OFFICER-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Officer-Offender Relationship Quality Matters:
Supervision Process as Evidence-Based Practice

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To improve public safety and offender outcomes, correctional practitioners must focus not only on *what* they do in supervision (or "technique"), but also on *how* they do it (or "process"). In this article, we (a) differentiate technique from process, (b) describe what high quality relationships are in community supervision and then (c) present evidence on the power of relationship quality to protect against recidivism. We conclude by offering concrete implications for practice.

DIFFERENTIATING TECHNIQUE FROM PROCESS

Technique and process can be differentiated in many types of professional relationships, from the therapist-client relationship in psychotherapy to the officer-offender relationship in community supervision. This distinction has been most intensively studied in the context of psychotherapy. In this section, we describe aspects of psychotherapy research that are relevant to the context of probation supervision in a variety of ways.

USING THE PSYCHOTHERAPY LITERATURE ON PRACTITIONER-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS AS AN ANALOGY

In psychotherapy, clinicians employ a wide array of *techniques* drawn from underlying models or theories (e.g., cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic). Most clinicians describe using an eclectic approach, drawing techniques from different theoretical models that seem particularly applicable to a given client (Norcross, Hedges, & Prochaska, 2002). Many endorse techniques that have been shown to be "empirically supported" (see American Psychological Association Division 12, 1993). For example, both interpersonal therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy are evidence-based treatments for depression. One focuses on helping the client discover alternative approaches to manage interpersonal relationship challenges (Markowitz & Weissman, 2004); the other, on changing maladaptive thinking patterns (Meichenbaum, 2009).

In contrast, *process* most often refers to the nature, quality and content of the interactions between the client and the therapist (see Henry, Schacht, & Strupp, 1990; Kiesler, 1973). Those who study process emphasize different aspects of the client-therapist interaction (e.g., language that is used, tone of voice, content of the conversations; see Kiesler, 1973), but the therapeutic relationship is perhaps the most common way that process is understood and researched. This relationship has been conceptualized and studied in the psychotherapy literature as a "therapeutic alliance" or "working alliance" that emphasizes a patient-therapist bond, mutually-agreed upon treatment goals between the therapist and client and how the therapist and client work together to achieve these goals in therapy (see Bordin, 1979; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989).

What have we learned about technique and process in psychotherapy? At the risk of oversimplification, there are three important "take home" messages. First, no validated technique or model is superior to another. Different therapeutic techniques often yield comparable outcomes. This finding is often referred to as the "Dodo Bird Verdict"—a reference to Alice in Wonderland, where the dodo pronounced after a race, "Everybody has won and all must have prizes!" (Carroll, 1865).

Second, the effects of psychotherapy appear to be driven less by specific techniques and more by "common factors" that are shared across a variety of interventions (see Castonguay & Beutler, 2006; Garfield, 1973; Rosenzweig, 1936). For example, clients' expectation or motivation for change is likely to affect their progress in treatment, regardless of the particular type of treatment their therapist employs. Similarly, the influence of the role of the therapist as a helper in the client's recovery is also shared across multiple techniques and therapeutic models. The strongest common factor, however, is the therapist-client working alliance. Two separate meta-analyses (a quantitative synthesis of effects across dozens of studies) have shown that the working alliance is the most potent controllable predictor of clients' clinical outcomes (e.g., symptom and functioning improvement; Horvath & Symonds; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000).

The third important conclusion derived from the psychotherapy literature is that technique and process may act synergistically (see Gelso & Hayes, 1998). The strength or quality of the therapeutic relationship is likely to affect how well the therapist delivers specific techniques, how well the client receives them and how the two work together throughout the course of treatment. A poor alliance—i.e., a weak bond, distrust, apathy or even hostility—does not provide an effective platform for behavior change. In contrast, a high quality alliance characterized by a strong bond, a sense of trust and therapists' genuine interest and concern for the client is likely to engage the client and facilitate change. Indeed, process or the therapeutic relationship, may provide the leverage for techniques to be effective (see Orlinsky, Grave, & Parks, 1994).

DRAWING PARALLELS BETWEEN THERAPIST-CLIENT AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE PRACTITIONER-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS

There are several parallels between the context of psychotherapy and that of community supervision. First, like clinicians, probation and parole officers use specific techniques as they supervise offenders. These techniques may be

influenced by the officers' general theory of supervision. For example, officers who believe in the law enforcement model of supervision may rely heavily on the techniques of sanctioning than other officers. In contrast, officers who endorse a social casework model may rely on such techniques as problem solving (see Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Trotter, 1999).

Today, there is a growing awareness that officers should use techniques consistent with cognitive-behavioral and social learning theories, given the evidence that these techniques reduce recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Dowden & Andrews, 1999; Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007). This is the general responsivity concept. Techniques like modeling and reinforcing prosocial behavior and teaching offenders to recognize linkages among thoughts and behaviors can help reach both public safety and offender rehabilitation goals.

The second parallel between the psychotherapy and community supervision context involves process. "Core Correctional Practices" (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980; Dowden & Andrews, 2004) reference the manner in which correctional practitioners deliver an intervention. Emphasis is placed on the effective use of (a) authority (i.e., using a firm-but-fair manner with offenders), (b) reinforcement and disapproval and (c)

social service brokerage. Perhaps most importantly (Dowden & Andrews, 2004), core correctional practices include high-quality officer-offender relationships.

Dowden and Andrews (2004) suggest that correctional practitioners need to establish strong relationships with offenders that are warm, flexible, empathic, open, reflect mutual liking and respect and employ "directive, solution-focused, structured, non-blaming or contingency-based communication" (p. 208). Remarkably similar to psychotherapy contexts, a meta-analysis of 273 effect sizes demonstrated that officer-offender relationships show a strong relationship to offenders' criminal outcomes (Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Once again, high quality relationships seem to protect against adverse outcomes.

Finally, as in psychotherapy, technique and process in correctional supervision do not occur in isolation from one another. The quality of the officer-offender relationships is likely to influence each and every interaction between the officer and the offender (Skeem, Encandela, & Eno Louden, 2003). For example, if an officer treats the offender in a distant, harsh and/or authoritarian manner, the techniques she uses are likely to be quite ineffective. In contrast, if the officer is fair and shows concern, supervision techniques are likely to have a greater impact. Thus,

relationship quality and technique work hand-in-hand.

Although these parallels exist between the psychotherapy and community supervision literatures, there are some key ways by which these relationships differ from one another. In the next section, we offer a description of high quality community supervision relationships.

OFFICER-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNITY SUPERVISION

What are the main elements of high quality officer-offender relationships in community supervision? Although these relationships parallel everyday relationships and the working alliance in some ways, they are also distinctive. In this section, we describe components of high quality community supervision relationships.

OFFICER-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS INCLUDE COMPONENTS OF EVERYDAY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Officer-offender relationships are structured in the same basic way as other relationships. According to Interpersonal Theory, all human relationships (e.g., parent-child, teacher-student, spousal, friendships, co-workers) are defined by their relative emphasis on two primary domains: control (i.e., degree to which control is exerted by one party and deferred to or rejected by another) and affiliation (i.e., degree of warmth vs. hostility; see Freedman, Leary, Ossorio, & Coffey, 1951; Gurtman, 1992; Keisler, 1983; Leary, 1957). Importantly, these two dimensions are viewed as orthogonal -- they can exist independent of one another. One domain (e.g., control) need not influence the other (e.g., affiliation). Control is not necessarily "bad" or hostile.

To illustrate, relationships can be more or less affiliative, ranging from quite hostile to warm and connected. Additionally, relationships reflect varying expressions of control. One specific model within this theoretical framework (the Interpersonal Circumplex Model; see Benjamin, 1996) suggests that one person in the relationship may take control or grant autonomy, whereas the other person may respond by submitting or asserting his/her independence. The two domains of control and affiliation act independently from one another, however. For instance, one could be in a "controlling" relationship that is hostile or affiliative (or neither).

Consider a typical parent-child relationship, where the parent sets and enforces the rules by which a child must abide. The parent monitors the child's behavior for compliance with

these rules and may punish the child for noncompliance. Despite this control, however, parents *can* still maintain a good relationship with their child. The authoritative parenting approach (Baumrind, 1967) is successful in doing so. In such a relationship, the parent exerts control in a manner that is consistent, predictable and fair. When also coupled with warmth and connectedness, control is thus expressed as nurturing and protecting. In contrast, control expressed in an authoritarian manner may come across as more attacking and blaming; thus the quality of the parent-child relationship may be adversely impacted. It is important to reiterate that the mere expression of "control", however, does not necessarily have to influence parent-child affiliation at all; again, these dimensions are independent of one another. Such behaviors like setting rules and monitoring could be considered "neutral" expressions of control (see Benjamin, 1996).

The discussion about control in parent-child relationships is in many ways akin to officer-offender relationship. Officers theoretically set and enforce the rules, monitor for compliance and exact punishments for noncompliance. Offenders (ideally) exhibit submission (i.e., listen, adhere to rules, show deference), but may also withdraw and/or assert their autonomy. Both parent-child and officer-offender relationships, like any

other interpersonal relationship, can be characterized by varying degrees of control and affiliation. Perhaps more than most any other type of interpersonal relationship, however, the officer-offender relationship places great emphasis on the control dimension. Notably, this is quite different from traditional voluntary psychotherapeutic settings where therapist control is often contraindicated.

Can control and affiliation peacefully co-exists in officer-offender relationships, as Interpersonal Theory would suggest? Are these dimensions truly independent in such a context or does control come at some expense to affiliation in community supervision? To answer this question, we report the findings from a recent study on relationships between 125 offenders with mental illness and their mandated treatment providers—a relationship similar in many ways to mandated community supervision. Here, Manchak, Skeem, & Rook (2013) found that mandated treatment relationships were significantly higher in control than traditional (i.e., voluntary) practitioner-client relationships. Despite this, these relationships were also largely still affiliative. How might this be possible, and how can community officers achieve similar relationships with their supervisees?

INTEGRATING PROCEDURAL JUSTICE INTO DUAL ROLE COMMUNITY SUPERVISION RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship that community supervision officers establish with their supervisees has been conceptualized as a "dual role relationship" (Trotter, 1999). That is, officers must establish a relationship with the offender that reflects the dual roles of their profession. Officers must first and foremost work to protect and promote public safety vis-à-vis their supervision and monitoring of offenders on their caseload. Officers must also fulfill a social casework role, as they are often required to not only help secure needed community resources for their supervisees but also to work with offenders one-on-one to change their behavior and improve their criminal and social outcomes. How officers navigate these dual roles—how they reconcile being both "counselor" and "cop" (Skeem, Eno Louden, Polaschek, and Camp, 2007; Trotter, 1999)—can impact the nature of the relationship that develops between officers and their supervisees (see Manchak et al., 2013; Ross, Polaschek, & Ward, 2008; Skeem & Manchak, 2008).

There is some evidence to suggest that when officers place substantially more emphasis on one of these roles at the expense of the other, outcomes are unfavorable. In one study, researchers coded the supervision style of intensive parole supervision (ISP) parole officers and then examined the criminal outcomes of the 240 parolees on their caseloads. Parolees whose supervising officers used either a law enforcement model or a social casework model had worse outcomes than those whose officers employed a "balanced" approach to supervision that emphasized both components. Specifically, those parolees with a balanced officer had a 19 percent revocation rate, whereas those with a law enforcement or social casework officer had revocation rates of approximately 59 percent and 38 percent, respectively (Paprozzi & Gendreau, 2005). Similar findings have also been noted in probation samples as well (see Klockars, 1972).

How do officers effectively balance both roles of social casework and law enforcer and thus develop high quality dual role relationships? How can an officer maintain their authority, exert control over offenders, help them and, perhaps most importantly, ensure that offenders will willingly cooperate with them? The key may be for officers to utilize and practice principles that are consistent with a construct called procedural justice (see Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989, 1994; Watson & Angell, 2007). Procedural justice is a term that is often used to describe

subjective perceptions of individuals who come in contact with the justice system. A fundamental premise of procedural justice is that people will react receptively to those in authority if they have a perception of fairness. Such receptivity, or "buy in" is clearly essential if one is to affect long-term change in offenders' lives (Tyler, 2003).

This sense of fairness stems from how authority figures treat offenders. Specifically, authority figures must give offenders a voice. Offenders must know that they are entitled to express their views and that their opinion is valid and valued. Officers can do this by taking the time to have conversations with offenders, actively listen (e.g., make eye contact, show interest and concern, reflect and summarize the offender's statements) and consider the offender's viewpoint and situation when making decisions. They should have conversations *with* rather than talk *at* the offender. Officers should also include offenders in decision-making. Officers can solicit the offenders' views and opinions and incorporate them (when feasible) into case management decisions. Finally, offenders need to feel that the *process* of control is fair. Punishment cannot and should not be meted out haphazardly or inconsistently. If an offender feels that the rules vague and/or are inconsistently applied across time and across other supervisees, their perceptions

of fairness will dwindle. Therefore, officers must clearly communicate the rules and the corresponding consequences that will follow for noncompliance and be consistent and timely when enforcing the rules.

In sum, officers can effectively blend their role as counselor and their role as cop by engaging in practices that are consistent with the principles of procedural justice. Giving offenders a voice, treating them with respect and interacting with them in a firm-but-fair authoritative (not authoritarian manner) is important to both roles. Additionally, such treatment can help offenders establish a sense of trust (Tyler, 2003) and lay the foundation for a relationship that has the potential to influence offenders' psychosocial and criminal outcomes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OFFICER-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNITY SUPERVISION

What potential impact can officer-offender relationships have on offender outcomes? We know from the psychotherapy literature that therapist-client relationship quality predicts clinical outcomes (e.g., symptom and functioning improvement; Horvath & Symonds; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000). We also know that very broad, general and rough proxies of correctional practitioner-offender relationship quality (e.g., staff

is warm, empathic, respectful and non-blaming; (Dowden & Andrews, 2004) are related to reductions in recidivism. To truly assess the importance of officer-offender relationship, however, it is necessary to use a validated measure of relationship quality in this context and then directly test whether scores on this measure predict offenders' outcomes. In this section, we describe one such measure and its development and validation. Then, we present the extant evidence suggesting that high quality dual role relationships are fundamental to offenders' success on community supervision.

DEVELOPMENT AND INITIAL VALIDATION OF THE DUAL-ROLE RELATIONSHIP INVENTORY-REVISED

For many years, officer-offender relationship quality has been touted as a "core correctional practice" (Dowden & Andrews, 2004), one that was "necessary but not sufficient" for offenders to meaningfully change (Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003). Until it was formally operationalized, however, researchers were unable to directly test just how important relationship quality actually is in community supervision.

The Dual Role Relationship Inventory-Revised (DRI-R; Skeem et al., 2007) is the only known existing validated measure that assesses relationship quality unique

to the context of community supervision. This measure was informed by both the literature and real-world correctional practitioners and the offenders they supervise. Specifically, Skeem and colleagues (2007) consulted the literature (reviewed here) and conducted focus groups (Skeem et al., 2003) with offenders on probation and (separately) their probation officers to identify the core components that comprise officer-offender relationship quality in this context. The results from the focus groups were remarkably in line with the literature.

To summarize, both the literature and "real world" practitioners and offenders on supervision recognize that relationship quality in the community supervision context is much more than relationship quality in a traditional "therapeutic context" (Bordin, 1979; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989). Thus, measures like the Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989) used in traditional voluntary psychotherapy contexts do not fully capture the true essence of relationship quality in mandated treatment or community supervision; they lack an incorporation of the care/control balance that officers must achieve to establish high quality relationships with their supervisees. As such, any measure of officer-offender relationship quality must (a) reflect the dual roles of officers (e.g., as agents of support/help and control),

(b) include items that assess domains of affiliation (e.g., trust, caring) and control that is expressed in a manner consistent with procedural justice principles (i.e., "firm-but-fair), and (c) ensures that officers do not use authoritarian practices. The DRI-R was developed to assess three primary domains:

- fairness and caring,

- trust,

- toughness (assesses authoritarian control and is reverse-coded)[1].

To validate this measure (e.g., formally test whether the internal structure of the measure is consistent and stable as it relates to other variables in theoretically meaningful ways), the authors administered the measure to samples of specialty mental health probation officers and their supervisees with serious mental illness. This was an ideal context in which to study dual role relationship quality. In specialty mental health probation, not only are pressures and treatment mandates (i.e., types of control) "disproportionately applied" (Skeem et al., 2007, p. 398), but also officers typically perform many tasks that are generally reserved for case managers or treatment providers, sometimes even

TABLE 1
ITEM EXAMPLES FROM THE DRI-R (SKEEM ET AL., 2007), OFFENDER, OFFICER, AND OBSERVER REPORT

	DRI-R Scales		
Reporter	Caring-Fairness (20 items)	Trust (5 items)	Toughness (5 items)
Offender	X tries very hard to do the right thing by me.	I feel safe enough to be open and honest with my agent.	I feel that X is looking to punish me
Officer	I try very hard to do the right thing by X.	X seems to feel safe enough to be open and honest with me.	X seems worried that I am looking to punish him/her.
Observer	The PO tries very hard to do the right thing by the probationer.	The probationer feels safe enough to be open and honest with the PO.	The probationer feels that the PO is looking to punish him/her.

functioning as part of a treatment team (see Skeem, Emke-Francis, & Eno Louden, 2006). If there was any context in which officers truly embodied both dual roles of counselor and cop, this was it. In this study, higher scores on the DRI-R (which indicated better relationship quality) were associated with better in-session behavior (e.g., less resistance and more willingness to change), better supervision compliance (e.g., fewer "no shows" to supervision appointments), and fewer new offenses.

EFFECTS OF DUAL ROLE RELATIONSHIP QUALITY ON OFFENDERS' OUTCOMES

Since its initial validation, two known, methodologically rigorous studies have since used the DRI-R to test the effects of officer-offender relationship quality on offenders' criminal outcomes. Both suggest, quite convincingly, that good relationship quality truly is essential to offenders' success on community supervision. In the first study, Skeem and colleagues compared 176 offenders with mental illness on traditional probation (i.e., probation as usual) to a statistically matched sample of 183 offenders with mental illness on specialty mental health supervision. At baseline, offenders rated their relationship quality with their supervising officer using the DRI-R. The researchers found that specialty officers and probationers had higher quality dual role relationships characterized by higher

scores on Fairness/Caring and Trust scales and lower scores on the Toughness scale (Manchak, Skeem, Kennealy, & Eno Louden, 2014). More importantly, however, officer-probationer relationship quality affected offenders' criminal outcomes across both sites. Specifically, higher-quality relationships—regardless of where probationers were supervised—predicted a decreased likelihood for arrest. Most notably, these relationships fully mediated the effectiveness of specialty supervision on offenders' arrests. In other words, the broad effect of specialty vs. traditional supervision was no longer significant when the researchers tested for the effects of dual-role relationship quality (Skeem & Manchak, 2010).

In the second study, Kennealy and colleagues (2012) also tested the effects of dual-role relationship quality on offenders' outcomes. Their study, however, contributed some important additional information. First, this study showed that the consistent findings observed among offenders with mental illness could also generalize to non-disordered offenders. Using a sample of 109 parolees *without* mental illness, Kennealy and colleagues (2012) found that DRI-R total scores and Caring-Fairness scale scores significantly predicted the number of days until an offender was arrested upon prison release. Specifically, for every one point

increase in DRI-R total scores (indicating better relationship quality), there was a 31 percent decrease in the likelihood of a new arrest. Second, this study also demonstrated that the importance of officer-offender relationship quality on offenders' outcomes is not impacted by an offenders' risk level or personality traits. The researchers tested the assumption that higher risk offenders or those with difficult interpersonal styles could impede the offender's ability to form high quality relationships with their supervisor and/or may mitigate the importance of that relationship on criminal behavior. Results were to the contrary; neither risk nor personality mattered. High quality dual role officer-offender relationships reduced criminal outcomes consistently across offenders who were low and high risk and offenders with and without difficult personality traits.

CONCLUSION

There is mounting evidence to suggest that high quality dual role relationships are essential to offenders' success on community supervision and they are important across offender types and community corrections contexts. As the body of literature continues to grow, we suspect this pattern of findings to hold across other criminal samples (e.g., youth) and other dual role correctional practitioner-offender relationships (e.g., correctional treatment providers,

mandated mental health and substance treatment providers). The studies reviewed here underscore that if officers are to meaningfully reduce recidivism among their supervisees, they must attend to not only what they say and do (i.e., technique), but also *how* they supervise offenders (i.e., process). Skills in these domains reciprocally influence one another and work in tandem to affect offenders' behavior. As such, when officers implement evidence-based techniques into routine supervision, improvements in officer-offender relationships are likely to follow.

Only recently has the research on technique (e.g., use of cognitive-behavioral strategies) begun to infiltrate routine correctional supervision, but less attention has been devoted to teaching officers how to develop high quality dual role relationships with their supervisees. Though several current correctional intervention programs (e.g., Effective Practices in Community Supervision, EPICS, Smith, Schweitzer, Labreque, & Latessa, 2012; Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest, STARR, Robinson, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Lowenkamp, 2011) emphasize the importance of high-quality relationships in correctional supervision, more attention could be given to *teaching* officers how to develop them. Part of this training should be didactic; officers should be explicitly

informed about the elements (reviewed here) that comprise high quality dual role relationship quality. This training should also include hands-on practice, where officers are taught evidence-based strategies for establishing rapport and enhancing motivation (e.g., motivational interviewing; Miller & Rollnick, 2002) and can practice engaging with clients in a caring, trusting and firm-but-fair manner that emphasizes a commitment to offenders' perceptions of fairness (e.g., procedural justice). Training officers how to develop high quality dual role relationships not only equips them with an important supervision tool, but will enhance their ability to protect public safety and promote successful offender rehabilitation and reintegration. ▷▷▲

ENDNOTE

[1] Of note, there are three versions of this measure—an officer-rated, an offender-rated, and an observer-rated form, and example items from each can be seen in Table 1. To access the DRI-R and more information about it, visit http://riskreduction.soceco.uci.edu/index.php/dual-role-relationship-inventory/

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