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From the Inside

The Meaning of Probation to Probationers

Brandon K. Applegate

University of Central Florida, Orlando

Hayden P. Smith

University of South Carolina, Columbia

Alicia H. Sitren

University of North Florida, Jacksonville

Nicolette Fariello Springer

University of South Florida, Tampa

Beyond considerations of relative punitiveness, very little is known about how offenders understand the experience of serving a probation sentence. The current study surveyed offenders currently on probation to assess the extent to which they believed their sentence was rehabilitative, incapacitative, deserved, and a deterrent to future offending. Perceptions that probation served no purpose and that it represented a game of manipulation and impression management were also investigated. The results showed that most probationers believed that their sentence was a deterrent, and it was rehabilitative and deserved. They also felt that probation served multiple purposes, and a minority of respondents perceived that there was no point to being on probation. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: *probation; correctional goals*

Recent national estimates reveal that probation remains the most widely used sanction in the United States. At the end of 2006, more than 4.2 million people were serving probation sentences throughout the country. This figure is more than double the number of people incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails (Glaze & Bonczar, 2007). Despite this widespread popularity, relatively little information about how probationers perceive their sentence has been systematically assembled. Policy makers assume, often implicitly, that offenders will think about their sanctions in a certain way, but research on the relative severity of sanctions has called such assumptions into question. The current study seeks to expand our knowledge of perceptions of probation by examining the extent to which offenders see probation as achieving the traditional goals of corrections: rehabilitation, deterrence, incapacitation, and retribution. We also examine whether probationers think that probation serves no purpose for them and whether they believe that their ultimate goal is to manipulate the system and their probation officers.

Authors' Note: Please address correspondence to Brandon K. Applegate, Department of Criminal Justice & Legal Studies, University of Central Florida, PO Box 161600, Orlando, FL 32816; e-mail: bapplega@mail.ucf.edu.

Literature Review

The existing literature on the purposes of punishment is largely restricted to philosophical debates, surveys of public preferences, and assessments of policies and practices that evince specific correctional goals. For example, Bentham (1789/2007) and Beccaria (1764/1963) provided early discussions about the goals of punishment. In the 1970s and 1980s, several volumes debated the merits of a retributive justice model (e.g., von Hirsch, 1976) and rehabilitation (e.g., Allen, 1981; Cullen & Gilbert, 1982). And, during the later 1980s and 1990s, attention turned to discussions of harming and confining offenders (e.g., Clear, 1995; Zimring & Hawkins, 1995).

Assessments of public opinion also are widespread. Taken together, they reveal complex feelings, where people are open to a range of responses to criminals. The public supports deterrent and incapacitative punishments and believes that offenders deserve to be sanctioned while simultaneously embracing rehabilitative treatment (Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000). Researchers have also undertaken sustained efforts to assess the effectiveness of deterrence (e.g., Pratt, Cullen, Blevins, Daigle, & Madensen, 2006), incapacitation (Zimring & Hawkins, 1995), and rehabilitation (Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; MacKenzie, 2006). Analyses of offenders' views of their sanctions, however, are in far more limited supply.

The Relevance of Offenders' Perceptions

Past research has investigated elites' views on correctional goals. The relevance of the opinions of legislators, prison wardens, correctional officers, judges, and others is clear: They are in positions to design or carry out policies, and these policies may be promoted or not depending on one's correctional orientation. It may be less immediately clear, however, why offenders' viewpoints are also important. Careful consideration of traditional correctional goals reveals assertions and assumptions about how criminals think about their sanction. Moreover, it is ultimately in the perceptions and future behaviors of offenders that punishment philosophies find their relevance.

Deterrence asserts that offenders alter their perceptions of the relative costs and benefits of committing future crimes based on their experience with punishment. A large body of literature has assessed this contention, finding that it holds up, at best, weakly (Paternoster, 1987; Pratt et al., 2006). It is notable, however, that these studies take for granted that the "punishments" being evaluated for their deterrent value are actually experienced as punitive by offenders. For more than a decade, we have known that offenders' perceptions of the relative severity of different punishments vary (see, e.g., Crouch, 1993; May & Wood, 2005; Petersilia & Deschenes, 1994; Spelman, 1995), and there is good reason to be suspicious about whether some of the sanctions investigated in the deterrence literature are truly experienced as unpleasant by offenders (Sitren & Applegate, 2006).

Criminals' perceptions also matter for rehabilitation and retribution. Retribution involves calculations of deserved punishment. Under this philosophy, society determines what sanctions are deserved for which transgressions. However, the offender is also relevant, in that perceptions of the sanctioning body's legitimacy are important. Behavioral psychologists point out that punishment can lead to anger, resentment, and retaliation if it is not perceived as legitimate and deserved (Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003). It has also been asserted that

antisocial or “criminogenic” attitudes are an important predictor of continued criminal behavior and an appropriate target for rehabilitative efforts (Andrews & Bonta, 2003). An offender’s belief that his or her sentence is providing valuable treatment—“buying into” therapy—would signal prosocial views. Furthermore, a client’s willingness to invest in therapy is recognized as a critical component of the relationship, or “therapeutic alliance,” between clients and treatment providers (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993). In a variety of settings, research has shown that the quality of that alliance is a significant predictor of successful treatment outcomes (Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000).

We venture that, in the context of probation, offenders’ perceptions are relevant even for incapacitation. Penologists and criminologists have tended to regard the offenders’ perspective as irrelevant to the goal of incapacitation; rather, what matters to these researchers is the reality and extent of the restrictions. Probation, however, does not provide nearly the physical incapacitation offered by imprisonment. Probationers are restricted by supervision and monitoring, but they are in frequent contact with the broader community, which may provide myriad opportunities for offending. The incapacitative ability of the sentence may depend, in part, on how restricted the probationer feels. Two probationers serving under near identical conditions may experience vastly different levels of incapacitation, based solely on personal perceptions of the level of constraint.

Research on Offenders’ Perceptions

Perhaps the most extensive body of literature addressing offenders’ sanction perceptions developed during the past 20 years has focused on how they view the relative severity of different punishments (Apospori & Alpert, 1993; Crouch, 1993; May & Wood, 2005; May, Wood, Mooney, & Minor, 2005; McClelland & Alpert, 1985; Petersilia, 1990; Petersilia & Deschenes, 1994; Spelman, 1995; Wood & Grasmick, 1999; Wood & May, 2003). This work was spurred by efforts to develop “intermediate sanctions”—such as intensive supervision probation, day fines, shock incarceration, and others—as fitting along a continuum between prison and regular probation (Morris & Tonry, 1991). One notable finding directly challenged assumptions about intermediate sanctions: Intensive supervision probation and some other community-based sanctions are often regarded by offenders as at least as punitive as short periods of incarceration (Petersilia & Deschenes, 1994; Spelman, 1995; Wood & Grasmick, 1999; Wood & May, 2003). For example, nearly one third of the Texas prison inmates in Crouch’s (1993) study reported that they would prefer 1 year in prison to just 3 years on probation. Despite challenges to core presumptions about intermediate sanctions, these studies have confirmed that regular probation—with little supervision and minimal restrictions on behavior—is consistently seen as less punitive than a variety of other possible sanctions. Thus, the popular belief that probation is a nonpunishment gains some support from these studies. Even so, this body of work addresses only a single aspect of correctional efforts—punitiveness—excluding other possible dimensions of the meaning of probation. From this work, we know only that offenders tend to see probation as comparatively less harsh than other sentences; it tells us nothing about other aspects of how probation is interpreted by probationers.

We were able to uncover only two prior studies that examined the meaning of punishment from the offenders’ perspective. One, conducted by Allen (1985), gauged the views

of a group of federal probationers in 1983. The other study was conducted by Van Voorhis, Browning, Simon, and Gordon (1997) and assessed inmates' perceptions of prison. Although our focus here is on probation, this study still provides some insights.

Allen (1985) asked his respondents two sets of questions regarding the traditional goals of corrections. First, he asked that they report their level of agreement or disagreement with four statements about what "the main purpose of probation is" (p. 70). He then posed a single question to the probationers on what they believed "the main purpose of probation *should* be ideally" (p. 70, emphasis in the original). Seventy-eight percent agreed strongly or agreed that the main purpose of probation "is to keep tabs on the probationer to prevent further violation of the law" (p. 70).¹ Somewhat fewer believed the main purpose to be rehabilitation or desert: 63% and 61%, respectively. Finally, only 41% strongly agreed or agreed that the main purpose was what Allen (1985) called the "justice model"—"to resolve the problem between the probationer and the victim in a fair and just manner" (p. 70). When asked what *should* be the main purpose, each probationer was allowed to provide multiple answers. Overall, 69% indicated rehabilitation, 55% deterrence, 17% desert, and only 7% justice. Thus, probationers expressed a preference for rehabilitation over other goals. In contrast, they perceived the reality of probation to be more focused on surveillance or "keeping tabs" on them.

Allen's (1985) study suffers from several limitations. First, his data were collected nearly 25 years ago. The intervening decades have seen fundamental shifts in probation. Changes include the expansion of monitoring technologies, increases in the number of people on probation in the United States, and a swing in the overarching orientation of probation. In the early 1990s, Feeley and Simon (1992) argued convincingly that corrections, including probation, had tilted in favor of an emphasis on classification, risk management, and efficient processing of cases. More recently, Steiner, Wada, Hemmens, and Burton (2005) showed that between 1992 and 2002, the number of legislatively established punishment functions within community corrections increased, whereas rehabilitative functions decreased. Second, Allen sampled 87 probationers who were scheduled to have their probation terminated during his 3-month study period. This approach virtually guaranteed that his sample would be unrepresentative by including mostly probationers who would successfully complete their sentences. Indeed, Allen reported that the outcome for 79 of his respondents was "difficulty free" (p. 72). Those who successfully complete probation may have experiences quite different from those who fail. Third, by wording his interview items in the third person when he asked probationers what is the main purpose of probation, Allen treated the meaning of probation as a general one not an individual one. Generalized reports of a situation may paint a very different picture than the personalized experience of each individual.

In contrast to Allen (1985), Van Voorhis et al. (1997) purposely sought to measure "actual inmate experiences of the prison environment" (p. 159). In this regard, most of the survey items they presented to their minimum and maximum security inmates were worded in the first person. For example, to assess respondents' views that their sentence was rehabilitative, Van Voorhis et al. (1997) had them agree or disagree with these two statements: "This experience is helping me to grow" and "I can accomplish something here" (p. 145). Van Voorhis and her colleagues also examined a broader set of possible meanings than Allen (1985) had. They included statements to measure inmates' perceptions that the

purpose of their sentence was rehabilitation, deterrence, retribution, desert, incapacitation, to impress the parole board, and to “scam” the staff. They also included one item to determine if the probationers believed that their sentence served no purpose.

We are persuaded that Van Voorhis et al.’s approach provides a more meaningful and more complete assessment of how correctional clients perceive their sentence. Although our methodology differs somewhat from theirs, their exploration of prison inmates served as the basis for the current exploratory study of probationers. In this way, we were able to investigate several dimensions of how probationers make sense of their sentence. Do probationers consider their probation to be a deterrent? Do they experience it as punitive? Do they believe they deserve to be on probation? Do they believe the sentence to be a rehabilitating experience? Do they take probation seriously or something only to be endured? That is, do they think there is no point to them being on probation? Do probationers see it merely as a game where they must attempt to manipulate their probation officer into seeing them in a positive light?

We also explore possible correlates. The literature on offenders’ perceptions of the relative severity of sentences has shown fairly consistently that Blacks and males are less favorable toward community-based sanctions than their demographic opposites (Crouch, 1993; May et al., 2005; Spelman, 1995; Wood & Grasmick, 1999; Wood & May, 2003). Prior experience with a particular sanction may also alter perceptions (Apospori & Alpert, 1993; McClelland & Alpert, 1985; Van Voorhis et al., 1997; Wood & Grasmick, 1999). We assess whether these variables predict how probationers understand the meaning of their probation sentence.

Methodology

Sampling and Data Collection

We collected the data for this study between May and September 2006 through self-report surveys distributed to misdemeanor probationers in a large metropolitan area of the Southeastern United States. Participants were invited to complete the survey as they waited to meet with their probation officer at the county probation office. This department serves all community corrections offenders in the county, and all face-to-face meetings with probation officers are conducted at this single location. The research reported here reflects a sample of 369 probationers who responded to the survey. Some of the analyses reported below, however, are based on fewer cases because of missing data on individual items.

In an effort to encourage candid responses, we informed each respondent that their answers would be kept completely confidential and would not be shared with their supervising officers. We also made a concerted effort to have the research team appear independent from the probation department. In this regard, researchers refrained from interacting with the staff as much as possible during data collection visits, and each researcher wore a prominent name badge emblazoned with a university logo. The questionnaire itself also clearly identified the study as being conducted by the University of Central Florida and emphasized confidentiality.

For several reasons, we were unable to randomly select respondents from the department’s client roles. Instead, we attempted to obtain a sample that was as representative as possible in two ways. First, we invited each and every person who arrived at the probation

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	226	77.7
Female	65	22.3
Race		
Black	77	20.5
White	193	51.5
Hispanic	92	24.5
Other	13	3.5
Employment status		
Full-time	244	64.4
Part-time	72	19.0
Unemployed	63	16.6
Current offense type		
DUI	117	40.2
Battery	51	17.5
Drugs	37	12.7
Theft	28	9.6
Other	58	20.0
Supervision intensity		
More than once per month	42	11.2
Once per month	310	82.7
Less than once per month	23	6.1
Previously on probation	163	43.4%
Age	289	Mean = 32.6, standard deviation = 10.3

department during each data collection visit to participate, and only rarely did a probationer decline. Second, the days and times of data collection were varied. Still, by collecting data from individuals who were at the probation office for a contact visit with their officers, we excluded those on the lowest levels of supervision. That is, probationers who were supervised only through telephone contacts with their officers were not included in the study. According to the probation department, 24% of the active probation cases were on telephone supervision.² In addition, only an English version of the questionnaire was available to participants; therefore, those who could not read English were also excluded. The probation department reported that 6% of their clients were non-English speaking.

Table 1 reports basic descriptive information about our sample. As shown, we were successful in recruiting a group of respondents who were diverse in terms of gender, race, age, type of offense, and prior experience with probation. The majority of our respondents were serving a sentence with a modest level of supervision—one contact with their officer per month. Notably, the sample is very similar to the population of clients who were serving a probation sentence at the time of data collection. Of the 4,184 probationers being supervised, 80% were male, 23% were Black, and 46% were on probation for a DUI (driving under the influence) offense.³ Moreover, the mean age of all probationers was 31.6 years—only a 1-year difference from the mean age of the respondents included in this study.

Operationalization

Although others have investigated what the public and various specialized groups believe *should be* the main goal of corrections (e.g., Applegate, Cullen, & Fisher, 1997; Cullen, Latessa, Burton, & Lombardo, 1993; Harris, 1968), as noted above, our intention was not to assess probationers' prescriptive beliefs. Rather, we sought to assess each probationer's individual understanding of what their probation experience meant to them. In short, we assessed what goals each probationer thought probation was serving, not what goals he or she believed it should strive toward. Within the context of a larger survey, each respondent was presented with 12 items operationalizing what purpose was being served by being on probation. These questions were adapted for the probation context from Van Voorhis et al.'s (1997) study of prison inmates. Two items each measured four traditional correctional orientations: rehabilitation, specific deterrence, incapacitation, and retribution. We also included two items to assess whether the respondent believed that being on probation simply meant trying to manipulate a probation officer or manage his or her impression. Two items also measured whether the respondent felt that there was no purpose to being on probation. All items are listed in Table 2. For each item, probationers responded on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

We also explored the possibility that probationers' perceptions were related to the characteristics listed previously in Table 1. Data on race, supervision intensity, and previous experience with being on probation were gathered on the self-report questionnaire. Initially, race and Hispanic ethnicity were measured separately. The survey responses revealed, however, that the probationers did not make this distinction. They consistently marked "Other" for race and indicated in the subsequent question that they were of Hispanic origin. To be consistent with the probationers' conceptions of themselves, we combined our race and ethnicity variables into a single measure. Anyone who indicated that they were Hispanic was coded as such regardless of their answer to the first question, and anyone who did not mark White or Black on the first question and also did not mark Hispanic on the second question was coded as Other.

Data on the remaining two independent variables were gathered from probation files. For 291 of the respondents, we were able to match their survey responses with probation department records on gender and current offense. The remaining files could not be matched because of missing or incomplete identification information.⁴

Results

The Meaning of Probation

Table 2 reports the distribution of probationers' responses to the 12 items measuring their perceptions of what it means to be on probation. The respondents thought that their sentence was serving a variety of purposes, but the largest portion of respondents believed that their sentence was a deterrent. More than 90% of the probationers agreed or strongly agreed that they had given up any future crime to avoid probation again. More than three quarters also agreed that being on probation increased the risk of being punished. Although scholars typically think of punishment and rehabilitation as being opposing goals, a large majority of the respondents thought that their sentence was not only a deterrent but was also

Table 2
Probationers' Perceptions of the Meaning of Probation

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean (<i>n</i>)
Deterrence					
To avoid ever being on probation again, I have given up crime forever	58.5	34.5	3.1	4.0	3.47 (354)
Being on probation would make it riskier to commit a crime	53.4	21.8	14.0	10.7	3.18 (363)
Rehabilitation					
Being on probation is helping me grow as a person	24.1	36.0	24.9	14.9	2.69 (369)
Through probation, I have gotten help with my problems so I can stay away from crime	22.4	50.3	17.9	9.4	2.86 (340)
Retribution					
Being on probation makes me feel like I am paying back society for my crime	21.6	33.2	27.1	18.0	2.58 (361)
I deserve to be on probation	13.7	34.8	26.8	24.7	2.38 (365)
Incapacitation					
Society is safer with me on probation	4.2	16.1	35.0	44.6	1.80 (354)
It would be easy for me to commit a crime while I am on probation ^a	6.3	11.4	26.7	55.6	3.32 (367)
Impression management/manipulation					
It doesn't matter what my probation officer thinks of me ^a	9.2	28.2	39.9	22.6	2.76 (358)
I try to do the things that will make my probation officer think I am using my time constructively	29.9	56.3	10.9	2.9	3.13 (348)
No purpose					
There is no point to me being on probation	22.5	31.4	38.0	8.1	2.68 (347)
Being on probation doesn't do any good for me or for society	16.4	27.4	38.0	18.2	2.42 (347)

a. Item was reverse coded to compute the mean. For all other items, strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1.

rehabilitative. Upwards of 60% believed that probation fostered personal growth and provided assistance with problems. Many respondents also understood probation to be serving a retributive purpose. More than half of the probationers said that they felt their sentence was helping them repay society for their crime; just less than half thought that they deserved to be on probation.

Somewhat in contrast to these views, however, are the results for the items assessing whether the probationers felt there was no purpose in probation. A slight majority agreed

or strongly agreed that there was “no point” in being on probation, whereas only 8% strongly disagreed with this statement. Furthermore, almost 44% indicated that they thought their probation experience was not doing “any good” for them personally or for society. The probationers did tend to believe that they needed to foster a positive impression while on probation. More than 8 in 10 agreed that they try to engage in activities that will make their supervising officer see them as productive. More than three fifths of the probationers revealed their belief that what their probation officer thinks of them matters. The results for the two items ostensibly measuring the remaining traditional correctional goal—incapacitation—are not consistent with each other. Although almost 80% indicated that they thought their supervision was not making society any safer, an almost equal portion reported that committing a crime while on probation would be difficult. Thus, the probationers acknowledged feeling the effects of incapacitation, yet claimed that being incapacitated did not prevent any real harm. We explore the implications of these beliefs later in the discussion section.

From the results reported in Table 2, it appears that many probationers believed that their sentence served multiple purposes. To investigate these results further, we examined the interrelationships among these perceptions. Table 3 reports results from an exploratory factor analysis. The two-factor solution, which was produced using principal components analysis with varimax rotation, reveals which items were answered similarly (Warner, 2008). Specific goals, particularly rehabilitation and retribution, predominate in the first factor. The highest loadings are revealed for the items measuring perceptions that probation is assistive and is allowing the probationer to pay society back. Substantial loadings are also shown for the first incapacitation item and the first deterrence item. On the second factor, the two highest loadings are for the items measuring perceptions that probation has no purpose. Beliefs that committing a crime while on probation would be easy and that a probation officer’s opinions do not matter also contribute meaningfully to this factor. To explore possible correlates of probationers’ perceptions, we regressed each factor score on race, gender, age, employment status, the type of offense for which the respondent was on probation, supervision intensity, and prior experience with being on probation. Neither regression model was statistically significant.⁵

Discussion

At the outset of this article, we pointed out that very little is known about probation from the probationers’ viewpoint. Prior research shows that probationers believe that probation is relatively less punitive than most other forms of criminal punishment, but studies assessing other dimensions of probationers’ perceptions of their sentence are nearly nonexistent. We also raised the argument that probationers’ views are a relevant topic for investigation. We did not contend that probationers should be asked what the purpose of their sentence should be. Indeed, it is highly improbable that many probationers would indicate a preference for severe punishment that would dissuade them from committing any more crimes. Instead, we argued that the traditional philosophies of corrections make implicit assumptions about how probation is experienced, thus, calling for understanding what probation means to probationers. In this regard, the findings reported above enhance our knowledge about the nature of probation as well as point out some issues ripe for future investigation.

Table 3
Principal Components Analysis of Meaning of Probation Items
Using Varimax Rotation ($n = 302$)

Rotated Pattern Coefficients Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
To avoid ever being on probation again, I have given up crime forever	0.528	-0.006
Being on probation would make it riskier to commit a crime	0.306	-0.141
Being on probation is helping me grow as a person	0.650	0.336
Through probation, I have gotten help with my problems so I can stay away from crime	0.707	0.122
Being on probation makes me feel like I am paying back society for my crime	0.721	0.290
I deserve to be on probation	0.579	0.210
Society is safer with me on probation	0.617	0.002
It would be easy for me to commit a crime while I am on probation ^a	-0.242	0.510
It doesn't matter what my probation officer thinks of me ^a	-0.009	0.653
I try to do the things that will make my probation officer think I am using my time constructively	.376	-0.118
There is no point to me being on probation	-0.348	-0.718
Being on probation doesn't do any good for me or for society	-0.322	-0.691
Eigenvalue	3.426	1.510

a. Item was reverse coded in the analysis.

Before discussing the results of this study, we wish to acknowledge its limitations. Care should be exercised in generalizing the findings of the study. As we noted above, we were unable to randomly select the sample of participants. Although our efforts to include a wide variety of participants appear to have been successful, and the sample mirrors the population of probationers within the jurisdiction we studied on several dimensions, sampling bias may exist. In particular, we did not include probationers on the lowest level of supervision (telephone contacts only), those who could not read English were excluded, and probationers who had absconded during the data collection period, by definition, were unavailable and could not be included in the study. Also, the sample was drawn from only a single jurisdiction that supervised exclusively misdemeanor probationers. Misdemeanants make up only about half of all people on probation nationwide (Glaze & Bonczar, 2007). Felony probationers may hold different views. Furthermore, the organizational context of community corrections departments can influence how officers perform their jobs, thereby affecting their clients' experiences (McCleary, 1992). The extent to which our results are unique to the agency studied here or can be generalized to other probation departments should be assessed by replicating the current project in other jurisdictions.

With these caveats in mind, this study produced some important insights. As we noted early in this article, traditional correctional goals make implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumptions "about what may or may not be going on in the minds of offenders" (Van Voorhis et al., 1997, p. 164). The current study provides evidence on the extent to which these assumptions are consistent with the way probationers view their sentence. Deterrence theorists propose that exposure to a criminal sanction will increase an offender's perception of the risks of future criminality and the unpleasantness of the consequences that follow.

An important underlying question, then, is whether offenders perceive probation as a punitive experience. Our results demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of probationers see an increased risk of punishment for any future crime, and they assert that the threat of probation will keep them crime free. Whereas the deterrent effectiveness of punishment is questionable (Pratt et al., 2006) and is beyond the scope of the current study, learning that offenders perceive probation as punitive is an important finding. It raises a challenge for those who believe that probation is a nonpunishment. Although probation may lack legitimacy as a punishment with scholars, policy makers, and the public (Roberts & Stalans, 1997), probationers see it differently. Spelman's (1995) interview results suggest that probation may be viewed as unpleasant because of the inconvenience it imposes. As one offender put it, compared to probation, jail is "easier on your work and lifestyle" (p. 124). Future studies could investigate perceptions of the particular components of probation further, but the broader point is that probation is felt as a punitive experience. Thus, probation has a place in any deterrence-based correctional policy.

Our findings also hold implications for other correctional goals. Retribution seeks to deliver a level of punishment that is deserved based on an offender's infraction. Although broader society typically determines what is deserved, an offender's perception may also be relevant. Punishments that are not felt as legitimate may be disintegrative (Braithwaite, 1989) and may lead to resentment and retaliation (Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003). Our results show that probationers as a whole are somewhat ambivalent on this issue. Approximately half of our sample believed that they were paying society back for their crime by being on probation and half thought that they deserved a probation sentence. The remaining probationers disagreed or strongly disagreed with these orientations. Thus, a substantial portion of probationers do not see their sentence as legitimate. Far more of them, however, embraced views consistent with rehabilitation: 6 in 10 thought that their experience was helping them grow, and more than 70% said that probation was helping them solve problems related to their criminality. Probation programs can build on these perceptions by providing programming that addresses criminogenic needs (Andrews & Bonta, 2003) and by fostering an assistive relationship between probation officers and their clients. Although community correction has shifted toward punishment functions during the past decade and more (Clear, 1995), rehabilitation remains an important goal of probation among legislators (Steiner et al., 2005). Probationers seem to embrace it as well.

A curious finding was the discrepancy in reactions to the two items intended to measure feelings of incapacitation. The small minority of respondents who said that society was safer because they were on probation contrasted sharply with the large majority who indicated it would be difficult for them to commit a crime while on probation. These items also loaded on different factors in the principal components analysis. Apparently, the respondents did not equate being personally prevented from breaking the law with a protective effect for the broader public. The divergent results for these incapacitation items suggest that the respondents felt that their offenses posed no risk to society; being incapacitated, they believed, did not gain any real protection for possible victims. In short, these probationers felt that they were not "real criminals" worthy of fear or distrust. These perceptions deserve further investigation, but on their face, the practical implication is clear. Probationers would benefit from restorative justice efforts that would increase their understanding of how their criminal activities affect victims.

Probation may be suffering from the situation of traditional criminal justice described by Umbreit, Coates, and Vos (2001): "The state has somehow stood in for the victim, and the offender has seldom noticed how his or her actions have affected real, live people" (p. 30). To the extent that this is true, victim-offender mediation—where victims and offenders are brought face-to-face to discuss the offense, its impact, and possible ways of repairing the harm—would be a useful component of probation. Assessments reveal that, among other outcomes, participation in victim-offender mediation helps offenders see the consequences of their crimes. Umbreit and Coates (1992) provide direct illustrations of how offenders' perceptions were changed by their experience with mediation. As one offender noted, "After meeting the victim, I now realize that I hurt them a lot . . . to understand how the victim feels makes me different" (p. 16).

Although these approaches show promise for addressing the views of probationers who have committed property and personal offenses, probationers convicted of victimless crimes made up a substantial portion of our sample. Those whose primary charge was DUI or a drug offense constituted more than half of our respondents. A different approach within the restorative justice paradigm may help these offenders recognize the harm that their crimes cause as well. Karp and Drakulich (2004) evaluated Vermont's "Reparative Probation" program, which they report works mostly with victimless crimes and with cases where the victim declines to participate in restorative justice efforts. Under this model, victims are welcome to participate, but even when they do not, "a board composed of trained volunteers convenes with the offender to discuss the impact of the offense and find a restorative resolution" (Karp & Drakulich, 2004, p. 659). One of the central goals of this board is to help the offender see the harmful consequences of his or her action, even when there is no clear individual victim. The authors did not assess whether the program changed offenders' views, but they did find that more than three fourths of victimless cases included a specific component (such as attending a victim impact panel, writing an essay, or delivering a public presentation) aimed at this goal. Our results suggest that probationers may need such efforts to address beliefs that their offenses do not pose a risk to community safety.

Beyond implications for individual correctional goals, it is also notable that the probationers in our sample tended to experience aspects of several goals, seemingly simultaneously. This result can be contrasted against the arguments of scholars that typically pit one goal against others or argue that the goals are incompatible. Some authors have begun to suggest that treatment and punishment may profitably coexist (e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 2003). Pursuing multiple goals discomfits retributivists who vehemently reject the utilitarianism underlying other traditional goals of corrections (e.g., American Friends Service Committee, 1971; von Hirsch, 1976). Other critics include those who embrace treatment and see no need to pursue policies of harsh punishment (e.g., Gendreau, Paparazzi, Little, & Goddard, 1993) and writers who support incapacitation and eschew treatment efforts (e.g., Wilson, 1975).

Apparently, probationers have no such concerns in terms of how they actually experience their sentence. Not only did large segments of the sample agree with multiple goals, but the responses to these goals also tended to be related. Those who expressed a belief that their sentence was rehabilitative also tended to feel that it was a deterrent, and it was incapacitative and deserved. These results are not completely unexpected. Allen's (1985) federal probationers also asserted multiple goals as "the main purpose of probation," and

Van Voorhis et al.'s (1997) inmate respondents expressed a belief that their sentence met several ends.

A final aspect of our findings merits additional consideration. Among the correlates we investigated, none were related to the probationers' views of their sentence. Thus, men, women, Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and probationers of other races all experienced their sentence similarly. This result is in contrast to other research showing differences in the perceived severity of various punishments, particularly a preference for prison over probation (Crouch, 1993; May et al., 2005; Spelman, 1995; Wood & Grasmick, 1999; Wood & May, 2003). We also found that probationers' views were not structured along lines of age, employment status, prior experience with probation, supervision intensity, or the type of offense for which the client had been placed on probation. In short, we were unable to distinguish any subgroups who perceived probation in a certain way. Future research should investigate other possible correlates.

Conclusion

When asked what corrections should be, it is not uncommon to find that professionals and the public alike endorse multiple goals (see, e.g., Applegate, Davis, Otto, Surette, & McCarthy, 2003; Kifer, Hemmens, & Stohr, 2003; McCorkle, 1993). When unencumbered by considerations of how pursuing different goals might lead to conflicting practices, people want offenders to be deterred and rehabilitated, to be punished only to the extent they deserve but also to be isolated to protect the public from their future offenses. Humans seek meaning within the complexity of the criminal act, so there is no reason that similar reasoning would be suspended in terms of punishment philosophy. Judging from what probationers report feeling because of their sentence, probation more or less is meeting all the philosophical goals. It appears that for many offenders probation is experienced as unpleasant—more than a “nonpunishment”—it feels restrictive and deserved, and probationers believe it is doing them some good.

Notes

1. Although Allen identified this item as “deterrence,” it does not imply that the person is dissuaded from committing further criminal acts because of any unpleasantness of the probation experience. Rather, this item seems to tap perceptions that being on probation serves an incapacitative function.

2. Nearly one third of the probationers on telephone-only supervision, however, hold this supervision level because they live outside the local area. Thus, their supervision status was not based on low-risk levels, and apart from their location, it is unlikely that they differ substantially from those probationers who were included in our sampling strategy.

3. Data on other offense classifications were not available from the probation department for the full population.

4. These items were excluded from the questionnaire for two reasons. First, an examination of probation records prior to data collection suggested that they were accurately and reliably recorded in those files. Second, under the direction of our institutional review board, we sought to eliminate unnecessary questions from the survey to minimize the burden placed on respondents. As one reviewer noted, researchers collecting the surveys could have recorded “their best guess” as to each respondent's gender. We did not adopt this practice, however, so gender information is available only for respondents whose surveys could be matched with their probation records.

5. See online appendix for table displaying these results.

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Brandon K. Applegate is an associate professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Central Florida. His primary areas of research include punishment and rehabilitation policy, juvenile justice, jail operations and populations, offenders' perceptions of their sentences, and public views of correctional policies. He has served as Secretary of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and as President of the Southern Criminal Justice Association.

Hayden P. Smith is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina. His work centers on health disparities in the criminal justice system, penology and jail diversion programs, self-injurious behaviors in corrections, and criminological theory.

Alicia H. Sitren is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of North Florida. Her published work has been devoted to punishment philosophies and revisions of deterrence theory. Her research agenda includes studies in corrections and policing as well as continuing to examine central elements of deterrence theory using data drawn from convicted offenders.

Nicolette Fariello Springer is the project manager of the Criminal Justice, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Technical Assistance Center, which is housed at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida. Her research interests include mental health and substance abuse, particularly relating to juveniles, as well as issues concerning gender, race, and ethnicity in the criminal justice system. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in criminology at the University of South Florida.