and halfway house) were viewed differently from those that provided an identifiable service like inpatient and outpatient treatment or job placement referrals.

Table A-1 (Review of sanctions and incentives grids from 18 states) revealed that referrals to treatment and other treatment-related activities appear as sanctions 62 times. This approach of using corrective responses as punishment may not represent the best approach to positively shape behavior. The approach, delivering therapeutic adjustments as punishment, can impact the offender's thoughts about the corrective response and may influence the client's willingness to engage in the treatment process. Equating corrective

responses to punitive actions may also impact the professional's delivery of the response. For example, the corrections professional might deliver the response with a punitive connection—“you broke rule X so we are going to make you go to treatment.” An alternative would be to separate the therapeutic response from the contingent punishment that goes with the behavior. For example, “you broke rule X—so you are going to be put on curfew. Our intent is to help you avoid this behavior in the future. We believe the treatment center is an opportunity to acquire the skills necessary for that to happen.” The point of the separation is presenting the corrective response as an opportunity instead of a punishment.

One possible consideration might be better education on the part of the supervising officer in helping the offender understand what the program has to offer and the purpose and

benefits of sending him or her there to change the way the offender views these items.

Finally, turning to hypothesized reinforcements, a number of items hypothesized to be reinforcement were seen as punishments or neutral by the offenders completing the survey. For example, “having your story printed in an agency newsletter,” “a ceremonial court hearing in recognition of your achievements,” “lunch with the chief probation officer,” and a “day pass from a residential treatment center” were all, on average, ranked less than 4.5, meaning they were at best seen as neutral by the overall sample. For many other items it is apparent that, for the most part, offenders completing this survey rated hypothesized reinforcements as things that they would at least “like a little.” Again, it is important to note that there is variability in the average ratings across the items and within these ratings.

The ordering, based on average offender ratings, is interesting. For instance, being released from supervision earlier than planned (“good time—get off supervision sooner”) is ranked similarly to having “supervision fees removed.” Both of these items are substantially higher than the average ratings for reducing curfew hours (reduce curfew hours—you can stay out later) or getting off of electronic monitoring (remove from electronic monitoring). In reviewing the sanctions and incentives grids from 18 states, we found that only two contained incentives. While the majority of states have structured sanction grids, very few contained recommendations or suggestions for responding to positive behaviors. For the two states that did so, incentives fell into three main categories: supervision-related (e.g., released from supervision early or remove conditions), verbal (e.g., praise from officer or supervisor), and written (e.g., certificates).

The second hypothesis examined in the study was that average responses would vary by risk level, race, ethnicity, and/or gender. The basic precept inherent in the RNR principle is that not all offenders are the same, and thus our strategies and interventions must reflect the individual constellation of risk, needs, and responsivity factors of the offender as well as how the offender responds to correctional services provided (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Cullen, 2013). Within this framework, offenders will be motivated by different contingencies.

The theoretical principles of RNR have been applied to support the formulation of calculated incentive and sanctions grids based on risk level, seriousness of the violation, and other miscellaneous offender characteristics, with the premise that as offender classifications of risk change, so should the offenders’ response to various incentives and sanctions. If this assumption were correct you would expect to see a difference in the identified desirability of various incentives and sanctions based on offender risk. However, this assumption was not supported by the findings from the survey. Only 12 items listed on the survey showed statistically significant differences related to risk. The widest disparity between high-risk offenders and low-risk offenders occurred in ratings of “bus passes” (high: 5.8, moderate: 5.1, low: 4.9), “alcohol monitoring device” (high: 2.9, moderate: 2.4, low: 2.1), “day pass (from a residential treatment center)” (high: 4.8, moderate: 4.3, low: 4.0), and “your story in agency newsletter” (high: 3.3,

moderate: 3.1, low: 2.5). The vast majority of the punishment, reinforcement, or service items did not produce a statistically significant difference across offender classifications of risk, sex, race, or ethnicity.

Survey findings and lessons learned from this research have helped us identify some practical implications for considering the best response to positive and negative behaviors of those under community supervision.

Effective case management begins with an actuarial risk/needs assessment tool. The results of the assessment form the basis of supervision, from the level of supervision to the interventions and referrals necessary to address the offender’s risk to reoffend. Within this case plan there are several considerations to be made. Some of those considerations include the offender’s risk level, criminogenic needs, strengths, and responsivity factors, including motivation to change. Just as the case plan should include specific plans to address the offender’s unique criminogenic needs and skill deficits, an individualized system of incentives and sanctions should encourage and support compliance, reward prosocial behavior, and extinguish antisocial behavior, violations, and noncompliance. Very few incentive and sanctions grids tailor the actual reward or punishment to best meet the motivation of the offender. This research suggests that by better understanding what motivates the offender individually and giving the offender the opportunity to create his or her own menu of options, officers can better influence how they respond to efforts to change their behavior and minimize their risks to reoffend.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions for Research*

The current study advances our understanding of rewards and sanctions by providing a better understanding of how one group would perceive the suggested responses. Moreover, the data suggest that rewards and punishers might best work when responses are individualized based on client-specific variables. The study, however, has a number of limitations that should be considered. The sample size is small and the participants are volunteers from a single jurisdiction.

Although we now know more about the varied response to the proposed stimuli, we still do not know if the suggested responses effectively extinguish undesirable behavior or lead to replication of desired behaviors. For example, the client may receive something

rated as “like a lot,” but fail to connect the response to performing the desired behavior and fail to replicate the behavior in future situations. This might suggest that the efficacy of the response is related both to the client’s perception of the response and how the helping professional administers the reinforcement or punishment.

The current study also stops short of examining the offender’s perception of the intensity required to modify behavior. Understanding the client’s perception of intensity will help agency leaders understand resource needs and provide front-line staff with valuable “how much” guidance. For example, a client reports to “dislike a lot” a requirement to report more frequently. Understanding the client’s perception of intensity will help the officer determine “how much” more often is necessary to extinguish the behavior and create an opportunity to adopt a replacement behavior. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of the proposed behavioral response model. Specifically, future studies should explore how understanding the individual client’s perceptions about potential punishers and reinforcers might impact intermediate (for example, client engagement) and ultimate client outcomes. Additionally, future research should examine the intersection between the client’s perception of intensity and outcomes.

## References

- Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J., & Hoge, R. D. (1990). Classification for effective rehabilitation: Rediscovering psychology. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 17, 19-52.
- \*Arkansas Offender Violation Grid. (2013). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/AR/AR\\_Violation\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/AR/AR_Violation_Guide.pdf)
- Bassett, J. E., Blanchard, E. B., & Koshland, E. (1977). On determining reinforcing stimuli: Armchair versus empirical procedures. *Behavior Therapy*, 8, 205-212.
- Bonta, J., Rugge, T., Scott, T.-L., Bourgon, G., & Yessine, A. (2008) Exploring the black box of community supervision. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 47, 248-270.
- Bourgon, G. (2013). The demands on probation officers in the evolution of evidence-based practice: The forgotten foot soldier of community corrections. *Federal Probation*, 77(2), 30-35.
- Carter, M. M., & Sankovitz, R. J. (2014). *Dosage probation: Rethinking the structure of probation sentences*. Silver Spring, MD: Center for Effective Public Policy.

- Cautela, J. R., & Kastenbaum, R. (1967). A reinforcement survey schedule for use in therapy, training, and research. *Psychological Reports*, 20, 1115-1130.
- \*Colorado parole—Colorado violation decisions making process user guide (2011). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/CO/CO\\_CVDMP\\_UsersGuide.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/CO/CO_CVDMP_UsersGuide.pdf)
- \*Connecticut probation response to non-compliance guideline (2014). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/CT/CT\\_ProbationNonComplianceMatrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/CT/CT_ProbationNonComplianceMatrix.pdf)
- \*Georgia GDC Consistent Sanctions Response Matrix—Violation Levels (2011). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/GA/GA\\_Sanctions\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/GA/GA_Sanctions_Matrix.pdf)
- \*Hawaii violation response chart (nd). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/HI/HI\\_Violation\\_Grid.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/HI/HI_Violation_Grid.pdf)
- Hickert, A. O., Prince, K. C., Worwood, E. B., & Butters, R. P. (2014). *Development of Utah's incentive and response matrix*. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah, Utah Criminal Justice Center.
- \*Idaho offender violation/ response matrix (2009). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/ID/ID\\_Violation\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/ID/ID_Violation_Matrix.pdf)
- \*Illinois parole sanction matrix (2008). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/IL/IL\\_Sanction\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/IL/IL_Sanction_Matrix.pdf)
- \*Kansas violation response policy and behavior response guide (2009). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/KS/KS\\_Violation\\_Response\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/KS/KS_Violation_Response_Policy.pdf)
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Lowenkamp, M. S., & Robinson, C. T. (2010). *Effective practices in correctional settings-II*. Hudson, OH: CCS, LLC.
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Holsinger, A. M., Alexander, M., & Robinson, C. R. (2013). Diminishing or durable treatment effects? A research note on 24-month re-arrest rates. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 37(2), 275-283.
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Holsinger, A. M., Robinson, C. R., & Cullen, F. T. (2013). When a person isn't a data point: Making evidence-based practice work. *Federal Probation* 76(3).
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Alexander, M., Robinson, C. R. (2013). Using 20 minutes wisely: Community supervision officers as agents of change. In J. Smykla & M. Crow (Eds.), *Offender Reentry: 21st Century Issues*. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett.
- \*Maine graduated sanctions grid and agreement (2013). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/ME/ME\\_Sanctions\\_Grid.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/ME/ME_Sanctions_Grid.pdf)
- \*Michigan parole violation response guideline (2009). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/MI/MI\\_Violation\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/MI/MI_Violation_Matrix.pdf)
- \*Missouri violation response grid (nd). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/MO/MO\\_Violation\\_Grid.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/MO/MO_Violation_Grid.pdf)
- \*Nebraska parole violation matrix responses (Rev. 2014). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/NE/NE\\_Par\\_Violation\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/NE/NE_Par_Violation_Matrix.pdf)
- \*North Dakota managing noncompliant behavior (2014). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/ND/ND\\_ManagingNoncompliantBehavior.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/ND/ND_ManagingNoncompliantBehavior.pdf)
- \*Ohio violation hearing grid (Rev. 2012). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/OH/OH\\_Sanction\\_Grid.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/OH/OH_Sanction_Grid.pdf)
- \*Oklahoma sanction matrix (2008). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/OK/OK\\_Sanction\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/OK/OK_Sanction_Matrix.pdf)
- Raynor, P., Ugwudike, P., & Vanstone, M. (2013). The impact of skills in probation work: A reconviction study. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 13(5), 1-15.
- Rimm, D. C., & Masters, J. C. (1979). *Behavior therapy: Techniques and empirical findings*. New York, New York: Academic Press, Inc.
- Robinson, C. R., Lowenkamp, C. T., VanBenschoten, S., Alexander, M., Oleson, J. C., & Holsinger, A. M. (2012). A random study of Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR): Using core correctional practices in probation interactions. *Journal of Crime & Justice* 35(2): 167-188.
- \*South Carolina violation matrix (nd). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/SC/SC\\_Violation\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/SC/SC_Violation_Matrix.pdf)
- Spiegler, M. D., & Guevremont, D. C. (2003). *Contemporary behavior therapy* (4th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Wadsworth.
- Taxman, F. S. (2008). No illusion, offender and organizational change in Maryland's proactive community supervision model. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 7(2), 275-302.
- Trotter, C. (1996) The impact of different supervision practices in community corrections. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 29(1), 29-46.
- Trotter, C. (1999). *Working with involuntary clients: A guide to practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- \*West Virginia violation & graduated sanction policy (nd). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/WV/WV\\_Violation\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/WV/WV_Violation_Policy.pdf)
- \*Wisconsin functional responses to violations (2008). Retrieved May 15, 2015, from [http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/WI/WI\\_Violation\\_Grid.pdf](http://www.interstatecompact.org/Portals/0/library/statefiles/WI/WI_Violation_Grid.pdf)
- Wodahl, E. J., Garland, B., Culhane, S. E., & McCarty, W. P. (2011). Utilizing behavioral interventions to improve supervision outcomes in community-based corrections. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 38(4), 386-405.
- Wodahl, E. J., Ogle, R., Kadleck, C., Gerow, K. (2013). Offender perceptions of graduated sanctions. *Crime and Delinquency* 59(8), 1185-1210.

\* = reviewed for Table A-1.

## Appendix

We accessed the sanction grids from 18 states (random sample of 50 percent) that are listed on APPA's website (<http://www.interstatecompact.org/StateDocs/ViolationGrids.aspx>). We then determined if each sanctioning grid required multiple steps, made use of offender risk information, made use of violation severity information, and included incentives. About one half of the grids require a multi-step process to determine which sanctions can be administered. Just under two thirds (61 percent or 11 out of 18) make use of offender risk information, all grids make use of violation severity information, and two grids included information on incentives while 16 included information on sanctions only.

We also entered all the different sanctions and incentives listed on the 18 grids and then categorized the sanctions and incentives using the following designations: supervision—increases or decreases in supervision level, addition of conditions, and revocations; treatment—any treatment-related activity, including homework assigned by the officer; residential—halfway house or other residential placement that was not designated as treatment; community service—addition of community service as a condition or increases in community supervision hours; drug testing—adding or increasing drug-testing conditions; electronic monitoring—home confinement, GPS, electronic monitoring; hearings—with supervisors, court, paroling authority; incarceration—jail or prison; job referrals—job placement or job programming; verbal—warnings, reviews of rules/conditions of release, discussion; written—warnings, review of rules/conditions, reports

to court; and unspecified—non-specific sanctions or sanctions that were not clearly placed in other categories.

The distribution of the different categories of sanctions is listed in the Table A-1.

**TABLE A-1.**  
*Sanctions and Incentives found in Sanction Grids from 18 States*

Category	Sanctions		Incentives	
	n	Percent	n	Percent
Community Service	18	5		
Drug Testing	20	5		
Electronic Monitoring	32	8		
Hearing	18	5		
Incarceration	25	6		
Job Referral	7	2		
Residential	13	3		
Supervision	103	26	6	35
Treatment	62	16		
Unspecified	36	9		
Verbal	29	7	4	24
Written	32	8	7	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>