

# Criminal Justice Perspectives

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*A journal focusing on a broad spectrum of empirical, theoretical, and interpretive studies on issues related to criminal justice.*

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# Criminal Justice Perspectives

Journal of The Ohio Council of Criminal Justice Education  
Volume 9, Issue 1



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## Editorial Introduction

### **Reflections on a Rebranded Journal**

Keith F. Durkin

*Ohio Northern University*

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome readers to Criminal Justice Perspectives. Criminal Justice Perspectives is the official journal of the Ohio Council of Criminal Justice Education (OCCJE). One of the primary objectives of the OCCJE is to:

“Stimulate and facilitate research, experimentation, and evaluation in criminal justice and related problems of learning and teaching (in doing so, serve as a clearinghouse of information and reports on these matters and to publicize the findings of studies that have significance for the improvement of criminal justice)”

(Hazy et al., 2012, p.3)

The OCCJE has published a journal for the better part of a decade, and it is the hope of the editorial team that the rebranded offering called Criminal Justice Perspectives will excel in accomplishing that objective. With this in mind, the editorial team has adopted high standards for contributions to the journal. All papers submitted to Criminal Justice Perspectives undergo a rigorous blind peer-review process involving multiple referees. Authors are never charged a fee to publish their work in Criminal Justice Perspectives.

The generation and dissemination of knowledge is central to the mission of the academy. In spite of often daunting teaching and service loads, scholars at “non-elite” (i.e., non-Research 1) intuitions are increasingly subjected to “publish-or-perish” imperative (Weeber, 2006). Likewise, there is the expectation that graduate students publish in order for them to have a competitive edge in the academic job market upon graduation (Eliason, 2008). We are hopeful that this journal will serve as an important outlet for such scholars. We welcome submissions, both empirical and theoretical, on any of the vast array of topics relating to criminal justice, including: criminology, policing, courts, law, corrections, substance abuse, offender rehabilitation, community re-entry and recidivism.

The contents of this issue are representative of both the mission of the OCCJE and the diverse scope of the academic discipline criminal that is known as criminal justice. First, a paper by Christopher Utecht reports on the results of an ethnographic investigation into the working lives of correctional officers. In the next paper, Dana Davis and colleagues provide an insightful analysis on the effectiveness of including pictures in classroom presentations. The final offering is a review of Deborah Appleman’s book *Words No Bars Can Hold*, contributed by Kathryn L. Johnson.

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## Research Articles

### **The Working Lives of Corrections Officers: An Ethnographic Study<sup>1</sup>**

Christopher Utecht  
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#### **Abstract**

*The corrections officer has always been an important part of our criminal system. Whereas the lives of police are fairly well known through research, the corrections officer is less well known. There is an acknowledged shortage of information about the working lives of corrections officers. This research seeks to illuminate the working lives of corrections officers through the use of participant observer research to create an informed ethnography of a large medium security facility in the Midwest.*

#### **Keywords**

*corrections; correctional personnel; correctional institutions; correctional workplace*

The corrections officer has always been an important part of our criminal system. They are responsible for the care, custody, and control of their charges (Cornelius, 2016). In the criminal justice system, no other practitioner works more closely with offenders on a daily basis than the corrections officer (Britton, 2003). This is a matter of proximity: they are locked into the institution together. The role of corrections officers has taken on even more importance since the advent of tough-on-crime policies in the 1970's. The resulting incarceration boom has created a need for these highly skilled though lowly respected professionals (Britton, 2003).

Whereas the lives of police are fairly well known through research, the corrections officer is less well known. As with other aspects of the criminal justice system (police and courts), what people know about corrections officers is from how they are portrayed in the media, such as the HBO series *Oz* or in movies such as *Cool Hand Luke*, *Escape from Alcatraz*, and *The Shawshank Redemption*. In the case of corrections officers, media portrayals are almost uniformly negative (Russo et al., 2018). Officers are stereotyped as having awful jobs, and are generally depicted as brutish with a predilection towards sadism. They are depicted as living a Hobbesian existence, under fear of constant violence, in a Malthusian institution bursting with prisoners, a powder keg waiting to explode (Conover, 2000; Britton, 2003). This trope is based on two centuries of stereotypes, and does nothing to improve the situation of corrections officers or their charges (Britton, 2003; Crewe et al., 2013; Russo et al., 2018).

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In reality, the working life of a corrections officer is not as it is portrayed in the media. It is true that the potential for violence exists. However, in large part inmates have as much interest in the peace and quiet found in a smoothly functioning institution as the corrections officers do (Britton, 2003). Corrections officers train for the worst, but often find inmates to be cooperative. Even though they must, by necessity, maintain their suspicions, corrections officers must work daily with the inmates to ensure the efficient operation of the institution (Britton, 2003).

There is an acknowledged dearth of information about the real working lives of corrections officers. As Conover (2000) states in his popular ethnography of corrections officers: the kept are studied far more than the keepers. Officers are, in the words of Conover (2000), the dentists of the criminal justice world: doing professional work just like everyone else in the system, but always looking for the level of respect granted to their law enforcement brethren.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of corrections officers. Specifically it examined the corrections officer occupation, its subculture, as well as the benefits and challenges experienced by corrections officers. The intent of this study is to help close the knowledge gap regarding the practice of institutional corrections, answering the question: What is it like to work as a corrections officer?

Pursuant to this research question, I completed a corrections officer internship with the Midwestern Jail Facility (MJF), a medium security institutional correctional facility located in the Midwestern United States. During the course of that internship, I engaged in participant-observation over a three-month period.

## **Literature Review**

Besides bars and locks, when the public thinks of prisons or jails they think of the corrections officer (Cornelius, 2010). Though ripe for inquiry, the literature surrounding the occupational life of corrections officers is surprisingly weak (Crawley & Crawley 2013; Ricciardelli, 2016). Generally, more attention has been paid to prisons and jails as institutions or to the inmates themselves (Crawley & Crawley, 2013; Britton, 2003). Where ethnographic research of prison staff exists, it mostly concerns correctional educators and psychologists. While research into the working lives of corrections officers exists, the quantity is definitely wanting, especially for a topic so rich in possibilities (Crawley & Crawley, 2013).

The literature that does exist points to corrections officers as the other prisoners of the correctional system (Kauffman, 1988; Britton, 2003). These capable, hard-working, and diligent men and women are locked in their places of employment eight to twelve hours a day. They experience many of the same concerns for their safety and well-being at work as the inmates they are guarding. This includes an ongoing series of arguments and challenges to their autonomy, sudden and unpredictable violence, fear, and the realization that they are estranged from the general public (Kauffman, 1988; Britton, 2003; Crawley & Crawley, 2013). Because of these stressors, corrections officers are susceptible to emotional stress and its physiological manifestations (Kauffman, 1988; Britton, 2003).

Although the most basic job of the corrections officer is to keep the inmates secure and safe, many day-to-day tasks are needed to make that goal a reality (Cornelius, 2010). The basic occupational life of corrections officers can be broken down into two main subdivisions: security duties and interacting with inmates (Cornelius, 2010). Security duties involve the tasks surrounding incarcerating offenders and preventing escape. Interacting with inmates concerns all aspects of social interaction between corrections officers and their charges and how officers comport themselves at work (Cornelius, 2010).

## **Security Duties**

Security is the essence of a correctional institution; those that are incarcerated are expected to be kept until their sentence is served (Cornelius, 2010). The most basic job of the corrections officer is to keep the prisoners imprisoned (Carlson & Thomas, 2006). This is seen in many of the regular formal security duties of corrections officers. For instance, upon arrival at a prison or jail, inmates are formally processed into the facility's population. This involves having their paperwork checked and confirmed, property inventoried, health screened, and person searched prior to being accepted and assigned to housing (Cornelius, 2010).

Officers regularly check on inmates, in a process known as headcounts, to make sure all are present and accounted for, either in their cells, their classrooms, or their workplaces (Cornelius, 2010). As an adjunct to headcounts, inmates in these areas are also subject to search by officers looking for unauthorized items known as contraband or any other signs of illegal activity. Furthermore, officers monitor inmates' behavior and hygiene, watching for illegal behavior as well as signs of depression or mental illness, and supervise inmates in their work assignments (Cornelius, 2010).

While many of these duties may seem routine or mundane to the uninitiated, they are of grave importance to the safety of everyone in the prison. For example Schanbacher (2015) notes that inappropriate classification for housing assignment leads to a higher incidence of prisoner sexual assault.

Taken together, the security duties of a corrections officer present a view of the corrections officer's workplace as very detail oriented (Cornelius, 2010). Corrections officers must be observant, and possess the ability to think laterally. Additionally, the bureaucratic nature of their workplace demands documentation of all of the noted activities. Therefore, officers must be able to communicate clearly and articulately in writing (Cornelius, 2010).

## **Interacting with Inmates**

Concomitant to their security duties, officers must interact extensively with the inmates (Cornelius, 2010; Russo et al., 2018). As they are locked into the institution with the inmates, and usually unarmed, corrections officers must be able to participate in effective two-way communication with inmates, while also being able to give orders that will be received well and



with cooperation. This not only helps the institution achieve safety and security for the inmates, it also engenders a positive work environment for the officers (Cornelius, 2010).

While many of the formal duties of the corrections officer fall under security duties, many of their informal duties fall under interacting with inmates (Cornelius, 2010). Officers act as street-level bureaucrats, overseeing much of the reformatory role of the corrections system, and can have long-lasting positive or negative effects upon the inmates they oversee (Shannon & Page, 2014). Officers act as psychologists, legal advisors, parents, information agents, counselors, and diplomats (Cornelius, 2010). To accomplish these duties, officers must be able to comport themselves appropriately in a variety of different situations, as well as possess articulate verbal communication skills (Cornelius, 2010, Russo et al., 2018).

## **Stress**

Stress is a natural consequence of many criminal justice occupations (Crawley & Crawley, 2013; Shannon & Page, 2014; Russo et al., 2018). Corrections officers are no exception. Jails and prisons are workplaces that are rife with the possibility of danger. The profession can be both physically and emotionally taxing, although usually calling for higher levels of mental rather than physical toughness (Britton, 2003).

In addition to the workplace specific issues, corrections officers face the same worries as all other government employees. Given the recent trend of reduced revenues at all levels of government, corrections officers are being asked to do more work with fewer resources (Shannon & Page, 2014). In fact, many of the top reasons for leaving the profession are all either stressors or are caused by stressors (Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Russo et al., 2018).

## **Methodology**

Qualitative methods including ethnography/participant observation, have shown themselves to be better suited to assessing the context, process, and social meaning of human experiences (Whitehead, 2004; Bryman, 2012). In the milieu of cultural research, ethnography is recognized as a natural choice for researchers looking for insight into the social lives of their subjects (Bryman, 2012; Guest et al., 2013). Ethnography helps to provide a holistic understanding of the group being studied (Whitehead, 2004). As noted above, it should be commenced without any theoretical postulations or suppositions that could color the observer's perceptions of their interactions, inherently decreasing the validity of their data (Whitehead, 2004). This data can then be used to develop theoretical hypotheses to direct further qualitative or quantitative inquiry, with the intent to increase both the internal and external validity of the research findings (Bryman, 2012; Whitehead, 2004).

Participant observation is also inherently longitudinal in nature (Bryman, 2012). It requires researchers to spend long periods of time ensconced in the social setting which they endeavor to observe. This extended time frame results in participant observation being the clear, natural choice for researchers who wish to observe the nuanced changes that are experienced

over time in organizations. It allows researchers to make a large amount of observations over time and to analyze their data to establish connections that will help explain individual and organizational behavior, and inform future research (Bryman, 2012; Guest et al., 2013).

## **Research Design**

From the position of a corrections officer intern, I conducted participant-observation research at the MJF over a three-month period. Initial training consisted of 56 hours over two work weeks (a total of seven 8-hour days). After my initial training I was on-site for at least 16 hours a week, but some weeks I was on site for more. I completed 250 hours total at the facility during the three months of the study. I was immersed in their workplace attempting to learn all that I could about the working lives of corrections officers in order to elucidate the social relationships and networks of corrections officers and understand their working lives.

## **Data Collection**

Throughout my time at the MJF, I documented my daily observations of the role of corrections officers in their workplace. Specifically, I observed these officers' interactions with each other, with their superiors, and with their subordinates. I used mental and jotted field notes to increase the accuracy of my recollection of my observations, fleshing out those notes to full field notes at the end of my shift. Later, I processed these notes into a word-processed journal.

## **Data Analysis**

My data analysis began immediately in the field. I would inscribe mental notes immediately, and jot a mnemonic word or phrase as soon as I was able. As soon as practical afterwards, I would add additional description to my field notes in order to capture as much of an important incident as possible. Shortly after the beginning of my research, I began to analyze my notes for common themes. This led me to be more aware of them while in the field, and allowed me to pay particular attention to those topics, while remaining alert for other important observations and themes. These initial analytical steps were noted in my journal.

After completing my time in the field, I began an overall analysis in order to explain the data I collected. I developed descriptive categories in order to typify the observations inherent in the data. Based on these categories, I began to move relevant sections of text from my journal into different categories. This reorganized data was then reviewed in order to revise, specify, and elaborate on the information. During this time I was also able to add additional definitions and illustrations to clarify the information.

## **Field Role**

My ethnographic role was that of a participating observer. In this role, I was participating in the group's activities, but not as a full member (Bryman, 2012). My observations were overt, not covert. I made no secret of my status as an academic observer. I recognize this may have created issues with ongoing access, that is, it may have colored the employees' interactions with me since I was a known outsider. I am confident that my entrée was not compromised by my status being known. Everyone I encountered was so open and honest that I cannot imagine they were guarded in any way. I attribute this entrée to two points. First, I brought my experience as a law enforcement officer and long-time criminal justice practitioner, which gave me a certain degree of inherent entrée and credibility as a member of the subculture. Second, I went through some of the same rites of passage all corrections officers experience (Bryman, 2012).

## **Participants**

The community studied was the corrections officers of the MJF. As an ethnographic study, my sampling method would be best referred to as opportunistic sampling. I was given the opportunity to study the working lives of corrections officers at the MJF. Randomness was not a consideration in my study. Instead, I sought to understand the working lives of corrections officers as seen at this institution.

Participants were observed solely because they were employed at my host institution. I was interacting with them as a corrections officer intern in a workplace setting. Observations were made in an on-duty setting at the MJF. Therefore, the racial, age, socio-economic and other demographic factors of this sample were determined by (and reflect) the composition of the workforce I interacted with in the course of my duties.

All participants were provided with informed consent information sheets at roll call (that is, their pre-shift briefings). I also provided participants with my name and contact information in case they would decide to withdraw consent prior to the end of my internship/research. No participants declined to participate. In fact, participants seemed to be pleased to hear that I would be giving scholarly voice to their group.

## **Site Information**

The MJF is a medium security urban institutional correctional facility. The MJF was an excellent research site, as it allowed me get a broad experiential knowledge of the workings of a correctional facility. First, it houses both men and women. It blends aspects of a local jail with that of a prison, which provides for longer periods of incarceration for some inmates. As it is in an urban area, inmates have a multitude of job opportunities for work release. In addition, inmates perform traditional road and park clean-up duties. The MJF has robust rehabilitation and education programs, including multiple education and vocational programs designed to reintegrate inmates after release. It is also a rather large facility, rated to house a large number of inmates.

In addition, the MJF is a direct supervision facility, where corrections officers are in direct contact with inmates without barriers (National Institute of Corrections, 2004). Officers interact continuously with inmates, with the inmate housing units designed as large open spaces called pods. The MJF has a diverse workforce. The population of line officers was over 50% female and over 80% minority, consisting mostly of African-Americans and Latinos/Latinas.

## **Methodological Limitations**

### ***Time Constraints***

Time constraints were a limitation (Guest et al., 2013). There is a limited amount of time I was able to be on-site at the MJF. Despite spending 250 hours at the facility over the course of three months, there were bound to be characteristics of the workplace that went unseen by me.

A distinct possibility was that I only saw one particular season of life at the MJF. As the officers I interacted with related, many times the same populations of inmates come and go yearly through the MJF. Additionally, as is with many organizations, members have a tendency to use their vacation time during months of good weather, especially in the Midwest. It is entirely possible that had I made my observations in the summer season, or perhaps if I had concentrated my observations on the period from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day, I would have made some different observations.

I was also generally limited to dayshift hours, which presents another time-constraint limitation. Working the daytime shift, the inmates were always awake and moving about the institution to different treatments, programs, and work assignments. Had I worked the afternoon shift (3pm-11pm), where the majority of the inmates are confined to their dorms, or if I had worked the overnight shift (11pm-7am), where the majority of inmates are sleeping, there is a possibility that I would have had different observations because of the varying dynamics associated with the inmates being confined mainly to their dorms not moving around the institution, or sleeping.

### ***Position in Organization***

Furthermore, while the longitudinal nature of participant observation provides a great depth of knowledge on the observed subjects, I did my participant observation from the position of an intern. Generally, an internship offers interns the ability to rotate through all of the different units of the organization in order to give the student a breadth of knowledge regarding the organization. This rotation afforded breadth of knowledge, which is perfect for students interested in pursuing corrections as a career. However, for the purposes of this research, the rotation forced me to sacrifice a bit of one of the cornerstones of participant observation: depth (Bryman, 2012).

My status as an intern presented a further limitation in that I was not a fully vested employee of the organization. Due to this status, the administration had concerns about my safety, the safety of inmates, and liability that my unaccompanied presence would generate. Therefore, I was not allowed to be on my own in the institution, and I was not allowed to have more than incidental inmate contact, such as passing in the corridor.

### ***Known-Outsider Status***

Throughout this research, I was an outsider. This is clearly a concern for the ethnographer (Bryman, 2012; Guest et al., 2013). Even though I went through several of the rituals, rites of passage, and shared experiences common to all corrections officers, the fact remains that I was still an outsider, seeking to understand corrections officers, their workplace, and their culture. Therefore, individuals could potentially have been guarded when conversing with me, and may have acted differently when I was around. The subjects I observed may have had their suspicions about me, thinking I was there to search out their mistakes or as some sort of management spy looking for policy violations of any nature (Bryman, 2012). People may not have been as forthcoming with information or commentary, worrying that what they say would get back to their co-workers or management. Furthermore, people have a tendency to act differently when they know they are being observed. While this can be mitigated through time and credibility, it is a limitation that must be acknowledged by ethnographic researchers (Bryman, 2012).

### ***Going Native***

While my experience as a law enforcement officer and longtime criminal justice practitioner gave me a degree of entrée and credibility as a member of the officers' subculture, helping to overcome my status as a known outsider, it may have also predisposed me to go native. Ethnographic researchers have the challenge of building relationships with those studied while simultaneously remaining objective. Researchers who do not build relationships are ineffective but so too are researchers who over-identify with those studied (e.g., "go native") (De Jong et al., 2013).

The very nature of ethnographic field work requires that researchers form connections with their subjects (Guest et al., 2013). This sort of research can result in not only data to show what it is like being in a certain group, it can also help researchers expose the unknown-unknowns about a research topic. Both of these sorts of findings are crucially important to building a knowledge base. However, the relationships created through the experience of performing ethnographic research present their own issues in the form of a loss of objectivity. This loss of objectivity results from the researcher failing to preserve the professional distance necessary to make insightful observations (De Jong et al., 2013).

An ethnographer must simultaneously be immersed in their subject, while remaining estranged from it (De Jong et al., 2013). Walking this fine line allows the researcher to build the relationships needed for successful ethnographic research, while simultaneously adhering to their ethical responsibilities. Additionally, going native can have the effect of blinding the

researcher to important facets of the subject that may seem banal to an insider. Therefore, maintaining objectivity in a participant observation setting is of paramount importance.

Journaling is a very common, standard practice for doing ethnography. As such, it was a technique that I used daily in order to help maintain my objectivity. I was recording field notes every day, reflecting on those notes at least weekly, and refocusing my observations. This process helped me to focus on my mission: I was there to participate *and* observe in the organization. I was at the MJF daily taking descriptive field notes on basically everything that I could record, no matter how banal, augmenting my observations later when I had time to reflect, and formulating interpretations days later, away from the institution. This reflective, away-from-the-institution analysis helped me to practice professional-distance-fostering strategies, such as holding and breaking mysteries (seeking out surprises in my observations), and looking for irrational behaviors (those that might seem rational to an insider) (De Jong et al., 2013). I also actively utilized the strategy of *playing the jester*, in which I questioned assumptions in order to get explanations of why the officers did things the way they did (De Jong et al., 2013).

## **Research Observations**

This section will explore the working lives of corrections officers through an explanation of my observations during my time at the MJF. Its intent is to give a clear account of the general working life of corrections officers, with all of its benefits and pitfalls. The job of a corrections officer is not entirely different than most other blue collar jobs. It involves shift work and hourly wage labor. They have to punch a time clock, work well with others, and adhere to a bureaucratic chain of command.

The difference between the working lives of corrections officers and those of almost everyone else becomes immediately apparent upon officers' arrival at work. After parking their car, they to walk through the sally port, which is comprised of two motor operated gates approximately 75 feet apart that are controlled from inside the facility at a location called Master Control. After passing through the sally port (which closes behind them) they enter the facility in the employee entrance, and proceed to the locker room. Here they begin to socialize with the other corrections officers as they put on their uniforms for work. Conversation in the locker room is generally light-hearted.

After getting dressed, they will need to move any items they will be taking with them to their post, such as their lunch, into clear plastic bags. This may evoke images of something one would carry groceries home in, however these bags are far sturdier than anything you would find in a grocery store. They are purpose-built for people working in corrections. They resemble backpacks, tote bags, purses, and so on, but constructed of sturdy clear plastic or vinyl. These are required by institutional policy for anyone carrying items into the facility past the employee-only area in order to combat smuggling.

## **Roll Call**

After preparing themselves in their locker room, and checking their mailbox, officers proceeded to roll call. Best described as a pre-shift briefing, roll call consists of officers interacting with their supervisors and each other prior to beginning their shift. Roll call begins when the operations lieutenant, who is the supervisor for all line personnel on the shift, mounts the lectern. He begins by taking attendance and giving assignments. This portion of roll call goes on until all of the officers on the roster have been noted for their attendance and have been given their assignments.

After this, the operations lieutenant moves on to a description of any activity or notable events within the institution since their last shift (in this case, over the last 16 hours). Although needed as preparation for their shift as well as to ensure the continuity of care and custody for the inmates, this time can also result in a measure of humor, as many of the inmates noted as causing trouble or being sent to the segregated housing unit are well known to the officers. Next comes a period of announcements, where the various lieutenants and the shift captain will note any policy changes, or changes to standard operating procedures. This time can also include a short pep talk or motivational speech, usually by the captain (who is the supervisor for the entire facility for their shift), or the operations lieutenant. Finally, if time permits, there may be a short training session conducted. Training conducted at roll call usually consists of watching a short video, with commentary afterward by the officer administering the training.

Shifts at the MJF consist of 40-60 line officers with up to seven supervisors on duty. Outside of roll call, most of these officers will be working by themselves for the bulk of their shift. Even the lieutenants and captain are not immune to this solitude, as they too spend a large portion of their day toiling alone. Roll call presents an important opportunity for socialization and bonding. It is the one time every day that officers and supervisors get to experience in person the large team that they are, in fact, a part of.

## **Dorm Officers: On the Front Line**

After roll call, officers proceed to their daily duty assignment. For most of the officers on a shift, this means working in a housing unit. These are the inmate living quarters, also known as dorms or pods. The MJF has two distinct areas containing housing units. In both types, there is only one officer working in the dorm, supervising all of the inmates that live in that dorm. One is the older area of the facility. In this area, the dorms resemble military barracks from a Vietnam War or World War II movie, except instead of two rows of bunk beds lining the walls, there are four rows of bunk beds, two lining the walls and two in the center of the room. These older dorms are designed to house up to 70 inmates. These units are designed with the bathroom and dayroom as separate rooms from the area containing the bunks. This contributes to a need for the officer on duty in the dorm to be especially vigilant as there are line-of-sight issues since there are walls blocking his view into the bathroom and day room from the main dormitory area. This results in officers in these dorms patrolling more frequently, leaving their desk which is located near the door, next to the day room.

The newer dorms are rated for up to 60 inmates. Instead of looking like a military barracks, these look more like a gymnasium. The bunks and dayroom are all located in the same large gymnasium-like area. The bathroom is its own separate room; however, the wall separating the bathroom from the rest of the dorm is made of clear plexiglass. This enables the officer on duty in one of these newer dorms to maintain surveillance on every inmate present in that dorm throughout their entire shift from the officer's desk, which is located on a raised platform next to the door.

I had always had the impression that working in a correctional institution was rather dull. This opinion was formed from the various police officers and sheriff deputies I had worked with over the years who had worked in jails and prisons. They had usually compared it to factory work: highly routinized and generally mundane. My time at the MJF showed me that working in a correctional institution, though highly routinized, is anything but mundane. If an officer is doing their job correctly, they have something to do for almost every minute of their shift. When they arrive at their dorm after roll call, they are briefed by the officer they are relieving. This officer will inform them of any dorm specific incidents that have happened over the last shift, and anything that was passed on by the previous shift. When the new officer arrives at the dorm, the officer being relieved will have "bunked" the dorm, meaning that they will have ordered all of the inmates in the dorm on to their bunks. When a dorm is bunked for whatever reason, the inmates are only allowed to get off of their bunk if they need to use the bathroom (and then only one at a time), or if they have some sort of emergency.

After relieving the previous shift's officer, the incoming officer generally takes a few moments to get themselves situated at the duty desk, packing away their lunch and such, as well as taking a quick look at the jail log (a master journal for the dorm, logging all incidents in the dorm no matter how minor), and making sure all of their required equipment is at the desk and in working order. Next, the officer coming on duty makes an announcement to all of the inmates present. This includes a reading of all rules set forth by the institution for dorm living, as well as a statement by the officer regarding his expectations of how the dorm will behave. This reading of the rules, as mundane as it sounds, is done so that the inmates are keenly aware of the rules of the institution so they can be sure to abide by them. This is done in spite of each inmate being issued a copy of the rules upon intake to the institution, as well as the rules being posted in each dorm. This is more than just ritual, though; failing to obey the rules at the MJF comes with consequences, and officers who want to discipline an inmate for violating the rules need to follow procedure. This procedure includes documenting not only the infraction, but also that the inmate was aware of the rules, or at least had been made aware of them (the reading of rules is noted each shift in the jail log). Therefore, the ritual of reading the rules is also a necessary although perfunctory practice, so that if an inmate violates the rules they will not be able to claim ignorance.

Next the officer takes their first of at least three counts for their shift. A "count" is when the officer physically makes sure that every inmate on his dorm roster is present and accounted for. The officer is supposed to do this by checking the inmate's wristband as well as actually looking at the inmate to see that they match the picture on file.



Counts are done for a few reasons. First, it simply goes back to the idea that the most basic job of the corrections officer is to keep the prisoners imprisoned (Carlson & Thomas, 2006). By counting the inmates, the officer makes sure that all of his charges are present and therefore are still serving their sentence.

Second, counts are an opportunity for the officer to interact with the inmates one on one. Although the officers are expected to maintain a certain level of professional distance, and are certainly not allowed to have a personal relationship with any of the inmates, officers are not only expected to treat the inmates humanely, but to also treat them like humans. This one-on-one interaction can build a professional relationship between the officer and the inmates that can lead to making the officer's job easier long term. For instance, during the course of an investigation into a disturbance, and inmate who an officer has a good professional relationship with may be more willing to provide information to that officer about the incident, especially in the one-on-one interaction of a count.

Third, counts provide an opportunity for officers to inspect their charges and make sure that they are safe. This includes not only looking through their footlocker to see that it is in good order and that there is no contraband in it. It also includes the officers taking a moment to visually inspect the inmates, checking for any undisclosed injuries, illnesses, or even signs of depression or mental instability. Inmates have a vested interest in maintaining a facade that they are fine and in good working order. The reasons for this facade vary from inmate to inmate, but can include wanting to appear tough, or not wanting to look like they are informing (i.e. "snitching") on another inmate who may have injured them. Whatever the reason an inmate may be withholding their status as injured or ill, a count provides a perfect opportunity for officers to uncover these undisclosed maladies.

While an officer is required to perform at least three counts during the course of their shift, they may perform more at their discretion. While intended to provide officers with the ability to make sure that all of their inmates are present and accounted for, it also provides them with a way to informally discipline a dorm, or to get a dorm that is becoming unruly back under control. Whenever an officer calls for a count, he is effectively forcing all of the inmates to get on their bunks and requiring silence for the duration of the count. To this point, the count will not begin until everyone is on their bunk and silent. If silence is broken during the count, the dorm officer may "lose count" and be forced to start over in the interest of being thorough.

After the initial count, the officer will generally release the inmates from their bunks where they can go about their daily business, which usually includes programming of some sort, playing cards, watching TV, reading, or sleeping. Throughout the rest of the day the officer has to make at least one patrol of his dorm every half hour. This patrol must be logged in the jail log, and the officer is required to scan his electronic identification card at the scan box located at the back of the dorm. While patrols are required every half hour, they may be delayed or skipped altogether due to some sort of exigency. In these cases, however, the officer must make sure that they note in the jail log why it was that more than 30 minutes elapsed between their patrols.

In addition to patrolling the dorm and supervising the inmates, officers have a plethora of other duties to carry all throughout the day. They need to take care of “med pass,” which is when nursing staff comes by to distribute medication to inmates who require it. On this note, dorm officers must also make arrangements for inmates who need to go to the infirmary. There may also be other inmates who need to leave the dorm, for instance to attend court or some sort of programming. Programming includes schooling, such as earning a GED, attending to the law library, religious services, or counseling & group therapy. Inmates can also elect to work. This includes trustee work, such as laundry, housekeeping, janitorial services, and the like. The MJF also supports robust work opportunities in prison industries. In this case, inmates are able to work in a print shop, a recycling sorting facility, and vermiculture/vermicomposting.

Officers also have to make sure an inmate can take part in his visits. The MJF uses video visitations, so the inmates do not leave the dorm to receive any visitors. They simply sit down at a cubicle in the dorm and video conference with their visitor who is in the visitation area. Visitors can also make their visits from their computer at home. All of these duties are in addition to taking care of inmate questions and requests, which may be legion.

### **The Watchers Watched**

Dorm officers can get bathroom breaks on request pending the ability of a relief officer to attend to their dorm. Officers also get a half-hour lunch break during their shift, again, pending the ability of a relief officer to attend to their dorm. Officers are able to eat their lunch at their desk if they wish; however, since they will generally be eating food that is not available to the inmates, inmates have a tendency to stare at the officer while they are eating their lunch. This can be kind of awkward, and somewhat off-putting, especially to new officers.

While my exposure to direct inmate contact was limited, I did have a few instances where I found myself in contact with the inmates like an officer would. An example of this was when I observed a shakedown with a class of correction officer recruits (jail academy students). A shakedown is a search of a prisoner's person, cell, or a work area for contraband. The recruits from the academy did a shakedown of one of the dorms at the end of their academy class on jail security.

When we entered the dorm, the lieutenant directed me to stand behind the desk to observe. Since there was no officer behind the desk, I took up a position where the dorm officer would have stood. There were approximately 60 inmates in the dorm. The shakedown itself lasted for about an hour, with the inmates in the dorm for approximately 15 minutes, enough time to systematically search them and move them to the recreation area. However, throughout my time in that dorm with the inmates, the inmates continuously stared at each of the recruits, including me. This group of inmates was not allowed to talk to each other because they were under discipline for being disruptive earlier in the day; however, they would whisper back and forth to each other while staring at whatever recruit they were looking at. Ultimately a group of inmates were lined up waiting to get out of the dorm, with some of them clearly talking to each other about me. They noticed that there was a very slight difference in my uniform shirt, which

had the same badge embroidered on it as an officer's uniform, except instead of the state seal in the center of the badge, it had the logo from a local community college, due to my status as an intern. After some initial whispered discussions with each other while staring at me, the inmates began to comment out loud to each other on how I was afraid to be around them, and so on. When most think about corrections, they think about the institution as a place where the officers watch the inmates. While that is certainly true, the fact is that the officers are watched by the inmates just as much.

### **Other Daily Officer Assignments**

There are many other jobs to which officers can be assigned at the MJF. Generally, senior officers are given preferential posting to these assignments. They include relief officers (also known as floor officers), booking, records and classification, and master control. Relief officers are just that: the officers who go about and relieve dorm officers for breaks, lunch, and so on. When they are not relieving officers in the dorms, they are generally engaged in escorting inmates from their dorms for programming, visitation, court, and so on.

Booking officers are in charge of the area of the institution where inmates are received. This includes inmates who are transferred from other institutions, as well as inmates who report in after being sentenced on a date assigned by the court. In both situations, these officers are charged with taking all necessary steps to begin the process of the inmates' incarceration. The intake process, known as booking, involves getting all of the necessary identifying information about the inmate into the computer system. This also involves photographing, fingerprinting, and searching the subject to make sure they are not bringing in any contraband to the institution. Booking is also a place where inmates depart for court or to go to another institution. In these cases, the booking officers make sure that the inmate leaving is in fact the inmate that is supposed to leave. They make sure that any outside agencies that are picking up inmates have all of their paperwork in order, and that they are picking up the correct inmate. On this note, booking officers are also responsible for making sure that officers from other institutions do not bring any weapons into the MJF.

Records and classification officers are charged with two very important duties. First, they are the ones who make sure that all of the records for an inmate are in proper order. This includes any paperwork from booking, as well as any other paperwork that has been provided to the institution by the courts. They also have to make sure that they thoroughly check their in-house records in case the MJF already has a record started for a given inmate. Part of their job also involves inmates who will be leaving the institution. Records and classification officers are the ones who check the paperwork for each and every inmate that is going to be released or transferred out of the institution.

The second main duty of records and classification is to appropriately classify inmates. Classification is the process of categorizing inmates so they can be matched to appropriate correctional treatments. There is also an inmate safety aspect to classification. Here, classification involves separating inmates who have behavioral problems from those who will

not, as well as separating at-risk inmates from inmates who could victimize them. It also involves keeping specific inmates or groups of inmates separate from each other if they have some sort of past together. For example, it would create a very dangerous situation if the institution would house members of rival gangs in the same housing unit, so during the classification process, known gang affiliations must be taken into consideration before placing an inmate into their housing unit. An anecdote I heard while at the MJF involved an inmate who was housed in the same dorm with a subject whom he had attempted to murder years earlier. That inmate ended up being ambushed by the subject he had tried to kill, and was beaten very severely.

As with booking, records and classification is a very meticulous job requiring a great deal of attention to detail. Every time an inmate enters the facility, is moved from one dorm to another, or leaves a facility, their record is reviewed by records and classification. Mistakes on the part of records and classification officers could result in an inmate being released accidentally, or a misclassified inmate suffering bodily injury from an assault. However, for as detailed of a job as it is, there are many distractions. The officers in records and classification are constantly working on the following day's release paperwork; however, throughout the day they are interrupted regularly by court paperwork, calling other agencies to place holds on prisoners, and other sorts of paperwork that are of a more immediate nature.

Master Control is, as the name implies, the control center for the institution, similar to a nerve center. Situated in the heart of the institution, it is a darkened room, surrounded by one-way mirrors, filled with monitors, computers, and radio equipment. It is secured by two heavy locking doors, with a hallway between, similar to a sally port. Inside, there are over 300 cameras continually cycling on four big-screen monitors. The phone is ringing constantly. Every corridor doorway that is locked, as well as every exterior door, gets unlocked remotely by master control upon doorbell request. So, not only is the phone ringing constantly, so is the doorbell. Master control also functions similar to dispatch in a police department, monitoring the radio, dispatching relief officers to assignments, and controlling radio communications during an emergency or disturbance. In addition to all these duties, they are also in charge of key control, radio control, and Taser control, issuing each of these through a banker-style sliding drawer. The ability to multi-task is essential. It is a very intense job, usually reserved for experienced officers.

## **Commonalities across Duty Assignments**

### ***Violence.***

Correctional institutions can be violent places. While they may not be nearly as violent as portrayed in the media, they are the scene of regular violent disturbances (Russo et al., 2018). The MJF is no different. During my time there, there was at least one inmate fight every day. Disturbances ebb and flow; it depends on the inmates. Some days there will be multiple fights in a day, sometimes only one or on a rare day, none. It is like a sickness or an infection that runs through the institution. If there are multiple disturbances in one day, the captain will lock the facility down for at least 24 hours, meaning that all of the inmates have to stay on their bunks unless they are going to the bathroom until released from their bunks.

As one of the senior lieutenants explained to me, this actually makes a lot of sense. The lieutenant asked me to imagine my 60 most-liked people in my life. These would be the top 60 people that I enjoy spending time with. Now, he said, imagine that you are locked in a room with that same 60 people. You do not get to leave by your own volition, and you are constantly exposed to these same 60 people. You have to eat with them, and endure any of their habits and quirks without a break. He then asked, "Now, how long do you think it would take before you'd want to slap the shit out of somebody?" His message, of course, being that if people would be unable to stand being incarcerated with people they like being around, it makes a lot of sense that inmates who do not want to be incarcerated, who are with people they do not know and may not like, and who are incarcerated because they may have some sort of self-control issues, would end up getting in fights.

Violence, in the form of inmate fights, fighting with inmates, or both, is one of the common experiences or rites-of-passage that are shared by all officers. These form one of the cores of the correctional subculture. In my time at the institution, almost every war story (i.e. personal anecdotes) had to do with a fight. Even when I sat in on classes about verbal communication, most of the stories were about fights, although for these the instructor juxtaposed communication with fighting, explaining how much easier it made your job to talk rather than to fight. This was best summed up by her words: "The more you talk, the less you fight. The less you fight, the less you write."

Although talking about fighting comes off as machismo (from both male and female officers), it was a nuanced form of machismo. As one of the lieutenants explained to a group of trainees (new employees), the job is not a tough guy competition. Officers must be able to endure disrespect without showing that it is affecting them. And when it comes to a fight, officers do not "fight fair," that is, with equal numbers. Officers take on fights in groups of three or more if possible, in order to bring the situation back into control as quickly as possible with as little injury to the inmate as possible. As another lieutenant put it: "Don't be afraid to run, there's no need to fight and stand. It's 60-on-1 in there! There's a door right next to your desk that locks when you go out and the inmates cannot follow you. Get out and wait for backup!" Given this mentality, an officer having to fight is relatively rare, since when the situation arises, disorderly inmates are met with large numbers of officers in a huge show of force that usually causes them to stand-down, so actual hands-on force is not usually needed

### ***Importance of Respect.***

On the point of violence, it is clear that professionalism and respect for other officers and the inmates are considered officer safety skills at the MJF. This respect can just be a façade or lip-service, but it is necessary. In the words of an assistant superintendent: "You must be able to talk to people. It is your most important skill. This job is three to four times harder for females because most of the inmates are male and many of them have little to no respect for females from their upbringing. You have to develop your own style to manage inmates while conforming with policy. We don't expect you to be a robot, but we need you to follow policy while doing your

job in a way that makes you more comfortable. Something to understand about corrections officers is that we're all family, and sometimes families are dysfunctional. However, you must be able to get past your differences with your co-workers and support each other.”

Officers cannot brook disrespect from inmates, since it will lead to a loss of control over their dorm. However, also they cannot take it personally. They have to be able to shake off their personal feelings, but still hold the inmate accountable for their bad behavior or rule violations. An officer’s professional reaction to everything has to be to treat everyone with dignity and respect. Corrections officers have to overcome personal desire to be disrespectful in return, an emotional, human reaction. This can be hard to do; it violates our norms of reciprocity.

The corrections officer has to be firm but fair. However, when the correct answer is not apparent, ‘no’ is the easiest answer. An officer can always come back and change their mind on a ‘no’ answer, but if they say ‘yes’ and then change their mind it is going to upset the inmates. Along with being firm but fair, officers have to have some level of consistency. Inmates like to know what to expect, and that makes them easier to manage. They may not be happy about an officer who is uncompromising (i.e., a “hard-ass”), but they respect it and prefer that officer to one who is inconsistent.

If an officer has been respectful to the inmates they will help that officer, even in a fight. For example, a group of senior officers told me an anecdote about the importance of being professional and respectful involving the last time an officer got beaten severely by an inmate at the MJF. A night shift officer came into the dorm for his shift and started routinely calling the black inmates a racial slur during his shift-opening remarks. An inmate got off his bunk, approached the correction officer at his desk, and politely informed the officer that he would knock the officer out if the officer used that racial slur again. The inmate then returned to his bunk. The officer promptly used that racial slur again. The inmate got off his bunk, walked up to the officer, and beat him severely, leaving him with a broken jaw, broken cheek, broken orbital, and a severe concussion. The beating was so severe because not one of the other 59 inmates in the dorm lifted a finger to stop the beating. It was the experience of the officers telling this story that, in the event an inmate would attack an officer, the other inmates would generally jump on the attacking inmate to save the officer. The point of the story was clear: show disrespect to the inmates at your own peril.

### ***Importance of Communication.***

Something that became apparent early in my research was that verbal communication is of paramount importance to a corrections officer. Understanding how to talk to the inmates is the most critical thing an officer can learn. According to one of the veteran officers, all officers need to be able to talk their way out of almost everything with the inmates. He purportedly had not laid hands on an inmate in at least 10 years, a record he attributed squarely to his communication abilities. Based on the anecdotal numbers quoted to me from different officers, there is a general concurrence with Russo et al.(2018): corrections is a people profession.

At the beginning of my time at the MJF, while taking the new officer orientation with a class of trainees, we had been instructed to come up with three questions about working at the MJF that we could ask during question-and-answer sessions that were used to fill time if we finished a topic early. During several of these question-and-answer sessions, I asked the assembled instructors, senior officers, and lieutenants what the most important career skill was for someone entering the profession of corrections. Every one of them said verbal communication without any hesitation. In the words of one of the senior officers: "It's always a good day when you can talk someone into not doing something stupid or when you can talk someone into doing something you need them to do." This also came with the acknowledgement that good verbal communication is not just the ability to talk to people but also the ability to listen and also the ability to shake off back-talk and sass from inmates and co-workers alike.

Considering the relative importance of verbal communication to their training curriculum, it was portrayed by all instructors as possibly the most boring portion of the training. I found this to be an interesting paradox, especially in light of the fact that uniformly all of the senior officers, instructors, lieutenants, and the training supervisors had all said that verbal communication was the ultimate skill needed for corrections officers. I found the class to be excruciating (60 PowerPoint slides), as did the officer trainees.

However, the verbal communication curriculum includes important models for communication, like the concept that people would rather be asked to do something than told to do it, and that the idea sometimes officers will even have to offer at least minimal explanation to make things go more smoothly with the inmates. The jail academy instructors stressed that these are important concepts, even in the correctional setting. The recruits in class were incredulous, stating that they generally felt that telling/ordering the inmate to do something works better, with no explanation. One of the lieutenants summed up his thoughts: "If all you got is 'tell', you'll feel like a tent stake at the end of every day."

### ***Cursing as a Subcultural Argot.***

There are some workplaces where cursing is acceptable; the MJF was one of those places. To borrow a phrase from an internet meme, most of the officers at the MJF use the f-word like a comma. While incessant, the cursing never seemed excessive. This applied not only to the line officers, but to the supervisors and even up into administration and internal affairs. In general, anyone who had worked in a line position for any appreciable length of time cursed regularly in conversation. Probationary employees were notified by their trainers during orientation that they should not curse at the inmates, at least not until they are off probation. While even non-probationary employees may have a complaint lodged against them by an inmate for cursing at the inmates, a probationary employee could be released for that infraction. This being said, probationary employees are witness to cursing constantly. Instructors would regularly curse in the classroom while telling the trainees and recruits not to curse at inmates because it was unprofessional.

Given that employees are not supposed to curse at inmates, there is a tremendous amount of cursing that takes place in regular conversation between employees at the facility. It is not represented as cursing each other, though. Rather, it is called using “sentence enhancers,” like adjectives, to help illustrate points and for emphasis. With all the cursing, one would think that someone would be offended. Yet it seemed that no one ever was. Cursing was just a regular and accepted part of the officers’ argot.

The reason for this proclivity for what would generally be considered foul language can be found in research. Baruch and Jenkins (2007) describe the effect cursing has when it is used as workplace language. They describe two types of cursing: annoyance swearing and social swearing. Annoyance swearing is the type that occurs when someone is upset. An example from the MJF would be when someone finds out that they have received a duty assignment that they do not like, or when someone finds out that they are being forced to work overtime during a time when they had something else planned. Annoyance swearing allows people to vent anger without getting physical (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007).

Social swearing is conversational swearing that is not of a negative or abusive nature (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). It helps to define a relationship between individuals, paradoxically being shown to actually be a form of politeness in groups that curse often (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). In these groups, cursing is a mark of solidarity, something that helps to manifest solidarity in its role as lingua franca, as well as reinforce that solidarity through repetition, marking the individual as part of the group. It also helps group members to release stress and develop norms (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007).

The MJF is an archetypal organization benefitted by cursing as described by Baruch and Jenkins (2007). Employees experience elevated levels of stress; it has a male-dominated, or at least machismo dominated, culture; officers from a group that need cohesion, and benefits from solidarity. Cursing appears to be a natural outcropping of these factors.

### ***Gallows Humor as Subcultural Stress Relief.***

In addition to officers’ regular use of curse words, there is a significant amount of gallows humor displayed at the MJF. In addition to officers’ regular use of curse words, there is a significant amount of gallows humor displayed at the MJF. Gallows humor is also called dark humor, and is common throughout the emergency services professions as a coping mechanism to deal with exposure to tragedy and death (Tracy et al., 2006; Crawley & Crawley, 2013; Gayadeen & Phillips, 2016). Workplace humor helps to build social ties, promote cohesion, and provides a positive coping mechanism for workplace stressors (Gayadeen & Phillips, 2016).

In the time I was at the MJF, there were no workplace topics considered taboo for humor. It was clear the first day that the instructors in the training division had a good sense of humor, and this was quickly shown to be the case throughout the institution. At a roll call for the afternoon shift during my first week, the captain noted that previous night an inmate had tried to hang himself, was found by an officer, and saved. The captain noted that he was currently at



the hospital for neck pain, to the laughter of those assembled. The training officers used humor extensively during the part of the part of the academy dedicated to body cavity searches. While clearly a serious topic, and obviously the instructors were taking the topic seriously, it was an unmistakably awkward portion of the curriculum, and the training officers used humor to help diffuse the awkwardness and help the students learn.

In many cases, the use of humor as a coping mechanism at the MJF seemed to be a way to claim moral superiority over those who are the targets of humor. Humor is not reserved for inmate behavior; officers are not immune from becoming targets of humor. This includes being made fun of for minor foibles all the way up to terminable offenses. There is a generally level of good-natured ribbing taking place at all times. As far as ribbing over minor foibles, one day I even I found myself to be the target. I had cut my face shaving that morning, and had applied a small corner of tissue to the spot since I could not get it to stop bleeding before leaving my house. By the time I arrived at the MJF, I had forgotten I had it on my face. The officers I worked with that day, without explicit coordination, decided not to point it out and to see how long I would leave the tissue on my face. Their joke was foiled when another officer I had been assigned to in another part of the facility pointed it out to me. I had been walking around at the MJF for two hours with the tissue on my face, much to the amusement of the officers I was with.

In addition to using humor as a way of claiming moral superiority over their charges, I also found that it seemed to be a way for them to claim moral superiority over their wayward (and many times former) co-workers. The training officers told an anecdote about the guard tower calling in a fight. Usually when the tower would call in a fight, it would be inmates on work release fighting outside the institution; however, in this case it was a fight in the employee parking lot. It turned out that two female officers got into a fistfight over a man they were both dating, who happened to also be an officer at the institution. Both female officers ended up being disciplined. Second, during my time at the institution, there was a probationary officer who was terminated for establishing a dating relationship with an inmate, after only two months at the institution. She had met the inmate at the institution (as his dorm officer), and started a relationship with him. The officer had purchased a prepaid "burner" cell phone so they could talk on the phone when she was not at work. She had also put money on his canteen account (a place for inmates to purchase snacks and certain sundries), and eventually posted his bail. Relationships of this nature are strictly forbidden by federal and state law, agency policy, and subcultural values, and clearly demarcated during training. When word got around about why the officer had been terminated, jokes started to fly. This joking culminated the next day at roll call when the captain, without mentioning the officer or termination, reminded everyone of the policy barring personal relationships with the inmates. This generated some subdued chuckling. He then leaned over the podium to dispense some personal advice: "Folks, a first date meal shouldn't consist of ramen noodles, honey buns, or anything else you'd find on canteen. Don't date inmates." The room erupted into laughter.

In both of these situations, officers' first instinct was to make jokes about the situation because there was no way to make sense out of it. The conduct of the officers involved was so completely indefensible and absurd to their subcultural norms that words could not describe the

level of antipathy for the offending officers' conduct. Therefore, humor was a natural way to express their censure, reinforcing subcultural values and building solidarity among participating officers.

### ***Retention Issues.***

The MJF has a problem with employee turnover. In the four months I was at the MJF, 20 corrections officers quit, three retired, and one was terminated. During this same time period, they hired just 14 new corrections officers. Their maximum approved staffing level was 279 officers. By the end of my internship, the number of corrections officers working at the MJF had dipped below 220, which constituted a ten-year low. This translates into the MJF repeatedly spending money recruiting, hiring, and training officers, only to see them leave.

The reasons officers leave the MJF are various, but tend to center around two main reasons: low pay and high overtime. All posts in the facility have to be covered all of the time. This results in overtime and forced overtime regularly. The officers of the MJF regularly work immense amounts of overtime: they can plan to work at least 60 hours a week, every week (i.e. 20 hours of overtime). For those that want to work overtime, it would be possible for officers to work 16-hour days, seven days a week for as long as their body could take it. For those that do not want the overtime, there is the daily specter of forced overtime, with officers regularly being forced to work double shifts and forfeit their off-days. This is the reason for quitting generally cited among employees whose tenure is less than five years.

Longer tenured officers maintain that low pay is the reason for the turnover issue. They point to the fact that the MJF is one of the lowest paid facilities in the state, and that no one in the institution has received more than a cost-of-living raise in seven years. This pay freeze has occurred during a time of general increases in the cost of benefits. A 20-year veteran officer stated that today he is only taking home about \$25 more every two weeks than when he started due to the increasing cost of benefits and pay freezes.

Low pay and long hours have been shown to have a negative effect on job satisfaction, with a commensurate decrease in retention (Steinmetz et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2017; Russo et al., 2018). The MJF is a public institution, funded by public tax dollars. Given the current economic conditions for government, a reluctance to increase taxes by politicians, and disinclination toward increasing public employee salaries, a pay increase was not seen as a viable option by the administration. The plan, at least for the short term, was to continue trying to hire their way out of the problem.

### **Conclusion: A Call for Future Research**

Corrections has been generally portrayed as being boring, routine work. While I was at the MJF, I found it to be anything but boring. In fact, all of the jobs I observed seemed very intense. There was always something to do, and very little downtime. Even when not in a dorm, officers' heads must "be on a swivel." It takes a certain measure of *sang-froid* to be an officer.

They are expected to be professional, objective, and in-control of their area, but paradoxically have to be ready for trouble at a moment's notice.

Although their work was similar to other types of work in superficial ways, the working lives of corrections officers present a raft of areas ripe for research. These points illuminate another reason for studying corrections officers: they are people worthy of study in their own right. They are both members of the public as well as members of the institutional environment in which they work (Crewe et al., 2013).

It is unfortunate that the eye of research has been so little turned to the corrections officer. Given the logistical reality of the correction officers' workplace, it should come as no surprise. Corrections officers operate out of the public view, in an environment specifically designed to keep the inmates in and the public out. This study provided a wealth of information about the working lives of corrections officers. While having good data and analyzing that data for threads, trends, and commonalities is important, inspiring conversation is the hallmark of good research. It is my hope that this ethnographic study not only adds to the critical mass of scholarly material about the working lives of corrections officers, but that it also inspires my colleagues to turn their eyes (and research budgets) toward these important criminal justice practitioners.

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# **A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words: Retention of Material Through Use of Image Only Slides<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*The current study assessed students' retention of material after viewing text only slides versus image only slides. Prior work had mixed results as to the outcomes associated with the use of slides. Undergraduate students (N=90) enrolled in criminal justice and engineering courses completed a pre-test right after viewing the slides, and a post-test two weeks later. Results suggest students retain more information in the two-week time frame after viewing the image only slides versus the text only slides. This is important because students may be better able to retain information and apply those concepts to their future jobs with image only learning materials.*

## **Keywords**

*slides; retention; text; images*

## **Introduction**

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In a college classroom there are various ways for professors to distribute learning material to students, but slide lectures have become very popular in the classroom setting. The purpose of this study was to evaluate student's retention of lecture material after viewing specific slides. A previous survey was conducted to assess students' satisfaction of images versus text slides in lectures, and the results indicated most of the students agreed image only slides in lectures improved their learning (Barrick et al., 2018). Due to these results, we conducted a study to assess student's retention of material after viewing text only slides versus image only slides over a two-week time period and then complete a test related to the lecture.

A mastery of content is important in most disciplines. Here, we argue that being able to apply course concepts to real world scenarios and retain that information is especially important in the criminal justice classroom. First, introductory to criminal justice courses are often recognized as a general education requirement, meaning they are taken by a broad swath of the student population. Each of these students is living in a society where the criminal justice system plays an integral role. It is important that they understand and retain the basic concepts taught in criminal justice courses to understand the society in which they live. Secondly, the goal for most criminal justice majors is to become employed in the field. This means that they will be actively making decisions that directly impact other individuals and society as a whole (e.g., whether or not to violate someone on probation, whether or not to file charges on a potential offender, how to best supervise inmates in a correctional facility, etc.).

### **Best Practices in Slide Presentations**

In recent years, slides, including Google, PowerPoint and Prezi, have become staples in the classroom. Nearly 67% of college students have reported their professors use slides, and of those professors, 95% use slide software for most of the class (Baker et al., 2018). Researchers also have noted that it is hard to find what works for every student since students learn in different ways, but some conclusions have been made. First, there is a decrease in retention and learning when the individual presenting reads word for word off the slide. Second, graphs, graphics, and easy-to-read text allow for an increase in learning. Finally, to increase retention, research has found it is better to include a supportive graphic with a full sentence headline compared to a single word or phrase (Berk, 2011).

When it comes to the actual slides themselves, researchers believe applying the "less is more" rule is the best way to go. Slides should include minimal text and bullets (3-6), and highlight key points (Berk, 2011). In a study conducted to determine the effectiveness of different aspects of slides, it was found that the visual qualities of a slide should be less text-heavy (Brock & Joglekar, 2011). A combination of low textual density and high non-textual elements both produced positive student feedback. With that said, student feedback was more so determined by instructor use, in which effective instructors utilized slides to stimulate discussion. The article concludes with the suggestion that the best practice for slide use calls for minimal text and more visual elements, discussion topics, and the inclusion of only essential elements (Brock & Joglekar,

2011). The authors suggest a maximum of 20 words per slide, as slides are best used to develop concepts that cannot be easily explained with words (Brock & Joglekar, 2011).

The Multimedia Learning Theory (MMLT) was created by Richard Mayer based on his studies which consist of seven principles including multimedia, spatial contiguity, temporal continuity, coherence, modality, redundancy, and individual differences. MMLT explains how students learn more from pictures and words rather than looking at a slide with just words. The modality principle explains how animation and narration on the slides help students learn better rather than text on the slides. This allows students to make connections and have a better understanding of the lecture. Slides that contain text only can put a burden on an individual's memory, causing slower processing and learning (Gardner & Aleksejuniene, 2011).

### **The effectiveness of images in slides**

In examining the interdisciplinary differences between slide presentations, it was found that conflicting information about best practices for presentations are the result of underlying differences in disciplines (Garrett, 2016). The disciplines in which students reported that slides were highly effective typically utilize fewer, larger images. The disciplines in which slides were rated as more effective include economics, education, management, and marketing. The author describes these as "soft" disciplines which are generally multiple paradigms and use more complex writing (Garrett, 2016). Overall, the author concludes that slide design should consider the nature of the discipline foremost (Garrett, 2016).

A study of criminal justice students identifies they have long been comfortable with modern teaching styles such as PowerPoint slides (D'Angelo & Woosley, 2007). This study indicated that even in the early 2000's that criminal justice majors believe that their learning was enhanced by technology. Although this study was about their perception of technology, it still speaks to their openness to a different format of teaching in the classroom. Similarly, undergraduates in sociology and anthropology also perceived PowerPoint slides to enhance their learning (Hill et al., 2012). Survey respondents reported that PowerPoint slides aided in exam preparation, enhanced comprehension of the material and increased their attention during class. Similarly, an instructor of professional safety, a field closely aligned with criminal justice, supports the use of images in PowerPoints and cautions us from the overuse of bullet points of text in slides (Ricketts, 2018). He emphasized that relevant images increase interest and comprehension of the material, clarifies challenging concepts and stimulates discussion. An article discussing the pros and cons of PowerPoint in presentations to juries and judges also dissuades us from using text heavy bullet points in slides. This article confirms that audiences cannot read and process the verbal presentation simultaneously. The author encourages a picture, chart or other image to provide a memorable reference for the judge and jury (Brown, 2015).

A study was conducted comparing the effectiveness of oral presentations, slides, and zooming user interfaces such as Prezi (Moulton et al., 2017). In their examination, they found that participants rated Prezi as a more organized, engaging, persuasive, and effective medium than PowerPoint slides, due primarily to the format's panning and zooming transition animations.



With that said, the authors do consider that the preference for Prezi was due at least in part to the novelty of the format. Furthermore, while participants expressed a preference for Prezi, there was no difference among memory, comprehension, or learning among the formats (Moulton et al., 2017).

In a study comparing the effectiveness of image only, text only, and hybrid text image slides, it was found that participants had the highest recall of the text only slides, and the worst recall of the image only slides (Buchko et al., 2012). The authors suggest that the low recall on the image only condition may be due to information processing, in which participants were distracted from the information while processing the images. To further support this proposal, the authors report that the most effective slides across all conditions were those with words that reinforced processing of the verbal information channel (Buchko et al., 2012). It should be noted that this study served a dual purpose in that it also sought to examine the overall effectiveness of slides in a non-academic setting, specifically a religious institution, as such, the authors urge caution in generalizing results to other settings (Buchko et al., 2012).

All of the studies discussed here have some commonality in that the authors of each study urge against over-generalization of their results and express a need for further research. In comparing the aforementioned studies, some information may seem contradictory, for example, Buchko et al. (2012) suggest that images in slides are ineffective, while Brock and Joglekar (2011; 2012) suggest that images are more effective than text. It is apparent that a wide variety of variables influence both perceived and actual effectiveness of slide presentations and should be taken into consideration in related studies.

Another study was conducted to examine student's satisfaction with images versus text in PowerPoint lectures. The researchers discovered most of the students agreed images in PowerPoint lectures improved their learning. But when looking specifically at race, African American students reported less satisfaction with the images than whites (Barrick et al., 2018). Researchers believe this could be due to the variety of white-centered images used in the slides which did not relate to the culture of the African American students. They explained the importance of this finding due to the low retention rates of underrepresented students. They also discovered students who were further along in their educational career agreed images in slides enhanced their learning. This finding suggests those students are more prepared to handle challenging lecture styles (Barrick et al., 2018).

## **Student Retention**

In any classroom, the exact number/length of student's retention will vary depending on the student and their learning style. One study found that adults stay focused on a lecture for no more than 15-20 minutes (Booth, 2007). Tests were given out to students four different times and the results showed that after 20 minutes they had forgotten 47%, after one day 62%, which then rose to 69% forgotten after two days. By the time 31 days went by, the amount of information students forgot rose to 78% (Booth, 2007). An interactive learning study was done with medical students to see if the retention of information is better in interactive lectures and

results were as followed; 50.9% students strongly agreed, 36.6% agreed, and 1.8% disagreed (Katyal et al., 2016). When looking at student retention researchers have found that in order to show signs of improvement, it is most effective to have students take tests over the material throughout the course (Zabrucky & Bays, 2015). Other researchers looked at the timing of when a test was given and how it affected the student's retention. The study found students who were given a quiz immediately after a lecture, scored higher than on a quiz given one week later (DeRoma et al., 2003).

A research study found when students are actively involved in the learning process, they have a more motivating experience in the classroom which enhances their memory. By changing the pace of the class lecture, presenting the students with more 'real life' situations, and including different interactive techniques, it will keep them engaged for a longer period of time (Steinert & Snell, 1999). Providing students with image-based slides may be one way to provide a different technique that could enhance interest and retention in the material.

In this study, we try to clear up some of the contradictions in the literature. We hypothesize that while text may be more beneficial for student performance (as supported by Buchko et al., 2012), images may be more beneficial for retention beyond the test (as supported by Brock & Joglekar, 2011). Results from a recent qualitative study of Black students confirm that this minority population does share a common interest in image-based slides with their fellow white students despite their also feeling that they have no personal connection with the images (Davis et al., 2020). These results provide further support of student satisfaction with images in slides. These study findings could be important because perhaps if students perceive that images are a preferred learning style to them and believe that they help them retain information for later recall, this could potentially build their self-efficacy that they can do well on testing measures. While the current study is trying to determine a link between the use of image-based slides and retention the students' satisfaction with this lecture style may be positively enhancing their learning environment.

## **Method**

Institutional Review Board approval has been granted by the authors' institution for this research. The participants were asked to view a slides lecture, complete a test related to the lecture, and fill out a survey regarding their opinion about being a student in a classroom examining retention and satisfaction of images versus text in slide lectures. The survey instrument was created by the researcher using Microsoft Word. The survey consisted of demographic questions, Likert style questions focused on their satisfaction with images in slide presentations, and questions related to the lecture. Question topics included the stages of change, image versus text preference and the effect of images on student learning, ability to pay attention, and subject interest. A survey was handed out to the participants immediately after viewing the slides lecture. The participants recorded their answers on bubble sheets and included a unique eight-digit identifier to ensure that those who participated in the study remained anonymous.

A total of 90 students participated--46 in fall 2018 and 44 in spring 2019. The study was first piloted with 27 students in an Introduction to Social Work class during the fall 2018 semester. The participants were asked to view a slides lecture, complete a test related to the lecture and fill out a survey regarding their opinion about being a student in a classroom examining retention and satisfaction of images versus text in slides lectures. The results from the pilot study showed a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.65, and a mean score of 7.78 out of a possible 12. After receiving the results from the pilot, the researchers looked at four specific questions in which more than 50% of the students answered them incorrectly. These questions were then modified to increase possible positive responses for the main surveys which were then distributed to students across several criminal justice and engineering courses during the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters. The students were asked to complete a pre-test right after viewing the slides, and the same post-test two weeks later. The tests were distributed by the professor. The fall semester slides consisted of image only slides, and the spring semester slides consisted of text only slides.

Two surveys were distributed during the fall 2018 semester to 30 students enrolled in an engineering "Computing for Technologists" class, and a second to 16 students enrolled in a criminal justice "Criminal Victimization" class. The Computing for Technologist class first survey was distributed on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, and then again two weeks later, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The Criminal Victimization class first survey was distributed on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, and then again two weeks later, on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. For the fall semester, a total of 46 students completed surveys about the slides which consisted of image only slides.

Two more surveys were distributed during the spring 2019 semester in two different classes. There was a total of 15 students between the two classes, 7 enrolled in Computing for Technologists, and 8 enrolled in Concrete Design. A second survey to 29 students enrolled in two Crime and Delinquency classes. The Computing for Technologist and Concrete Design classes first survey was distributed on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, and then again two weeks later, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The first survey for the Crime and Delinquency class was distributed to two classes, one on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019, and the second on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Then again two weeks later, on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019, and April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019. A total of 44 students completed the surveys about slides which consisted of text only slides during the spring semester.

Participants watched a pre-recorded lecture. Once in the Fall semester with images, and once in the Spring semester with text. The same video recording was used in both semesters to ensure reliability, only the slides in the background were altered. All students watched the ten minute video in class and took the exam directly after. Students were asked to take the exam again in two weeks to measure retention.

### ***Measurement***

Independent Variable: Whether the slides were image only (1) or text only (0) is the variable of interest that differentiates the two groups being compared in the analysis.

Dependent Variables: Retention is measured as the number of items answered correctly regarding a lecture that is presented either through text only slides or image only slides. Short-term retention is measured as the “pre-test” which is the number of items answered correctly immediately after the lecture was viewed. Long-term retention is measured as the post-test which is the number of items answered correctly two-weeks after the lecture was viewed.

Control variables: A number of sociodemographic variables are used to describe the students in each of the two comparison groups. These control variables include age, gender, race, year of college, and course in which the exam was given.

### Analysis

We ran two phases of the analysis—descriptive and comparative. The descriptive used counts, percentages, measures of central tendency, and measures of dispersion. The comparative analysis used both 2 sample independent t-tests and paired t tests. SPSS version 20 was used.

### Sample

Demographic data can be found in Table 1. The data consist of 90 undergraduate students, male (62.2%), female (35.6%), transgender (1.1%), and one participant did not respond (1.1%). Participants reported that they were freshmen (4.4%), sophomore (20%), junior (31%), senior (37%), and described themselves as African American (10%), Caucasian (85.6%), Hispanic (3.3%), and Native American (1.1%). Participants were enrolled in one of several criminal justice and engineering courses. They were single (76.7%), married (6.7%), divorced (1.1%), or living with a partner (14.4%), and one participant did not respond (1.1%). A majority of the students were working during the fall and spring semesters, 1-10 hours (16.7%), 11-20 hours (24.4%), 21-30 hours (22.2%), 31-40 hours (14.4%), 41+ hours (20%), and two participants did not respond (2.2%).

	Number of Students (N=90)		Image Only Students (N=46)		Text Only Students (N=44)	
		(%)		(%)		(%)
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	56	62.2	35	76.1	21	47.7
Female	32	35.6	10	21.7	22	50
Transgender	1	1.1			1	1
Did not respond	1	1.1	1	2.2		
<b>Age</b>						
18-24	72	80	35	76.1	37	84.1
25-30	12	13.3	7	15.2	5	11.4
31-40	5	5.6	3	6.5	2	4.5

51+	1	1.1	1	2.2		
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>						
African American	9	10	5	10.9	4	9.1
Caucasian	77	85.6	38	82.6	39	88.6
Hispanic	3	3.3	2	4.3	1	2.3
Native American	1	1.1	1	2.2		
<b>Significant Other Status</b>						
Single	69	76.7	35	76.1	34	77.3
Married	6	6.7	4	8.7	2	4.5
Divorced	1	1.1	1	2.2		
Living with partner	13	14.4	5	10.9	8	18.2
Did not respond	1	1.1	1	2.2		
<b>Education Standing</b>						
Freshmen	4	4.4	1	2.2	3	6.8
Sophomore	18	20	3	6.5	15	34.1
Junior	31	34.4	20	43.5	11	25
Senior	37	41.1	22	47.8	15	34.1
<b>Hours a week employed</b>						
1-10 hours	15	16.7	6	13	9	20.5
11-20 hours	22	24.4	9	19.6	13	29.5
21-30 hours	20	22.2	8	17.4	12	27.3
31-40 hours	13	14.4	8	17.4	5	11.4
41+ hours	18	20	13	28.3	5	11.4
Did not respond	2	2.2	2	4.3		
<b>Primary caretakers for any children under the age of 18 that live in your home</b>						
Yes	5	5.6	3	6.5	2	4.5
No	84	93.3	42	91.3	42	95.5
Did not respond	1	1.1	1	2.2		

*Note.* There was another category under Age, but all students selected 18-24, 25-30, 31-40, or 51+.

*Note.* There was another category under Race/Ethnicity, but all students selected were either African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, or Other.

## Results

During the fall semester, students viewed the Slides which consisted of image only slides. Table 2 shows 25 out of 46 (54%) students passed the pre-test and 18 out of 46 (39.1%) passed the post-test. The slides students viewed during the spring semester consisted of text-only slides, 31 out of 44 (70%) students passed the pre-test and 14 out of 44 (31.8) passed the post-test. Table 3 breaks down how each demographic group did on the pre- and post-test.

	Image Only Students (N=46) (%)	Text Only Students (N=44) (%)	Mean Score
Pre – Test Pass	25 (54.3)	31 (70.5)	
Pre – Test Fail	21 (45.7)	13 (29.5)	
Post – Test Pass	18 (39.1)	14 (31.8)	
Post – Test Fail	28 (60.9)	30 (68.2)	
Image Only Students			
Pre-Test			7.76
Post-Test			7.04
Text Only Students			
Pre-Test			8.36
Post-Test			6.66

	Image Only Pre-Test Pass % (n)	Image Only Post-Test Pass % (n)	Text Only Pre-Test Pass % (n)	Text Only Post-Test Pass % (n)
% = Valid Percent				
Total number passed	54.3 (25)	39.1 (18)	70.5 (31)	31.8 (14)
Gender				
Male	51.4 (18)	34.3 (12)	57.1 (12)	38.1 (8)
Female	60 (6)	60 (6)	81.1 (18)	22.7 (5)
Transgender			100 (1)	100 (1)
Age				
18-24	51.4 (18)	37.1 (13)	70.3 (26)	29.7 (11)
25-30	71.4 (5)	42.9 (3)	60 (3)	40 (2)
31-40	66.7 (2)	66.7 (2)	100 (2)	50 (1)
51+	0	0		
Race/Ethnicity				
African American	40 (2)	20 (1)	50 (2)	25 (1)
Caucasian	55.3 (21)	39.5 (15)	71.8 (28)	33.3 (13)
Hispanic	50 (1)	50 (1)	100 (1)	0
Native American	100 (1)	100 (1)		
Significant Other Status				
Single	51.4 (18)	37.1 (13)	64.7 (22)	29.4 (10)
Married	75 (3)	50 (2)	50 (1)	100 (2)
Divorced	0	0		
Living with partner	60 (3)	40 (2)	100 (8)	25 (2)
Education Standing				
Freshmen	100 (1)	0	100 (3)	33.3 (1)
Sophomore	100 (3)	66.7 (2)	73.3 (11)	26.7 (4)
Junior	50 (10)	45 (9)	54.5 (6)	18.2 (2)

Senior	50 (11)	31.8 (7)	73.3 (11)	46.7 (7)
Hours a week employed				
1-10 hours	66.7 (4)	16.7 (1)	77.8 (7)	33.3 (3)
11-20 hours	55.6 (5)	33.3 (3)	46.2 (6)	38.5 (5)
21-30 hours	62.5 (5)	75 (6)	83.3 (10)	16.7 (2)
31-40 hours	50 (4)	50 (4)	100 (5)	40 (2)
41+ hours	53.8 (7)	30.8 (4)	60 (3)	40 (2)

*Note.* There was another category under Age, but all students selected 18-24, 25-30, 31-40, or 51+.

*Note.* There was another category under Race/Ethnicity, but all students selected were either African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, or Other.

Table 4 includes results from a paired sample t-test. The results show the overall scores fluctuated more with the text only tests than the image only test. Those results indicate students were able to retain more information in the two-week time frame after viewing the image only slides versus the text only slides.

There were significant differences between pre- and post-test scores for both the raw scores and the pass/fail rate in the text only group  $t_{43}=5.335$ ,  $p<.001$ . This means that the average score for the text only group was significantly different, and that the average difference was 1.705, which is over 10% for the 11-item quiz.

	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Fall Semester – Image Only Raw Score – Pre-Test & Fall Semester – Image Only Raw Score – Post-Test	.630	1.624	2.632	.012
Spring Semester – Text Only Raw Score – Pre-Test & Spring Semester – Text only Raw Score – Post-Test	1.705	2.119	5.335	.000

## Discussion

Results of this study indicate that students had better test scores right after viewing text in slides lectures. Results also indicate that students were better able to retain the information two weeks past the initial viewing with image only slides. This is an important finding because employers want students to be able to retain information learned in their schooling to apply these concepts to their future jobs. Anything we can do to help students retain information longer will be useful to applying important information from one class to the next and ultimately in their professional roles.

Overall, students were better at retaining information taught through image only slides, however, results also indicated that African American students did worse on retaining image only lecture material than white students. Although the sample of African American students is too small to be generalizable, two previous studies indicated that African American students found the image-based slides to be less interesting than their fellow white students (Barrick et al., 2018) and that the Eurocentric images held little relation to them (Davis et al., 2020). Results from both of these studies may indicate that students are better able to retain information from slide lectures if the images mean enough to them to be able to help them remember the concepts learned. This is important so that professors can be sure to provide various images that will make a connection with diverse groups of students. Keeping students' interest and attention is especially important when institutions of learning are moving more toward online formats where learners might be more susceptible to feeling disconnected from the topic.

### **Limitations**

It is important to note that in spite of the findings in this study, some limitations need to be addressed. The largest limitation to this research is that it only includes students from one university. Because the study was conducted by one university with a relatively small sample size, results from this study may be difficult to generalize. The fact that the survey was created by the researcher means it was not tested for validity or reliability. To enhance generalization, future research should include a larger sample and a more heterogeneous sample with a larger inclusion of non-white students. Additionally, retention should be measured beyond the two-week "long-term" outcome used in this study. Addressing exactly how much longer students may be able to retain information may be a good step in determining if what happens in the classroom can be retained and applied to future professional roles. Future research should attempt to resolve these issues so instructors can cultivate teaching techniques that promote academic achievement for all students.

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## Book Review

### **Review of *WORDS NO BARS CAN HOLD* by Deborah Appleman**

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This learning will make us free” (Appleman, 2019, p. xix). It’s a simple phrase but when it’s being spoken by an inmate in a maximum-security correctional center about why he chose to pursue a college education, it takes on a whole new meaning. These are the stories that Deborah Appleman shares in her book, *Bars No Words Can Hold*. Appleman takes the reader on a journey through the prison doors where she teaches and shows what can happen when those incarcerated are introduced to collegiate literacy courses. Appleman warns that this journey is not without danger as she tells of classes being suspended after a corrections officer was murdered. This book is not about the “WLB,” or White Lady Bountiful, that swoops in and rehabilitates unruly men, similar to the Michele Pfeffer’s character in the movie *Dangerous Minds* (Appleman, 2019). *Words No Bars Can Hold* provides insight into how these courses can liberate incarcerated persons and addresses the significances of these classes being introduced at the high school level to prevent a “school-to-prison pipeline.”

Deborah Appleman taught high school English before receiving her doctorate from the University of Minnesota. Once leaving the public school system, she became a professor of educational studies at Carleton College and is currently a visiting professor at Syracuse University and the University of California, Berkley. Appleman began her work in the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater in 2007 and continues to teach in the prison when able (Appleman, 2020). Appleman has spent ten years as an instructor collecting experiences from her prison classroom, including the written stories, poems, and other works of her students. These writings are what create the contents of the book. Each chapter also ends with an excerpt from the blog she kept while teaching fulltime in the prison during her sabbatical in 2007 (Carleton.edu, 2019). In chapter one “A Tough Sell,” Appleman outlines the difficulties of starting prison programs due to the nature of the penal system being “in the business of punishment” (Appleman, 2019). Even though there is much research to support education’s impact on recidivism, many prisons are canceling their educational programs with seemingly no cause. It is through the environment of the prison classes that Appleman began to see the school-to-prison pipeline evolve. Many of her students began their incarcerations during their high school years and were sentenced to 10+ years in prison (Appleman, 2019). Throughout the book, Appleman takes the opportunity to summarize the benefits and struggles of the literacy classes she teaches. She shares how these courses transform the inmates, but also how the slightest disobedience (e.g., taking an extra two minutes in the shower), often results in dismissal from the educational program (Appleman, 2019, p.33). For many of the “lifers,” these courses are not there to offer them a way to get a better job once they have been released, but to help give them an outlet for their emotions and experiences through creative writing. Chapter seven gives a glimpse of the work needing to be

done at the high school level to help prevent the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Appleman shares the story of how impactful it can be when a former inmate visits a public high school classroom and shares their experience and ways to stay out of prison (Appleman, 2019).

Appleman’s whole purpose can be summarized by the following quote from the first chapter;

This book focuses on the potential role of liberal arts education for the incarcerated and on the ways in which postsecondary education in general and creative writing opportunities, in particular, can help reframe the personal narratives of the incarcerated, especially for those serving life sentences (p.1)

Appleman also identifies a second purpose that is nearly as significant as the first;

It will also consider the school-to-prison pipeline or nexus from the sobering perspective of the end of the pipeline since most of the students with whom I have worked are serving life sentences in a state that no longer offers parole (p. 1).

In writing *Words No Bars Can Hold*, Appleman has provided a voice for those taking courses in a correctional setting. This book is appropriate for undergraduate and graduate students to increase their knowledge regarding correctional education.

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