Impact of Community-Based Provider Reports on Juvenile Probation Officers’ Recommendations: Effects of Positive and Negative Framing on Decision Making

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Drexel University

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Science in Psychology

November 2016
Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for making this project a reality – my heartfelt appreciation to all for the encouragement and guidance I received throughout this process. I would first like to thank my mentor, Dr. Naomi Goldstein, for her constant support. Through countless rounds of edits, conversations, and phone calls, Naomi was always patient, kind, and generous with her time, and encouraged me to believe in my own abilities. Her mentorship has been invaluable, and I am so grateful for everything she taught me throughout this process, both personally and professionally.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Ms. Rhonda McKitten and Dr. Dave DeMatteo, for their willingness to support my work. Their thoughtful feedback made my research questions and study design better, and I am honored that they were willing to be a part of this project. Thank you to Mr. Leo Lutz for agreeing to be my contact person at the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission and to the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers for being willing to send out my survey and to invite their probation officers to participate in this study. This research would not have been possible without their support.

A tremendous thank you to Dr. Lindsey Cole for her knowledge of statistics. I am grateful for her help and cannot thank her enough for the time she spent working with me. Thank you to my roommates, Kelley Durham and Amber Slattery, for their support and for letting me talk to them for so many months about this project. And lastly, thank you to all my friends outside of the program and to my family for bearing with me and offering encouragement at every step of the process.
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Abstract

Impact of Community-based Provider Reports on Juvenile Probation Officers’ Recommendations: Effects of Positive and Negative Framing on Decision Making

Elizabeth Gale-Bentz

The current study examined ways in which presentation of information in community provider reports that describes youths’ compliance with probation requirements influences juvenile probation officers’ (JPOs) perceptions of youth and recommendations to the court. JPOs (N = 318) employed by counties in the Pennsylvania Commonwealth participated in an anonymous, online study. This study used a 3 (framing) X 2 (risk level) experimental design to explore the impact of the presentation of information (positive, neutral, negative) and risk level (low, high) on probation officers’ decision making. Participants read one of the six community provider reports about a hypothetical youth on probation and answered five questions about their impressions of the youth and their recommendations to the court. JPOs rated compliance and effort significantly lower when information was framed negatively than when information was framed positively or neutrally. JPOs reported lower likelihood of recommending positive court responses and greater likelihood of recommending negative court responses when information was presented negatively, particularly when considering probation revocation for youth identified as high risk. Additionally, JPOs rated compliance significantly higher for youth identified as low risk than for youth identified as high risk. Mediation analyses revealed that JPOs’ perceptions of youth significantly mediated the pathway between report framing and recommendations to the court, but did not mediate the pathway from youth risk level to JPOs’ recommendations. Findings from the current study suggest that
JPOs’ differentially interpret identical probation-related behaviors depending on how the information is presented. Policy and practice implications will be discussed, with an emphasis on the importance of providing fair outcomes across all probation-involved youth.
Introduction

As the oldest and most frequently used community-based sentencing option for youth (NeMoyer et al., 2014; Sickmund, 2003; Torbet, 1996; Vidal & Skeem, 2007), the juvenile probation system impacts the lives of many young people. In 2011, 64% of youth adjudicated delinquent received probation as their ultimate disposition (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2014). As part of their dispositions, youth receiving community supervision are required to comply with the requirements of their probation, which can include a wide range of stipulations, such as participating in meetings with a probation officer, attending mental health and substance use treatment services, completing drug screens, and obeying curfew (NeMoyer et al., 2014; Sickmund, 2003; Vidal & Woolard, 2014). Among their many responsibilities, juvenile probation officers (JPOs) are tasked with monitoring youths’ progress toward probation completion (Smith, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2009; Thomas & Sieverdes, 1975; Vidal & Woolard, 2014).

Although compliance with court-imposed conditions is an integral part of progress toward successful probation completion, youth often do not follow all requirements (NeMoyer et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2009). NeMoyer and colleagues (2014) found that over half of youth in their sample failed to comply with at least one condition of probation. Official responses to noncompliance are at the discretion of the presiding judge (NeMoyer et al., 2014) and can have serious consequences for youth, including probation revocation and placement in correctional facilities (Sickmund, 2003; Griffin & Torbet, 2002). In fact, NeMoyer and colleagues (2014) found that almost half of the youth in their sample were sent to residential placements following revocation of probation. Judges’ decisions regarding outcomes for youth are largely informed by
reports written by JPOs (Harris, 2009; Lin, Miller, & Fukushima, 2008; Ward & Kupchik, 2010), scholars agree that making the ways in which JPOs portray youths’ (mis)behavior to the court an important area of research for further study (e.g., Harris, 2009; Lin et al., 2008; Steen, Bond, Bridges, & Kubrin, 2005).

**Decision Making Among JPOs**

Extralegal factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender) play a role in outcomes for youth at various decision points throughout the juvenile justice process (see Bishop, 2005; Taylor-Thompson, 2006). Specific to probation, for example, differences in documentation of noncompliance by race/ethnicity and class have been found; JPOs were more likely to document noncompliance by African American youth and youth from disadvantaged communities than they were for Caucasian youth and those young people from communities with higher socioeconomic status (Smith et al., 2009). Although Thomas and Sieverdes (1975) emphasized the importance of explicating the ways in which extralegal factors are utilized in decision making, the processes through which decisions about youth are made continues to be recognized as a methodologically difficult (Sanborn, 1996) and understudied (Vidal & Skeem, 2007), though relatively longstanding (e.g., Gross, 1967), area of juvenile justice research. Although a body of research exists on factors impacting decision making within the criminal justice system (e.g., Carroll, 1978; Lurigio & Carroll, 1985), the focus of the current paper is limited to decision making within the juvenile justice system.

The limited scholarship on influences on JPOs’ decision making indicates that several factors may impact JPOs’ conceptualizations of their supervisees and recommendations to the court. Although the methodological (e.g., case file review, JPO
interviews, vignette construction) approaches to identifying factors that affect JPOs’
decision-making processes vary, findings from extant research suggest that
conceptualizations of youth, probation strategies, and recommendations to the court are
affected by a variety of youth-specific and JPO-specific factors (see also Vidal &
Woolard, 2014).

**Impact of Youth-Specific Factors**

Regarding youth-specific factors, juveniles whose behavior was viewed as
stemming from negative internal causes were perceived to be at higher risk for
reoffending and more deserving of more negative sentencing recommendations (Bridges
& Steen, 1998). JPOs viewed African American youths’ behavior as stemming from
negative internal causes more often than they did Caucasian youths’ behavior (Bridges &
Steen, 1998). Examining the impact of race/ethnicity on decision making in an applied
context, researchers found that JPOs ascribed more negative characteristics and supported
more negative legal outcomes for a hypothetical youth when unconscious racial
stereotypes were primed (Graham & Lowery, 2004). Although there is strong support for
the existence of racial disparities in juvenile justice decision making, findings from the
literature are not unequivocal; for example, youths’ race/ethnicity did not impact JPOs’
decision making in a study that utilized hypothetical vignettes (Vidal & Skeem, 2007).

Gender differences in attributions of behavior have also been found. For
example, JPOs made more external attributions about female youths’ behavior than about
male youths’ behavior (Mallicoat, 2007) and identified different motivating factors for
girls’ and boys’ engagement in delinquent behavior (i.e., JPOs believed that girls react
against their families while boys follow cultural guidelines) (Sagatun, 1989). Family
background impacts decision making, with documentation of family problems and caregiver (specifically, paternal) incarceration (Rodriguez, Smith, & Zatz, 2009) and substance use within the family (Lin et al., 2008) related to more negative outcomes for justice-involved youth. Additionally, variables related to youths’ legal histories (e.g., prior arrests, detention prior to disposition, violation of probation) and risk and needs factors (e.g., negative peer group, substance use, recipient of counseling) predicted JPOs’ recommendations for placement (Lin et al., 2008).

Labels ascribed to youth can also impact JPOs’ beliefs about the youth and their recommendations (Murrie, Cornell, & McCoy, 2005; Vidal & Skeem, 2007) and supervision strategies (Vidal & Skeem, 2007). For example, using a vignette paradigm, hypothetical juvenile justice-involved youth labeled with conduct disorder, with a history of antisocial behavior, or with psychopathic traits (Murrie et al., 2005), and youth labeled with psychopathy or as a victim of child abuse (Vidal & Skeem, 2007) were viewed as being at greater risk of future offending than were justice-involved youth without these labels. Further, secure confinement was more likely to be recommended for young people labeled with psychopathy and child abuse histories (Vidal & Skeem, 2007) and with a history of antisocial behavior (Murrie et al., 2005) than for youth without these labels. In contrast to Vidal and Skeem’s (2007) findings, Murrie and colleagues (2005) did not identify relationships between a psychopathy diagnosis and more negative recommendations. In addition to influencing beliefs about youth and recommendations, labels also affected JPOs’ supervision orientations: they were more likely to endorse using a strategy that underscored community safety with youth labeled as psychopathic.
than with youth without this label, and using a rehabilitative approach with youth with histories of abuse than with youth without such histories (Vidal & Skeem, 2007).

Relationships between individual characteristics of youth and probation supervision practices have also been observed. For instance, JPOs reported more frequent use of an approach emphasizing accountability when working with younger than older youth and more frequent use of an approach emphasizing rehabilitation with youth who had received previous treatment services than with youth who had not (Schwalbe & Maschi, 2009). A positive relationship between both accountability and rehabilitative-focused strategies was found for youth with greater risks and needs (Schwalbe & Maschi, 2009). Using a slightly different conceptualization of probation strategies, youth characteristics produced differences in the frequencies with which JPOs reported using confrontational and client-centered strategies with their supervisees (Schwalbe & Maschi, 2011); however, the predictive patterns were neither simple nor straightforward. Instead, these patterns depended on interactions between gender and race/ethnicity, gender and previous use of treatment services, and perceived honesty and substance use history (Schwalbe & Maschi, 2011).

Taken together, one can conclude that JPOs’ perceptions of and interactions with young people are associated with a wide range of youth characteristics—demographic, clinical, historic, and behavioral. Further, although predictive models can and have been identified, the relationships between youth characteristics and JPOs’ professional orientations are far from simple. Youth characteristics and JPO-related outcomes vary across studies, and in practice, these relationships may depend on the characteristics of the individual JPOs, as well.
Impact of JPO Characteristics and Beliefs

Just as research suggests that relationships exist between characteristics of youth and JPOs’ recommendations and supervision approaches, relationships between personal traits of JPOs and probation-related decisions have also been found. For example, the age of JPOs has been found to play a role in recommendations and supervision practices, with findings generally indicating that older JPOs are less inclined to take more punitive stances toward their supervisees (Schwalbe & Maschi, 2011; Ward & Kupchik, 2010); however, not all findings support this pattern of treatment of youth (Lopez & Russell, 2008; Reese, Curtis, & Whitworth, 1988). Mixed findings also have been reported on the relationship between other demographic variables and supervision strategies and orientations, such as JPOs’ gender (Lopez & Russell, 2008; Schwalbe & Maschi, 2009; Schwalbe & Maschi, 2011; Ward & Kupchik, 2010) and JPOs’ race/ethnicity (Lopez & Russell, 2008; Ward & Kupchik, 2010). These varied findings suggest that relationships between JPO-demographic variables and probation-related decisions are not straightforward and that additional factors may be important to consider when examining the predictive patterns of the influence of JPOs’ personal characteristics (e.g., JPOs’ attitudes) on their decision making (Ward & Kupchik, 2010).

Regarding the beliefs and attitudes held by JPOs, when they believe that a connection exists between mental health and delinquency, JPOs tend to recommend more intensive dispositions (Reese et al., 1988). In addition, the amount of social support JPOs believe is present in youths’ lives positively impacts JPOs’ rehabilitative supervision orientation (Lopez & Russell, 2008). Within belief systems, JPOs’ beliefs about the importance of “moral character” (Ward & Kupchik, 2010, p. 46), the rights of victims,
and the seriousness of the crime (Ward & Kupchik, 2010), as well as beliefs about punishment and probation (Schwalbe & Maschi, 2009) are related to the JPOs’ supervision practices. Taken together, the mixed findings on the associations between JPO-specific variables and probation-related decisions suggest that JPOs’ personal characteristics, including their belief systems, may play a role in their recommendations to the court and supervision strategies.

**Impact of Language**

Research has also found that the culture of a juvenile probation department influences the specific language juvenile probation officers choose to use when portraying youth and their actions in their reports (Harris, 2009). More specifically, the language JPOs’ employed when describing youths’ behaviors and reasons for engaging in criminal activity created a more negatively- or positively-slanted depiction of the young people (Steen et al., 2005), which in turn affected JPOs’ recommendations to the court (Cavender & Knepper, 1992; Harris, 2009). In addition to the choice of words used, the number of words used in a recommendation plays a role in JPOs’ recommendations (Curtis & Reese, 1994). For example, JPOs wrote more extensively about those disposition recommendations they felt very strongly should be supported or denied by the judge; they wrote much less about those for which they had less strong opinions (Curtis & Reese, 1994). Finally, qualitative analysis of case files, interviews with JPOs, and open-ended questions revealed that JPOs’ often use negative and stereotyped language when describing females in the juvenile justice system (Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2004; Sagatun, 1989). Taken together, these findings suggest that language—or more specifically, JPOs’ choice of words—is a powerful tool that can influence the way in
which the behaviors of justice-involved young people are described and presented to the court.

**Effects of Negative and Positive Information**

The juvenile justice system’s emphasis on youths’ negative behaviors is consistent with information processing and impression formation research demonstrating that negative information is more powerful than positive information (e.g., Fiske, 1980; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998; Sutton & Altarriba, 2011). Baumeister and colleagues’ (2001) review of research across multiple domains – from relationship dynamics to information processing to memory – indicated that people attend more to negative information, stimuli, and events than to positive information, stimuli, and events, and they remember the negative more than the positive. In other words, “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001, p. 323).

More recently, however, researchers have questioned this singular stance, finding that the focus on negative information may not apply across all age groups (Reed, Chan, & Mikels, 2014) and can be impacted by positive priming techniques (Smith, Larsen, Chartrand, & Cacioppo, Katafiasz, & Moran, 2006). In addition, other factors can impact judgments and impressions and offset or exacerbate the effects of negative information. For instance, time pressure and distractions (Wright, 1974) negatively impacted judgments, the type of instructions presented (e.g., instructing individuals to make accurate impressions; Neuberg, 1989) buffered the effects of negative information, and the location of information in a narrative impacted the ways in which negative and positive information were perceived and remembered. For example, negative information presented earlier in a narrative was related to more negative impressions.
(Blakeney & MacNaughton, 1971), while positive information about a job applicant presented at the end of a narrative led to positive hiring decisions and ratings of applicants’ fit for the job (Belec & Rowe, 1983). Thus, as we consider JPOs’ perceptions of youth and their recommendations to the court, we must evaluate not only the negative and positive information provided to them about youths’ behaviors, but also the ways in which the information is presented.

Research from several distinct fields (e.g., psychology, health, consumer decision making) has revealed that the ways in which information is framed impacts the way it is received and used by individuals (see Levin, Schneider, & Gaeth, 1998). For example, framing information negatively resulted in more strongly held attitudes about political candidates (Bizer, Larsen, & Petty, 2011). Examining institutionalization decisions, participants who received information presented negatively (i.e., the probability of violence) were more likely to endorse a decision of commitment for a moderate risk individual than were participants who received the identical information, with a positive (i.e., the probability of nonviolence) presentation (Scurich & John, 2011). Applying the implications of these findings to a juvenile justice setting, it is possible that the framing of information JPOs’ receive about youths’ (non)compliance can impact their perceptions of the youths and subsequent recommendations to the court. More specifically, identical information about compliance can be framed positively or negatively, and the framing – rather than the specific behaviors – may impact JPOs’ impressions and recommendations.

**Information about Youths’ Compliance with Probation Requirements**

Although previous scholarship has examined the relationship between static youth characteristics and JPOs’ decision making (e.g., race, Bridges & Steen, 1998; labels
given to youth, Vidal & Skeem, 2007), much less research has considered the impact of youths’ legally-relevant dynamic behaviors (i.e., compliance with community supervision requirements) on JPOs’ perceptions of youth and their recommendations to the court. Understanding the relationship between young people’s probation-related behaviors and JPOs’ impressions of these youth may yield valuable information about factors that impact JPOs’ decision-making processes.

To that end, when asked which factors they believed were most important in probation revocation decisions, staff from an intensive supervision program (ISP) rated youths’ current noncompliant behaviors (both quality and quantity of violations), in addition to current and past offense history and substance use concerns, as crucial factors to consider (Lowe, Dawson-Edwards, Minor, & Wells, 2008). Findings from this study indicate that youths’ current behaviors play a role in JPOs’ recommendations to the court. As the work of Lowe and colleagues (2008) is one of the few studies that has explored the relationships between youths’ current behaviors and JPOs’ perceptions of youth, further research is needed. More specifically, further research that investigates the ways in which the documentation of youths’ compliance with their probation requirements impacts JPOs’ decision making is needed. To the best of our knowledge, no research has explored the impact of reports from community providers on JPOs’ impressions of youth and their recommendations to the court.

JPOs receive information about youths’ progress toward probation completion from a variety of sources, including information gathered during scheduled meetings, from school records, and from reports from community-based service providers. The juvenile justice system typically operates from a deficit framework (Barton & Butts,
and the information JPOs receive and subsequently communicate to the court about youths’ progress often focuses on noncompliant behavior. Although much of the information about youths’ compliance with probation requirements is objectively reported (e.g., results from a drug screen), other sources of information, such as reports from community providers, are flexible in how information can be documented. In addition to documenting quantitative information, community providers have the opportunity to provide more detailed information about youths’ participation and levels of engagement in the required programming. More specifically, community providers have opportunities to place behaviors in context, such as including the number of attended treatment sessions in addition to the number of missed sessions. To that end, the variability in the type and tone of information community providers communicate to JPOs about compliance—the negative or positive ways in which information about youths’ behavior is conveyed—has the potential to impact JPOs’ impression of youths and their recommendations to the court.

**Youth Risk Level**

Over the past several decades, juvenile justice policymakers have increasingly recognized the importance of assessing youths’ risk for reoffending to identify juvenile justice-involved youths’ service needs and to address community safety in detention and placement decision making (Vincent, Guy, & Grisso, 2012; Baird, Healy, Johnson, Bogie, Dankert, & Scharenbroch, 2013). Many jurisdictions use standardized risk assessment instruments to determine youths’ risk and needs, which can inform decision making about confinement and treatment planning (Hoge, 2005; Baird et al., 2013). The Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI; Hoge & Andrews,
2002; Hoge, Andrews, & Leschied, 2002) is used by the juvenile probation departments in 66 of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties (Wachter, 2014) and by many departments across the U.S. (Wachter, 2014). The YLS/CMI assesses a youth’s risk and needs in eight areas, and a single risk level score is produced, which is categorized from low to very high (Hoge, 2005). Consistent with the model of Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ), juvenile justice placement decisions should meet youths’ needs in the least restrictive environment that also minimizes risk to community safety (Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, & Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, 2015).

**Current Study**

Ongoing juvenile justice reform efforts emphasize the negative impacts of confinement on youth (Mendel, 2011), and research demonstrates that many youth under community supervision who do not follow their court-ordered requirements are at risk for placement in secure facilities (NeMoyer et al., 2014). JPOs’ reports and recommendations provide important information to inform and guide judges’ rulings and, therefore, can substantially impact youth outcomes (Harris, 2009; Lin et al., 2008; Ward & Kupchik, 2010). As a result, in line with other scholars (e.g., Lin et al., 2008), it is necessary to gain insight into the influences that affect JPOs’ decision-making processes. Previous research has examined the influence of youth-specific variables and JPOs’ personal traits on JPOs’ decision making. The current study sought to expand extant research by exploring the relationship between the ways in which information about youths’ compliance with their probation requirements is presented by community providers and JPOs’ perceptions of youth and recommendations to the court.
Understanding this relationship holds real-world applicability, as the narratives JPOs share with the court have the potential to impact—both negatively and positively—the lives of justice-involved youth.

Based on findings from information processing and impression formation research, I propose that JPOs’ impressions of youth and their probation recommendations would vary based upon the ways in which information is conveyed. The identical youth behaviors can be presented with negative, positive, or mixed negative/positive slants, and the valence of the presentation may affect JPOs’ perceptions of the youth and their subsequent recommendations to the court. For instance, if a youth on probation attends 10 out of 15 mandated therapy sessions in a given month, a community provider can specify in a report that the youth missed 5 mandated sessions, that the youth attended 10 required sessions, or that the youth missed 5 and attended 10 of the 15 required sessions. These different presentations of the same information by community providers may impact JPOs’ perceptions of youth and, consequently, the recommendations they make to the court at probation review hearings.

I anticipated that, overall, the valence of information provided by community providers to JPOs would affect their impressions and recommendations; however, the extent to which negative and positive portrayals impact impression formation of youth and recommendations to the court may differ based on youths’ risk levels. There are several possibilities for the direction of the differences. For instance, JPOs may assume that youth identified as high risk will exert low effort to comply with their probation requirements. As a result, feedback from community providers about these youths’ behaviors may be less impactful than it would be for youth identified as low risk.
Alternatively, positive feedback from community providers about youth who have been identified as high risk may be seen by JPOs as out-of-the-ordinary and impressive and, therefore, may influence JPOs impressions more strongly. In addition, JPOs may expect to receive positive feedback about youth identified as low risk, which makes this information less salient for JPOs when considering youths’ behavior. With these possible interpretations in mind, I proposed that the effect of the presentation of the information on JPOs’ perceptions and recommendations to the court would depend on youth risk level; however, I did not propose a specific direction of the interaction.

Finally, I anticipated that the impressions JPOs form about the youth based on the information provided in the community provider report would mediate the effect of report framing and risk level on JPOs’ recommendations to the court.

Primary Aim: To examine the effects of report framing and risk level on JPOs’ impressions of a youth and their recommendations to the court.

Primary Hypotheses: Main Effects

- I hypothesized that the way in which information in a community provider report is presented would impact JPOs’ impressions of a youth and recommendations to the court. Specifically, I expected that positively presented information would result in the most positive impressions and recommendations to the court and that negatively presented information would result in the least positive impressions and recommendations to the court.
- I hypothesized that youth risk level would impact JPOs’ impressions of the youth and recommendations to the court. To that end, I expected that a youth
identified as high risk would be perceived more negatively by JPOs than a youth identified as low risk, demonstrated through more negative impressions and recommendations to the court.

Primary Hypotheses: Interaction

- I hypothesized that there would be an interaction between type of information presented and youth risk level on JPOs’ impressions of youth and recommendations to the court. As the information about a youth’s behavior may be interpreted by JPOs in a variety of ways, I did not propose an anticipated direction for the interaction between risk level and presentation of information.

Secondary Aim: To examine the mediator in pathways between report framing and risk level and JPOs’ recommendations to the court.

Secondary Hypothesis

- I hypothesized that JPOs’ perceptions of a youth’s efforts to comply with probation requirements would mediate the effects of report framing and youth risk level on JPOs’ recommendations.

Method

Participant Characteristics

A total of 318 juvenile probation officers, from 32 counties in Pennsylvania, participated in this study between February 17 and March 1, 2016. Due to privacy considerations and pre-arranged agreements, the names of the counties in which participants work are not identified in this paper. A manipulation check was included in this study that asked participants to identify the risk level of the youth described in the
vignette; ninety-two participants were excluded because of this manipulation check—17 for incorrectly identifying the randomly assigned risk level and 75 for not providing a response to the question. An additional 17 individuals were excluded because they indicated no current or previous work with youth on probation (i.e., 10 individuals indicated they had never worked with youth on probation, and 7 individuals did not respond to the question). As a result, data from 209 participants were included in analyses.

Participants (45.9% female) ranged in age from 23 to 66 years with a mean of 42.42 years (SD = 10.25). Of the participants who responded, individuals primarily identified as White (92.3%), and 2.9% identified as Black or African American, 0.5% as Asian, and 1.9% as “Other”; 2.5% identified as Hispanic or Latino. On average, participants reported working in juvenile probation for 14.47 years (SD = 8.55) and having a mean of 18.31 youth (SD = 22.60) on their caseloads.

Measures

All JPO participants were provided with a community provider report, an Impression and Recommendations Survey, and a demographic questionnaire. To parallel the 3 (report framing: positive, negative, neutral) x 2 (youth YLS/CMI risk level: low, high) between subjects design of this study, there were six versions of the community provider report.

The structure of and type of content in this study’s community provider reports were modeled after actual community provider reports that were provided to the court. The six versions of the community provider reports were identical, varying only the framing (i.e., negative, positive, neutral) of information about a youth’s behavior and his
YLS/CMI risk level (i.e., low, high). The actual behaviors described were consistent across all versions of the survey. All versions of the community report provided the name, age, and level of risk, as well as a one-paragraph description of the youth’s behavior over the past several weeks. In all conditions, the youth had attended 10 out of 15 mandated sessions, provided documentation for 2 of the 5 absences, actively participated in 75% of the attended sessions, and had one incident (i.e., a verbal argument) with another youth. This information was varied by focusing on the positive (e.g., “has attended two-thirds of the sessions”), emphasizing the negative (e.g., “has not attended one third of the sessions”), or providing both positive and negative information (e.g., “has attended 10 out of the 15 sessions”).

Following presentation of the community provider report, JPOs were asked to complete the Impression and Recommendations Survey. This survey included questions to assess the primary dependent variables—JPOs’ impressions of the youth and their recommendations to the court at the probation review hearing. Questions sought information about how much effort JPOs believe the youth is putting forth, to what extent JPOs think the youth is complying with the terms of probation, likelihood of recommending adding or increasing severity of sanctions for the youth’s behavior, likelihood of recommending positive court responses, and likelihood of recommending probation revocation and residential placement. Questions were answered on a 1 (most negative/minimum rating, such as “Definitely not”) through 5 (most positive/maximum rating, such as “Definitely”).

A demographic questionnaire was provided to acquire information about participants’ age, gender, race/ethnicity, job experience (i.e., number of years working in
juvenile and in adult probation, number of juvenile and adult probationers on current caseload, division assignment within the department, and county of employment). No identifying information was collected.

**Procedure**

The Chief of Juvenile Probation in every Pennsylvania county was informed of the study through the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. They were told that, following thesis committee and IRB approval, they would be contacted via email to request their help reaching JPOs in Pennsylvania. Following stated approvals, I emailed all members of the JPO Chiefs Council and asked them to forward my recruitment email to their JPOs. In addition, I followed up individually with the chief of juvenile probation in one county to request participation.

My email to JPOs described the nature of the study, lack of identifying information about participants, and information about providing consent. The email contained a link to the study JPOs could click if they agreed to participate. The study took approximately five minutes to complete. Participants did not receive compensation for participation in the study.

**Method of Analysis**

Data were analyzed with a 3 (report framing) x 2 (risk level) between subjects ANOVA. I examined the main effects of framing and risk level, as well as the interaction between these two variables on JPOs’ impressions of youth and their recommendations to the court. Each condition was compared to each other condition. Given the exploratory nature of the study, post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Tukey’s Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test.
An a priori power analysis for a two-way between subjects ANOVA indicated that 162 participants (27 per condition) would be needed to produce a power of .80 to detect an interaction and main effects if medium effect sizes ($f = .25$) exist and alpha is set at .05. A medium effect size was chosen based on the small to large effect sizes reported in Vidal and Skeem (2007) and the small to medium effect sizes reported in Murrie, Cornell, and McCoy (2005), two studies that used vignettes to explore JPOs’ perceptions of youth based on labels given to the youth. Using G*Power, the final analytic sample size of 209 participants produced a power of .91 for a medium effect size ($f = .25$) and a power of .23 for a small effect size ($f = .10$).

To evaluate the secondary aim, six separate simple mediation analyses were conducted using Preacher and Hayes’ (2004, 2008) bootstrapping method and the PROCESS macro for SPSS to examine the indirect pathways from report framing to likelihood of recommending court responses (i.e., positive court response, sanction, probation revocation) through JPOs’ perceptions of the youth’s effort to comply with his court conditions. Three analyses included report framing as the independent variable, with the neutrally framed condition as the reference group, and three analyses included risk level as the independent variable. Currently, the PROCESS macro does not allow two independent variables to be included in a single model if one variable is multicategorical. Bootstrapping is appropriate for use with small samples (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011), and, therefore, the final sample size of 209 provided sufficient power for mediation analyses.
Results

To examine the primary aim of the current study – the effects of report framing and risk level on probation officers’ impressions of a youth and their recommendations to the court – five separate 3 (framing) X 2 (risk level) between groups analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. Prior to running these analyses, assumptions were checked. No meaningful outliers were identified, and all assumptions (i.e., random selection, categorical independent variables, continuous dependent variable, equal or similar sample size among groups, no gross outliers, normality, homogeneity of variance) were met except where indicated below.

Normality was checked visually with histograms and statistically by examining skewness and kurtosis values for each level of the 5 outcome variables. Histograms revealed that responses were generally normally distributed across conditions, though some skewed and kurtotic distributions were observed. Of the 60 skewness and kurtosis values examined, the absolute values of 12 values exceeded twice their standard errors, indicating that the assumption of normality was not met in those conditions.

Of the five outcome variables, Levene’s test was significant in three (i.e., impressions of compliance with court conditions, \( p < .001 \); likelihood of recommending a positive court response, \( p < .001 \); likelihood of recommending probation revocation, \( p = .024 \)), indicating violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance in these equations. Although data transformations and nonparametric tests were considered to adjust for this heterogeneity of variance, statisticians recommend against these adjustments (Erceg-Hurn & Mirosevich, 2008), and there is no recommended nonparametric test for a two-way ANOVA (Pallant, 2013). Additionally, multiple
options for addressing heterogeneity of variance exist (e.g., data transformations, conduct a robust analysis, lower the p value) (Laerd Statistics, 2015; Pallant, 2013), reflecting the fact that there is no singular agreed upon method to adjust for heterogeneity of variance. Additionally, from a conceptual standpoint, the heterogeneous distribution of scores observed in these equations is important to recognize in the data and interpret accordingly. The heterogeneity of variance observed may reflect meaningful patterns of responding to different conditions. This study focused on understanding the ways in which the framing of information impacts JPOs’ impressions of youth and their recommendations to the court; obscuring variability in responding to conditions through transformations would mask the findings central to this study. For these statistical and conceptual reasons and consistent with recommendations by Laerd Statistics (2015) and Pallant (2013), heterogeneity of variance was maintained in the data and will be recognized and emphasized in the interpretation and discussion of results.

Five 3 (Framing) x 2 (Risk Level) between groups ANOVAs were conducted, one for each outcome variable of interest. Overall, probation officers reported that they perceived the youth to be “somewhat” compliant with his probation requirements and that he was putting forward “some effort” following his court conditions. Regarding recommendations to the court, on average, probation officers reported the likelihood of recommending a sanction as slightly above “possibly,” the likelihood of recommending a positive court response as just above “unlikely,” and the likelihood of recommending probation revocation and placement in a secure facility as between “definitely not” and “unlikely.” See Table 1 for descriptive data for each condition.
Primary Outcomes: Effects of Report Framing and Youth Risk Level on JPOs’ Impressions and Recommendations

Significant main effects were observed of report framing, $F(2, 202) = 79.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .44$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.34, .52]$ and risk level, $F(1, 202) = 4.94, p = .027, \eta^2 = .02$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .08]$ on JPOs’ impressions of the youth’s compliance with his probation requirements. JPOs rated compliance significantly higher when the youth was identified as low risk than when the youth was identified as high risk. Tukey’s HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that JPOs rated compliance significantly higher in the positively framed than negatively framed condition ($p < .001$) and significantly higher in the neutrally framed than negatively framed condition ($p < .001$). No significant difference was observed between the positively and neutrally framed conditions ($p = .637$). A significant interaction was not observed, $F(2, 202) = .99, p = .372, \eta^2 = .01$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .05]$.

Report framing significantly affected JPOs’ impressions of the youth’s effort to comply with his probation requirements, $F(2, 202) = 70.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .41$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.31, .49]$. Tukey’s HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that JPOs rated effort significantly higher in the positively than negatively framed condition ($p < .001$) and significantly higher in the neutrally framed than negatively framed condition ($p < .001$). No significant difference was observed between the positively and neutrally framed conditions in perceptions of effort ($p = .682$). A significant main effect of risk level was not observed, $F(1, 202) = .25, p = .619, \eta^2 < .01$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .03]$, nor was an interaction between report framing and risk level on perceived effort, $F(2, 202) = .77, p = .464, \eta^2 = .01$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .04]$. 
Report framing significantly affected JPOs’ reported likelihood of recommending a sanction, $F(2, 202) = 29.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.13, .31]$. Tukey’s HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that JPOs rated likelihood of recommending a sanction as significantly lower in the positively framed than neutrally framed condition ($p = .009$), as significantly lower in the positively framed than negatively framed condition ($p < .001$), and as significantly lower in the neutrally framed than negatively framed condition ($p < .001$). A significant main effect of risk level was not observed, $F(1, 202) = .26, p = .612, \eta^2 < .01$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .03]$, nor was an interaction between report framing and risk level on likelihood of recommending a sanction, $F(2, 202) = .36, p = .700, \eta^2 < .01$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .03]$.

A significant main effect was observed of report framing on JPOs’ reported likelihood of recommending a positive court response, $F(2, 201) = 17.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.06, .23]$. Tukey’s HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that JPOs rated likelihood of recommending a positive court response as significantly higher in the positively framed than negatively framed condition ($p < .001$) and as significantly higher in the neutrally framed than negatively framed condition ($p = .002$). No significant difference was observed between the positively and neutrally framed conditions ($p = .050$). A significant main effect of risk level was not observed, $F(1, 201) = 2.84, p = .094, \eta^2 = .01$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .06]$, nor was an interaction between report framing and risk level on likelihood of recommending a positive court response, $F(2, 201) = .06, p = .944, \eta^2 < .01$, 95% CI of $\eta^2 [.01, .01]$.

Finally, a significant interaction was observed between report framing and risk level on JPOs’ reported likelihood of recommending probation revocation, $F(2, 201) =$
3.39, \( p = .036, \eta^2 = .03 \), 95% CI of \( \eta^2 \) [\(.01, .09\)], and significant main effects were found for both report framing, \( F(2, 201) = 16.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14 \), 95% CI of \( \eta^2 \) [\(.06, .22\)], and risk level, \( F(1, 201) = 12.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06 \), 95% CI of \( \eta^2 \) [\(.01, .13\)]. Tukey’s HSD post hoc comparisons revealed that JPOs rated likelihood of recommending probation revocation as significantly lower in the positively framed than negatively framed condition \( (p < .001) \) and as significantly lower in the neutrally framed than negatively framed condition \( (p < .001) \). Likelihood of recommending probation revocation did not differ significantly between the positively and neutrally framed conditions \( (p = .190) \). See Figure 1.

**Secondary Outcomes: Mediation Analyses**

JPOs’ impressions of the youth’s effort to comply with his probation requirements significantly mediated the pathway from report framing to likelihood of recommending a positive court response in the negative condition, as evidenced by a 95% bias corrected and accelerated confidence interval \([- .78, -.30]\) that did not include zero, but not in the positive condition, 95% CI \([- .05, .19]\); the neutral condition served as the reference category against which data from the negative and neutral conditions were compared. Similarly, JPOs’ perceptions of effort significantly mediated the pathway from report framing to likelihood of recommending a sanction in the negative condition, 95% CI \([.52, 1.0]\), but not in the positive condition, 95% CI \([- .22, .09]\). Additionally, JPOs’ perception of effort significantly mediated the pathway from report framing to likelihood of recommending probation revocation in the negative condition, 95% CI \([.32, .68]\), but not in the positive condition, 95% CI \([- .15, .06]\) (see Table 2).
Three similar analyses were conducted to examine the indirect effects of risk level on likelihood of recommending court responses through JPOs’ perceptions of effort. Significant indirect effects were not observed in any of the models, as all bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals included zero, indicating that perception of effort was not a significant mediator in this set of equations (see Table 3).

**Discussion**

Overall, the framing of information impacted JPOs’ perceptions of youth and their recommendations to the court. Despite identical information, JPOs interpreted youths’ negatively-framed behaviors as reflecting less effort to comply with probation conditions, which then influenced their recommendation decisions. These findings highlight the subjectivity of interpretation of youths’ probation-related behaviors; the very same behaviors were perceived as more or less compliant depending on how the information was framed, such as stating that the youth attended two-thirds of required sessions versus stating that the youth did not attend one-third of required sessions. In addition, the framing of behaviors led to variability in JPOs’ recommendations to the court—the same behaviors were interpreted as deserving of a wide range of responses, from recommending positive court responses to recommending probation revocation, a negative court response that removes youth from their daily lives and places them in a detention facility or a residential juvenile justice facility. This variability in interpretation can directly affect youth in court, as judges typically use information provided by JPOs to make decisions during review hearings (Harris, 2009; Lin et al., 2008; Ward & Kupchik, 2010).
Implications

The differential effects of youths’ behavioral framing on JPOs’ impressions and recommendations align with prior research on factors influencing the ways in which JPOs assign labels to youth and how these factors impact their decision making, such as youths’ race (Bridges & Steen, 1998) and probation department philosophy (Harris, 2009). To that end, findings from these studies, as well as others (e.g., Steen et al., 2005), emphasize the power of language in shaping JPOs’ decision making, discussing the ways in which differences in descriptions of youths’ behaviors impact outcomes (Bridges & Steen, 1998; Harris, 2009). The current study adds to this body of literature by revealing another factor that influences JPOs’ decision-making processes: JPOs’ perceptions of how hard youth are trying to comply with their probation requirements. More specifically, JPOs’ impressions of youths’ effort to comply, which were shaped by the ways in which their probation-related behaviors were framed, guided JPOs’ recommendations to the court. These findings provide further opportunity to discuss the ways in which implicit bias may operate within JPOs’ decision-making processes. Guided by the way the information was framed, JPOs who viewed youth as putting forward less effort to comply with probation requirements saw them as more deserving of court-imposed sanctions.

Existence of racial and ethnic disparities are recognized at many points of juvenile justice system processing (e.g., Bishop, 2005; Development Services Group, Inc, 2014; Soler, 2014), although more mixed findings have been reported in probation settings (e.g., Bechtold, Monahan, Wakefield, & Cauffman, 2015; Leiber & Peck, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). Many factors contribute to disproportionality (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender,
socioeconomic background), and central to the current study, implicit bias can negatively impact JPOs’ impressions of youth and their decision making (Graham & Lowery, 2004). The current study did not vary the race or ethnicity of the described youth, but the differential effects of framing on JPOs’ thoughts and recommendations about their supervisees may be compounded by race and ethnicity—when white youths’ behavior is framed positively, positive impressions and recommendations may be more frequent, and when behaviors of youth of color are framed negatively, they may be more likely to receive negative impressions and punitive consequences. Future research examining race and ethnicity as a moderator of the relationships between framing and JPOs’ conceptualizations of youth and their recommendations to court is needed.

The subjectivity of the interpretation of young people’s behaviors has broader juvenile justice system policy and practice implications. As juvenile probation departments across the country begin to develop and implement structured, developmentally informed systems of supervision that are intended to foster equity across youth (Goldstein, NeMoyer, Gale-Bentz, Feierman, & Levick, 2016), care must be given to the ways in which youths’ compliant and noncompliant probation-related behaviors are defined, described, and communicated among juvenile justice personnel. Although these structured systems aim to promote consistency in responding to young people’s behaviors, findings from the current study suggest that this task may be more difficult in practice than in theory. We see that differences in language choices—such as describing a physical interaction as a fight versus a scuffle—and emphasized behaviors—such as focusing on what the youth has done versus what the youth has not done—can affect the ways in which JPOs think about and respond to their supervisees’ progress on probation.
Differences in JPOs’ perceptions of youth and recommendations to the court were produced in a brief, one-paragraph vignette with limited information about a hypothetical youth. The negative impact of longer, more detailed reports and interventions over a period of months on JPOs’ decision making about their supervisees could have long-term impacts; the longer and more intensive juveniles’ probation supervision (e.g., being placed on electronic monitoring), the more opportunities to have misbehavior identified and be confined in secure facilities (Weisburd, 2015), with detention and placement associated with worse long-term outcomes for youth academically, vocationally, emotionally, and with respect to recidivism (Holman & Zeidenberg, 2006; Mendel, 2011).

In addition to the ways in which information is communicated to JPOs and judges about young people’s behavior, it is important to consider the ways in which descriptions of behaviors may be internalized by young people themselves. The phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948) has been observed in education settings, where children’s academic performance often matches teachers’ expectations, particularly for minority youth and youth from economically disadvantaged communities (e.g., Hinnant, O’Brien, & Ghazarian, 2009; Sorhagen, 2013), as well as in home settings, where parents’ beliefs about their children’s substance use impacts outcomes (Lamb & Crano, 2014; Madon, Willard, Guyl, Trudeau, & Spoth, 2006) and in sports settings (Weaver, Moses, & Snyder, 2016). Taken together, findings from this body of research indicate that the expectations communicated to young people impact their performance and behavior. Although the impact of expectations on youths’ achievement has not been examined in a probation context, these findings suggest that when community providers,
JPOs, and judges communicate to youth that they are not putting forward effort and failing to comply with their probation requirements, youth may adopt these negative attributions and act accordingly. However, positive expectations held by adults can combat negative expectations of youth held by other adults (Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007). Community providers and JPOs, then, have an important role in providing positive messages to court-involved youth about their abilities to succeed. Expectations communicated by JPOs and judges of young people’s capacities to successfully fulfill probation requirements have the potential to shape youths’ behaviors for the better. If court personnel seek to promote positive outcomes for youth, framing behaviors in ways that acknowledge effort, recognize success, and promote opportunities for improvement, they may better position youth to successfully complete probation.

**Limitations**

The findings of the current study must be interpreted within the context of its limitations. First, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not met, such that there was less variability in responses in the negatively framed condition than in the positively and neutrally framed conditions for most outcome variables. Despite this potential limitation from a statistical standpoint, within the context of the current study this pattern of responses provides meaningful information critical to the interpretation of results. The spread of responses indicates that JPOs interpreted behaviors similarly when the information was presented negatively, as demonstrated by a lack of variability in responses—with negative framing, JPOs consistently thought effort and performance was poor. There was less agreement among JPOs, however, when behaviors were framed positively or neutrally with interpretation of effort and performance ranging widely from
negative to positive. This variability in responding to positive and neutral framing suggests that other factors may have influenced JPOs’ perceptions of the youth when behaviors were framed positively or neutrally, which in turn, appeared to impact decision-making considerations regarding recommendations to the court. It is important, then, to understand the additional factors that influence JPOs’ thought processes when information about a youth is presented positively or neutrally and to examine whether these factors are accurately driven by experience or reflect implicit biases that can result in inconsistent and unfair responses to and treatment of youth under probation supervision.

Second, the generalizability of the current study must be considered when interpreting this study’s results. JPOs from only one state completed this survey, and findings could differ in other jurisdictions, as research suggests that supervision philosophies can vary among JPOs (e.g., Schwalbe & Maschi, 2009, 2011). However, Pennsylvania uses a county-based system, where probation departments are locally directed (Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, 2008). Thus, with JPOs from all of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties invited to participate, variability in departmental culture was likely captured. Nevertheless, future research should use a national sample of JPOs and collect state and county affiliations to be able to examine both individual and jurisdictional differences. Third, consideration should be given to the ecological validity of the current study, particularly as it relates to the hypothetical community provider report. Although the vignette was modeled after actual community provider reports, the length of the vignette (i.e., one paragraph) was considerably shorter than community provider reports typically written in the field, which could have impacted perceptions.
However, overall, JPOs indicated that the vignette was “somewhat typical” ($M = 3.04, SD = .79$) of community provider reports they have read in the field, and no significant differences in typicality ratings were observed by framing condition or risk level (all $p$ values $> .050$). Finally, the current study asked JPOs to rate the likelihood of recommending various responses to the court. Researchers have cautioned that behavioral statements may contrast with actual behaviors (Goldstein, Condie, Kalbeitzer, Osman, & Geier, 2003). The current research used an experimental design to maximize the internal validity of these findings, and future research should examine the impact of framing in actual community provider reports on JPOs’ decision making and youth outcomes in real-world cases.

**Future Directions**

Findings from the current study lay the foundation for several areas of future research. Findings from this study should be replicated in other jurisdictions across the country, as well as with other court personnel, such as attorneys and judges. Broadening the data in these ways may provide direction for policy and practice changes. For example, if consistent findings are produced by probation departments across the nation, standardized report formats might be adopted to promote the provision of fair and proportionate responses to the behavior of young people on probation. Recommendations for such standardized formats might include presenting quantitative information objectively (e.g., stating that the youth has attended 10 out of 15 sessions) to provide court personnel with information regarding what the youth has accomplished, in addition to what was required of the youth. Additionally, consideration might be given to the use of qualitative descriptors when describing youths’ behaviors, as these qualitative
descriptors can portray identical behaviors in markedly different lights. To that end, standardized language may help to reduce inconsistencies and disproportionality across youth.

Additionally, much of the current discussion has emphasized the impacts of negatively framed behaviors on outcomes for court-involved youth. However, it is also important to understand the ways in which positively framed behaviors impact decision making. For example, it is possible that there may be contexts in which JPOs pay greater attention to youths’ positive behaviors, such as when considering early discharge from supervision, reducing the frequency of supervision meetings, or providing formal court recognition of positive behaviors. To that end, more research is needed to examine the ways in which the context guides JPOs’ differential attention to youths’ positively or negatively framed behaviors.

Future research should also explore additional factors that may impact JPOs’ perceptions of youth and their decision-making processes, combining the design of the current study with prior lines of research on the influence of race and ethnicity (Graham & Lowery, 2004), gender (Mallicoat, 2007), and labeling (Murrie et al., 2005) on JPOs’ impressions of youth and their recommendations to the court. JPOs are asked to consider a great deal of information about youth under their supervision and many factors are likely to influence their decision making. Combining these lines of research may help identify whether particular groups of youth are particularly vulnerable to negative court-related outcomes.

Finally, future research should further explore the extent to which youths’ risk levels impact JPOs’ impressions of youth and their recommendations to the court.
Findings from the current study suggest that risk level influenced JPOs’ decision making, particularly when considering probation revocation—JPOs were more likely to recommend probation revocation for youth identified as high risk when receiving negatively framed reports of their behavior. Although this discrepancy may reflect bias—JPOs may be inclined to jump to negative conclusions and recommendations about youth labeled high risk—it may also reflect appropriate use of risk labels. If youth on probation are identified as high risk to the community, it may be appropriate to have a lower behavioral threshold for revoking probation. With movement toward use of risk assessment tools in juvenile probation decision making across the country (Wachter, 2014), better understanding the role of risk level in JPOs’ impressions and recommendations could improve case management and youth outcomes. Knowing the harmful effects of placement on youths’ wellbeing (Mendel, 2011), understanding factors that put justice-involved youth at greater risk for negative outcomes is a meaningful line of inquiry with important policy and practice implications.

Taken together, findings from the current study suggest that the way behavioral information is presented can dramatically impact JPOs’ perceptions of youths’ compliance with their probation requirements and recommendations to the court. Given the broad spectrum of responses JPOs recommended for identical behaviors—from positive court responses to probation revocation—consideration should be given to the ways in which community providers describe youths’ behaviors in their progress reports to JPOs, as judges often use information provided by JPOs to make decisions during review hearings (Harris, 2009; Lin et al., 2008; Ward & Kupchik, 2010). To that end, considering the ways in which differential reporting of probation-related behaviors
impacts JPOs’ impressions of their supervisees and their recommendations to the court is critical to ensure equitable outcomes across all court-involved young people.
Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Each Outcome Variable*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing Condition</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impressions of Compliance with Court Conditions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>(n = 36)</td>
<td>(n = 32)</td>
<td>(n = 68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.38 (.73)</td>
<td>3.31 (.74)</td>
<td>3.35 (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>(n = 37)</td>
<td>(n = 34)</td>
<td>(n = 71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.32 (.63)</td>
<td>3.18 (.63)</td>
<td>3.25 (.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>(n = 35)</td>
<td>(n = 34)</td>
<td>(n = 69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.29 (.71)</td>
<td>1.91 (.38)</td>
<td>2.10 (.60)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(n =108)</td>
<td>(n = 100)</td>
<td>(n = 208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00 (.84)</td>
<td>2.79 (.87)</td>
<td>2.90 (.86)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impressions of Effort to Comply with Court Conditions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>(n = 36)</td>
<td>(n = 32)</td>
<td>(n = 68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.14 (.64)</td>
<td>3.31 (.74)</td>
<td>3.16 (.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>(n = 37)</td>
<td>(n = 34)</td>
<td>(n = 71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.08 (.49)</td>
<td>3.09 (.57)</td>
<td>3.08 (.53)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>(n = 35)</td>
<td>(n = 34)</td>
<td>(n = 69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.26 (.61)</td>
<td>2.09 (.38)</td>
<td>2.17 (.51)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(n = 108)</td>
<td>(n = 100)</td>
<td>(n = 208)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.83 (.70)</td>
<td>2.78 (.70)</td>
<td>2.81 (.70)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Likelihood of Recommending a Sanction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>(n = 37)</td>
<td>(n = 32)</td>
<td>(n = 69)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>2.73 (.93)</td>
<td>2.75 (.92)</td>
<td>2.74 (.92)</td>
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<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>(n = 33)</td>
<td>(n = 70)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>3.19 (.88)</td>
<td>3.15 (.79)</td>
<td>3.17 (.83)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>(n = 35)</td>
<td>(n = 34)</td>
<td>(n = 69)</td>
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<td>3.74 (.82)</td>
<td>3.94 (.78)</td>
<td>3.84 (.80)**</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>(n = 99)</td>
<td>(n = 208)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.21 (.96)</td>
<td>3.29 (.96)</td>
<td>3.25 (.96)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Likelihood of Recommending a Positive Court Response</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>(n = 36)</td>
<td>(n = 32)</td>
<td>(n = 68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive (n=37)</td>
<td>Neutral (n=33)</td>
<td>Negative (n=70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Recommending of Probation Revocation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>1.46 (.56)</td>
<td>1.62 (.72)</td>
<td>1.85 (.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1.58 (.50)</td>
<td>1.85 (.86)</td>
<td>2.59 (.89)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1.51 (.53)</td>
<td>1.73 (.79)</td>
<td>2.22 (.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=68)</td>
<td>(n=71)</td>
<td>(n=68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Response scales ranged from 1-5, with 1 reflecting least compliance/lowest likelihood and 5 reflecting greatest compliance/greatest likelihood. *p < .05; **p < .01.
Table 2. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Framing Condition on Likelihood of Recommending Court Responses through JPOs’ Perceptions of Effort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Direct Effect</th>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
<th>Total Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b(\text{SE}_b)$</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>$b(\text{SE}_b)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Recommending a Positive Court Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Condition → Positive Court Response</td>
<td>.29 (.13)*</td>
<td>[.04, .55]</td>
<td>.05 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Condition → Positive Court Response</td>
<td>.04 (.16)</td>
<td>[-.27, .35]</td>
<td>-.53 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Effort → Positive Court Response</td>
<td>.58 (.10)**</td>
<td>[.38, .77]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Recommending a Sanction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Condition → Sanction</td>
<td>-.37 (.12)**</td>
<td>[-.62, -.13]</td>
<td>-.06 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Condition → Sanction</td>
<td>-.07 (.15)</td>
<td>[-.37, .22]</td>
<td>.74 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Effort → Sanction</td>
<td>-.81 (.09)**</td>
<td>[-1.00, -.63]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Recommending Probation Revocation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Condition → Probation Revocation</td>
<td>-.19 (.12)</td>
<td>[-.43, .05]</td>
<td>.03 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Condition → Probation Revocation</td>
<td>.00 (.15)</td>
<td>[-.29, .29]</td>
<td>.49 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Effort → Probation Revocation</td>
<td>-.54 (.09)**</td>
<td>[-.72, -.36]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *$p <$ .05; **$p <$ .01.
Table 3. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Risk Level on Likelihood of Recommending Court Responses through JPOs’ Perceptions of Effort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Direct Effect</th>
<th></th>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total Effect</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b(\text{SE}_b)$</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>$b(\text{SE}_b)$</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>$b(\text{SE}_b)$</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Recommending a Positive Court Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Level $\rightarrow$ Positive Court Response</td>
<td>-.18 (.11)</td>
<td>[-.39, .04]</td>
<td>-.03 (.06)</td>
<td>[-.17, .08]</td>
<td>-.21 (.12)</td>
<td>[-.45, .03]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Effort $\rightarrow$ Positive Court Response</td>
<td>.63 (.08)**</td>
<td>[.48, .78]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Recommending a Sanction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Level $\rightarrow$ Sanction</td>
<td>.03 (.10)</td>
<td>[-.17, .24]</td>
<td>.05 (.09)</td>
<td>[-.11, .22]</td>
<td>.08 (.13)</td>
<td>[-.18, .34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Effort $\rightarrow$ Sanction</td>
<td>-.89 (.07)**</td>
<td>[-1.01, -.72]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of Recommending Probation Revocation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Level $\rightarrow$ Probation Revocation</td>
<td>-.34 (.10)**</td>
<td>[.15, .53]</td>
<td>.04 (.06)</td>
<td>[-.07, .15]</td>
<td>.38 (.11)**</td>
<td>[.17, .60]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Effort $\rightarrow$ Probation Revocation</td>
<td>-.57 (.07)**</td>
<td>[-.70, -.43]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$. 
Figure 1. JPOs’ Likelihood of Recommending Probation Revocation
Appendix

We are researchers in the Department of Psychology at Drexel University and we are asking you to participate in a five minute, online research study that seeks to better understand how juvenile probation officers think about the behaviors of youth they supervise and the kinds of recommendations they make at probation review hearings.

Your responses will be anonymous. No identifying information will be collected. We are seeking the participation of at least 150 probation officers, and all responses will be presented as group level data (for example, “65% of probation officers agreed that…”).

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can agree to participate now and choose to stop at any time; it will not be held against you. You can skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

There are neither direct benefits nor anticipated risks to you from participating in this study. You will not receive compensation for your participation. It is hoped that answers to these questions will help improve probation officers’ supervision experiences and youths’ outcomes in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact Dr. Naomi Goldstein at 215-571-4299 or Elizabeth Gale-Bentz at 609-947-1423.

If you agree to participate in this study, please click here.
Vignettes

Positively Framed Condition

**Background information:** Anthony is a 15-year-old male who has been on probation for four months. His YLS score at intake identified him as [low/high] risk.

As part of his probation requirements, Anthony is required to attend weekly life skills classes at The Community Center. Anthony has attended two-thirds of the sessions and has provided documentation for nearly half of his absences. Regarding his participation during the sessions he attended, Anthony has been an active contributor to group discussions in 75% of the required activities. Fortunately, with respect to his behavior, Anthony has only been involved in one incident, a physical disagreement with another youth during the second week of the program.

Neutral Condition

**Background information:** Anthony is a 15-year-old male who has been on probation for four months. His YLS score at intake identified him as [low/high] risk.

As part of his probation requirements, Anthony is required to attend weekly life skills classes at The Community Center. Anthony has attended 10 out of the 15 sessions, and has provided documentation for 2 of his 5 absences. Regarding his participation during the sessions he attended, Anthony has been an active contributor to group discussions in 75% of the required activities, but was not an active contributor in 25% of the activities. With respect to his behavior, Anthony was involved in an incident, a physical scuffle with another youth during the second week of the program.

Negatively Framed Condition

**Background information:** Anthony is a 15-year-old male who has been on probation for 4 months. His YLS score at intake identified him as [low/high] risk.

As part of his probation requirements, Anthony is required to attend weekly life skills classes at The Community Center. Anthony has not attended one third of the sessions and did not provide documentation for more than half of his absences. Regarding his participation during the sessions he attended, Anthony has not been an active contributor to group discussions in 25% of the required activities. Unfortunately, with respect to his behavior, Anthony was involved in one incident, a physical fight with another youth during the second week of the program.
Impressions and Recommendations Survey

1. To what extent do you think Anthony is complying with his probation requirements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not all compliant</td>
<td>Minimally compliant</td>
<td>Somewhat compliant</td>
<td>Mostly compliant</td>
<td>Fully compliant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How hard do you think Anthony is trying to comply with his probation requirements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No effort</td>
<td>Minimal effort</td>
<td>Some effort</td>
<td>A lot of effort</td>
<td>Full effort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. How likely would you be to recommend adding or increasing the severity of Anthony’s sanctions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>Definitely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. How likely would you be to recommend a positive court response, such as lifting Anthony’s sanctions or adding privileges?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>Definitely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. How likely would you be to recommend probation revocation and residential placement?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>Definitely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. How favorable a report do you think this was regarding Anthony’s compliance with his probation requirements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What was Anthony’s risk level, as determined by the YLS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. What was Anthony’s race/ethnicity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic/Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. How old was Anthony?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Recognizing the wide variability in community provider reports, how typical is this report of those you receive?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all typical</td>
<td>Pretty atypical</td>
<td>Somewhat typical</td>
<td>Pretty typical</td>
<td>Very typical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic Questionnaire

1. Your Age: _____________________

2. Your Gender (circle one):
   a. Male
   b. Female

3. Your Ethnicity (circle one)
   a. Hispanic or Latino
   b. Not Hispanic or Latino

4. Your Race (check all that apply):
   a. American Indian or Alaska Native
   b. Asian
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   e. White
   f. Other: _______________________

5. How many years have you worked in probation? ________________
   a. How many years have you worked or did you work with juveniles on probation? ________________
   b. How many years have you worked or did you work with adults on probation? ________________

6. Think about your current caseload.
   a. Approximately how many juveniles are on your caseload? _____
   b. Approximately how many adults are on your caseload? _____
7. To which division are you assigned within the department?

_____________________

8. County of employment: _____________________
References


Confronting racial and ethnic differences in American juvenile justice (23-82).

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. DOI:
10.7208/chicago/9780226319919.003.0002


Retrieved from


Personality and Social Psychology, 56(3), 374-386. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.56.3.374


Confronting racial and ethnic differences in American juvenile justice (245-269).

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.


10.1037/h0037186