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Perceived Understanding, Trust, And Satisfaction In Communication Between Probationers and Parolees and Their Probation And Parole Officers

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PERCEIVED UNDERSTANDING, TRUST, AND SATISFACTION IN 
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PROBATIONERS AND PAROLEES 
AND THEIR PROBATION AND PAROLE OFFICERS

By

LAURA TODE

THESIS
Presented to the faculty of the
Department of Communication Studies
At Carroll College in Helena, Montana
In fulfillment of the requirement for graduation

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This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of Communications Studies.

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ABSTRACT

People on probation and Parole make up a measurable portion of the population. Central to the success or failure of an offender on probation or parole is the communication between the offender and their probation or parole officer. Presently, little research has been done to determine the perceptions offenders on probation and parole have regarding the communication that occurs with their probation or parole officer. This research administered three directive questionnaires to people on probation and parole in an attempt to measure the level of trust, perception of understanding, and satisfaction they have with regards to the interaction with their probation and parole officers. The research suggests a correlation between trust and perceived understanding and an overall dissatisfaction with the interaction. In addition to the questionnaires, two open-ended questions were asked to discover common themes experienced by probationers and parolees in the communication they have with their probation and parole officers. From the responses nine patterns emerged. Further analysis revealed that four of the patterns seemed to be related to the concept of confirmation, and another four seemed to be related to the concept of disconfirmation. The subjects tended to report the confirming behaviors of listening, encouraging, caring, and communicating directly as confirming communication behaviors that they valued and the disconfirming communication behaviors of deceiving, controlling, de-humanizing and rushing as behaviors they disliked. The subjects also reported a fear of disclosure which may be related to disconfirmation in the interaction.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The department of corrections on both the state and federal level is a maze of programs, institutions, treatment centers, pre-release centers, prisons, and jails. In many states, the prisons and other facilities are overcrowded. In an effort to curtail this growing problem, many states have experienced a rise in the number of offenders who are sentenced to supervision within the community. When an offender is sentenced to a conditional release into the community in lieu of incarceration, it is known as probation. If an offender is released into the community after serving a portion of his or her prison term, this is known as parole.

According to the Department of Justice statistics on probation and parole, over 3.9 million adults were on probation or parole at the end of 1997. This number has risen steadily by 3.0% per year since 1990 and continues to rise. Adults on probation and parole make up a measurable portion of our population, and based on the numbers alone, this group of people is worth researching.

Within both probation and parole, there are varying levels of supervision. For example, intensive supervision (ISP) is a program where the offender wears a wrist or ankle bracelet and is forced to check in with the probation and parole officer several times during the day and night. This is generally done using a computerized device attached to the parolee's telephone. However, the parole officer may at any time show up unannounced to search the offender's home or person. On the opposite end of the spectrum, a probationer may only be required to check in once a year with the probation and parole officer.

The conditions of probation and parole depend entirely on the individual and his or her sentence. Offenders struggling with addiction will likely be required to submit to a
weekly urine analysis. Offenders with convictions for drunk driving may not be allowed to enter bars, restaurants, or casinos where alcohol is served. Parolees are limited as well in where they can seek work; for instance, an offender with a history of theft will not be allowed to take a position where cash handling is in the job description. In addition, the probation and parole officer has the power to change the conditions of the client’s supervision plan as the officer sees fit. As the probationer or parolee becomes more independent, the officer may choose to loosen the restrictions on a client’s plan, or if the client is not responding positively to the stipulations in the supervision plan the probation and parole officer may choose to tighten the restrictions on the client.

As can be expected, trust, satisfaction, and mutual understanding between the officer and the client are paramount to the success of the offender. If the offender violates his or her probation, it could result in a prison sentence, if a parolee violates his or her conditions of parole, he or she will likely end up back in prison.

Communication, specifically, between probationers and parolees and probation and parole officers is important to study because so much depends the communication itself. Probationers and parolees are required to be in contact and stay in contact with their officers. The responsibility of “checking in” is placed entirely on the offender. In not “checking in” the offender is in violation of the supervision plan. The officers are required to maintain that contact as well as gather information from teachers, employers, counselors, and relatives of the probationer or parolee. Regardless of the quality of the interaction, it is required. However, so much could be gained if more was known about the quality of the communication between probation and parole officers and their clients, especially in the areas of perceived understanding, trust, and satisfaction.
Mike Cronin of the Montana Department of Corrections shared a story that exemplifies the importance of mutual understanding in the communication between probation and parole officers and their clients (personal communication, October 1998). Cronin related a hypothetical scenario of a probationer who meets with his or her probation officer to discuss finding a job. The probation officer tells the probationer that he or she cannot, according his or her supervision plan, hold a job where alcohol is primarily sold. The probationer then goes out into the community and secures employment as a clerk in a convenience store, assuming that the only places he is not allowed to work are bars and liquor stores. When the probation officer discovers the offender has secured a position in a convenience store that sells beer and wine, the probation officer confronts the offender for violation of the terms of the supervision plan. Based on the misunderstanding of the term "primarily," the probationer could be sent to prison, or at best, be forced to quit the job.

Trust, satisfaction, and perceived understanding are paramount in effective probation and parole supervision, but little is known where the offender's perception lies on these critical areas of communication. Trust as a variable is important in this context because of the role trust plays in the development of interpersonal relationships. A relationship with a high level of trust reflects respect and confidence, two necessary dimensions related to compliance. Without understanding, little chance of compliance is possible, and feeling understood relates to feelings of satisfaction. The three variables combined create an interrelated framework for measuring the overall perceived quality of the relationship.

Few, if any, studies have been done that examine the interaction between probation and parole officers and their clients, and because so little is known about the
communication between them research should begin at the most basic levels: mutual understanding, trust, and satisfaction. Just knowing more about the nature of the communication within this context could help to gain a deeper understanding of these communication elements. Furthermore, understanding the perceptions of people on probation and parole would give probation and parole officers direction in improving the interaction that is necessary between the officers and their clients. Additionally, understanding the differences between the perceptions of the offenders and the perceptions of the probation and parole officers can better direct the training of the officers.

The purpose of this study is to begin to investigate the level of trust, satisfaction, and understanding that exists between probationers and parolees and their probation and parole officers. Self-report data will be used to gain the perceptions of probationers and parolees. It is assumed for this study that regardless of the quality of the communication that exists between the two parties if the perception of one of the parties is that the communication is of lesser quality, it could lead to an eventual breakdown of communication. Just knowing whether or not a significant level of trust, satisfaction, and understanding exists is enough to ignite further investigation.

Chapter Two delineates related studies pertaining to people on probation and parole and previous research done in the areas of trust, understanding, and satisfaction. Chapter Three describes the methods used to obtain the sample and the scales administered to measure trust, satisfaction, and understanding. The results follow in Chapter Four. Chapter Five discusses both the quantitative and qualitative results. In Chapter Six, the conclusions of this study are explicated, as well as an overview of the limitations of the study and further research and implications.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Unfortunately, little if any research has been done on the communication between people on probation and parole and their probation and parole officers. Within the field of sociology, studies have been done that both criticize and defend the criminal justice system including investigations of the systems of probation and parole. The sociological research regarding probation and parole tends to focus on the theories behind delinquency, and the demographics and backgrounds of the offenders. The field of psychology has also developed a perspective on probation and parole that focuses on the attitudes and social characteristics of people on probation and parole. Studies have also been done by researchers in the fields of criminology and criminal justice. Even though numerous studies have been done in other fields research regarding communication has not been found.

Similarly, within the field of communication, however, there are no known studies that focus on the communication that occurs within the framework of the interpersonal relationship between people on probation and parole and their probation and parole officers. The following review of the studies focus on probation and parole are representative of the information commonly found in the fields of psychology, sociology, criminal justice, and criminology. The review of the studies on trust, understanding, and satisfaction comes mainly from the fields of communication and psychology. This study seeks to balance the perspectives of all the fields represented.
Several studies have investigated the attitudes and perspectives of people on probation and parole including the perceptions they have towards the system of parole. The significance of these studies lies in the efforts of the researchers to grasp the perceptions of people on probation and parole towards the structure and function of the probation and parole systems.

Differences have been reported in the attitudes between minorities and non-minorities toward the criminal justice system (Berman 1976). Berman (1976) interviewed a panel of eighty-seven men who had formerly been incarcerated and were currently on parole. The respondents were asked to answer questions based on their perception of the police, judges, courts, lawyers, and the parole system, parole agents, and parole rules. The questions were worded in such a way so as to produce an answer that was in the form of a percentage. For example, one of the questions was, “What percentage of police officers harass parolees?” In an additional line of questioning, the parolees were simply asked if they agreed or disagreed with a statement like, “Most lawyers do everything they possibly can to help their clients.”

The results of the study indicated that parolees viewed the police rather negatively. Only 8% of those interviewed felt harassed by the police, but the average estimates by parolees of the proportion of police who harass parolees was at 40%. What this indicates is a gap in the reality and the perception of the respondents. This is not altogether uncommon; however, it is worth noting because, where a faulty perception exists, there also exists a possibility of a breakdown in communication.
This negative opinion continued with the parolee’s views of the courts system and lawyers, but reversed to a positive view of the parole system, parole agents, and parole rules. An overwhelming 89% of the subjects agreed with the statement “Your parole agent does everything he can to help parolees,” and only 23% agreed with the statement, “Your parole agent just does not understand the problems a parolee faces.” These results are especially significant not in the content itself, but in what it says about the interaction between the parolees and their parole officers.

Berman (1976) hypothesized that, “One plausible explanation of why parolees responded more positively than they might, considering their situation, is that the interviewers told the respondents that they had gotten their names and addresses from the parole agent” (p. 515). It can be supposed that in an effort to make an impression on the parole officer, the parolees answered the questions in what they viewed as a more favorable response. Another possibility is that the parolees may have perceived that since the interviewers had come through the parole officers, the interviewers would go back to the parole officers with their responses. Additionally, it should be noted that the parolees had no reason to give socially desirable answers toward their perceptions of the courts and police, whereas they did have reason to give socially desirable responses regarding parole. The group with the most power over the parolee is not the courts or police, but rather the parole system—especially the parole officer. This is a delicate situation, which only exemplifies the need for further research especially in the area of perception and social desirability. Furthermore, it sets the stage for criteria that need to be addressed when selecting a sample, especially in such circumstances.

Perceived meanings of rehabilitation have been investigated for parole officers and parolees and it was discovered that parole officers and parolees saw rehabilitation
from different frames of reference (Shihadeh, 1973). The researcher stated, “Parolees
tended to view rehabilitation in terms of the attainment of immediate, specific, personal
goals, while parole officers interpreted it in terms of relatively broad societally oriented
goals” (Shihadeh, 1973, p. 336). Shihadeh (1973) discovered that this difference in
perception led to a difference in the perceived value of rehabilitation, and parole
functions. Understanding that the perceptions of the people on probation and parole can
differ from those of their probation and parole officer further warrants the investigation
of the communication between the two.

Shihadeh’s study (1973), also briefly touched on the power held by the parole
officer in the interpersonal interaction between the parolees and their parole officers. The
researcher stated, “The conditions under which a parolee is released and the ability of a
parole officer to change, delete, or modify these conditions create a potential for fear and
hostility between the two groups, as well as the need for conformity by the parolee to
those conditions and their strict observance” (Shihadeh, 1973 p. 336). Tension is created
between the punitive consequences of parole and the rewards of continued freedom.
Without trust, understanding, and continued attention to communication, the probationer
and parolee may not view the probation system as anything beyond an agent of
punishment.

In a follow-up study, Shihadeh (1981) investigated the perception of the value of
rehabilitation for both parolees and parole officers. The focus of this study was two-fold:
first, to determine any differences in the perceptions between parolees and parole
officers, and second, to determine any differences that might occur in the perceptions of
the parolees depending on their age. The results revealed that the parolee’s perception of
the value of rehabilitation through parole was less favorable than the parole officer’s
perception of rehabilitation through parole. In other words, it could be said that the parolees had less faith in the system than the parole officers.

Insofar as age was concerned, Shihadeh (1981) suggested that the older parolees had a significantly more favorable perception of the parole system than the younger parolees. Furthermore, the older parolees were not as able to return to their familiar associations as the younger parolees, and therefore focused on the positive affects of rehabilitation through parole. The researcher further reported that the older parolees generally did not go back to prior associations with the same frequency as younger parolees. This may be due to the narrower gap in perception between the parolee and the parole officer, which could have resulted in more effective communication. The increase in effective communication and subsequent satisfaction may have been a factor in the success of the parolees.

The significance of the above cited studies lies in the efforts of this research to grasp the perceptions of the parolees toward the structure and function of the parole system. Of equal value is the research on the parole officer’s perceptions. The gap in the perceptions toward the system between the parolees and the parole officers could lead to misunderstandings and opposing value judgements, which could in turn effect the communication and the outcome of the terms of supervision. At the heart of concurrent perceptions is mutual understanding.

Having reviewed the studies generally pertaining to communication and perceptions of parolees, it is important also to look at studies supporting the importance of perceived understanding, communication satisfaction, and trust. Each area will be addressed separately.
Perceived Understanding

Perceived understanding has been shown to be a critical factor in relationship development. Furthermore, the perception of being understood has also been linked to the development of interpersonal relationships (Cahn, 1983). In the context of probation or parole officer and client interaction feeling understood is likely to be an important factor in light of the necessary compliance that is required by the client. In the context of the interaction between individuals on probation and parole, the development of interpersonal relationships may also play an important role in the success of the offender.

Perceived understanding or misunderstanding is defined as a "communicator's assessment of his or her success or failure when attempting to communicate with another person" (Cahn & Shulman, 1984 p. 122). Cahn's (1983) research discovered a positive correlation between interpersonal trust, attraction, and feeling understood. The higher the subjects scored on the perceived understanding measure, the higher they scored on the measures of interpersonal trust and attraction. Overall, the study (Cahn, 1983) demonstrated that the perception of understanding/misunderstanding functions as an index of intensity of the development of the relationship—that is to say that the perception of understanding grows incrementally as the interpersonal relationship develops. The more developed the relationship, the more important perceived understanding is. Successful probation and parole depends on many factors, but one of the most critical is the relationship between the probation and parole officer and the offender.

Understanding has been studied regarding physician patient interaction, and it has been shown in this context that a positive correlation exists between perceived
understanding and satisfaction (Smith, Polis, & Hadac, 1981). Furthermore, understanding has been studied in the context of teacher-student relationships (Cahn, 1984), and also in the development of interpersonal relationships (Cahn, 1983). Cahn’s (1983) research shows a correlation between trust and feelings of being understood, as an interpersonal relationship develops.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is another concept that has been shown to be an important factor in interaction; it is likely that in the probation or parole officer and client interaction satisfaction will somehow play a role. In interpersonal interaction, feeling understood has been positively correlated with feelings of satisfaction (Van Kaam, 1959). In this study by Van Kaam, respondents were asked the open-ended question: “Describe how you feel when you feel that you are really being understood by somebody” (1959, p. 67). Ninety-nine percent of the subjects reported feelings of satisfaction as a part of the experience of “feeling really understood.” Feeling understood and feeling satisfied go hand in hand.

A second important concept from this study (Van Kaam, 1959) are the other factors related to the experience of feeling understood that were mentioned the most frequently in the responses of the subjects. One factor was a perception that the person co-experiences what things mean to the subject. In other words, the subject feels like the person with whom they are having an experience, shares the same feelings and thoughts on the experience. The other significant factor that is noteworthy is the feelings of safety subjects reported in the relationship. Ninety-one percent of the subjects reported feeling safe when they experienced feelings of being “really understood” by another person.
Using the “feeling understood/misunderstood” scale developed by Cahn and Shulman (1984), coupled with the Medical Interview Satisfaction Scale developed by Wolf, Putnam, James, and Stiles (1978), Abrams (1989) studied the communication satisfaction and feelings of understanding as perceived by patients toward their physicians. Abrams’ study (1989) is significant to the current study because it attempted to determine the correlation of “feeling understood” with the overall satisfaction of the patient toward the physician.

Because of the roles of patient and physician in interaction, it is likely that similarities exist in the interaction between the probation and parole officers and their clients, with one glaring exception, offenders do not have a choice in who they can see, as the patients have with the doctors. Abrams’ (1989) study reported a generally positive correlation between satisfaction and perceived understanding between the patients and their doctors.

Additional studies have shown the importance of satisfaction in the context of doctor-patient communication (Comstock, Hooper, Goodwin & Goodwin, 1982; DiMatteo, Linn, Chang, & Cope, 1985). Within the field of medical communications, patient satisfaction is considered to be a determining factor in patient compliance (Lane, 1983).

Trust

Trust is another aspect of relationship development that may be critical in the communication between probation and parole officers and their clients. Trust is important because without trust in the interaction, it is likely that a relationship cannot
develop, and in the context of probation or parole officer and client interaction, trust is just as important as it would be in any other relationship. Rotter stated that, "The failure to trust others, particularly representatives of society, such as parents, teachers and powerful community leaders, has frequently been cited as an important determinant in delinquency" (1967, p. 651). Probation and parole officers function as representatives of society in the relationships they have with their clients. In this context especially, it is clear that trust plays a huge role in the development of the relationship between a probationer or parolee and their officer. The development of a trusting relationship may in turn help to produce success for the offender.

Interpersonal trust is defined as "a process of holding certain relevant, favorable perceptions of another person which engender certain types of dependent behaviors in a risky situation where the expected outcomes that are dependent upon that other person are not known with certainty" (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977 p. 251). Wheeless and Grotz (1977) concluded that trust in a specific individual is a necessary condition for self-disclosure to that person. Self-disclosure represents a necessary function of probation and parole. Probationers and parolees need to be able to openly discuss their problems and difficulties with their probation and parole officers. It is likely in this context that only once interpersonal trust has been developed will self-disclosure begin. Wheeless and Grotz's (1977) research indicated that the amount of disclosure was greater for those who scored higher in the individualized trust scale. Additionally, self-disclosure and its correlation with trust have been the focus of many other studies of interpersonal relationship development (Derlega & Chaikin, 1975; Rosenfeld, 1979; Wheeless, 1978).

The development of self-disclosure and trust in the relationship between people on probation and parole and their probation and parole officers should be considered
serious objectives of the probation and parole system because of what they can bring to the quality of the interaction.

Trust has been studied in the context of the development of cooperative behavior (Loomis, 1959), and in the development of interpersonal trust in relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Bok, 1983; Mellinger, 1956; Pearce, 1974; Remple, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Studies have also addressed the effects of deceit and suspicion in interpersonal relationships (Deutsch, 1958; Knapp & Comadena, 1979).

Although research has focused on the perceptions of people on probation and parole, no studies were found that addressed the perception of the communication that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients. Research has suggested that perceived understanding positively correlates with satisfaction (Van Kaam, 1959), and that trust tends to be based on a perception of understanding (Cahn, 1983). In social situations each of these factors plays an important inter-related role, but in situations such as probation and parole, where so much depends on the development of an arranged relationship, these factors can determine the success or failure of an offender.

Research Questions

Although much research has been done in the field of communication studies regarding understanding, trust, and satisfaction, the majority of studies tend to focus on interpersonal relationships, with specific attention being paid to doctor-patient relationships. Obvious differences exist between the communication that occurs in doctor-patient interaction and the communication that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients. However, satisfaction, understanding and trust are likely
to be factors in any relationship, and the relationship between people on probation and parole and their probation and parole officers cannot be considered as an exception.

This study then poses several questions within the context of that relationship:

RQ1: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between trust and satisfaction?

RQ2: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between perceived understanding and satisfaction?

RQ3: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between perceived understanding and trust?

RQ4: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between perceived understanding, trust, and satisfaction?

RQ5: What communication behaviors exhibited by probation and parole officers contribute to a probationer or parolee’s likes and dislikes concerning the communication they have with their probation or parole officer?
The present study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to begin the investigation of communication in the context of probation and parole. By using two approaches this study offered a more global view of the perspectives of individuals on probation and parole. First, the survey method approached the context of the communication seeking a deeper understanding of three foundational communication behaviors: understanding, trust, and satisfaction. Second, the open-ended questions used for grounded theory analysis, offered an opportunity for investigation of other communication behaviors that the subjects perceived as important. Due to the lack of communication studies research in the area of probation and parole, this study sought to determine critical factors that can be further investigated. By using both a qualitative and a quantitative approach, it was hoped that more could be discovered than by using just one of the approaches.

Because of the links between satisfaction, perceived understanding, and trust, this study used the three above-mentioned scales, the Perceived Understanding Scale (Cahn & Shulman, 1984), the Individualized Trust Scale (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977), and a modified version of the Medical Interview Satisfaction Scale (Wolf, Putnam, James, & Stiles, 1978). In addition to the three scales, two open-ended interview questions were asked: “What communication behaviors does your probation or parole officer (PO) exhibit that you like?” and “What communication behaviors does your probation or parole officer (PO) exhibit that you dislike?”

The perceived understanding instrument (Cahn & Shulman, 1984) was originally developed to measure the level of understanding in therapeutic situations, but is non-
specific enough to be used in this study. Cahn and Shulman (1984) reported a test-retest reliability of .90.

The scale used to measure individualized trust (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977) was used specifically because it is directed or “individualized” towards the perception of the communicator, in this case the probation or parole officer. In addition, the instrument works well with the other scales because it takes only about one minute to complete. The scale has a split-half reliability of .92.

The Medical Interview Satisfaction Scale (Wolf, Putnam, James, & Stiles, 1978) was slightly modified to correlate with the perceptions of people on probation or parole towards their probation and parole officers. For example, where “doctor” was used in the original scale, it was replaced with “probation or parole officer,” and where the original scale made reference to “illness” and “the effects of illness”, the modified version used the words, “supervision plan” (see Appendix A). The Medical Interview Satisfaction Scale (Wolf, Putnam, James, & Stiles, 1978) was chosen because it referred to communication satisfaction in specific context rather than global satisfaction.

The current study included both people on probation and people on parole. All of the subjects were willing volunteers who were gathered using a network sampling technique. Or more specifically, the first subjects were contacted by asking as many people I knew who were on probation or parole if they would know of any willing probationers or parolees who would allow an interview. From these first interviews, I asked for referrals to other offenders and so forth until the sample was large enough for a pattern to develop. The ten subjects ranged in age from 18 to roughly 60 years of age, and were from different cities throughout an area in the Northwestern United States. In an effort to achieve a group of subjects with as many different probation and parole
officers as possible, the subjects were from four different counties and represent a total of seven different probation or parole officers. Of the ten subjects, seven were on probation and three were on parole. All of the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face situation and verbal responses to the open-ended questions were audio-taped. The interviews were conducted in public gathering places wherever convenient and comfortable for the subjects (i.e., public libraries, restaurants).

Probation and parole officers were never contacted, and the subjects were told explicitly that the study was not intended for the benefit of the state corrections department, nor was the study conducted by or affiliated with the state department of corrections. Subjects were also told that the individual answers on the questionnaires were not going to be used individually but as a compilation of data, and where the responses to the open-ended questions were used for grounded theory analysis, full anonymity would be upheld. Based on the study done by Berman (1976) where possible bias existed due to the perceived connection that the parolees thought the interviewers had with the parole officer, the decision not to have contact with any officer from the department of corrections was made as clear as possible to the subjects. However, if the subjects at any time decided to tell their probation and parole officer about the interview, no attempt was made to dissuade them.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Satisfaction

To determine the perceived satisfaction of the subjects an adapted version of the Medical Interview Satisfaction Scale was used (Wolf, Putnam, James, & Stiles, 1978). Satisfaction was measured in three different categories: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive questions deal with comprehension. The affective questions are concerned with emotions and feelings, and the behavioral questions regard behavior. Respondents were given a list of positive statements and were asked their level of agreement based on a scale of one to five (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=uncertain, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree). A complete list of the questions is available in Appendix A. According to the authors, a score of 4 or higher indicates satisfaction, whereas a score of less than 4 indicates dissatisfaction.

Results of the current study revealed a mean for the cognitive portion of the questionnaire of 2.7 with the highest individual mean being 3.4 and the lowest individual mean being 1.0. In the affective portion of the questionnaire, the overall mean was 3.4 with the highest individual mean being 4.3 and the lowest individual mean being 2.3. The mean for the behavioral portion of the questionnaire was 3.0 with an individual high of 3.8 and an individual low of 1.8. The overall mean from the combined scores was 3.0 with the highest individual mean overall being 3.8 and the lowest individual mean overall being 2.0.
Table I

Summary of Means and Standard Deviations

For Responses to the Satisfaction Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Combined</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: (5) Strongly Agree (4) Agree (3) Uncertain (2) Disagree (1) Strongly Disagree

Trust

To measure the trust perceived by the subjects in the interaction, the Individualized Trust Scale was used (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). The individualized trust scale was employed to measure trust in a specific person rather than all people in general. This scale uses fifteen pairs of antonyms with the subject responding by marking one of seven spaces on the scale closest to the reaction felt during the interaction with the specific individual. The scale was scored so that the higher the numerical score the more positive the reaction. The complete scale is in Appendix B. For the purposes of this study a positive response has a numerical value of five or better, and a negative response has a numerical value of three or less. A response of four can be considered neutral or indifferent. The scale is scored by totaling the numerical responses with the highest possible score being 105 and the lowest being 15.

Results of the current study revealed a mean response of 4.0 with a mean sum of 60. The highest individual score was 104 and the lowest individual score was 31.

Table II

Summary of Responses to the Individualized Trust Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Response</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Mean Sum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1-7 (1)low/(7)high Highest Possible Sum: 105, Lowest: 15
Feeling Understood/Misunderstood

To measure feelings of understanding and misunderstanding, the Perceived Understanding Scale developed by Cahn and Shulman (1984) was used. This scale consists of eight items to measure perceptions of feeling understood and eight items to measure the perceptions of feeling misunderstood. In addition to the 16 items, eight distracter or dummy questions were included. The scale in its entirety is located in Appendix C. The subjects respond to each item on a scale of one to five to indicate the extent to which they feel the emotion that is associated with each item with five being “very great” and one being “very little.” The feeling misunderstood items are summed then subtracted from the sum of the feeling understood items. The possible range of scores is from −32 to 32. The more positive the score, the more understood the subject feels.

In the current study, the mean response for the feeling understood items was 2.40. The mean response for the feeling misunderstood items was 2.38. The highest overall individual mean for the feeling understood items was 4.38, the lowest was 1.13. The highest overall individual mean for the feeling misunderstood items was 3.38, and the lowest was 1.0. The mean sum of the feeling understood items was 19.2 and the mean sum of the feeling misunderstood items was 19, which gives a score of 0.2. The highest individual sum for the feeling understood was 35 and the lowest, 9. The highest individual sum for the feeling misunderstood items was 32, and the lowest was 8. The highest individual score was 25 and the lowest individual score was −19.
Table III
Summary of the Responses to the Feeling Understood/Misunderstood Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Response</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Mean Sum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understood</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1-5 (1) very little/(5) very great. Score determined by subtracting FM from FU.

Comparison of Individual Scores

The following is a table that represents the individual scores of the subjects. It can be used to determine any possible patterns of correlation of the factors in the more extreme high scores and low scores. (Note, for example, that subject six held the high score for both the trust categories and the feeling understood categories.)

Table IV
Summary of Subjects Individual Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Trust Scale Scores</th>
<th>FU/FM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave.</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the qualitative research will be described in Chapter Five in the section immediately following the discussion of the quantitative results.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

There are many factors that come into play in the communication between probation and parole officers and their clients. Satisfaction, interpersonal trust, and feeling understood are only three of the elements at work to create either successful communication that will result in compliance and change in the client, or unsuccessful communication which may result in a lack of cooperation and regression. The discussion that follows focuses on the results gathered through the survey questionnaires, and is primarily focused on satisfaction, interpersonal trust, and feeling understood and how each correlates with the other and how the three correlate together. The results of the scales administered for each of the three factors will be discussed separately. An examination of the relationships between the factors will then be addressed in the discussion of the research questions. Following the discussion of the quantitative data, common themes that emerged in the open-ended segment of the interview will be described.

Discussion of Quantitative Results

Satisfaction

The results of this study seem to indicate a degree of dissatisfaction. For the purposes of this study, satisfaction is a response of four or better on a scale from one to five, five being strongly agree, and one being strongly disagree. In the cognitive portion of the scale, not one subject reported a mean response higher than 3.7. In the affective
portion of the scale seven of the ten respondents gave a mean response of four or lower. In the behavioral portion only one of the ten respondents had a mean response of four or higher. Overall, not one respondent had an individual mean of higher than a 3.8. In the mean, which is inclusive of all the responses given, the highest score was a 3.4.

This data may indicate dissatisfaction within this population. Furthermore, the developers of this scale reported an average satisfaction score of 4.0 and believed the scale to be skewed higher because of the patients reluctance to use the lowest two points on the scale and from the predominance of positively worded items (Wolf, Putnam, James, & Stiles, 1978). In this study it is not possible to determine if the average response of 3.0 was skewed higher but generally speaking, responses tended to range throughout the scale.

**Interpersonal Trust**

The data from the Individualized Trust Scale (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977) is much less straightforward than the satisfaction data. The mean response overall was four. This was based on a scale of one to seven with seven being the most positive, one being the least. The mean response of four seems to indicate a possible neutral or indifferent response. However, in looking closely at the range of the responses, it should be noted that the average of four was a result of polarized responses. Respondents mainly seemed to use the extreme high and low ends of the scale with very few respondents marking four more than once on the scale. This could indicate that in most cases trust was either present or absent with very little graduation in between. The mean score, which is determined by summing the responses of each subject and averaging them, was found to
be 60, almost exactly the middle. Again, this is representative of the wide spread of the responses, in fact, only one subject had a score close to the average, a 57. The highest score was 104 and the lowest was 31. What this data may indicate is that trust generally does not exist to a varying degree in the interaction between probationers and parolees and their officers. It could be that trust in the officer is present or absent and does not occur in widely varying degrees.

Feeling Understood/Misunderstood

The data from the Perceived Understanding Scale (Cahn and Shulman, 1984) follows the same trend as the results of the trust scale. The results are fairly widely spread, although not as widely spread as the results of the trust scale. The mean response for the understanding items was 2.40 on a scale of 1 to 5, and there appears to be a possible reluctance to use the higher end of the scale (5/very great). In all of the responses combined for the entire scale, five as a response was used only ten times out of the 160 responses given compared to one as a response which was used 65 times. What this may show is that both in feeling understood and feeling misunderstood, there was not a sufficient level of intensity of feeling to use the “very great” response. However, because the reluctance to use five as a response was a trend both in the feeling understood and feeling misunderstood, it probably is not a factor that could significantly skew the results of the data.

The overall average score that was obtained by subtracting the sum of the average responses for the “misunderstood” section from the average of the responses from the “understood” section was 0.2. Again, this average is reflective of a broad spread of
responses. The high score was a positive 25 and the low score was a negative 21. It could be that this indicates a pattern similar to the pattern found in the results of the trust score, that perceived understanding may be either present or absent, with very little possibility of a varying degree of perceived understanding.

Discussion of Research Questions

RQ1: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between trust and satisfaction? Based on the results of the separate scales it does not appear that a correlation exists between satisfaction and trust. Where a subject scored high on the trust scale, the satisfaction score remained low (as in subject #6), and where a subject scored low on the trust scale the satisfaction scale score also remained low (as in subject #10). However, there seems to be an unexplainable trend that the higher trust scores correlated with lower satisfaction scores, and the lower trust scores correlated with slightly higher satisfaction scores. It should be noted that no individual overall satisfaction score was four or better indicating positive satisfaction.

RQ2: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between perceived understanding and satisfaction? The results of the separate scales seem to indicate that there is no correlation between perceived understanding and satisfaction. The subject with the highest score on the satisfaction scale was one of the lowest scores on the perceived understanding scale,
while the subject that scored the highest on the perceived understanding scale had one of the lowest overall scores for the satisfaction scale. In addition, it appears that a negative relationship exists between the scores of the cognitive section of the satisfaction scale and the perceived understanding scale. In response to the research question, it is likely that there is a negative relationship between perceived understanding and satisfaction.

RQ3: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between perceived understanding and trust?

The data from the Perceived Understanding Scale compared with the data from the Individualized Trust Scale suggests a positive correlation between the two. The subject with the highest perceived understanding score also holds the highest score on the trust scale, and the five lowest understanding scores are the subjects with the five lowest trust scores. Additionally, the average score of the perceived understanding scale is almost exactly halfway between the highest and lowest possible scores for the scale, and the average score for the trust scale is exactly halfway between the high score of 105 and the low score of 15. This could indicate that the results of the two scales have the same broad variation in responses. It is not known, however, if either variable influences the other.

RQ4: Within the context of interaction that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients, what is the relationship between perceived understanding, trust, and satisfaction?
Having discussed the relationships between trust and satisfaction, perceived understanding and satisfaction and the relationship between trust and perceived understanding, it was found that the only correlation that exists is between trust and perceived understanding. By looking at all three variables at once it may be possible to develop a broad picture of the perceptions of the subjects interviewed. Basically, it could be said that the subjects reported an overall low level dissatisfaction of the interaction they encountered with their probation and parole officers regardless of the amount of trust they felt and regardless of the perceived feelings of understanding they had. It is likely that the situation of being on probation and parole cannot be satisfying even when there is adequate trust and feelings of being understood. With this suggestion in mind, it could be a possible justification for the absence of correlation between satisfaction and the other two variables.

If the study were to simply look at the average responses and average scores of the subjects without looking at the overall spread of the responses, it would show a positive correlation between all the variables, all the responses would fall in the middle, or the undecided or indifferent category. Because the sample size was so small it would be an oversight to look only at the averages, however, if the sample were larger, a trend may likely appear and more would be known about the inter-relatedness of the three variables.

Perhaps more could be learned about the relationships between the variables by looking at the answers to the open-ended interview questions. Before answering the fifth research question this study will now move from the discussion of quantitative data to the discussion of qualitative data.
Qualitative Results and Discussion

During the interviews, the subjects were asked two open-ended questions: first, “What communication behaviors does your PO exhibit that you like?” and second, “What communication behaviors does your PO exhibit that you dislike?” Overall nine themes emerged inductively. Eight of the nine themes fall into two general categories. These two general categories appear to involve confirming communication behaviors and disconfirming communication behaviors. The themes that fall into the confirming category are listening, encouraging, caring, and communicating directly. The themes that fall into the disconfirming category are deceiving, controlling, de-humanizing, and rushing. The final theme that falls into neither category and will be discussed separately is the client’s fear of disclosure.

**Confirming Communication Behaviors**

Confirmation involves communication behaviors, both verbal and nonverbal, that actively acknowledge a person by recognizing him or her as a unique, significant individual, capable of choice and worthy of existence (Cisna & Sieburg, 1990). In order for communication behavior be considered confirming it needs to meet four criteria related to basic human experience. Confirmation will express recognition of the other’s existence, acknowledge a relationship of affiliation with the other, express awareness of the significance or worth of the other, and accept the experience of the other as valid (Cisna & Sieburg, 1990). Basically speaking, confirming behaviors allow people to experience their own feelings of being and significance with an understanding of their
interconnectedness with others. Confirmation, therefore, by nature, cannot be solicited or manipulated.

Four confirming themes emerged in the subject’s responses to the question, “What communication behaviors does your PO exhibit that you like?” that appear to show confirmation: listening, encouraging, caring, and communicating directly. Each will now be discussed in further detail.

**Listening**

Listening is traditionally defined as effective sensing, interpreting, and evaluating the meanings of another (Stewart & Thomas, 1990). In the interaction between probation and parole officers and their clients, listening on the part of the officer was viewed as a confirmation of the value of the client. The clients view listening as a starting point for the development of direction and solutions. The example that follows is representative of the client’s perceived value of listening.

“He’s willing to listen, which is unlike most probation officers. He’s willing to work with me.” (Subject 106)

The confirming behavior of listening exhibited by the probation officer has been received by the client which is evidenced by the “willing to work with me,” part of the statement. The client associates the probation officer’s listening with a willingness to help the client with his or her situation. Trust can then be developed as the client allows the interaction to continue, which may result in an increased effectiveness during the
interaction. Research has shown that a willingness or unwillingness to listen influences the effectiveness of communication (Vinson & Roberts, 1990). This atmosphere created by the officer's willingness to listen may open doors to deeper levels of dialogue. In the following example a similar pattern of confirmation is evident as well.

"I can tell that he is new, because he listens to me and cares what I think."

(Subject 101)

In this example, listening is an indication to the client that the officer cares about the perspectives and situation of the client. Within interaction situations, individuals want to feel valued, and to feel as though their experiences are valid. It is likely that probationers and parolees are not an exception. Just as in any other interpersonal relationship, value is placed on listening as a confirming behavior. According to Charles Kelly (cited in Wolvin & Coakley, 1996), "Listening by its very nature, has to be empathetic; a person understands what he has heard, only to the extent that he can share in the meaning, spirit, or feeling of what the communicator has said" (p. 284). In addition, the part of the phrase that says "I can tell that he is new" indicates that the subject believes listening to be out of character for the officer. It could be that because the listening behavior is unexpected the client perceives it to be of greater value in this context.
Encouraging

Encouragement can be considered a statement of social support (Jones, 1997). Research on social support has determined three basic functions of social support. First, it can offer an opportunity for a distressed person to vent feelings, anxieties, and emotions. Second, listening and showing concern for another can also be used as a method of emotional support. Finally, the use of supportive messages can offer encouragement, acceptance, or reassurance (Jones, 1997). Social support in the form of encouragement is important in this context because it can foster openness and respect in the dialogue between the officer and the client. The following is an example of an encouraging statement of social support. In this example, hope in the future is instilled in the client when encouragement is offered. That hope is also evident in the following example of social support.

“She always gives me as much time as I need, when I have something going on she helps me find solutions, she is always supportive and encourages me.” (Subject 201)

This example shows the inter-relatedness of support and encouragement. This statement seems to indicate that encouragement is support and support is encouraging. The nonverbal act of “always gives me as much time as I need,” indicates the client is allowed to vent his or her frustrations and anxieties. This follows with the first function of social support as listed above. This emotional support may have created hopefulness in the client’s outlook, which could be translated from the statement, “she helps me find


solutions.” The following is a statement given by a subject in response to the question of “What communication behaviors does your PO exhibit that you like?” The client expresses feelings of being encouraged.

“Oh... he pushes me to go to school—to college.” (Subject 104)

This statement provides the client with support by acknowledging the client’s value in his opportunity and ability to continue with his or her education. A message like this one could reassure the client of his or her own abilities. Encouraging statements can give the client a feeling of value, worth, and significance. Although “pushing” could have a negative connotation, this respondent valued the support the officer was giving, allowing that should he decide to go to school, the officer would be in favor of the decision. The terminology of “pushing” may simply be an indicator that the officer uses the encouragement to go to school frequently. In the context of the interaction between probation and parole officers and their clients, encouragement can indicate help, and in help there is hope. Both examples show how encouragement is found in both message content and in non-verbal behaviors.

Caring

Caring is a natural responsiveness to others characterized by personal involvement (Montgomery, 1993). Therefore, caring statements are messages that convey responsiveness and personal involvement. Caring occurs when the message sender conveys an interest in the receiver on a personal level. Again, as with listening and with
encouragement, caring statements are confirmation of the value, worth and significance of the individual as a person. The following example shows the client's perception of caring.

“She's interested in how I am doing, like my family life and any complications with that.” (Subject 105)

Within the context of the interaction between probation and parole officers and their clients, information about the client's family life is generally not necessary information, nor is it routinely asked. The value of a caring statement perceived by the client is in the genuineness of the interest in his or her home life. It is likely that the client is confirmed as an individual because the officer has expressed interest and concern about the client's life beyond the community supervision plan, and the stipulations of the client's sentence. Using a caring statement or question the officer can respond to the client, show social support and possibly foster an open honest dialogue. The following statement is another example of caring behavior.

“He likes to talk, to discuss things.” (Subject 106)

Again, this statement came as a response to the question, “What communication behaviors does your probation and parole officer exhibit that you like?” Although considerably less straightforward than the first example given, this example also shows elements of caring behavior. Because talk in this instance has a positive connotation according to the subject, it can be assumed that the talk is of a comfortable nature and
focused on the client in a positive light. It could be that questions are answered and attention is given to the client in the form of open, genuine conversation. The “discuss” in this statement also indicates a two-way communication that is shared equally by both speakers. This example indicates a responsiveness felt by the client in the interaction.

Communicating Directly

Directness is communication that is characterized by openness and honesty that in turn encourages a response that is equally as open and honest (Devito, 1995). In direct communication, expectations are made clear and when language is used with brevity, the opportunities for misunderstandings are minimized. Mutual understanding thrives in the open, honest environment of directness. The following is an example of one subject’s perception of communicating directly.

“I know what he expects, he’s (pause) clear.” (Subject 203)

Using the open and honest approach of directness, it may be possible to make a statement that initially may not be what the client would like to hear, while at the same time maintaining the positive elements of social support such as confirmation, value, worth and significance of the client as an individual. Honesty on the part of the communicator is the factor that maintains the respect for the receiver. This honesty is conveyed in the absence of embellishments and double-speak, which the receiver may interpret as manipulative. The following is another example of how the subject values communicating directly.
"He's pretty short and to the point, I like that myself." (Subject 202)

Again, this example conveys a perceived value by the client in the straightforwardness of direct communication. In being "short and to the point," the officer communicates his or her expectations clearly to the client, and in doing so, the officer communicates a desire to be understood. This mutual understanding is the first step to the client's compliance with the stipulations of his or her supervision plan, and without understanding in this context, compliance is not possible. By communicating directly, the officer creates an atmosphere where compliance comes easier and a willingness to cooperate is developed out of the openness and honesty.

Listening, encouraging, caring, and communicating directly in the context of communication that occurs between probation and parole officers and their clients do not necessarily encompass all of the confirming behaviors that are exhibited by probation and parole officers. It is possible and quite likely that there are many confirming behaviors that occur in the interaction that are not covered in this study. However, it should also be noted that not all confirming behaviors are received in the same way by all people. Individuals may differ in how they interpret the same acts of confirmation, and assign different meanings to that same act. It is in this way that one subject can feel confirmed by talking and discussing things with his or her probation and parole officer, while another subject feels confirmation by getting right to the point. Overall, confirmation of any kind holds value for the other by actively acknowledging him or her as a unique, significant individual who is worthy of existence.
Disconfirming Communication Behaviors

Having explored confirmation in this context it is necessary to also look at elements of disconfirming communication behavior that were perceived by the subjects. Disconfirmation can be defined as communication behavior either verbal or non-verbal that does not acknowledge the existence or self experience of another and denies him or her of significance. Cissna and Sieburg (1990) grouped disconfirming responses into three general categories. The first, an indifferent response, denies the existence or relation of the other. The second, an impervious response, denies the self-experience of the other, and the final category, the disqualifying response, denies the significance of the other. The disconfirming behaviors perceived by the subjects in this study fall broadly into all of the categories. The disconfirming behaviors most commonly reported by the respondent’s are deceiving, controlling, de-humanizing, and rushing. A discussion of each follows.

Deceiving

Deception, or lying, is an easily understood human phenomenon; almost all of us have been lied to and have all had first-hand experience with deceit. For the purposes of this study, however, deception can be defined as any act that seeks to coerce or manipulate the trust of another individual (Bok, 1989). Trust in some degree functions as a foundation of human relations, and once deception enters the relationship trust is forced out. According to Bok (1989), lying alters the choices of the receiver of the lie by making the situation falsely uncertain or falsely certain. It can effect the objectives seen,
the alternatives believed possible, and it can effect the estimates the receiver must make of the risks and benefits of the situation. In other words, those who are lied to are hurt because their choices are limited and are seen as secondary to the choices of the liar.

Six of the ten subjects interviewed perceived deception in the interactions they had with their probation and parole officers. Lying and broken or false promises were the most commonly given examples. The following is one subject’s account that outlines a clear-cut act of deception.

“He lies, like one time he told me he wasn’t going to send in a urine sample then he did and I found out from the lady at the front desk that he did.” (Subject 107)

In this situation, the probationer left the interaction situation with the impression that the officer was not going to take an action, which the officer then took. Although the deceit in this situation is obvious, what is below the surface is where the deception has the most impact. First, the probationer’s available choices are limited. In believing the officer’s statement, the offender leaves the office with a misconception of what will occur, then is forced to act on that misconception, based on a lack of knowledge of relative options. In the above example, knowing that the urine sample was going to be sent in would have likely caused the client to have a different perspective of the situation. Second, the deceit damages the relationship’s further interaction between the probationer and the probation officer. The interaction is no longer open and direct, but suspect and questionable. An interesting thing has now happened, once the lie is discovered, the manipulative power that the officer created with the lie is gone, and the power that he
held before lying is also diminished because his word can no longer be trusted. He has undermined his own authority.

Not all of the responses cited by the subjects were as obvious as the above example. It should be noted that just as every individual interprets interaction through a filter of his or her own life experiences, so also do offenders, and frequently their filters are filled with experiences of deceit from the past. Although they may not be being lied to or deceived in any actual instance, they may perceive that instance to be a lie. The following account is a representation of what could be considered to be a filter problem.

“He tells me one thing then he does another, like he tells me I have a good chance at getting pre-release then he tells me I’m going to prison. He’s put me in jail so many times I can’t even count.” (Subject 102)

Unfortunately in this situation the damage that occurs as a result of a lie has occurred as a result of a faulty perception, and likely not as a result of a lie. It is quite possible that the client has taken statements the officer has made out of context. Accustomed to being lied to by others through the course of life the client may see lies at every juncture. Trust in this case was never an element in the relationship that could be lost—it simply did not exist in the first place. What has occurred in the example of the above exchange is not so much a matter of the officer deceiving the client but the client deceiving himself. Self-deception is used as a survival skill or a protective measure so as not to allow him to be in a situation where trust is necessary. Bok (1989) stated, “self-deception may be our only shield against knowledge that would otherwise cripple us ... and without self-deception we could not survive” (p. 60). In this particular situation, it
is likely that the probationer who is only 19 years old cannot face either pre-release or prison without self-deception.

Deceiving communication can cause a breakdown in the trust between communicators. When this has happened, the primary goal of communication with a distrusted person becomes the reduction of one's own anxiety rather than the accurate transmission of ideas (Mellinger, 1956). Regardless of how the breakdown in trust has occurred the results are the same, without trust communication loses its effectiveness.

Controlling

Power is central to control. Power is the element that enables one person to change or alter the behavior of another. Control is the exercising of that power by one individual on another. No interpersonal relationship exists without a dimension of power (Devito, 1995). Within the context of interaction between probation and parole officers and their clients, power is a central issue. Probation and parole officers have power to change the terms and stipulations of a client's supervision plan, they may make a decision to overlook or respond to a client's violations as deemed necessary, and in most states, they have the power of arrest. The terms of an offender's sentence as outlined in the offender's supervision plan also further limit the power of the offender. The probation or parole officer holds the majority of the power in the relationship. The following example shows the subject's awareness of the control that the officer has over the client.
"He’s a two-faced lying sack of shit, but he is polite about it. Basically, anything you want you can’t get. There’s no compassion, that’s clear... It’s just that they have control over your life. His interest is not in helping anyone.” (Subject 203)

In this situation the client acknowledges the power that the probation and parole officer has over his or her life in the “anything you want, you can’t get” phrase. DeVito (1995) identifies six different types of power: referent, legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and information or persuasion. In the context of the interaction between probation and parole officers and their clients all the different types of power may be present, but basically two types of power are dominant. Legitimate power, which is based on the role and duties of the probation or parole officer, and coercive power, which is the power to punish non-compliance. Coercive power has many problems, for instance, compared to reward power, which rewards compliance, people who are punished or threatened by punishment tend to dislike the coercive power holder. Furthermore, when coercive power is exerted and punishment is given it is an indication that the coercive power has been ineffective and has not resulted in compliance (DeVito, 1995). It is likely that coercive power may not be the most effective form of control when compared to the uses of the other forms of power. The above subject’s disdain for the probation or parole officer as is seen in the “sack of shit” phrase is likely to be related to the coercive power of the probation or parole officer in the “anything you want you can’t get” and “control over your life” phrases. This compliance-resisting strategy of manipulating the image of the person in power is a defense mechanism called identity management. In identity management a positive or negative attribution is assigned to the individual
seeking compliance as a method of coping with coercion (DeVito, 1995). Unfortunately, given the power differential that is present in this relationship it could create a no-win situation for both the officer and the client. The following example presents another subject’s awareness of the coercive control association.

“That’s the thing about speaking up, there’s always consequences and repercussions.” (Subject 103)

In this statement it is clear in the language of “consequences and repercussions” that the power used for control in this case is not one of a positive nature, but negative. In this example we also have a compliance-resisting strategy at work, the strategy of justification. Using this strategy, an individual justifies his or her refusal to comply by citing the negative consequences of compliance. In these instances, compliance is not limited to compliance with the terms of the supervision plan, but is inclusive of the officer’s desire for openness, and direct, honest communication. In the above situation for example, the client may be in full compliance with the terms and stipulations of the supervision plan and be distant, and uncooperative with the officer during the meetings. This can again be viewed as a coping mechanism or compliance-resisting strategy, to deal with the control exerted through the use of coercive power.

Because the power in the interaction between a probation or parole officer is a constant variable it will invariably affect all the communication that occurs between the two. However, if more were understood about the effects of power and control it may be possible for probation and parole officers to manage the power differential that exists in different ways and gain compliance by exercising as little coercive power as possible.
De-Humanizing

The theme of de-humanizing may possibly be the strongest form of disconfirmation. De-humanization encompasses all three of the disconfirming behaviors mentioned above. De-humanizing communication denies the existence of another, denies the self-experience of another, and denies the significance of another. In essence, de-humanizing communication creates inequality in interaction by refusing the human existence and significance of another. The following one subject's account of de-humanizing communication that was given in response to the question, "what communication behaviors does your PO exhibit that you dislike?"

"We're not people, we're numbers, like he said to me one time, 'you're the one with the AO number behind your name, not us.'" (Subject 103)

Reducing a person to a number can be seen as one of the most clear de-humanizing messages. In this instance the subject is aware of the clearly defined inequality between the officer and client. This inequality is communicated in the "you're the one with the AO number behind your name not us" part of the statement. It communicates a disqualifying message that strips the client of his or her significance. Coercive power is also communicated in the statement when the officer makes it clear, that the client is marked by a number that restricts his or her rights. The following is another subject's perception of de-humanizing communication.
"The way she talks down to me. She just doesn't treat you like a person, that is the main thing, and she goes off of what other probation officers have said about me in the past. She hasn't even tried to get to know me as a person, and I don't feel like that is very fair." (Subject 103)

This instance is a good example of an indifferent disconfirming response. The "she hasn't even tried to get to know me as a person" statement indicates that the officer is only becoming as minimally involved with the client as possible to achieve compliance. Cissna and Sieberg (1990) stated that although recognition is a necessary first step in confirming another, it in itself is not sufficient unless accompanied by some, further indication of a willingness to be involved. It is likely that the client does not perceive a willingness on the part of the officer to become actively involved with her situation. The following is a more extreme account of de-humanizing communication.

"Distrust, putdowns, um (pause) he's just degrading all the time. Like last night I saw him at the hockey game and he's like 'oh, you actually have friends?' just shit er stuff, sorry, like that." (Subject 104)

Not only does this example show de-humanizing communication in the putdowns and degradation, it also disconfirms the client by denying the self-experience of friendship for the client. The "oh, you have friends?" statement sends a message that the client is not worthy or capable of personal relationships. This also illustrates the inequality the officer is fostering in the relationship that may later be used to gain power and control. The essence of disconfirming and de-humanizing communication is
inequality. Inequality sends the message that one individual is of lesser importance or value than another. Inequality in communication can cause negative feelings to arise (DiVito, 1995). In these particular instances it is likely that the clients have developed negative feelings toward their officers.

Rushing

In some instances disconfirmation can be communicated non-verbally. Non-verbal actions frequently communicate a different message than words being said. The most commonly reported form of non-verbal disconfirming communication was that of rushing. Respondents cited examples of probation or parole officers rushing through meetings and not allowing enough time for the clients to express themselves. Rushing in this context disconfirms the client by sending the message that the probation or parole officer has more important things that he or she could be doing than meeting with the client. The following is one subject’s perception.

“He’s in too big of a hurry, like he’s got too much to do for me to ask the things that I need to.” (Subject 202)

In this statement the client has identified the message that the rushing is sending. The phrase, “like he’s go too much to do for me to ask the things that I need to” indicates a perception of the denial of the client’s attempt to communicate. The client also admits that his or her needs are not being met in the interaction. At the most very
basic level, disconfirmation by indifference (displayed non-verbally through rushing) denies another's existence. Another subject expressed the same perception.

“Sometimes she is rushed, she is impatient with other people, but not with me. I think they just work her last nerve that’s all.” (Subject 201)

This example is interesting because the client cited the rushing behavior with regards to the disconfirmation of others, and not directed towards him or her. What this may show is that disconfirmation through rushing is a choice made by the officer depending on the officer's attitude toward the client. It is possible that the clients who are responsive and cooperative are confirmed whereas clients “who work the last nerve” of their officers are systematically disconfirmed. It may be possible that by confirmation of all clients, those clients who are unresponsive and uncooperative, may become responsive and cooperative in a confirming communication environment.¹

Both confirmation and disconfirmation can be demonstrated verbally and non-verbally. Both are a choice made by the communicator. Messages can be constructed to either confirm or disconfirm another. Confirming messages acknowledge the other as unique, valuable and significant, and allow the self-experience and feelings of the other. Disconfirming messages work in the opposite manner by denying the self-experience, and significance of the other and can lead to alienation, self-destructiveness, and violence against others (Cissena & Sieberg, 1990). Given the context of the interaction between people on probation and parole and the basis of criminal activity that has led to

¹ Rushing is likely attributed to the heavy caseload carried by most POs, usually 75 to 100 clients.
community supervision, it could pose a threat to the client, the officer, and to others to introduce disconfirmation into the interaction.

Beyond the patterns of confirmation and disconfirmation, one other theme emerged, the theme of a fear if disclosure. The fear of disclosure could be as a result of the destructive communication patterns listed above (deceiving, controlling and dehumanizing) or it could be from the client's past life experiences. Whatever the cause, it plays a significant role in the interaction that occurs between officers and their clients. The fear of disclosure differs from the other themes that have been discussed because it deals with an internal perception of the client rather than a communication behavior that is exhibited by the probation or parole officer.

Fear of Disclosure

Knapp and Vangelisti's (1996) definition of self-disclosure holds that self-disclosing messages reveal something about the speaker, generally, something that would not be found out if the communicator did not tell it to others. In human interaction self-disclosure serves several purposes. One motivation is for a release of emotion, to get something "off our chest." Another motivation is to reveal to others through the expression of our innermost thoughts who we really are, and the emotion surrounding our existence. Studies have shown that self-disclosure develops intimacy in relationships, and that only in a trusting environment can self-disclosure have a positive impact (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996).
A person on probation or parole's fear of self-disclosure appears to be directly related to the trust they perceive in the relationship. The following example shows the clear link between trust and self-disclosure.

“You can't trust the people that are supposed to be there for you, so then you can't express yourself (pause) you end up keeping everything to yourself because it will be used against you.” (Subject 203)

The problem of a lack of trust is evident in the phrase “you can't trust the people that are supposed to be there for you” even before the respondent reveals his or her fear of disclosure. What is meant by the statement “it will be used against you” is unclear. It could mean that the information provided by the client will be further probed, and what he or she says will be the subject of further uncomfortable conversation. Or it could mean that in being honest about a situation or feeling that the client has, he or she opens him or herself to reprimand or discipline. For example, if an offender tells his probation officer that the anger management class he is attending is not working it is likely he will have to repeat the class. The following is a statement that reflects the subject's perception of the “consequences” of disclosure.

“That is the thing about speaking up, there is always consequences and repercussions.” (Subject 103)

In the context of probation and parole “consequences” and “repercussions” can mean that the client could have a heavier sentence imposed or more stipulations applied
within their supervision plan, and even incarceration. The client has to constantly be aware of the possible consequences of self-disclosure when weighing the decision to self-disclose. Do the positive benefits of increased intimacy outweigh the possibility of reprimand and discipline? In our everyday communication the worst that can occur as a result of self-disclosure in most cases is embarrassment or ridicule. It is likely that in the interaction between the probation and parole officer and their client, the client not only faces embarrassment and ridicule, they face tighter control, limited rights and freedoms, and closer scrutiny. It is not hard to see that frequently self-disclosure is too risky.

To summarize the results of the qualitative data based on the open-ended questions, nine themes emerged overall. Eight of the nine themes fell into the two broad categories of confirming communication behavior and disconfirming communication behavior. The confirming themes were listening, encouraging, caring and communicating directly. The disconfirming themes were deceiving, controlling, de-humanizing, and rushing. The final theme that deals with the perspectives of probationers and parolees is the fear of disclosure. With the overview of the results from the qualitative research, the final research question can now be addressed.

RQ5: What communication behaviors exhibited by probation and parole officers contribute to a probationer or parolee’s likes and dislikes concerning the communication they have with their probation or parole officer?

Because listening, encouraging, caring and communicating directly were the most commonly given answers to the question of what communication behaviors the client likes, it could be assumed then that those four confirming communication behaviors contributed to some of the positive experiences of the probationers and parolees interviewed. Within that same framework, however, are also the responses to the disliked
communication behaviors, which fell into the category of disconfirmation. These responses, deceiving, controlling, de-humanizing and rushing, are likely to contribute to some of the overall negative experience expressed by the clients interviewed.

In many respects, there was an equal balance in the responses of the subjects that supports the quantitative data in the areas of trust and perceived understanding. While the respondents had negative perceptions, they also had responses that were equally positive. Not all subjects, however, had a response for both the likes question and the dislikes question. In some cases, the subject had no response for one or the other, but the balance was still maintained. This balance of the positive and negative experiences of the subjects carried through into the two categories of confirmation and disconfirmation.

The responses on the trust scale were generally polarized. Either the subjects reported a high level of trust or a very low level of trust. Very few responses fell into the middle or average categories. Similar results occurred in the data from the perceived understanding scale. It could be that disconfirmation is related to a lack of trust or a lack of perceived understanding or both, and confirming communication behaviors are related to a clients experiences of trust and feeling understood.

In conclusion, the quantitative data suggested an overall low level of dissatisfaction for all of the subjects, and a relationship between trust and perceived understanding. In most instances, where the subject reported a high level of trust the subject also reported an equally high level of understanding, and where a low level of trust was reported a low level of understanding also occurred. In addition, the responses given for both the understanding scale and the trust scale were polarized, that is to say that they tended to fall on opposite ends of the scales: very little and very much. This is
an indication of either an absence or presence of trust and perceived understanding with very little opportunity for varying degrees of either experience.

The results of the qualitative data presented a pattern of eight themes that fell into the two broad categories of confirming communication behaviors and disconfirming communication behaviors. The confirming behaviors that were reported most were listening, encouraging, caring, and communicating directly. The disconfirming behaviors reported were deceiving, controlling, de-humanizing, and rushing. An additional theme that surfaced was the client’s fear of disclosure. This fear could be as a result of the disconfirming communication, or a consequence of the interaction that occurs in this context. Overall, the data could be summarized by saying that each approach offered a different perspective on the interaction, but both supported a pattern of common experiences between all of the subjects.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Summary

This study began in Chapter One with the reasoning behind the decision to study the perceptions of people on probation and parole and provided a broad informational base of information on the details and characteristics of probation and parole. Chapter Two discussed previous research in the areas of probation and parole and in the areas of satisfaction, trust, and perceived understanding. The past investigations came from several fields including sociology, psychology, communication studies, and criminal justice. Chapter Two concluded by posing the research questions all of which dealt with the inter-relatedness of the three variables, satisfaction, trust, and perceived understanding. Chapter Three then outlined the methods used for obtaining the sample and collecting the data. Chapter Four provided detailed quantitative data obtained through the use of the scales, and provided an account of the nine themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Chapter Five offered the discussion of both the quantitative data and the qualitative results and gave responses to the research questions. Chapter Six includes the chapter summary followed by a section on the limitations of the present study, the possibilities of continued research, and implications of the current study.

Limitations

Several things limited this study. First, the sample size was, in many ways, small to be representative of so large a population. Second, the sample was gathered by way of
a networking technique so it was not at all a random sample. Had time allowed, more
subjects would have been obtained. The problems with the sample size and method of
obtaining the sample, may have caused problems with the internal validity of the study.

An additional issue pertaining to the validity of the study was the contact that the
researcher had with two of the subjects prior to the study. Two of the subjects were
known by the researcher prior to the beginning of the study. It is possible that the prior
contact could have either biased the researcher or biased the subjects, or both.

A third limitation of the study was the limited geographical scope of the project.
The ten subjects were from only three different cities in an area of low population
density. Subjects gathered from larger cities or from different cultural backgrounds would
improve the scope of the study.

Further Research

The overall purpose of this study was to begin the investigation of
communication within the context of probation and parole. In light of this goal, it could
be said that we now know more about the subject than before. However, in the course
of this study more questions were raised than could be answered at this time. Further
research will need to be done to determine the perceptions of probation and parole
officers in order to begin to develop a more complete understanding of the interaction.

Other factors, such as age and gender should also be considered in further
studies. Although, both age and gender were not factors that this study addressed, several
patterns seemed to be surfacing. For example, it was observed that younger offenders
had far more extreme perceptions compared to older offenders, and that female offenders were more willing to participate in the initial requests for interviews.

It was also understood during this study that it is possible for there to be differences in the perceptions between probationers and parolees. Time spent in prison is likely to change a parolee’s entire perspective, whereas the probationer would not have the experience of prison to shape his or her perspectives. In future studies the two groups could be compared to see what differences exist as a result of their experiences.

A final area of interest that was only briefly discussed in the current study was the offender’s possible bias toward the system. It could be that an offender’s understanding, trust, and satisfaction is linked not only to their experiences with one particular probation or parole officer, but is linked to their perception of the entire system of probation and parole as a whole. The system of probation and parole is a complex, rigid environment that is likely to have an effect on communication that occurs within that context. In some instances it may even be difficult for the offender to separate the actions of his or her probation or parole officer from policies of the system. Further research may even discover that the offender’s perception of their individual probation or parole officer is shaped by their perception of the system. In light of all that can be investigated within this context, the current study is only a small beginning, but is shows how much research will need to be done, and how warranted the investigations are.

Implications

The patterns of communication that were investigated in this study have both practical and theoretical implications. Considering the theoretical implications within the
field of communication studies, more could be learned about the different elements of communication that were presented in this study. Additionally, these elements, studied within this complex system, may give communication scholars a different or deeper understanding of communication within context. Factors such as trust, understanding, satisfaction, confirmation, disconfirmation, and self-disclosure cannot be adequately studied without taking into account the context of the interaction. This study offers one more context to consider in the pursuit further understanding.

Additionally, the integration of both a qualitative and a quantitative approach can be beneficial to other studies as it was in the case of the current study. Both methods sought an understanding of the interaction within the context, and in the final result supported each other. Because so little is known about the communication in this context, future research in this area should seek to balance the different approaches to studying communication.

The practical implications are where the strength of this study lies. The current study has isolated several patterns of communication within the interaction occurring between probation and parole officers and their clients. The ineffective elements of communication in this context could hopefully be isolated and addressed, while at the same time identifying the effective elements of the interaction and reinforcing their use. At any level, the identification of these elements could be taught to probation and parole officers, who in turn could use positive confirming communication to attempt to gain compliance from the offenders.

Although officers cannot make clients trust them, they can listen, and respond to the client in ways that will encourage the development of self-worth and self-respect. Out of this development of self-worth and self-respect comes a different kind of
compliance. Instead of following the stipulations of the supervision plan out of fear of the consequences, the client, once their self-worth has been established, is likely to comply out of an inner desire. From this internal personal discipline that comes from self-respect is likely to come a more long term reform. Recidivism rates are high, and it could be that this is a consequence of using power and control to gain compliance, and that once the power and control are lifted, the offender returns to his or her previous lifestyle because no inner desire to change has been established. The focus of the system of probation and parole should be to contribute to the personal development of individuals as they learn to be contributing members of a community.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

The following research questionnaire is being used solely for academic purposes. This project is in no way affiliated with the state or federal department of corrections or probation and parole systems. In agreeing to fill out this questionnaire, your identity will be protected, and at no time will your name be asked or used or given to anyone.

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements by marking the appropriate number to the left of each statement according to the scale below.

1. strongly agree
2. agree
3. uncertain
4. disagree
5. strongly disagree

1. The probation and parole officer (PO) informed me of my supervision plan in words I could understand.
2. After talking with my PO, I know just how serious my supervision plan is.
3. After talking with my PO, I have a good idea what changes I can expect throughout my supervision.
4. My PO told me all I wanted to know about my supervision plan.
5. My PO is very good at explaining the reasons for the different requirements of my supervision plan.
6. My PO has told me how my supervision plan will affect my lifestyle.
7. My PO has relieved my worries about probation or parole.
8. My PO has told me what the programs I am required to be involved in will do for me.
9. I feel I understand my supervision plan pretty well.
10. My PO gave me a chance to really say what was on my mind.
11. I really felt understood by my PO.
12. After talking to my PO, I felt much better about my supervision plan.
13. I feel that my PO really knows how difficult my supervision plan is.
14. I feel free to talk to my PO about my private thoughts.
15. I feel like my PO accepts me as a person.
16. I feel like my PO doesn't take my situation very seriously.
17. The PO was not friendly to me.
18. My PO would be someone I would trust with my future.
19. My PO and I discussed all of the problems I mentioned.
20. I am satisfied with the PO's decisions about what programs I need to take part in.
21. I feel like my PO does not spend enough time working with me on my supervision plan.
22. My PO seems rushed during our meetings.
23. My PO gives directions concerning my supervision plan too fast.
24. The PO seems to know what he or she is doing.
APPENDIX B

The following research questionnaire is being used solely for academic purposes. This project is in no way affiliated with the state or federal department of corrections or probation and parole systems. In agreeing to fill out this questionnaire, your identity will be protected, and at no time will your name be asked or used or given to anyone.

Instructions: On the scales that follow, please indicate your reaction to your probation and parole officer. Place an “X” in the space between the colons that represent your immediate feelings about this person. Check in the direction of the end of the scale that seems to be the most characteristic of this person. Mark only one “X” for each scale and please complete all of the scales.

Trustworthy: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Un trustworthy

Distrustful of this person: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Trustful of this person

Confidential: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Divulging

Exploitive: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Benevolent

Safe: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Dangerous

Deceptive: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Candid

Not Deceitful: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Deceitful

Tricky: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Straightforward

Respectful: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Disrespectful

Inconsiderate: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Considerate

Honest: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Dishonest

Unreliable: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Reliable

Faithful: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Unfaithful

Insincere: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Sincere

Careful: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: ______: Careless
APPENDIX C

The following research questionnaire is being used solely for academic purposes. This project is in no way affiliated with the state or federal department of corrections or probation and parole systems. In agreeing to fill out this questionnaire, your identity will be protected, and at no time will your name be asked or used or given to anyone.

Instructions: Recall how you generally feel when talking with your probation and parole officer. The following terms refer to feelings that may be relevant when people attempt to make themselves understood by others. Please indicate the extent to which each term describes how you generally feel when and immediately after trying to make yourself understood by the person you specified above. Respond to each term according to the following scale.

1 - Very little
2 - Little
3 - Some
4 - Great
5 - Very great

Interview # __________________

How long have you known your PO?

Have you spoken to your PO in the last 45 days?

If yes, how often do you generally talk with your PO?

What specific communication behaviors does your PO exhibit that you like?

What specific communication behaviors does your PO exhibit that you dislike?