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Social Identities and Meanings in Correctional Work

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Sociology

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by

Caitlin Botelho

December 2016

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Dr. Martha Copp, Chair

Dr. Joseph Baker

Dr. Melissa Schrift

Keywords: correctional officers; emotion management; gender norms; occupational status;

dirty work

## ABSTRACT

### Social Identities and Meanings in Correctional Work

by

Caitlin Botelho

This study focuses on correctional officers' values and perceptions of their workplace, the people they work with and for, and members of the general public. Although prior research has investigated correctional staff members' feelings about their occupation, far fewer studies have implemented a comprehensive qualitative, microsociological approach. The author conducted 20 in-depth interviews with current and former correctional officers (COs) in public-supported facilities. Additional data were collected through two public Facebook pages designated for COs and citizens interested in the criminal justice system. The study offers insights about the significance of COs' feelings about their work and how the correctional environment affects their lives at work and away from the workplace among the non-incarcerated public. How COs contend with the devalued nature of correctional work and how female COs deal with a male-dominated workplace are primary analytical themes.

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## DEDICATION

My research is dedicated to the two people who inspired me to do this study, my father and aunt, Jeffrey and Gloria Botelho. They have been strong, influential figures throughout my life—greatly impacting my education; believing in me when at times, I did not believe in myself; and encouraged me to spread my wings and fly.

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Over the course of my time spent at ETSU, many friends and family members have unconditionally supported me through troubling occasions and personal uncertainties. More specifically, I would like to thank my friends that I met through the graduate program, Adria and Erin, who took me under their wing and helped shed light on the process of graduate school. Lastly, although my good friend Jeannette Roberts has passed away, I must acknowledge the support she gave to me as I entered a new phase in my life in an unfamiliar environment through her thoughtful and loving words that will never be forgotten (July 23, 1939 - August 17, 2015).

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Although most people do not aspire to enter correctional work, our country's emphasis on incarceration makes correctional supervision necessary. Correctional officers are responsible for managing and setting the tone for their work environment, but this environment leaves its mark on them. A correctional officer (CO) is solely exposed to the hostilities, prejudices, and fears that are part of society, and must work in an enclosed building that requires isolation and confinement with inmates on a routine basis (Cheek and Di Stefano Miller 1983). The most recognizable difference between correctional officers and inmates is that COs get to leave prison or jail (at the end of a shift), whereas the inmates typically do not. Many COs feel that they too, are imprisoned like inmates, which alters their lives (Clemente, Reig-Botella, and Coloma 2015). Correctional officers have no gratifying accomplishments to show the public, which can make them feel alienated from the product of their labor, which is the power over inmates that they are expected to exercise (Marx 1959; Foucault 1995).

It is imperative to look at this subculture, because it not only affects those who participate in it but also members in society as a whole. Some of the groups who are affected by an unhealthy correctional workforce consist of the public, employers, COs, their families, and insurance companies (Finney 2013). Many correctional officers are subjected to working overtime and extended shifts which can take an immediate toll on them, but eventually will affect others. Family members of COs have reported that their relatives have become more controlling, negative, impersonal, and self-justifying subsequent to entering corrections (Cheek and Di Stefano Miller 1983). Most people do not associate with large numbers of criminals and

detainees on a daily basis, so it may be difficult to see how this subculture personally affects those who do not work in corrections, especially because correctional work is sequestered from the public eye.

A year ago, I took a field research methods course and decided to observe at a local county jail. I have several family members who work in corrections, but I wanted to learn more about the work correctional officers do from my outsider perspective. Initially, I thought I knew what correctional work was like, but in fact, I did not. After several observations, I soon realized that COs have a very different take on heinous crimes than I did as an outsider. This stark contrast came to me during one of my observations in a segregation unit for high-risk inmates. As I entered the unit, the correctional officer who escorted me pointed to an inmate who was freely walking around and began to tell me about his accusation. He nonchalantly told me that the inmate was arrested a week earlier for killing his girlfriend and stuffing her body into a trash can with her son's help. My perception of this particular inmate radically changed and my observation of the CO felt chilling because his manner seemed so out of context. The CO's relaxed nonchalance and familiarity with amorality shocked me as an outsider who instantly was taken aback by learning about the inmate's alleged crime.

This study investigates the psychosocial factors in correctional work and how they enhance or devalue correctional officers' identities and impact their emotional, social, and physical well-being by using data collected through 20 in-depth interviews and public Facebook posts. I present the wide-ranging perceptions that COs have about their line of work, and how public perceptions can devalue the occupation and what COs do to address this. Following a review of relevant literature and the methods I employed, I will explore the nature of correctional work, COs' feelings about their work environment and career progression, their interpersonal

relationships inside and outside of the workplace, and the changes in their behavior and personality due to the occupation.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A correctional officer works in a total institution (Goffman 1961) that houses convicted inmates in federal and state prisons and people facing civil or criminal charges in jails. The CO role is to ensure security, facilitate the rehabilitation process, and provide accommodations to inmates (Hemmens and Stohr 2000; Bourbonnais et al.; 2007; Finney et al. 2013). Research in corrections typically investigates issues such as inmate subcultures, prison violence, legal interventions, recidivism, and inmate prison-life (Lambert et al. 2005). To date, there is a small body of research that focuses on the correctional officer subculture and COs' feelings about correctional work and the challenges they endure.

Correctional work is typically viewed as an occupation for men, rather than women. In the early start of corrections, it was more likely for women to work as paraprofessionals or clerical workers rather than work in the line of duty as a correctional officer. According to Horne (1985), in 1979, 13 percent of correctional officers were women. In 1988, female COs made up 15 percent of the occupation (Carlson, Thomas, and Anson 2004). Stephan (2008) reported that 87 percent of correctional officers in federal prisons were male in 2005, leaving females to be the minority at large. Currently, there are 72.9 percent of male staff who work in corrections; a 14.1 percent decrease in male COs and 14.1 percent increase in female COs in a thirty-seven-year span (Federal Bureau of Prisons 2016). These statistics support the notion that corrections continues to be a male-dominated occupation.

### *Predictors of Job Dissatisfaction and Gratification*

Many different psychosocial factors contribute to COs' contentment with or antipathy toward their job. The interpersonal relationships they maintain inside and outside of the workplace are significant in predicting the possibility of adversarial feelings towards correctional work. Stinchcomb and Leip (2013) found that COs' work climate and amount of autonomy greatly impact their job satisfaction. The participants in their study reported that a good workplace offers competitive salaries and benefits, more autonomy in CO decision-making, and appreciation and respect from administrative leaders (Stinchcomb and Leip 2013). Walters (1993) found that male COs who have a good working relationship with female COs also reported a high acceptance and job satisfaction.

Many COs report that the guidelines that administrative leaders set are often unfair and do not effectively address the issues they deal with on an everyday basis. Cheek and Di Stefano Miller (1983) proposed that because correctional work deals with complex situations, one set of rules cannot apply to every situation. They point out that strict guidelines can instead cause COs to act inconsistently, which is problematic in exerting and regulating control over inmates. COs may find the rules inoperable and perceive those who enforce them as overly critical and harsh, which can create resentment towards administration, co-workers, and inmates (Cheek and Di Stefano Miller 1983). Cheek and Di Stefano Miller (1983) further posit that COs not only have a lack of support from administrative leaders who view them as emotionless soldiers, but from members of the public who tend to paint negative images of them, and inmates who verbally and physically assault them.

COs who are highly invested in their jobs may experience a sense of obligation or commitment and view correctional work in a favorable light (Hogan, Lambert, and Griffin 2013). In spite of this, Hogan et al. (2013) found a negative relationship between COs' job involvement and their organizational commitment which may appear paradoxical. COs who reported high levels of job involvement and are not committed to the organization may reinterpret the meaning of their commitment in other ways that meet their moral values rather than associating it with sunken costs such as a loss of benefits (Hogan et al. 2013). My analysis will further support this notion due to an exception in my sample.

COs with high organizational commitment, on the other hand, may experience job stress because of the importance they place on losing the benefits and compensation accumulated during their time there if they were to retire prematurely. Hogan et al. (2013) posited that with limited fiscal budgets in correctional settings, it may be difficult for administrators to incorporate additional means for maximizing staff behavior. Similarly, Clemente et al. (2015) found that the longer a CO spends doing correctional work, the more they will feel trapped by the confines of their job and experience role ambiguity and role conflict. Many participants in my study who had high levels of organizational commitment reported similar feelings about correctional work. As my analysis will show, it may not be that administrators need to implement more monetary incentives and benefits, but express a greater amount of understanding, appreciation, and respect towards COs—something which has no economic value.

#### *Work-Induced Stresses and Personal Costs*

Working in corrections incurs many personal costs. The stressful environment common in corrections is associated with reduced social, emotional, and physical well-being for COs.

From 1992 to 1996, COs experienced 58,000 non-fatal workplace incidents (U.S. Department of Justice 2000). Corrections is second only to policing in high forms of victimization (US Department of Justice 2000). Thirty-seven percent of COs experience forms of stress and burnout, a higher proportion than for the general working population (19-30%) (Finney 2013). Given these statistics, it is interesting to note Lai, Wang, and Keller's (2012) findings that 'vicarious victimization' has a greater chance of heightening COs' fears of being targeted by outsiders than actual personal experience with victimization, and was the greatest predictor of workplace fearfulness and safety. A consequence of correctional work is that as much as COs are expected to be in control, a significant portion of COs feel victimized by the job. The more COs talk about past violent scenarios that occurred and the 'what-ifs,' the more they dwell on ways they can be targeted in and outside of the workplace, which heightens their stress (Lai, Wang, and Keller 2012). Past research on COs' fear of victimization has not been closely examined. My analysis will contribute to research on how these types of responses magnify COs' fear and how they respond to it.

Burnout is "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind" (Griffin et al. 2010: 240). This tends to happen to COs when they experience high amounts of work-home conflict and job stress. Griffin et al. (2010) found that CO burnout was influenced by job satisfaction, job stress, and job involvement. However, they did not examine how COs' motivation to partake in correctional work may influence work-related burnout and detachment, as my analysis will show. Taxman and Gordan (2009) studied whether COs' sense of fairness in the workplace influences their attitudes and level of commitment to the organization. They found that employees who perceived inequity in the workplace reported increased cynicism toward their institution and its

management. Although there is truth to their findings, they neglected to measure CO relationships with their peers, inmates, and outsiders, which allows for a greater, more thorough representation of the possible variation in perceived inequity. My analysis will present how some COs report inequity in the workplace, yet are idealistic about correctional work.

Stress is the cumulative product of a worker's feelings of job-related tension, anxiety, frustration, worry, emotional exhaustion, and distress (Griffin et al. 2010). COs have higher rates of divorce, serious physical and mental health problems, and stress than police officers (Cheek and Di Stefano Miller 1983). Cheek and Di Stefano Miller (1983) found that CO machismo greatly impedes reporting their own weaknesses and stresses, but not in reporting similar problems in co-workers. Interestingly, the participants in their study reported the enjoyment of an intense, stressful, rigid environment, yet the researchers found that the highest job stressor was a "lack of clear guidelines for job performance" (Cheek and Di Stefano Miller 1983: 117).

Auerbach, Quick, and Pegg (2003) found that the highest stress in correctional work occurs for workers whose autonomy is inhibited by unsupportive administrators. CO stress and burnout can arise when there is an imbalance between the demands placed on them by administrative leaders and their ability to deal with those demands (Finney et al. 2013; Hogan, et al. 2013). However, my analysis alludes to the idea that having a considerate administration is not the only "piece of the puzzle" to achieve synchrony, which is extremely hard to accomplish because of the inequities that are built into the nature of correctional work. Having an increased communication with outside agencies is considered to be a positive coping strategy while being in isolation or smoking/drinking alcohol can be considered negative (McCarty, Zhao, and Garland 2007). Hurst and Hurst (2007) did not find any significant differences and discussed



pluralistic ignorance which is when the public behavior of individuals is a misrepresentation of their private opinions. There is a high correlation between depersonalization in men and the use of pain medicine and high alcohol and cigarette consumption and demonstrated the inadequacy of depersonalization as a coping mechanism (Hurst and Hurst 1997). Men are more likely to use coping strategies that involve self-control while women seek support from others.

### *The Underlying Gender Inequalities in Role Expectations*

Correctional work is not typically something an average person would deem highly sought after, nor would they say that it is equally meant for men and women to do. Identity codes (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996) and important job skills for correctional officers usually entail physical strength, a willingness to use force, emotional inexpressiveness, and verbal aggressiveness—traits coded as masculine in our culture (Jurik 1988; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; Griffin 2006). However, achieving that male standard carries a cost for women COs: having others label them as manly or unfeminine (Jurik 1988). Female police officers are more likely to encounter higher levels of harassment, overt hostility, and other negative social interactions when compared to their male colleagues (He, Zhao, and Archbold 2002). Because CO traits are mostly coded as masculine, female COs are expected to conform to the desired masculine performance and outlook (Rader 2005). As one can see from the brief list, the job calls for qualities that men are assumed to have, and that are part of typical masculine gender socialization.

Women in corrections are easily discredited and stigmatized because of their gender, but the CO role in general is discreditable because they are not easily identifiable outside the workplace unless they expressively convey their role (Goffman 1986). Male COs inside the

workplace are not stigmatized, yet women are. But when COs leave the confines of the correctional setting, they benefit from the lack of identification of their work identity. Because of the detached nature one needs to possess in order to successfully be a CO, outsiders may stigmatize a person for employing such behavior, even within the confines of the workplace. It is undesirable for a CO to express or display their emotions about their work, especially while working. Some ways COs combat these associated stigmas is by using tactics such as othering or defensive othering and emotion management (Schwalbe et al. 2000). When one engages in defensive othering, they negatively say or do something that puts down members of their same beleaguered group in hopes to elevate their status and deflect any stigma. Emotion management is managing one's emotions (both feelings and displays) in order to adhere to normative patterns of situationally-specific interaction (Thoits 1990). However, regardless of these tactics, it is extremely difficult for (especially female) COs to suppress their emotions because the structure and nature of their work sets them up for failure (Copp 1998).

Women have made large strides in being able to legally work and have equal opportunities in corrections. In 1969, the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training suggested opportunities for women working in corrections expand as much as possible (Horne 1985). Following this, *Title VII* in the Civil Rights Act of 1972 was amended and prohibited sex discrimination by state and local governments (Horne 1985). In 1973, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals supported equal opportunity for women in corrections and suggested to remove job qualifications that viewed female-gendered traits as a liability (Horne 1985). Even though policies such as these were put into motion, inequality remained existent throughout the 1970s and 1980s and currently exists in correctional work today.

Kanter (1977) provided a typology of female CO roles—all negative stereotypes. The *pet* is seen as an incompetent, innocent, weak little sister who seeks out male protection and readily accepts it; the *seductress* is viewed as sexually desirable and manipulative, yet equally incompetent to the *pet*; the *mother* is typically seen as supportive, scolding and incapable of independent action; and lastly, the *iron maiden* is seen as competent but also harsh, cold, and asexual. These stereotypes convey that there is nothing women can do to be perceived as ideal, competent COs. Taken altogether, these roles convey that male COs are, by contrast, strong, competent, masculine leaders. Female COs may face attitudes of overprotection from male peers as well as unfair competition. Some male colleagues may want to protect a female CO to the extent where she does not have a fair chance to do her job (Etheridge, Hale, and Hambrick 1984).

Pogrebin and Poole (1997) suggested that a generalized perception of threat to male power and control lies behind most harassment of women in the workplace. Farnsworth (1992) found three key sources of resentment by male COs toward female COs: strip searching male prisoners, managing violent prisoners, and inequality of a given assignment that involves higher contact with prisoners. These three key sources of male CO resentment reinforce female CO stereotypes such as being incompetent and helpless due to the nature of the key sources: being in high-risk, compromising situations that may affect a female CO's safety. Male COs may then assume that females need to be rescued, which turns them into liabilities as workers, something that my analysis will further explore.

Bruhn (2013) found that male COs tend to view young female COs as a 'mother' or 'whore' figure, but hold greater respect for older female COs who are typically associated as the

‘mother’ figure. When it comes to new (male and female) COs who may be ignorant or overly macho, COs agree that they present obstacles for other COs (Bruhn 2013). Interestingly, this is the extent of the negative perception of male COs, which can be fluid and change over time due to the accumulation of experience as do some of the other perceptions COs tended to have of female COs. As my analysis will show, negative stereotypes of female COs are typically sexually objectifying. Rader (2005) interviewed 12 female COs and their views of other female COs and found they had negative perceptions of female counterparts that consisted of being weak/incapable, flirty/sexual, resistant, and overly friendly towards inmates. As previously mentioned, (both men and women) COs face many stresses in correctional work, but the point of emphasizing discussion about women is to show how they are operating from a deficit on top of the typical stresses in the workplace environment. The requirement of being emotionally restrained or alienated poses costs for women and men equally, but the possible benefits men get by protecting female co-workers for example, is a question my analysis will explore.

Conversely to my analysis, Griffin (2005) found financial and family responsibilities increased female COs’ job commitment, as opposed to male COs because conventional gender beliefs suggest these obligations have a higher relevance to women. Employees with fewer family responsibilities are more amenable to other job opportunities since they do not have to consider the impact that such a decision might have on a spouse or family member. Griffin suggests that male COs’ job commitment was not affected because conventional gender role expectations exempt men from staying home and not working for pay outside the home. What Griffin’s 2005 study failed to discuss is how role expectations for men to financially provide for the family unit can also fortify their job as a CO, whether they enjoy it or not. Triplett, Mullings, and Scarborough (1999) found that men reported the same level of work-home conflict as

women did. Men must play the role of the provider and employee while still having to fill their roles at home. Men and women COs experience similar conflicts when they attempt to cross rigid cultural boundaries, such as “a women’s place is in the home” and a man’s role is to provide for the family (Triplett et al. 1999: 384).

Although corrections is a male-dominated field, the acceptance of female COs has improved. Walters (1993) surveyed COs from four state prisons in a Midwestern state and found that males with higher levels of education reported a higher acceptance of female COs. In a study of workers in two Midwestern prisons, Carlson et al. (2004) found that male COs believed women had a neutralizing effect while the female COs did not. This suggests that prison culture benefits from women’s conventional traits, such as compassion, empathy, and understanding and may alleviate any tension. Bruhn (2013) argues that for women to survive in this occupation, the department of corrections needs to redefine the correctional officer’s role and embrace the skills, characteristics, and patterns of interaction that female COs bring to the workplace. However, by suggesting these alternatives to change the correctional environment, it only creates false gender parallels (Schwalbe 2007) because the focus placed on female characteristics is not entirely true for all women. Rather than focus on gender traits, emphasis could be directed towards toning down the masculine rhetoric of the job and viewing female COs as human beings as opposed to liabilities, which would be more effective.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

This study examines themes that are prevalent in correctional work and how participants attach importance and meaning to their role as correctional officers. Highlighting these attributes of correctional officers allows a higher understanding of the occupation and awareness within this male-dominated subculture. My research explored the self-reported behaviors and perceptions of correctional officers and examined how correctional officers dealt with their obligations and duties in correctional work.

In order to gain insight into how correctional officers attach meaning and value to their work and occupational identity, I used qualitative methods with an interpretive and interactionist approach (Kleinman, Stenross, and McMahon 1994). I conducted twenty in-depth interviews with eight women and 12 men who currently or formerly have worked in either county jails or state prisons, all in the public sector<sup>1</sup>. The ages of the participants ranged between 20 and 60 years old, with an average age of 39 years. The amount of time they worked in corrections ranged from less than one year to 27 years, with an average of 11 years. Fourteen participants were current COs; two were retired; three had left corrections and worked in similar roles such as police officer, investigator, and a counselor for troubled youth; and one worked in a food retail

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, I planned to complete observations inside a U.S. northeastern prison along with conducting in-depth interviews. Gaining approval from the prison superintendent required my motivated efforts over several months. In my quest for approval, I spoke to multiple people in the prison's administration who gave me glimpses of hope. The chair of my thesis committee and I decided to each write formal letters describing my project and requesting approval for field observations. I finally received a reply denying my request because of safety concerns. At the outset, I did not realize that the inconsistent responses from administrators would be an indication of what was to come in my data. In looking back, I experienced in a small way what some correctional officers reported about their administrative superiors.

business. Their work prior to entering corrections was labor-intensive, security-related, public-service oriented, and clerical, which all offered fewer benefits and a lower salary than what the state department of corrections or county jails provided.

The majority of my interviewee recruitment resulted from “snowball sampling” (Lofland et al. 2006: 43). I have close connections to people who do correctional work, so I interviewed some of them and subsequently they put me in contact with other correctional officers who were willing to participate in my study. Additionally, I successfully recruited one person through one public Facebook page directed toward correctional officers. I made a post about my study and informed the members that if they did decide to participate, it would be completely anonymous and I would assign pseudonyms. Some of the interviews were done face to face in the participants’ homes, while the others were held over the phone. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. I audio-recorded each interview with the permission of the participant, and then transcribed them in order to accurately capture their responses.

Many COs were reluctant to speak to me about their experiences with and thoughts about corrections. For example, in a text exchange with one recruit, Hannah (a pseudonym) wrote: “How long will it take?” Caitlin: “It should take between 45-60 minutes.” Hannah: “Oh boy ok.” There were many people who inquired about the study but opted out once I gave them my informed consent document. Some agreed but repetitively rescheduled our interview until I no longer heard from them. Like Hannah, the ones who reluctantly agreed to do the interview appeared to open up as time went on and showed enthusiasm when they realized the questions were about how they felt about their work, rather than the inner-workings of the system and how

inmates felt. I say this because academic research and especially mass media tend to focus more on inmates rather than correctional officers.

As I attempted to recruit people through Facebook, I realized that the incredible amount of valuable data that filled the two public Facebook pages I had discovered would greatly supplement my interviews. Soon after, I stopped posting comments to recruit people for my study (which proved to be of little help anyway), and began to observe the frequent activity on those pages<sup>2</sup>. One Facebook page's description stated that it was "the world's most comprehensive and trusted online destination for Correctional professionals, department decision-makers and industry experts" and the other was identified as a "News/Media Website."

I decided to do a qualitative content analysis of all the Facebook users' posts that were relevant to my interview questions. Some of the questions I asked the participants to talk about were their likes and dislikes about being a CO, how their perception of corrections changed once they became a CO, people's reactions when they learned the participant worked in corrections, their thoughts about the inmates they supervised, and who they got along with the most and least at their job. To my surprise, many of the Facebook posts directly posed similar questions. Even though they generally identified as a news source, Facebook users used them in a forum-like way by publicly expressing their feelings about their work. More often than not, the Facebook posts had dozens of responses and hundreds of 'likes' and 'shares.' These Facebook pages offered me a fascinating resource that the interviews did not allow: interaction between people who engaged in correctional work and others who were associated with it in some way.

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<sup>2</sup> Because these two pages are open to the public, even those without a Facebook account, my data sampling did not require formal IRB approval. I did, however, ensure that this would be the case by filling out a short ETSU IRB questionnaire.



I collected the Facebook data from October, 2015 through July, 2016. I initially discovered the two Facebook pages in April, 2016 and went back as far as October, 2015 to gather more data. Between the months of April 2016 to September 2016, the pages had garnered 11,300 combined ‘likes,’ totaling 328,000 likes between both of the pages. One of the pages predominantly posted about breaking news and current events such as CO and inmate assaults and fatalities, corrupt COs sentenced to prison or jail, and other correctional topics such as lethal injections, to name a few. These proved to be somewhat helpful, not because of the content being posted, but the comments that followed. Regardless, I tried to focus on posts that directly related to my interview questions. The other Facebook page had only about 10 percent of likes than the other, but was surprisingly more insightful and active due to the role of the person who managed the page, Anthony Gangi. He took a more proactive role on correctional-related topics and showed effort to raise awareness about the difficulties COs face.

Using NVivo (10), a qualitative data analysis software, I imported all of the interviews and Facebook posts, then coded and analyzed the data. Using a grounded theoretical approach, I began to build my analysis by doing line-by-line coding, then, after coding the 20 interviews, I conducted focused coding on the rest—focusing on a wide variety of themes (Charmaz 2014). Coding Facebook data followed this same approach, but I made sure to note any exceptions to the main patterns. I frequently reviewed how I categorized and grouped different themes as my understanding of how they connected grew deeper. I was careful to not let my personal affiliations with some of the participants get in the way of my sociological analysis, regardless of my feelings towards them (Kleinman and Copp 1993). Several emergent themes in my analysis include: the structure and nature of correctional work, ways CO contend with “dirty work,” and what it means to be a CO and its related consequences.

## CHAPTER 4

### NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF CORRECTIONAL WORK

Correctional work is hierarchical in the sense that people of varying statuses and occupational ranks exert a form of control over others within a highly regimented system. As I will show, the CO role requires exercising control over people who have violated societal laws and suppressing emotional responses to the crimes these people have committed. Status is “a quality of professional or public honor...entailing deference and precedence in interaction” (Abbott 1981: 820). Correctional officers possess a higher status than inmates, but outside correctional walls, they are perceived as holding a lower status occupational role. Their occupational status within the workplace may also be low, compared to administrators and other COs in positions that involve more autonomy. The prestige of an occupation is based on non-routineness, the workers’ power, and the clients’ status, power, and income (Abbott 1981). Correctional work is highly routinized, deals with criminals, grants workers a ‘quasi-power,’ and provides adequate compensation and benefits, yet, Abbott (1981) implies that moderate income is a weak determinant of occupational prestige.

#### *Trajectory of the “Moral Career” and Socialization Process*

Corrections is a type of work that most people do not know much about because it is not in the public eye. Therefore, when people enter the field without a sense of familiarity, they can experience a form of culture shock. Not every state department of corrections (DOC) offers a training academy for people to attend prior to working in an institution. However, even when it is offered, the amount of training and knowledge imparted cannot truly prepare a person for the job. Most of the COs reported that they did not know much about corrections beforehand, and

that what they “knew” consisted only of how mass media portrayals and bits and pieces from family members and friends who also worked in corrections. Because the public and DOC academy may not sufficiently prepare them for correctional work, the COs described being socialized by those who are seasoned the most in the field. This can be problematic for new COs because of the many internal conflicts between correctional officers, administrators, and inmates, which will be further discussed.

COs’ responses to correctional work ranged from naive to idealistic to pragmatic. Starting with the notion of ignorance, many COs reported that new COs tended to have unrealistic views of their duties and outcomes in correctional work. New COs were not welcomed with open arms by seasoned COs. One Facebook post described “the newbie” as having zero to three years of experience and had a cartoon of a male correctional officer with big eyes, standing pigeon-toed, and appearing timid and scared. In fact, being hard on the new COs is both a teaching tool and a negative type of “pay it forward” socialization process encouraged by the seasoned COs, which can be seen as an incentive for their time put into correctional work. The older, long-time COs described experiencing a steep learning curve and ongoing inconsistencies in the organization (which will be further discussed in this chapter), so they pass this on to the next generation of COs. The new generation of COs gives the seasoned COs an opportunity to exert some power and authority which has been gradually stripped from them by administrators. To the seasoned COs, it is imperative that the newbies learn the pecking order because of their own experiences throughout the socialization process.

Christopher: The new guys today think they know it all and think they understand what the job is really about but they have no idea because they haven’t put enough time in. They haven’t been put in situations and had to deal with crazy things. So they’ve never been challenged, but they think they have. (Interview)

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Shawn: ...If you just got out of academy do not act like you know everything. Shut up and listen to what help is being offered.

Bethany: Two worst words you could use... "I know".

Shawn: I was told that today. By a [person] fresh from academy. I just told him "Fine" and walked away.

Tucker: I would let them cuff up an inmate and when it took too long or they just did it wrong I would make them sit in a corner and think about why they were there. I was a dick.

Shawn: And that, [Tucker], Is why I like you haha. (Facebook comments)

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David: [The new CO is] in there [with the inmates] taking [their] eggs to order, Sunny-side up, scrambled, and we're just like, "Holy shit dude are you kidding me? What are you doing?" [laughs] It's just the innocent things. 'Oh they're people just like us and you treat them this way.' And they are people like us, don't get me wrong. But you have to understand the games that they play... (Interview)

Making fun of the newer COs' lack of experience does not help them learn the technicalities of the job. They learn that once they gain more autonomy and seniority, then they, too, can criticize the next generation of COs. But, in order to be included and welcomed into correctional work, a CO must exclude others. Putting down other COs serves a purpose that establishes a more cohesive bond in the workplace (Durkheim and Simpson 1933; Melossi 2008). Situations such as these, are only a piece of the varying status inconsistencies COs face (Lenski 1954). COs may yield authority and power through belittling others which is considered to be inconsistent social values.

Another Facebook post mentioned that "the fish," also known as the newbie, is eager to learn and show off the skills they have acquired. Yet, there is a fine line, because the new CO who begins to think he or she knows it all creates conflict among co-workers.

Hannah: ...first of all, they usually just throw [new COs] to the wolves, 'good luck'. They think all new officers are just gonna be ignorant and act like they know everything, so a lot of them don't even try to help them. You can be put on

a block with a senior officer who tells you, “Go do your job. Bye.” It’s like ‘ummm, what is my job?’ [laughs]...I got a lot of help when I started because I didn’t play the ‘know-it-all’ game...Especially ‘cause you’re new and you don’t know what the fuck you’re doing! That’s the way I took it...I see a lot of new officers disrespecting senior officers and they’ve been around the block a few times and they deserve the respect. (Interview; 3 years of experience)

Respect, autonomy, and power are highly valued CO assets that do not come easily and need to be attained through effort and amassing time doing correctional work. Stereotyping new COs is a form of social control and creates hierarchical boundaries that only some COs benefit from, which can be seen as a perk and incentive for the “dirty work” (Hughes 1962) they otherwise do. An analysis of “dirty work” appears further in this chapter. Perhaps seasoned COs want new COs to make mistakes so that they can appear more knowledgeable and in control.

Not all new COs enter corrections as ignorant innocents; according to the Facebook post mentioned earlier, some are seen as “the hot shot” or “pitbull” who are overly confident and aggressive. Some COs who were initially ignorant may also grow excessively confident as their career progresses. COs who are mid-career have invested much of their time into corrections, yet still have a lot more to invest if they want to receive their full benefits and pension. Rather than completely losing hope in their efforts of inmate rehabilitation, some COs redirect their focus from inmates to themselves. Several interviewees with an average of 10 years of experience viewed their CO role as their central identity. At this point, they knew how to navigate the inner-workings of the organization and realized that they deserved much more attention and concern than what they were afforded. There are only a select few COs who decide to counteract the injustices and biases they face inside and outside of the correctional walls, however, it is a difficult feat and most will lose this idealistic perspective. Some of these COs may grow bitter,

yet remain overly confident and robust. Reflecting back on earlier parts of his 20-year-career, Gregg grew bitter, yet used his confidence and authority to put inmates in their place:

I'd say [to an inmate], 'you want me to bring you a sandwich? I'll bring you a sandwich.' And I'd be a wise guy and bring the sandwich and say, 'oh, is this your sandwich?' Then I'd eat it and tease them. [The inmate would say] 'You're a rotten bastard.' But they would say [to me] 'bring me a sandwich, or else.' [I'd say] 'I ain't doing shit for you; I'm gonna bring it in front of you and eat it.' After that he never talked to me again [laughs]. (Interview)

These general career patterns are fluid and work for some, but most COs reported that these are negative CO stereotypes because of the emphasis placed on emotional inexpressiveness.

Additionally, many COs reported that these kind of tactics are an undesirable approach: "The harder you pull, the tougher it gets. [Don't go]...looking for trouble and don't make any waves" (Interview with Eddy).

Once COs approach the last years of their career, some begin to adopt a more pragmatic outlook. They may be more apt to focus on the remainder of their time, counting down the days until retirement, and care less about the necessary changes that are needed in the field of corrections. The Facebook posts and interviewees suggest "the veterans" now view what once was interesting and exciting, as mundane. For example, Troy, with 8 years of experience, said:

I'm almost changing towards the "older" CO now...Take a doctor for instance. When you first become a doctor, you think you can save the world. No matter what you know, you think you can save them...New COs think they can save the world and change everybody's lives in prison. I think the older COs kinda know that you need to be a little more cautious or see the bigger picture. (Interview)

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James: Starting out...you think 'oh I'm going to make a difference today', you know? [But really] you're gonna go and sit in the block, do your rounds, and make sure nobody dies. That's the name of the game...When I first started, it was exciting...I was 24 years old, still hanging out with my own friends and they'd ask what happened that day. Back then, you wanted to talk about stuff about

finding different weapons. Now, it's just like *ah*, you don't even want to be bothered [laughs]. It has changed a lot. The excitement. (Interview; 21 years of experience)

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Eddy: ...when I first walked in...I couldn't believe the way they talked to the inmates. They would say, 'no, get out,' even before [the inmates] could finish [what they were saying]...I would never talk to another person like that! I was like, 'can't you talk to them a little better?' And they were like, 'you'll learn.' Sure as shit, 8 years later [laughs]...the first thing I learned, was how to get hardened...

[Later in the interview] Eddy: ...I've always had that coolness mentality. People thought I had 20 years in but I was like 'I don't, I have like 4 or 5.' It's cause I'm older too. (Interview; 8 years of experience)

Several COs I interviewed at this stage in their career (eight males and one female) tended to be more pragmatic, which has helped them successfully cope with the “dirty work” of corrections. Unlike the idealistic COs, they spent little time worrying about or trying to manage their identity for public approval. They expressed more interest in getting the job done, being compensated, and retiring with little to no personal consequences, whether or not they acknowledged the possible negative outcomes.

Some of the pragmatic COs seemed quite desensitized and viewed their occupation as “just another job.” They have “successfully” lasted in corrections, coped with the hostile environment, and seemed positive overall about correctional work, which may be surprising. This category of COs placed less emphasis on having a valued CO identity and tended to focus more on the job's extrinsic benefits. These COs did not seek out opportunities to elevate their status earlier in their career and instead took a more stoic, business-like, approach. Downplaying the drama of their jobs nevertheless followed a male trope: the “inexpressive male” who shuns any signs of weakness (Sattel 1976). Among my interviewees, men predominately adopted the silent stoic model, but there were some women who followed suit:

Michelle: I started in 1978. Right out of college. Women were hated, harassed and maligned. I rose through the ranks, learned to navigate the many land mines. Get over it cry babies. Dress professional, have a good attitude and retire. Go to Burger King if you are unhappy. (Facebook comment)

Michelle's example holds a measure of defensive othering (Schwalbe et al. 2000)—calling other female COs “cry babies.” She portrayed herself as successful by adopting a hardened, emotionally stoic demeanor, which is associated with being masculine.

Even though all of the interviewees and many on the Facebook pages reported that their chief motivation for working in corrections was for the monetary benefits and compensation, the pragmatic COs made compensation their central focus.

Alice: It's hard to quit. It's hard to walk away....and it's not because of the job, I mean that's easy—who would want to be around that? No one in their right mind wants to be around criminals all the time but I mean when I walked away [in 2006], I was making \$27 an hour (Interview)

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Brian: The reason I took it was because of the benefits...After I ended up retiring [in 2006] it was something over \$50,000 a year. That's just base pay. If you took the overtime...I think one year I made \$75,000. Money was good so people stayed. When I left 10 years ago, I was making \$28 an hour. (Interview)

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Gregg: It's a good job you can support your family with; that's it. It's not something you want to grow up to be, to do, or whatever. Who wants to go work with rapists, and murderers all day long? What kind of job can you have a high school diploma and make 36 bucks an hour? You can't. Most people go to college 4, 5, 6 years and still don't even make that. (Interview)

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Ron: Don't care at all. Just give me my [money] and 20 and out, and medical benefits for life. Pension is 50% of the [average] of highest 3 years. I will be 42 when im done. Currently, i have 17 completed in CT DOC. I could care less what anyone thinks of me, or my title. Just pay me. (Facebook comment)



By not treating correctional work as their central, valued identity and identifying with other roles they filled in life, these COs created a distance between themselves and the “dirty work” they did. As one commenter on Facebook wrote, “I’m a Dad first. I’m also a farmer/rancher [and] an ex- C/O; no one says thank you to me...never do anything for recognition, do it for yourself.” The pragmatic COs may have assigned greater value to other identities, but they understood their CO role as necessary to pay bills and achieve financial security.

Caitlin: Did you ever feel as if you were not given enough of recognition throughout your career?

Allen: Caitlin, I never cared about that. I came from working in a textile factory that had terrible working conditions and offered no benefits. When I started working in corrections, I had raises every couple of years and the pay was way better. This was so much better than what I came from. I never cared if anyone viewed me as a glorified babysitter. (Interview)

Allen did not view his twenty-seven-year CO role as his central identity; however, Jodi did. For example, Jodi experienced terrible moments throughout her twenty-five-year correctional career, but redefined her role in a more positive way rather than focusing on the wrongs that were done to her.

Jodi: I drank urine in the coffee, me and 3 other inmates drank the urine because [other COs] had peed in the coffeemaker, *unbeknownst* to us...

[Later in the interview] Jodi: ...[COs] accused me of having sex with an inmate, and it never happened, never would of happened, never will happen.

[Later in the interview] Jodi: I see [ex-inmates] on the street that I know I mentored and they are doing great, that's really rewarding...so to be able to reach people [and] change their paths by doing positive and staying positive and getting them on the right track, you know what I mean? (Interview)

It is interesting to note that out of all the seasoned COs in my sample, Jodi was the only one who viewed the CO role as her central identity and was not pragmatic, stoic or cynical.

*“Double-Binds” Women Face*

Correctional work is highly male-dominated. My interviewees’ experiences and the Facebook data I analyzed support this characterization. Because male COs are defined as the standard, female COs must meet that male standard in their demeanor.

Caitlin: So what do you think it takes to be a good CO?

Hailey: You have to be able to put up with yourself. You have to be strong enough to hold if you get into a fight with an inmate...If you get hit you can’t just be like, ‘ow you hit me.’ You got to keep going. You can’t put anyone else in danger. You have to worry about everyone else... (Interview)

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Brian: You gotta use common sense...in prison. My nephew—I could see it in his eyes. He was scared [and] timid. He’s not a fighter. His wife would have been a good CO, she was a fighter! [laughs] (Interview)

Appearing to be strong is one essential requirement and a pattern that is reported by COs. When one cannot meet the requirement, it is seen as an indicator that the person may not be cut out for correctional work. Hailey reported how her seven-month CO position was not as enjoyable as she thought it would be:

...But if you’re like me, who’s happy and doesn’t feel like putting people down or attacking someone, it’s not a good thing...Always have to be on your feet just in case someone takes off running. You always have to be ready for anything that will come your way. It’s not something anyone can do. (Interview)

Even when COs who are not cut out for correctional work fail, it appears that they do not want to outwardly admit it. Additionally, COs associated a happy or emotional demeanor with being feminine and not tough enough, which runs counter to the CO identity codes (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996).

Caitlin: Would you recommend being a correctional officer to your kids?

Hannah: It takes a special person to be a [CO], and I really think the inmates will

make my daughter cry, and my son's kinda nerdy. It just wouldn't be a good fit for him [laughs]. I think he'd be better with computers or something. (Interview)

Not only is correctional work male-identified, it calls for incumbents to follow a model of emotional manhood (Vacarro, Schrock, and McCabe 2011).

You have to be able to put on that face...when you go to work...if you're gonna manage assholes, then you gotta be an asshole. Takes one to know one! So in other words, you gotta become a jerk. (Interview with Eddy)

When a CO does not follow the male emotional model in this field, it can be seen as deviant because they are not complying with the general expectations of correctional work. Because of the masculinized CO identity codes, females are pointed out more than their male colleagues for this type of failure, which seems illogical in lay terms.

Caitlin: So, what's the initial reaction when someone learned that you were a CO?  
Hailey: ...I would be like, 'yeah I'm a CO' and people would just be like, 'no, you're joking with me right now.' [laughs] I've had a lot of people just think that I'm kidding with them. I'm a really bubbly, happy person and I'm not one of those people you would think would be working in that environment. I've had to show people my badge to show them I was a CO and even then they're like, 'are you serious?' There was a lot of times that no one ever believed me. (Interview)

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Caitlin: So what did your friends and family think about you becoming a CO?  
Ryan: ...They were definitely proud...that I became a CO. A state job. Good benefits. Definitely uh, reliable. But they weren't surprised. (Interview)

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Caitlin: What was the initial reaction of someone when they learned you were a CO?  
Brian: "I believe it." [laughing] When I was younger, I was kind of a tough kid. The kids I used to get beat up by were probably 4, 5 years older than I was. Not too many people messed with me when I was younger, especially when I got out of the Marine Corps. (Interview)

Male COs are automatically given the benefit of doubt because of their gender privilege in relation to the nature of correctional work. Assumptions about the best 'kind of person' for an

occupation typically has a gendered undertone. Hence, female COs have more explaining and proving to do when it comes to their CO role, whereas male COs do not.

For female COs, the conventional way being a woman is culturally defined—as a sexual object to men, for example—makes living out the CO identity more difficult. Female COs do not have enough clout or solidarity to challenge their double-bind and some end up reinforcing it.

Alice: [When I first started] I remember standing there being very nervous monitoring...lunch...and the inmates were standing looking at us. The new ones; there was 3 of us [and I was the only female]. I remember them staring at us and yelling vulgar things about yeah, you know, 'she's here to get laid' and such things. (Interview)

Female COs are sexualized first, and viewed as a worker, second. Women learn through the socialization process that defensive othering is an identity work option (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Because some women comply with sexual objectification and fall prey to sexual exploitation as COs, pointing this out and decrying it through defensive othering is a way those other women COs can try to establish their work identity. This means that they avoid any sexual suggestion of involvement with their co-workers to evade the undesirable stereotype. Yet, if the women do not sexually engage with their co-workers, they will also be stigmatized and ridiculed, hence giving way to the concept of a double-bind (Frye 1983). Alice reported when this happened to her: “There were times, I remember certain COs asking me out. You’d say no and they’d ask ‘Why, you sucking on an inmate?’ Just trash talk like that” (Interview). Alyssa reported a similar experience:

Any female that comes to work there, [Elijah, my male co-worker] tries to date them, and when they won’t, he just puts up this wall of hatred for them...Actually before I started there, he actually told the entire department that me and him were talking...Everyone came up to me and was like, “You’re the one talking to

Elijah” and I’m like, “Who?” ...So I brought it up to him and he’s like, “No, I never said that.” He was just trying to cover himself. (Interview)

As the interviewees’ comments show, assumptions about male COs’ sexuality were essentialized as normal, and not seen as something that would undermine their status. None of the COs reported any stories that involved sexual promiscuity of male COs, but stories characterizing women COs as promiscuous and as sexual objects were very detailed and elaborate. Even when looking at outsiders’ views, female COs reported receiving sexually objectifying remarks.

Caitlin: So what’s the initial reaction when someone learns that you’re a CO?

Alyssa: Oh my gosh, if it’s coming from a male, they’ll go “Do you ever hook up with the inmates; I bet you get flirted with a lot; oh you should come wear your uniform for me.”

Caitlin: How do you feel about those kind of comments?

Alyssa: I honestly get really offended. First of all, why would I hook up with a felon; second of all, I have a son so why would I risk losing my son over someone who’s in jail. (Interview)

Both through the comments they receive and hearing negative stories about sexually promiscuous female COs, women learn that their sexuality is seen as a liability.

Some female COs tended to distance themselves from conventional womanhood, while others complied and embraced it. Complying with gender expectations, such as being submissive, “motherly,” or a “girl” who cannot hold her own physically, for example, may undermine respect from female and male co-workers and give more reason for the men to continue to treat women as subpar in correctional work. It bolsters male CO’s status and gives them exclusive rights to say that they are physically competent, tough, and authoritative. Female COs may successfully adapt, but learn that being a woman is seen as a liability. Some attempt to

compensate this inequality by performing stereotypically feminine gender roles. For example, Hannah and Tyler described how gender expectations are fulfilled in their workplace:

If I'm assigned to the unit and [the male CO is] assigned to the control desk, they'll switch with me because they don't want me to...be in the unit [with the inmates] because I'm a girl...There are some females, that even if they are assigned to the unit, they'll go straight to the control desk. (Interview with Hannah)

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...we have a young female [CO] right now who [is] dating a CO and...will tell the new girls...that they should date a male CO because how wonderful it is. You know exactly how much your boyfriend is being paid, you know how much money he has, and they actually use that as an excuse to be with somebody...The girl who was told to go and date a male CO [by this other female CO] actually came out and said how weird she thought it was. "Why is this lady...telling me to go find some dude to date, I don't want to date somebody here." But that's the mentality that some people have, where they think it's a good idea to find a guy that's gonna take care of you. (Interview with Tyler)

Incorporating the demeaning term "girl" in CO rhetoric, further implies that female COs are weak, inexperienced, youthful, incompetent, and not seen as authoritative figures. COs hardly referred to male COs as "boys" unless it was used in terms to describe corrections as "the good ol' boys club" (Interview with Jodi), which further signals manhood in corrections as default.

When women fulfill conventional gender expectations, it undermines their ability to act and be seen as the male COs' peers and emphasizes their deviation from the male CO standard. Carrissa reported how she feels when her male counterparts are placed in a compromising position by violent inmates:

I mean, the males see us as their sisters and stuff, but you know, females automatically have a mother instinct. So anytime [a CO gets hurt], like their brothers or anything, you know that we want to respond and we're gonna flip crap if we don't. (Interview)

Carrissa equated being aggressive (i.e. “flip crap”) with being a mother—avoiding any suggestion of masculinity—keeping gender boundaries between women and men clear. Being passive in correctional work is not acceptable, so for some, explaining this reasoning by attributing “innate” motherly characteristics is a safer form of compliance. Carrissa initially mentioned how the male COs view female COs as “sisters.” When one thinks of the dynamic of a sister-brother relationship, it is a typical assumption that a sister will look towards their brother for help and assistance, and plays more of a passive role. Also, thinking about the sister-brother dynamic, as children, more often than not the sister seeks acceptance of her brother and his peers and usually does not gain access and is excluded from their group activities. Alice’s comment suggests that male COs closed ranks against female COs, and sexualized them as well:

Other females, they didn’t have anybody there you know, just they were hung out to dry. They were treated like shit and passed around like hoe-bags, really. ‘Cause one of the COs would you know, get with one of them and tell everyone that he was with this one and she’s easy. They get passed around. Where no one was really like that with me because I have brothers there and an uncle there. They don’t want to get their face busted open. (Interview)

Women turning to male relatives or allies to halt sexual harassment may help in the immediate situation that Alice described, but it fails to fix the root problem of CO work as male-dominated. Women are not full members and peers of the male-based “brotherhood,” but have to fit in the “boy’s club” despite the double-binds.

By defining competency in terms of a male standard, COs reinforce and maintain gender segregation in the workplace in ways that privilege men (at the women’s expense). Brittany reported how gender defined a CO’s work area at her job:

On third shift, [administrators] tend to keep the female officers away from the male inmates so they don’t have to like, worry. Because third shift has the least

amount of staff so when they put one officer in a unit, they don't want that one officer to be a female in an all-male block and run the risk of [her] getting raped and all that stuff...I feel like because I'm a female, they keep me as a control officer more often than the unit officer...When you're control officer, you have to worry about who's coming in and out of your unit and if they belong there, then you have people calling you like "oh can you send so-and-so to medical...and it can be like, 'oh my god, the phone needs to stop ringing and people need to stop coming in and out of this unit because it can be overwhelming.'" [laughs]  
Sometimes it's just easier to be the unit officer because...your only responsibility is to make sure everybody is okay and doing what they're supposed to be doing.  
(Interview)

Brittany's comments are an example of how female COs are at times, given more difficult work assignments while also being protected from potential sexual violence. This example indicates how they face a double-bind: not capable of some tasks yet given a harder, busier job without getting credit for it. Perhaps, the idea of receiving appreciation from co-workers is based on the amount of contact a CO has with inmates due to foreseeable risks. This partly defines the nature of correctional work and the perception of female COs as not equal to the males.

Brian: When a female works in a [correctional] institution, they put 'em in certain areas. They don't put 'em in every area where there's males walking around. They either put 'em in a tower, or a control center. Or places where there are a lot of COs, so they can have help and they can be watched. (Interview)

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Tyler: ...an officer is supposed to be an officer, but females are taken care of...[Females] will always be put in an easier spot, they'll work with the women [inmates], or they'll work in the spots where there's no inmate contact or minimal inmate contact; it's just the way it is.

Caitlin: So how do you feel about that, that they get the easier spots?

Tyler: I don't mind it, as long as it's something that you can justify, I justify it completely because the women aren't men and I don't care how strong a girl is, I'm 220 pounds and I know I could pick her up and beat the crap out of her...I don't have 'an officer is an officer,' I have 'what would happen to this girl if something did happen?' (Interview)



Once again, Tyler's use of "girl" discredits female COs as incompetent, weak, and as needing protection. Protecting women from men inmates stereotyped as sexual predators then allows the men to appear more capable of all parts of the job.

Although such gender stereotypes are typical in corrections, one should not fall victim to the fallacy that all COs resent and refuse to accept their female colleagues (Walters 1993).

Troy: I have good manners with females outside of work like chivalry, respectful. Inside of work, I'm not so chivalrous because I don't want inmates to think the females are helpless. (Interview)

Nevertheless, female COs report that this widely held gendered distinction affects how they handle their work. They are required to do more identity work (to give meaning to themselves) and emotion management (actively trying to manage their feelings, expressions, and displays) if they want to fit in as much as possible (Hochschild 1979; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996).

Jennifer: If a female officer gets assaulted in any sort of a "sexual" manner the public and rank will sadly look at that and blame it on "an established relationship gone wrong" believe it or not I've personally experienced hearing that myself. Us females are a minority in corrections. We are belittled a lot more and we don't really get the credit we deserve sometimes. Especially dealing with male offenders. (Facebook comment)

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Alice: It takes about a year for females to earn the respect. You have to earn it, it's not given. That comes from the correctional officers too. You'll get more respect from the inmates than the correctional officers being a female. Because the inmates will test you, but once they see you're not there for a mat, you earn their respect. You never get the COs respect because it's an 'old time boy's world'. It's like any other career where it's usually male dominant or at one time was males only. They don't want females there and they make it known. Cons have a code of respect... Male COs have zero respect for females. (Interview)

The point of these sexual, physical, and emotional double-binds is not only that it makes female COs' jobs harder, but that these characterizations define women as non-standard and elevate men as superior—at women's expense.

*Conflicts with Administration, Seniority, and Promotions*

People who work in administration, including those who are sergeants and lieutenants, have a higher organizational authority than a CO does, which can cause friction and resentment. About half of the people who were interviewed reported having conflict and friction with others in administrative roles. The people who reported approval of administrators either personally knew them, directly worked with them, or benefited from them in some way.

Hailey: I was actually neighbors with the captain so if I had a lot of issues, I would ask him a question. One time I tore a ligament in my foot and had to be off for a little while. So I did hospital duty. It's a good thing to have relationships with some of them. (Interview)

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Teresa: I'm very in tune with the administration...My job is considered a superintendent's pick so I'm picked by the superintendent of our facility to do these specific jobs...The captain runs the shift but we don't really deal with the captain in general. We deal directly with administration. So other than personality issues or the way they might handle things, I feel like I'm better apt to deal with administration than most people. (Interview)

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Hannah: I don't think they're bad...Like, when my boyfriend's daughter died, I called out [of work] and didn't want it to be an excuse. So I asked him if he would've change it so I would of used it as one of my holidays, my floating holidays. He did it for me after the fact, which I thought was really awesome...When it comes to family, they're really cool about it and work with ya. I've never had a personal issue with anybody in administration, but a lot of people don't like them. They don't think they appreciate us enough and stuff like that. (Interview)

A few COs have found ways to get along with administrators despite the low CO status in corrections by using their connections and advantages. When COs have some type of support from administrators, it may soften their perception of routine difficulties because of how highly valued administrator support is.

More often, though, COs expressed resentment towards administration and how they have forgotten what it was like to be a correctional officer.

Hannah: What I feel should of happened [in response to the inmate riot,] was that the facility should have been locked down right then and there. But the [captain] was like, 'nope, we're gonna continue rec.'...I'm like, 'This is crazy. We should just lock them down and deescalate the situation.' But, it wasn't my call. It kinda sucks sometimes when you get told to do something that you don't agree with, but gotta do it anyway. A lot of these cases, like with this captain, he hasn't been in a blue shirt in many, many moons. Totally never dealt with something to that caliber and was just like, brushing it off. (Interview)

COs' control is tested and thwarted by those both above and below them in rank. Correctional officers are given a small amount of power and control, yet there are many instances where the cooperation among personnel is undermined, which can create problems and furthermore, status inconsistency (Lenski 1954). Power, authority, and respect are concepts that are highly emphasized and valued in correctional work. Here, Joe mentions how friction exists between COs and administrators:

Joe: ...your administration sets policy that makes you feel like nothing...You tell a inmate 'no' to something and he demands to speak to a supervisor...Little things set in place to put us in our place. And often the supervisor does not have your back. (Facebook comment)

COs reported how these higher-status people undermine their tenuous grip on authority over inmates. In an interview, another CO similarly expressed how she felt about being undermined by administration:

Brittany: What really sucks is when you tell the inmate no and then the lieutenant comes in and speaks to them and tells them they can have what you just told them they couldn't have. So that really sucks.

Caitlin: So how often does it happen?

Brittany: A lot actually, it's kind of upsetting. That's what takes all of the power away from the officers, then the next time there's a problem, they don't even want to deal with you. They'll want to go right to the supervisor because they don't care what you have to say because they know the supervisor can obviously go over what you say and they do it. I mean, it's aggravating but he's over me, or she. If they say do it, I just do it and take it on the chin because they have more power than me.

In addition to friction with administrators, COs also mentioned problems with their colleagues who have seniority. The COs made frequent references to their place in the correctional hierarchy and constantly compared themselves to others. COs who have not gained seniority or have restricted autonomy tend to criticize others who do. They expressed resentment about senior COs getting preferential treatment over others who are 'better' workers.

Caitlin: So what do you like the least about being a CO?

Jake: Uh [laughs]. Honestly, I have a major problem with guys that work hard don't get rewarded... There are a lot of guys that have a lot of time (seniority) and made really bad mistakes and have a really bad attitude that are getting those better posts. There are the younger guys that are coming in who are hungry and willing to do the job correctly that get punished because they don't have enough time to win a [desired] schedule... The seniority-based system is something that I really think needs to go by the wayside... I got 4 years in, and I got Tuesday and Wednesday off... A lot of guys have checked out and just show up to work every day and just sit around... Then when you ask them to do something they huff and puff and make a big stink when they gotta work... It brings down the morale in the place. Your co-workers are more stressful than the inmates are. It's a frustrating philosophy, but unfortunately it's true [laughs]. (Interview)

Some COs tended to envy their higher-ranking co-workers, even if their status was associated with the negative stereotype about the "older" CO who typically is desensitized or cynical. Many COs viewed the concept of seniority and authority as an unfair aspect of corrections, while those who had seniority or higher authority, neglected to mention it because it became a privilege that

blurs their early experiences in corrections. Hailey reflected on a time when she knew what should have been done, but did not act because of another CO who challenged her discretion:

Caitlin: Looking back, which events stand out the most in your mind?

Hailey: We did have a lot of people have seizures and stuff, and you don't know if they're faking it or not. I wasn't back there when [the seizure] happened, but there was this female having a seizure and you could tell she wasn't faking it. Some COs just didn't like the girl and was like, 'oh no, she's just faking it.'

Caitlin: So what did you do?

Hailey: There was nothing I could really do because the other CO had a little bit more authority than I did. Not authority, but just been there longer. It was the person that I didn't get along with who was saying that. I kinda just kept quiet [laughs]. It's very frustrating because I actually liked the inmate too. She was only 19 years old. (Interview)

When a CO reports having a lack of power to some extent, they feel helpless and settle for the fact that they do not have a say in the matter, whether they want to or not. Seniority does not equal defined authority, but does equate to a degree of power and autonomy.

Because of the variations in status, people in administration have different goals than COs do. Tyler discussed some internal conflict when administrators give a questionable order:

[Administration will] put things in a memo that don't make any sense, or that might be dangerous to staff members. They don't care because it has nothing to do with staff members, it has everything to do with 'well it looks good on paper' and that's a hard thing to swallow, when someone is telling you to do something that you know is wrong, but you have to do what they want because they have your job in their hands. (Interview)

Many COs characterized administrators as exercising authority in ways that made their jobs harder rather than easier. COs are expected to have authority, but their authority is tested by inmates and limited by administration. Even more, some COs reported that they did not have support from their supervisors. Any power over COs was interpreted as a constant reminder to them about their low occupational status, which fed their resentment towards administrators.

What is interesting to note is that when given opportunities for promotion, some COs rejected them because of the negative connotation that goes along with administrative positions even if they reported not having amiable relations with their CO peers. The people in my sample who expressed these types of concerns were virtually all men:

Caitlin: Who did you get along with the least?

Gregg: I hated everybody [laughs]. I probably got along with 2 people and hated everybody else, so pretty much take it for what it's worth. They're all a bunch of backstabbing rats. I was there to do my job and get out of there without getting fired...It was a job, that's all it was. I mean, you could be a sergeant or lieutenant there but when you do that, then you gotta rat on your own people. I didn't do it because I'd gotta go against my own people, and my own people are more important than an extra 10, 20 bucks an hour. (Interview)

It seems that in correctional work when people have more autonomy and higher authority, it is perceived as being used against others. Because of this, COs tend to have a shared solidarity against people in administrative roles. For some, violating the CO code is so important that a CO would rather be paid significantly less. Women, in contrast, viewed administrative job openings as a chance to be in a higher position of authority that came with a higher salary, sense of respect, and seemed to enjoy work that encompassed those features.

Caitlin: So how long have you been working in corrections?

Teresa: Eight years...[but] I've been a sergeant for [the] two [past] years.

Caitlin: Okay. So what made you change your role in corrections?

Teresa: Just to further myself into the next step...More money and more responsibility...I like to stay busy. Right now I'm a little more into the inner-workings and more analytical on how to handle situations after and dealing with the paperwork and things like that. In that respect, I like that part of my job. Obviously the reason we all do it is for the benefits and retirement because you really can't beat that, especially in our state. (Interview)

Other men who did not pursue these opportunities reported how the higher status and salary would not be worth the effect it would have on their family life.

Tyler: ...my days off are more important to me than my rank because of my personal life, I don't know if you've ever had Tuesday and Wednesday off...but to go to work every Saturday, every Friday night, um, especially with a wife and normal friends, it is taxing on you. (Interview)

### *Quasi-Camaraderie*

Correctional work requires interdependence between COs in order to do their job. On average, there is one CO to at least fifty inmates, if not more. If a riot broke out between inmates, that CO should be able to call for back-up without hesitation. This type of work greatly depends on the reliability of co-workers' immediate response in times of crisis, as many COs explained:

Caitlin: What do you like the most about being a CO?

James: I'll tell ya, the brotherhood. The guys that I work with. I think we get a bad rap. You see the cops, and you see the state police out in the street doing their thing...movies portray us just like brutes that beat up inmates....When we get on our radios when an officer needs assistance, you see people come together. Like, we all have each other's backs.... I'd say the friendships I've made, and the brotherhood—you just can't beat it. (Interview)

\* \* \* \* \*

Caitlin: What did you like the most about being a CO?

Matthew: I loved the camaraderie. You're going through crazy times and you build trust, so you have that. The most important thing is...to know where the CO is... You always know where your partner is. Let's put it this way—they better have an eye on you, they better be looking at you...The inmates are going to try and distract [COs]...It's the number one thing. (Interview)

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Caitlin: What do you like most about being a correctional officer?

Tyler: ...the brotherhood...that you build with other officers that you work with and...grow up with, because you spend so much time with them, you need to rely on them, and you build a bond with them...I don't have a lot of friends there because I try to keep my life on the outside normal, but the friends I do have on the inside are some of the strongest, like, most solid men I know. (Interview)

After reading these examples, it may appear that the connection among COs is formed on equitable grounds, but in actuality, a lot of the social ties derive from criticisms of clueless or

deviant COs (further discussed in the following chapter), hence the significance of quasi-camaraderie in correctional work.

Despite expressing appreciation for the close relationships they have developed with co-workers, participants' comments also indicate that the 'brotherhood' is not all it is cracked up to be. Many interviewees signaled a lack of solidarity because their main strategy to appear as good, worthy, and competent correctional officers depended on making comparisons that raised their own status by putting down co-workers' performance. In other words, because CO work is devalued, workers' efforts to gain appreciation came at the expense of solidarity.

### *"Dirty Work"*

Everett Hughes (1962: 9) stated about people in society, "The greater the social distance from us, the more we leave in the hands of others a sort of mandate by default to deal with them on our behalf." In other words, and in terms of correctional work, the more we incarcerate devalued people—isolating them from society—the greater the need for correctional officers to deal with inmates and be in their presence. Additionally, most civilians avoid any association with criminals, widening the social distance. There is much ambivalence from outsiders because COs do the work that most of us chose not to do or learn about. As a person wrote on Facebook "No one wants to know what a C.O. goes thru each day. They like the societal blinders that protect them from the unpleasant. The only stories that leak out are the negative ones."

James: [Administration] expect[s] you to do a job and want it done but then want to hold you accountable if you did it wrong, or if the inmate files a lawsuit, 'yeah, you're fired, see ya later.' They want something done, but they don't want to get their hands dirty. It's just easier for them to say 'bye, see ya later.' (Interview)



According to some of the COs, as James explained, not only does the public maintain social distance, but so do administrators.

The inmates that correctional officers supervise, who are highly stigmatized in Western culture, bring COs no form of honor to their work. There is an overwhelming amount of people who are incarcerated, and COs are expected to treat them humanely, even though the public despises them. Yet when they do act with humanity, their social image becomes tainted even more. Hence, COs perform “dirty work” and experience a courtesy stigma by sheer association with criminals who are not deemed public-worthy (Goffman 1986). Those who gain a courtesy stigma do so because they try to accept and see the stigmatized for who they are rather than their stigma, unlike most members of the public.

Gregg: I was at work when 9/11 happened. I was inside an inmate’s cell, watching it on TV with an inmate...[Co-workers were] calling me like, “Gregg, where are you, where are you?” “I’m in here, shut up, I’m down in cell 2.” I’m sitting on the guy’s bed, having a coffee, watching TV. (Interview)

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Carrissa: We have our own inside jokes. I got one [inmate], every time she sees me she goes ‘heeeeeey shaw-tay!’ I just have fun with them. Because you know, we have to live with them too. Even though that’s where they live permanently and we get to come home every night, we’re still with them a lot. (Interview)

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James: It’s funny, because people wouldn’t believe that we’ll sit around sometimes with inmates...telling jokes and laughing. It sounds...like a bunch of COs sitting around...What people see on TV, it’s...‘us against them,’ which to some extent it is. You have to not let your guard down, but [you] can’t walk around on eggshells all day long. You gotta have some kind of rapport with these guys. (Interview)

COs have to work around inmates for a large part of their day, so rather than constantly reminding inmates of their stigmatized status, many COs described humanizing themselves.

Yet, inmates are often perceived as inherently bad in the public imagination, and quite frankly, negative CO stereotypes are fueled by misrepresentations in mass media (Freeman 1999), hence doing a ‘good’ job does not yield external praise.

David: When you’re stopping fights and crimes in there, for half a second you feel good because you saved somebody some pain or saved a life, but at the same time you’re thinking ‘I just pulled a child rapist off of a homicidal gangbanger.’ It’s like, who cares? You’re saving a scumbag from a scumbag. It gets to the point that you do it because it’s your job... (Interview)

Conversely, if a CO exercises forms of control that may be seen as too assertive or aggressive, the public will also criticize their actions:

Randy: Every kid growing up says they want to be a cop or fireman or anything else. Ever here [sic] one say, when I grow up [I] want to be a prison guard? You would take your kid to therapy. There is a natural stigma on anything to do with prison. When I started in the early 80's there was the stigma of the knuckledragging mouth breathing baton wielding guard. I would overhear people saying stuff like “oh he's a prison guard. You know how they can be.” (Facebook comment)

\* \* \* \* \*

Dillon: its a dirty job but someone has to do it. (Facebook comment)

COs were aware of their courtesy stigma and morally “dirty work,” but many of them reported that inmates treated them better than most of their own colleagues. Since many COs were concerned with respect and appreciation, perhaps that particular CO-inmate dynamic eased the sting of the association with stigmatized individuals.

Some COs reported that when they expressed their feelings about and reacted to an inmate’s heinous crime, the public scrutinized them for it because their discretionary judgment is not a part of their job or their mandate. Every CO I talked to reported that as a CO, you are to ‘treat all inmates the same way’ and even more, ‘treat them how you would want to be treated.’

Many of them reported that even though they try to live up to the golden rule, it can be difficult to abide by, especially if it is a sexually-related crime: “We’re not here to punish anybody. The jail time is already their punishment. But you can’t just let it go if it’s somebody who rapes kids, especially if you have a child at home yourself” (Interview with Troy).

Another way that working as a CO entails “dirty work” is literal: COs may deal with physically disgusting circumstances, degradation by many people within the workplace, and are faced with moral and ethical dilemmas (Hughes 1994). During an interview, Matthew talked about supervising difficult inmates: “When you get feces or urine thrown on you, it’s tough to be professional...All you’re gonna see is red, and you’re gonna fucking kill this guy.” Tyler recounted a part of the job that he was not expecting:

No one ever explained to me the guys that will cut open a vein and you don’t know if that person has HIV or HepC or any diseases and they’ll stand there bleeding and you’re the person who has to go in and deal with it, no one told me about human beings covering themselves, when I first saw an adult covered in feces, its still, it, it set me back.

Caitlin: So what did you do when you saw that?

Tyler: Uh, the first time I saw it, I kind like, you kind of freak out, like a normal reaction is like ‘what the hell is going on? Why are you covering yourself in shit?’ ...when I first saw it, I was in shock and awe, and you don’t know what to do, so you call for help, and the guys come with experience, and obviously, ‘hey, we’re gonna put you in the shower, you gotta clean yourself off’ this and that et cetera, but there have been times, and I haven’t been involved in it thank goodness, where a guy will cover himself in feces, and no matter how many times you spray him with pepper spray, he’s gonna want to fight you, he wants you to come and get him. (Interview)

As Matthew’s and Tyler’s remarks show, a difficult condition of correctional work is that they must help highly stigmatized people (inmates) by having contact with potentially dangerous and debasing bodily fluids and excrement.

Part of the CO job requires exercising discretion, but unlike other jobs where discretion improves morale and job satisfaction, discretion does not seem to make COs' job any better (Heinsler, Kleinman, and Stenross 1990). Several COs echoed David, quoted above, that when they do what they are supposed to do, such as breaking up inmate-on-inmate fights, they experience a moral dilemma.

Hannah: I've had to work the sex offender block with men that are in there for raping women, for molesting children, *all* that stuff. I have to treat them with respect, and it's like 'I just wanna bash your face in a wall. If you ever touched my daughter I'd kill ya!' But ya know, 'you're an inmate and I'm an officer so I have to treat you like a human being, but really, I can't stand you' [laughs].

(Interview)

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Jake: I go into a place that, ninety percent of the US population would never step foot in. I go in there every day and throw myself in a situation where a guy who committed a heinous murder might be getting stabbed to death by another guy who committed a heinous murder. If that's not a moral struggle to jump into a fight like that where you have no benefit of helping anybody at the end of that except for the murderer who's getting stabbed to death. You put yourself in harm's way for somebody who a lot people believe that don't deserve it.

(Interview)

Their view of doing their job well gets spoiled. When COs take an outsider's perspective, they conclude that their hard work and good deeds (e.g., saving a criminal's life) will not increase their occupational status. Worse, they cannot convert moral and ethical behavior on the job into public credit.

COs not only face these moral and ethical dilemmas through their dealings with the population they supervise, but also because their co-workers place them in compromising positions:

Allen: The other day I went into the treatment center and there was a stupid officer in there on a computer looking at a porn site. Now how do you think that looks upstairs? That's the first time I seen that go on and that officer told me he's been doing it for a while. And he's been called up front for it before. He's gonna get fired sooner or later.

Caitlin: So what did you do when you saw that?

Allen: ...He'll get hung just like I would. It doesn't matter, they're watching it as it is.

Caitlin: Would you get in trouble if you don't report something like that?

Allen: Yep, [administration] could screw people over. (Interview)

Brian (Duncan) similarly discussed a situation that could have spoiled his image even more:

One CO...said [to me], "Hey I wanna take this guy somewhere...why don't you come in with me." I'm thinking he's just gonna yell at him. All of a sudden he brings the inmate in [the supply room] and grabs him by the throat. I'm like 'oh *Jesus Christ*, what are you doing?' [He] starts yelling at him 'blah, blah, blah.' Of course, he lets him go. Then he shuts the door and *I* start on the officer. "The hell is wrong with you? Wanna get me jammed up?" I started on him. He's like "No, I just wanted to show him that I'm not his little toy. He talks to me like I'm crap." I told him that he could have pulled him aside by yourself and didn't have to act like that. He's twice the size of this kid. I said, "What did you need me in there for?" He says, "I knew you would be there to back me up." I says, "FOR WHAT? This guy ain't gonna attack you. He's scared shit[less] of you. As soon as you grabbed him, he probably shit his pants." Anyway, we came out and what do you think the inmate does? He comes over to my desk with the other city-boys...and says, "*Hey* Duncan, I hear you like smacking people around in that spare room over there, huh? Is that what you guys are gonna start doing?" To me! And I wasn't even involved! But I was there...So I had to deal with it. (Interview)

The purpose of this chapter was to lay out the fundamentals of the inner-workings of correctional work, showing how the nature of it sets up problems that COs struggle with and try to resolve. Thus far, it can be said that the structure and nature of correctional work is built on inequity. Regardless of how successfully COs may navigate their job and its contradictions, they risk a spoiled identity. The next chapters will explore to what degree.

## CHAPTER 5

### SALVAGING IDENTITY AND ENHANCING OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

Not all correctional officers feel the same about their work. For example, some view themselves as the “forgotten cop” of law enforcement, while others seemed untroubled by the lack of public recognition. In order to salvage their status, some COs spoke in patronizing tones about others to elevate their work, uniting with other COs to form bonds, while others focused on the job’s extrinsic benefits. The way they contended with “dirty work” exposed how they made their work matter. Heinsler et al. (1990) studied detectives and campus police and similarly found that even though they all believed they engaged in dirty work, the detectives found ways to view their job as worthy, but the campus police employed strategies that oftentimes made them feel worse about their work. COs responded to the stigma of “dirty work” and their courtesy stigma of supervising inmates by implementing strategies that elevated their status. These strategies include: valorizing and sanitizing the job; code-switching; opting out of a central CO identity; and employing defensive othering.

#### *Valorizing the Job*

A subset of COs sought to validate their work and their status. Correctional work is often hidden from the public eye, which can make it difficult for the workers to gain appreciation from outsiders about the realities of their job. In situations like these, Goffman (1986) theorized that people who have membership in a discreditable subculture greatly benefit by having a personal representative speak to the public and vicariously voice their feelings, potentially softening their current social label (Goffman 1986). This category of COs frequently compared themselves and identified with police officers as their law enforcement brethren. Anthony Gangi, a full-time

correctional officer, podcaster of “Tier Talk” on [www.Spreaker.com](http://www.Spreaker.com), and creator of the “Tier Talk” Facebook page, frequently engaged in valorizing COs as law enforcement officers. COs such as Gangi, who view the CO role as their central identity and feel they do not receive approbation and admiration from the public, experience a high degree of status inconsistency and are more apt to invoke social movements or political actions that are connected with higher status groups (Lenski 1954). However, because the police were heavily criticized for excessive use of force on unarmed citizens in recent years, this alignment with police was potentially spoiling his effort. To handle the problem, Gangi attempted to deflect the stigma of excessive and fatal use of force on civilians. One of his tactics was to blame and reify the media:

But it's gotten to that point now...the media has bastardized the uniform; has degraded the uniform. So the uniform therefore doesn't carry that much respect [and] sense of authority anymore...The police who protect ourselves...should be respected because they have their uniforms on...The media also has a habit of fueling animosity between two groups ...You get one side of reporting, as opposed to both sides...This really bad reporting...is causing a war on the streets. It's causing officers to lose their sense of respect with the public...So just, come on guys, Media think what you're doing. You're fueling anger in a world that's already angered by you and you just keep fueling it...Don't be shocked 'media' when this happens cause this is the outcome with what you're doing. So don't sit there with your hands up. This is *all* you; I blame the media. (Facebook video)

What is fascinating and vital to note about the above quote, is that the video was created in response to the Dallas, Texas shooting that occurred on July 7, 2016, which involved the shooting of police officers, not correctional officers. Attempting to include COs under the law enforcement umbrella seemed to be a strategy to elevate their status and depict COs as morally worthy.

Some of the COs discussed the dangers associated with their work environment. Doing this publicly seemed to be a bid for validation and to be seen as sympathy-worthy workers rather

than domineering villains. One way the COs positioned themselves as sympathy-worthy was to align themselves with police officers who currently seem to be ‘under siege’ by the “Black Lives Matter” movement as Anthony Gangi did, quoted earlier. The notion of unity between law enforcement officers and their public advocates is growing, with the implementation of “Blue Lives Matter” for example. Some COs took this as an opportunity to enhance their occupational status. Even though the Dallas shooting of police officers on July 7, 2016 had nothing to do with correctional officers, Gangi misused the event as a strategy to rally COs and align them with a subgroup with higher status.

We also are targets...wear your uniform when you get to work as opposed to driving with your uniform on, then when you leave, take your uniform off. Maybe it is our better bet, especially for those states that don't give you a chance to protect yourself. You know, you're gonna wear the uniform proudly, but now you're a target, and now you can't even protect yourself so maybe it's just [better] to, when you get to work, put on your uniform, then when you leave work, take it off. (Facebook video)

Gangi's comments were a way to inform the public that COs are also putting their lives on the line for public safety and are subjected to great risks. Additionally, he encouraged COs to think of their job as not just thankless in the public eye, but as facing increased public dangers. This was an attempt to prop up COs' status by claiming that even they are even threatened by the dangers that Black Lives Matter activists have supposedly promoted.

Gangi used the Dallas shooting as a way to prop up COs' status, but by doing that it negates the reality of African Americans' daily tribulations (Schwalbe 2007). Because racial profiling is a negative act that further devalues the law enforcement image, COs opt out of discussing the critical problem of institutional racism in corrections and evade such conversations. Few COs reported acts of racism in their workplace or acknowledged personal



racist tendencies. In our interview, Eddy reported how working in corrections has changed his view of black people:

I look at black people differently. I'm not a racist and never, but I know there are white bad people and black bad people and I think for some reason, being around all these black people, I look at it differently. Like, if I see them on the news, 'Oh another one shot in Dorchester,' I'd be like, 'well, no kidding.' My wife would be like don't say that, that's awful. But that's become a lot more.

Caitlin: Now what's the breakdown of the inmates' race [at your facility]?

Eddy: I think it's more white to be honest with you. But I just, being white, I think I look at the whites differently to tell you the truth. I mean, I don't know how to put that [laughs]. It's kinda weird, and I think corrections just brought that out even more.

If COs and administrators avoid taking racial profiling seriously, then some COs' efforts to align themselves with police officers and defend police practices are likely to magnify, not lessen, institutional racism. Later in this thesis, I discuss how law enforcement training procedures could be improved to promote social equality in the penal process.

A pattern in my data is that the category of COs who viewed being a correctional officer as their central identity tended to be more concerned about being targeted by outsiders. They frequently mentioned the specter of spotting (ex)inmates in public. Even though this proves to be detrimental to their social lives, it indicates that their strong central identity follows them off the job site, similar to detectives (Heinsler et al. 1990).

Hannah: ...our investigations unit is wicked big into gang investigations, and ISIS, and all that. They get us all nerved-up with this whole ISIS-targeting-law-enforcement thing, so we don't like to walk around in our uniform for that reason either. We don't want to get targeted.

The emphasis placed on being targeted by outsiders may be self-sabotaging and serve as a cautionary tale in corrections, which was touched on in the literature review. Talking about their fears and concerns amongst themselves and with the public makes the CO job seem more heroic

and action-packed, but data on CO fatalities does not necessarily support this depiction. From 1998 to 2008 there were 113 CO fatalities, of whom 17 committed suicide (Konda et al. 2013). The leading cause of these CO deaths were assaults and violent acts in which 65 percent of the homicides were committed by inmates. In 2012, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), protective services occupation (e.g. police, fire, and corrections) had the highest rate of suicide among female workers, possibly due to the occupations being male-dominated, and it ranked sixth for men. Perhaps the sympathy COs are striving to cultivate could be focused on more grave issues related to corrections, such as correctional officers' mental and emotional health, a topic I analyze further in a following chapter.

### *Sanitizing the Job and Code-Switching*

To help publicly sanitize the work they do, the COs I interviewed spoke cautiously and professionally about their dealings with inmates. They avoided reinforcing stereotypes about rude and uncaring correctional officers. For example, Tyler reported his concern with inmate accommodation:

[An inmate will say] 'Oh, I'm having a bad day.' Well [I'll say,] 'How can I help you' or [sometimes they'll say,] 'Hey I'm not feeling good can I see the nurse?' [I'd respond,] 'No, you can't see the nurse right now, but give me a minute and I'll try to get a nurse to you.'...certain individuals...actually [are] not bad people, so when they ask you for something, they actually need it. (Interview)

Yet how COs discussed this topic with me contrasted sharply in Facebook users' exchanges, perhaps due to the level of comfort they may have had with peers. Their comments struck a more defiant tone. Because of the great contrast between COs' professional fronts and crude backstage personas, they constantly are required to engage in forms of facework in order to impress

other people and act accordingly in particular encounters (Goffman 1967). Here are some responses to a Facebook meme about learning to say “no” to a multitude of inmates’ questions:

Jessie: [The answer] no is the best, inmate logic is retarded anyways

Ben: (comment aimed toward inmates) Shut the fuck up. I got other shit going on and I'll deal with your bullshit when the opportunity arises.

Hilary: What about f##\$% off.that works.

COs who want to look tough and unsentimental may report exaggerated performances to their peers. Comments such as these may allow some COs to feel powerful and elevate their status. Yet, they are deeply discrediting if inmates and the public heard them—a fascinating paradox about the public nature of these Facebook pages. The professional front expected of COs and shown to non-COs is sanitized. But this sanitized front is shallow, as the Facebook pages make evident.

The COs’ code-switching (between professional and hardened CO talk) indicates that what they want to say to peers and what they are allowed to say to inmates and the public are two different things. It should be noted that although I cannot presume to be seeing the “real” person who works as a CO, everyone is still presenting a socially crafted self. Based on many Facebook comments, these are typical things that a CO might think or wish to say while they are working, but know that they cannot truly express how they feel. Although COs explained that it was unwise to let inmates know what they think of them during their incarceration, they felt differently once the inmates finished serving their sentence and returned back into society:

Jodi: ...[I'll say to] the guys on the inside... ‘I don't care if you're with your mother, your girlfriend, your wife or your kid, but if I come across your path [in public], and I'm [not a good mood], I might just tell you, what I thought of ya, just to let you know.’ (Interview)

Perhaps some COs expressed feeling this way because of the risks and consequences they would endure if they did not maintain their work face. Once the COs and (ex)inmates meet on the outside, they possess different roles and faces. Whether or not a CO gives a former inmate a piece of her or his mind remains unknown. But it indicates how COs feel constrained to maintain a professional front.

The nuances in correctional jargon may appear to be contemptuous and cold, but as Cohn (1987) found in her study of men who were nuclear strategic and defense analysts, the process of learning the native idiom helps people distance themselves from unpleasant or inhumane work. According to some Facebook users' comments, here are some alternative ways COs refer to what we know as straight-jackets: turtle suits; pickle suits; bam-bam suits; taco suits; suicide-snuggies; and horse blankets. To tell an inmate that they are being moved to segregation, COs may say "You're goin to the hole!" (Facebook comments). It is important for them to regulate their discourse when speaking to outsiders to enhance their status and social identity, but it is equally important for them to engage in their unique figure of speech in order to cope with the duties of correctional work. Hence code-switching is a key component of correctional work.

The bonds that some COs developed through the Facebook pages can undermine their efforts to valorize their work, but are quite insightful to my study. The Facebook users seemed comfortable and open about discussing various correctional topics, perhaps because they presumed that their Facebook audience were peers. It is true that the Facebook pages' audiences were mainly COs, but there are outsiders who also watched and commented on posts. COs appeared to have fun with words, but those words may come across as cold and only reinforce an uncaring stereotype. COs are required to suppress their emotions and regulate their discourse

while they are at work and not necessarily when they are out of their uniform, but the contradictions of their valorizing and sanitizing efforts pose limitations. Interestingly, not many interviewees brought up racial issues and reported that they “don’t see color.” If COs openly expressed any racism, it would only “dirty” their image even more; by not discussing racism, they found a way to sanitize their job.

### *Fighting Danger or Babysitting?*

Some COs opted out of valorizing their main tasks by characterizing their supervision of inmates as “babysitting.” They seemed to see no need to pump up the danger and make themselves look like heroes. Because “Babysitting” fit what they mainly did as correctional officers, they did not view it as demeaning. Instead, it seemed to be easier way to explain their job to people who were not familiar with correctional work.

Gregg: I made it as easy as possible for [my kids] to understand it. [I’d tell them] People that go to court and get locked up, well, I watch them. I was a professional babysitter. (Interview)

\* \* \* \* \*

Tyler: ...when I do explain, like I explain it to you, when adults ask me, I will tell everybody it is adult babysitting...people understand what a babysitter does, so you kind of give them that broad spectrum. (Interview)

It is here where the majority of the stoic, seasoned COs fall into place in terms of their neutral views of correctional work seen as “babysitting.” In an earlier quote, Allen reported that he was not concerned whether or not people viewed him as a “glorified babysitter,” as long as he was paid and compensated.

The concept of babysitting is typically seen as women’s work, and done by many students to make extra money, for example. Therefore, babysitting can be demeaning work, and

contradict the impression of CO work as valued and masculine. Thus, I found strong objections to the babysitting characterization on Facebook. Here, Steve and Ashley reported how that particular word devalues their work:

Steve: Baby sitters? These people we "baby sit", kill and rape BABIES, women, men, and children...they aren't there for minor traffic violations. These are cold hard criminals whom most of are institutionalized with nothing but time to plot their next move. Weather [sic] it be to rape, kill, injure staff OR escape and go back to their life of crime in the free world... (Facebook comment)

\* \* \* \* \*

Ashley: ...what happened to you today? [Pantomiming how someone may respond to her question] 'Nothing'. Me[?], I got in a use of force involving me and 5 other CO'S against 8 inmates in chow hall. ya I don't think baby sitter covers it (Facebook comment)

By elevating the amorality and danger inmates pose, COs suggest how correctional work matters in terms of protecting the public, reestablishing that this is an important, dangerous job.

Notably, some COs did not try to valorize and sanitize their job. Eddy, who favored a more stoic approach and identified as a seasoned CO, reported how he made sense of his CO role:

I think the most that I like about [my job] is that I'm doing a service for the state, for the people, for the community. It's not a great one, but it's a service. I like to tell myself that [laughs]. (Interview)

This example signifies that some COs did not push for higher status, demonstrating the conflict between the "pragmatists" and the "valorizers." Jodi did attempt to enhance her status, but in a gender-appropriate way, taking on more of a "social worker" role:

It is rewarding...cause you can be a mentor, a mother, a good listener, [and] a teacher...I can live with myself, knowing that I help people...I encourage guys to go to school, family, and church for the guys that are looking for that. I try to point them in the right path. And there have been some success stories...so I am

happy with what I have accomplished, in my career. It is rewarding to see [ex-inmates] on the street and...stay on the street and not come back through the doors...(Interview)

Focusing on positive ways their job affected others permitted COs like Eddy and Jodi to attach meaning to their work. Eddy took a more passive, masculinized approach by demonstrating how he deemed his job as “a service for the state,” while Jodi embraced a more softened approach, reporting her role as a “mentor, mother, good listener, and a teacher,” all conventional traits for women. COs who adopted this kind of strategy tended to have better outlooks on correctional work, while other COs who berated others just continued to reinforce the hostile nature of corrections. Perhaps not caring about so much public respect can be a way to resolve the distrust of and condescending stereotypes that the public has for COs.

### *Defensive Othering*

The same category of COs who wished to be seen as police officers’ equals during difficult times also denigrated police work to enhance their occupational status. This is another strategy COs employed to try to make their work seem more important. Heinsler et al. (1990: 249) found that campus police “parodied the police role to which they aspired” by employing practical jokes and engaging in one-upmanship. Here are some responses to a Facebook meme that says, “What if I told you that correctional officers deal with more shit than police do?”

Mason: Dam straight we do, easy [for police to] catch them, we keep them 24/7 365, going to war every day.

Seth: We deal with the guy the police only spend 5 minutes with everyday.

Meghan: ...we do what police do minus the conventional weapons and it's inside a city who's borders are walls [and] citizens are slightly less appreciative...

In our interview, Hannah made a comment about police officers and the lack of respect COs get:

...I feel like if you took a police officer off the streets and put them in a block with 100 inmates, gave them the keys and said 'here ya go, you're on your own,' they would freak the fuck out. I feel like a lot of times outside law enforcement agencies look at us like the red-headed stepchildren of law enforcement.

Police officers were not the only group that COs attacked in attempts to raise their status.

Facebook users also made comments about lower-status occupations in security work and made jabs at outsiders:

Jerry: a corrections officer is higher up on the food chain than them flat-footed pompadore looking things you see at the mall.

Nick: Let's call it like it is. A lot of wrinkle free dockers and penny loafers wearing "men" talk about us behind our backs, call us morons and claim we're a burden on tax payers, but they would never last 30 seconds behind razor wire.

Doing security work at a mall can be viewed as lower status "dirty work" than what COs do.

Additionally, this comment suggests that security work is effeminate in comparison to masculinized correctional work. By undermining the manhood of other workers, COs sought a powerful virtual (masculine) status (Schwalbe et al. 2000). If COs are not viewed as a "man" then they are seen as inferior and incapable of handling correctional dirty work. This was another way for them to say that they deserved respect for the tough, harsh environment they worked in.

COs also tended to point out corrupt COs and ones who did not correctly do their job.

Schwalbe and his co-authors (2000) observed that people in subordinate roles who engage in defensive othering attempt to deflect their subordinated or stigmatized status in order to appear equal to the dominant group. Key to defensive othering is calling oneself the exception to the lower-status group. One Facebook user said: "We called substandard COs Lops. As in, 'you stupid Lop-eared bunny, wtf did you do that?' Lop for short." Many women and men COs enhanced their status by condemning certain female COs as the "facility ho" (Facebook



comment). During an interview, Alice reported that “It’s very normal for new females to walk in and get all the [sexual] attention from the inmates, and they just go with it.” From the interviews and Facebook posts, there are many comments made by men and women about female COs engaging in sexual promiscuity with male COs and inmates. This was a way COs could enhance their status by pointing to the egregious things some female COs have allegedly done.

Tim: ...a female officer I worked with put a slit in the crotch of her uniform, would allow inmates to pull her black panties to the side and have their way with her when she was securing the rec building... (Facebook comment)

\* \* \* \* \*

Gregg: The females have a tendency to get caught with the inmates doing the nasty. Every one of them. Unbelievable! You’re making 36 bucks an hour, why the hell would you go and do that with an inmate? To get fired? (Interview)

\* \* \* \* \*

Tyler: ...we had a young female, who when she started was engaged to an officer who has been there for a while...[then] she left him for another male CO [and] during their relationship, swinging started to happen where other male COs were allowed to sleep with her, and now she left [him] for a young female CO because now she’s a lesbian. (Interview)

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Alice: The female [CO] was stupid and sleeping with an inmate, and I didn’t want to work with her because she’d be in the bathroom doing whatever and I’m standing there like, “Where is she now?” ...He used to put a sign up that said ‘Closed for Cleaning’ and she would go in there and he would be in there waiting for her.

Caitlin: Did you ever talk to her about it?

Alice: Yeah, I told her she was a stupid bitch! [laughs] And that was *naaaasty*. [She said in a pathetic-sounding voice] “*Oh, he loves me, he’s so good to me, he’s going to take care of me and my kids...*” He’s a drug dealer inside of jail, how’s he going to take care of you and your kids. (Interview)

Interestingly, more female COs than males engaged in defensive othering. Aligning themselves with male COs as the standard for excellence helped them achieve distance from the stigma of being inferior as women in a male-dominated occupation. Because their status as women sets

them apart as inferior to men, female COs have much more to prove than the males do; one way to salvage their identity is to distance themselves from the stereotype of an incompetent woman. Putting down female COs as sexual pariahs and corrupt, ignorant male COs as unethical reinforced the negative stereotypes of COs even as people characterized themselves as good COs.

## CHAPTER 6

### IMPLICATIONS OF BEING A CORRECTIONAL OFFICER

As Carissa said, “[Corrections is] a really good, really *really* good career...to get into. I enjoy it, but it takes a special type of person to do it” (Interview). People who hold a central identity adhere to its identity codes—a set of rules and expectations that define a particular identity in all its entirety (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). In the previous chapters, I analyzed the nuances that COs expressed in their language and their (often unexpressed) feelings about their work. Here I will discuss the impact of certain CO identity codes that I have yet to expand on and how they impacted the officers themselves. CO identity codes set standards that some could achieve, but were unreachable for others, creating CO status inconsistencies. A CO is expected to remain professional at all times, on the job and in public, which requires muting and suppressing emotional expression of any kind.

Six out of the 20 interviewees had an overall negative perspective of correctional work; all six described problematic relationships with other COs and administrators. Additionally, all six recognized how the hostile environment took a toll on them. This does not mean that the other 14 COs wholeheartedly enjoyed correctional work. Yet they positively viewed their overall experience in corrections because of how they contended with dirty work, established meaningful relationships at work, and redefined (salvaged) their status as discussed in previous chapters. Because COs are required to frequently suppress their emotions, perhaps their self-reports of correctional work were not entirely truthful and somewhat slanted. Regardless of how some COs may have not addressed certain issues (such as racism), the concept of status inconsistency (Lenski 1954) supports how COs can be committed to the organization and not

involved with the job, and vice versa. An experience of status inconsistency helps explain the paradoxes mentioned earlier in the literature review. If COs' social positions are not in line with their perceived roles and obligations related to their occupational status, then they may either feel connected to their job or disenchanted with it. Throughout this thesis, many reasons were proposed for contradictions in COs' reactions to their job. For the remainder of this chapter, I will expand on how status inconsistencies and identity contradictions can gravely affect COs in the workplace and beyond. Further, I will discuss the benefits COs receive from having identity congruence and how it helps them deal with correctional work better than when they experience identity incongruence.

#### *Unwritten Job Requirement: Suppressing Emotions*

As one man wrote on the "Tier Talk" Facebook page, "You don't get paid to have feelings." Correctional work's emotion culture (Thoits 1989) emphasizes the suppression of emotions to hide any perception of weakness or excessive anger which can be seen as "losing control." As discussed earlier, COs learn through their socialization process that expressing emotions is not encouraged. This is a necessary strategy for managing the job, but it can be harmful over time and comes at a personal cost.

William: We don't like to ask for help because it's almost as if your [sic] going to get punished for it. If you ask for help then in many cases they want to revoke your weapons card until the state deems you ok. And we all [know] how that can pan out. (Facebook comment)

Some reported withholding empathy for other COs, perhaps to enforce the ban on emotional expression, or possibly to enhance their own status as tough and unemotional externally. COs

tended to criticize emotional expression in other COs, which offered a way to elevate themselves and put down others who struggled to suppress their feelings.

Teresa: Between certain people there we talk about how we're all kind of terrible to each other and that has to do with being strong all the time. So if somebody's having a bad day and instead of someone asking 'are you okay, can I do anything to help you?' They're more likely to make fun of them or say 'why are you being such a wimp?' (Interview)

The symbolism of the uniform is one way COs communicated their identity to others, which some viewed as a burden, and for others as a status symbol (Goffman 1986). The spillover from work to public setting can occur through ways other than verbal expression.

Carrissa: Even when I'm not in uniform, people still know that I work for the sheriff's department... You do this job even outside of uniform and if you're doing this wrong, you're making the sheriff's department look bad... That's probably another thing that I hate. I just turned 21. It's just one of those things where you can't do this or do that, or have to make sure nobody knows you did this or that. You're always, 24/7, representing the...department. (Interview)

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Caitlin: How does working as a CO affect you personally?

Ryan: Well you know you gotta watch what you do in public and can't act ridiculous. Can't be getting pulled over and arrested. Definitely hold yourself in a higher regard. You're a public servant. (Interview)

In the following quote, Jodi's experience is about exploiting her power in public and not behaving professionally, which can hurt the CO image.

...I like it when I make men shake because people tend to be a little nervous [that I'm a CO]. I went to a funeral for my niece...and there was 2 people in the chairs just looking at me like I had come to arrest them [laughing]...I'm walking through the room and it was like you could hear a pin drop. [Another time] I go to the gas station...[and] go in the opposite direction...I'm only pumping a seven-dollar deal, and I got an older guy and a guy that's younger than me...both basically telling me off, and they're adamant, cause I'm in uniform, and I'm a female. [They're] like, 'you really need to get in your car and get out of that lane, now' and basically I tell 'em both off [small laugh]. (Interview)

Carrissa and Ryan reported how high the expectation is for COs to “behave” in public yet, Jodi sees it as an opportunity for potential intimidation. Unlike Carrissa and Ryan, Jodi’s social identity and personal identity are congruent. Hence, she experiences status consistency which can partly explain how she has worked in corrections for 25 years and expressed how much she enjoyed it, opposed to other interviewees’ reports.

Suppressing emotions can be beneficial for some COs, but not for all. COs reported that there are times when they cannot hold back their feelings, especially during a traumatic experience which further exemplifies the damage the job can do to them.

Alice: ...An old man came in and...showed me a picture of his family. His son and his son’s wife, were standing in the background [in the photo] and his two grandchildren were in front of him. He looked at me and said that, that he fucked his son and he fucked both his [brief pause] these were his words that he said. [pause] And that he had done his grandson and granddaughter, but that his grandson was his favorite...And then at that moment I remember grabbing him by his head, by his hair, and I started smashing his face up against the desk and his nose popped open, and there was blood all over the place, and another officer came running in to take me out. (Interview)

Paradoxically, COs believe that it is important for inmates to not upset or provoke them, yet they must work with people who want to engage with them in unpleasant ways. A CO may experience a traumatic event, however that alone does not indicate that they report a wholly negatively view of correctional work.

#### *Detrimental Effects on COs’ Social and Emotional Life and Physical Health*

The preceding chapters suggest that suppressing emotions is a necessary requirement in order for COs to deal with their dirty work, yet it can affect their social and emotional lives, even their physical well-being. It is apparent that the COs in this study have been tainted by

correctional work in some way, but the question is, to what degree? Some COs shared their concern with how much their job shaped their lives. A great way one Facebook user put it was: “A quiet place will bother you. Your circle of friends will shrink, and your attitude towards people will change and you can't go out in public in peace because you can pick up on who's up to no good in a heart-beat.” Yet not everyone described experiencing the detrimental effects of correctional work.

Several COs shared their observations of feeling desensitized toward correctional work and related how their friends outside their work noticed a personality change:

Eddy: I'd say things around my friends now and they look at me like, 'wow, did he just say that?' [laughs] One time my cousin said 'hey you better watch what you say' and I was like, 'for who, for what?' He was trying to tell me that I swear a lot more. (Interview)

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Teresa: I think that my CO friends are a little more uh, crass [laughs]. We don't really hold back, we're vulgar, and desensitized to a lot of things so it's a very different kind of interaction. Other people would be like 'are you really talking about dead bodies while you're eating' and I'm like 'yeah, it doesn't bother me.' [Laughs] Some people not in corrections find that strange... (Interview)

Eddy's and Teresa's examples may not indicate that correctional work is detrimental in regard to outsiders' standards, but because they were successfully socialized into the CO role, it appears as if they were proud of their altered selves more than anything. However, other COs reported that their altered selves disturbed them because their interpersonal relationships, particularly with their families, seemed to suffer. Notice how Hannah's and David's reports connect their jobs to their social and emotional lives:

Hannah: ...I had been on a 'drug eyeball' [and that's when COs] suspect that a female has drugs, either they ingested it or they have it in their vagina, butt, whatever...so they put them on a drug watch and [the inmate has] to shit three

times to get off the watch. When they shit—I have to go through it. I think I was on [it] for three or four days straight, for eight hours. I came home that day after sifting through this girl’s shit...*eight* times. I told her she could stop [laughs]...I come home, [and] all I can smell is shit. I’m totally disgusted, I’m angry, I’m aggravated. Walk in the door, and my son’s playing on his *stupid* phone. He’s *supposed* to be looking for a job. All he does is sit around the house and do nothing. So, I go in the room and say, “Did you go job hunting today?” No. Just matter-of-factly, “No.” He’s playing on his phone, like I’m not even standing there. I’m like, “So what’d you do today?” He said, “Oh I got up, I watched a movie, I made breakfast for me and Ashley, and I’ve been playing on my phone.” And I said “Oh! I’m *so* glad that I can go to work and sift through shit for eight fucking hours so you can play on your fucking phone!” And I went to go make a sandwich and...there was no bread...I was like, “I worked all these fucking hours and I can’t even have a sandwich!” And the mustard went flying. It burst opened and my entire kitchen was yellow. And my daughter, she started crying, and my husband was like “Oh my god!”...I just had enough [laughs]. (Interview)

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David: You know it’s pretty bad when your five-year-old daughter asks you why you’re so mad and angry, and yell all the time. Nothing will break your heart or rip it out faster...You ask them, “How’s Daddy been? Has he been yelling as much? How do you feel?” And when they tell you that they like ‘this Daddy’ or ask, “When are you going to go back to the special doctor so you don’t yell anymore”, you know it’s time to get out [of corrections]...(Interview)

When COs’ roles outside of the workplace greatly differ, it can be hard to manage both sets of roles, therefore, role conflict and work spillover occurs. These concepts significantly parallel with status inconsistency. Some COs reported that they do not receive the same response from outsiders, such as family members, than they do from co-workers or inmates. At times, the same behavior they employ within the workplace may be praised, while it can also be destructive to their home life.

COs’ relationships outside of work are crucial in defining the importance of their work role. In my sample, 11 participants were married, one widowed, four divorced, and four not married but were intimately involved with someone. Throughout my analysis, I found that compensation and benefits were the main reasons the COs decided to work and continue in



corrections. They pointed to their familial responsibilities and the need to provide financial support. Although they reported satisfaction with how their compensation allowed them to fulfill those responsibilities, their work seemed to harm them in other ways.

Christopher: ...It's a horrible, horrible place to stay.

Caitlin: So what makes you stay?

Christopher: The reason I stay is because in a few more years, I can get a full pension and be done with the job. That's the reason why. I can have a full retirement in 8 more years and never have to work again. (Interview)

Christopher's overall perception that his workplace is "horrible" suggests that focusing on monetary benefits is a cognitive emotion management strategy (Thoits 1989) to keep working as a CO, yet over time the personal cost may increase and prove detrimental. Such an approach seems pragmatic for successfully completing CO duties; but can be socially, emotionally, and physically harmful to the CO, their family, and inmates.

For example, due to the nature of correctional work, some COs seemed to experience a hypervigilant pattern in that they struggled with trusting others and reported avoiding public places.

Janelle: My husband and I are both COs. we fight over who gets to see the entrance at a restaurant all the time, someday we share the same side, being a CO has changed so much of how we function in our daily lives but I'm a stronger more aware person for it.

Richie: Sounds like you are paranoid

Janelle: Not at all. I know many COs that are like this. We work in a maximum security adult male facility sorry if we don't find it appropriate to let our guards down anymore. (Facebook comments)

Again, some COs like Janelle may come across as being proud of their behavior, but their response can also be seen as a defense against criticisms of their changed lifestyles due to the exposure to correctional work. Marking the boundaries between COs and outsiders can highlight

their differences. Christopher's negative outlook on correctional work is based on his lack of interpersonal relationships and his distrust with others. He reported how he minimized his interactions with others because of this. Choosing to live in pseudo-isolation can negatively define a CO's outlook on their correctional work.

Christopher: I'm definitely not the same person I was. I'm pretty much, I'm very distant and isolated from most people. I think over time, I've become isolated from most people...It's a very, very dark, lonely atmosphere. It's more than most people realize...The job reminds me of walking over a tight-rope every day and below you is a mine field, and once you fall off the tight-rope, it can just ruin your career...It's the stress of management, it's the stress of, you can be involved in an inmate incident and there's cameras everywhere nowadays...we're only there to do a job and management can give a rat's ass about you. We're all easily replaced and there's no loyalty. You can be the most outstanding officer of the year and can screw up one time and you're gone. So we're all disposable assholes, excuse my language, but that's what it is. (Interview)

COs' social and emotional lives are interconnected and affected by the different social factors around them. In our individualistic society, it can be difficult to imagine that we do not have as much autonomy in our own decisions and behavior as we think.

Eddy: There's a lot to this job that you got to understand that affects you as a person. You can say to yourself, 'no that's not going to affect me; but guess what? It already has. Deep down, it's already changed you. I try to fight off all this stuff but I talk to a lot of guys at work and they're like, 'oh this isn't stressful.' Listen, you put on your uniform, it's stressful! A lot of these stresses and changes are going to happen whether you like it or not. (Interview)

It may be hard for some COs to acknowledge that correctional work has altered them in one way or another depending on how they contend with it. At the outset, I mentioned that the worker affects the environment and the environment affects the worker. Eddy reported how even if a CO acknowledges it or not, they will experience a personal change. Interestingly, one of the main goals COs appear to have is "doing their time" and successfully making it to retirement—a

similarity to that of an inmate. CO language has adapted to prison life and all that encompasses it. There has been much research done on inmates and people who have lived in isolation and the detrimental effects of it. COs share some parallels with inmates in this sense.

In addition to those who may recognize the detrimental effects of correctional work, there are some COs who reported unmistakable effects on their mental and physical health.

Hannah: ...I don't even think I want to do this for the rest of my career. I've been thinking about it and after almost three years of doing it, I have become very cynical and suspicious of everybody. I can see the negativity getting into me. Just thinking everybody's bad and everybody's gonna hurt me and everybody's gonna do something bad to me...It's changed me...If I've been doing it for three years, what's 20 years gonna do? You can't get out of this without being a totally different person and sometimes, it's not for the better. (Interview)

Realizing that correctional work is beginning to personally affect them can help COs find ways to deal with their environment. However, because of the embargo on showing emotions, COs indicated that seeking help could be risky. For COs who suffered from mental illness, getting help could be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Some COs reported having PTSD, depression, and experiencing a co-worker suicide.

Jonathan: Here recently in the last few months I've been seeing a therapist. I've been diagnosed with PTSD and hypervigilance. And with a failing marriage, depression, I feel corrections isn't for me anymore. (Facebook comment)

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Gregg: ...my own [work] partner killed himself. He went in the backyard, his girlfriend was in the house with the kids, went into the shed in the back yard, drunk a bottle of Jack Daniels, got [on] a milk crate and put a rope around his neck, and hung himself right in the shed...And [another instance a] guy that worked across from me put a 357 Magnum in his mouth. It's just, 'Why ain't you here? Why ain't you at work today?' And they come on and announce at roll call that he took his own life yesterday before work, he couldn't handle working here anymore. People just don't kill themselves for no reason. When you work in that type of environment it kind of inflames it. You're already working with sick people as it is. All they think all day is how to get over on you, how to rob, how to

steal, how to sneak stuff in...How to take advantage of you. So when you work with them all day and see this all day long, it rubs off on people. (Interview)

In our interview, Matthew reported how the stress of relentless overtime exacted a social, mental, and physical toll on a worker: "...there [are] people [who get] forced [to work overtime] every other day for months...to a year—and that breaks people. That’s why there was suicides, people turning to drugs [and] alcohol. It’s the working conditions they were in.” In Matthew’s example, it is apparent that not only relationships sustained outside of corrections can cause mental strife for a CO, such as unrealistic scheduling and a lack of support from administrators, not just working with troubled inmates can harm COs.

In addition to mental health problems, the harsh realities of correctional work negatively affect COs’ physical health due to the compromising situations they are placed in by violent inmates and the daily stress they experience. One Facebook user reported they were "...injured by [an] inmate, resulting in...a laminectomy, a fusion of c,5,6,7, and after healing for 2 years...couldn't [return to corrections]...due to the injury.” Similarly, Gregg reported the cause of his forced retirement: “[The inmate] was pushing [a cart] towards a corner, and I was turning the corner as he was...We ran into each other and that was the end of that. Home, doctors, and that’s been my life ever since” (Interview). James reported his concerns about working in such a violent environment: “I can get a guy that comes in from court and just pulls out a shank and boom. Having to explain that to my daughter that ‘Daddy’s not coming home today’ ...just breaks my heart” (Interview). Lastly, the high amount of daily stress they undergo can further cause detrimental health issues.

David: The day after my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, I got 911 dialed from the facility because I was on the verge of a heart attack. Uh, I’m balding, I’m greying—and I’m only 33. [Doctors] found heart damage...like blockages, leaking from the valves,

thickening of the arteries and the walls of my heart. I eat well; I run; I lift. It's all stress, because when you don't know how to react to it and you don't react, you internalize it and you attack yourself. (Interview)

As David explained, the effects of one's social and emotional lives and physical well-being are interdependent; COs can experience a cascade of harmful effects.

COs tend to deal with "dirty work" in many different ways, but the emergent patterns in the data indicate that there are some limitations on how they can make their work entirely better. Wesley stated, "Sure we get to go home at the end of our shifts, but we are subjected to the same negativity, violence and chaos [inmates] are" (Facebook comment). Correctional work takes a toll on the CO; depending on how they frame their correctional role can predict the severity of the consequence. The relationships COs develop with their co-workers, administrators, inmates, and outsiders greatly influences how they feel about correctional work.

Some COs managed the detrimental effects of correctional work in disadvantageous ways, such as isolating themselves from others, but other COs grasped that sharing their work stresses with co-workers was helpful. Confiding in their peers helped relieve some of their stress, at least to some degree. COs may turn to each other to lend moral support about their work and talk about the experiences they go through on a daily basis. This interaction is not just merely to discuss techniques of the trade, but can be seen as an outlet to relieve some of the stress caused by their work environment.

David: [COs are] bonded more that 'hey we work a lousy job together and we all need to be there for each other.'...You start telling stories and you don't start telling a story because it's funny. It's almost like therapy. You want someone to listen and these people have some things in common...you're always talking about work...it's more to decompress and to feel human because the second you lift up your head and look out that window, it's like you're at the zoo, only there's nothing pleasant about it. When you look down and look at your co-workers,

some would say ‘This is normal, it’s okay, I’m okay, she’s okay, he’s okay, so let’s laugh and be stupid because next time we go outside it might be for a fight or a use of force, so for now let’s be us.’ (Interview)

\* \* \* \* \*

Eddy: It sounds weird but it’s just like, what else is there to talk about while we’re behind the walls, besides family and how things are? It becomes like a little bit of a therapy session! You have something to tell your partner or somebody you trust. Friends on the outside I think are just, um, not as intense. (Interview)

Charlton and Hertz (1989) similarly found that having camaraderie among security specialists in the U.S. Air Force was a way for them to cope with boring, uneventful, yet stressful work and seen as one of the best aspects of the job. Although some COs tended to do this, others saw sharing personal tribulations as a sign of weakness, so not many COs reported confiding in co-workers to relieve their stress. Here, a Facebook user expresses how he preferred to not recollect some of his correctional work experiences:

What can I say, start[ed] in 1987-2013, at Oklahoma Department of Correction, too many to mention, don't want to think about it...People that did 25 plus years in the penitentiary...[it] was a hard line/life to walk. People I worked with, we don't talk about it, it's the past, time to try to get your mind untwisted. (Comment)

COs do not necessarily only vent to others who are familiar with correctional work and share the same status. They also find solace and validation in speaking to outsiders who accept them for who they are and sympathize with them due to their connection to the individual. There were many times COs posted Facebook comments about the lack of public recognition and outsiders would respond by posting validating comments.

Brandon: I was a corrections officer for 15 yrs. Never heard the word thank you from the public instead all I heard was negative comments due to my size....The public views us as the enemy...

Cheryl: Thank you! I don't think the public will ever fully understand if any at all what you guys go through for our safety. (Facebook comments)

\* \* \* \* \*

Shontel: Did anyone else hear "You're only a CO because you couldn't be a REAL cop!" ?

Barbara: Amen to that. We get very little respect

Eric: Thank you to all correction OFFICERS we need you so much as we need other officers. Thank you to be there for us (Facebook comments)

During our interviews, Jake and David interpreted my researcher role as an example of how they wished the public could see them: "...what I think you're doing is great. It's kind of a matter of knowing what goes on in there and seeing what goes on in the mental battles"; "It feels good to talk to you. And especially not to be judged." For some COs, I was seen as a way for their voice to be heard and for others, I was a person to whom they could vent. The Facebook pages are not only seen as a "News/Media Website," but also as a forum to air out CO grievances, including the lack of public recognition, and to show to the public that they were sympathy-worthy.

Throughout my analytical chapters, I have posed that some long-term COs do not seem to be suffering as much as others, which is paradoxical. One possible interpretation may be that COs who appear to be managing well experience an identity congruence between their personal and social identities. For example, Jodi, who is a seasoned CO and an exception in my sample, redefined her CO role as a mentor and rehabilitator of inmates which is typically viewed as a "good" and moral role. Throughout our interview she reported how she is a good person inside and out of the correctional walls, therefore her moral identity supersedes any social stereotypes and encompasses both her personal and social identities. For those COs who became pragmatic over time, other social roles grew more important for them. This, too, could support the idea of identity congruence. Many outsiders do not view correctional work as an appealing occupation, and the COs who opted out of raising their occupational status seemed to view their job as

outsiders do. They did not align their personal identity with their CO role. By keeping their work secondary rather than central, they did not struggle with outsider perceptions of the low occupational status and stigmatized social identity of a correctional officer.

Those who struggled to raise their low occupational status seemed to experience an identity incongruence because their positive personal identity contradicted the negative social identity imputed to them by the general public (see Snow and Anderson 1992). A lack of validation and support from others can expose them to social, mental, and physical harms. Even the COs who do not attempt to publicly raise their occupational status, such as Christopher, can also experience identity incongruence, or status inconsistency. In his case, he solely works in corrections, a “horrible” job, for the monetary benefits. He reported how others, including administrators, viewed COs as “disposable assholes,” a spoiled social identity. His comments showed that he did not appreciate the lack of respect from administrators and peers. He suggested that he deserved much more respect and support even though over time, his technique of lowering expectations of others has somewhat helped him in that regard. Lacking respect from co-workers, administrators, and even outsiders greatly influences COs’ identity incongruence and experiences with status inconsistency, contributing to increasing CO suffering over the span of their correctional careers.



## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

It is widely recognized that there are serious problems in corrections that academic research covers well, despite mass media inaccuracies. Focusing on correctional officers' perceptions of their workplace and what their work means to them provides deeper insights into the faults and complications of correctional institutions from insiders' perspectives. To understand correctional work, there is no one better to consult with than COs themselves, in a format that encouraged them to speak their minds.

Correctional work offers substantial benefits and compensation to employees who lack a college degree, and all COs appreciated this even though their work does not yield much status. It maximizes a person's time and money investment in an era that emphasizes costly post-secondary education and an uncertain job market. Yet, despite the monetary inducement, COs contend with a stressful work environment that poses constant dangers. The stress is clear and apparent, but because this occupation takes place in segregated settings, many members of the public do not see, or perhaps even think about, how much jails and prisons affect COs' psychic, social, and physical well-being.

The CO socialization process is deliberately rough for new COs; the goal is for them to feel that they have earned their position in the eyes of the seasoned COs. An overlapping theme throughout the analyses shows that correctional officers must prove themselves better than others in order to gain some sense of status, respect, and autonomy. This notion even applies to members of the public, which coincides with some of the COs' defensive comments about the hard work they do for outsiders who do not acknowledge the daily dangers in corrections. New

COs have to prove themselves to their peers by prevailing over dangerous situations, and the more they prevail, the more respect they will earn from co-workers. But, as I also show, COs almost uniformly seem to operate from the standpoint that they know better and work smarter than their co-workers; thus they give less respect than they expect to receive.

Correctional work typically follows the workers outside of the workplace. So perhaps some COs are looking for extended amounts of appreciation and recognition from outsiders the same way they try to accumulate it from peers as they advance in their corrections career. Yet, they reported that the general public pays little mind to the difficulties of the CO role. Status inconsistencies arise when COs' unrealistic expectations of members of the public are not met. COs labor in obscurity not only because it is hidden from the public eye, but also because it is dirtied and devalued. When COs compare themselves to outsiders who are unfamiliar with correctional work, it can create distress and emotional upheaval for those who seek public appreciation because of the lack of understanding. If there are so many paradoxes in correctional work, how might we, as an advanced society, move forward in implementing social change for the benefit of inmates and correctional workers in the U.S.?

Mass incarceration has risen dramatically and is only now possibly stabilizing. A current effort underway to reform some sentencing policies may yield substantial change if most states make a concerted effort (Silber, Subramanian, and Spotts 2016). Yet jail reforms are still needed (Subramanian et al. 2015). Overcrowding is only one area of concern when it comes to mass incarceration. If policies improve, perhaps fewer people will be locked up permanently for lesser crimes. Although inmates and COs (figuratively speaking) are locked away from society in the confines of high-surveillance buildings, members of the public must not forget that COs actually get to leave their hostile workplace and re-enter society on a daily basis. Non-incarcerated

citizens are protected from 'prison life' by COs who must interact with a stigmatized population. An assumption about people who work in emotion-regulated occupations and professions, such as medical students and veterinary technicians (Smith and Kleinman 1989; Sanders 2010), is that they must remain professional and detach themselves. When those workers deviate from their occupation's emotion norms (Thoits 1989), other people may demonize them for it. According to COs, corrections is a thankless job as far as the public goes. Similar to flight attendants, emotional detachment is necessary but harmful (Hochschild 2012). As more and more people work in the service sector, perhaps these restrictive emotional suppression norms may weaken.

Given the continued problem of overcrowding and high cost of corrections, CO health should be of great importance and concern, especially because it connects to how COs treat inmates. Many COs reported the harsh realities of corrections and role strains they experience. If people want better treatment for inmates, then better support and training for correctional officers should be provided and implemented. The more COs are forced to work overtime (which many reported to me), handle a large number of difficult inmates, and are placed in compromising positions because of conflicting administrative orders and ill-informed peers, the more they will become resentful of the institution and criminal justice system altogether. If people in our society want to "...[maintain] distance from the [dirty] act, tending always to entrust it to others, under the seal of secrecy," then it is imperative we have effective programs in place for COs to openly resolve troubling issues that arise in the workplace (Foucault 1995: 9-10).

Delving deeper in my analyses, I discussed how status inconsistencies in correctional work affects COs' lives. The many inequities built into the correctional system impede COs' capacity to manage their environment and their work-related duties. Many techniques they employed to contend with their jobs are not morally justified (e.g., name-calling, putting down

others), but those efforts helped them continue rather than quit. If they failed to assimilate to the correctional subculture, they were more likely to experience lasting ill effects. Although there were some exceptions to this case, this was the general pattern that emerged in the data.

In future evaluations of corrections within the criminal justice system, the effects of the occupation on its workers and how the workers affect the occupation must be taken into account. A more sociologically mindful approach (Schwalbe 2008) to understand people who operate this major social institution can provide dividends for these workers and the inmates they supervise and protect (from harm or from causing further harm).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CLASSIFICATION SHEET

<b>Person</b>	<b>Correctional Facility</b>
Alice	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Allen	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Alyssa	County jail; male and female units
Brian	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Brittany	County jail; male and female units
Carrissa	County jail; male and female units
Christopher	Medium security state prison; all-male units
David	Medium security state prison; male and female units
Eddy	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Gregg	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Hailey	County jail; male and female units
Hannah	County jail; male and female units
Jake	Medium security state prison; all-male units
James	Medium security state prison; male and female units
Jodi	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Matthew	County jail; male and female units
Ryan	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Teresa	Medium security state prison; male and female units
Troy	Medium security state prison; all-male units
Tyler	Medium security state prison; all-male units

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What year were you born?
2. What is your marital status?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. What is (or was) your official job title?
5. Do you have any children?
6. (If participant has children) What do you tell your children about your line of work?
7. Would you recommend being a correctional officer to your children?
8. How long have you been working as a correctional officer?
9. How did you come to choose this occupation?
10. Please describe a typical day at work for me. What are some of the routine things you need to do?
11. What kinds of problems do you encounter at work? How often do they come up? How do you deal with them?
12. What did you do before you became a CO?
13. What do you like the most about being a correctional officer?
14. What do you like the least about being a correctional officer?
15. How do you feel about your compensation for your work?
16. Do you ever interact with other COs outside of work?
17. If so, what do you all typically do?
18. Do you hang out with anyone who isn't in corrections?
19. Is there a difference between new COs and other COs who have been there for a while?

20. What advice do you give to new COs?
21. What typical mistakes do they make, as they learn on the job?
22. What happens when a CO calls-out for their shift?
23. Have others calling out of work ever directly affected you?
24. What did you know about being a CO before you became one?
25. How does working as a correctional officer affect you personally?
26. What is the initial reaction when someone learns about your position as a CO? What do they say?
27. What are your thoughts about the inmates you supervise?
28. What types of crimes that inmates have been convicted of impact you the most?
29. What types of crimes that inmates have been convicted of impact you the least?
30. What are some of the things you've learned about how to interact with inmates? Can you give me an example?
31. What have you learned not to do? How do you avoid doing that?
32. In your current place of work, are there guidelines about the gender of the CO and the inmates gender?
33. Do male COs ever supervise female inmates? Has this always been the case?
34. Do female COs ever supervise male inmates? Has this always been the case?
35. How do you deal with inmates who are of a different race?
36. Considering the inmate population you work/worked with, what racial/ethnic group is the most common? Has this always been the case?
37. What racial/ethnic group are you least likely to encounter among inmates?
38. Who do you report to? How does their job affect you?



39. Who do you get along with the most at your job?
40. Who do you get along with the least at your job?
41. How do you think administration treats you?
42. How do you typically relieve stress?
43. How often do people quit corrections?
44. As you look back on your experiences as a CO, which events stand out in your mind?
45. What's one thing you want at work, but can't have?
46. Is there anything you'd like to add, that we have not discussed today?
47. Is it okay for me to contact you in the future if I need any clarifications?

This concludes our interview. I thank and appreciate you taking time to share your thoughts and experiences with me.

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