



The limits of individual control? Perceived officer power and probationer compliance

Hayden P. Smith ^{a,*}, Brandon K. Applegate ^b, Alicia H. Sitren ^c, Nicolette Fariello Springer ^d

^a Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina, Currell College, Room 207, 1305 Greene Street, Columbia, SC 29208, United States

^b Department of Criminal Justice and Legal Studies, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL 32816, United States

^c Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL 32224, United States

^d Department of Criminology, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620, United States

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Interactions between correctional agents and the offenders they supervise are assumed to be highly contingent upon latent power dynamics. Yet, currently there is little research that differentiates the bases of power used by correctional personnel. The present study drew on a classic typology to examine the role of power in probation supervision. Perceptions of power and their impact on probationers' compliance were examined using data collected from self-report surveys and case files of 376 misdemeanor probationers. Although the results for perceived power were similar to those of prior research, the current study's findings largely did not support the expected relationship between bases of power and compliance with the conditions of probation. The theoretical and practical implications of these results are discussed.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The issues surrounding the use of power and power-relations become highly salient when one examines criminal justice organizations. Indeed, one of the central functions of the criminal justice system involves controlling defendants and offenders (Packer, 1968). Among other activities, police detain and arrest suspects, judges impose sentences, and correctional agencies exercise their power to control and sometimes confine convicted offenders. In the context of probation, officers use a variety of techniques to constrain the behavior of probationers in order to promote compliance with the conditions of their sentence. Still, relatively little is known about the use of power in correctional settings. In fact, to date only four studies had differentiated the bases of power used by correctional personnel, and all four addressed this issue in the context of prisons (Hepburn, 1985; Stichman, 2002; Stojkovic, 1984, 1986). No study had yet examined the role of power in probation supervision.

The prison power studies could only suggest what one might expect from the officer-client relationship in probation. Serving a sentence within an institution can alter the way in which inmates interact with others (Sykes, 1958; Toch, 1992). Moreover, those who are in prison may be supervised by several different officers, in different contexts, and at different times. In contrast, people serving probation sentences are typically supervised by a single officer, serve their sentence in the community, and have committed crimes that are much less serious than those committed by those who go to prison. The community context and more personal nature of supervision on probation, therefore, may result in different power relationships. The

present study began to address this neglected area of research by determining what sources of power probationers believe their supervising officers possess and to what extent these bases of power are related to probationers' misbehavior. As a prelude to the current study, the nature of power, how it relates to correctional supervision, the approaches that have been used previously to assess the bases of power in corrections, and what is currently known about this issue are discussed below.

Literature review

Power and the coercive institution

Issues of power are inextricably linked to the criminal justice system, with expressions of power in criminal justice institutions primarily demonstrated through coercive organizational goals. Here, criminal justice agencies are deemed successful when they maximize offender compliance with a set of requirements. Comparative studies of prisons and jails, for example, have used low inmate infraction rates as indicators of superior institutions (see, for example, Dilulio, 1987; Keller & Wang, 2005; Senese, 1997). Officers are given specific authority to limit the offender's freedom and choices, and as such, power in this sense reflects the ability to coerce and abrogate *prima facie* rights (Airaksinen, 1988). The offender faces the classic utilitarian decision: balancing a need to maximize potential pleasures while minimizing potential pains. In short, it is the coercive criminal justice institution and its agents that deliver power directives towards the offender, and the offender from whom compliance is expected.

To sociologists like Etzioni (1961), criminal justice institutions are predominately coercive, exhibiting power through physical or symbolic expressions of violence, reduced freedoms, and restricted movement.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 803 777 6538; fax: +1 803 777 9600.
E-mail address: SmithHP@mailbox.sc.edu (H.P. Smith).

Etzioni asserted that coercion was particularly salient in the prison setting, where low power-holders (prisoners) lacked commitment towards organizational goals. Sykes (1958) also recognized the coercive nature of prisons, though he argued that directives and force were largely ineffective against strong inmate cohesion. Sykes (1958) stated that in prison, "power must be based on something other than internalized morality and the custodians find themselves confronting men who must be forced, bribed, or cajoled into compliance" (p. 47).

While criminal justice institutions demonstrate power in the formal sense, a host of informal power directives are used by criminal justice agents. For example, Cloward (1968) suggested that it was in fact the inmate "elite" who largely controlled the social equilibrium within prison. As such, formal restrictions from the institution were viewed as having a minimal effect on inmates. Cloward observed that prison guards were forced to rely on a complex process of ignoring certain rules, manipulating information, and generally propagating an informal system in which inmates were used to control each other. More recently, Marquart (1986) revealed that prison guards used physical coercion to control inmates and that willingness and ability to exert such power was intricately entwined in informal relationships among officers.

These formal and informal power relations expressed in the prison setting may shed light on the coerciveness of probation supervision. Like the prison setting, the institution of probation is responsible for controlling and coercing offenders. As such, the punitive power entrusted to probation officers to enforce compliance is both necessary and viable for the criminal justice system. Yet at the same time, probation officers are required to provide rehabilitation and reintegration within a traditional law enforcement setting. In probation, the role ambiguity between control and rehabilitative orientations is further compounded by inconsistent mission goals at the department level (Lindner, 1994). As a result of this ambiguity, little is known about the manner in which probation agents administer power directives.

Currently, there are over four million American adults under federal, state, or local probation jurisdiction (Glaze & Bonczar, 2007). Restated, this means that at the end of 2006, the equivalent of one in every fifty-three American adults was under probation supervision. In terms of power relations, the potential benefits of understanding how probation officers monitor and direct probationers become apparent. In light of the economic and social benefits of having fewer probationers occupying jail or prison space due to revoked probation, and the importance of identifying "what works" in probation, the practical aspects of understanding probation officer power are paramount.

The existing literature contends that criminal justice institutions may be viewed as predominately coercive out of necessity, with the demonstration of power being both formal and informal. While this conclusion is supported by previous research on power relations in the prison setting, it is not yet clear whether the same can be said of power relations within probation supervision. Like prison, probation is responsible for coercing and controlling offenders. Unlike most prison guards, however, probation officers are also required to provide rehabilitation and reintegration (Steiner, Wada, Hemmens, & Burton, 2005). Probation holds a distinctive niche in the criminal justice system. It has a unique clientele, and it is guided by conflicting mission goals and strategies that are designed to encourage probationer reform as well as compliance. With this in mind, the concept of power is revealed to be complex and dynamic, and rarely has it been studied in criminal justice.

Bases of power

Power is regularly defined as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber, 1968, p. 53). Thus, the concept of power includes the assumption that social actors frequently possess different goals. Power becomes salient when an "inferior" actor yields to the will of a

"superior" actor, and is forced to relinquish personal status, goods, or goals. In fact, Lukes (1974) stated that power could only exist in the presence of some form of resistance.

Starting from this definition, French and Raven (1959) developed a classic typology of the social bases of power. French and Raven divided the bases of social power into five types: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Briefly, reward power is the perception of the "inferior" that the "superior" can issue rewards for desired behavior. Coercive power is the perception that the "superior" can inflict punishment on the "inferior" for undesired behavior. Legitimate power refers to perceptions that the "superior" possesses inherent rights to direct actions, while referent power finds its efficacy in the level of personal identification that the "inferior" feels towards the "superior." Under expert power, the basis of control is the "inferior's" perception that the "superior" holds knowledge or skill in a given area.

Theoretically, all of these bases of power may be exercised in probation supervision. Although the opportunities appear slim, probation officers may offer rewards—requests for the judge to reduce supervision, requests for early sentence termination, free transportation coupons—that may be used to encourage probationer compliance. Initiating the process of loosening probation restrictions may be among the most valuable rewards at an officer's disposal. In light of their structural position, officers also hold legitimate power. Exercise of legitimate power, however, rests on acceptance of the structural hierarchy of authority imposed by the probation system. Officers may display expert power through superior knowledge about probation, legal processes, the vagaries of particular judges or the local probation office, the effectiveness of treatment, or other areas salient to probationers. Frequently, knowledge is demonstrated by instructing probationers and through familiarity with the nomenclature of probation. Officers obtain referent power in direct proportion to the level of respect and admiration they receive from offenders on their case loads. Finally, coercive power seems to undergird the entire probation experience. Noncompliance can result in a host of sanctions, including informal and formal reprimands, increased surveillance, and initiation of revocation proceedings resulting in incarceration. Probation officers may use the threat of such consequences to motivate desirable behavior among probationers.

Previous studies of power bases in corrections

To date, only four studies had been conducted that examined power relations within correctional settings. In two of the earliest studies, Stojkovic employed a qualitative methodology in a maximum security prison. First, Stojkovic (1984) formally interviewed forty male inmates in order to ascertain their use of power on other prison inmates. Second, Stojkovic (1986) identified the bases of power used by twenty prison officers and eleven prison administrators on prison inmates. During this time period, Hepburn (1985) also studied prison guards' perceptions of power, but used a quantitative methodology. Here, Hepburn (1985) distributed self-administered questionnaires to 360 guards employed at five different prisons, asking for their views on why inmates did what officers wanted. Building on this study, Stichman (2002) surveyed nearly 400 male inmates housed in an Ohio high-close security facility in order to ascertain inmates' perceptions of the bases of power used by prison guards.

Examination of these four power studies revealed a modest degree of concurrence. In the qualitative studies, Stojkovic (1984) found that inmates primarily used referent and coercive powers to control other inmates. Supplemental bases of power were largely dependent upon circumstance and opportunity. For example, legitimate power was used by older respected inmates, expert power was used by inmate-lawyers, and reward power was virtually nonexistent. In the case of prison administrators and guards, Stojkovic (1986) found that coercive and reward were key bases of power, while administrators

and officers considered referent, legitimate, and expert forms of power ineffectual. Use of reward power, however, was restricted to more reliable inmates who supported institutional goals, operating under the risk of a backlash due to competition for coveted positions. Thus, coercive power was a favored approach among prison inmates and administrators alike as a method of control.

The two relevant quantitative studies also showed some consistency, with legitimate and referent bases of power being the most important, and coercive and reward being the weakest bases of power (Hepburn, 1985; Stichman, 2002). Specifically, Hepburn (1985) discovered that legitimate and expert power ranked highest among the guards' perceptions of why "inmates do what you want them to do" (p. 151). This result was largely stable across all five correctional institutions. Stichman's (2002) survey of inmates also found a high ranking for legitimate power ("respect for the position") and referent power ("respect for the person"). Similar to Hepburn, reward power was viewed as largely ineffectual. In contrast to Hepburn, however, inmates believed that their officers could exercise power through the manipulation of possible punishments (coercive power). Inmates also tended to reject the idea that guards have any particular expertise and asserted that the officers' skill level had no effect on their compliance with prison directives.

Stichman (2002) has been the only researcher to assess the extent to which inmates believe officers have certain bases of power at their disposal. The perspective of offenders is particularly critical because it is their behavior that is targeted for control through the exercise of power. As Stichman (2002) observed, "power is effective only when the person being controlled perceives it" (p. 7; also see French & Raven, 1959). Stichman's (2002) study, however, did not fully disentangle inmates' perceptions that their officers held certain attributes from how those perceptions related to inmates' behavior. An inmate may perceive expertise among officers—"corrections officers have an ability to resolve conflicts between inmates" (Stichman, 2002, p. 89)—but this perception may have no bearing on his or her behavior. The perception in this case creates the possibility of power (what may be termed "perceived power")—but it does not necessarily result in real manifestations of power (what may be distinguished as "manifest power"). Stichman (2002) addressed this issue to some extent by including the idea of control in some of her survey items. For example, inmates who agreed that they "cooperate with some officers because they are fair" (p. 89) attributed their good behavior to a referent power base. Still, self-evaluations of the reasons for behavior are bound to be problematic in correctional populations. There is evidence that even among the general population, people have considerable difficulty accurately specifying the causes of their actions. Frequently, people attribute their behavior to plausible explanations rather than accurate ones, and they seldom develop multivariate or generalizable models (Bishop, 2004). As such, Stichman's study omitted valid and reliable measures of manifest power, thus limiting the understanding of the association between the dynamics of power in a real-world context and the associated rates of offender compliance.

The current study

The current study aimed to develop knowledge in several important areas that were lacking in the existing literature on bases of power. Prior academic studies on the bases of power used by correctional agents had been restricted to the prison setting. For at least three reasons, the power dynamic between prison guards and prisoners may be dissimilar to what occurs in the relationship between probation officers and probationers.

First, power relations are assumed to be overt in prisons, with control of inmates a key concern for an outnumbered officer staff. Inmates in a correctional facility are highly alienated from society and are required to display a degree of reverence and subordination to guards (Marquart, 1986). They are in the community, thus, proba-

tioners are far less alienated from society, and they may feel much less obliged to demonstrate subordination. Thus, the line between probation officer and probationer is less bold than that between prison guard and inmate. Second, prisons are more likely to contain inmates convicted of violent and predatory felonies compared to probation departments where half of all probationers are convicted solely of a misdemeanor (Glaze & Bonczar, 2007). Third, communication within the prison setting frequently occurs within earshot of other inmates. The bases of power used on a specific individual, therefore, quickly resonate to other inmates. Where a strong inmate network is present, demonstrations of power by correctional officers find a wide audience. Comparatively, probation tends to include one-on-one meetings where power relations take place "behind closed doors." Moreover, there is no evidence of a strong "probationer-culture" where officer actions would be discussed in the broader probation population. As Gibbons and Rosecrance (2005) have pointed out, probation supervision is "played out over long periods of time in small offices far from the spotlight, often with ambiguous guidelines" (p. 131).

This research also addressed the theoretical weakness inherent in the previous four power studies. All but one of these studies had been based on perceptions of one's own expressions of power—the self-perceptions of inmates in influencing other inmates (Stojkovic, 1984), the self-perceptions of administrators and guards in influencing inmates (Stojkovic, 1986), or the self-perceptions of the guards in influencing inmates (Hepburn, 1985). Only one study specifically examined inmates' perceptions of the bases of power afforded to guards (Stichman, 2002). As discussed, Stichman's (2002) study suffered from another weakness, as it conflated self-perceptions of the bases of power used by guards with self-perceptions of what base of power facilitates compliance. Due to the fact that no data on inmate compliance were collected in any of these studies, one is only provided with assumptions about what base of power could potentially influence inmate behaviors ("perceived" power), devoid of any objective measure of what actually does influence inmate behaviors ("manifest" power). Several researchers have argued that in order to "test" power, one must first identify the "manifest" variable (Debnam, 1984; Lukes, 1974). By failing to document offender compliance, prior studies revealed only self-reported perceptions of how power is used within corrections, and thus have failed to investigate the outcomes associated with power directives.

The current study addressed a significant gap in the power literature, as no previous studies had examined the bases of power within the probation setting. This study also furthered the existing literature research on bases of power by assessing perceived power and determining empirically whether each base of power is manifest in encouraging probationer compliance with supervision. These tests were based on self-reported behavior, as well as official measures drawn from case file reviews.

Methods

Sampling and data collection

Participants were drawn from a misdemeanor probation department in a large southeastern metropolitan area. This probation department served all community corrections offenders in the county and all face-to-face meetings with probation officers were conducted at this single location. In an effort to encourage candid responses, the researchers informed each respondent that their answers would be kept completely confidential and would not be shared with their supervising officers. The research team also made a concerted effort to appear separate from the probation department administration and staff. During data collection visits, researchers refrained from interacting with the probation officers as much as possible, and each researcher wore a prominent name badge bearing the logo of the University of Central Florida. The questionnaire itself also clearly identified the study as being conducted by the university.

Between May and September 2006, data were collected by surveying probationers at the county office before they met with their supervising officers. In all, 376 probationers provided usable survey responses. Due to item missing data, some of the analyses were based on fewer cases. In addition to the surveys, data were collected by reviewing probationers' files. Unfortunately, eighty-eight of the survey responses could not be matched to individual probationers. As a result, official data obtained from file reviews were available for fewer cases.

Random selection of research participants from the department's client roles was not possible. The researchers, therefore, attempted to obtain a sample that was as representative as possible in two ways. First, data collection occurred on a rotating basis in order to access individuals meeting with their probation officers across all days of the week and at different times throughout each day. Second, every person who arrived at the probation department during each data collection visit was approached and invited to participate in the study. As such, only probationers who could not speak and read English, lacked reading skills, and those supervised via the telephone were excluded from the study. There was no clear reason to expect that including these probationers would have produced different results, but it was possible.

Examination of the demographic characteristics of research participants evinces a diverse group, which was equivalent in the distributions of race, gender, age, and current offense to the population of 4,184 probationers who were under supervision by this agency at the time data were collected. In terms of racial characteristics, the largest portion of the sample was Anglo American (51.5 percent), followed by African American (20.5 percent), Hispanic (24.5 percent), and other (3.5 percent). More than three-quarters of the sample were male (77.7 percent). With regard to education status, 1.9 percent reported no high school, 18.8 percent some high school, 50.3 percent graduated high school or earned a GED, 14.5 percent achieved a two-year college degree, 8.6 percent achieved a four-year college degree, and 5.9 percent reported possession of a graduate level degree. The majority of respondents were never married (56.3 percent), followed by previously married (28.3 percent), and currently married (15.5 percent). The average age of the probationers was 32.6 years old.

Operationalization of dependent variable

Probationer compliance was operationalized three ways. The first measure assessed *self-reported compliance* and was based on survey responses to three distinct questions. Participants were asked, "How often do you follow your probation officer's directions?"; "When your probation officer says you cannot do something, how often do you do it anyway?"; and "Regardless of whether your probation officer knows or not, how many times would you say you have violated some condition of your probation?" When respondents replied to all three items indicating perfect compliance, they were coded as compliant (1). Otherwise, they were coded as self-reporting noncompliance (0). The second and third measures were based on official data from files maintained by the probation department. Here, it was determined whether each probationer had ever tested positive for drug use (0) versus remaining drug free (1)—*drug use compliance*—and whether each probationer ultimately completed his or her sentence successfully (1) or had his or her probation revoked (0)—*probation success*. *Drug use compliance* was examined only for those who had been tested at least once ($n = 210$), and *probation success* was assessed only for those who were no longer under supervision at the time of data collection ($n = 227$).

Operationalization of independent variables

The main independent variables were the bases of power outlined above. Operationalization followed the theoretical meaning of each base and was similar to the approaches used in previous quantitative

studies of power. Each base was measured by asking the probationers to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements about their probation officer. Two or three items in the survey pertained to each of the bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, or expert. For each statement, respondents could select from one of four points on a Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The wording of these items is shown in Table 1.

Also important to understanding the relationship between perceived power and probationer compliance is the inclusion of correlates of probationers' propensity for success or failure while on probation. Morgan (1994) identified nine factors associated with probation compliance: gender, age, marital status, education level, race, employment, prior criminal history, offense type, and sentence length. Data on age, race, educational attainment, marital status, and whether probationers were employed were gathered from survey data. Probationers' files provided data on gender and probation risk, which encompassed issues of current offense and criminal history. In December of 2005, the probation department adopted a new risk-assessment instrument. Thus, three-quarters of the sample had been assessed using the old instrument, while the remaining participants were scored on the new one. The metrics of the two tools were not equivalent, so to produce comparable values for all members of the sample, all risk scores were converted to standard scores.

Findings

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the individual base of power items and cumulative indexes. Index means show clearly that probationers perceived the existence of expert (3.28), legitimate (3.25), coercive (3.10), and referent (3.04) bases of power most strongly. Thus, more than nine out of ten probationers believed that

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for bases of power

Base of power	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Index mean
<i>Expert power</i>					3.28
My probation officer does not have the skills or experience to be a good probation officer ^a	5.8	5.8	51.3	37.1	
My probation officer knows his/her job	42.3	54.4	2.5	0.8	
<i>Legitimate power</i>					3.25
My probation officer has the right to tell me what to do	34.6	53.1	10.3	2.0	
My probation officer is in a position to tell me what to do	38.7	53.9	6.4	1.1	
<i>Coercive power</i>					3.10
My probation officer can make life difficult for me	23.9	45.2	23.1	7.8	
My probation officer can make sure I get punished if I don't do the right things	42.6	52.8	4.0	.6	
My probation officer can get my probation revoked	32.0	42.2	18.3	7.6	
<i>Referent power</i>					3.04
My probation officer is fair	38.7	56.2	3.4	1.7	
I respect my probation officer	47.0	49.3	2.3	1.4	
My probation officer is also my friend	11.6	32.7	40.3	15.3	
<i>Reward power</i>					2.57
My probation officer can reward me for my good behavior	15.8	40.5	36.4	7.3	
My probation officer can give me special benefits that will make my life easier	11.6	34.5	43.8	10.1	

^a Item's coding is reversed for computation of the index.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between dependent, independent, and control variables

	y ₁	y ₂	y ₃	x ₁	x ₂	x ₃	x ₄	x ₅	x ₆	x ₇	x ₈	x ₉	x ₁₀	x ₁₁	x ₁₂	Mean	SD
Self-report compliance (y ₁)	1.00															.68	.47
Drug use compliance (y ₂)	.15*	1.00														.69	.47
Probation success (y ₃)	.10	.16*	1.00													.66	.48
Coercive power (x ₁)	-.03	.01	-.05	1.00												3.10	.64
Referent power (x ₂)	.13*	.09	.05	.09	1.00											3.04	.58
Legitimate power (x ₃)	-.00	.07	.10	.25*	.45*	1.00										3.25	.60
Reward power (x ₄)	-.04	.00	.05	.23*	.39*	.29*	1.00									2.57	.73
Expert power (x ₅)	.16*	.15*	.13*	.01	.58*	.44*	.25*	1.00								3.28	.58
White (x ₆)	.01	-.04	-.01	.08	-.01	-.12	-.16*	.05	1.00							.51	.50
Female (x ₇)	.16*	-.02	.09	.16*	.01	-.04	-.06	.04	-.08	1.00						.22	.42
Age (x ₈)	.04	.04	-.05	.04	-.04	.02	-.06	.02	.05	.04	1.00					32.56	10.32
Married (x ₉)	.36*	-.01	-.02	.07	-.04	-.05	-.06	-.06	-.01	.01	.15*	1.00				.16	.36
Education (x ₁₀)	-.04	.08	.01	-.04	-.06	.05	.02	.04	.11*	.02	.04	.04	1.00			3.27	1.10
Employed (x ₁₁)	.07	.10	.08	.07	-.10	-.12*	-.04	-.00	.03	-.14*	.04	.06	.10	1.00		.84	.37
Standardized risk (x ₁₂)	-.05	-.17*	-.14*	-.05	.01	.06	-.01	.06	.00	-.05	.16*	-.01	-.11	.01	1.00	-.01	.99

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

their officers knew their job, occupied an official position to tell them what to do, and could get them punished for misbehavior. Nearly as many supported the notion that probation officers have the right to tell them what to do and have the necessary knowledge and skills to be probation officers. Conversely, reward power ranked last with little consensus on whether a probation officer could reward good behavior (agree categories = 56.3 percent; disagree categories = 43.7 percent) and whether a probation officer could provide special benefits (agree categories = 46.1 percent; disagree categories = 53.9 percent).

With regard to probationer compliance, 68 percent of probationers self-reported zero violations while on probation, compared to 32 percent of probationers who self-reported at least one violation. The two measures drawn from official records—*drug use compliance* and *probation success*—yielded highly consistent aggregate estimates of success. Compliance with the requirement to remain free of illegal drugs occurred for 69 percent of probationers, compared to failed drug testing in 31 percent of cases. Successful probation completion occurred in 66 percent of cases, whereas 34 percent of probationers had their probation revoked.

Using zero-order correlations, a beginning examination of how bases of power relate to probationer behavior is reported in Table 2. As shown, only two bases of power related to the measures of compliance. *Self-reported compliance* was significantly related to referent power and expert power. As such, the perception held by probationers that their officers possessed referent and expert bases of power correlated with higher chances of reporting compliance with

probation. Perceived expert power also predicted a greater chance of remaining drug-free and of completing probation supervision successfully. Only three other variables were significantly related to probationer compliance. Females and married respondents were significantly more likely to self-report compliance with probation conditions. Risk score predicted outcomes on drug testing and completion of supervision in the expected directions, where higher risk scores were associated with testing positive for drugs and failing to complete probation successfully.

Two other patterns in the zero-order correlations were also notable. First, probationers' perceptions of their officers' bases of power were almost entirely independent of demographic characteristics. Only race, gender, and education produced significant correlations, and these variables were each related to only one power base at a statistically significant level. Here, coercive power was positively correlated with being female, referent power was negatively correlated with employment status, and reward power was negatively correlated with being White. Second, the indexes for the five bases of power were related, but these correlations were, at best, moderate. Only one correlation—expert [x] referent—exceeded .5 and seven of the ten correlations range between 0.23 and 0.45. These results suggested that probationers perceived these bases of power as at least somewhat distinct among their supervising officers.

Table 3 presents the results of regressing the measures of compliance on bases of power and the control variables. The logistic regression analyses produced weak models that could account for

Table 3
Logistic regression of probationer compliance on bases of power

	Self-reported compliance (n = 259)		Drug use compliance (n = 210)		Probation success (n = 227)	
	b	Wald statistic	b	Wald statistic	b	Wald statistic
Coercive power	-.33 (.24) [.72]	1.80	-.16 (.28) [.86]	.33	-.43 (.27) [.65]	2.57
Referent power	.36 (.35) [1.44]	1.10	.20 (.40) [1.22]	.24	-.19 (.36) [.82]	.29
Legitimate power	-.04 (.29) [.99]	.01	.15 (.31) [1.16]	.21	.51 (.31) [1.67]	2.80
Reward power	-.31 (.23) [.72]	2.09	-.22 (.25) [.80]	.81	.22 (.23) [1.25]	.93
Expert power	.63 (.31) [1.87]	4.02*	.47 (.35) [1.60]	1.79	.32 (.33) [1.38]	.94
White	.08 (.29) [1.08]	.08	-.41 (.33) [.67]	1.50	-.03 (.31) [.97]	.01
Female	1.01 (.39) [2.74]	6.71**	.07 (.38) [1.08]	.04	.90 (.39) [2.46]	5.26*
Age	.01 (.02) [1.01]	.62	.02 (.02) [1.02]	1.54	-.01 (.02) [1.00]	.01
Married	.45 (.41) [1.58]	1.22	-.15 (.44) [.86]	.12	-.08 (.40) [.92]	.04
Education	.07 (.14) [1.07]	.25	.13 (.15) [1.14]	.75	.01 (.15) [1.01]	.01
Employed	.73 (.38) [2.08]	3.77*	.81 (.42) [2.26]	3.80*	.86 (.40) [2.36]	4.54*
Standardized risk	-.21 (.14) [.82]	2.01	-.49 (.16) [.62]	9.00**	-.40 (.15) [.67]	6.89**
Constant	-1.86 (1.26) [1.6]	2.17	-2.14 (1.40) [1.3]	2.34	-1.49 (1.35) [2.3]	1.22
Model $\chi^2 =$	20.92		21.11		24.276	
Nagelkerke R ² =	.15		.13		.14	

Note: Entries (b) are logistic regression coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses, and odds ratios are in brackets.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

only 13 to 15 percent of the variation in probationer compliance. Moreover, the expected relationship between bases of power and measures of compliance failed to be substantiated. The only exception was a statistically significant relationship between expert power and self-reported compliance ($p < .05$). Thus, probationers who rated expert power higher were more likely to report that they complied with all probation conditions. A one-unit increase in the four-point expert power index raised the odds of self-reported compliance by 87 percent. None of the bases of power, including expert, were related to *drug use compliance* or *probation success*. Probationers' perceptions of their officers' expertise, ability to punish, to reward, or to gain respect and be a friend, and perceptions that their officers were in a hierarchically structured position of authority had no impact on the official measures of probationer compliance.

More predictive of probationer compliance were the control variables gender, employment, and standardized risk score. Females were significantly more likely to self-report compliance and to complete probation successfully. The predicted odds of *self-reported compliance* for a female were 174 percent higher than the predicted odds for a male. The odds differential by gender was almost as great for successful completion of probation. Females were not significantly more likely to abstain from drug use. Being employed was significantly associated with probationer compliance on all three measures. Specifically, the predicted odds of self-reporting compliance for employed probationers were twice those for unemployed respondents, and the odds ratio was somewhat greater for *drug use compliance* and *probation success*. Lastly, probationer risk scores were negatively related to *drug use compliance* and *probation success* at a statistically significant level. In both cases, a one-unit increase in standardized probation risk score decreased the predicted odds of success by approximately one-third.

Discussion and conclusion

Stichman (2002) had observed that the "maintenance of order among [prison] inmates is essential for the prevention of prison riots, the reduction of inmate victimization, and the success of treatment programs" (p. 3). In the context of probation, the stakes may be lower, as misbehavior is likely to be individual rather than collective. Still, the vicious media and political attacks on the criminal justice system that ensue when an offender commits a heinous crime while under community supervision (Surette, 2006) highlight the important role of probation in public safety. How officers achieve compliance from their charges, then, is a critical concern. The current study sought to go beyond the existing literature on bases of power in corrections by examining probationers' views and their behavior. The four previous studies on the bases of power focused only on "perceived power"; that is, they examined inmate perceptions of correctional officer bases of power without determining whether those perceptions were related to any inmate behavior. This study assessed what power correctional clients believed their supervising officers held, but also examined whether this power was manifest—did perceived power affect actual outcomes on self-reported compliance, drug use, and successful completion of probation?

Before discussing the findings, three limitations of the current study should be mentioned. First, the current study drew on a nonrandom sample of participants from a single probation department. Unique characteristics of the participants and the agency to which they reported may have affected the results. Future studies should determine to what extent the results reported here generalize to other contexts. This is particularly salient in the modern day context whereby the majority of probation officers are also responsible for the supervision of parolees. Second, the current study included only probationers who could speak and read English. To assess the possibility that Spanish-speaking clients are affected differently by the aforementioned bases of power, a study could be conducted with

enhanced ability to examine language and cultural differences. Third, the present study relied on survey data to assess probationers' subjective perceptions of their officers' bases of power. Perceptions figure prominently in theoretical discussions of power (see Bacharach & Lawler, 1975) and individual behavior (e.g., Paternoster, 1987). As discussed below, however, it would be useful to also know about probation officers' actual inclinations, attributes, and activities. Such data could advance understanding of power relationships and probation compliance in a more holistic manner.

Regarding perceptions of officers, this study revealed similarities to prior work. Stichman's (2002) was the only prior study to examine perceived power from the perspective of correctional clients. Her results (based on prison inmates) and the current ones (drawn from probationers) showed that the relative ranking of bases of power was quite similar for two very different populations. Both groups of subjects tended to report the highest levels of agreement that their officers' power was based on the legitimacy of their position, their fairness and respectfulness, and their ability to impose punishments for inappropriate behavior. These results appeared to be in harmony with the nature of probation. Probation clients tended to embrace the legitimacy of their inferior structural position. To them, it was right for their officer to tell them what to do and not to do. Had they rejected this notion, they would be questioning the very mandate of probation supervision. The respondents also largely believed that their officers' directives were backed by real consequences for misbehavior. Knowing that noncompliance may result in sanctions, and ultimately, revocation from probation is a potential motivator. Finally, probationers' acknowledgment of a referent base of power suggests that personal relationships are being formed. From the probationers' perspective, perhaps probation can be more than "superficial cooperation" between officers and clients (Gibbons & Rosecrance, 2005, p. 277).

The current study also echoed previous findings in that the probationers were less inclined to embrace notions about reward power. Hepburn (1985) has suggested that the relatively low perception of reward power may reflect actual conditions in prison where officers have few tangible incentives under their control. Stojkovic's (1986) administrators and guards also reported limited use of reward power, employing it only with particular inmates. Anecdotal comments from the probation officers in the current study reinforced the interpretation that low perceptions of reward power are based on the reality of meager available rewards. The officers contended that they had few meaningful rewards at their disposal.

In contrast to Stichman's (2002) inmates, the probationers in the present study perceived their officers to hold considerable power through expertise. Whereas the prison inmates in Stichman's (2002) study rejected notions that their officers had good conflict resolution skills and that they listened to their officers because of their expertise, this study's respondents believed their officers knew their job and rejected the idea that their officers were not skilled. Many possible explanations for the difference in results exist, including the composition of the offender groups, the context of prison versus probation, and possible unique aspects of the agency and institution included. Typical prisoners would likely have committed more serious offenses and have more serious criminal histories than individuals on misdemeanor probation roles. As others have observed, the prison experience can also engender a host of negative reactions from inmates and guards alike, degrading interpersonal relationships (see e.g., Haney, 2003; Johnson, 1996; Lombardo, 1981).

The present study moved well beyond the prior literature on the bases of power by examining not only perceived power, but also manifest power. In this regard, it tested the extent to which the five bases of power could predict probationers' compliance with their sentence. The results suggest little actual power among probation officers. While risk scores and two demographic variables predicted success, nearly all possible relationships between perceived bases of

power and probation compliance were statistically insignificant. Thus, relatively high perceived power did not result in manifest power. The mean score for four of the five base of power indexes was approximately 3 or greater, translating to “agreeing” that officers possessed the potential for expert, legitimate, coercive, and referent power. These perceptions, however, did not predict compliance with probation requirements.

These null findings point to two possibilities. First, it may be that officers are not capitalizing on the potential power they hold. Based on the univariate results, it appears they could realize the greatest payoff in terms of affecting probationer behavior by playing on perceptions that they are knowledgeable, and that have the right to direct probationers and the ability to punish noncompliance. As noted earlier, direct evidence on probation officers and how they interacted with their clients would be useful. Without such data, it is not possible to know to what extent probation officers are already trying to wield the power that probationers believe they hold. This raises a second possible explanation for the current finding that perceived power was unrelated to compliance. Rather than failing to mobilize their potential power, and despite their best efforts, officers may hold little actual sway over probationers' compliance with the conditions of their supervision. It would be ignorant to suggest probation is wholly ineffectual. Indeed, there is compelling evidence that community corrections programs that adhere to theoretically and empirically derived principles of intervention foster law-abiding behavior (Gendreau, 1996; Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Smith, 2006; Lowenkamp, Pealer, Smith, & Latessa, 2006). True power, however, may not rest at the individual level, instead being vested with probation organizations. In this way, probabilities of probationer misbehavior would be unrelated to variations in the perceived power among individual officers—as they are in this study—but would respond to broader structural arrangements of probation supervision.

In his classic work, *Dangerous Men*, McCleary (1978) reached a similar conclusion regarding parole supervision. He argued that power was a concept best explored in the organizational or group context, not the individual. In practical terms, McCleary found that the heterogeneity between parole officers and parolees was so pronounced that power issues rarely surfaced at the individual level. According to McCleary, individual parole officers might have enjoyed significant discretionary power, however, “they exercise this power only to benefit a few special clients” (p. 103, italics in original).

Conversely, McCleary found that parole officers were fighting, resisting, and manipulating, the organizational directives of “superiors” on a regular basis. This suggests that criminal justice agencies with high degrees of homogeneity between work groups may produce a competitive environment in which power relations are more prominent. Adding to this argument, McCleary (1978) stated:

It is clear that parole officers enjoy substantial discretionary power. What is not immediately clear is that, if individual parole officers routinely exercised their powers, the bureaucratic dynamic described in the last chapter would collapse. The branch offices (and the people who work in them: POs and supervisors) and the central authority (DC officials) co-exist in a status quo that serves the interests of both. (p. 81)

The emphasis on bases of power at the organizational level should direct future research. McCleary (1978) simply observed that within parole, “power was enjoyed by groups or classes, not by individuals,” an insight that “contradicts the conventional wisdom of criminology, which tries to explain parole outcomes at least in part as a function of PO discretion” (p. 79).

Testing the proposition that manifest power resides at the organizational level in probation was not possible with this data.

Future research should consider approaching studies of power using multilevel models that could examine the place that individuals occupy within institutions. The concept of power is fundamental to criminal justice and it merits continued efforts to further understand how it functions.

References

- Airaksinen, T. (1988). *Ethics of coercion and authority: A philosophical study of social life*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Bacharach, S. B., & Lawler, E. J. (1975). The perception of power. *Social Forces*, 55, 123–134.
- Bishop, G. F. (2004). *The illusion of public opinion: Fact and artifact in American public opinion polls*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Cloward, R. A. (1968). Social control in the prison. In L. E. Hazelrigg (Ed.), *Prisons within society: A reader in penology* (pp. 78–112). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Debnam, G. (1984). *The analysis of power: Core elements and structure*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Dilulio, J. (1987). *Governing prisons*. New York: Free Press.
- Etzioni, A. (1961). *A comparative analysis of complex organizations*. New York: Free Press.
- French, J., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (pp. 259–269). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gendreau, P. (1996). The principles of effective intervention with offenders. In A. T. Harland (Ed.), *Choosing correctional options that work: Defining demand and evaluating the supply* (pp. 117–130). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gibbons, S. G., & Rosecrance, J. D. (2005). *Probation, parole, and community corrections in the United States*. New York: Pearson.
- Glaze, L. E., & Bonczar, T. P. (2007). *Probation and parole in the United States, 2006*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Haney, C. (2003). The psychological impact of incarceration: Implications for postprison adjustment. In J. Travis & M. Waul (Eds.), *Prisoners once removed* (pp. 33–66). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Hepburn, J. R. (1985). The exercise of power in coercive organizations: A study of prison guards. *Criminology*, 23, 145–164.
- Johnson, R. (1996). *Hard time: Understanding and reforming the prison*. New York: Wadsworth.
- Keller, M., & Wang, H. (2005). Inmate assaults in Texas county jails. *The Prison Journal*, 85, 515–534.
- Lindner, C. (1994). The police contribution to the development of probation: A historical account. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 20, 61–84.
- Lombardo, L. X. (1981). *Guards imprisoned: Correctional officers at work*. New York: Elsevier.
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Latessa, E. J., & Smith, P. (2006). Does correctional program quality really matter? The impact of adhering to the principles of effective intervention. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 5, 575–594.
- Lowenkamp, C. T., Pealer, J., Smith, P., & Latessa, E. J. (2006). Adhering to the risk and need principles: Does it matter for supervision-based programs? *Federal Probation*, 70, 3–8.
- Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A radical view*. New York: Macmillan.
- Marquart, J. W. (1986). Prison guards and the use of physical coercion as a mechanism of prisoner control. *Criminology*, 24, 347–366.
- McCleary, R. (1978). *Dangerous men*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Morgan, K. D. (1994). Factors associated with probation outcome. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 22, 341–353.
- Packer, H. L. (1968). *The limits of the criminal sanction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Patemoster, R. (1987). Deterrent effect of the perceived certainty and severity of punishment: A review of the evidence and issues. *Justice Quarterly*, 4, 173–217.
- Senese, J. D. (1997). Evaluating jail reform: A comparative analysis of podular/direct and linear jail inmate infractions. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 25, 61–73.
- Steiner, B., Wada, J., Hemmens, C., & Burton, V. S., Jr. (2005). The correctional orientation of community corrections: Legislative changes in the legally prescribed functions of community corrections 1992–2002. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 29, 141–159.
- Stichman, A. J. (2002). *The sources and impact of inmate perceptions of correctional officers' bases of power*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.
- Stojkovic, S. (1984). Social bases of power and control mechanisms among prisoners in a prison organization. *Justice Quarterly*, 1, 511–528.
- Stojkovic, S. (1986). Social bases of power and control mechanisms among correctional administrators in a prison organization. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 14, 157–166.
- Surette, R. (2006). *Media, crime, and criminal justice: Images and realities* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Sykes, G. (1958). *The society of captives: A study of a maximum-security prison*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Toch, H. (1992). *Living in prison: The ecology of survival*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Weber, M. (1968). *Economy and society*. New York: Bedminster Press.