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# Correctional Officers "Through the Looking Glass": Understanding Perceptions and their Impact on Personal and Professional Identity

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**CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS “THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS”:  
UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON PERSONAL AND  
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

By

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**THESIS**

**Submitted to the Department of Criminology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Master of Arts (Criminology)**

Wilfrid Laurier University

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## ABSTRACT

The external and institutional stressors that correctional officers face while performing their duties, such as managing a demanding workload, staffing shortages, and monitoring potentially dangerous inmates, have received some attention in the literature. However, researchers have not examined correctional officers' perceptions of how others view their role and professional identity—whether prisoners, their families, or members of the general public—and how these perceptions are believed to influence an officer's perspective of their work and their well-being. To explore this gap in the literature, this project seeks to analyze whether or not correctional officers sense these perceptions while performing their duties and if acknowledging these attitudes influences their views of the job.

This study is interpretive and framed around the emerging perceptions and experiences of correctional officers and sensitizing concepts of stigma (Goffman, 1963), the “looking-glass self” (Cooley, 1902) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Ten male and female correctional officers employed with the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services were interviewed about their workplace experiences and about the portrayal and public engagement of correctional news media. The analyses found that officers view their work through three distinct perspectives (individual, media-centred and organizational).

**Keywords: correctional officers, perceptions, experiences, perspectives, symbolic interactionism, perceived stigma**

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Referred to as “jailers, guards, correctional officers, and peace officers” by criminal justice administrators and as “screws, turnkeys, and badges” by the inmates; the role of correctional officers is labelled and redefined by various groups within and outside of the prison industrial complex (Bensimon, 2004, para. 10). A correctional officer’s role is rarely regarded as positive in the public domain with media and popular culture offering many distorted and often sensationalized representations of correctional officers (Vickovic, Griffin & Fradella, 2013; Crawley, 2013). Contemporary criminological literature on prisons has largely emphasized the study of prisoners rather than correctional staff (Bensimon, 2004).

This study focuses on correctional officers, who face unique challenges and are perhaps disciplined and socially redefined within the prison industrial complex as much as prisoners (Tracy, 2004). The external and institutional stressors that correctional officers face while performing their duties, such as managing a demanding workload, staffing shortages, and monitoring potentially dangerous inmates, have received some attention in the literature (Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013; Shannon & Page, 2014; Sundt, 2009). However, researchers have not examined correctional officers’ perceptions of how others view their role and professional identity—whether prisoners, their families, or members of the general public—and how these perceptions are believed to influence an officer’s perspective of their work and their well-being.

My interest in this area of study grew out of my experience working at a correctional facility for a few years. I began as a receptionist responsible for answering outside calls that were coming into the institution, many of which came from family members and friends of incarcerated loved ones who were often in distress after being told that the day’s visiting privileges had been cancelled for security reasons. I was not at liberty to disclose the exact

reason for the cancelled visits, and callers often assumed that the officers were at fault, telling me that it was because of the unreliability and unresponsiveness of correctional officers, that the institution could not meet the needs of their incarcerated loved ones.

These interactions raised questions for me about officers' understandings of how they are perceived and whether these perceptions shape officers' own perspectives of their work and identity. Despite the fact that these were mere assumptions, the above scenario raised questions for me about officers' understandings of how they are being perceived in the media and by others, and whether or not these perceptions shape officer's own perspectives of their work and identity. Social theorists within the tradition of symbolic interactionism have been concerned with how individuals' understandings of themselves and their social identities are shaped in relation to beliefs about others' perceptions of them. These theorists posit that our social interactions provide us with information about how others perceive us. Our sense of self is then informed by these interactions and perceptions, known as the "looking glass self" (Cooley, 1902). However, when there is a limited opportunity for interaction with a group of people, others may develop assumptions about that group, based on the experiences of others or distorted representations in news media (Crawley, 2004).

Between late 2014 and early 2016, the media reported about a potential labour disruption that would involve over 6,000 correctional officers in Ontario. Although an officer strike did not occur, the media coverage of the labour negotiations provided the general public a rare glimpse of the occupational stressors and difficulties that correctional officers are met with on a regular basis (Cheeseman et al., 2011; Davidson, 2015; Philliber, 1987; Richmond, 2015; Roberts, 2005; Shannon & Page, 2014; Thompson, 2015; Tracy, 2004). News media is currently one of the primary ways that information about corrections gets disseminated in Canada (Tracy, 2004). This

research explores the role of media in constructing public perceptions of corrections and the common themes that news media present about correctional services. I also examine public responses to, and how correctional officers make sense of these media portrayals and how they impact their views and experiences of the job.

To answer these sets of research questions, I used a mixed-methods qualitative research design that involves a media analysis of contemporary Canadian correctional news media and semi-structured interviews with ten correctional officers who work at provincial remand centers in Ontario. I begin by examining the current state of the literature on corrections, and examine previous research on media portrayals, along with the experiences and lived realities of correctional officers. Next, I will discuss the theoretical framing of this project that incorporates specific elements of symbolic interactionism – an interpretive lens through which social behaviour and interactions can be shaped by the impressions and attitudes that others are perceived to have towards a certain group of people. In chapter three I present the methodology for this research and discuss the process of data collection and analysis. Lastly, in chapters four through six, I discuss the findings of this research, addressing media representations of correctional work and officers' perceptions of their occupation. The conclusion of this study will tap further into officers' perspectives of their work, by including officers' suggestions towards improving corrections while increasing public awareness of their duties.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Challenge and Change in Corrections**

While there is a growing literature base that looks at occupational stressors in public service careers, much of this literature focuses on paramedics, police officers and frontline crisis workers (Anderson, Litzenberger & Plecas, 2002; Clark-Miller, & Brady, 2013; Durkin, 2012; Gearing, Saini & McNeill, 2007; Issachar & Byran, 2007; Leblanc et al., 2012; Webster, 2013;). As such, very little is known about provincial correctional officers aside from the obvious – they are tasked with monitoring and securing individuals accused of a crime and remanded into custody to await trial, or convicted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment of two years, less a day (Bensimon, 2004; Cook & Lane, 2014).

An average day for a correctional officer is mainly spent within the four walls of the institution fulfilling the primary function of maintaining the security of the facility by preventing escapes and remaining alert in the event of prison riots, or other altercations (Shannon & Page, 2014; Sundt, 2009; Tracy; 2004). Officers also spend a large portion of their time caring for inmate needs by answering questions, receiving and responding to requests, giving advice, and counselling prisoners during their period of incarceration (Philliber, 1987; Roberts, 2005). Isolated from the rest of society by a well-delineated boundary of prison walls that structure the scope of their activities, it is often difficult for correctional staff to legitimize or assert their professional identity publicly (Bensimon, 2004; Cheeseman et al., 2011).

Several writers have outlined ideological changes in corrections that have altered the way that correctional officers perform their duties. For example, Correctional Service Canada (2014) noted that prior to the 1930's, inmates were punished by shackling, flogging, solitary confinement, and darkened cells. Under the old philosophy, there was no oversight nor

restrictions on regulations or policies issued by the institution, resulting in limited rights and entitlements for prisoners (Correctional Service Canada, 2014; Philliber, 1987). Correctional officers were given broad discretion to manage and discipline prisoners, and were rarely held accountable for wrong-doings (Bensimon, 2004; Correctional Service Canada, 2014; Philliber, 1987). If an officer refused to discipline prisoners, fellow officers would view them as weak (Philliber, 1987; Toch, 1981).

Erving Goffman described the use of vigilance and punitive measures in his book *Asylums* (1961). Goffman (1961) observed that guards in mental hospitals have to be prepared for any eventuality, including organized efforts to escape or attempts to “frame” officers that could subsequently result in censure. As a result, Goffman (1961) found that the guards often exhibited anxiety that was not easily alleviated. He suggests that guards may experience ambivalence in using discipline to protect themselves and prisoners:

...staff members may find themselves forced to manhandle these patients, creating an image of themselves as *harsh* and *coercive* just at the moment when they are attempting to prevent someone from doing to himself what they feel no human being should do to anyone. At such times, understandably, it is extremely difficult for staff to keep their own emotions in control (Goffman 1961, p. 83).

A correctional officer’s duty to protect themselves while keeping prisoners secure is an arduous and emotionally trying task. According to Shannon and Page (2014), when members of the public hear of these tense situations, they often invoke a misinformed, negative public image of officers as “brutal” and “careless.” However, this argument is in contrast to traditional understandings of what the prison represents – an institution that *punishes* prisoners for their wrong-doings and serves justice for victims of crime. As the public became more aware of

assaults and abuses that were occurring in prisons, via the media (Perkel, 2013; Sawa & Loiero, 2013; Thompson, 2015; White, 2015) the negative image of the prison guard was exacerbated (Freeman, 2001).

In the 1960s, there was a marked shift in prison ideology and practice which moved away from understanding prisons as merely punitive institutions; increasing emphasis was placed on rehabilitation. This shift necessitated a redefinition of prisons (Correctional Services Canada, 2014). During this time, the justice system was placed in the spotlight soon after hearing of the abuses and punitive measures that were being used against inmates in several facilities across the country. The rise of rehabilitation and emphasis on correctional treatment has affected the ways that correctional officers interact with inmates and respond to prisoners' safety and security needs (MCSPRB, 1975). As the move towards rehabilitation and crime prevention was occurring in correctional facilities across Canada, the world of the correctional officer was changing as well. Increased focus on prison systems and their operations resulted in more scrutiny and increased inquiry into the perceptions and experiences of correctional staff in federal and provincial facilities (Correctional Services Canada, 2014; Philliber, 1987).

### **Attitudes and Perceptions of Correctional Employment**

Research investigating correctional officers' perceptions and attitudes about their jobs, the inmates they oversee, and their interactions with correctional administration has increased in recent years (Crawley, 2013; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011; Shannon & Page, 2014). One question that has received minimal attention in the literature, is the extent to which correctional officers' perceptions of others' attitudes and opinions about their work effect their overall job satisfaction and their interactions with prisoners and the general public (Cheeseman, Kim, Lambert & Hogan, 2011). Cheeseman et al., (2011) found that officers believed that the

prisoners they were supervising were “hostile” and “devious” towards them, and these traits were perceived as posing a significant threat for correctional staff (see also Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012; Philliber, 1987; Ricciardelli & Gaszo, 2013; Toch, 1981). Further, this research found that these perceptions can impact the way officers interact with prisoners and fellow coworkers. Officers who sense perceptions of threat from prisoners, according to Ricciardelli and Gaszo (2013) become tougher, less caring, and mistrusting towards prisoners. Such attitudinal changes are illustrated through displays of confidence, aggression, minimal humour and the creation of social distance when interacting with and in the presence of prisoners (Cheeseman et al., 2011; Goffman, 1959; Ricciardelli & Gaszo, 2013;).

Recent research from the UK reflects these attitudinal changes as it was found that prisoners perceived the prisoner-guard relationship to be confrontational and distant, and believed that correctional officers were uncaring and unwilling to provide assistance to them (Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012). While Sykes (1958) was one of the first individuals to examine the prison setting and how officers and inmates interacted with one another, research conducted by Ricciardelli (2016), adds to contemporary understandings of prisoner-officer interactions by emphasizing work-related factors (ex. stress, working conditions, organizational practices) that influence officers’ attitudes towards prisoners and their work experiences.

Public perceptions of prison populations and prison conditions also create a problem for the correctional system and the staff that are employed within it. Many community members believe that correctional facilities, whether provincial or federal, contain violent and dangerous prisoners who enjoy an easy and comfortable life behind bars (Roberts, 2005; Vickovic et al., 2013). The blending of these two stereotypes fuels skepticism about the justice system and likely undermines public confidence in corrections (Roberts, 2005). Roberts (2005) conducted a

literature review on public opinions of corrections. Some of the data Roberts (2005) gathered came from a 2002 Ipsos-Reid poll, that asked Canadian respondents how much confidence they had in criminal justice agencies. Eighty-eight percent of respondents expressed having the most confidence in police while fifty-one percent had the least confidence in the correctional system (Roberts, 2005).

These numbers, according to Roberts (2005), reflect the growing number of correctional officers who feel that they are not well respected or acknowledged by the Ministry and some members of the community. These perceptions have also raised concerns about community relations for correctional officers; in particular, correctional officers believe that members of the public do not understand their role (Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012; MCSPRB, 1975; Tracy, 2004; Vickovic et al., 2013). It is useful to demystify the day-to-day experiences of correctional officers in order to improve public understandings of officers' roles in the correctional system.

### **Understanding Correctional Officers' Institutional Environment**

Correctional staff are often met with a number of workplace challenges, such as facility overcrowding, long hours, and inadequate staffing, that make it difficult for officers to attend to their own stress management (Roberts, 2005). Many of these challenges are not readily visible or acknowledged in the public sphere (Crawley, 2004). Public acknowledgement of corrections and correctional officers has been and continues to be confined by the physical structure of their workplace environment. Many provincial remand centres in Ontario are large, imposing structures surrounded by security cameras, barbed wire fences, concrete walls, and steel doors and gates that can make visits to the institution rather daunting. Restrictive security protocols make public and media access a continuing challenge.



As a previous employee at a correctional facility in the Greater Toronto Area, I understood first-hand how unique the correctional work environment is in both context and purpose. According to Armstrong & Griffin (2004), most correctional institutions tend to be relatively noisy, over-populated, and generally lack many comforts found in other work environments, such as natural lighting. Correctional officers also have reported feeling “imprisoned” by their work environment (Bensimon, 2004; Sundt, 2009; Tracy, 2004; Tracy & Scott, 2007). Beyond the physical structure of the workplace, the environment it contains can also pose a challenge to officers. As identified in previous research, correctional officers have a tendency to perceive their workplace as more conducive to injury and violence when working in medium/maximum security prisons with high-risk prisoners, as opposed to minimum security institutions (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Heightened perceptions of violence, disorder and fear sensed by officers in maximum security institutions have been associated with higher levels of stress and illness among correctional staff (Farkas & Manning, 1997; Shannon & Page, 2014; Welch, 2004).

One of the first Canadian studies involving provincial correctional officers was conducted in Ontario in 1975. The purpose of the study was to gather a better understanding of the attitudes, relationships and performance of correctional staff as they underwent institutional change to emphasize a more rehabilitative role for officers (Bensimon, 2004; MCSPRB, 1975). Many of the officers interviewed described working long hours, including overtime, to compensate for staffing shortages. While overtime hours ensured adequate staffing to prevent institutional lockdowns and the resulting discomfort to prisoners, long work hours provided officers little relief from the unpredictable work environment and associated tensions, in turn resulting in increased strain, anxiety, absenteeism, and high turnover rates (Armstrong & Griffin,

2004; Bensimon, 2004). Stress and job dissatisfaction are also more generally associated with a variety of negative consequences including poor job performance, mental and physical illness, and premature aging and death. (Cheeseman & Downey, 2012; Philliber, 1987; Tracy, 2004).

Identifying the structural and environmental factors that affect the health of correctional officers has been, and continues to be, very well represented in the literature (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Farkas & Manning, 1997; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011; Sundt, 2009; Welch, 2004). However, there are social and institutional factors related to correctional officers' well-being that warrant further study. These factors include certain organizational practices that perpetuate role ambiguity and the continued decline in social support for corrections at both the public and ministerial level (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Cheeseman & Downey, 2012; Roberts, 2005).

### **The Social World of a Correctional Officer**

According to the Ministry of Correctional Services (2017), correctional officers employed in provincial remand centres across Canada are “peace officers responsible for the *care, custody, and control* of prisoners.” (para. 2). It is within broad service definitions like this, that role conflict often ensues (Thomas, 1972; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011). Role conflict essentially refers to the difficulties officers face when trying to reconcile the two important aspects of their work—*custody*, and *care* (MCSCS, 2016). Officers must place emphasis on public safety by keeping prisoners secured while simultaneously trying to care for and foster their rehabilitation. The notion of *care* runs contrary to traditional expectations of prisons as institutions designed to punish prisoners (Bensimon, 2004; Crawley, 2004; Leibling, Price & Shefer, 2011), and thus the institutional mandate itself contains a seeming contradiction that officers must navigate.

Strained relations with administrative staff and coworkers are also associated with a general decline in officer well-being (Tracy, 2004). Officers often perceive a lack of organizational support from union representatives and agencies assigned to advocate for them (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011). Officers may also feel that upper management and administrative staff do not appreciate their work, especially when it comes to issues surrounding work ethic, seniority and rank (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011; Sim, 2012). Officers have also expressed minimal support when dealing with public problems with visitors, protestors, and the press (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Tracy (2004), and Shannon and Page (2014) found that officers are aware of public perceptions of correctional employment, including the view that officers are deviant and lazy. Tracy (2004) also found that officers deal with denigration not only from the public, but also from police officers who tend to view them as “professional babysitters” (p. 514).

According to Tracy (2004), negative public perceptions of correctional officers are exacerbated by assumptions that prisoners are victims of unfortunate circumstances, and are now being subjected to control by officers whose main goal is to punish and discipline prisoners by making their time in prison miserable. Tracy (2004) also argued that correctional officers engage in a variety of tactics to try and control, manage, and furthermore distance themselves from the “taint” associated with prisoners. Also referred to as a “contagion effect”, the general public sometimes perceive correctional officers as being not so different from the population they control (Tracy & Scott 2006, p. 16; Tracy & Scott, 2007). As a result, officers were convinced that the community did not understand them nor their work, and felt that their public image was poor and in need of positive publicity.

## Correctional Officers in the Media

Because of the closed nature of the prison institution and the lack of readily available information, the general public relies on mainstream news and entertainment media as a way to acquire knowledge and information about the criminal justice system (Crawley, 2004; Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012). However, many media depictions of correctional officers are extreme, or inaccurate (MCSPRB, 1975; Vickovic et al., 2013). These misrepresentations contribute to a distorted image about the justice system and how it operates which can affect public and social support for correctional officers.

The first studies of how correctional staff felt about their employment and the way it is portrayed in the media were conducted in the early 1980's (Philliber, 1987; Tracy, 2004; Sundt, 2009; Vickovic et al., 2013). For several decades however, popular culture and news media portrayed correctional staff as "brutal", "careless" and "apathetic" beings (Tracy, 2004, p. 517; Vickovic et al., 2013). According to Doyle and Ericson (1996), it is rare to find television shows and films that portray correctional officers as heroes because sensationalized portrayals are more compelling and entertaining. Portraying officers as professionals does not raise intense emotions from audiences as do prisoner riots, escapes, and brutalities.

Negative media reporting and often over-dramatic displays of correctional work in film and television media have done very little to challenge the negative stereotypes that surround correctional staff (Crawley, 2004). For example, television shows and movies such as *Oz* (1997), *Orange is the New Black* (2013), *The Green Mile* (1999), and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), fictionalized some of the worst historically documented accounts of officers mistreating prisoners using traditional forms of punishment (ex. shackling, flogging, darkened cells) (Freeman, 2001).

Prior to Hollywood's involvement in sensationalizing prison abuses most, if not all, systemic mistreatment of prisoners remained hidden from the public (Freeman, 2001). While these stereotypes are reflective of the behaviours of some correctional officers, Hollywood and mainstream news media benefit from the sensationalism that sells movies and newspapers (Freeman, 2001; Surette, 2014). These types of portrayals inevitably create a negative public image of officers as demeaning, unpredictable, untrustworthy and sometimes violent (Roberts, 2005; Sundt, 2009). Crawley (2004), documents how negative media portrayals can affect officers' interactions with others. Several officers in her study felt reluctant to disclose their occupation due to fear of being associated with these stereotypes. Correctional officers often report that they feel that they are viewed more negatively than other public service workers (e.g. police, firefighters, emergency responders) and devalued by upper management and the general public. Feeling underappreciated, particularly in the media, is source of resentment and disappointment.

According to Hans Toch (1981), "officers are imprisoned by our ignorance of who they are and what they do, which is the price they pay for working behind [prison] walls" (p. 41). This quote emphasizes the public's lack of knowledge about corrections and expresses their attitudes and prejudgments of the officers' actions (Sundt, 2009; Toch, 1981). This ignorance of correctional officers is not confined to an uneducated public. Early U.S. studies of the prison environment did not turn their attention to prison staff until the 1940's (Crawley & Crawley, 2012). Prior to that time, American academics portrayed officers based on stereotypes – as unintelligent, brutal, and insensitive individuals who did nothing more than carry keys, use their fists, and shout out orders (Crawley, 2004; Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012; Philliber, 1987; Toch, 1981).

Researchers have examined the impact of various external and institutional stressors on the mental health of correctional officers (Welch, 2004; Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011). Such stressors include a demanding workload, staffing shortages, long and many hours, and the prisoners themselves (Cheeseman et al., 2011; Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012; Tracy, 2004). However, what is often overlooked are some of the internal stressors like perceptions, fears, judgements, and beliefs that can also impact an officer's well-being, interactions with others and their overall job performance.

Like police officers and paramedics, correctional officers are also exposed to varying degrees of unpredictability in the performance of their duties (McAloney, 2011). However, what one actually sees and hears about correctional officers with respect to the nature of their work and their daily encounters with prisoners and their families is minimal at best. Examining these experiences in greater detail is significant to understanding how correctional officers feel about the work that they do, which in turn, could influence the way they perform their duties. In review of the literature, it becomes apparent that there are sensationalized representations of correctional officers portrayed both in television and film media, and some of the stereotyped notions of officers transcend further into mainstream news media in corrections. What remains to be seen is how officers' awareness of media and public attitudes towards corrections shapes their perspectives and experiences of their work. What also needs to be examined further is the ways in which Canadian news media portrays correctional officers through publicized events such as labour disputes, and how the public responds to these events, to see how officers are being perceived by the public.

## **Symbolic Interactionism and the “Looking glass self”: Theoretical Framework**

Several symbolic interactionists offer theoretical understandings of how “others” perceptions may influence identity formation and the sense of self that individuals express to “others.” Specifically, this study draws on Cooley’s (1902) concept of the ‘looking-glass self’ and Mead’s ‘social self’ (1982), which describes how an individual’s sense of self is related to the perceived judgements of others (Downey, 2015; Rousseau, 2002). However, other concepts within the symbolic-interactionist framework, such as Goffman’s work on the presentations of self, impression management, and managing stigma offer a more complete representation of this phenomena, as each is oriented toward explaining the *meaning* of actions, rather than their origins (Goffman, 1963;1969; Ricciardelli, 2014; Saperstein & Penner, 2014).

The concept of the looking glass self as posited by Cooley (1902) is based in a social-psychology theory that provides a detailed account of how individuals operate in a variety of social settings (Downey, 2015). It also demonstrates that self-relation, or how one views oneself, is not an independent psychological phenomenon, but a social construction that is influenced by social situations, and the distinct roles that individuals possess in specific social contexts (Downey, 2015; Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2013; Rousseau, 2002). The way that human beings become aware of and react to others’ perceptions of them is an evolved capacity; the ability to assess one’s surroundings, including the behaviour and attitudes of others, serves an important protective function, providing a social reference point that informs individuals’ behaviours and actions (Rousseau, 2002). This social reference point takes the form of an imagined view of one’s self as it appears in another’s mind, and the kind of self-feeling that results is determined by the attitude or response to that perceived appearance (Rousseau, 2002; Stets & Burke, 2003).

Cooley refers to a social self of this sort, as the “reflected” or “looking glass self” (Downey, 2015; Rousseau, 2002).

The looking-glass self, contains three main components (Cooley, 1902). First, the persons involved learn about themselves in each situation by exercising their imagination to reflect on their social performance. They imagine themselves as others must see them, and this social construction of what others must see is fundamentally like a mirror image that is reflected back at them (Downey, 2015; Rousseau, 2002; Shaffer, 2005). The second part is an extension of theory of mind analyses (Shaffer, 2005) wherein Cooley argued that in envisioning oneself as others see them, individuals then imagine what those others must *think of* them, attributing judgement, whether positive or negative. Finally, and most importantly, the actor experiences an emotional reaction to the imagined evaluation of the other person, and the emotional responses are related to the other person’s perceptions (Rousseau, 2002). For example, if the other person’s evaluation of the actor is positive, then the emotional response is most likely to be positive such as feelings of pride and superiority, and if the others’ perceptions were negative, the response is more likely to be defensive or one of shame and embarrassment (Shaffer, 2005; Rousseau, 2002).

The idea that motivates the actor to feel a sense of shame, pride, or defensiveness is not just the mere reflection of oneself, but also the imagined effect of this reflection upon the other person’s mind (Downey, 2015; Rousseau, 2002). Therefore, by studying the ebb and flow of others’ perceptions, one may soon begin to see a connection between the actor’s own interactions and the ways in which they change over time. The sensing of others’ perceptions can furthermore give the actor an ability to perceive their own influence in the minds of others (Rousseau, 2002).



Several elements of Cooley's concept are incorporated in Herbert Blumer's discussion of symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism has three basic premises. The first is that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer 1969, p. 2). This refers to anything that humans may encounter in their world, for example, categories of human beings, (e.g. friends and enemies), or institutions such as government and education (Blumer, 1969; Rousseau, 2002; Stets & Burke, 2003). Second, the meanings or attitudes that are derived in response to these things arises from the social interaction that the individual has with those categories and with other people. Finally, Blumer (1969) posits that the meanings and manifestations that result are then subjectively modified through an interpretive process that the individual undertakes in interactions including processes such as perceiving, defining, and/or judging the other person, situation, or institution.

Blumer (1969) recognizes that social interaction is a vital part of human conduct and during the process of interacting with another, one must strategically take into account what the other person is doing or saying and be able to predict what they are about to do and say in response (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1969; Stets & Burke, 2003). By taking the role of the other and seeing ourselves from the other's perspective, the responses that are produced and the resulting interactions that occur tend to complement each other in a strategic way (Goffman, 1969; Shaffer, 2005). Actors are able to choose their words, deeds, and sometimes even the physical setting for their outward performances, and they do so in order to convey an identity or appearance that Goffman (1969) terms "face". Goffman's research over the years provides a rich catalog of strategies and tactics that performers employ in the hope of managing the impressions that others will form of them (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1969; Shaffer, 2005). Several researchers have analyzed and illustrated some examples of these protective strategies used by

correctional officers (Crawley 2004; Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012; Ricciardelli & Gaszo, 2013; Tracy, 2004); and these findings are summarized in the next section.

### **Emotionality and Presentations of Self in the Workplace**

Several researchers have studied correctional officers' emotionality and neutralization techniques in the workplace—specifically considering officers' interactions with prisoners and the general public. The analyses suggest that correctional officers are aware of negative connotations associated with their occupation, and therefore are conscious of their behaviour and self presentation. For example, Ricciardelli & Gaszo's (2013) research on how correctional officers perceive and respond to threats from prisoners found that power was an important dynamic of correctional officers' presentation of self. The officers tend to employ an authoritative and confident self-presentation in the presence of prisoners and fellow officers. However, officers may try to balance these presentations of self by building positive relationships with coworkers and a sense of respect with prisoners to strategically try and minimize any potential safety threats within the institution (Ricciardelli & Gaszo, 2013). According to Ricciardelli and Gaszo (2013), these threats extend beyond physical or verbal victimization, to include threats to the officer's sense of self and identity.

These elements of strategic interaction and creating "face" were also prominent in Tracy's (2004) ethnographic study which documented that correctional officers' conduct is drastically affected by organizational rhetoric through which emotional constructions such as detachment, paranoia and an "us-them" mentality tend to manifest. These emotional responses influenced the behaviours that officers exhibited toward prisoners and fellow staff members and even the researcher (Tracy, 2004). As quoted by one officer from her study, "I think people have

this perception that we're just a bunch of gorillas in there, beating upon inmates and getting them pregnant. But anyway, I'm sure you could give a shit about that" (p. 512).

Emotional expression, according to Crawley (2004), is often limited by the "feeling rules" within the organization—implicit rules about the kinds of emotions that are appropriate to express. Hannem's (2014) chapter on reflexivity and emotionality in criminological research defines "feeling rules" as emotional standards that govern the intensity, direction, and duration of emotions expressed by the researcher. With respect to correctional officers, several sources indicated that workplace environment influences the types of emotions that are appropriate and inappropriate for officers to express (Crawley, 2004; Tracy, 2004; Ricciardelli & Gaszo, 2013; Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012). Furthermore, officers tend to maintain an emotional distance from prisoners so as not to be viewed as "weak" in the eyes of fellow coworkers (Crawley, 2004; Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012). In meeting these and other norms of conduct, officers do their best to appear respectful when they feel disgust or anger towards prisoners and maintain a level of caution while remaining calm when they find themselves in a threatening situation (Tracy, 2004; Ricciardelli & Gaszo, 2013).

The literature paints a picture of correctional officers as often hardened, damaged, cynical and alienated individuals, resulting in officers reacting with passivity, perceived laziness, and an inability to respond effectively to volatile incidents in the institution (Vickovic et al., 2013; Tracy, 2004). These problems are linked to unfavourable outcomes for correctional officers including high turnover and job dissatisfaction rates as well as personal negative outcomes such as alcoholism, divorce, mental health concerns, and a shortened life expectancy (Cheeseman et al., 2011; Cheeseman & Downey, 2012; Cook & Lane, 2014; Shannon & Page, 2014; Sundt, 2009; Vickovic et al., 2013).

Correctional officers' daily work experiences are highly unpredictable which can make instances of victimization and violence more traumatic and damaging to their self-concept (Ricciardelli & Gaszo, 2013). Correctional officers' experiences and perspectives of their prison work environment can result in a shift in their sense of self that extends outside of the facility (Crawley, 2004; Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012). Recent research has identified that correctional officers' social identity may become "tainted" by their work with prisoners (Tracy, 2006; Tracy & Scott, 2007). This is a unique avenue that has received little attention in the literature, and is one that merits further study.

### **Sociological Construction of "Taint"**

According to Tracy (2004), correctional officers also engage behavioural and emotion management as a way to help manage and distance themselves from the "taint" associated with prisoners. The stigma associated with prisoners can rub off onto prison workers and correctional officers, who are often regarded by the public as not being significantly different from the prisoners (Pryor et al., 2012; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Tracy (2004) discusses how some officers were told by managerial staff to be "better behaved" around the researcher to manage this impression (p. 522).

Prison officers interviewed in Crawley's (2004) research shared that their public encounters with others outside the prison engendered wariness, mistrust and feelings of isolation. The officers from Crawley's (2004) study also commented that members of the public regarded them with suspicion as if they were 'tainted' by their association with the prison. As one female officer stated in Crawley's study, "if I have to go to the doctor's office in my uniform, when I sit in the waiting room, people just move. They physically move away from you...it's as if you smell" (Crawley 2004, p. 183).

According to Goffman (1963), correctional officers often feel public discomfort as they are perceived to have a “spoiled identity.” These feelings of discomfort could be related to fear and mistrust of authority, especially if a prison visitor or family member of a prisoner had a previous negative experience with correctional staff. Goffman’s (1963) concept of “spoiled identity” is present in existing literature regarding correctional officers as “prisoners” who are involved in “dirty work” (Crewe, Bennett & Wahidin, 2012; Tracy & Scott, 2006). “Dirty work” is defined as a task that society considers socially, morally, or physically undesirable (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Correctional officers’ duties and responsibilities are considered physically “dirty”, and socially “tainting” for a number of reasons. First, certain aspects of the job are physically unpleasant such as conducting strip searches of prisoners or cleaning up messes made by prisoners who, in some cases, may swallow contraband or other foreign objects, trash their cells, and throw food, urine, or feces (Tracy & Scott, 2007; Tracy & Scott, 2006; Tracy, 2004). Correctional officers also experience social taint because their work represents a servile relationship with prisoners, who are stigmatized and considered less than human (Becker, 1960; Tracy & Scott, 2006). Tracy and Scott (2006) argues that correctional officers must work to overcome their negative public reputation as “professional babysitters” and the “scum of law enforcement.”

The literature presented here presents questions surrounding whether or not a correctional officer’s feeling of being “socially tainted”, perceived differently, or perhaps stigmatized by prisoners and the general public, influences the interactions that occur within prison walls. Although stigma is an overarching concept, it is typically understood as only relevant in the context of marginalized groups and subcultures in society. However, the contagion of stigma towards correctional officers can perpetuate the effects of original stigma

exhibited by prisoners themselves (Hannem, 2012). More research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of how stigma can apply to various other groups, like correctional officers, who are not typically considered a marginalized group in society (Goffman, 1963; Pryor et al., 2012; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009).

### CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research examines how correctional officers' social identities, experiences and perspectives are shaped by their perceptions of how outsiders (those who do not work in corrections) view them. This chapter sets out the qualitative methodology that I employed to explore correctional officers' perceptions of media representations of their occupation and how these are felt to play a part in shaping their presentations of self, their role, and their interactions within the institutional setting. By asking officers about the work that they do, and how they think others perceive the job, I examine their perspectives of the work they do and how these are affected by the judgements of others.

In order to gain a better understanding of how the looking glass self (Cooley, 1092) affects correctional officers' interactions, I set out to address several specific questions:

1. How are Ontario correctional officers portrayed in contemporary news media?
2. How do correctional officers believe they are perceived by members of the public and by prisoners?
3. Do correctional officers sense *social taint* and does this impact their perspective of their work?

This study examines correctional officers' perceptions; in order to situate their understandings in the "looking-glass" (Cooley, 1902) I also need to have a sense of the public attitudes that surround corrections and correctional officers. Therefore, this research engaged two modes of data collection – first, I conducted a contextual media analysis, including public comments and responses to media, to understand how correctional staff are portrayed in contemporary Canadian news and understood by the public. Secondly, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Ontario correctional officers to understand how officers *believe* that

they are perceived by members of the public and to understand how these perceptions impact officers' experiences and feelings about the work that they do. Exploring the answers to these research questions can provide further knowledge on correctional employment and inform a contemporary perspective on the ways in which the correctional officer role is being shaped.

### **Part I: Analyzing Media Constructions of Correctional Officers and Public Responses**

When correctional facilities find their way into the news, it is usually in the context of negative events such as security breaches involving escape attempts, riots, officer misconduct, or contentious union contract negotiations (Doyle & Ericson, 1996; Surette, 2014). The general public have limited personal experience with correctional institutions; therefore, media plays an important role in informing their beliefs (Bennett, 2006). It then follows that public understandings of reality within correctional facilities comes from a blend of popular culture, along with personal narratives from those who have come into contact with the correctional system (Bennett, 2006; Doyle & Ericson, 1996).

Thus it is important to examine contemporary media and news reports that document events involving provincial remand centres throughout Ontario in order to contextualize the experiences of interview participants. The knowledge of these events provide increased understanding of the framing of media-reported incidents or situations involving corrections in Ontario. It will also provide a contextual framework that contributes to the analysis of officers' interview responses to these media representations and how they might shape an officer's experiences and perspectives on their work.

The main goal of the media analysis is to provide context into how Ontario correctional services is portrayed in contemporary Canadian news media. Several media analysts have emphasized and documented that changes in public perspectives towards a group of people can



stem from representations in media and popular culture (Mason, 2007; Surette, 2014; Tracy, 2004; Vickovic, Griffin & Fradella, 2013). However, correctional officers are a group of public service employees whose occupation—by its very nature—generally does not warrant specific attention in local news (Doyle & Ericson, 1996). In late 2014 increased news and social media exposure of the labour negotiations between OPSEU and the Ontario Government gave correctional officers a public platform through which they could voice their perspectives, and spread awareness of the duties they perform within remand facilities across the province. This event offered a key moment to examine media portrayals of correctional officers in Ontario and the public's reaction to them.

With this in mind, a two-part media analysis was required. The first part involved conducting detailed internet searches through several popular Canadian news websites that covered stories in Ontario. A specific emphasis was placed on uncovering news stories about provincial correctional officers published between December 2014 to January 2016. This timeframe is significant because it marks the end of the previous contract between public service employees (including corrections) and the Ontario government, and the beginning of a new contract that was settled thirteen months later. During this period, a number of news reports discussed the role and duties of Ontario correctional officers who work in provincial remand centers, documented incidences and challenges of working in corrections, and voiced the needs and concerns of correctional staff.

The second part of the media analysis examined public responses to media representations of the strike preparations and ongoing labour negotiations, and how these might speak to the level of knowledge that the public may have about correctional officers. These are some of the research questions that the second part of the media analysis aims to examine. In an

occupation that typically does not make headlines (Surette, 2007), it is important to examine, through comment forums and social media responses to these events, the level of understanding that community members have of corrections. Doing so will allow me to provide some empirical support for officers' perceptions of their public image. Being able to understand whether officers are aware of these public comments provides insight into their engagement with news media and the implications this may have for their sense of self and their professional identity.

I used Altheide and Schneider's (2013) method of Qualitative Media Analysis to collect and analyze news media and public comments related to correctional officers in Ontario. Altheide and Schneider's (2013) approach to qualitative content analysis is theoretically and methodologically influenced by Mead and Blumer among other symbolic interactionists who believe that social life is a communicative and interpretive process that informs one's definition of the social situation. This approach to data analysis involves immersion in news article content and public comment forums while maintaining reflexive stance on the social world that surrounds us (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

To collect online news data published during the 2014-2016 labour talks, I used a set of key search terms, such as "correctional officers and strike preparations in Ontario," "OPSEU labour dispute in corrections," and "corrections collective bargaining", to narrow the media search to content relevant to the labour negotiations. For the purposes of the media analysis, I focused on news media outlets that publish online content and news stories within Ontario.

### **Article Collection and Analysis**

During the participant recruitment phase of my research, I began to collect and analyze online news articles and social media postings that emphasized OPSEU's continued negotiations with the Ontario Government. At this point, I had collected an electronic dataset in a 252-page

Portable Document Format (PDF) containing 105 relevant news articles. Of these news reports, 33 contained public responses threaded from comment forums on the popular social networking site, Facebook. I then separated the comment pages from the news articles and created a second PDF file that was 148 pages in length. I then uploaded these file collections into *Nvivo 11* qualitative data analysis software for analysis.

The analysis of this media content was framed by examining the news sources to see which ones were associated with certain themes, frames and angles. According to Altheide and Schneider (2013), analyzing the content within those three categories will illustrate the ways in which the content changed or moved within a specified time frame. A simplified coding process was undertaken. According to Charmaz (2014), coding incorporates elements of both initial line-by-line and focused coding processes. Coding essentially involves attaching a short and simple label to each line and selection of data that seemingly represented a topic or category (Charmaz, 2014).

While reading the online news reports, I coded the key ideas that came out from each article with the end goal of obtaining a summary of the information that was disseminated to the public during the strike negotiations. During this portion of the analysis, I kept in mind the following questions: *what knowledge about corrections do readers gain from these articles? What do readers learn about the correctional officer role? What kinds of workplace challenges or situations do readers become aware of? What sort of image(s) do these articles illustrate regarding correctional officers' work environment?*

Keeping these questions in mind allowed me to create codes and sub-codes for certain themes as they were being identified. For example, a vast majority of the articles released during the 2014 strike negotiations made frequent mention of the phrase “crisis in corrections” and the

various workplace challenges that correctional officers encounter on a regular basis. Therefore, I created the *in vivo* code (language of data source) (Charmaz, 2014) “crisis in corrections.” I was further able to divide “crisis in corrections” into two smaller sub-codes that helped differentiate content that discussed “traumatic events” and “workplace challenges.” Based on the content of the news articles, “traumatic events” captures any experiences or incidents that occur within the institution that threaten the safety and security of the institution, the prisoners, and the officers (e.g. staff assaults and hostage situations, prisoner riots). There were also some reports that gave detailed accounts of correctional officers’ “workplace challenges” or characteristics that surround the physical structure of the prison and other related workplace conditions (e.g. poor maintenance, high turnover and staffing shortages among officers.).

After reviewing the news articles a second time I was able to establish and code the angles through which the articles were written (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) while documenting any notable changes in the content of the articles while the Ontario government, correctional officers, and the union progressed further into contract negotiations. For example, at the beginning of the labour dispute, article content was framed specifically from the officers’ point of view with regards to what they were fighting for and the challenges they faced on the job. However, as contract negotiations continued over a year later, the focus had shifted towards the perspectives of union representatives and the Ontario government negotiators, who acknowledged officers’ workplace conditions were at the forefront of their agenda. The government was considered a stakeholder in this affair as they tried to avoid a strike or lockout position for officers up until the final hours of negotiations. This noticeable change in perspective raises questions about what was considered more “newsworthy” during the labour

dispute—officers’ perspectives, or the ministry’s response and subsequent action plan of the Ontario government?

In the second part of the media analysis, I wanted to capture public responses to these labour negotiations in order to get a sense of public perspectives on issues surrounding correctional officers. Some questions that I used to help guide this part of the analysis were: *how did the public respond to the labour dispute?* and, *how does the public perceive correctional officers and the duties that they perform?* Analyzing public responses to these news articles will complement the “looking-glass” theoretical perspective because it illustrates where the public stands on their views surrounding correctional officers, and whether officers, during the interviews, acknowledge or sense these public perceptions.

## **Part II: Semi-structured Interviews with Provincial Correctional Officers**

The next part of this project seeks to tighten the literature gap on correctional officers by answering the following research questions: *how do correctional officers believe they are being perceived by others while performing their public service duties? What are these perceptions and what are the implications? Do officers believe these perceptions influence their experiences and perspectives of their work?* This research employs a method informed by the constructivist grounded theory approach to further explore these research questions (Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist grounded theory approach is an emergent process of qualitative research, and involves several stages of data analysis to capture the important themes and insights that recur throughout the data being investigated (Charmaz, 2014).

I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with correctional officers employed by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional services. The interview participants were employed in various provincial remand centres in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA); they ranged

in age from 25-66 years, with correctional experience varying between entry level to more than forty years. This sample of officers included six men and four women. The interview guide (see Appendix A) was composed of open-ended questions giving respondents the opportunity to answer freely, share narratives, and be more open to discussing and reflecting upon their experiences as correctional officers.

### **Participant Recruitment and Procedures**

The participants were recruited through a personal contact who I met while previously working for the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Because officers were being recruited by a fellow co-worker, the recruiting officer, in accordance with the University's ethics requirements, had to complete a confidentiality agreement to ensure the anonymity of the participants who were involved in the study. Officers were voluntarily recruited through word of mouth and through email correspondence, in joint coordination with myself and the recruiting officer. Several of the officers who responded to the call for participants were individuals who I had met previously and had spoken with on occasion while working at the institution.

The data collection process took place in February and March, 2017, following the receipt of approval from the research ethics board at Wilfrid Laurier University (REB #5156). Interviews took place at a time and location that was convenient for officers outside of their working hours, including at coffee shops, restaurants and the participants' home. The interviews ranged in length from thirty minutes to three hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, a face sheet (see Appendix G) was drafted—to capture demographic data—and voluntarily filled out by the participants before interviews began.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended, exploratory questions organized by the key themes of this research, each of which are designed to better understand the personal attitudes

and perspectives of correctional officers (See Appendix). While data collection was ongoing, I began to transcribe and code the first few interviews to see if adjustments needed to be made to the interview guide for the remaining participants that would tackle some missing links that I came across during preliminary analysis. I ended up having three edited versions of the interview guide which included more probing questions regarding correctional officers' perceptions, and a considerable rewrite and deletion of questions that were confusing to the first few participants who tried to answer them.

### **Qualitative Content Analysis**

The interview data was organized and analyzed using *Nvivo 11*. Interview transcripts, typed and post-interview field notes were imported and organized within the program. For the first three interview transcripts, I broke each down using initial line-by-line coding, while reflecting on the prominent and recurring themes and codes that emerged in this process to create a number of focused codes. I operationalized each of these codes by creating a definition that outlined the parameters of what each code contained. For example, under the focused code "stigma consciousness" I provided a description of the scenarios in the data that would best reflect this concept: narratives that suggest correctional officers have an awareness of a certain level of "taint" that is attached to their job, which involves close associations with an already stigmatized population of prisoners. Although Charmaz (2014) recommends the use of *gerunds*, or action tense, I felt it was more appropriate, based on my research questions regarding officers' perceptions, to code based on topics and categories of interest.

I then went back to each of these three transcripts and started to look for the bigger picture that was being painted by those initial codes. For example, when examining perceived public perceptions of correctional officers, I was able to group together the line-by-line sub-

codes of “overpaid”, “lazy”, and “bullies” into the main focused code of “stereotype consciousness.” Next, I looked across these first three transcripts to identifying any consistent themes that best capture officers’ views and perspectives of their work. Some preliminary themes started to emerge including “workplace challenges”, “lack of public exposure”, and “perceptions of the ministry.” Due to the overarching nature of these themes, I felt it was best to designate them as categories, as I was beginning to see several codes and sub-codes that would later fall into each of them (Charmaz, 2014). I proceeded to code the remaining transcripts using the focused codes that had emerged from the initial coding process, adding new codes in situations where certain concepts did not fit into a category, and removing codes if they no longer made sense or held significant relevance to the data.

From the data analysis, a codebook was established in *Nvivo 11*, that organizes each of the codes that I come across into categories and subcategories based on the common themes that were illustrated in the data. At this point, I had all of these ideas, terms and codes and connections in my head that I needed to get down on paper before they became lost in the analysis. The only way for me to do this logically at this stage was by mapping it out. According to Charmaz (2014), diagramming is a helpful way to create visual representation of the categories that are being developed, and by placing directional arrows between categories I was able to evaluate how they interacted with each other. I was also able to begin clustering specific codes around more coherent categories as I continued to read and focus code important sections from the remaining transcripts. In order to illustrate this part of the process, I will consider the example of “change in practices” which is an influential category in my code book. Based on the data, I was able to further separate change in practices into two different *in vivo* descriptors (Charmaz, 2014): “old school” and “new school.” The names of these categories were significant



because they captured the participants' own language to describe the way policies and procedures have changed in corrections over the years.

The categorization process proved to be very useful when beginning to write the analytic memo because it allowed me to start creating theoretical links to the data grounded in literature, thereby strengthening the connections between the categories of "old school" and "new school" (Charmaz, 2014). From there, I was able to establish codes under each new category, including "increased surveillance", "ministerial scrutiny" and "hiring practices." In doing so, I was able to follow the change in practices that the officers were describing. These codes were emergent, which according to Charmaz (2014) is reflected in the process of axial coding whereby these codes were important illustrations of the patterns that I was beginning to see across a majority of the transcripts. Once I had identified and operationalized some of these categories, it then became much easier to highlight and separate excerpts from each transcript that discussed "change in practices" and how it plays a defining role in shaping correctional officers' work experiences. In *Nvivo 11*, the transcripts and quotes were organized by participant and grouped together into their respective coding categories to make it easier to view.

As I was continually refining and revising these categories and codes, the process itself began to feel more cyclical and systematic because there was a level of organization building among the themes that emerged. This made the rest of the coding process much easier as the data slowly started to become more redundant, as I was seeing the same patterns develop consistently across transcripts. For example, issues related to ministry practices, lack of public exposure within corrections, and various workplace challenges were all key themes that kept emerging which allowed the larger categories to reach a point of saturation (Charmaz, 2014).

## **Role of the Researcher**

The idea for this research study was spurred by my own curiosity as a graduate student with a background in applied psychology and previous work experience at a provincial remand centre. The psychological construction of perceptions and the amount of thought that goes into our daily interactions with other people had often made me wonder how notions of status in society could affect the way individuals engage with others.

During the proposal phase of this project, I came to the realization that my own personal experiences of working in corrections had clouded my ability to go into the research with an open mind. For example, I developed negative assumptions based on observing officers' interactions with public visitors and prisoners, that officers were being misperceived or viewed in a destructive way. I had often wondered whether officers are consciously aware of how visitors and the public may view them, and whether or not this plays a role in how they communicate, behave or respond to these individuals in the context of their work.

Having already developed a working relationship with some of the correctional officers can influence the level of reflexivity that is involved in the interview process. Charmaz (2014) describes reflexivity as in part, "an assessment of the researcher's presence within the research process including the techniques, nature and extent of the data obtained" (p. 165). Some of the officers that I interviewed knew me well from when I used to work at the correctional facility with them and, because of this, I felt that they were more comfortable to share their stories with me. One of the officers had even went to incredible lengths to show me video footage of an assault he was involved in with an prisoner he was escorting to a unit. It was moments like those that indicated to me that officers were comfortable with my presence; they knew who I was, and

appreciated my position as a graduate student who was eager to learn and seek further “behind the scenes” knowledge of correctional officers’ everyday experiences.

Reflecting on my previous work experience, it is safe to say that the environment that I worked in was significantly different from the officers’ because I spent most of my time in the administration office of the correctional facility. The administrative building is housed in the outermost part of the facility, sheltered well away from the central areas of the prison, where the prisoners were housed and the officers conducted most of their daily operations. As my experience working in the facility increased, so too did my interest in understanding the lived realities of correctional officers on the front lines. Being reflexive also involves developing a rapport with interview participants as a way to establish a level of trust and in doing so, researchers must respect the voices of their participants, especially when it comes to forming theoretical constructions from the resulting data (Charmaz, 2014; Warren & Karner, 2015). There were a few occasions, near the end of the interviews, where officers (those I did not know personally) admitted to feeling an initial sense of distrust and reluctance to sharing their experiences with me, primarily because they knew they were being audio recorded. As one participant shares:

With this thing sitting here [*pointing at recording device*] it’s just like—not because of what I’m saying, it’s just—going through an investigation was very shitty, and they have this little device, and he’s like “talk louder”—or “don’t use your hands to talk” —and it’s a heated subject (Frederick, P05).

Here, the officer reflects on his previous experiences of being audio recorded during an investigation of a use of force incident. Being in the presence of an audio recorder once again

may have reminded him of the uneasy experience he had of being investigated in the past.

However, at the end of the interview, Frederick comments:

...then you ask a question, it just seems like you care more. I know you care a lot like a whole lot. [*Coworker*] has told me a lot about how you care. It's nice to be part of a positive thing (P05).

Another participant also shares his increased level of comfort, and candidness as I progressed further into his interview when he states, "I met you, I asked you a few questions before we started, I have to feel comfortable. If I'm comfortable, this is my position" [*sitting relaxed in arm chair, arms open, leaning back*] (P02). On the contrary however, I believe that if I did not have the background that I did, I may not have been well-received, or viewed as trustworthy by some officers. This was illustrated when the Edward continues to share the following scenario:

If I'm not comfortable, I'd be like "who recommended you?" That kind of stuff, that tells me a lot, right? Cause if I'm just meeting you for the first day on the street, and you walk in here, [I'm thinking] who the fuck is this chick, what does she want? (P02).

Therefore, I feel that my workplace background and thoughtful recommendations from the participant recruiter really helped bolster support for this project and increased the overall willingness of officers to be interviewed.

Rapport building was important throughout the data collection process as it allowed participants to openly share their stories regarding their experiences as correctional officers. These narratives expressed officers' sense of self both professionally and personally; giving way to two thematic perspectives of how correctional officers feel about their work and the common perspectives they share. The first them examines officers' perceptions on an individual level and

the second is tied to the organization of the criminal justice system that correctional staff are a part of. The role of news media in publicizing events from these two perspectives is also important in disseminating knowledge about corrections and informing public opinions on what goes on inside provincial prisons.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS OF MEDIA CONTENT IN CORRECTIONS

#### **The Face of Media in Corrections**

Since most of the work that correctional officers perform takes place behind prison walls, the general public have little knowledge of what they do. Frederick, one of the correctional officers interviewed believes that this “limited awareness” becomes salient when news stories on corrections get published: “certain events will make the public aware, ‘holy shit’ –like they forget about jails. They know that bad people go to jails, but they don’t think about it” (P05). This chapter explores the media coverage of the 2014 contract negotiations between corrections employees and the Ontario government. First, I will present a summary of themes and framings gathered from the news media analysis of events pertaining to the 2014 strike negotiations. Subsequently, I discuss public responses to the news media in the form of open comments on news articles in order to get a better understanding of media-driven public attitudes of corrections and correctional officers. Lastly, this chapter will explore officers’ responses and their perceptions of the 2014 labour dispute, and of how their occupation is being perceived by the general public.

#### **Labour Dispute in Corrections 2014-2016: What did the Media say?**

News coverage of prisons has been under researched, especially in Canada. Prisons are the most closed institutions in the criminal justice system and receive less media attention than earlier stages of the criminal process (Doyle & Ericson, 1996). Some researchers suggest that this limited level of media attention stems from tight ministerial control over media knowledge of correctional institutions (Doyle & Ericson, 1996; Bennett, 2006; Mason, 2007; Surette, 2014). The 2014 strike negotiations between the Ontario Public Service and Employees Union

(OPSEU) and the Ontario government revealed some important details about the duties and challenges facing correctional officers who work in remand centres throughout the province.

The most recent labour dispute began on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014; which marked the end of correctional employees' previous two-year contract with the Ontario government. The divergence of positions between OPSEU and the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (MCSCS) resulted in two years of negotiations. If an agreement was not reached, correctional and probation officers would be in a legal strike position on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016. However, on January 9<sup>th</sup>, a tentative agreement was reached between OPSEU and the Ontario government. Part of this agreement included the declaration of correctional officers as an "essential service"—meaning that they no longer have the right to strike, and future bargaining disputes will be settled through binding arbitration (The Canadian Press, 2016). The agreement also lifted a wage freeze and resulted in the province agreeing to hire 800 new officers over the next two years (The Canadian Press, 2016).

As described in the methodology chapter, I collected and analyzed 105 online news articles which described the context of the dispute and reasons for the impending strike, and highlighted key challenges faced by correctional officers, as well as their demands. Several key themes emerged from my analysis. The first involves the overall framing of the labour dispute as a "crisis in corrections" by discussing the institutional challenges and traumatic events that officers experience. The next discusses the media's marked shift in headline descriptors of officers from "jail guard" to "correctional officer" throughout the event. Finally, I discuss the ministry's response during the labour dispute, which according to officers, was believed to answer to the media and society first, while considering officers' needs as secondary.

## **Framing the “Crisis in Corrections”**

The labour negotiations in 2014 were framed around what OPSEU declared, a “crisis in corrections” throughout the province of Ontario. According to journalists, many of whom received frequent communication from union officials, correctional institutions in Ontario were suffering from massive understaffing, overcrowding of prisoners and deteriorating infrastructure due to insufficient funding. These conditions, according to OPSEU president Warren Thomas, created dangerous environments for both correctional officers and prisoners (Belgrave, 2015).

Throughout the bargaining process, the union employed radio and social media to help publicize Ontario’s “crisis in corrections,” which was primarily typified by a shortage of officers that stemmed from a hiring freeze during the McGuinty-Liberal era. Chronic understaffing results in delayed prisoner transportation to court hearings and frequent lockdowns at many provincial correctional institutions (OpHardt, 2016). These staffing shortages and frequent lockdowns also posed a risk to prisoner welfare, such that some prisoners did not get fed, or were not able to access proper hygiene and visitations from loved ones.

Aside from addressing understaffing and overcrowding within provincial correctional facilities, correctional officers also wanted to be declared an “essential service” and to have a salary that is on par with other emergency first responders such as police officers, and firefighters. The Province of Ontario (2012) defines an essential service as “services that are necessary to enable the employer to prevent danger to life, health or safety, the destruction or serious deterioration of premises, or disruption of the administration of courts.” Under their new “essential service” designation, correctional officers will lose their right to strike which means that services will be uninterrupted in the event of a labour dispute.



## Media Framing of Officers' Role, Workplace Challenges and Traumatic Events

### *“Jail Guard” or “Correctional Officer”?*

In media, on television, or in films, correctional officers are often referred to as “guards” or “wardens”; both of these terms carry a host of stereotypes – most of them unflattering. All of the news stories analyzed for this thesis typified officers as “jail guards.” This description according to Surette (2014), downplays the importance of the correctional officer role to one that is akin to a “security guard” of an establishment, and is often used in negative contexts, especially in pop culture and news events that portray officers in an unfavourable way (Bennett, 2006). Many of the headlines of the articles collected contained the words, “jail guard.” Here are just a few examples:

*“Jail guards ‘sat around and did nothing’ for weeks”* (CTV Kitchener, 2016).

*“Ontario jail guards plan province-wide protests”* (Burton, 2015).

*“Ontario jail guards’ impending strike threatens prisoner rights”* (Thompson, 2015).

*“Ontario prison guard strike could put prisoners’ rights ‘in peril’”* (The Canadian Press, 2015).

Although the choice of descriptors may depend on the authors’ personal views or level of knowledge about corrections, I noted an interesting trend when looking at these headlines. While the strike negotiations were ongoing, journalists referred to correctional officers as “jail guards”; however, once a deal was reached and officers became an “essential service” writers began to refer to them as “correctional officers” in subsequent articles. The following examples illustrate this shift in language:

*“Ontario corrections workers give up right to strike in tentative deal”* (The Canadian Press, 2016).

*“Ontario corrections officers to resume training after new deal”* (Prokopchuk, 2016)

*“Deal with Ontario corrections workers includes ‘essential service’ designation”* (White, 2016).

As illustrated above, some news media articles covering the labour dispute, included negative terms to describe officers. Cheryl pointed out that when reporters referred to officers as “jail guards”, it minimized the work that correctional officers do:

One of the little things—well it’s more of a big thing to us—we’re called “jail guards.”

But we try and teach—we’re “correctional officers” by title. You would never hear the media say “the cops” –it’s “police officers.” Society wouldn’t probably catch on to this, but I’m just thinking [...] “jail guard” is a negative connotation with what we do (P08).

The lack of respect suggested by the use of the term “jail guard” instead of “correctional officer” in news headlines is put into sharp relief when contrasted with the media’s careful use of the term “police officers” rather than “cops”. The media framing and choice of language further perpetuates the negativity surrounding the profession, making it increasingly difficult to offer a more positive lens on corrections.

Headlines that described correctional officers as “jail guards” were used predominantly in articles that discussed the challenges and decline in care that prisoners would experience in the event of a strike (Burton, 2015; CTV Kitchener, 2016; Sawchuk, 2015). The inconsistent descriptors of officers’ role in these headlines, according to Bennett (2006) make it difficult for officers to publicly legitimize their professional identity. Because their work environment is closed and secure from the public eye, most of the information available about corrections is published primarily through media reporting (Doyle & Ericson, 1996).

Limited media reporting on corrections has significant implications for content that is being released to the public. Much of what is published does not come directly from officers themselves, but through ministry spokespersons and union representatives who do not necessarily have first-hand experience as do correctional officers. Therefore, much of the content that is reported on is filtered by the ministry and selectively chosen for public consumption (Doyle & Ericson, 1996; Mason, 2007). However, when the strike negotiations began, correctional officers engaged more directly with media especially when the discussion of workplace challenges was at the forefront of the labour dispute.

### ***Institutional Challenges: Overcrowding and Understaffing***

In their coverage of the labour dispute, several news sources highlighted the challenges that correctional officers face; focusing particularly on workplace conditions and prisoner violence towards correctional staff. This helped readers to better understand what officers were fighting for during contract negotiations, but it also shed light on the unsettling realities that correctional officers contend with on a day-to-day basis. News outlets and journalists provided readers with first-hand accounts from correctional officers who have experienced life-threatening altercations with prisoners inside provincial institutions. One specific example of a traumatic event that occurred during the bargaining period, involving an officer taken hostage by 68 prisoners at Thunder Bay Jail became a major highlight during this time (White, 2016). The hostage-taking lasted twelve hours, during which the prisoners had assaulted the officer, attacked other prisoners, destroyed windows and doors, lit fires, and destroyed lights and cameras in one wing of the jail (Sawchuk, 2015). OPSEU president Warren Thomas argued that overcrowding and understaffing in jails were responsible for this incident; allowing prisoners to take control over a portion of the jail (White, 2016). Fortunately, the individuals involved were not injured,

but the media coverage of this event struck a nerve with union officials who proposed that a motion be put forward to provide safer working conditions for officers and increase staffing levels where demand is highest.

A number of news articles also reported on the dangerous physical settings of the institution that make it difficult for officers to perform their duties safely, thereby increasing their risk of burnout, fatigue, personal injury and illness, and post-traumatic stress. Reporters specifically discussed the Toronto South Detention Centre, a so-called “state-of-the-art” institution that opened in 2014 to replace three aging, overcrowded facilities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The newly built correctional facility has since revealed various construction faults such as breakable windows, poor air circulation, unreliable door locks, and malfunctioning computer systems (White, 2015). In several other, much older correctional facilities, environmental concerns such as asbestos, mould, leaking roofs and pipes, and failing water systems pose safety risks for both officers and prisoners.

As the media coverage of the labour negotiations developed, it became clear that correctional officers were experiencing increasing difficulty in performing their duties, especially as resource constraints limited the overall safety and security of institutions. As one officer shared, “assaults on staff are going up. The overall environment is changing...which is okay, but we have to be given the tools to do our jobs properly” (Keown 2015, para. 7). The changing environment does not just involve issues with poor infrastructure, prisoner overcrowding and staffing shortages; it also involved a recent influx of prisoners with mental illnesses due to cutbacks in mental health programming outside of corrections. Officer training has also been neglected, leaving officers ill-equipped to address the needs of prisoners with mental illness. As one officer shares, “these prisoners are now being put into correctional

facilities that aren't equipped to deal with them, so we need to make sure our staff, and the prisoners are safe" (Keown 2015, para. 11). The media played an important role in disseminating knowledge to the public about correctional officers' experiences, and how issues such as prisoner mental health, facility overcrowding, and understaffing compromise workplace safety and security for officers.

News articles highlighting the difficulties faced by provincial correctional officers provided context about what officers were fighting for during the labour negotiations. On the other hand, some news reports maintained a negative stance towards correctional officers, arguing that the labour disputes were disruptive for prisoners and negatively compromised their care, custody and control. These reports further publicized prisoners' feelings of ministerial neglect (Beattie, 2016; CBC News, 2015; Richmond, 2015; Thompson, 2015).

Covering the effects of the labour dispute from different angles by incorporating officers' views on how a potential strike would affect prisoners emphasized the need for the ministry to provide satisfactory and safe conditions in prisons for both officers and prisoners. The inclusivity of media reporting in this regard raised questions about the assumption that officers mistreat and do not adequately care for prisoners (Freeman, 2001), and put onus on the ministry to provide a response that would primarily appease the public, while treating the needs of correctional officers and prisoners as secondary.

### **Ministry's Response: "A contingency plan" to Keep Everyone Safe**

Throughout the lengthy labour negotiations, ministry officials reiterated their commitment to the collective bargaining process to news outlets and the public. Then Minister of Corrections, Yasir Naqvi stated, "correctional service staff in our communities work hard every day to keep us safe and we acknowledge the difficult challenges they face" (Mealing 2015, para.

9). However, there seemed to be a contradiction between ministry rhetoric and action in the bargaining process. MCSCS designed a contingency plan to prepare institutions for a potential strike situation; it involved an expenditure of \$5.8 million to renovate institutions to provide spaces for managers to sleep and shower in the event of an OPSEU strike (Fraser, 2016). The government also invested another \$2.7 million into hiring more managers, training and providing infrastructure necessary to handle a strike, including things like temporary trailers that would serve as living quarters for managers at some institutions, mattresses for management to sleep on, and televisions for break rooms, as many of them would be working 24/7 during a strike (Fraser, 2016).

Officers interviewed by news reporters perceived these early strike preparations as evidence that the ministry was bargaining in bad faith by preparing for a strike rather than meeting the needs of officers. While next steps were being considered, ministry spokespersons argued that it would be negligent on their part if they did not prepare for the worst case scenario—a strike or lockout situation for correctional officers. In January 2016, the Ontario government and OPSEU met in a last attempt to find a resolution. A collective agreement was reached on January 9<sup>th</sup> which recognized the essential services of correctional officers. Such recognition – similar to firefighters, police and emergency first responders – provided correctional officers with a stand-alone collective agreement which gave them their own pension and benefit entitlements (White, 2016). This move separated correctional officers from non-correctional employees who were previously grouped together, and would help bring correctional officers’ annual salaries closer to those of police and court officers (White, 2016).

In summary, news coverage of the strike talks provided readers with the perspectives of officers, the union and the ministry, on the challenges and needs of correctional officers.

However, early media representations and news headlines of the labour disruption perpetuated negative stereotypes associated with the role, duties and responsibilities of correctional officers. In doing so, these articles elicited a mixture of responses from members of the public, and provided unique insight as to how corrections and the role of officers is being perceived by the public.

### **Public Responses to the Labour Dispute in Corrections**

Stereotypes of correctional officers as brutal, lazy, and overpaid permeated through the responses of online commenters during the news coverage of the labour dispute. Three key themes emerged from the comments. The first involves minimization of the correctional officer role; the second includes public stereotyping of officers' characteristics and duties; the third illustrates public perceptions of prisoners and the ministry; that by the end of the labour dispute, led to a shift in criticism from officers to the provincial government.

#### ***Minimization of Correctional Officer Role: "Union jail guards think they are so special..."***

A majority of public respondents to the news content on the labour dispute expressed ignorance about correctional officers, their duties and responsibilities within provincial jails. Several posters described officers as having limited skill or education, minimizing the importance of their role, the pay that they deserve, and the level of danger they encounter. As one commenter shares, "majority of those workers make more than most others do. They can all be easily replaced. They aren't even that skilled or that rare." A second commenter offered similar sentiments, and even further devalued the job by stating how much officers should be earning, "anyone who is not retarded will be competent enough to do the job perfectly with proper training. It is actually a job worth 15/hr."

Another poster minimized the level of danger associated with working in corrections with the comment, “more Ontario convenience store workers, gas station attendants and late night fast food workers are threatened or hurt on a daily basis than Ontario jail guards are.” This comment suggests that the public assumes that provincial institutions are not dangerous places to work because most violent prisoners are believed to go federal penitentiaries (Crawley, 2013). However, because provincial facilities operate as remand centres, prisoners who have committed serious crimes often remain in custody awaiting a court date (on remand). Therefore, the danger that correctional officers experience is often underestimated by public commenters.

Several commenters also questioned the importance of the strike in the first place, considering the perceived minimal dangers of the job by some members of the public, as illustrated in the following post:

Danger...every job has a danger, a trucker stands the chance of getting killed everyday he's on the road; a firefighter has his dangers to deal with; a convenience store owner stands the chance of getting robbed...even working for a coffee shop has its dangers...these people better start dealing with it or get out of the business, or deal with the stress...most other jobs have a poor pension and benefit package.

This commenter believes that officers should “deal with” with realities of their job, suggesting that many other occupations carry a similar perceived level of danger. The overall minimization of the correctional officer role has also led to public skepticism about the rise in prison assaults on staff that were reported during the labour dispute. As one commenter wrote:

The issue of increased assaults and violence towards staff by inmates also needs to be examined in greater detail. OPSEU contends there is a drastic increase in violence/threats towards jail staff. The reality is staff are over reporting incidents in order to inflate the



numbers and help push their agenda forward. This also ties up police resources as policy mandates all threats and assaults must be reported to police (*sic*).

Here, it is believed that union officials and correctional staff are over-reporting incidents of violence in provincial facilities in order to prompt a swifter ministry response to key issues of prison overcrowding and staffing shortages. The increased reporting and news coverage of incidents in provincial jails during the labour dispute led some readers to question whether or not these occurrences were prompted by the possibility of a strike. The public's assumption that correctional officers are over-reporting prison violence, according to Bennett (2006), is linked to the stereotype that some correctional officers are "on the take" and "untrustworthy" individuals.

Some public responses to the potential strike outcome were disdainful. as one poster wrote: "guess you should have worked a real job or had the smarts to invest yourself to get a decent pension." This comment suggests that correctional officers are stereotyped as uneducated, which may be related to the fact that a high school diploma is the minimum educational requirement to become a correctional officer (MCSCS, 2016).

### ***Public Stereotyping: "Overpaid and Undereducated"***

I identified many negative assumptions about correctional officers that appeared consistently in the comment forums analyzed. These assumptions focused on the level of pay, education, character, and appearance of correctional staff. Many commenters believed that correctional officers are "overpaid", "uneducated", and "lazy" public service employees, exemplified in the following comments:

"[Citizens'] taxes just went up to pay for the wage increase for these overpaid public service slackers."

“I’ve known a few people that were correctional officers, and they weren’t the sharpest tools in the shed. In fact, they were fairly dumb.”

“[The strike] would cut into their on-the-job video game/internet time.”

“Strange...how that big overweight man is a symbol of your typical public sector employee.”

Based on these comments, it is believed that officers are “lazy” and do not do much in the way of providing care, custody and control for prisoners. Correctional officers are portrayed as overpaid when in fact they earn significantly less than other essential service employees (ex. police and firefighters). As presented in news media, and corroborated by the interview data, many senior officers had not received a raise since 2011 (Howlett & Bradshaw, 2011). In addition, prior to 2000, correctional officers were not entitled to pay into a pension plan, which placed officers nearing retirement, at a disadvantage (Howlett & Bradshaw, 2011). Although these comments from the public do not reflect empirical reality, increased public exposure to events that relate to correctional services drudges up negative portrayals of correctional officers in the minds of the public.

Another commenter presented some assumptions about the duties that officers perform, suggesting that their job is not difficult and can be executed by anyone. This commenter also believed that officers lack self-control and are “bullies”:

Most of these folks are lard assed wannabee cops who have no control in their own [lives], so crave the ability to push others around. Basically bullies who sit in a locked room and push buttons. The inmates are locked out of their rooms during the day and sit around the day room watching TV or playing cards [...] VERY little actual contact unless [prisoners] need to be taken to see the doc or escorted to a job in the facility.

The original post was a little longer and contained additional comments about what correctional officers do. What was interesting to note here was the level of detail that this commenter used to describe the daily duties of officers; almost as if he or she was an ex-prisoner. A post like this could be indicative of a past negative experience with the correctional system which coloured his or her perceptions of officers. The anonymity of posters comes also to question, because it is not known “who” is posting these comments.

***“Turning a Blind Eye”: Public Perceptions of the Ministry and Ontario Government***

As the 2014 labour dispute entered into its second year, the type of comments that were written in response to news media that circulated during this time moved away from correctional officers and began to address the ministry as a key player in the unaddressed challenges that have impacted the correctional environment. In late 2015, the Ontario government and ministry reached a tentative agreement that failed to satisfy and address the needs that correctional officers were fighting for. It became apparent in the discussion forums, that members of the public, more often than not, perceived that MCSCS and the Ontario government had done very little to respond to the declining condition of Ontario’s prisons. As one commenter shares,

Try doing the job correctional officers face each day and the assaults they face before you comment. [...] The entire fault is that of a government that refuses to answer to over 800 assaults to correctional officers this year alone. And the deplorable conditions both inmates and staff face each day. If one took an animal and put it into a deplorable living condition, the police, the SPCA and the general public would be all over the owner and charges laid. But put the correctional officer into the same type of working and living conditions and it seems people shrug their shoulders. This is not all about money; it is

about a government that turns a blind eye to the facts...working conditions and assaults each day. Would you work in this type of stress each day?

This commenter believes that the ministry is not doing enough to meet the needs of correctional officers and is seen as trivializing systemic issues within prisons, which is a recurring theme in this thread of posts. Another poster writes: “the Ontario government is putting lives in danger as well as putting citizens in danger by their ignorance and blind eye to the danger these officers face each day.”

From these comments, it appears that members of the public perceive the government as ignoring the needs of correctional officers, and this has fuelled skepticism about the ways in which the ministry outlines and manages its budgetary goals for public sector employees. Another commenter wrote: “after all the money wasted by the liberal government and money spent to cover up their activities, the guards deserve a wage increase.” Perceived mismanagement of the province’s funds is of particular focus here, suggesting that resources and equitable pay for correctional officers would be seen as worthy expenditures in comparison to other government expenses.

The safety and security of correctional officers were also held in the balance when changes in institutional policies began to creep up during and after contract negotiations. News outlets and journalists emphasize the ministry’s change in segregation rules for prisoners. The media’s exposure of improper housing and treatment of prisoners prompted the provincial government to reduce a prisoner’s time in segregation from a thirty-day minimum to a fifteen-day maximum; at the end of this period, a review is held to determine if the prisoner could be relocated – either to another institution or another unit (White, 2017). Several commenters

believed that this would pose a threat to other prisoners as well as officers' safety in an already unstable environment within provincial jails. As one commenter wrote,

I would really like to know when inmates had more rights than corrections officers. I always understood if you committed a crime, you lost your rights, now you might as well give the inmates the keys to the institutions because the government has basically said you are nothing but glorified babysitters. What is happening to our justice system?

The commenter empathizes with the officers and believes that the new segregation rules limit officers' ability to provide effective care, custody and control of prisoners, especially if it creates an environment where certain prisoners are not being housed appropriately. The changing policies surrounding segregation for prisoners also highlights a perceived disconnect that correctional officers believe exists between the creation of some institutional policies and their effectiveness in practice.

***“I for one, wouldn't want to be a correctional officer”: The Empathizers***

Near the end of strike talks, news media rhetoric shifted from “jail guard” to “correctional officer.” As the province got closer to reaching an agreement with corrections, public acknowledgement, recognition and empathy for correctional officers became the focus of discussion in the comment forums—a noticeable change. Several posters recognized the work environment and continued challenges that correctional officers face and explicitly recognized that correctional work is difficult work. This was illustrated in several comments:

“Tough job this...and not for the weak of heart; dealing daily with the under belly of society.”

“Provincial corrections puts their lives on the line every day just like federal and police”

“I wouldn’t want to have to work in those conditions... I feel just a smidgen more sympathy for the guards. If it’s a human rights issue for the criminals, would it not be a human rights issue for the employees?”

These comments suggest that media exposure of corrections, specifically during the labour dispute, although negative, may have been helpful in raising awareness about the conditions in correctional institution and further reinforces Tracy and Scott’s (2006) theoretical perspective of correctional work as “dirty work.” Many posters also supported the officers’ strike rationale:

“Work one day in their shoes and you will see why they are asking for what they are.”

“These people who work by keeping us safe from criminals should have a decent wage for compensation.”

One of the difficulties with anonymous comment forums is that it is impossible to discern who is writing these comments and the background experiences that inform their perspectives. Due to the anonymity of comments, understanding who the “public” is would be difficult; however, several individuals self-identified as correctional officers or as those who knew a correctional officer personally in order to give their views more weight. These individuals may try to debunk some of the myths and stereotypes about corrections and correctional officers that emerged in media as the strike talks progressed. Some of the negative comments from those who seemed to be quite knowledgeable about prison operations may have been written by jail visitors or ex-prisoners who have had negative interactions with officers in the past. The final section of this chapter will highlight some insights from officers during the interviews, who spoke about the state of media in corrections with particular focus on the 2014 contract negotiations.

### **Officers’ Perspectives of the Media and Responses, Post-negotiations**

A few questions in the interview guide asked participants to discuss their findings and perspectives about corrections in the media and, more specifically, how news outlets covered events from their last labour dispute. Several officers shared the opinion that the strike situation was often misinterpreted by both the public and the news media. There were a few key themes that emerged from the responses; each of which reflect officers' beliefs about the way the media perpetuates issues in corrections, and how they used an event like the labour dispute to further enhance the negative social taint that surrounds correctional officers and the work that they do. The first theme taps into the limited acknowledgement that the ministry displayed towards officers during the labour dispute. Next, I illustrate how the media perpetuated issues in corrections which make it difficult for officers to bring perceptions of positivity into the occupation.

### ***Limited Ministerial and Public Acknowledgement of Corrections***

Much of the union and ministry rhetoric surrounding the strike talks gave officers the impression that their job did not matter, and that issues of being “underpaid” and not having proper benefit entitlements were trivial in comparison to other jobs in the public service sector. As Justin stated, “the government portrays us as the ‘bad guy’, the ‘money grubbers’ and yet, they never talk about the reality of going nine years without a pay rise” (P09). He believes that the Ontario government does not realize how serious prison conditions have become as a result of hiring freezes and the influx of prisoners with mental illness to provincial jails (Keown, 2015; White, 2015).

During the final months of contract negotiations, media framing of the events were largely focused on the ministry's response and preparations, if a strike were to occur. One officer in particular felt discouraged about the way the ministry positioned themselves by emphasizing

preparations, as opposed to solving the “crisis in corrections.” Cheryl felt that the ministry showed little concern for officers’ needs:

The media just wanted to find every negative aspect that they could. Instead of really shedding a light on what we were fighting for, and what our needs were. [The ministry] spent a lot of money preparing for the strike—bringing couches, a bed and food and just anything to take care of [managers] while they were locked in 24/7. So our thing was [the ministry] is spending all this money on their strike prep, when they could have just prevented the strike and gave us what we deserve in terms of pay.

Along with increased pay considerations, officers also believed that much of the money that the province spent on strike preparations could have been put towards funding security equipment such as body scanners to search for drugs and other contraband (MacAlpine, 2016). Even when a deal was reached between the Ontario government and OPSEU, officers did not necessarily feel as though their concerns had been addressed:

When they came to a deal, [the ministry] portrayed it as if we got everything that we wanted and then some and that, we were an essential service and all of our questions and demands have been answered and it hadn’t. It was just to basically shut us up. We didn’t get anything that we wanted. Anything that we would present to the media would completely get skewed by other views. I don’t know if [the media] wanted to try to catch the light on things that the government is spending [...] but nothing was ever really focused on our job.

This participant believed that officers’ needs were being forgotten and furthermore trivialized, because news outlets did not educate the public about what correctional officers do, and the work environment to which they are subjected.



Justin corroborates these negative perceptions when he states, “I find that rhetoric and everything involving the media, and how much we should get paid. I just find that abhorrent. [...] The press hasn’t done us a kindness. [...] We’re always being portrayed as the ‘bad guy’”. Thus, the portrayal of correctional officers as “bad guys” amidst contract talks further perpetuated the negativity and “social taint” of their profession (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Crawley, 2013; Sundt, 2009). Frederick also recollects public negativity toward corrections during news coverages of the labour dispute:

When we had the big rally at Queen’s Park, two or three years ago all the comments in the Sun or the Star, or maybe it was the Globe and Mail. So many comments were negative about us being “babies”, and being “overpaid”, and one of them was like “I work in a private job, and I don’t have benefits.” It bugged me. It just was very disheartening. They just think that we’re a bunch of cry babies at times. That’s stereotyping (P05).

The officers in the above passages were conscious of the stereotypes that surrounds their profession, and read about them in comment forums. Being conscious of how others view one can alter one’s feelings about their identity. Cooley states, “the character and weight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves makes all the difference with our feeling” (as cited in Garner 2010, p. 188). Frederick and Justin also mentioned feeling disheartened by the views that the public has of correctional officers, as “bad guys” and further senses a degree of unfairness at the way officers are being publicly perceived.

Several other officers discussed the stereotyped feedback that they have received from members of the public, or read in news article comment forums, including the following response from Justin, who says,

We don't help ourselves. What does [the public] know of us? What do they see of us? When we're [out picketing] standing outside by burn barrels, with slogans and [the public] drives by and goes "get back to work" type of stuff (P09).

While the everyday work of correctional officers is invisible, confined to the institution, the "public face" of correctional officers emerges in public labour demonstrations such as pickets, rallies and protests. While labour demonstrations are often controversial, particularly for public employees, officers suggested that there is consistent loss in public support that hinders the public image of corrections, especially when it comes to strike negotiations.

***"It's all hearsay to the media": How News Media is Perceived to Perpetuate Issues in Corrections***

According to Surette (2014), limited public access to provincial institutions and officers' work with a vulnerable population of prisoners make it challenging for the public to understand what correctional officers do; they rely on popular culture and news media for information. However, sensationalized representations of correctional officers in popular television shows and movies such as *Oz* (1997), *The Green Mile* (1999), and *Orange is the New Black* (2013), have perpetuated misunderstandings of what goes on inside prisons. Cheryl touches on this when she states, "I think the media is a huge negative impact on corrections, because people really don't know what happens inside institutions (P08)." Charles contributes more to the conversation about public misunderstandings of corrections when he says,

The media presents a perception, which is false. You have newspapers like the Toronto Sun releasing information out, or papers that release, you could say, "false news", or we can say, "embellishment" about what we do based on nothing that they know of. To turn

around and tell people, or tell the public about what we do for a living when you don't have any idea (P04).

The correctional officers who participated in this research believe that news coverage of events in corrections is sensationalized and not an accurate representation of their experiences, especially when the public reads about prisoner assaults, escape attempts and deaths within the institution. As Julia says,

Nothing is ever printed in the papers unless [a prisoner] has committed suicide, or somebody died from a beating—those kinds of things. And then of course the public is up in arms because “where were the guards?”, “what were they doing?” (P01).

Justin expresses similar thoughts when he states, “we don't do ourselves any kindness in the public eye. All the press we ever get is negative when they read about inmates dying and guards suspended because they neglected their duties and failed to provide the elements of life.” Cheryl also discusses the level of scrutiny that the media places on officers' operations, especially when it involves the death of a prisoner:

If you have a mentally ill person, that just does not want to live...and is constantly trying to take their own life. If anybody got wind of that, the [media and the public] would just say, “oh, it's the correctional officers, they don't care, they're not doing their job.” But they don't realize that we don't have the proper housing for them, we don't have the proper mental health training (P08).

Here, Cheryl points to underlying institutional challenges and resource constraints that make it difficult for officers to provide the best care possible for prisoners with mental illness.

The level of scrutiny that the media places on correctional officers and their duties overshadows officers' ability to bring a positive light to corrections. Correctional officers are

generally aware that as an occupational group, they are negatively perceived by the public. Moreover, negative media reporting and dramatic (often fictional) representations have done little to dismantle those perceptions (Crawley, 2004). In some cases, ex-prisoners or third parties such as prison visitors or members of the public have had a negative experience with correctional officers and want to share this experience with the public and the media. Cheryl comments on media communication that is received from third party sources like family members and friends of prisoners when she says,

When the media comes up with a story, they're gonna listen to those who have been negatively impacted by something like corrections. So, somebody who's maybe incarcerated before who had a bad experience, whether it was from the one officer, or where they were housed in the institution. They will totally skew the whole thing and the media will leak that out because they need a story (P08).

Martyna shared similar views about third party dissemination of issues within corrections and also believed that stereotyped notions of "laziness" and "inattention" are being reported by individuals who do not necessarily see the broader scope or significance of officers' role:

[The public], when they come into the institution, that's it—they just have like that first negative experience, and say, "'yeah it's very negative' 'They're lazy, they don't do anything.'" But they don't see what we do all day long. The doors are closed, so nobody actually sees what happens except for us, so it's all hearsay to the media (P07).

A few officers also commented about news content as being "one-sided" in the sense that reporters tend to focus on traumatic events that occur because they are more newsworthy and garners more attention from the public. This is reflected in Jessica's views:

I think it's sad. I honestly feel that there's so much negative being printed that even to have a boring day of "wow [the inmates] are out all day just playing cards" doesn't sell as [well as] "oh hey there's a fight over there, there could be a knife here," [or] "there's a drug deal goin' on over there" (P10).

Stefan commented on the biased reporting of news events in corrections, especially when it comes to assaults within the prison:

If you google, [or go] on CBC.ca, um, there is [video footage of an officer]. He got fired, for beating an inmate, and it's all on video. CBC has a bunch of, videos of that and the issue I had with that is—well, you never seem to show the beatings that the guards get. And there have been beatings (P03).

Media emphasis on incidents of violence perpetrated by correctional officers and the minimal attention that is given to prisoner assaults on staff perpetuates the stereotype that correctional officers are "brutal" and "violent" (Freeman, 2001).

### ***Bringing a Positive Light to Media in Corrections***

Increased media exposure to negative events in corrections have made it difficult for officers to garner public support for their occupation. During interviews, a few officers who have been involved in life-saving situations in provincial jails felt discouraged about the way news reporters responded. Charles recalls a situation where the press had a chance to bring forward a positive image for correctional officers, but instead, turned the focus away from them altogether:

I came upon on situation on [an inmate] –they had gotten a hold of crystal meth, and one was gurgling sitting up in his bed, [...] and the one that I attended, was cold, [...] By all purposes, he was dead. So [...] we started CPR compressions and we brought him back to consciousness. The ambulance drivers arrived and they took the three [inmates] away

to the hospital. Toronto Sun had a front page [that said], “Ambulance attendants save lives at Mimico.” There wasn’t a word about us at all. I contacted [the Regional Director] at the time, and I said “this was our opportunity to get a positive light to corrections.” And nobody cared. Nobody cared (P04).

A second participant corroborated these views when she says,

You never hear the positive things that happen in there and how many people, because we were there, we were able to save them that day. So the stuff that just makes it to the media, is always the negative stuff. It’s not the stuff that “oh, this happened, but this was the good outcome of it” because they don’t care to hear about that. But that’s how the media works (Martyna, P07).

The above passages make it clear that perhaps bringing forward a more positive spin to corrections is not of interest to the ministry and news reporters alike.

## **Discussion**

News reports provide limited perspective on the challenges that officers face; the majority of what is disseminated does not come directly from the officers themselves. The 2014 strike talks provided a public platform for officers to share their views, and to illustrate to the community the dangerous situations that understaffing and overcrowding in prisons have created for officers in recent years. However, a review of public responses to the news media finds that traditional stereotyped notions of officers as “lazy”, “overpaid”, and “uneducated” individuals still dominate the discourse. The publicity surrounding the labour dispute perpetuated negativity towards corrections and correctional officers. Officers interpret the media coverage to mean that they are underappreciated, not only by the public, but also by MCSCS. In the next chapter, I

discuss officers' experiences of the looking glass self and the implications for their interactions with others.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OFFICERS' PERCEPTIONS BASED ON INDIVIDUALIZED WORK EXPERIENCE

The primary focus of this chapter is to present the ways in which correctional officers' views of the job are shaped by their perceptions of how "outsiders" to their occupation view them. Analysis of the interview data suggests that it is not so much officers' perceptions of "outsiders" that shape how officers view their work, but that their perspectives are also shaped by larger systemic issues that surround the criminal justice system – more specifically, the policies and procedures that have been implemented by (MCSCS).

#### **Correctional Work as a "Socially Tainting" and Misunderstood Profession**

One section of the interview guide asked correctional officers about public perceptions of corrections. Several officers mentioned a lack of support for corrections; officers believe that negative public perceptions of corrections are related to the stigma associated with prisoners, and criminals more broadly. Charles believes that the public is not interested and generally do not care about prisons or those housed within them:

[Correctional officers] take the human "garbage" –or [rather, what] society proclaims as being "garbage", and now we take care of that garbage. Normally the public perception is, they really don't care about what happens to inmates because it's just not something of any interest (P04).

Charles believes that the institution, the staff, and the prisoners are typically forgotten. Officers believe that the importance of prisons has been minimized due largely to the fact that they operate out of sight, and out of mind to the general public. Edward corroborates this, also discussing a perceived public lack of interest in corrections, which he attributes to the negativity attached to carceral spaces:



The public doesn't wanna know shit about the jail. Folks just wanna know that they're there, and they tell their kids and their friends [that] '*bad people go there.*' When [accused persons] go to jail, it's kinda out of sight, out of mind. They don't care. [The inmates are] done—they're bad people (P02, *emphasis added*).

In this excerpt, Edward also expresses the transferred stigma and negativity that pervades the institution, because of the perception that “bad people” (e.g. criminals) go there.

According to Grandy (2008), the stigma attached to carceral institutions is transferred to correctional officers who work within them. Therefore, officers, in turn are viewed as “dirty” in the eyes of others (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Correctional officers, according to Tracy and Scott (2006), are considered “dirty workers” because they tend to experience “social taint”; as their work represents a servile relationship with stigmatized prisoners (Becker, 1960; Tracy & Scott, 2006). The awareness of “social taint” among correctional officers was identified by Justin during interviews when he explains, “there's a negative stigma about being another man's keeper. There's a negative taint on [the job] brought on by the inmates themselves” (P09).

Stigma, as demonstrated in the quote above and in the context of “dirty work” is understood as an attribute which, according to Grandy (2008), “is regarded as flawed, deviant or inferior through social interactions” (p. 179). These discrediting and undesirable associations mean that the individuals defined by these attributes are “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). The following scenario described by Frederick illustrates the sensing of public undesirability towards correctional officers when he shares:

When I'm out, I'm usually with another Caucasian guard, with a black inmate, and you just see people giving you like, '*the look*' –that we're the bad guys. I'm not a bad guy,

my partner's not a bad guy, and the inmate is probably not a bad guy—but it's that perception—that we're *holding somebody down*. I didn't put him in jail. He may have, [or] he may not have put himself in jail with his actions. There's a lot of circumstances that go into it, so people are very taken aback by our appearance—what we wear, the pepper spray we carry, the baton, the handcuffs, the leg irons—the bright orange [that the prisoners wear] (P05, *emphasis added*).

Several officers interviewed also shared that their public encounters with others outside the correctional facility, were met with wariness, a perceived mistrust of authority, and feelings of suspicion as if the officers were also being “tainted” by their associations with prisoners. Feelings of public discomfort are often elicited by those perceived to have a “spoiled identity” (Goffman, 1963). According to Goffman (1963), the formation of a “spoiled identity” is developed from an attribute that discredits an individual, and becomes representative of the individual's total character. As a result, others perceive the individual, based on those negative traits, as inferior, or “tainted.” In this particular scenario, the officer sensed that he was not being positively received while he was performing his job in public.

The officer's reference above that the public perceives them as “*holding somebody down*” suggests that officers may assume that the public holds negative stereotypes of them as being restrictive and punitive towards prisoners. These negative perceptions were also sensed by Frederick, who says, “we're already the bad guys in a lot of people's minds, in terms of what happens in jails and their preconceived notions of jails” (P05).

Several correctional officers also reported a perceived misunderstanding of their role among members of the public. As Edward points out:

What a lot of people don't realize is that...I work in a jail, but I didn't put the guy in jail. A court did that. [The public] automatically assumes that I'm judge, jury, and executioner, and I say no, no my mandate is care, custody and control. I just gotta make sure that when [inmates] come in through those [jail] doors, that I care for [them] (P02).

Edward suggests that there are members of the public who see officers as executors of justice and believe they should react more punitively towards prisoners who have committed serious offences. As Justin explains, “[the public doesn't] get the system at all. I think it's their expectation that, [if] a child molester comes in [...] and the judge gives him a thirty-day intermittent sentence [...] that we're gonna starve and beat him. That's justice” (P09). These expectations of correctional officers can result in negative public attitudes and misconstrued accountability for an individual's outcomes in the criminal justice system.

### **An Endnote on “Social Taint”: Officers' Perceptions of Visitors to the Institution**

Another insight that came through in the data in relation to transferred stigma was that not only did some officers sense that they were being socially “tainted” by their engagement in prison work, but they, in turn, had a tendency to impose that taint on the prisoners' families and friends, especially those who visit the institution. Several of the interviewees had worked at the visitor's reception desk and had been responsible for screening, recording, and checking-in visitors prior to visiting. Officers' views of prisoner families and friends may be influenced by their experiences working in the units with prisoners. According to officers, the observation of prisoners' traits and behaviours may colour their perceptions of visitors' behaviours in the reception area. For example, Martyna described the following:

I've worked on the units for so many years, and now that I work with the public—they're negative sometimes you can't relate to them because I know the inmates that they're

related to, and it's just like, "oh, I can see where you get it from" –like you're exactly like your son, or your son is exactly like you. I can see, he's no different than you are (P07).

Cheryl also makes this comparison when she states:

There are some people who are completely rude and it's very hard to distinguish them from the person they're visiting. If [the prisoner] is known to have behavioural issues or mental health issues or just total disregard for society. You can see that sometimes in the people that visit as well (P08).

In the above passage, the officer further reinforces the tendency to assign personality traits to prison visitors; assuming on some level that there may be some behavioural similarities between visitors and their incarcerated loved ones. The officers' perceptions of "rudeness", "mental health issues" and "total disregard for society" among some prisoner families and friends are considered to be discrediting attributes and static personality traits, rather than the product of interaction in the jail. Officers tend to believe that visitors share the same negative traits that resulted in their loved ones' incarceration.

### **Professional Identity Management: *"I'm just trying to blend in"***

Public dissemination of information about corrections and the duties of correctional officers is challenging due to privacy concerns and restrictive access to provincial remand centres. Before going into the interviews, however, I assumed that at least officers' friends and family members would have an understanding of what they do for a living as correctional officers. I was surprised to hear the officers unanimously report being quite selective in the details they share with the public or their loved ones. Although there is a level of workplace confidentiality that prevents them from disclosing specific details about prisoners or events within the institution, there is a perceived lack of knowledge and understanding of their

profession among members of the public, including family and friends, that diminishes officers' interest in sharing more about what they do. As quoted by one officer, "there's a lot of stuff that I don't tell people because they're not gonna understand it as much as I, or other officers will" (P05).

It can be a challenge for officers to discuss their professional identity with the public, and even more so with family and friends due to the questions that result. Edward, during his interview, exemplifies this level of curiosity and questioning among family members when he states:

You never tell the full story. Even if you have best friends or a good relationship with your [spouse] I don't go home and tell them what happens 'cause then there's the fuckin' questions that come afterwards, like "why did you do that?", "why did you do this?" I don't need that. I just want to get it out and let it go. [...] That's why I don't talk (P02).

Charles, also expresses similar thoughts:

That's something I have difficulties with. [When] you come home and your family says "how was your day?", and I laugh about that because they have no idea what the job entails, and I don't tell them the graphics or I don't tell them the details of the job, and my children would never know. My two daughters have no understanding of what my [number of years] in this business has done to me (P04).

These passages highlight some of the difficulties that officers face when their loved ones and members of the public question them about their occupation. Aside from feeling misunderstood, officers may feel like they are being interrogated and scrutinized, which results in discomfort and hesitancy to share with others. Other officers stated that they felt trapped because although they want to share with their families, things they have seen and heard, and

their experiences as correctional officers, they feel that they cannot or should not. By self-censoring, they also minimize the concern and worry that family members feel regarding their workplace safety. Officers often feel that they have no one outside of work that they can relate to and thus, officers seek support from coworkers because they are the only ones who understand the day-to-day aspects of the job and are perceived to not judge them negatively (Shannon & Page, 2014).

Several correctional officers also shared similar experiences around discussing their occupation in public. Often, during public encounters, the conversation leads to further misunderstandings and assumptions of their role within the institution. Jessica discussed a scenario when a member of the public asked her about what she did for a living, and it brought forward some stereotyped notions about correctional officers and how they are believed to act in an institutional setting:

We used to camp in a trailer park, and as soon as word got out somehow of what I do, attitudes totally changed. It came out, like a fire and it was totally like “oh, you’re a screw”, “oh, so you’re gonna frisk me now?” I don’t need that outside of work (P10).

Therefore, to reduce these difficulties in social situations, some officers try to blend in and hide their profession by using broader public service job descriptions. As Edward describes:

When people come [up to me] –could be anywhere, up at a party, or a house party, and someone asks “what do you do?” I don’t know you, so I’m gonna say “I work for the province.” “Well, what do you do?” “Well I’m just a civil servant, that’s all.” Guards usually don’t like to be the centre of attention, so we just kind of blend in (P02).

A few other participants also discussed “blending in” visibly so as not to alarm community members while on duty supervising prisoners outside the facility. Justin shared his experience of

working in the community with a group of prisoners doing volunteer work. He requested permission for himself and the prisoners to dress in a neutral fashion, so as not to raise any eyebrows in public while they worked doing grounds keeping in local parks:

I talk at length to the people in the organization here, and it was agreed that we would go out into the community and sort of look non-descript. So, a generic white van, and for safety's sake, I've got [the prisoners] dressed in a fluorescent yellow coverall (P09).

These notions of “blending in” are reflective of Goffman’s (1963) stigma management technique of “passing.” According to Goffman, individuals tend to protect themselves from social judgement using selective disclosure strategies designed to conceal information sensed to be potentially discreditable (Goffman, 1963; Hannem & Bruckert, 2016). This strategy is prevalent among officers who are aware that their occupation is stigmatized, but do not believe that it applies to them (Meisenbach, 2010). Goffman (1963) explains that individuals who possess an invisible stigmatizing attribute also have a “normal” identity that they display in many social contexts. Thus officers tend to hide their profession by using such vague job descriptors as “working for the government” or “civil servant” and not wearing uniforms when supervising community service work with prisoners. Some officers even expressed avoidance and reluctance to go out in public through fear of being recognized as an officer, as Frederick states, “I try to keep it low profile, where I live, as much as I can.” Martyna also described a scenario where she avoids certain shopping malls because she knows she will be identified by ex-prisoners:

Anytime I went to Bramalea City Centre, I ran into inmates there all the time, and they're very quick to recognize you. [...] So there's places I no longer go to because you run into that clientele that we deal with (P07).

Charles described a situation in which he disclosed his occupation and elicited stereotypes about the character of correctional officers:

I remember going to a wedding [for] a friend of my wife, and these people had no idea who I was and what I do. We sat at a table—it was ten people at a table [...] [A] lady there says, “what do you do for a living?” and I said, “well, I’m a correctional officer”, and the whole table froze. They didn’t know what to say. And she says, out of the blue “well you don’t seem like a correctional officer”, and I said “well how are we supposed to be?” She says, “well, you seem like you’re funnier” (P04).

The above scenario gives us a glimpse of how the general public perceives correctional officers which, according to the literature (Freeman, 2001; Surette, 2007; Vickovic et al., 2013) includes views that officers are “hardened” and “cynical” individuals. The officer in this passage went on to say that he was made to feel different from civilians, due primarily to the fact that the woman at his table believed that correctional officers do not have a sense of humour.

Officers generally sensed that the public may not completely understand them or what they do for a living because their job is out of the public eye. Several officers expressed that they may be willing to share more with others about their work but were reluctant to talk openly with the public because they were not sure what “side” they were on when it came to corrections. These feelings of uneasiness and mistrust motivated Cheryl to ask her family members to be careful about to whom they disclosed her occupation:

I’m definitely guarded—I watch who I talk to, and who I tell what my position is. My family members, they’re extremely proud of what I do—and they don’t understand what goes on, they just know how society thinks. But, they really don’t know the ins and outs of it, but they go “yeah, my daughter” or “my wife is a correctional officer” and I’m just



like, “you have to be careful who you tell because people out there truly hate us.” And there’s some people out there who unfortunately, who wouldn’t think twice about hurting someone. [...] So just knowing how society views us, [...] it’s almost like an identity crisis. You feel like that sometimes, because you have to keep things so bottled up and private. You shouldn’t have to. You really have to watch what you say to people and who you say it to because, you can have an ex-inmate out there who had a bad experience—one of those that doesn’t have remorse or has a total disregard for human life and wouldn’t care to take yours. It’s one of those battles where you’re guarded but you’re proud [and] you kind of have to find the balance (P08).

The officer captioned above speaks about the internal identity struggle she experiences when trying to balance the level of pride she feels in her job and the insecurity she feels when sharing details about her role as a correctional officer in public. The officer is also concerned that she or her family may encounter former prisoners who might react negatively or do them harm.

Other officers, however, are less concerned about the possible negative repercussions of speaking openly about their occupation. Frederick shared his perspective:

I’m not shy about telling the stories. I don’t want to get into details of things or whatever, but I also don’t have this big ‘*don’t talk about it*’ thing. You know, if people displace what they do...it’s almost like they’re *ashamed* of what they do. I’m not ashamed of it [...] I never understood that ideology of ‘don’t talk about it.’ Are you not proud of what you do? You’re not proud of who you’re with? (P05, *emphasis added*).

Here, the officer believes that they are being silenced by the “don’t talk about it” culture in corrections. Because officers work with a vulnerable population of prisoners, they are limited by confidentiality and privacy laws in what they can share about incarcerated persons at the

institution. However, the office quoted above did not believe that this should prevent them from speaking more generally about their work, to the point where they are perceived to feel a sense of shame about their occupation.

Officers tend to be selective in the details they provide the public and their loved ones about their occupation. Examining how officers manage their identity provides unique insight into the ways correctional officers try to “pass” and minimize attention from those who do not understand or support the work that they do. Officers also believe that many public misunderstandings of corrections can be attributed to the fact that provincial prisons are closed institutions and information is often unavailable for public access. Officers believed that they are misunderstood and therefore, tend to shy away from creating more open dialogue about their work. Furthermore, a lack of information and misunderstanding of the correctional officer role can lead to the formation of stereotyped public opinions towards officers.

### **Stereotype Consciousness: “*We’re the knuckle draggin’ bullies*”**

Another significant theme that was identified in every interview was “stereotype consciousness” (Hannem & Bruckert, 2016). According to Hannem and Bruckert (2016), stereotype consciousness is an interactional process through which individuals, through a three stage process, come to recognize a stigmatized identity. First, one must be aware of stereotypes of discredited or stigmatized identities; this awareness most often emerges through social interaction and involvement with a dominant culture’s definitions and expectations (Hannem & Bruckert, 2016). Next, individuals become aware that they have been ascribed a discreditable identity, and finally, they then engage in self-reflection and grapple with the implications of this potential label for their sense of self (Hannem & Bruckert, 2016). Stereotype consciousness was a recurring theme during interviews as officers painted an image of how they believed the

general public viewed their occupation. Two main groups of stereotypes emerged in the data. The first involved stereotypes that surround officers' identities as a public service employee and the second set of stereotypes were associated with officers' duties and treatment of prisoners.

Many officers were quick to note that they believed that correctional officers were not as well respected as other government agents such as police and emergency services. As Cheryl states, "I guess it's all just been a stereotype that corrections is kinda like the armpit of law enforcement" (P08). Other officers specifically compared public reception to their profession and others, such as police and firefighters. Stefan said:

Anytime something is in the press, it's always negative. I've always said everybody loves a firefighter cause, what does he do? He saves lives. What does a policeman do? For the most part, he does good, right? I'm sure there's ones that don't like the police, because you're arrested, but they're in the public's eye. [...] We're behind the walls, and the only time [the public] hear about us is when something goes wrong (P03).

Limited access and public exposure to corrections makes it a challenge for officers to publicly create a positive professional identity.

In terms of stereotypes, many officers believed that the public "just sees us as government employees—we make good money, and we sit on our asses all day" (Julia, P01). Another officer mentions, "one of the stereotypes is always just been correctional officers are fat and lazy" (Cheryl, P08). These quotes demonstrate that officers are aware that the public may perceive them as lazy, or overpaid, and these stereotypes translate into negative interactions. Julia even recalled interactions she had with visitors to the institution when she worked in reception: "[they were] calling me 'worthless', or 'no good', or the 'c' word, or 'I'm the 'b'

word', or 'I pay your mortgage', or 'I pay your bills'" (P01). These comments further suggest that families and friends of prisoners draw on these negative stereotypes.

Officers also discussed some of the interactions they have had with members of the public, when asked what they do for a living:

I had one [person] not too long ago say, "oh well, you made lots of money, your pension must be really, really good." They don't realize that I was a casual for nine years and never got to pay into my pension (P01).

The above quote demonstrates that there is a certain level of ignorance that the public has regarding correctional officers as being "overpaid" government workers. This longstanding myth has resonated with the public for decades (MCSPRB, 1975; Surette, 2014), however, not all correctional officers have full-time employment or reach higher levels of pay.

Harnessing public support for corrections seems to be a significant challenge; when asked how they believe the public views them, correctional officers brought forward another set of negative stereotypes especially when sweeping generalizations are being made about the duties that correctional officers perform within the institution on a daily basis. Public misunderstandings of correctional officers brought forward the second set of stereotypes regarding officers' duties and treatment of prisoners:

"They all think we beat these guys, we're all knuckle draggers, we're all beating these guys, we have dungeons [...]" (P02).

"'You have an attitude of a screw.' We don't feed the [inmates] and there's hidden rooms that we torture them in. [...] That you're looking for a relationship, if you're a female [officer] [...] That there's obviously dirty CO's, and that we bring stuff in" (P10).

"Certainly that we're violent, aggressive, and we beat people up, and carry clubs" (P04).

Correctional officers believe that the public views them as corrupt, violent individuals, who use violence to gain compliance from prisoners.

Officers also believed that the public generally underestimated the importance of their role and the amount of skill required to perform their job effectively. As Cheryl says:

I know before I started in corrections, a lot of people would be like “why do you wanna be a correctional officer? All you do is turn keys.” So, what they meant by that is

literally—your job is worse than a security guard, and you just open doors all day (P08).

These kinds of comments belie a perception that being a correctional officer is simple, and does not require a lot of skill. Another officer suggests that there is a connection between perceptions of job simplicity and the minimum level of education required to become a correctional officer (which in Ontario, is a minimum high school diploma). Frederick was involved in conducting public tours of the institution for high school and post-secondary students, and shares this observation from his experiences:

“[The public] is amazed that I don’t speak with an ‘uhhh’ and a ‘duhhh’ and, that I’m more articulate than I am—based on my perception of what I look like, or based on what I do for a living. [...] It’s tough when people kind of dismiss you, and that you’re just this dumb, uneducated goon” (P05).

These quotes illustrate that correctional officers are generally aware that they may be perceived negatively by the public. Many of those interviewed believed that public perceptions are influenced by news media and pop culture (including prison films and television shows), which often portray officers unfavourably:

The only things you ever see on TV— [back then] they had *OZ*, and they had all those other shows. Now they got this ‘black orange’ or whatever this thing is—that’s what they

see, and that's a public perception. So our image is portrayed on a TV screen. We're never portrayed as a nice guy. The guards are always bad, we're always corrupt, we're always beating folks up, we're always on the take, that kind of stuff (Edward, P02).

Every movie that you see—every show that you see, you see the big, dumb jail guard. I was hired as a big, dumb, jail guard, and that was my job (Charles, P04).

Officers have the perception that they are being negatively judged by the public which perpetuates a sense of “felt stigma”. Felt stigma has profound implications for officers' social interactions, increasing their wariness and mistrust of others. This, in turn may reinforce some stereotypes about officers and lead members of the community to believe that they are true. In the next chapter, I examine the role of the ministry in shaping officers' perceptions of their work.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ROLE OF THE MINISTRY IN SHAPING CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS' PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES

The initial focus of this qualitative study was to understand how correctional officers believe that they are perceived by the public and to examine what impact these perceptions have on correctional officers' own perspectives and experiences of their work. However, as interviews unfolded, it seemed that public perceptions were not the only significant factor in shaping officers' experiences. Officers discussed how their experiences and perspectives of their work are shaped by ministerial communications, changes in institutional practices and development of new policies.

#### **Perceptions of the Ministry**

One example that reflects the ministry's rapid response to negative media involved concerns about prisoners' mental health. During the strike negotiations, a lot of media attention had been placed on the treatment of prisoners, however, officers argued that many of the strategies to improve mental health (i.e. segregation limits, provision of programs), were implemented at the cost of officer safety and security of the whole institution:

Society these days, I feel is very, surrounded by mental health and because of that, corrections has gone to this phase of making sure we do everything for mental health and that we're supporting [prisoners]. They've changed our segregation rules in order to support mental health, and it's not in a positive way. It's detrimental to segregation as a whole. But they're trying to impress society so much by saying, 'oh corrections is leaping into a more positive direction for mental health and care and reintegration and social aspects.'...that they've taken away from so many other aspects. Then society goes, 'oh,

corrections is helping mental health', but they don't realize what else it's done negatively or how it's impacted the rest of the institution (P08).

Interviewees believed that limiting a prisoner's segregation time (from a 30-day minimum to a 15-day maximum) places increased strain on officers and the rest of the prison to accommodate vulnerable and mentally ill prisoners in general population, where they may not be safe.

Officer concerns with the ministry's response to mental health issues in provincial prisons suggests a discord between policy and practice, and that government officials and union representatives need to better understand frontline correctional practice. The first step to accomplishing this, according to officers, is to have ministry and union representatives visit the institutions on a regular basis and initiate open dialogue with frontline staff. As Martyna suggests, "come in and see the jails, before you start talkin' about them. A lot of them just talk, or say what they think the public wants to hear. It's not really touching on what's going on day-to-day in the institution."

### ***"Old school" vs. "New school": Perceptions of Change in Institutional Practices***

Interview participants expressed the view that institutional practices have shifted in corrections over a period of decades, characterizing the shift as the difference between "old school" and "new school" approaches to corrections. Primarily, these changes are exemplified by two significant differences: shifts in hiring practices, and changes in the role and definition of a correctional officer.

#### ***Hiring practices: "We're getting kids...that's the problem"***

The media publicized "crisis in corrections" emphasized hiring freezes, and limited staffing in provincial jails that created a dangerous environment for correctional officers. Media reports discussed that officers often experience burnout from working extensive hours and



overtime shifts to cover for the shortage of staff. In response to the criticism of this, the ministry promised to hire more than 800 correctional officers in Ontario over two years. Although this seemed like a good resolution, there are ramifications to hiring many officers in a short amount of time. Cheryl discussed some of these issues:

They're just hiring large amounts of people and it's affecting the way they're being trained. The inmates aren't stupid. They see a hundred brand new working officers, and they take advantage of them daily because they don't know the rules or they don't know the job yet and they're trying to. So there's been so many accidents and staff assaults; the inmates are taking over the jails because of [new] working staff (P08).

Cheryl also expressed skepticism about the ministry's motivations:

I think it was great that society spoke out and the ministry responded, but they did it just because they needed to please society in such a short amount of time, so people would stop saying all this "crisis in corrections" (P08).

Mass hiring may pose a security risk when new officers are poorly trained and ill prepared.

Cheryl went on to describe that applicant screening was relaxed to allow the ministry to meet their hiring targets and that this has negative consequences:

[The ministry needed to do something but] they didn't do it in a healthy way, they just started hiring everyone and anyone. I feel as though the credentials didn't have to be as acceptable as they were in the past. I know anybody can practically get the job because of the way they are hiring. So I guess it decreases your expectations and the level of commitment from the type of officers they're hiring (P08).

Because officers believe that entry into the profession is becoming less competitive and that the rigour of training has declined, they perceive their new coworkers to be less effective and less committed to the job.

Based on the findings presented in this section, there is a growing consensus that the Ontario government's appreciation of corrections has yet to be felt. Officers believed that their sense of pride in the occupation has diminished, especially in recent years as changes in institutional practices and resource constraints have exacerbated officers' perceptions of underappreciation and minimal acknowledgement from the Ministry. For example, Jessica reported feeling slightly despondent about the Ministry's mass hiring of new correctional officers with limited training and experience, and personally felt a lessened sense of pride about being an officer compared to when she was first hired. Jessica comments, "I did really have a lot of pride in it, but I think its's going [down]. I think the mass hiring and who [the Ministry] is hiring, it's gonna reflect negatively, unfortunately."

Participants also noted that the number of officers who are accommodated to having "no inmate contact" are on the rise. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC, 2008), employers have a duty to accommodate employees who experience undue hardship on the job. Issues in employment accommodation most often relate to the physical and psychosocial needs of employees including those with disabilities, older workers, pregnant women or employees with family status. The increase in accommodated employees in corrections is recognized by one officer who states, "right now, we're hiring people and then we accommodate them to not do the job" (P02). A second officer offers similar sentiments when he shares,

We have people who are accommodated to no inmate contact because they're afraid of inmates. They don't wanna deal with inmate issues, and these people are on accommodation for years...and the ministry can't do anything about it (Charles, P04).

Although the request to be accommodated may come from officers who experience mental health or physical ailments, the influx of young officers into the profession caused some of the senior officers, during the interviews, to question their readiness and reliability to do the job effectively. Several participants believed that hiring some older officers with more experience could help shape some of the newer, inexperienced ones. However, the occupation continues to lose its appeal for those with experience primarily due to limited pay considerations. These beliefs are shared among a few officers who state the following,

“Our recruitment—we're getting kids, that's the problem. I want some seniority”

(Edward, P02).

If you want good people, you're gonna have to pay the money for it...professional people.

We have that danger at the moment. We have a danger for people who are not of high quality, of high stature coming into the business because it's not paying as well as it should be (Charles, P04).

Officers also believe that hiring practices in corrections have become more politically oriented, as inclusivity and diversity becomes a prominent social trend. The influence of these social trends are believed to affect the selection and recruitment strategies that the ministry uses to hire correctional officers. Several officers made comments about the way recruitment officers are “cherry picked” because they match the image of diversity that the ministry is trying to portray:

Recruiters will go to all these little job fairs, or like to a Brampton YMCA and they'll set up a booth. So for two to four hours, they sit, and they got posters and they stand, and [the public can] talk to actual correctional staff. It's the selection process that pisse[s] me off. I know it's racist, but they picked the food groups. There's a gay, there's a bi, there's a trans, there's a fuckin' black and there's an Aboriginal. Is that what we wanna fuckin' represent, or [do] you want a fat, crusty old man to tell you the truth? [The ministry] doesn't want that. They want the politically nice food groups all laid out. I get it, because they want to recruit [from] those communities (P02).

Clearly some officers believe that MCSCS's approach to recruiting and hiring new correctional officers does not meet the needs of institutions, but prioritizes the promotion of the ministry as a diverse and inclusive employer. Officers perceive that the need to hire skilled and properly trained staff remains unanswered.

***Care, Custody and Control: “[The ministry] caters too much to the inmates”***

Concerns about prisoner welfare were also emphasized during the 2014 contract negotiations; reports by the Ombudsman and advocates cited alleged prisoner abuses and persistent institutional lockdowns as a violation of prisoners' rights. In respect, MCSCS launched an inquiry into the conditions of correctional facilities, including the number of institutional lockdowns that occurred during and following strike negotiations. Ministry officials also examined officers' uses of force towards prisoners, placing officers' actions under the microscope. Increasingly, officers are expected to take on a more rehabilitative and facilitative approach to working with prisoners, which is a shift from previous disciplinary approaches. Stefan engages with this shift in corrections when he states,

Corrections has changed where, I think they cater too much to the inmates in a way that they complain about everything now, and I'm not saying that it's not valid...[prisoners] do have valid complaints and I understand that. It's supposed to be punishment when you go to jail right? But, it just seems to have lightened up a lot, and once again I'm not saying 'beat [the] inmates.' I don't condone that, but there has to be some sort of punishment for them, and when they took away the time we could put them in segregation...what are you going to do to them? What can you do to them?

Nothing...really. So it's just unfortunate. The purpose of the whole institution of a prison, I feel has definitely changed (P03).

Officers believe the ministry's increased focus on prisoners and their human rights creates a negative image of correctional officers as being the "bad guys", especially when prisoners make threats to sue if an officer was believed to not have handled a situation appropriately. One officer alludes to these sentiments when he says,

Now I'm hearing about an inmate who, all the time... 'I'll sue you, I'll sue you', 'I'll sue you', and they do, and they win, and you're just doing your job. The same job you've been at for ['x' number] of years...for what? (P05).

The "bad guy" perception is further exacerbated by increased ministerial scrutiny that is placed on their duties, actions, and responses to crisis situations within the prison (Tracy & Scott, 2007).

***Increased Scrutiny: "inmates have more rights than we do"***

Another interesting theme that emerged from the data is that surveillance and the function of what Foucault (1974) called panopticism. The "panopticon" according to Foucault (1974), describes a prison structure with a tower placed at the centre from where officers are able to see into each prisoner's cell. In the case of modern Ontario correctional facilities, we can see a

similar use of surveillance through cameras inside prisons, however the object of surveillance has shifted and is no longer confined to prisoners. Correctional officers perceive that their actions are being rendered visible and can be watched by ministry investigators who later report on and question officers' actions if a use of force or altercation is witnessed. Some officers view this managerial tactic as a "visibility trap", much like the panoptic tower, as officers can be seen, but are unable to communicate directly to those who are "watching them" (Foucault, 1974).

The level of scrutiny that is placed on officers' actions, specifically when it comes to making contact with prisoners, leaves officers second-guessing their work performance. This is illustrated by Justin who shares:

Now, everybody lives in fear of being arm-chaired, quarterbacked by someone sitting in an anti-septic room with a cup of coffee in their hands, going 'well, you shouldn't have done that, you shouldn't have done this' and that's actually made more of an impact on the whole atmosphere within this place. Just, that kind of scrutiny [...] ...it's a terrible management style too. It's a little dehumanizing at the end of the day (P09).

Officers also believed that the "panoptic" impact of cameras, although necessary for the safety of officers, prisoners and visitors, has made officers more precarious while performing their duties out of fear of being disciplined for any perceived wrong-doings. The increase in ministerial scrutiny towards officers' actions has also given off the impression to officers that the safety and treatment of prisoners are of more importance than the needs of correctional officers. These sentiments were expressed by several officers. For example:

The pendulum swings to one side or the other. At this point, it swings more in favour of the inmates instead of officers. So, we always have to be careful with how we act, our

mannerisms, because someone's watching over you. There's cameras always on (Nathaniel, P06).

As soon as you walk into an institution, you're on camera, you're being recorded moment A to moment Z. So, you gotta be careful—you just gotta do your job right, and be cognizant that the cameras are there (Edward, P02).

Increased scrutiny affects officers' job performance by adding to the stress that they experience. The role of cameras in surveilling officers and enhancing officers' feelings of being watched and judged on their work performance is seen by officers, as a ministerial tool. Aside from the original intent of surveillance cameras as devices that help monitor, control and ensure the safety of those inside the institution, officers believe increasing surveillance has other implications for correctional staff. As Frederick explained, officers seem to have an ambivalent relationship with the institutional cameras:

[The ministry] is gonna be micromanaging everything that we do. So I think adding cameras...it works, [but it's] not beneficial. [The ministry] thinks it's more beneficial to us, but it's worse. I don't do bad things so you can watch me all day long. But those judgemental eyes are worse (P05).

Martyna similarly highlighted: "cameras are good because then they can always see what's going on, but you feel like you're always on your toes, as if somebody's watchin' ya" (P07). The emphasis on prisoner rights and the rehabilitative role of correctional officers has illuminated the ministry's need improve prisoners' treatment in provincial facilities. While surveillance cameras are a tool for control and security in prisons, they can also paradoxically be a site of insecurity for correctional officers, potentially putting them at risk of disciplinary action.

### **Continual Shift in Correctional Officers' Perspectives of their Work**

### *Public Censorship and Scrutiny Transcends Outside of Work*

A few officers also believed that aside from the potential benefits of having the public know more about what correctional officers do (i.e. overcoming stereotypes, knowledge dissemination), there are also drawbacks that need to be considered. Neil, quoted below believes that increasing public knowledge about corrections would only lead to more scrutiny, especially when a negative event or altercation gets publicized in the news:

I also find [public awareness] to be little bit more dangerous.... because the public would have different opinions about how situations should be dealt with compared with how we have to deal with situations. It's like a double-edged sword. You want [the public] to know, but you don't...because they'll never understand us. That's one thing I like about corrections a little more...policing is always under the public eye, we're not. [...] We don't have to answer to the public (P06).

Correctional officers conduct their work behind closed doors, leaving much less room for scrutiny in the eyes of the public when compared to police. However, as demonstrated in chapter four, public commentary on the 2014 strike talks was critical of correctional officers and their job performance, especially as news of prisoner deaths and escape attempts were widely publicized during that time.

Increasing public knowledge of corrections was identified by participants as one way to change public perceptions about correctional officers. However, officers believe that MCSCS was not supportive of improving public understanding of corrections. Justin gave an example of an experience he had when trying to bring a positive light to corrections and the local community work that prisoners have become a part of:



[Church name], wants to hold a luncheon in appreciation of the efforts that we (officers and prisoners) have done through the winter digging out a basement for them.

They wanted to invite the Superintendent, and my bosses. So I speak to [the deputy], and I tell him what the intentions are. I said that they're interested in inviting [the local newspaper] and they wanna bring reporters down there, photo op, that kind of stuff. Well that sent the whole deputy system there, screaming and running for cover. They'd have to contact the media branch of corrections, and you know, they're afraid of photos, and they're afraid of what I might say, and do (P09).

The officer's interpretation of the MCSCS media protocols was that administrative staff and ministry representatives do not fully support public exposure of institutional programming and activities that take place in the community. Of course, there are confidentiality and safety considerations around the potential publication of photos that include prisoners, or alerting the public to the presence of convicts in their community. These concerns may pose a barrier to media reporting on positive correctional initiatives.

Disseminating knowledge about corrections to members of the community also comes in the form of providing tours of the institution and having officers attend career fairs and schools to talk about their work with students and others who may be interested in a career in corrections. However, officers believe that the information that is shared is censored by MCSCS, who select officers to present this information during these learning opportunities. Thus, there is a perception among officers that MCSCS controls the framing of their role to ensure that the selected officers do not give the wrong message or "taint" the ministry's public image. Charles experienced the effects of the selection process when he volunteered to be a guest lecturer for one of the high schools in his area:

First of all, you have to be appointed by the ministry. I've volunteered to do that, but they didn't want me, cause I'm not the political...what their choice is. I'll say whatever I choose to say, not what they want me to say. I speak the truth. [The ministry] doesn't want that (P04).

The ability to spread public awareness and recognition of what correctional officers do through community outreach and educational programs is a positive initiative. However, some officers are uneasy about sharing what they do for a living with others, especially considering the level of ministerial scrutiny and public censorship that comes with the job, and the fact that they may not know who their "audience" is. These uncertainties leave officers silenced, they feel under-acknowledged and misrepresented by a ministry whose representatives rarely make contact with the frontline staff responsible for ensuring its carceral institutions are running smoothly.

***How Officers feel about Ministerial policies: "We're disrespected by the government"***

MCSCS has made significant policy changes in recent years in an attempt to improve conditions in provincial prisons. However, many officers perceive a disconnect between policy development and their implementation into correctional facilities; the failure to consult with frontline officers about correctional policy leaves officers feeling mistreated and unacknowledged by the government. As one participant reflects,

We have people at the higher levels who have no interest in talking to us and asking us what we think. If your policies are not gonna work and you expect your people to follow those policies, it's not gonna happen. We do what we have to do to make it work. It's demoralizing to us at our level. There are people in our business with...I would say a few years' service that are very frustrated about how they're being treated...instilling policies that don't make any sense (Charles, P04).

Stefan also feels “that the government disrespects us, we’re like the redheaded stepchild of community safety” (P03). Ministry policies and procedures are also believed to perpetuate notions of “silence” within correctional work due to perceived fears of public denigration and criticism. Officers also feel that this impedes the opening of more dialogue between correctional officers, the press and the public, because officers believe that they will be disciplined or reprimanded for doing so. Justin alludes to these perceptions when he comments,

The organization itself and its hierarchy and everybody at the top created like this... ‘maxwell smart code of silence’ thing where nobody talks about anything. That’s a huge problem...nobody will say anything to the press that there was a riot and this is what caused it, for fear of some kind of reproach. I think we’ve been victimized overall by this government. Let’s face it, these super jails are basically just warehouses...they’re not user friendly whatsoever (P09).

The officer above also makes an interesting comment about the state of provincial prisons, and how it has believed to change the work environment for correctional officers throughout Ontario.

The Ontario government’s push to achieve modernization within its correctional system has irrevocably changed correctional officers’ work environment. For example, the 2014 opening of the Toronto South Detention Centre was a multi-million-dollar facility that incorporated contemporary architecture to support implementation of the “direct supervision model” (Anderson, 2015). Modeled after many American prisons, the direct supervision model allows officers to maintain personal contact with prisoners as opposed to monitoring and surveilling them in modules behind glass. The direct supervision model has been effective in several prisons in the United States and is used in federal penitentiaries in Canada (Correctional Services Canada, 2015).

However, in order to support the need for a new, larger institution in Toronto, several smaller facilities in the GTA had to close. This resulted in a widespread shuffling of prisoners to other remand facilities, leading to facility overcrowding and further reinforcing officers' views about the current state of corrections as "warehousing" prisoners. In order for direct supervision to work, there needs to be a healthy officer-to-prisoner ratio so that the safety and security of both prisoners and staff can be maintained. However, the Toronto South Detention Centre, three years after its construction, has yet to facilitate this contemporary supervision model, as the facility has since been operating at half capacity; reporting some of the lowest officer to prisoner ratios than any other provincial remand centre in Ontario.

Prisoner overcrowding in provincial remand centres has been and continues to be a problem that correctional officers face in their day-to-day operations. This leads some officers to believe that with increased overcrowding comes more ministerial scrutiny and investigation of officers' actions and without proper supports from the government, both officers and prisoners' safety will be at risk. Frederick reflects on the potential consequences of facility overcrowding and the effects that heightened monitoring of officers' actions has had on their job performance with the following quote, "the [prisoners] ...they're human beings, and so are we...and to have [officers] suspended, investigated, and put through the ringer on a regular basis is very disheartening." Charles adds more to the discussion by commenting on other changes in corrections that have had a direct impact on correctional officers' resources and training programs:

[Before, when you became] a correctional officer, [the ministry] increased the training, they gave us nice uniforms and they increased our pay a bit. There was hope and future for the job...and then in the 90's, [the ministry] slam dunked us, and told us basically that

we don't really serve a purpose and they treated us as such. The training programs were cut; the pay certainly hasn't been adjusted to what we do on the whole (P04).

The above excerpts further illustrate the disrespect that officers believe the ministry has towards corrections and the occupation itself. Based on the interview data, it is apparent that officers, despite receiving essential service designation, continue to share similar perceptions of underappreciation and limited acknowledgement when it comes to their work.

### **Discussion**

Keeping in tune with perceptions of the Ministry and its influence on officers' views of the job, Charles also believes that Ministry does not appreciate the work that correctional officers do, and looks to other avenues outside of work to feel a sense of self-worth. These avenues, according to Charles, involve teaching and pursuing interests that allow him to give back to the community. These thoughts and beliefs are reflected in the following passage, "if you're looking for appreciation and self-worth, you look for avenues other than the job to survive. You don't even get an accomplishment or reward, so don't expect anybody to pat you on the back doing this job" (P04). The perceived lack of appreciation from the Ministry reflected by this officer raises questions about how officers feel about the work they do and the values that are associated with being a correctional officer.

During the proposal phase of this project, I initially framed my research questions and interview guide around public perceptions of corrections and how officers' sensing of these perceptions influence their views and perspectives of their work. However, upon completion of the interviews, it is safe to say that further consideration needs to be given towards the ministry, as they appear to play a significant role in shaping the perspectives and attitudes that correctional officers harbour towards their career. Based on the interviews, there is more to consider than just

public perceptions and individualized experiences of officers; a large part of their perspective is shaped by broader systemic issues of ministry policies and procedures. However, it is also important to emphasize that perceptions are not permanent, and are subject to change based on the continual ebb and flow of the correctional system and corresponding influences of those changes on officers' personal and professional identity and social environment.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study, I was able to explore officers' perceived public perceptions and get a better understanding of how sensing negativity from the public increases their reluctance to engage with the community and speak more openly about their occupation. To conclude, I thought it would be beneficial to drive home these perspectives by exploring the main research question of this project: do perceived public and Ministry perceptions influence officers' perspectives of the job? I will end off this part of the discussion by incorporating officers' reflection on their time as a correctional officer and share their suggestions about the ways in which corrections can be improved. Another interesting avenue that was explored during interviews was how communication can be improved with the media and to the public about what officers do. I will conclude this chapter by discussing some limitations, and future considerations of this study.

#### **Do Perceived Public and Ministry Perceptions Effect Officers' Views of the Job?**

After analyzing the interview data, and exploring officers' individual and ministerial perceptions, a general consensus was reached about their overall views of the job. Although several officers experienced some changes in the way they socialize and conduct themselves publicly, most of the officers mentioned feeling little change in their overall perspective of the job. Neil's response succinctly captures this point of view when he says, "we don't really care what [the public] think[s]. We know what we do, and we know how we have to do things, and we do it effectively." (P06). Despite not feeling phased by perceived public negativism towards correctional officers, officers believe that the difficulty in changing public mindset lies in the generalized representations that the public has of correctional officers, as quoted by Julia, "if one

of us is no good, none of us are any good” (P01). Presentations of self become important for officers here, as they become cognizant of their behaviour and actions when interacting with “outsiders” including visitors to the institution.

Another challenge in changing public perceptions is acquiring public access to officers’ enclosed, secure workplace environment. Thus, members of the public rarely get to *see* correctional officers on duty. Justin moves on to explain that constantly being aware of what others think can be destructive and add undue stress on officers’ mental health, “I can’t worry about what people think, and I can’t change what people think or what they do, you just gotta forge on, [or] it’ll drive you to madness. You’ll become completely dysfunctional, especially within this setting.” Cheryl also shared similar views to Justin regarding whether or not perceived public perceptions play a role in shaping officers’ work experience. However, in the following passage, she maintains that having integrity on the job is important, even while taking into consideration public perspectives:

I would think about all of the things I hear, throughout society. I'm really trying to take them into consideration and while I'm working I would try think, ‘okay, like I can see how society would think this.’ But at the same time, I'm true to what I do and I know I'm an honest person, and honest to my job. My integrity is very important to me (P08).

There is a level of integrity that shines through officers’ individual perspectives of their work which shows a level of personal growth and appreciation for the work that they do, and the realist perspective it has given them. The next section illustrates officers’ personal reflections of their work in light of the narratives shared by officers regarding their perceptions of Ministry and the general public.

### **Officers’ Personal Reflections and Values of their Work: “*I did matter*”**



Officers during interviews, unanimously came to the conclusion that regardless of what is out there in the media, including public perceptions of corrections, they still enjoy their job, proud of what they do for a living and harbour no regrets regarding their career path. Below is a brief summation of responses from a few officers who expressed these sentiments:

I'm very proud of what I do. It's become who I am completely. [I am] very proud of what I've done...I know that at the end of the day, when I go home, I've done a good job, I'm not a bully, I'm not a bad person (Frederick, P05).

"I love my job. I wouldn't trade it for the world" (Neil, P06).

A few officers also acknowledged the stereotypes that tend to surround their profession and instead, viewed them as rewarding opportunity to educate the public, rather than let certain negative traits define who they are. As Frederick describes, "I try and educate [the public] as much as I can, and not fall into stereotypes. I choose to educate them, and it's rewarding (Frederick, P05).

Another insight that has grabbed my attention, is summarized in an interesting quote made by Justin, who shares this sentiment, "I have mirrors in my home, and I'm not afraid to look into them" (P09). Several officers have expressed a sense of pride and self-esteem in the work that they do, which did not seem to be heavily affected by the stereotyped notions that officers believe the public harbours towards them. This quote captures a level of integrity that some officers have within themselves; that they know they are doing a good job at the end of the day, and are proud of who they see when they look in the mirror. In fact, a second officer also made reference to "mirrors" as providing a reflection of themselves so that they can see and evaluate how their actions, and professional identity are being viewed by others while at work:

I have mirrors in my house, because I can look into [them] and if I'm happy with what I see, I really don't have regrets. I can look into the mirror, and have no regrets that I've done anything wrong. [...] Some officers might not have mirrors inside their house (P03).

The officers' use of mirrors in this situation provides an interesting connection to the theoretical concept of "introspection", which according to Mead (1934), involves examining one's sense of self and experiences from two major perspectives; the "I" and the "me." The "I" is how an individual responds to the attitudes of others, while the "me" is the set of attitudes and perceptions that an individual assumes (Mead, 1934). Thus, when these officers state that they are happy with the reflection they see, and have no regrets about being a correctional officer, they are responding with self-acceptance and integrity, to the perceptions that "outsiders" tend to harbour towards officers. Stefan's quote also expresses the possibility that some officers may not own mirrors in their homes to be able to assess their self-presentation both in public and at work so that officers can get a sense of how their behaviours and actions are impacting fellow coworkers or others around them.

## **Improvements to Corrections**

### ***Working Conditions and Training***

Participants at the conclusion of interviews were given the opportunity to suggest some improvements to corrections that could aid in institutional operations and perhaps bridge the gap between Ministry and media rhetoric when it comes to public dissemination of issues and events in corrections. Several officers spoke about much-needed improvements in working conditions and training especially as the entry of young prisoners with mental illness is on the rise.

Below, Cheryl discusses the needed improvements in training so that officers are better equipped to respond and care for prisoners in distress or suffering from mental illness:

I think too that our training can improve because we're pushing so much towards mental developments and facilities for mental health. [The Ministry] really needs to start training in that area in order to be able to work with them accordingly and in a separate space.

[The government] took away a lot of mental health facilities, so that's why half of them are just sitting with us when they shouldn't be with us (P08).

Because Cheryl is a newer officer, the emphasis on improving training and resource provision for new correctional officers could not be more pertinent, especially for new recruits coming into corrections. Several officers believe that mental health awareness training and having adequate resources to care for prisoners with mental illness will help officers deescalate situations.

Earlier in the literature review, it was apparent that the physical structure of prisons (ex. concrete walls, minimal natural light, poor air ventilation and cleanliness) create an environment that is not easily workable for correctional officers. Several officers made an interesting insight about the design of provincial facilities in which certain units and wings should be directly visible for officers so that they can see and hear everything that is going on, as opposed to having one officer in a control module that is responsible for providing the eyes and ears across the whole range. Aside from suggested improvements in working conditions and training operations for correctional officers, another prominent theme that recurred at the end of interviews was the significance of educating the public and increasing awareness about the roles, responsibilities and risks that come from being a correctional officer.

### ***Educating the Public and Increasing Awareness***

At the end of the interviews, I asked officers what some of the outcomes might be if the community was engaged to learn more about what correctional officers do. The responses given were centred around the theme of respect and appreciation, as one officer states, "there's more

respect, and it makes the job easier when people respect you more for it” (Frederick, P05). In fact, half of the participants interviewed believed that increased community engagement can be beneficial to changing the perception and negativism that surrounds correctional officers, and has been heavily driven by stereotyped portrayals in film and television media, and through negative publicity in news events and articles.

The awareness of negativity that surrounds this profession, according to some officers, has motivated them to make changes by being proactive:

“I wanna be a part of the group in corrections who makes a movement to help society understand, get our name out there. Whether it’s volunteering in public or speaking in programs” (Cheryl, P08).

I like changing the perception of how people see us. I try and educate [the public] as much as I can, and not fall into stereotypes. I choose to educate, and it’s rewarding.

Sitting back and complaining about how people perceive you doesn’t change it. So if you’re in the public, the more positive you act, [the more the public will view that] as a really positive thing, and think ‘oh, you’re good too’ (Frederick, P05).

Breaking down the barriers of silence and countering the felt stigma that is attached to their profession is also viewed as a key motivator for change; change that can neither occur in silence nor inaction. A curious public, according to one officer, indicates there is untapped potential in that segment of the population whose perceptions and attitudes towards corrections have yet to be well informed.

Provincial correctional officers have been, and continue to be involved in certain charitable initiatives such as the Special Olympics and Canadian Tire’s Jumpstart program for kids. Increasing officers’ presence at these fundraising events and in other educational

endeavours for students and members of the public would be a major step in improving the way corrections is publicly advertised and marketed, especially for prospective students who want to pursue a career in corrections. Charles makes mention of having a diverse representation of officers involved in schools and lectures specifically designed for students taking courses in corrections:

Conestoga college [is] having courses on corrections. I think that's good, and having more correctional officers involved in that would be good. There are a lot of us that would love to get the message out. A lot of us would love to come out, and take that opportunity to talk to the people [who] are interested and taking the course. At least we'd be trying to help the [students] get educated in the course already (P04)

One final note about the outcomes of increased public awareness in corrections is summarized in the following quote,

I'm glad to make somebody think more positively of us. People do a lot of things that paint us in a bad light...and people's perspectives are the problem. If you can change theirs, or they can change yours it makes for a better environment (Frederick, P05).

### ***Suggested Ministerial Improvements***

Based on officers' perceptions of the ministry, which was summarized in chapter six, several officers made it important to voice their suggestions of ways to improve cooperation with the ministry. More than half of the officers interviewed believed that when it comes to improving corrections, one must start at the top. Fostering collaboration with frontline officers to inform ministry representatives of best practices within provincial prisons could drastically improve policy implementation in the future. In terms of cooperation with news media, Stefan believes that having a dedicated frontline spokesperson for corrections could help shape the way news

events are presented to the public in future when he states, “I think it’s important to have a good frontline representative, a good public relations person” (P03). Since a vast majority of news content (with the exception of contract talks) is sourced by third parties (ex. family and friends of prisoners, ex-prisoners, ministry representatives), much of what is disseminated to the public does not come directly from the officers themselves.

To conclude, I believe that one major takeaway from this research experience is to “never judge a book by its cover.” Being cognizant of the “others” perspective is just as important as being aware of one’s own perceptions and judgements. How one’s sense of self is shaped by the perceived judgements and perspectives of others –whether it be the general public, news media or the Ministry—does play on the minds of some correctional officers, but it is through their own sense of integrity and pride that officers are able to overcome criticism and stereotype and further appreciate who they see “through the looking glass.”

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are mainly routed within the object of analysis and the researcher’s level of experience. Because the study’s object of analysis was interpretive and focused on one key perspective – correctional officers’ — beliefs about their perceptions of the public and the ministry cannot exactly be affirmed or denied as fact, even though each participant shared a narrative of individual truths and experiences that made each interview unique and telling. The recruitment procedure was convenient and efficient for this study, however, due to the small sample size, and because participants were well-known to the recruiter and to each other, there is a chance that officers disclosed their participation in the study and their responses to the interview questions with each other. This may or may not have influenced the similarity in data obtained from several participants. During the research process, particularly

in the data collection and analysis phase, I became aware of my novice research experience as there are certain areas during interviews where I could have probed further to retrieve more data.

### **Future Directions**

Interviewing prisoners' loved ones to get a sense of their perceptions of visiting provincial prisons and their experiences while interacting with correctional staff can provide a more complete perspective of how officers are viewed by visitors to the institution. During interviews, officers also discussed their social interactions within their own circle of friends as well as their family. Interviewing correctional officers' loved ones and understanding how they feel about the work these officers do can also provide unique insight on how they provide support to officers' at home, especially if they have been involved in a traumatic event. Looking deeper into the external stressors of the job specific to provincial corrections (ex. physical, environmental, mental health, managerial) can also provide further detail into how it impacts correctional officers' mental health and job performance. Examining gender differences in officers' perspectives of the job would be another avenue for further study if a larger sample size is acquired. Because federal and provincial correctional systems in Canada are remarkably different in terms of their organizational structure, security level and work environment, it would also be interesting to do a comparative study of provincial and federal officers' perspectives of their work in order to find any differences or gaps that can further assist researchers when it comes to providing constructive feedback on improvements that may be fruitful on both levels of the spectrum.

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## APPENDIX A: ORIGINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Before we begin, please feel free to let me know if you have any questions and/or concerns regarding this interview, your participation, and/or the research project. Before we begin, I'll just remind you that the audio recorder can be turned off at anytime – just let me know when.

### **Introductory Questions**

*The first part of this interview is just to get to know you and the work that you do a little bit better.*

- 1) Please tell me a little about yourself and your background as a correctional officer.  
*What made you decide to pursue this as a career? How did you become a correctional officer and what did that involve?*
- 2) If you could describe your typical day as a correctional officer, what would that look like?  
(prompts: duties, posts, responsibilities, hours in a shift, individuals you encounter/work with)
- 3) How might you describe the occupational culture of correctional work?  
(prompts: uncertainties, setting(s), types of interactions, encounters, rules/procedures)
- 4) What might be some positive aspects of being a correctional officer?
- 5) From your point of view, what are the most serious problems and challenges facing corrections?  
Prompt: *In your opinion, what influences these challenges?*

### **Examining the personal attitudes and perspectives of correctional officers**

*The next part of this interview will consist of questions that focuses on your attitudes, and perspectives of being a correctional officer.*

- 6) How do you feel about being a correctional officer?  
Prompt: *What sorts of attitudes do you have towards your work?*
- 7) Have these attitudes experienced any sort of change as you progressed further into your career?  
Prompt: *What may have motivated these changes in attitude?*
- 8) Do you believe that your job affects your life outside of work? If so, how?
- 9) As a correctional officer, what do you value the most about this type of employment?  
Prompts: *Have these values changed throughout your years of service?*  
*What may have motivated these changes in values?*
- 10) What do you NOT value so much about this type of employment?  
Prompts: *Have these values changed throughout your years of service?*  
*What may have motivated these changes in values?*

**How do correctional officers believe they are being perceived by *others* while performing their public service duties, what they believe these perceptions consist of and examining potential implications of these perceptions.**

*The third part of this interview will tap into your views regarding the perspectives that other individuals may have of your career. This section includes several groups of people you may encounter in the workplace such as prisoners and their known associates as well as your fellow peers and management team. This section also contains aspects of public domain such as community, media, friends and family.*

***Community***

11) What do you believe the general public currently knows about correctional employment?

Prompts: *What do you think the community should know more about when it comes to correctional employment?*

*In what ways do you think this information could be made more meaningful to the community?*

12) How do you suppose the community views correctional officers?

13) How do you think the general public sees your job?

14) What, in your opinion, motivates these perceptions?

15) What might be some problems with or implications of these views?

16) Where do you believe these views may have come from?

*During the strike negotiations, several news reports had also been circulating regarding correctional work. Do you believe that this increased public awareness was helpful in informing the general public about what correctional officers do?*

***Prisoners' known associates***

17) When it comes to working or interacting with prisoner families and friends, how do you think they view correctional officers?

18) What, in your opinion, motivates these views?

19) What do you suppose influences these perceptions?

***Officers' known associates outside of work***

20) Does your job affect your relationships with people that you know? If so, in what way(s)?

21) What level of understanding do you believe your friends/family outside of work know about your career?

Prompts: *What do you believe helps or hinders this level of understanding?*

*How could communication about your duties as a correctional officer become more or less improved with your loved ones?*

22) Do you suppose that this level of understanding influences your own perspective of your work? If so, how does it influence your perspective?

23) Are there things about your job that you keep from family and friends outside of work?

**Addressing the potential source(s) of these perceptions as a way to make information more meaningful regarding correctional employment**

***Media***

24) What do you see as the most prevalent myths about corrections?

Prompt: Do you believe there are certain myths that surrounds corrections? What might those be?

25) In what ways do you believe that pop culture (ex. movies, television shows, books) portray correctional officers?

26) How do you suppose local news/media outlets portray correctional officers?

27) What might be some challenges/implications of these media portrayals?

28) In what way(s) do you believe that these media portrayals might help or hurt the way this career is publicly displayed/advertised/marketed?

***Word of Mouth***

29) For those who have come in contact with the correctional system (prisoners, visitors) - What role might they play in sharing knowledge about their experiences with correctional officers?

Prompt: *What do you suppose, are some of the benefits and drawbacks of this method of communication?*

30) How could communication between among these individuals (ex. prisoners, their families, visitors, reporters) be more or less improved?

**Concluding Remarks**

*Thank you for your thoughtful responses thus far. We now reach the final part of the interview that consists of questions regarding your views towards how awareness of correctional work can be more or less improved in the future. This concluding portion will also provide you with an opportunity to share anything that was not covered in this interview that you feel would be important to include.*

31) What sorts of benefits might be associated with having others in the community learn more about this occupation?

32) What strategies do you suppose should be put in place to increase information sharing regarding correctional employment?

- 33) In what way(s) do you believe that these strategies would improve or hinder what the community may know about correctional employment?
- 34) What might be some risks or challenges associated with having others outside the field learn more about this occupation?
- 35) What areas of professionalism, in the realm of corrections, do you believe need the most improvement?
- 36) Looking back on your career (so far), what are you most satisfied with in terms of your achievements? Conversely, is there anything you are least satisfied with?
- 37) Is there anything else that you would like to add, that we did not get the chance to discuss during this interview?

*In case I need to get in touch with you regarding follow-up information, would it be okay to send you information via e-mail or through a mailing address?*

*As outlined in your consent form, you requested an opportunity to review your complete transcript to ensure accuracy and comfort level. Where would you like your transcript sent? (e-mail, home address)*

*In your consent form, you have requested a final copy of the report. How would you like this to be sent to you? (personal e-mail, home address?)*

Note: This interview guide was semi-structured and intended as a guideline and not a verbatim example of how questions would be worded and asked.



## APPENDIX B: REVISED INTERVIEW GUIDE

### ***Interview Guide***

Before we begin, please feel free to let me know if you have any questions and/or concerns regarding this interview, your participation, and/or the research project. Before we begin, I'll just remind you that the audio recorder can be turned off at anytime – just let me know when.

### **Introductory Questions**

*The first part of this interview is just to get to know you and the work that you do a little bit better.*

- 1) Please tell me a little about yourself and your background as a correctional officer.  
 Prompts: *What made you decide to pursue this as a career? How did you become a correctional officer and what did that involve?*  
*Before your first day on the job, did you have any sort of expectations of what this job would be like? Do these expectations meet reality?*
- 2) If you could describe your typical day as a correctional officer, what would that look like?  
 (prompts: duties, posts, responsibilities, hours in a shift, individuals you encounter/work with)
- 3) What are some positive aspects of being a correctional officer?
- 4) From your point of view, what are the most serious problems and challenges facing corrections?  
 Prompt: *In your opinion, what influences these challenges?*

### **Examining the personal attitudes and perspectives of correctional officers**

*The next part of this interview will consist of questions that focuses on your attitudes, and perspectives of being a correctional officer.*

- 5) How do you feel about being a correctional officer?  
 Prompt: *What sorts of attitudes do you have towards your work?*
- 6) Have these attitudes experienced any sort of change as you progressed further into your career?  
 Prompt: *What may have motivated these changes in attitude?*
- 7) Do you believe that your job affects your life outside of work? If so, how?
- 8) As a correctional officer, what do you value the most about this type of employment?  
 Prompt: *Have these values changed throughout your years of service?*  
*What may have motivated these changes in values?*
- 9) What do you NOT value so much about this type of employment?  
 Prompts: *Have these values changed throughout your years of service?*  
*What may have motivated these changes in values?*

**How do correctional officers believe they are being perceived by *others* while performing their public service duties, what they believe these perceptions consist of and examining potential implications of these perceptions.**

*The third part of this interview will tap into your views regarding the perspectives that other individuals may have of your career. This section includes several groups of people you may encounter in the workplace such as prisoners and their known associates as well as your fellow peers and management team. This section also contains aspects of public domain such as community, media, friends and family.*

***Community***

10) What do you believe the general public currently knows about correctional employment?

Prompt: *What do you think the community should know more about when it comes to correctional employment?*

*In what ways do you think this information could be made more meaningful to the community?*

11) How do you think the general public sees your job?

***How do you believe the general public feels about the work that you do?***

12) What, in your opinion, motivates these perceptions?

13) What might be some problems with or implications of these views?

14) Where do you believe these views may have come from?

15) Based on your beliefs about these public perceptions about corrections and where they may have come from, how does this make you feel?

Prompts: *What are some of the positive and negative outcomes of these perceptions, as it relates to your job? Do you believe these perceptions affect your own perspective of the job? What about how you interact with others?*

***Prisoners' known associates***

16) Have you ever had to work or interact with visitors to the institution? What was that experience like for you?

Prompts: *When it comes to working or interacting with prisoner families and friends, how do you think they view correctional officers?*

17) What, in your opinion, motivates these views?

18) What do you suppose influences these perceptions?

***Officers' known associates outside of work***

19) Does your job affect your relationships with people that you know? If so, in what way(s)?

20) What level of understanding do you believe your friends/family outside of work know about your career?

Prompts: *How do you believe your loved ones feel about the work that you do?*

*Why do you believe this is?*

*What do you believe helps or hinders this level of understanding?*

*How could communication about your duties as a correctional officer become more or less improved with your loved ones?*

21) Are there things about your job that you keep from family and friends outside of work? If so, what might be some of the reasons for this?

### **Addressing the potential source(s) of these perceptions as a way to make information more meaningful regarding correctional employment**

#### ***Media***

22) Do you believe that there are certain myths that surrounds corrections? What might those be?

23) In what ways do you believe that pop culture (ex. movies, television shows, books) portray correctional officers?

24) How do you suppose local news/media outlets portray correctional officers?

Prompt: *During the strike negotiations, several news reports had also been circulating regarding correctional work. Do you believe that this increased public awareness was helpful in informing the general public about what correctional officers do?*

*How did you feel about the media coverages that occurred during the labour dispute?*

25) What might be some challenges/implications of these media portrayals?

26) Do you believe that these media portrayals might help or hurt the way this career is publicly displayed/advertised/marketed? If so, how?

#### ***Word of Mouth***

27) For those who have come in contact with the correctional system (prisoners, visitors) - What role might they play in sharing knowledge about their experiences with correctional officers?

Prompt: *What do you suppose, are some of the benefits and drawbacks of this method of communication?*

28) How could communication between among these individuals (ex. prisoners, their families, visitors, reporters) be more or less improved?

### **Concluding Remarks**

*We now reach the final part of the interview that consists of questions regarding your views towards how awareness of correctional work can be more or less improved in the future. This concluding portion will also provide you with an opportunity to share anything that was not covered in this interview that you feel would be important to include.*

- 29) What sorts of benefits might be associated with having others in the community learn more about this occupation?
- 30) What strategies do you suppose should be put in place to increase information sharing regarding correctional work?
- 31) In what way(s) do you believe that these strategies would improve or hinder what the community may know about correctional employment?
- 32) What might be some risks or challenges associated with having others outside the field learn more about this occupation?
- 33) What areas of corrections, do you believe need the most improvement?
- 34) Is there anything else that you would like to add, that we did not get the chance to discuss during this interview?
- **In case I need to get in touch with you regarding follow-up information, would it be okay to send you information via e-mail or through a mailing address?**
  - **As outlined in your consent form, you requested an opportunity to review your complete transcript to ensure accuracy and comfort level. Where would you like your transcript sent? (e-mail, home address)**
  - **In your consent form, you have requested a final copy of the report. How would you like this to be sent to you? (personal e-mail, home address)**

Note: This interview guide was semi-structured and intended as a guideline and not a verbatim example of how questions would be worded and asked.

APPENDIX C: WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD  
APPROVAL



January 13, 2017

Dear Emma Mistry

REB # 5156

Project, "'Through the Looking Glass': Understanding Correctional Officers' Perceptions and its Impact"

REB Clearance Issued: January 13, 2017

**REB Expiry / End Date: August 31, 2017**

The Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University has reviewed the above proposal and determined that the proposal is ethically sound. If the research plan and methods should change in a way that may bring into question the project's adherence to acceptable ethical norms, please submit a "Request for Ethics Clearance of a Revision or Modification" form for approval before the changes are put into place. This form can also be used to extend protocols past their expiry date, except in cases where the project is more than two years old. Those projects require a new REB application.

Please note that you are responsible for obtaining any further approvals that might be required to complete your project.

Laurier REB approval will automatically expire when one's employment ends at Laurier.

If any participants in your research project have a negative experience (either physical, psychological or emotional) you are required to submit an "Adverse Events Form" within 24 hours of the event.

You must complete the online "Annual/Final Progress Report on Human Research Projects" form annually and upon completion of the project. ROMEO will automatically keep track of these annual reports for you. When you have a report due within 30 days (and/or an overdue report) it will be listed under the 'My Reminders' quick link on your ROMEO home screen; the number in brackets next to 'My Reminders' will tell you how many reports need to be submitted. Protocols with overdue annual reports will be marked as expired. Further the REB has been requested to notify Research Finance when an REB protocol, tied to a funding account has been marked as expired. In such cases Research Finance will immediately freeze the release of your funding.

All the best for the successful completion of your project.

(Useful links: [ROMEO Login Screen](#) ; [ROMEO Quick Reference Guide](#) ; [REB webpage](#))

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Basso".

Robert Basso, PhD  
Chair, University Research Ethics Board  
Wilfrid Laurier University

## APPENDIX D: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

**Correctional Officers Through the Looking Glass: Understanding Perceptions and its Impact (REB# 5156)**

Letter of Information/Consent for Interviews

**Principal Investigator:**

Emma Mistry

MA Candidate, Criminology Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford 73 George St. Brantford, ON, N3T 2Y3 905-699-2225 mist5390@mylaurier.ca

**Research Supervisor:**

Dr. Stacey Hannem

Associate Professor, Criminology Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford 73 George St. Brantford, ON, N3T 2Y3 519-756-8228 ext. 5785 shannem@wlu.ca

**Research Objectives:**

The objective of this research is to better understand correctional officers' perceptions about how others, including the general public, prisoners and their families, view them and their occupation. I am interested in how others' views affect correctional officers' sense of identity and feelings about their job. In order to better understand this experience, I will be conducting 5-10 interviews with active correctional officers working for the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. From these interviews, I will examine: (1) how correctional officers feel they are broadly being perceived by others such as the general public, prisoners and their families, (2) where these impressions come from, (3) how these perceptions and attitudes are believed to impact an officer's views and experiences of their work and (4) ways to better communicate meaningful information to the general public regarding correctional officers and their contributions to maintaining public safety.

This research project was developed through an invested interest in correctional services based on the researcher's previous work experience with the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and is part of the degree requirements for the Master of Arts in Criminology Program at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Findings from this research project will be presented in the researcher's MA thesis and will also be available in the form of an executive summary report. The results of this research may also be presented at academic conferences and may result in the publication of a journal article or book chapter. If you wish to receive copies of any publications from this research, including the thesis, summary report or any other publications, you may request these from the researcher at any time.

**Procedures involved in the Research:**

I would like you to participate in an in-depth interview, either face-to-face or over the telephone, at a place and time that is convenient to you. With your consent the interview will be digitally voice recorded for transcription and analysis. The interview will last approximately ninety minutes. I will invite your open-ended responses to several questions about your work and your perceptions surrounding correctional employment. I may, at your choosing, contact you a second time with follow-up questions or with clarification questions. You may, at your choosing, review the transcript of your interview.

**Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:**

There are no physical risks to participation in this study. While I will keep your identity and information confidential, because the participants will be recruited from the same correctional facility, there is minimal risk that administrative staff and fellow co-workers might become aware of your participation in this study if you choose to disclose your participation. This study looks to map out the perceptions, views and experiences that you have of being correctional officer and examine any associated feelings, judgements and attitudes that you feel that the general public, prisoners and their families may have towards correctional staff and whether or not these perceived notions have a personal and/or professional impact. Because of this, some of the questions asked during the interview could potentially cause some discomfort, however you may decline to answer any question at any time. Throughout the study, your information will remain anonymous and all identifying material will be kept separate from your data, in a locked drawer located in the researcher's home office. The data will be stored on a password protected computer accessible only to the researcher. All data and identifying data (recordings, transcripts, face sheet, and consent forms) will be permanently deleted at the end of the study.

**Potential Benefits:**

You may benefit from being given the opportunity to express your views and opinions on your work processes. Further, you will be provided with a final copy of the written report, at your request (that will provide a thematic presentation of the aggregated data). Our hope is that the information acquired through this study will provide insight into the attitudes that the general public may have regarding correctional officers and whether these perceptions are believed to influence the perspectives and experiences of their work. It will also help disseminate knowledge regarding correctional employment.

**Confidentiality:**

Interview data will be digital voice recorded and transcribed for later analysis by myself. I will be assigning a number to this interview rather than your name, and all of your responses will be held in strict confidence. The findings will NOT provide specific information, regarding the institution's policies and procedures. Further, no identifiable data pertaining to the name of the institution or the individuals involved will be included in any reports. This consent form will be kept separate from the data set and destroyed at the end of the study. Your digital recorded responses will also be assigned a number and will not be identifiable in the final report. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you can choose to have your digital voice recorded deleted. While initial recruitment of participants will be done by a fellow officer, the recruiting officer will sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure anonymity of participants involved. Anonymity

will also be maintained for research participants through anonymous quotation in the final report and in all presentations.

### **Participation:**

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time and there are no consequences to doing so. If you decide to withdraw before the interview is conducted, the interview will be cancelled. If you withdraw during the interview, the interview will stop and the recording will be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw after the interview, but before the final study report is written, you may contact Dr. Hannem or myself to do so. All your data will then be destroyed unless you specify otherwise. At any point throughout, or after, the interview, and prior to publication, you may request to have your data removed from the study. In such cases, your data will not be included in the final analysis or report. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

### **Rights of Research Participants:**

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact, Dr. Stacey Hannem, by phone 519-756-8228 ext. 5785, or via email shannem@wlu.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier University's Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

Dr. R. Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University Research (519) 884-1970 ext. 4994, e-mail: rbasso@wlu.ca

### **CONSENT**

I, (print name) \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the above information about the study on perceptions of correctional employment. I have received a copy of this form and I agree to participate in this study, in accordance with the terms set out above.

I agree to have the interview digitally recorded

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Following our interview, I would like an opportunity to review my interview transcript and add or delete information to ensure accuracy and comfort level.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that direct, anonymous quotes may be used from my interview transcript in the final report.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that the graduate researcher can contact me for a follow-up after completion of the interview.



Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to request a copy of the final report.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E: CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

To whom it may concern:

My name is Emma Mistry and I am a graduate student of criminology at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am seeking to learn more about the lived experiences and perspectives of correctional officers who are employed with the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The project, titled "Correctional Officers Through the Looking Glass: Understanding Perceptions and its Impact" has been reviewed and approved by Wilfrid Laurier's Research Ethics Board (#5156).

The purpose of this study is to better understand correctional officers' perceptions about how others, including the general public, prisoners and their families, view them and their occupation. I am interested in how these views affect correctional officers' sense of identity and feelings about their job. In order to better understand this experience, I will be conducting 5-10 interviews with active correctional officers working for the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. From these interviews, I will examine: (1) how correctional officers feel they are broadly being perceived by others such as the general public, prisoners, and their families, (2) where these impressions come from, (3) how these perceptions and attitudes are believed to impact an officer's views and experiences of their work, and (4) ways to better communicate meaningful information to the general public regarding correctional officers and their contributions to maintaining public safety.

I am reaching out to you to inquire about whether or not you or fellow employees within the Ministry would be willing to participate in an interview. The interview would be conducted by telephone or in person, and would last approximately ninety minutes (at your convenience and discretion). You will have the opportunity to withdraw during or after the interview. I will follow this e-mail up with a phone call, if you wish, in order help answer any questions or concerns that you may have. If you are willing, we can mutually arrange an appointment for the interview. The interview will take place at a location of your choice.

Findings from this study will lead to the creation of a final written research report, that will provide a presentation of the findings from the interviews. This final report will be shared with you, at your request as well as with my research committee. Results of this research may also be presented at academic conferences and may result in the publication of a journal article or book chapter.

If you have any questions about the study or your participation, please do not hesitate to contact either myself via e-mail ([mist5390@mylaurier.ca](mailto:mist5390@mylaurier.ca)) or telephone (905-699-2225) or my research supervisor, Dr. Stacey Hannem, via email [shannem@wlu.ca](mailto:shannem@wlu.ca) or by telephone 519-756-8228 ext. 5785. Thank you very much for your time in considering my invitation.

Sincerely,

Emma Mistry  
MA Candidate  
Wilfrid Laurier University

## APPENDIX F: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR RECRUITERS

**Confidentiality Agreement for Recruiters / Research Assistants / Transcribers/Translators****Name of Recruiter:** \_\_\_\_\_**Title of Project:** 'Correctional Officers Through the Looking Glass: Understanding Perceptions and its Impact.' (REB #5156)

Before we can begin the recruitment process, I must obtain your explicit consent not to reveal any of the identities of the participants (i.e. the officers) being recruited and interviewed. If you agree to these conditions, please sign below.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G: DEMOGRAPHIC FACE SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

***Face Sheet: Please provide responses to the following fields. Responses are optional and will be kept confidential.***

Gender: M \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest level of education attained: \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Background: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years as a Correctional Officer: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any family members who work in corrections? \_\_\_\_\_