

## Short-Term Effects of Sanctioning Reform on Parole Officers' Revocation Decisions

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Parole officials have traditionally been afforded considerable discretion when making sanctioning decisions to be able to tailor sanctions according to substantively rational concerns such as individuals' unique needs and situations. However, the application of substantive rationality in sanctioning can also generate unwanted disparities because sanctioning decisions may be based on extralegal factors that parole officials consider relevant. Concerns regarding disparate treatment of offender groups have prompted a number of states to consider adopting administrative violation response policies that emphasize formal rationality and uniformity by restricting parole officers' discretion and structuring sanctioning decisions according to legally relevant criteria. By emphasizing formal rationality in sanctioning, structured sanction policies present a dilemma for parole officers—uniformity versus individualized treatment. In 2005, the state of Ohio implemented an administrative violation response policy designed to reduce parole officers' reliance on revocation hearings and promote uniformity in sanctioning decisions. This study involved an examination of whether Ohio's shift to structured sanctioning coincided with differences in legal and extralegal effects on parole officers' decisions to pursue revocation hearings. Analyses of data collected before and after the implementation of the policy revealed a reduction in the number of revocation hearings officers pursued. Only modest increases in uniformity were observed, however, because there was little disparity resulting from officers' hearing decisions before the policy was put in place. These findings are discussed within perspectives on justice system actors' decision making.

**I**n most states, parole supervision was founded on progressive ideals regarding individualized punishment, case management, and rehabilitation; and historically, parole officials have been afforded considerable discretion to individualize offender treat-

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ment according to substantively rational concerns such as offenders' unique needs, situations, and attributes (Petersilia 2003; Rothman 1980; Simon 1993). Similar to other areas of the justice system, however, the discretionary decision making of parole officials has been criticized because of its potential to produce unwanted disparities in the treatment of offender groups (see, e.g., Burke 1997; Simon 1993; Walker 1993). Concerns regarding parole officials' misuse of discretion have, among other things, prompted a number of states to consider parole reform (Committee on Community Supervision and Desistance From Crime 2008; Solomon et al. 2005; Travis & Lawrence 2002; Travis & Petersilia 2001; Travis & Visser 2005). Administrative graduated sanctioning models have emerged as a promising strategy that may reduce disparate treatment and promote a uniform response to offender noncompliance (Burke 1997; Taxman et al. 1999).

Graduated or progressive sanctions are structured, incremental responses to noncompliant behavior by offenders under supervision (Taxman et al. 1999). When included in an administrative violation response policy, sanctioning is structured in a manner consistent with criminal sentencing under state sentencing guidelines. Sanctions are presumed to be certain, and the types of sanctions imposed are dictated by formally rational criteria such as the severity of violations and offenders' prior history. The discretionary decision making of parole officers is restricted, with the intent of providing a structured, consistent, incremental response to noncompliance (Burke 1997; Taxman et al. 1999). Despite their potential, however, the effects of these reforms on violation response procedures have received little empirical attention.

Examining the effects of policies designed to constrain justice system actors' discretion illustrates the tension between formal and substantive rationality (Savelsberg 1992; Ulmer & Kramer 1996). Parole officers, for example, may resist policies that structure sanctioning according to formal rational goals because they have long operated according to substantively rational sanctioning practices (Simon 1993). Further, parole officers, as opposed to other system actors, are typically more involved with the offenders under their supervision, and this greater level of involvement may generate additional resistance to policies that direct officers to consider offenders in the aggregate (e.g., high-risk) instead of as individuals (Feeley & Simon 1992; Lynch 1998; Simon 1993). In order to better understand these issues, we examine the effects of the implementation of an administrative violation response policy in Ohio. The Ohio Adult Parole Authority Progressive Sanction Grid was designed to reduce officers' reliance on revocation hearings and promote consistency and uniformity in sanctioning. We examine

whether the implementation of the policy impacted parole officers' decisions to pursue revocation hearings and promoted a more uniform response to offender noncompliance. Drawing from perspectives on justice system actors' decision making, we also add to the limited research on parole officer decision making and, more generally, justice system reform.

## **Influences on Parole Officers' Decision making**

Concerns over the disparate treatment of suspects or offender groups has generated a considerable amount of research on the exercise and control of discretion in the justice system (e.g., Albonetti 1991; Gottfredson & Gottfredson 1988; Smith et al. 1984; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Walker 1993; Wooldredge et al. 2005; Zatz 2000). Only a modest amount of research, however, has focused on correctional decision making, and most of these studies have examined the decisions of parole boards (e.g., Bonham et al. 1986; Cavender & Knepper 1992; Conley & Zimmerman 1982; Gottfredson 1979; Grattet et al. 2009; Huebner & Bynum 2006; Morgan & Smith 2008; Pogrebin et al. 1986; Winfree, Sellers, et al. 1990; Winfree, Wooldredge, et al. 1990). Few studies have examined the decisions of line-level probation/parole officers (see, e.g., Erez 1992; Harris et al. 2001; Simon 1993). In many respects, however, parole officers' sanctioning decisions are comparable to sanctioning decisions made by other justice system actors. When responding to violations, parole officers consider various sanctioning options, some of which impact offenders' liberty (e.g., revocation). Similar to those of other system actors, parole officers' decisions can be influenced by legally relevant criteria such as the severity of violations or other factors that may be considered extralegal (e.g., gender). Given these parallels, it seems reasonable to inform expectations regarding the influences on parole officers' sanctioning decisions by drawing, in part, from the more extensive research conducted on decision making by other justice system actors. These explanations regarding the influences on sanctioning decisions contribute to a more reasonable examination of whether changes in parole officers' decision making can be expected once more formal constraints are placed on their discretion.

In studies of justice system actors' decision making, researchers have found that legal factors account for most of the variation in sanctioning decisions (e.g., Huebner & Bynum 2006; Johnson 2006; Smith et al. 1984; Spohn 2000; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth 2001; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Ulmer & Johnson 2004; Wooldredge et al. 2005). For parole officers, legally relevant criteria include factors such as the severity of violations

and offenders' prior history both before (e.g., static risk classification) and after their release (e.g., number of prior sanctions).

In addition to legal factors, extralegal factors have also been found to influence the decisions of justice system actors, prompting consideration of these variables in related studies (see, e.g., Johnson 2006; Spohn 2000; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth 2001; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Ulmer & Johnson 2004; Ulmer and Kramer 1996; Wooldredge et al. 2005; Zatz 2000). Explanations regarding why extralegal factors may affect decision making have been framed within perspectives such as causal attribution (e.g., Albonetti 1991; Farrell & Holmes 1991; Hawkins 1987) or focal concerns (Steffensmeier et al. 1998). For instance, scholars have theorized that justice system actors' legal decisions are based on their beliefs regarding individuals' potential for reform (Bridges & Steen 1998). Yet system actors rarely have all the relevant information regarding individuals' prospects for future criminality. In order to reduce the uncertainty involved in these decisions, system actors may be influenced by their preconceptions regarding higher risk offenders (Albonetti 1991). The foundation for these beliefs is often derived from system actors' attributions regarding the personal and environmental causes of criminal behavior (Albonetti 1991; Bridges & Steen 1998; Hawkins 1987). System actors may hold individuals more responsible if they perceive that the acts perpetrated by those individuals were influenced more by personal factors than by environmental factors; this is because these individuals are considered more culpable and therefore thought to pose a greater threat to society (Bridges & Steen 1998). Due to their overrepresentation in offender populations, minorities, males, and younger individuals may be perceived as more culpable; this could cause system actors to impose harsher sanctions in cases involving individuals with these characteristics (Albonetti 1991; Wooldredge et al. 2005).

Researchers have also suggested that justice system actors make legal decisions guided by three focal concerns, which include their assessments of individuals' blameworthiness, their interests in protecting the community, and the practical constraints surrounding individuals and organizational resources (Huebner & Bynum 2006; Steffensmeier et al. 1998). Assessments of blameworthiness are primarily influenced by legal factors. Individuals with lengthier criminal histories, those who have committed more serious acts, and those who were guilty of playing a major role in the commission of the act are viewed as more culpable and sanctioned more harshly. System actors have an interest in protecting the community, and this desire influences them to make predictions about individuals' odds of reoffending. Because system actors generally perceive that individuals who commit more serious acts and have more extensive

criminal histories are a greater risk to reoffend, they frequently impose harsher sanctions in cases involving individuals who possess those characteristics. Finally, justice system actors are also constrained by their desire to maintain relationships with other members of the justice system, their perceptions regarding certain types of individuals' ability to cope with sanctions, or the social costs of imposing sanctions on someone who has certain responsibilities (e.g., dependent children) (Huebner & Bynum 2006; Johnson 2006; Steffensmeier et al. 1998).

Similar to attribution theory, the focal concerns perspective also recognizes that justice system actors typically make sanctioning decisions with limited information regarding individuals' prospects for reform, culpability, and so forth. In order to reduce uncertainty when making decisions, system actors develop perceptual shorthand. Stereotypes derived from individuals' characteristics often provide the foundation for patterned responses that link their interpretations of different focal concerns to the characteristics of individuals and situations (Johnson 2006; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier et al. 1998). As a result, individuals who are younger, male, or racial/ethnic minorities may be sanctioned more severely because these individuals are often perceived to be a greater threat to society, with limited prospects for reform. Minorities, males, and younger individuals are also overrepresented in offender populations, so system actors may perceive them as being better able to cope with the sanctions they impose (Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier et al. 1998).

The context surrounding parole officers' work is also filled with uncertainty (Huebner & Bynum 2006; McCleary 1978; Simon 1993). Officers typically manage large caseloads with few resources, and contact between officers and the offenders under their supervision is infrequent (Petersilia 2003; Simon 1993). As a result, violations of release conditions are frequent and sanction or revocation decisions are often made with limited information about the offenders' day-to-day adjustment in the community, let alone their prospects for rehabilitation. Even though parole officers are often equipped with assessment tools that aid them in determining offenders' risk to reoffend (Beck & Hoffman 1985), they are also aware of the limitations of those tools (Huebner & Bynum 2006; Silver & Miller 2002; Simon 1993; Wright et al. 1984). It seems reasonable, therefore, that parole officers might consider legal factors but, in the same way as other justice system actors, also rely on cues derived from stereotypes of offender groups that they perceive to be higher risk offenders. Consistent with the perspectives discussed above, extralegal characteristics of individuals who are overrepresented in the offender population relative to their distribution in the general population can provide the

foundation for these stereotypes (Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Wooldredge et al. 2005). Offenders who are younger, minorities, male, or from lower socioeconomic strata may be perceived as higher risk or more culpable than other persons because they often symbolize the “dangerous class,” which is thought to pose the greatest threat to communities (Steffensmeier et al. 1998). Due to parole officers’ interest in controlling and reducing recidivism (community protection), these factors may be associated with harsher sanctions. Empirical evidence derived from studies of the decisions of other justice system actors’ supports the inclusion of these variables in related models (e.g., Conley & Zimmerman 1982; Huebner & Bynum 2006; Johnson 2006; Smith et al. 1984; Spohn 2000; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth 2001; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Ulmer & Johnson 2004; Winfree, Wooldredge, et al. 1990; Wooldredge et al. 2005; Zatz 2000).

Although parole officers work in an atmosphere with a high degree of uncertainty, they are typically more involved with the offenders under their supervision than other justice system actors (Lynch 1998; Simon 1993). Parole officers’ level of involvement with offenders may provide them with additional information that could influence their decision making. Parole officers are generally required to monitor offenders’ conditions of release, such as those governing offenders’ residential situations, employment, and rehabilitative treatment (MacKenzie et al. 1999; Petersilia 2003). In making sanctioning decisions, officers may consider these situational attributes of offenders’ community adjustment because they may reflect in part offenders’ commitment to conventional behaviors. If officers perceive that offenders are committed to conventional behaviors, they may view them as less culpable and attribute less blame when those offenders violate the conditions of their release. In contrast, if officers perceive that offenders are not committed to conventional behaviors, they may consider them higher risk and attribute their behaviors to personal factors rather than environmental influences. Because parole officers have an interest in reducing recidivism, offenders whom they perceive as higher risk may be sanctioned more harshly when they violate the conditions of their release. For example, officers may be less likely to initiate a revocation hearing for offenders who are employed or living in a situation that provides some control over their behavior (such as a spouse or parent). On the other hand, officers may be more likely to pursue a revocation hearing in cases where offenders are homeless or at large. Similarly, officers may be more likely to pursue the revocation of offenders who have been afforded more treatment opportunities, such as community-based services or residential programs. Researchers have observed that

other justice system actors consider factors such as employment, family situations, and use of rehabilitative programs (Bonham et al. 1986; Koons-Witt 2002; Moore & Miethe 1986; Pogrebin et al. 1986; Simon 1993; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Wooldredge et al. 2005).

## **Effects of Policy Changes on the Sanctioning Process**

Despite the accumulation of research on justice system actors' decision making, only a limited number of studies have examined the effects of changes in policies governing responses to crime and deviance on the decisions of justice system actors (e.g., Koons-Witt 2002; Martin et al. 2009; Miethe 1987; Moore & Miethe 1986; Winfree, Wooldredge, et al. 1990; Wooldredge 2009; Wooldredge et al. 2005). Policies designed to restrict discretion emphasize formal rationality and consistency in sanctioning. Discretion, on the other hand, permits system actors the flexibility to base sanctioning decisions on substantive rationality (Savelsberg 1992; Ulmer & Kramer 1996). Substantive rationality in parole officers' sanctioning decisions may involve considering offenders' individual needs, situations, or attributes, but such considerations may also produce sanctioning disparities. Thus, the imposition of policies designed to structure parole officers' sanctioning based on formal rationality presents officers with a fundamental dilemma in social control decision making—uniformity versus individualized treatment (Ulmer & Kramer 1996).

Some of the existing studies of policies designed to restrict the discretion of justice system actors have revealed moderate increases in uniformity after the respective policies were put into place (Martin et al. 2009; Moore & Miethe 1986; Wooldredge 2009; Wooldredge et al. 2005). Increases in uniformity could be viewed as support for these policies. However, justice system actors are used to enjoying considerable discretion in making sanctioning decisions, and substantively rational sanctioning considerations are often ingrained within elements of the justice system (Simon 1993; Ulmer & Kramer 1996). Therefore, it is not surprising that researchers have also revealed that some extralegal factors continue to impact system actors' decision making even after the policies designed to encourage uniformity have been implemented (Koons-Witt 2002; Miethe 1987; Moore & Miethe 1986; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Ulmer & Kramer 1996; Wooldredge 2009; Wooldredge et al. 2005).

In this study, we evaluate the impact of the state of Ohio's implementation of an administrative violation response policy on parole officers' decision making, thus extending this line of research to the context of parole officers' sanctioning decisions. We



examine whether the policy achieved its primary procedural objectives of (1) promoting a more uniform response to violations of release conditions, and (2) reducing officers' reliance on revocation hearings to manage offender noncompliance.

## Parole and Structured Sanctioning Guidelines in Ohio

The state of Ohio has been a determinate sentencing state since 1996. The Ohio sentencing guidelines are presumptive guidelines where sentencing is structured according to the type of offense, the felony level of the offense (range = 1–5, where 1 is the most serious), and the defendant's prior record. Judges can, however, depart from the presumption so long as they provide adequate justification (see Wooldredge 2009; Wooldredge et al. 2005 for a discussion of Ohio's sentencing guidelines). Although the implementation of sentencing guidelines abolished discretionary parole release, the guidelines still provide for post-release control (PRC) supervision for those offenders who would have previously received parole and discretionary PRC placement for nonviolent offenders.<sup>1</sup> The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) is responsible for supervising all adult felony offenders in the state of Ohio. The Ohio Adult Parole Authority (APA), which is contained within the ODRC, is responsible for the release and supervision of adult felony inmates returning to communities from prison.

Offenders under post-release supervision in Ohio are monitored by APA parole officers, who are responsible for aiding offenders in their transition to the community (e.g., making treatment and employment referrals) as well as monitoring and enforcing the conditions of their release (e.g., collecting urinalysis). If offenders do not comply with the conditions of their release, APA officers may pursue violation hearings, which can result in offenders returning to prison. Ultimately, decisions to revoke or return offenders to prison are made by APA hearing officers during violation hearings; however, the majority of all hearings generally result in revocation.<sup>2</sup> It is presumed that APA officers' decisions to

<sup>1</sup> Following from the Supreme Court's decision in *Blakely* (*Blakely v. Washington* 2004), the Ohio State Supreme Court declared that elements of Ohio's sentencing guidelines were unconstitutional (*State v. Foster* 2006). After the *Foster* decision, the sentencing guidelines became strictly advisory. These changes, however, had no bearing on mandatory parole supervision (PRC) in Ohio or the sanctioning policy examined in this study.

<sup>2</sup> In Ohio, due process violation hearings were established in the mid-1990s. The use of violation hearings, however, did not result in a reduction in the number of revocations for violations of release conditions (Martin & Van Dine 2008). Regarding the current study, approximately 75 percent of all hearings pursued for violations resulted in revocation. The remaining 25 percent of the hearings resulted in acquittals or other sanctions, or did not



pursue revocation hearings are the key decision in Ohio's revocation process (Martin & Van Dine 2008). These decisions are typically made within a short period of time after officers become aware of violations (1–2 weeks). Prior to the implementation of the policy discussed below, decisions whether to pursue revocation hearings were made at the discretion of the supervising APA officers, although supervisors were often consulted.

In consultation with the National Institute of Corrections and the ODRC Bureau of Research, the APA developed the Ohio Adult Parole Authority Progressive Sanction Grid. The sanction grid, which is contained in the Appendix, was implemented in July 2005 as part of a larger policy addressing the sanctioning of offenders who violate the conditions of parole or PRC supervision. The policy revision was issued in response to perceived disparities in the treatment of offenders who violated conditions of supervision. Specifically, the policy was designed to:

foster consistent procedures designed to promote public confidence, safety, and fair, objective decision making when the Adult Parole Authority imposes sanctions for violation behavior committed by offenders during their period of supervision. (ODRC 2005: policy 100-APA-14)

The policy was also consistent with the ODRC's larger reentry initiative that was published in 2002 and contained recommendations to develop a violation policy that was supportive of the ODRC's reentry goals (e.g., to reduce recidivism) and that structured and provided statewide consistency in the use of progressive sanctioning (ODRC 2002).

More specifically, the policy directs officers to consider both public safety and proportionality when addressing violation behavior, and it refers officers to the sanction grid in order to determine the most appropriate response to violations. Similar to state sentencing guidelines, the sanction grid groups offenders by risk and violation severity. Offender risk scores are based on a static risk assessment developed in Ohio that is used to determine offenders' initial level of supervision. The assessment tool primarily consists of indicators of offenders' criminal history (e.g., prior commitments) and classifies individuals as high, medium, or low risk. Violation behaviors are grouped into three categories: major violations, high-severity violations, and low-severity violations. Major violations, which include sex offender violations, new felony offenses, weapons offenses, and threat behaviors, are not required to be addressed by grid. High-severity violations include behaviors such as absconding,

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occur because the offenders were either recommitted for a new felony offense or were still at large at the conclusion of the study.

certain misdemeanor offenses, and programming violations, while low-severity violations include reporting, employment, substance abuse (e.g., positive drug tests), and other minor infractions.<sup>3</sup>

Responses to violations are determined by cross-classifying the risk and violation severity categories by the number of sanctioned violation incidents that have occurred since the offender's release. Sanction options are then provided in terms of a level of organizational action, each of which includes multiple sanction alternatives that are detailed in the policy. Officers maintain some discretion concerning the sanction alternative that is imposed within each level of action, although the sanction grid does presume that sanctions will be imposed for all violations. The sanction grid also presumes multiple opportunities to impose unit-level sanctions before proceeding to a violation hearing. As such, the policy was implicitly designed to reduce officers' reliance on revocation hearings and promote the management of offender non-compliance in the community. Generally, the sanction grid is consistent with administrative graduated sanctioning policies that have been proposed or implemented in other jurisdictions across the United States (see, e.g., Burke 1997; Taxman et al. 1999).

## **Method**

The analyses described here focus on parole officers' decisions to pursue revocation hearings before and after the implementation of the administrative violation response policy. We focused on decisions to pursue violation hearings as opposed to other sanctioning outcomes because hearing decisions were to be made in accordance with the legally relevant criteria contained within the sanction grid. Ultimately, the policy was designed to ensure that sanctions were applied in a progressive manner, eventually graduating to (but ideally preventing) a revocation hearing.

The target populations for the study included all the violations committed by offenders who were released on discretionary parole or PRC in Ohio during a three-month period before (October–December 2003) and after (August–October 2005) the policy was implemented statewide. Each offender was followed for a full year after release, permitting an examination of the effects of the policy for approximately one year after it was implemented. Using the procedures described below, we collected data regarding officers' responses to 3,291 violation incidents from the case files of 1,222 offenders.

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<sup>3</sup> In Ohio, absconding refers to an official declaration by parole officials that an offender's whereabouts are unknown and that he or she is a violator at large.

## Data and Measures

The study required information regarding offenders' violations of their release conditions and parole officers' responses to those violations. Because it was unclear which offenders had violated the terms of their release prior to examination of the offenders' case files, the offender samples had to be initially representative of all offenders released on post-release supervision during the time frames described above. For each sample, offenders were selected from a list of all the offenders released under post-release supervision in Ohio for the first time in their current case during the periods mentioned above. Female offenders were selected with certainty and males were selected randomly, with the goal of 95 percent confidence intervals for parameter estimates. The male sample also included an oversample of 20 percent to account for unusable cases (e.g., interstate compacts), cases with missing data, and so forth. These procedures resulted in 1,040 and 1,012 offenders for the two samples, respectively, making 2,052 offenders altogether. Sample weights were derived to adjust for the oversampling of female offenders. These weights were normalized for the multivariate analyses.

Information regarding each offender was collected from a number of official sources, which were cross-referenced against each other in order to increase the reliability of the data. The majority of the information used for this study was obtained from offender case files. Parole officers' field notes were examined for the timing of a number of the offenders' post-release release activities (e.g., violations, sanctions, employment), and this information was cross-referenced with a number of supporting documents. Offenders were followed for a full year after their release or, if applicable, until the date they were returned to prison. Following offenders over time permitted any changes in offenders' situations (e.g., employment) between violation incidents to be recorded. It is important to note, however, that the one-year follow-up period did restrict the generalizability of the results to short-term effects of related policies. The data were collected by two researchers, and an interrater reliability analysis conducted using a random sample of 10 cases revealed an internal consistency between the two researchers of .93.

As discussed above, the study focused on parole officers' responses to offenders' violations of the conditions of their release, so only those offenders who had violation incidents recorded within the first year after their release were ultimately included in the study. Of the 2,052 offenders initially sampled for the study, 1,266 had a recorded violation incident. Offenders were also removed if

they were released to outstanding warrants ( $N = 21$ ) or had missing data on any of the variables of interest ( $N = 23$ ). These procedures reduced the sample used here to 1,222 offenders, who had 3,291 violation incidents recorded within the first year after release.

All the measures included in the final models are described in Table 1. As discussed above, the structure of the data was hierarchical, with violation incidents nested within offenders, and variables were measured at both levels of analysis.<sup>4</sup> The outcome variable was a dichotomous measure of whether an officer pursued a hearing for a violation incident. In addition to the outcome variable, several of the predictor variables were also measured at the incident level (within individuals) in order to allow their effects to vary over time (i.e., offenders' situations and the characteristics of their violations may vary between incidents). We included dichotomous variables measuring the type of violation: a major violation or a high-severity violation. Low-severity violations were treated as the reference category. Coding procedures for these categories were generally consistent with the language of the policy described above. If multiple violations were recorded as a part of the same incident for which the most serious violation was selected, however, the models also included a dichotomous variable indicating whether multiple violations were recorded. Also consistent with the policy language, we included the number of prior sanctions that had been imposed prior to each incident. Characteristics of offenders' situations at the time sanctions were applied were also examined. Specifically, we included measures of the number of service referrals that parole officers had made on an offender's behalf, measures of whether the offender was employed, and measures of different living situations, including whether an offender was married and cohabitating, cohabitating with a parent, placed in a residential program, or was homeless or at large. In order to adjust for time at risk, a measure of the number of days under supervision was also included as a statistical control.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Technically, offenders were also nested within officers; however, the focus of the study was on the effects of the policy on the organizational response to offenders' violations of their conditions of release. Thus, data were collected on offenders (and the offenders' individual violations incidents) in order to determine whether the influences of officers' decisions to pursue revocation hearings were impacted by the implementation of the policy (e.g., whether offenders' race influenced hearing decisions before the policy was implemented versus after the policy was implemented). Although not the focus of this study, an equally important question could be whether different types of officers were impacted differentially by the implementation of the policy. Given the focus of this study, however, an adequate amount of data for modeling between officer differences was not collected.

<sup>5</sup> A potential limitation of the measure of number of days under supervision is that the measure could include days that offenders served in jail for minor incidents that did not result in their return to prison. A more proximate measure of time at risk would have been actual street time. Unfortunately, specific dates regarding incarcerations in jail were not collected for this study.

**Table 1.** Sample Means and Standard Deviations (Unweighted)

	Pooled		Before		After	
Outcome						
Pursued a hearing	.14	(.35)	.17	(.38)	.12	(.32)
Incident-level						
Major violation	.18	(.38)	.17	(.38)	.18	(.38)
High-severity violation	.43	(.50)	.45	(.50)	.41	(.49)
Multiple violations	.39	(.49)	.37	(.48)	.42	(.49)
Number of prior sanctions	1.10	(1.42)	1.11	(1.46)	1.10	(1.37)
Number of service referrals	.64	(.48)	.70	(.46)	.58	(.49)
Employed	.28	(.45)	.25	(.43)	.31	(.46)
Married and cohabitating	.03	(.18)	.04	(.19)	.03	(.18)
Cohabitating with parent	.27	(.44)	.28	(.45)	.26	(.44)
Placed in residential program	.11	(.31)	.11	(.31)	.11	(.31)
Homeless or at large	.21	(.40)	.22	(.42)	.19	(.39)
Number of days under supervision	158.57	(105.30)	162.14	(103.32)	155.12	(107.10)
$N_1$	3,291		1,616		1,675	
Offender-level						
Age	33.53	(9.30)	33.41	(8.79)	33.66	(9.78)
Female	.14	(.34)	.13	(.34)	.14	(.35)
African American	.53	(.50)	.54	(.50)	.52	(.50)
Felony level of committing offense	3.09	(1.31)	3.08	(1.30)	3.09	(1.32)
Sex offender	.17	(.38)	.17	(.38)	.17	(.38)
High-risk	.17	(.38)	.23	(.42)	.12	(.42)
Low-risk	.26	(.44)	.22	(.41)	.30	(.41)
Parolee	.27	(.45)	.35	(.48)	.20	(.40)
Post-policy case	.50	(.50)	—	—	—	—
$N_2$	1,222		608		614	

*Note:* All measures are dummy-coded except number of prior sanctions, number of service referrals, number of days under supervision, age, and felony level of committing offense.

Offender-level (between individual) predictors were also considered. The primary variable of interest was whether the offender was a post-policy case, which indicated they had been released in the period after the violation response policy was implemented. Other offender-level variables included offenders' age at the start of supervision, whether they were female or African American, the felony level of committing offense (range = 1–5), and whether the offenders were classified as a sex offender, high-, or low-risk.<sup>6</sup> Sex offenders were defined as a separate risk category regardless of their risk score because responses to violations committed by sex offenders were decided (per policy) on an individual basis. The measures of high and low risk were taken from the ODRC's additive static risk assessment,

<sup>6</sup> Although an argument could be made for including separate dichotomous measures reflecting the various felony levels of the offenders' committing offenses, we chose to use the ordinal scale for several reasons. First, use of the ordinal scale did not substantively mask the unique effect of any of the felony levels. Second, the ordinal scale accounted for roughly the same amount of variation in the dependent variable as including four dichotomous variables tapping different felony levels. Finally, the offenders' committing offense was only included as a control variable, so we chose the more parsimonious method of measuring its effect. The ordinal scale used here was reverse-coded for the analyses, so that higher numbers reflect more serious offenses.

which is considered within the sanction grid described in the Appendix. Finally, because some offenders in the sample were sentenced prior to the implementation of the Ohio sentencing guidelines (1996), we included a measure of whether offenders were released on discretionary parole as opposed to PRC as a statistical control.

## Statistical Analysis

Examination of parole officers' decision making differs from studies of most other justice system actors because officers frequently encounter offenders multiple times during a study period (i.e., offenders often violate release conditions more than once). For example, the data examined in this study contained 3,291 violation incidents committed by 1,222 offenders. This situation creates problems for conventional analytical techniques such as pooled ordinary least-squares regression (e.g., violation incidents are not truly independent of the offenders who commit them) (Raudenbush & Bryk 2002).

The hierarchical data structure (violation incidents nested within offenders) required the creation of bilevel data sets with violation incidents at level-1 and offenders at level-2. Creating the bilevel datasets with violation incidents at level-1 allowed us to (1) adjust for non-independence among incidents "nested" within the same offender, (2) base the hypothesis tests on the appropriate sample sizes (for incidents versus offenders), and (3) remove (through group mean-centering) between-offender variation in situational characteristics that might have corresponded with differences in hearing rates across offenders (e.g., higher risk offenders may have been less likely to be employed).

The evaluation of the effects of the sanction grid involved estimating a pooled model that included all the cases and the offender-level measure indicating whether the case was a post-policy case. Separate models were then estimated for each sample (before and after), permitting the comparison of coefficient estimates derived from the two samples (i.e., did the effects of particular measures become stronger after the policy was implemented?).

The dichotomous outcome measures were examined using hierarchical Bernoulli regression. First, an unconditional model revealed significant variance ( $p < .05$ ) in each outcome at level-1 (incidents) and level-2 (offenders). Next, fixed-effects models were estimated that included each of the level-1 predictors variables. In these models, the level-1 model intercepts were allowed to vary randomly across offenders, permitting an analysis of the main effects of the level-2 predictors on the level-1 model intercepts. Reliability indexes for each of the model intercepts exceeded .50, indicating adequate within-group sample sizes for estimation of hierarchical

models (Raudenbush & Bryk 2002). Consistent with objective (3) from above, the measures of offenders' situations were centered on their means for each offender. By contrast, the level-1 legally relevant variables (e.g., number of prior sanctions) and control variables were grand mean-centered in order to control for their effects at level-1 as well as to adjust the level-1 intercepts for their effects (see Raudenbush & Bryk 2002). Last, the level-2 predictors were entered, permitting the examination of the main effects of the level-2 predictors on the level-1 intercepts. All the level-2 predictors were left uncentered because there was not a higher level of aggregation. The final level-2 models also included a level-2 control for the number of violation incidents recorded for each offender.<sup>7</sup>

Once the final models were estimated for both the pre- and post-policy samples, the coefficient estimates were compared using the equality of coefficients test developed by Clogg et al. (1995). Brame et al. (1998) demonstrated the applicability of this particular test to a comparison of maximum likelihood coefficients between two independent samples.

## Findings

Table 2 contains the incident-level estimates derived from the model of the pooled sample as well as the results generated from analyses of the before and after samples. Table 3 displays the offender-level main effects for all three models. Tables 2 and 3 also contain the differences between the before and after coefficient estimates denoted by the z-scores that resulted from the equality of coefficient tests. Only the z-scores that resulted from tests indicating a significant difference in the magnitude of the effects are reported.

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<sup>7</sup> In many respects, the use of hierarchical generalized linear modeling is well suited for modeling nested data structures such as those used in this study. However, the estimation technique also creates a potential problem that may affect the validity of the level-2 results. The level-2 outcome (the adjusted rate of hearing decisions) can become unstable due to the differences in the amount of violation incidents offenders incur and the restricted range of the frequency of officers' hearing decisions. In hierarchical analyses of dichotomous outcomes, the level-2 outcome becomes an adjusted rate of the level-1 outcome, where the numerator of the level-2 outcome (the hearing decision, 0 = no, 1 = yes) is standardized by the number of level-1 units (violation incidents) and then adjusted for the effects of level-1 predictors (excluding those that were group mean-centered). Thus, offenders whose supervising officers pursued hearings for their second violation incident would have somewhat different values than offenders whose supervising officers pursued hearings after their fourth violation incident, even though a hearing was ultimately initiated for both offenders. We addressed this problem in part by including a level-2 control variable tapping the number of violation incidents. We also estimated offender-level models (with the same predictors included) predicting a dichotomous indicator of each outcome in another software package. Comparisons across the two analyses revealed nearly identical results for the level-2 effects.



**Table 2.** Bernoulli Models Predicting Officers' Decision to Pursue a Revocation Hearing (Maximum Likelihood Coefficients Reported With Standard Errors in Parentheses)

	Pooled	Before	After	z-score
Intercept	-1.86	-1.62	-2.12	2.52*
Major violation	1.55** (.11)	1.62** (.16)	1.37** (.14)	
High-severity violation	1.15** (.09)	1.22** (.13)	1.04** (.12)	
Multiple violations	.28** (.07)	.14 (.10)	.40** (.10)	
Number of prior sanctions	.44** (.04)	.34** (.05)	.60** (.05)	-3.68**
Number of service referrals	.14 (.12)	.43** (.17)	-.32* (.17)	3.12**
Employed	-.23* (.10)	-.05 (.14)	-.50** (.14)	2.27*
Married and cohabitating	-.40 (.33)	-1.08 (.67)	.01 (.48)	
Cohabitating with parent	-.22 (.14)	-.11 (.20)	-.42* (.18)	
Placed in residential program	.50** (.15)	.76** (.21)	-.13 (.22)	2.93**
Homeless or at large	1.08** (.12)	1.10** (.16)	1.01** (.17)	
Number of days under supervision	-.001** (.0005)	-.001 (.001)	-.001 (.001)	
$N_1$	3,291	1,616	1,675	
Proportion level-1 variation explained	.34	.38	.42	

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

## General Effects on Parole Officers' Decisions to Pursue Revocation Hearings

The results from the analysis of the pooled sample contained in Table 2 show that officers were more likely to pursue a hearing for incidents that involved a major violation, a high-severity violation, or multiple violations. Officers were also more likely to pursue a hearing for incidents that involved offenders who had been sanctioned more times during their term of supervision. It was also more likely for officers to initiate hearings if the offenders involved were homeless, at large, or living in residential programs. In contrast, officers were less likely to pursue hearings if offenders were employed or had been under supervision for longer periods of time. Neither the number of service referrals nor whether an offender was cohabitating with a parent or spouse had an effect on officers' hearing decisions. The significant predictors accounted for a notable percentage (34 percent) of the incident-level variation in officers' hearing decisions.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In hierarchical analyses of dichotomous outcomes, the meaning of the variance estimates are based on the validity of the assumption regarding the underlying probability

**Table 3.** Level-2 Main Effects on Officers' Decisions to Pursue Revocation Hearings (Level-1 Intercepts as Outcomes)

	Pooled	Before	After	z-score
Intercept	-.76	-.98	-1.09	
Age	-.002 (.01)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	
Female	.10 (.20)	.22 (.33)	-.03 (.26)	
African American	-.30* (.12)	-.31 (.18)	-.30 (.18)	
Felony level of committing offense	.15** (.05)	.13 (.08)	.21** (.07)	
Sex offender	.52** (.17)	.10 (.24)	.96** (.24)	-2.53*
High-risk	.12 (.18)	.12 (.24)	-.07 (.29)	
Low-risk	-.35* (.17)	-.31 (.26)	-.55* (.23)	
Parolee	-.02 (.15)	-.08 (.20)	-.33 (.24)	
Post-policy case	-.52** (.12)	—	—	
$N_2$	1,222	608	614	
Proportion level-2 variation explained	.27	.21	.32	
Reliability of the level-1 intercept	.55	.59	.50	

Note: Models include a control for the number of violations.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

Turning to the offender-level results (Table 3), the analyses revealed that officers were less likely to pursue hearings in cases involving offenders who were released in the period after the administrative violation response policy was implemented. Officers also pursued fewer hearings for violations involving African American offenders or offenders classified as low-risk. On the other hand, officers were more likely to initiate hearings for violations involving offenders who were incarcerated for more serious felonies or were designated as sex offenders. Offenders' age, sex, whether they were high-risk, or released on discretionary parole had no effect on officers' hearing decisions. The relevant predictors in the model explained 27 percent of the between-offender variation in hearing decision rates.

distribution of the outcome variable. For the models presented here, the estimates of variance were derived under the assumption that the level-1 random effects conformed to a logistic distribution (see, e.g., Raudenbush & Bryk 2002; Snijders & Bosker 1999). The proportion of variation in hearing decisions at level-1 and level-2 were computed from the estimates of error variance generated by HLM6.08. The significant predictors added to the models will reduce the estimates at the relevant level of analysis, and these estimates across the models were used to compute the proportion of explained variation at each level. As a check on the level-1 results, logistic models of officers hearing decisions that included all of the level-1 predictors were also estimated in SPSS. No substantive differences emerged between the amounts of variation explained resulting from these logistic models and proportion variation explained for each of the level-1 models reported in the tables.

## Comparing Officers' Decisions Before and After the Implementation of the Policy

Confirming the results derived from the pooled sample, the incident-level analyses (Table 2) revealed that officers pursued fewer hearings after the administrative sanction policy was implemented. The number of prior sanctions affected officers' decisions in both time periods; however, the effect was stronger in the period after the policy had been implemented. The effects of number of service referrals, employment status, and living in a residential program also differed between the two time periods. Officers were more likely to pursue a hearing if they had made more service referrals in the period before the policy was put into practice but less likely to pursue a hearing in those cases in which they had made more service referrals in the period after the policy was implemented. Offenders' employment status had no effect on officers' decisions to initiate a hearing before the policy was implemented. However, after the policy was implemented, officers were less likely to initiate hearings if offenders were employed. In the time period before the policy was implemented, officers were more likely to proceed to a hearing if the offender lived in a residential program, but whether an offender lived in a residential program had no effect on officers' decisions in the period after the policy was put in place. All the other incident-level effects were either consistent with those derived from the analysis of the pooled sample or not significantly different between the two time periods. The two models explained a comparable amount of the incident-level variation in officers' hearing decisions, 38 percent and 42 percent, respectively.

Table 3 shows that, compared to the time period before the policy was implemented, officers were more likely to pursue hearings for violations that involved sex offenders after the policy was put in place. Otherwise, all the offender-level effects were consistent with those generated from the analysis of the pooled sample or not significantly different between the two time periods. The post-grid model explained 32 percent of the variation in hearing decision rates, compared to only 21 percent in the pre-grid model.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Administrative graduated sanction models emphasize formal rationality by structuring the sanctioning of parole violations according to legal criteria such as the severity of violations, the number of previous sanctions imposed, and the level of risk offenders pose to the community. The discretion afforded parole officials is restricted. Sanctions are presumed to be certain, and

they are applied in a progressive, incremental manner. By ensuring consistent responses to violations, potential disparities in the treatment of offender groups are purportedly reduced and uniform responses to violations are encouraged (Burke 1997; Taxman et al. 1999). Graduated sanctioning models also hold the promise of proactively preventing revocation hearings by compelling parole agencies to manage offender noncompliance in the community (Burke 1997; Taxman et al. 1999). This study contributed to the limited knowledge regarding these reforms by examining the short-term effects of an administrative violation response policy on parole officers' decisions to pursue revocation hearings.

In general, we found that the policy change was effective in reducing the number of hearings that parole officers initiated. Officers only pursued hearings for 12 percent of violation incidents after the policy was implemented, compared to 17 percent before the policy was implemented. The multivariate analysis confirmed these findings by revealing that, once relevant factors were controlled for, officers pursued fewer hearings for violations that occurred during the time period after the policy was put in place. Because the policy was implicitly designed to compel officers to manage offender noncompliance in the community (as opposed to initiating revocation proceedings), it seems that the imposition of the policy was effective in achieving this goal.

The findings from this study also reveal several differences in how offenders who violated the conditions of their release were treated before and after the implementation of the policy. In the period after the policy was put in place, officers' hearing decisions were influenced more strongly by the number of sanctions previously imposed during the offenders' period of supervision. This finding also suggests that officers were imposing more community-based sanctions prior to initiating a hearing in the post-policy time period.

Whether offenders had received treatment services (i.e., number of service referrals, living in a residential program) increased the likelihood that officers pursued hearings in the period before the policy was implemented, but it had little effect on hearing decisions in the period after the policy was implemented. Officers may have been more likely to initiate revocation proceedings for offenders who had received treatment in the pre-policy period because they felt that those offenders had been given an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves. In the period after the policy was implemented, however, officers were constrained by the policy, which structured sanctioning according to formally rational criteria. In the period after the policy was put in place, officers were also less likely to pursue hearings for violations committed by offenders who were employed. On the one hand, this finding suggests that officers considered this seemingly extralegal characteristic

of offenders' situations when making their decisions. In his study of California parole officers, Simon (1993) also found that offenders' employment status influenced officers' violation decisions. However, it could also be that employed offenders committed fewer violations in general, and as a result of the policy did not "graduate" to the point where Ohio officers would pursue a hearing.

The results of the offender-level analyses revealed very few changes in the factors that influenced parole officers' hearing decisions resulting from the implementation of the policy. For example, the demographic characteristics of offenders had no effects on officers' hearing decisions in either time period (before or after). Consistent with the policy directive to treat sex offenders as a separate risk category, parole officers were more likely to pursue hearings for sex offenders in the time period after the policy was implemented. The decision to treat sex offenders as a separate risk category followed from the perceived risk that sexual offenders pose to public safety (see, e.g., Huebner & Bynum 2006). Overall, then, the imposition of the policy resulted in very few increases in uniformity because there were few disparities that resulted from officers' decisions to pursue a hearing in the first place.

The broader implications of the findings regarding the effects of the policy may be that concerns regarding the disparate treatment of offenders that often fuel the implementation of policies designed to restrict parole officials' discretion are unfounded. Parole officials appear to make sanctioning decisions primarily based on legally relevant factors and indicators that may reflect offenders' adjustment in the community (e.g., employment). However, the findings here do suggest that violation response policies such as Ohio's can reduce officers' reliance on revocation hearings and promote the management of offender noncompliance with community-based sanctions. These latter findings are promising because the state did not increase the number of sanctioning options, programs, or other alternatives to incarceration after the policy was implemented. Officers simply used the resources already available to them to manage offender noncompliance within the community. Such a finding could be important to states that are seeking to reduce the influence of paroled offenders (via revocation) on prison populations (see, e.g., Blumstein & Beck 2005).

Administrative graduated sanction policies such as the one under study here are also predicted to increase offender compliance by promoting consistency, uniformity, and ultimately fairness in the application of sanctioning (Burke 1997; Taxman et al. 1999). Although not the focus of this study, the findings may also be relevant to states seeking to increase offender compliance by enacting policies that promote uniformity in sanctioning. A separate analysis of the data examined in this study revealed no differences between

the pre- and post-policy samples in offenders' odds of recidivism (Martin & Van Dine 2008). On the one hand, these findings suggest that Ohio's violation response policy did not achieve an increase in offender compliance; however, such findings must be tempered by the results of this study, which revealed a reduction in officers' use of hearings but no significant increases in uniformity across officers' sanctioning practices. These results imply that officers were applying sanctions fairly prior to the implementation of the policy. Thus, if uniformity in sanctioning contributes to offenders' perceptions of fairness in sanctioning, which in turn increases compliance, then there is no reason to expect that offender compliance (other than compliance measured by a reduction in revocations for technical violations) would have increased as a result of the policy. Of course, all this assumes that uniformity in the application of sanctions influences offenders' perceptions of fairness. It may very well be that what offenders perceive as fair and what appears to be fair from the perspectives of justice system actors is not the same. Future researchers may want to investigate these issues.

The primary focus of this study was on the effects of the administrative sanction policy on parole officers' hearing decisions. However, the findings also add to the limited research on parole officers' decision making. Influences of parole officers' decisions were considered within perspectives on justice system actors' decisionmaking. Consistent with these perspectives and studies of justice system actors' decision making (e.g., Huebner & Bynum 2006; Johnson 2006; Smith et al. 1984; Spohn 2000; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth 2001; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Ulmer & Johnson 2004; Wooldredge et al. 2005; Zatz 2000), we uncovered that legal factors accounted for most of the variation in hearing decisions at both the incident- and offender-level of analysis. The results from the incident-level analysis of the pooled sample indicated that the legal predictors accounted for 88 percent of the explained variation in officers' revocation hearing decisions. The offender-level legally relevant variables accounted for 96 percent of the explained variation in hearing decision rates. No substantive changes in these findings emerged in the analysis of the pre- or post-policy sample. Thus, it seems that parole officers arrive at their decisions to pursue revocation proceedings primarily by considering formal rational criteria that seemingly represent the "risk" that offenders pose to the community.

In contrast to a number of studies of the decisions of other justice system actors (e.g., Johnson 2006; Smith et al. 1984; Spohn 2000; Spohn & Holleran 2000; Steffensmeier & Demuth 2001; Steffensmeier et al. 1998; Ulmer & Johnson 2004; Zatz 2000), the results of this study reveal that the demographic features of offenders under supervision had virtually no effect on parole

officers' hearing decisions. Although the coefficient for offenders' race reached statistical significance in the pooled model, the magnitude of the effect was weak and not in the expected direction. These findings, along with the results of the comparisons of the findings derived from the pre- and post-policy samples, suggest that there was little or no disparity that resulted from officers' hearing decisions. In general, these findings are consistent with other studies of line-level probation/parole officers' sanctioning decisions (e.g., Harris et al. 2001; Simon 1993).

It may be that parole officers rely less on the demographic characteristics of offenders than other justice system actors because they are often more involved with offenders' lives (e.g., Lynch 1998; Simon 1993). This increased involvement of parole officers in offenders' lives may decrease the uncertainty surrounding their sanctioning decisions. In addition to legal factors, parole officers may instead be influenced by more proximate, albeit still substantively rational concerns such as situational indicators of offenders' risk to reoffend. Indeed, the findings from this study reveal that officers were less likely to initiate revocation hearings in cases where offenders were employed. Officers could be more willing to use community sanctions (as opposed to pursue revocation) to hold offenders accountable if they have demonstrated some indication of conventional behavior (e.g., employment). However, if offenders have not demonstrated some level of commitment to conventional behavior, then officers may be more willing to attribute blame to the personal characteristics of those offenders as opposed to environmental factors. Researchers have observed that justice system actors who attribute blame to the personal characteristics of individuals rather than environmental characteristics often sanction them more harshly (e.g., Bridges & Steen 1998). In further support of this idea, officers were more likely to pursue hearings if offenders were homeless or at large at the time of their violation. Officers also initiated hearings more often if offenders had been afforded an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves in a residential program but violated their conditions of release while in that program. In contrast, offenders who were cohabitating with conventional others (such as a parent or spouse) were not treated differently than offenders living alone or with friends or relatives. Regardless of these latter findings, however, the mixture of results observed here suggests that future studies should examine the relevance of more direct measures of these concepts (e.g., commitment to conventional behaviors). Future studies may also examine what factors parole officers perceive to be reflective of offenders' commitment to convention. The limitations of our measures aside, the findings from this study do suggest that officers are less likely to pursue revocation hearings for offenders who are



successfully reintegrating into the community but more likely to initiate revocation proceedings if offenders do not appear to be adjusting to the community. These findings are consistent with Simon's (1993), and similar findings have also been observed in studies of judicial sentencing practices (e.g., Spohn & Holleran 2000; Wooldredge et al. 2005).

Taken together, the results discussed above suggest that when faced with uncertainty, parole officers are much more likely to consider substantively rational factors related to successful reintegration over the demographic features of offenders. In other words, the increased involvement that parole officers have in offenders' lives provides them with more information than other criminal justice actors (Lynch 1998; Simon 1993). This information, in turn, provides some of the foundation for officers' determinations regarding offenders' prospects for reform (perceptual shorthand). Although still limited in many respects, the substantively rational information parole officers consider seems to be more proximately linked to successful reentry into the community instead of more limited considerations of gender, age, or race. From parole officers' perspectives, offenders whose behaviors demonstrate some level of commitment to convention may be viewed as those offenders who are less likely to reoffend. Of course, additional research including more direct measures of the relevant concepts is needed to substantiate these processes, and future studies may also examine other characteristics of offenders' situations such as whether they have children or their level of education. Studies of decisions by other justice system actors have found that these factors influence legal decision making (Griffin & Wooldredge 2006; Koons-Witt 2002).

In addition to the limitations regarding some of the measures used here, it is worth noting several other limitations to this study. First, a number of the variables were created from information retrieved from official sources. Even though attempts were made to increase the reliability of the measures by cross-referencing the information across multiple sources, the information is still potentially subject to some discretionary recording by parole officials. Second, the findings are only generalizable to short-term effects of the policy because offenders were followed for only one year after their release. Several studies of state sentencing reforms have revealed some differences in short- versus long-term effects (e.g., Koons-Witt 2002), although other studies have found virtually no differences over time (e.g., Wooldredge 2009). Absent a longer follow-up period, however, we are unable to discern whether the differences between the pre- and post-policy time periods persisted over time or whether new differences emerged. Finally, the limited amount of data collected here prohibited us from examining the potential rel-

evance of community context on officers, sanctioning decisions. Researchers of courtroom actors' sentencing decisions have uncovered important variation in sanctioning across county contexts (e.g., Johnson 2006; Ulmer & Johnson 2004). Although parole officers report to the state, whereas courtroom actors work within counties, it is certainly possible that the context within which offenders are situated could influence officers' revocation decisions (see Smith et al. 1984 for a related discussion pertaining to police officers' arrest decisions). Future research may investigate this possibility.

Altogether, this study of the effects of Ohio's implementation of an administrative graduated sanctioning policy revealed a decrease in officers' reliance on revocation hearings and some modest increases in uniformity. It appears, however, that the effects of the policy on reducing disparities were minor, simply because the relationships between offenders' extralegal characteristics and officers' revocation decisions were weak to nonexistent in the first place. Changes may also have been less likely because the initial sanctioning procedures were generally perceived as fair by officers (Makarios et al. 2010; Steiner et al. 2011). Studies of the effects of sentencing guidelines have revealed similar results (e.g., Griffin & Wooldredge 2001; Wooldredge et al. 2005). Further, many of the factors that were related to officers' hearing decisions could be considered indicators of successful reentry, as opposed to demographic characteristics such as race or gender. Still, the findings from this study are limited to one state, so studies of other jurisdictions may uncover different results. The need to consider parole reform is clear (Burke 1997; Committee on Community Supervision and Desistance From Crime 2008; Solomon et al. 2005; Travis & Lawrence 2002; Travis & Petersilia 2001; Travis & Visher 2005), and it is only through continued evaluation of promising reentry initiatives that legal researchers can better understand what works and what does not.

**Appendix A: Ohio Adult Parole Authority Progressive Sanction Grid**

Offender Category	Violation Level	Number of Sanction Incidents													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Risk: 6,7,8 (High)	High-Severity Violation	US	US	PBS	OC	IC									
	Low-Severity Violation	US	US	US	US	PBS	OC	IC	IC						
Risk: 3,4,5 (Medium)	High-Severity Violation	US	US	US	PBS	PBS	OC	IC	IC						
	Low-Severity Violation	US	US	US	US	US	US	PBS	PBS	OC	OC	IC			
Risk: 0,1,2 (Low)	High-Severity Violation	US	US	US	US	PBS	US	OC	IC	PBS	IC	IC			
	Low-Severity Violation	US	US	US	US	US	US	US	US	US	PBS	OC	OC	OC	IC

*Risk Assessment Items:* Prior convictions (adult or juvenile), prior commitment more than one year (adult or juvenile), recent commitment-free period (three years), probation/parole/confinement/escape status at this time, prior probation/parole revocations, older offender (40 or over).

*Violation Level:* Major: sex offender violations, weapons infractions, threatening behavior, absconding out-of-state, and causing bodily injury (major violations are not addressed through the grid). High-Severity: 1st and 2nd degree misdemeanors, absconding, violation of protection order, intentional contact with victim, unsuccessful program termination, and unapproved change of residence. Low-Severity: All other violations.

*Code for Grid Box:* US: Unit-Level Sanction (e.g., privilege restriction, electronic monitoring) PBS: Parole Board Summons OC: Out-of-Custody Hearing IC: In-Custody Hearing

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