Theoretical and Practical Application of Loose Coupling: A Study of Criminal Justice Agencies in the State of Florida

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Abstract
Karl Weick’s (1976) application of loose coupling theory to the study of organizations presented an opportunity to explore how social service agencies interact in exchange relationships. However, there has been little empirical research in the social sciences that applies loose coupling to social service organizations since that time. This is especially problematic as public agencies, such as criminal justice agencies and mental health agencies, are increasingly being tasked with the daunting prospect of working together to address social issues. However, what was not addressed was the systemic fragmentation associated with both the criminal justice and mental health systems. The current study sought to explore the fragmentation within the criminal justice system based on the theory of loose coupling. To accomplish this, a Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 1991) survey, utilizing multiple mail-based and email-based contacts, was administered to all law enforcement agencies within the state of Florida. Findings indicate that the system is not as fragmented as believed in that responding agencies are not only willing to couple with outside agencies but also report relatively high levels of experience with interprofessional collaboration. These findings have profound implications for the future of multi-agency responses to social problems.

Key Words: coupling, interprofessional collaboration, collaboration, loose coupling, organizational behavior, organizational relationships

INTRODUCTION
In 1976, Karl Weick first introduced the concept of loose coupling, a conceptual framework formerly relegated to the field of computer systems, to organizational studies. From an organizational perspective, the concept of loose coupling suggests a resilient system of independent agencies that work harmoniously in an exchange relationship while the different parts retain physical and professional autonomy (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979; Weick, 1976). Moreover, coupling can occur within organizations, forming a more cohesive organization, as well as
without, which creates interdependent partnerships between organizations. For public service organizations, effectively exchanging information between agencies can be especially valuable when the objective of their relationship is in a state of change or unclear, but a sudden response to a social issue is warranted (Orton & Weick, 1990). However, the degree of coupling within the organization may affect the amenability to couple with external agencies and accept changes in the delivery of social services.

A contemporary example of coupling, and the ambiguity associated with the concept in social service organizations, can be illustrated in the relationship between criminal justice and mental health agencies and the dilemma of appropriately handling mentally ill offenders. Although there continues to be growing support for collaboration between mental health and criminal justice practitioners when handling mentally ill offenders, the paradox of providing the most appropriate treatment in the least restrictive criminal justice setting has led to ambiguity among the participants as to their exact purpose in the exchange relationship (i.e., treatment vs. incarceration). However, the ambiguity of the exchange relationship is overshadowed by a shared perspective of a social issue (such as incarceration being an inappropriate response to the mentally ill offender) (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979), which allows the opportunity for a shared perspective and response (Glassman, 1973). Using the example of mental health and criminal justice agencies, this shared perspective has made effective coupling even more plausible because both the mental health and criminal justice systems fall under the umbrella of human services, which, simply stated, are loosely coupled to begin with.

The flexibility of loose coupling allows for systems, even those that seem ideologically incompatible (like criminal justice and mental health) to join when a need arises and create composite services (such as intensive case management of mentally ill offenders, which utilizes the power of criminal sanctions to enforce mental health treatment). These composite services occur when managers redefine their perceptions of their operational environments based on the creation of a shared view with external agencies regarding a social issue. However, the fact that the systems may be incompatible due to ideology, operations, etc., along with the fact that ineffective loose coupling can allow for exchange relationships to be disassembled quickly leads to the reality that the structural and organizational elements within the system are often only nominally linked. This leads to rule and jurisdiction violations, unimplemented decisions, and unpredictable consequences for decisions that are implemented (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

The impact of inappropriate coupling within a system allows for the possibility of ceremonial representation within the system instead of legitimate involvement of organizational resources (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979). This allows for the system to accept increasing facets of operation (e.g., the criminal justice system’s adoption of drug courts, mental health courts, etc.) without significantly altering day to day operations (Glassman, 1973), thereby increasing societal legitimacy while maintaining organizational efficiency (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, ceremonial representation produces negative effects that can lead to further specialization and fragmentation between and within agencies, which exacerbates the ambiguity of the concept of loose coupling and exchange relationships.

Systemic fragmentation within the fields of mental health treatment and criminal justice, coupled with a lack of inter-communication between the practitioners in both fields, has made practical coupling between criminal justice and mental health practitioners exceedingly dif-
ficult. The reality that both systems are individually fragmented and loosely coupled (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979) makes the prospect of successful coupling between the systems to address the treatment of the mentally ill highly problematic. The result is that both criminal justice and mental health systems have been attempting to address the problem as autonomous entities. In effect, the most logical course of action, collaboration, has been haphazardly pursued without a basic knowledge of the willingness to collaborate among criminal justice practitioners, or knowledge of collaborative practices among criminal justice practitioners. This situation provides the impetus for the current study of criminal justice practitioner’s views on collaboration, and a study of the collaboration practices among criminal justice agencies.

MEASURING COUPLING

The coupling of criminal justice agencies can be measured in two ways. First, from a theoretical standpoint, coupling can be measured through an agency’s willingness to communicate with outside agencies. Appropriately coupled agencies theoretically possess a willingness to communicate with outside agencies (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979). This communication with outside agencies and social institutions facilitates a holistic view of the offender and creates a Beccarian style, offender-based punishment that would deter that specific offender from future criminal activities.

An integral factor related to interagency communication and decision making is the presence of professional autonomy. Autonomy for agency representatives within a collaborative effort allows for immediate decision making from the line practitioners and provides flexibility to the collaborative effort through a process of information sharing (Brundrett, 1998; Corrigan, 2000; Creamer, 2003; Johnston & Hedeman, 1994; Jordan, 1999; Koehler & Baxter, 1997; Leonard, 1999a, 1999b; Leonard & Leonard, 2001). Retaining professional autonomy is an important facet of a harmonious partnership within a collaborative effort that is appropriately coupled because it allows the stakeholders to take ownership of the decisions being made (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979; Weick, 1976). The literature acknowledges that agencies that are inappropriately coupled retain nominal linkages, which can lead to rule violations, unimplemented decisions, and vague consequences for the decisions that are not implemented (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

It is recognized that for professional autonomy to remain significant within appropriately coupled agencies, open communication without fear of reprisal is necessary (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Short & Greer, 1997). The uninhibited flow of communication permits trust building and provides a dissemination of differing ideas among collaborative stakeholders while fostering a sense of selflessness (Jordan, 1999; Knop, LeMaster, Norris, Raudensky, & Tannehill, 1997; Leonard & Leonard, 2001). Therefore, open communication can be measured through the degree to which respondents feel comfortable exercising professional autonomy within collaborative efforts and the degree of importance that they give to other stakeholders within the collaboration.

The ability to communicate without fear of reprisal, as well as the willingness of collaborative partners to share decision-making power and responsibility, are but some of the criteria that were utilized as measures in this study. Other factors, such as the ability to volunteer to work with outside agencies, valuing the diverse backgrounds of other agencies, sharing a clear sense of purpose, and staying committed to a collaborative effort, were used as measures of coupling.
Unfortunately, due to the divergent ideologies often found within interprofessional collaboration efforts, and the lack of shared theoretical foundations for collaborating (Walsh, Brabeck, & Howard, 1999), there frequently develops a vying for authority (Abramson & Mizrahi, 1996; Allen-Meares & Moroz, 1989; Biaggio & Bittner, 1990; Reppucci & Crosby, 1993; Staley, 1991; Tharinger, Bricklin, Johnson, Paster, Lambert, Feshbach, Oakland, & Sanchez, 1996; Theil & Robinson, 1997; Walsh, Brabeck, & Howard, 1999; Weil, 1982). Such power-struggles do not allow for professional diversity to accomplish strategic planning and problem solving (Knop et al., 1997; Jordan, 1999) and dissuade willingness to share power (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Mankoe, 1996). The ultimate result of this power struggle is the emergence of non-coupled agencies that are unwilling to relinquish authority or communicate with outside agencies. This situation represents the negative side of the coupling continuum where agencies are, at best, nominally linked and any collaborative effort is ceremonial.

As stated, agencies that are appropriately coupled experience a symbiotic relationship with other agencies that involves open communication and information sharing. However, practically speaking, a second way to measure an agency’s coupling is to analyze an agency’s past experience of involvement in community outreach programs and team approaches to social problem solving (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Short & Greer, 1997). This collaborative experience provides useful insight into the practice of the agency’s philosophy. Logically, the concepts of agency coupling and collaborative experience are inextricably linked. This rationale is based on the assumption that as agencies become more coupled with outside agencies, then their collaborative experience will increase, and the inverse should also hold true. Even though it is possible that agencies may be highly coupled with outside agencies and not have any practical experience with collaboration, such agencies are not actually expected to be found, as agencies that participate in an exchange relationship are hypothesized to have engaged in an actual collaboration project (Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979; Maguire & Katz, 2002; Manning, 1997).

To attempt to dissect collaborative experience from coupling is a complex yet necessary task. Hypothetically, appropriately coupled agencies will have undertaken several collaborative experiences in several forms. However, the necessity to divide coupling from collaborative experience lies in the fact that one concept, coupling, lies in the theoretical understanding of what it means to participate in an exchange relationship with external agencies. The other concept, collaborative experience, is equally important in that it measures the practical application of that theoretical understanding. This scrutiny of coupling and collaborative experience as separate principles, theoretical and practical, is the basis for the current study.

**STUDY ADMINISTRATION**

The current study utilized a mail- and email-based survey to focus on the perceptions of leaders in all of the Florida criminal justice agencies toward collaborating with non-criminal justice agencies regarding mentally ill offenders. A complete enumeration of the 20 state’s attorney’s offices, 50 county probation offices, 67 county sheriffs, and 316 municipal police departments across the State of Florida was surveyed. The survey was distributed to the agency head, or their designated representative responsible for mentally ill offender policy, for each agency using the Tailored Design Method, as formulated by Don Dillman (2000), for a total of 453 possible respondents. The Tailored Design Method, as stated by Dillman (2000) utilizes several design elements, such as; easily understood questionnaires, multiple contacts (with
the potential for multiple modes of contact), and inexpensive response methods (i.e., stamped return envelopes, a computer-based survey, etc.) in order to increase the response rate. For the purposes of this survey, respondents were contacted over a 45-day period, with a letter once before and once after survey administration, as well as three “survey reminder” emails distributed after the post-survey letter.

There were 222 actual respondents, which accounted for 49% of the 453 possible respondents. Within this, 56% (37 total) of sheriff’s offices responded, 50% (158 total) of municipal police departments, 45% (9 total) of state’s attorney’s offices, and 33% (18 total) of probation offices. On the surface, this distribution presents a representative sample of all agencies surveyed with the exception of probation offices. This was in large part due to the number of privately run probation departments (approximately 56% of all departments) with outdated contact information: Approximately 80% of all privately funded probation departments could not be contacted. Additionally, two of the potential respondents for publicly funded probation offices no longer existed, as the county had done away with the services altogether, which left a total of 39 possible respondents. Eighteen of these 39 possible respondents from probation offices actually responded, which equates to an adjusted response rate of 46% for probation offices, and represents primarily publicly funded probation offices.

Furthermore, it was found that 65% of overall responding agencies came from the top 30% of counties based on population density (as reported by the 2000 census). The other agency types had at least 55% of their respondents coming from the top 40% of counties based on population density. Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties had the highest modes of responding agencies respectively, and 76% of responding municipal police departments coming from the top third of counties based on population density. Approximately 49% of responding agencies possessed less than 50 total personnel (sworn and unsworn), 17% had 51–100 personnel, and 33% of responding agencies possessed 101 or more total personnel within the agency.

Furthermore, the data illustrates that the respondents were slightly skewed (although not significantly) toward areas with higher total crime rates. The total crime rate for the State of Florida in 2000 was 4,855.3 per 100,000, while the average crime rate of the responding agencies was 4,989.9 (median = 4,824.6; range = 937.6 to 7,306.8, standard deviation 1,475.9; skewness = -.269; Standard Error of the skew = .163).

Additionally, responding agencies were significantly skewed toward areas with higher per capita income. The average per capita income for the State of Florida was $29,559. Alternatively, the average community per capita income among responding agencies was $27,727 (median = $26,594; range = $12,385 to $43,626; standard deviation = 7,200.12), but the most frequently reported per capita income among responding agencies was significantly higher at $43,626, which led to the positive skewing of results (skewness = .836, Standard Error of the skew = .163). Regardless of the positive skewing, both the median and the mean of responding agency’s per capita income are lower than the State of Florida average per capita income. This indicates responding agencies that are from areas with lower per capita incomes.

**COUPLING SCALE RESULTS**

It must be noted that the derived measures for coupling are purely exploratory. The concept of coupling in organizational research has enjoyed little in the way of empirical research. As such, the measures used in this study were obtained from the literature-based theoretical foun-
dations of coupling (i.e., open communication without fear of reprisal, professional autonomy and use of discretion, a shared perspective with external agencies regarding social issues, and views on the extent of agency involvement). Coupling is an elusive term, as it presents a bipolar scale ranging from little practice with the above named concepts (inappropriate coupling) to a deeper understanding and practice (appropriate coupling). As the concept of coupling is problematic to construct, this study presents an exploratory construct of coupling. Although not exhaustive, the construct presented in this study presents a unique and much needed foundation for future research on the concept of coupling.

Collectively, the following variables provide indicators of “coupling” and specifically cover the theoretical components of “coupling.” Measures of appropriate coupling (no repercussions for open discussion, divert mentally ill out of criminal justice, open communication encouraged, agency values outside input, flexible with outside agencies, shares decision-making power, decision responsibility should be shared, defined goals are necessary, collaboration possible when all are committed, and collaboration effective when not forced) were reverse coded as Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. This was done to facilitate interpretation of results so that higher numbers would represent greater levels of coupling. Additionally, measures of inappropriate coupling; prior approval for decisions, plan of action in order to collaborate, unlikely to share decision making, commitment determined by agency leadership, and seeks blame for problems were coded as Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5 with the same logic in mind that higher numerical values would represent greater levels of coupling. Coding the variables in this way would lead to an expected range of 15 (very uncoupled) to 75 (highly coupled) if all 15 variables are used in the final scale construction. Multiple measures were used (as with shared decision making) in order to begin to adequately measure the multiple facets associated with coupling between agencies. It is believed that this would allow the current study to address how agencies feel about sharing decision-making power with external agencies (from both a negative and positive perspective) as well as measure the propensity to do so.

The fifteen measures of coupling were further analyzed through a test of Cronbach’s alpha for group inter-correlationonal consistency in order to assess the ability to create a coupling scale based on these variables. Analysis of Cronbach’s Alpha statistics displayed that the variables “leadership determines level of commitment” and “collaboration more effective when not forced” should be removed from the final scale in order to increase the alpha coefficient. This was done, and the resulting scale produced a coefficient of .654 (Friedman’s $X^2 = 120.70, p = .000, n = 184$) based on a two-way mixed interclass correlation to measure the agreement of values within cases. Although the alpha coefficient could have been increased by removing more variables from consideration, the increase would have been marginal and would have reduced the conceptual scope of the scale of coupling. This would not have allowed for a complete analysis of the concept of agency coupling as derived from the literature. Based on the findings, the 13 variables were combined into a scale of coupling.

The mean score for the coupling scale was 48.73, and the scale ranged from 38 (moderately coupled) to 62 (highly coupled) with a standard deviation of 4.08. The sample’s observed range of coupling was compared to the expected range of coupling (13 - not coupled at all to 65 – very highly coupled; based on 13 variables) in order to assess the sample’s level of coupling.
A one-way ANOVA was calculated to compare the mean scores of coupling among the responding groups (sheriff’s offices, police departments, probation offices, and state’s attorney’s offices). A significant difference was found (F (3, 180) = 3.11, p = .028) among the means with probation offices showing the highest mean score for coupling followed by sheriff’s offices, state’s attorney’s offices, and municipal police departments respectively.

Overall, the sample represents responding agencies that are moderately to highly coupled with outside agencies. Interestingly, agencies that are either not coupled at all or possess low levels of coupling are not represented in the sample. This raises questions on whether uncoupled agencies exist or chose not to respond, or if the conceptual framework of coupling as espoused by the literature is accurate.

COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE INDEX

Like the theoretical concept of coupling, which moves from inappropriate to appropriate along a continuum, the practical application of coupling through collaborative experience logically falls into a continuum from not experienced to possessing a great deal of experience.

Due to the dichotomous nature of the variables used to measure collaborative experience, the variables (agency currently working with community leaders, agency works to keep mentally ill out of criminal justice, agency participates in outreach programs, agency represented in community improvement, and agency provides CIT training) were not checked for skewness (due to the obvious data ramifications of having just yes/no responses). Further analysis through Cronbach’s alpha, to determine the feasibility of creating an index of collaborative experience, produced a coefficient of .639; Friedman’s $X^2 = 24.77$, $p = .000$, $n = 222$.

The collaborative experience index ranges from 0 (no experience) to 4 (a great deal of experience; standard deviation = 1.29), with a mean of 2.43 (median = 3.00), which displays moderate to high levels of collaborative experience.

Unlike levels of agency coupling where a statistically significant, although not substantial, difference between agency means emerged with probation offices displaying the greatest levels of coupling and police departments displaying the least amount of coupling, the index of collaborative experience displayed more substantial differences. A one-way ANOVA was calculated comparing the mean scores of respondents’ agency type and levels of collaborative experience. A significant difference was found (F (3, 218) = 6.23, $p = .000$) with sheriff’s offices displaying the greatest level of collaborative experience followed by municipal police departments, probation offices, and state’s attorney’s offices respectively. Interestingly, municipal police departments report high levels of collaborative experience yet reported the lowest levels of agency coupling among all responding agencies. This alludes to the possibility of negative experiences with collaborative exchanges that drove municipal police departments to become less coupled with other agencies.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS ON COUPLING

Overall, the current study suggests that coupling falls into a continuum, much like the previous literature on coalitions and collaboration propose (Schrage, 1995; Leonard & Leonard, 2001). Theoretically, this continuum ranges from being appropriately coupled and desiring communication and input from outside agencies to less appropriately coupled with agency
leadership determining the extent of commitment to collaborative efforts and agencies unlikely to share decision-making powers. Within the current study, however, the respondents reported a truncated version of the coupling continuum in that all of the responding agencies were at least moderately coupled. There were no agencies that were inappropriately coupled, and it is therefore difficult to determine if an actual scale of coupling (from inappropriate to appropriate) exists. Furthermore, in the construction of the scale of coupling, agencies that did not respond to all of the measures being used were excluded from the results, which further limits the generalizability of the results.

Due to the truncation of the coupling scale (representing agencies that are moderately to highly coupled) agencies with low levels of coupling were not represented. This presents several possibilities for future researchers. First, the research on the coupling of criminal justice agencies may be dated, as shown that much of the research on agency coupling comes from the 1970s (Glassman, 1973; Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976). Therefore further study is necessary in order to further determine the current nature of agency coupling within the criminal justice system. A second possibility is that those agencies that are uncoupled chose not to respond to the survey. As a result, research is needed to determine if non-responding agencies chose not to respond to the study due to lower levels of coupling. Although these agencies did not respond to a mail-based survey, a qualitative analysis of a few agencies via face-to-face, or phone-based interviews may produce better results.

Finally, it is possible that the conceptual framework of agency coupling as espoused by the literature from the 1970s does not reflect the actual current practice of agency coupling. Therefore, uncoupled agencies would not have been able to appropriately respond in a way that was reflective of their coupling status. As a result, future research should continue to form a definition of coupling that is reflective of contemporary day-to-day operations, which responding agencies may more easily associate with. This study provides a foundation from which to begin the evolution of this definition as it represents one of the very few studies of loose coupling in the social services.

A possible direction for this future research lies in the finding that similar to the minimal literature on coupling, which is based on bringing order to a fragmented criminal justice system through interprofessional collaboration (Manning, 1997; Maguire & Katz, 2002; Weick, 1979), the respondents in the current study appear to focus on increasing knowledge and skills through peer interaction. This is displayed through the measures of coupling, which illustrate a desire for open communication because the agency values outside input and is flexible in working with outside agencies. This is an especially important finding for advocates of the collaborative treatment of mentally ill offenders. If, as reported, criminal justice agencies desire input from external agencies and are flexible in working with outside agencies, then their amenability to accepting the President’s Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus Project (2004) objectives is very high. Additionally, it would appear from the data that criminal justice agencies are not as loosely coupled or fragmented as once thought and seek to maximize their organizational development through peer interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Walsh, Brabeck, & Howard, 1999; Wood & Gray, 1991).

This development would seem to make criminal justice agencies more approachable for information sharing with outside agencies and negates a long-standing criticism of the criminal justice system. Although there was nothing in the current data, other than a less than major-
ity response rate, to make the findings suspect (such as outliers), continuing research on the coupling continuum would be able to discern if the respondents in the current study were an anomaly or are representative of the true nature of coupling among criminal justice agencies.

**PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF COUPLING THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE**

The concept of collaborative experience is theoretically enmeshed with agency coupling in that collaborative exchanges are believed to represent the manifestation of an agency’s level of coupling. This led to several measures associated with collaborative exchanges that would assess the participation of agencies in activities external to the agency. It was believed that presenting the concepts of coupling and collaborative experience as separate concepts would be a difficult prospect due to the theorized interrelationship between the two concepts, as espoused by the literature. This co-relationship was supported and alluded to a continuum of collaborative experience much like the continuum of coupling.

Along this continuum, sheriff’s offices reported the highest levels of collaborative experience, which corresponds with their reported high levels of agency coupling. However, other responding agencies report moderate to low levels of collaborative experience. This may be due to the generalized measures of collaborative experiences (i.e., participation in community outreach programs) as opposed to identifying specific collaborative exchanges that responding agencies may have more easily identified with. Through a general definition of collaborative experiences, errors in interpreting the true meaning of a survey item used within the study may have occurred. Therefore, specificity in identifying and defining collaborative exchanges would assist in reducing this interpretation error and may increase response rates.

Future researchers should reduce ambiguity about studying types of collaborative exchanges as much as possible. Reducing ambiguity about what is involved in collaborative activities is important in reducing the apprehension associated with engaging in a collaborative exchange and was cited, in this study, as an important part of why agencies couple with other agencies. Furthermore, a study of why sheriff’s offices report having engaged in more collaborative exchanges needs to be made. It is believed that this engagement may be due to the fact that county sheriffs are elected to their positions and highly visible to the public, which may cause more participation in collaborative exchanges as a result of political pressure to do so. The presence of political pressure to engage in collaborative exchanges would support Farmakopoulou’s (2002) assertion that agencies (and allegedly agency leaders) will engage in collaborative exchanges out of a sense of self-preservation. The result of this political pressure may have an unmeasured effect on assessing the perception of benefits from collaboration and true levels of support for collaboration. The current study did not address political pressures that agency leaders face to collaborate, and therefore provides another avenue for researchers to focus on.

**CONCLUSION**

The current study on the coupling of criminal justice agencies was conducted in order to begin to measure the willingness of criminal justice agencies to enter into an exchange relationship with external agencies. Prior to this, little research was conducted into the collaborative behaviors or ideologies among criminal justice practitioners, and it was often assumed that
criminal agencies were fragmented and inappropriately coupled. Instead, responding agencies reported being highly coupled and supportive of collaboration. This negates the arguments posed by much of the research that the criminal justice system is unlikely or unwilling to seek collaborative exchanges. Apparently, not only do criminal justice practitioners acknowledge the growing problem of increased incarceration of the mentally ill, as illustrated by the prior research, (Ditton, 1999, Bonovitz & Bonovitz, 1981, Hagan, Hewitt, & Alwin, 1979), they are willing to work with outside agencies in an exchange relationship to respond to this special needs population. This has profound implications for the success of interprofessional collaboration efforts between mental health and criminal justice agencies. Although this study has helped to dispel the myth that the criminal justice system is a fragmented system that is unwilling to communicate with outside agencies, actual support for interprofessional collaboration needs to continue to be established. Through measuring support for collaboration, and identifying types of collaborative activities that agencies are willing to participate in, a foundation for advocates of policy reform (especially in regards to the mentally ill) can be established. This has profound implications for interdisciplinary systems building and a reduction in the duplication of services, as well as providing linkages to services from agencies that are qualified to address unique social issues.
REFERENCES


**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Christopher R. Sharp received his Ph.D. in Public Affairs from the University of Central Florida. His dissertation, titled “Interprofessional Collaboration between Criminal Justice and Mental Health Practitioners regarding Mentally Ill Offenders: Perceptions of Collaboration from Criminal Justice Practitioners” sought to study support for interprofessional collaboration efforts, in treating mentally ill offenders, between criminal justice and mental health practitioners. Dr. Sharp is currently an assistant professor of criminal justice at Valdosta State University. He is currently involved in researching the concept of loose coupling and organizational collaboration among public service organizations, as well as treatment options for mentally ill offenders.