THE BLEEDING EFFECT:
EXPLORING PRISONIZATION AS A SOURCE OF DOMAIN CONFLICT AMONG CORRECTIONAL STAFF

ETHAN M. HIGGINS¹, KRISTIN SWARTZ², and AMANDA ROBERTS²

¹Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of North Carolina Wilmington

²Department of Criminal Justice, University of Louisville
THE BLEEDING EFFECT: EXPLORING PRISONIZATION AS A SOURCE OF DOMAIN CONFLICT AMONG CORRECTIONAL STAFF

In the previous four decades, correctional researchers and scholars have devoted considerable empirical work to drawing out the consequences associated with existing among a “society of captives” (Sykes, 1958; Lombardo, 1981). Although early correctional work predominantly focused on the lives of inmates (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958), contemporary work in correctional scholarship has only recently considered a sympathetic view and appreciation for the life of the correctional worker. Specifically, in the previous decades researchers only started to study the sources and dimensions of stress attributable to lives of those employed within the prison (Cullen et al., 1985). This line of research led to empirical work that teases out the consequences of the harsh environment on correctional workers, such as officer alienation (CITE), burnout (CITE), low levels of job satisfaction (CITE), and more recently, PTSD symptomology among correctional staff (Spinaris, Denhof, & Kellaway, 2012). Of late, the occupational stress literature among correctional workers has seen a growing base of empirical work start to uncover the tensions between work and family. Work-family conflict has been noted as a “double-edged sword”—or as having a bi-directional relationship—where work and family have tremendous pull over one another (Lambert, Minor, Wells, & Hogan, 2015; Michel, Mitchelson, Kotrba, LeBreton, & Baltes, 2009).

Despite recent study on correctional workers, early theoretical and empirical work by scholars predominantly focused on the lives of inmates (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1960). Particularly, the concept of prisonization was used to describe how the prisoner adapts to, and internalizes aspects of, the harsh physical and social conditions of the
prison environment (Clemmer, 1940). Since the introduction of prisonization, scholars have endeavored to explore the mechanisms by which prisonization works. Two explanations emerged over the following decades—deprivation and importation theories. Whereas deprivation theory identified that prisoners adapt to the “pains of imprisonment,” importation theory suggested that pre-prison socialization experiences are brought into the prison (Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Schrag, 1961; Thomas, 1977). Although these theories were originally pitted against one another, recently scholars have agreed on the need for both theories to fully explain the concept of prisonization (Akers, Hayner, & Gruninger, 1977; Pollock, 1997; Trammell, 2009; Winfree et al., 2002; Paterline & Petersen, 1999; Thomas & Petersen, 1977). Of late, scholars have argued that importation theory may be one-sided, as inmates may also export internalized prison values back into the community through a fluid, feedback loop (Mitchell, Fahmy, Pyrooz, & Decker, 2017).

Although scholars have recently devoted a considerable amount of studied attention to correctional workers and prisonization has endured a broad base of theoretical work, correctional staff have not yet been investigated within a theoretical lens of prisonization. In this study, we draw upon 18 focus groups of correctional staff, across all 12 adult facilities in one state, to explore correctional staff within a theoretical lens of prisonization. We examine the extent to which correctional staff experience deprivation, importation and exportation and how these theoretical mechanisms catalyze domain conflict (e.g. conflict between work and family). We argue that correctional workers experience “bleeding effects”; or rather, the deprivations of working in the prison creates fluidity between domains, where workers embody values and socialization processes of one domain and import/export them into another.
Our findings speak to a range of theoretical and empirical endeavors across the correctional literature. On one hand, we contribute to the correctional literature that has recently explored work-family conflict among correctional workers, by using the theoretical toolkit of a prisonization framework to assess how domain conflict emerges. On the other hand, we contribute to the prisonization literature by evaluating two domains. Although the majority of prisonization research has been uni-directional—and studied a single domain (e.g. the prison)—this study takes advantage of the opportunity to explore correctional workers who concurrently live inside and outside the prison. We argue that this bi-directional lens allows this work to illuminate the interconnections and workings of deprivation, importation and exportation. We also argue this combined theoretical lens, allows us to demonstrate the fluidity of prison culture and the extent to which prison values and processes are exportable.

CORRECTIONAL WORKER STRESS AND DOMAIN CONFLICT

Although early correctional work predominantly focused on the inmate (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958), the previous four decades have witnessed a shift in the correctional literature where correctional officers and workers have become valuable subjects of study. In contrast to early conceptions of the prison trope which held “guard-as-villain” (Cullen et al., 1985), scholars began to call for a sympathetic turn towards correctional workers (Jacobs and Retsky 1975; Webb and Morris, 1978; Crouch and Marquart, 1980). In turn, researchers started to devote a considerable amount of empirical work to teasing out the dimensions of occupational stress within the prison. These endeavors include identifying types of stress and coping mechanisms (Cullen et al., 1985), as well as negative outcomes such as alienation, burnout and a loss of job satisfaction (Cheek & Miller 1983; Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980; Jurik, Halemba, Musheno, & Boyle 1985; Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Merker, Rhodes, & Vito, 1984; Poole and Regoli, 1980a,
1981; Toch and Klofas, 1982; Veneziano, 1984; Wickman, 1985). Of late, researchers have begun to extend this line of research beyond stress and focus on trauma. Recent work has demonstrated high rates of PTSD symptomology among correctional staff, shockingly high rates of suicide ideation, depression, and low life expectancy (Spinaris, French, Swartz).

The sympathetic turn towards correctional staff and the line of research examining occupational stress has recently evolved into studying conflict across domains. Domain conflict is rooted in role conflict theory (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), which asserts that conflict is less likely when the major domains in an individuals’ life agree. One type is work-family conflict (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011), which refers to an imbalance between the demands of the workplace and home life causing conflict for the individual (Buonocore & Russo, 2012; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Recent research has proposed that domain conflict has a bidirectional relationship (Brough & O’Driscoll, 2005), where work issues and problems may spill over into the home domain and family issues may spill over into the work domain (Michel et al., 2011; Michel, Mitchelson, Kotrba, LeBreton, & Baltes, 2009). Work-family conflict has only been applied to correctional contexts in a small number of studies (Armstrong, Atkin-Plunk, & Wells, 2015; Lambert, Hogan, Camp, & Ventura, 2006).

Research focusing on work-family conflict and correctional staff has also examined a variety of problematic outcomes. Work-on-family conflict has been found to increase the likelihood of work stress (Griffin, 2006; Lambert, Hogan, Camp, & Ventura, 2006; Lambert, Hogan, & Griffin, 2007; Triplett et al., 1999) and job burnout (Lambert & Hogan, 2006; Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010), and has been found to be positively associated with both role conflict within the job and perceived job dangerousness (Lambert & Hogan, 2006), as well
as higher levels of depression (Obidoa et al., 2011). In contrast, work-on-family conflict has been found to be negatively associated with job satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2003, 2006), life satisfaction (Lambert et al. 2005), organizational commitment (Hogan, Lambert, Jenkins, & Wambold, 2006), and perceptions of organizational fairness (Lambert & Hogan, 2006). Further, Lambert and Hogan (2006) found work-on-family conflict to have positive associations with correctional officers’ higher level of support for inmate punishment and lower level of support for inmate treatments. Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of understanding the role of work-family conflict in correctional officer outcomes.

A broad turn towards a sympathetic view of correctional workers ushered in a trend of studying occupational stress, as well as associated negative outcomes and coping mechanisms. Recently this line of research has begun to investigate how occupational stress catalyzes conflict outside of the prison—most notably, between work and family. Although this area of research has been fruitful in documenting the negative outcomes apparent in work-family conflict, there has been little attempt to study the processes and mechanisms that illuminate how this conflict emerges. We argue that a lens of prisonization provides an opportunity to investigate the theoretical mechanisms by which this domain conflict is catalyzed.

THEORIES OF PRISONIZATION: DEPRIVATION, IMPORTATION AND EXPORTATION

Originally coined by Clemmer (1940), prisonization broadly refers to the adoption of the culture, values, and mores of prison. Since the origination of the concept, theoretical and empirical work has explored the process by which prisonization occurs through three primary concepts: deprivation, importation and exportation. Deprivation theory refers to an adaptation process by which inmates attempt to cope and adapt to the “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1961; Thomas & Petersen, 1977), or the social and physical
deprivations inherent in the nature of imprisonment which involves an attack on the prisoner’s ego and sense of self-worth. Facing the conditions of the prison universally, deprivation theory identifies that inmates begin to collectively formulate cultural adaptations to solve these immediate problems. The set of adaptations that emerges from a shared set interests produces codes for an “inmate society” (Thomas & Petersen, 1977), which is designed to help one cope with and navigate the pains of imprisonment. Ultimately, this leads to an inmate subculture that is typically characterized by violence and opposition against correctional staff and the correctional administration (CITES).

However, a range of criticisms were levied against deprivation theory over its limited explanatory power in the prisonization process. Most significantly, opponents of deprivation theory argued that if inmates all face the universal pains of imprisonment together then they should all become similarly prisonized. Theorists argued instead that the only way to explain variations in prisonization between inmates is to utilize a model that highlights pre-prison socialization. These criticisms resulted in a new theoretical model—called importation theory—which refers to the socialization experiences, norms and values that offenders bring with them into the prison environment (Giallombardo, 1966; Irwin, 1981; Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Schrag, 1961; Wheeler, 1961). In other words, prisoners may simply be importing street culture experiences and values into the prison rather than constructing a unique subcultural convict code within the prison (Hassine, 2011). It is also possible that pre-prison socialization processes mitigate the prisonization process for offenders with prosocial relationships in the community and reduce to the extent to which they embody prison values (Thomas et al., 1978).

Empirical work on importation theory has found prisonization to be positively associated with an array of demographic factors, including age, race, educational attainment as well as
socio-economic status prior to prison (Alpert, 1979; Flanagan, 1983; Jensen & Jones, 1976; Schwartz, 1971; Thomas, 1973; Wright, 1989). Beyond demographic factors, empirical work has also demonstrated prisonization to be associated with a range of factors, involving economic deprivation (Hochstetler & DeLisi, 2005; Irwin, 1981; Jacobs, 1974; Waquant, 2001), criminal history and identification with criminal values (Alpert, 1979; Schwartz, 1971; Thomas, 1973; Zingraff, 1980)—and broader political and religious identification (Thomas, 1973). In contemporary empirical work, these factors have been demonstrated to effect inmate behavior, violent or otherwise, in prison (Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Hochstetler & DeLisi, 2005; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; McCorkle, Miethe & Drass, 1995; Poole & Regoli, 1980; Waquant, 2001).

Since Clemmer’s seminal piece, these two theoretical models—deprivation and importation—have been developed and explored as a means to understand inmate culture and behavior (Sykes, 1958). Although initially viewed as two opposing perspectives of inmate adjustment, researchers have argued that a single model cannot offer a complete explanation of inmate adaptation; and therefore, a complete theory of prisonization would include both models (Paterline & Petersen, 1999; Thomas & Petersen, 1977). In turn, scholars have generally agreed that prisonization takes place in combination, where the social deprivations of the prison and the imported norms work to produce a code of embodied inmate values (Akers, Hayner, & Gruninger, 1977; Pollock, 1997; Trammell, 2009; Winfree et al., 2002). Additionally, in recent years, researchers have also suggested the possibility of a feedback loop exists between the social deprivation of the prison and the cultural norms that are imported into prisons (Trammell, 2009; Stowel & Byrne, 2008). Termed exportation, researchers suggest that street and inmate
subculture are interconnected and (re)socialization processes may be fluidly transferred between them—regardless of their origin (Mitchell, Fahmy, Pyrooz, & Decker, 2017).

Despite this rich theoretical and empirical history, prisonization theories have not yet been applied to correctional staff. This absence has not been lost on scholars. Whereas the majority of researchers followed the emerging trend of investigating the prisonized inmate (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1960), the effects on correctional staff who worked among a “society of captives” was conspicuously left absent from the literature (Jacobs & Retsky, 1975; Lombardo, 1981). In response to this absence, researchers shifted to an appreciative view of the lives of correctional staff (Cullen et al., 1985). As the view of correctional workers shifted to a sympathetic vantage, a burgeoning area of empirical work began to explore correctional worker stress and research in this area has continued to grow and spread beyond correctional worker stress and burnout, to include post-traumatic stress symptoms (Denhof & Spinaris, 2016; French, 2017; Spinaris, Denhof, & Kelleyway, 2012), and a range of negative outcomes, such as depression, anxiety and suicidality (Lerman, 2017; Obidoa et al., 2011; New Jersey Police Task Force Report, 2009; Tartaglini & Safran, 1997; Stack & Tsoudis, 1997). Despite this historical adjustment to empirically investigate correctional workers, a lens of prisonization has still not been applied to the population of workers who exist among a “society of captives.”

THE CURRENT STUDY

Whereas Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958) initiated a line of inquiry in which scholars studied inmates within a lens of prisonization, in recent decades researchers that have studied correctional worker stress and burnout have begun to explore how domain conflict emerges out of a tension where correctional workers are bringing “work” home, and taking “home” to work.
Although both of these endeavors are fruitful in their own right, there has not yet been an exploration of correctional workers within a theoretical lens of prisonization. This absence is curious considering relevant literature suggests that prisonization is directly tied to time spent within the prison (Wheeler, 1961).

Although the “pains of imprisonment” is a concept representative of the inmate experience and subculture (Sykes, 1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1961; Thomas & Petersen, 1977), correctional workers share similar experiences, such as reported losses of liberty (due to long, mandatory shifts), autonomy (policies from administrators unwise to the realities of the prison), of intimate relationships (primarily at home), and certainly of an undermined sense of security (due to violence in the prison). Additionally, over the course of a career, the amount of time correctional staff spend within the walls of a prison parallels that of some inmates. Thus, it is likely that correctional staff may experience a similar process of prisonization. In addition, theories of prisonization suggests that as an individual assimilates to the values and processes of the prison that they drift farther away from life outside the prison (Clemmer, 1940; Wheeler, 1961).

The current study explores domain conflict among correctional workers through the theoretical lens of prisonization. Although domain conflict is a useful area of study, a lens of prisonization provides a useful theoretical toolkit to unpack its processes. Likewise, investigating prisonization across domains provides a useful bi-directional lens to lend further understanding to the workings of deprivation, importation and exportation. Thus, investigating correctional staff offers a unique opportunity to study the how consequences of prisonization manifest across domains. To accomplish this goal, the current study draws from 18 focus groups across all 12
adult facilities of one state in order to investigate the reported ways that prisonization produces conflict between domains for correctional staff.

METHODS

DATA AND SAMPLE
PROCEDURE AND ANALYSIS

Focus groups provide a couple benefits in the course of data collection that cannot be retrieved in other qualitative methodologies. Focus groups provided an energetic environment by which correctional staff engaged in natural conversation as co-workers. Thus, one benefit of the focus group research design is found in the opportunity for correctional staff to find themselves in free-flowing conversation about pre-selected topics in a familiar environment. For fear of disrupting the flow and energy of focus groups, we did not attempt to identify individuals or use identifiers to trace unique speakers in focus groups. Thus, findings do not typically indicate when one speaker ends and another begins. Indeed, correctional officers often added to, piled upon, or even finished one another’s lines or sentiments as conversations continued; and in turn, stories act as a sort of pastiche of experiences. By benefit of the focus group research design, the findings in this paper do not simply seek to cut up individual thoughts and stories to find commonalities (CITE). Instead, a considerable strength of this research design lies in the ability to consider the following results as collective stories and shared experiences of correctional staff (CITE).

Moderators used a semi-structured interviewing strategy to minimize restriction imposed upon the moderator and the respondents. Generally, moderators endeavored to intervene in discussion as little as possible, and instead, to allow focus groups to collectively tell stories related to the occupation, stress, trauma, as well as manifest and latent effects on home life. Moderators attempted to remain as almost invisible observers—only guiding discussants when
groups had wandered off-track or to introduce new topics. Focus groups were followed with team collaboration with moderators and research team partners in order to adjust or improve probing strategies or questions. The focus groups covered topics related to job stress and satisfaction, motivations for entering and persisting in the career, access to resources, and experiences of violence and trauma. These focus groups lasted an average of two hours. All of the focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The coding strategies used to identify and analyze common themes among focus groups were consistent with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Charmaz, 2006), and were completed using the qualitative software package, Nvivo 11. Analysis unfolded in two coding stages, including open and axial coding strategies. For the open coding stage, the research team independently read through transcripts of focus groups and generated themes. Afterwards, the research team discussed the open coding stage by recounting common understandings of themes and reconciling differences in discrepancies. Open-coded themes varied, but involved correctional staff stressors, scenarios of trauma, dealing with stress and trauma through coping mechanisms and how the occupation had changed the individual. After an iterative process of developing open-coded themes, the research team worked to produce a set of axial codes by using themes to generate a set concepts based on theoretical or logical reasoning. Using concepts of prisonization and work-family conflict, the research team recoded the transcripts with new thematic schema. Thus, the findings represent a means to explore prisonization and work-family conflict among correctional staff.

FINDINGS: THE BLEEDING EFFECT

Correctional staff represent a complicated position within a lens of prisonization. On one hand, correctional staff reported that they are subject to the deprivations of the prison and that
they internalize prison values. Indeed, throughout the course of focus groups correctional staff routinely suggested that they are “serving time” in the institution, and similarly to inmates, that they too are “being institutionalized.” On the other hand, whereas the study of prisonization of inmates is uni-directional—where deprivation is limited to the prison and socialization processes can only be imported from outside the prison—a lens of domain conflict makes prisonization “bidirectional”—where (re)socialization can be fluidly imported/exported between domains.

Thus, when we investigate correctional staff prisonization within a lens of domain conflict, we are provided a unique opportunity to explore the consequences of prisonization. Indeed, in our findings, the collective stories that emerge from correctional staff focus groups suggest that (re)socialization processes are transferred fluidly between domains. Emerging from the data, we have termed this fluid and interconnected process of deprivation and importation between domains, “the bleeding effect.” The following results are organized thematically by “bleeding effects”; or rather, correctional staff recounted experiences of how prisonization resulted in conflict between domains.

EMOTIONAL (DIS)CONNECTION: “YOUR KIDS BEHIND THE WALLS”
(Central, Treatment, p. 111-112)

Correctional staff discussed the extent to which their personal lives were emotionally impacted by the prison environment. For many of the correctional staff members, they noticed a considerable change in their personal lives in the course of working in the prison, which can generally be read within domain conflict as “behavior-based conflict.” Correctional staff experience behavior-based conflict when the strain of their job produces roles changes at home (e.g. loss of emotion in an intimate relationship). Generally, correctional workers reported that
behavior-based conflict emerged due to witnessing violent, traumatic or grotesque prison experiences that weighed heavily on their psyche:

You’ve got those one or two friends that are generally interested in your day. “My job I’m an accountant what did you do today.” “Oh, you counted money?” I’m like your job sucks but I do sometimes when I go home I’m like I’m not you know I’m not even going to try to talk to my husband about this. Because A) I don’t want to traumatize him and B) he’s not going to understand. So, instead yeah, I’ll just stop by a liquor store on the way home (Central, Treatment, p.121-125).

Such experiences are borne of the occupational environment and of working among a “society of captives.” For correctional workers, who also feel as though they are serving time, violence spurred from the population they manage spurred a need for coping mechanisms and adaptations—such as alcohol.

Moreover, these violent experiences led to more meaningful adaptations, such as establishing emotional barricades. Despite having friends and family that express interest in the work, correctional staff members identified an internal resistance to share their work experiences with those close to them. At times, this involved anxiety that close friends or family members would fail to understand or appreciate the experience completely, but at other times, this served as a means to protect the family members from traumatizing images and stories:

I mean I don’t enjoy talking about work at home you know that’s another thing back on the relationship thing. My wife asks me, you know, your typical wife when I get home “how was your day, hon?” “It was a day.” And she’s like “is everything okay” and I just really don’t want to talk about it, I don’t want to bring that home and that creates a wall between you and your spouse. You know she feels that I’m not opening up to her, I feel that I don’t want to bring that home to her. I create yeah, it’s a wall that it’s hard to get over that wall I mean… Sometimes you just want to shelter the people in your personal life that don’t know what the prison life is like so I don’t talk about it, I don’t tell prison stories and stuff like that unless it’s on the news, watch it at six o’clock. I don’t want to give her the image of that person who hung themselves in their cell I don’t want to put that image in her head, she doesn’t need to think about that I have to think about it she don’t need to (Central, Cross Gender, p. 38).
Correctional staff responses indicated how traumatic experiences—staged by the deprivations of the prison—were interconnected with social and emotional deprivation at home. Correctional staff suggested that violent experiences shocked them into a prisonization mode—where their psyche alters. Shocked by the violence of the prison, correctional workers reported becoming emotionally disconnected to those close to them. Theoretically, a lens of prisonization conventionally offers the term “deprivation,” to suggest how prison experiences imprint onto the psyche of the inmate. In the bi-directional lens of domain conflict, we witness how a correctional worker internalizes deprivation in the prison and mirrors its character at home. In this sense, we witness an *exportation* of deprivation, where the pains of imprisonment become mirrored in the home domain as social deprivation.

The exportation of deprivation to the home often manifested as a communication barrier. Correctional workers suggested that the rationale for this barrier is that outsiders are incapable of understanding the deprivation of the prison, because they had not experienced it first-hand:

> It’s hard to find things in common like the longer you stay in the department the more distance I have found that with people that I talk to, you distance yourself from people that aren’t in corrections and you guide yourself more to having those friends in corrections because you have something to compare with…but I couldn’t go out with Joe Blow that works at Walmart and care two cents about what he’s talking about some guy at the register he rang up his merchandise. “Oh my god a lady tried to hang herself and you’re worried about oranges?” You know what we take home and what we think is common to public is like what. You know common to public is like “oh really you forgot your cereal at the grocery, you didn’t put your gas cap on when you left the gas tank wow that’s a conspiracy.” Right, I have all the time my friends that don’t work in corrections, anything crazy happen today” …and I say “you have no idea.” Then I try to explain it to them and they’re like, they’re lost. So, it definitely affects that (Central, Cross Gender, p. 35-37).

From the perspective of correctional staff, citizens had not been subject to the violence the prison environment offered, and thus, had no knowledge of the codes developed among correctional workers to give meaning to these experiences. Like the “inmate society” that developed codes to
solve immediate problems, correctional workers had a frame of reference for experiences and the meaning attributed to them within the prison, and these codes were used to interpret what was important or meaningful in the world.

At times, staff reported that the growing emotional distance was involuntary, and other times, it was the result of conscious effort:

After seeing shit like that your whole train of thought and the way you see everything in life changes, and there's no ... I mean I'm not going to go home and tell my wife, 'Babe look, I seen this dude cut his nuts out. It was awesome.' I'm not going to tell my wife that. I'm not going to say, 'Hey, this dude cut his neck. Man, just give himself his own necktie,' you know (Eastern, High Risk, p. 169-171).

The domain conflict evident within this bleeding effect offers an interesting opportunity to examine the interplay of the models of prisonization. As already shown, experienced deprivation in the prison may catalyze an exportation, where the traumatic scenes and (re)socialization of values manifests at home as social or emotional isolation. However, at the same time, social deprivation at home also begets importation. As staff reported feeling social deprivation at home—which manifested as emotional disconnection—they imported the need for emotional connection back into the prison domain:

I think it's just you become part of the job, it's just one of those if it's for you, and it's for you. We joke about when they say we're a family and a team and all of that but we kind of are because he and I can be mad at each other and not speaking but let something happen and we're in there together. And when it's over I'll say thanks buddy I appreciate it but I'm still not talking to you. You might be my brother or my sister I'm still not talking to you I’m mad but I’ve got your back. Yeah always. You're not going to have a good day if you don’t have a good partner and when you have a good partner it makes everyday a little easier to do...I always say this job grows on you like a fungus. You can’t get rid of it, it stays around you...You know like he said we’re more of a family than anything. Especially these twelve hour shifts you spend so much time with these people (Central, Veteran Officers, p. 134-136).
Correctional workers reportedly identified individuals—mostly other correctional staff—in the prison as family members. As the previous quote shows, staff reported that in assimilating to prison-work (“you become part of the job” and “this job grows on your like a fungus”) is connected with the process of establishing emotional connections with other staff.

Thus, as correctional staff become prisonized—or assimilate to the occupational values and codes of prison work—they detach from family at home:

I think another part of taking it home with you is we are family. If I'm out there I worry about whether my staff are safe. We are a family. The longer you're in this you make connections, not just with people at your own institution, but you make connections with people at other institutions and your family grows and it grows and it grows. I'm at family reunions and people are telling stories, funny jokes or whatever, and I start to say something, I'm like, "This is not the place. These are not the people." You form that bond with the people that you work with because you have that common ground. You have that common sense of humor (Eastern, Veteran Officers, p. 180-183).

When the emotional deprivation at home mirrors the psychological and structural deprivations of the prison, staff begin to import their family relationality into the prison. This tendency makes sense, as correctional workers face similar occupational deprivations and developed similar codes or adaptations to the experience—such as a common sense of dark humor which is well-documented across an array of different fields that experience stress or trauma (CITE).

Prisonization experiences for staff members—including violence catalyzed by the structural conditions of the prison—facilitated the importation of family bonding and relationships as a coping strategy. This was replete throughout the data and correctional staff freely labeled correctional staff with conventional family designations (e.g. brother, sister, etc.), even when they admitted to not know the other correctional worker well:

My main concern every day is that all of my staff no matter which shift it is goes home and I worry about it 24/7. These guys know that they can call me anytime. They can call me when I’m at home at midnight, in the mornings, in the afternoon because here they’re my family. There’s just me and my wife at home, we have
no children, but these guys they’re my family for 22 years and I worry about them every day…the only color I see in corrections is blue uniform and we’re one family and we take care of each other and watch after each other because if we don’t…I couldn’t count over the years just since I’ve been here how many staff members have committed suicide. You work with somebody one night, you leave out one night cutting up with them on the front steps and you think everything is cool and then they call you at 1:30 or 2:00 in the afternoon and tell you this guy blew his brains out. You sit and you wonder if that guy would have come to me for help is there anything I could have done to change his mind on it… (Western, Treatment, p. 345-346).

Correctional workers suggested that the importation of family relationality worked as a coping mechanism, as they drew sharp associations between the work and suicidality. Familial bonding in the prison can be read as a coping mechanism that arises out of the harsh conditions and traumatic experiences of the environment. In turn, anxieties over the well-being of fellow workers followed them home. In other words, as correctional staff emotionally drifted away from their own family at home, they drifted closer to other correctional workers—and this trend continued even after the end of a shift.

Where it was common for correctional staff to identify other staff as brothers, sisters and so on, staff did—although, more rarely—also relate to inmates in this manner:

It’s almost like having like a hundred different problem children. Yeah it is, just like that for me it’s 160/180. You’ve got to treat them all different. It is a balancing act because you do recognize that these are adults, these are grown adults and you want to, well I personally want to give them the respect as an adult but at the same time when they’re behaving in the manner that my eleven or fourteen-year-old behave. Yes, I use my Mom voice at work a lot of times and my prison voice at home a lot of times. Because you don’t want to have to use your Mom voice on your kids behind the walls (Central, Treatment, p. 111-112).

As correctional workers routinely reported that correctional staff served the role of brothers and sisters, the following quote displays how a correctional worker identified inmates as children.

This makes sense, in that correctional workers are present to manage and supervise inmates in the prison. Interestingly, the previous quote identifies the extent to which this emotional
(re)connection occurs, where the staff member reports using different types of “voice.” The correctional worker reports using “mom voice” with inmates, and further demonstrates the fluid prisonization mechanism of import/export where the “prison voice” emerges at home.

Emotional (dis)connection has demonstrated that when reported prisonization experiences are viewed in a lens of domain conflict we witness a re-conceptualization of who is appropriate for emotional connection. In turn, this bleeding effect has demonstrated tangible consequences of prisonization, such as using different types of voice and a retreat from family life. From a theoretical lens, this section has begun to explore the interplay between deprivation and importation; that is, when deprivation is experienced in one domain it is then imported to another, and in response, the alternate domain imports elements to the original domain. In this way, this section has begun to speak to the prospect by which the importation mechanism creates fluidity between domains.

CORRECTIONAL INSTINCT: “IT’S SECOND NATURE TO US”

(Western, Treatment, p. 329-331)

Correctional staff depicted their correctional instinct—or automated correctional behaviors—as emerging in domains outside of the prison. Often unwittingly, correctional instincts reportedly manifested in places and during interactions outside the prison where they became disruptive. In a lens of prisonization, staff reported these behaviors as not necessarily conscious efforts but embodied instincts necessary to survive the structural conditions of the prison. Correctional instincts were reportedly garnered through deprivation, but were exported from the prison environment to other domains. Similarly, to emotional (dis)connection, the bleeding effect of correctional instincts reportedly caused conflict across domains.
The violence of the prison environment necessitates a set of survival codes, which includes a set of behaviors that correctional officers instinctively use as survival adaptations in a dangerous environment. However, correctional staff illuminated how these survival tools used in the prison—as a byproduct of institutional deprivation—are carried with them into other domains and caused behavior-based conflict:

We were out the other day and I broke my knee on Friday, I got a fracture so I had to go to the emergency room and I’m sitting there on the bed and everyone that passes I’m up and down I could tell you what color their socks were what they had on their head just while they walked past and Becky was like “you’re doing it, you’re up and down everybody that walks past” and I had a comment for every one of them. You all know what I’m talking about. It’s just everybody I walk past or I come in contact with when we’re at the restaurant or the store. Seriously I will read that person from head to toe (Central, Veteran Officers, p. 137-138)?

One prominent example of deprivation manifesting outside the prison for correctional staff was the automated practice of “reading” the moves, behaviors and external appearances of inmates. Correctional staff identified how the survival technique, of “reading,” subconsciously emerged in contexts outside the prison.

Moreover, correctional staff reported a high success of accurately “reading” a person and suggested an ability to spot offenders in any domain:

You're like, "He's a convict." Or you go, "He's not a convict." You just know. You can pick out the sex offenders real quick. You walk into Walmart, you're like edging, "Get over here." You know? They just ... you can pick them out [Speaker 6]. You sort of tend to see the bad in everybody or assume the worst. My wife gets after me so much for that. She's one of those types of people that she sees the good in people and the potential. I'm totally the opposite of that [Speaker 9]. He's a friendly old man. Well, why's he so friendly for? He's too friendly. Everybody's gonna know [Speaker 3] (Eastern, Veteran Officers, p. 180-183).

The previous quote involves three different correctional staff discussing the use of correctional survival instincts across domains. Although correctional staff touted the ability to identify offenders accurately, the practice also aligns with research that has demonstrated increased
anxiety and paranoia among prison-incurred trauma among correctional staff (CITE).

Nonetheless, correctional staff reported that the survival instinct of “reading” allowed them to unpack verbal and nonverbal cues to elicit situational information in attempts to prevent potential violence, or other undesirable consequences:

We are always aware of everything that is going on around you even if you don’t know what’s going on to the point that he could be having a conversation, say this was my husband and I’m like uh-huh, uh-huh. I’m not listening to a word he’s saying because I’m wondering what the world is going on around me…You look at people and you’re like I wonder where they did they’re time, I wonder what they’re crime is. You look for the signs that they’ve been in prison. There’s a spider web tattoo yeah, “we’re not sitting there we’re not sitting over there honey let’s set two tables back here.” Make sure we have a line to the door, “okay is your back clear?” “Okay, we’re good? “Are we safe, we have an exit door and another exit door over here.” That really is dinner time with me and my family. We stay cold and we are shut off from the regular general public because of the way we’ve been trained (Central, Cross Gender, p. 41-42).

In a similar process to emotional (dis)connection, the deprivations of the prison reportedly resulted in a mirrored social isolation in other domains. The embodied code set that provided survival adaptations for correctional staff and necessitated by the deprivations of the prison, also infiltrated and disrupted normal social experiences across domains—such as a family dinner:

We joke and we say we’re institutionalized and I guess we are as much as the inmates. We do things a certain way at certain times. Even at home. And our families when I first started this job over fourteen years ago several friends over the years would say you’re changing, you’re changing because I would do things like when I first come in they were sitting here my first response was to sit right there. Wall to the back, sitting here I know he’s here and one is here I’m not worried about my back now because I have other people around me who know why I sit the way I do. They’re constantly watching and everything. So here I’m comfortable but if you put me out with somebody who hasn’t done this job you’ll find me in the corner with my back to the wall. Back all the way over there, the last person to enter the room. Which is why most of us we don’t do well with eye contact we’re always looking everywhere else then (Central, Veteran officers; pg. 88-9).
As the previous quote illustrates, correctional staff depict that the survival instincts—which originally emerged due to the danger of the prison—become heightened in other domains. This is because the correctional staff are aware that family members and friends have not been exposed to the violence of the prison and they lack the training of correctional staff. In turn, correctional workers reportedly felt more at ease within the prison environment and felt heightened alertness at home with family. Although survival correctional instincts are shaped within the prison staff report the tendency for them to manifest more outside of the prison, because within the prison they benefit from the safety and trust in other correctional staff. As we have seen previously, within a domain conflict lens we see the interconnected nature of exportation and importation. In this case, staff reported that survival instincts emerged in domains outside the prison because they felt less at ease at home, then within the prison walls with other correctional workers.

Beyond survival instincts, correctional staff also discussed how routine, involuntary actions permeated other domains. Unlike survival instincts, these involuntary behaviors were imprinted on the psyche of the individual because they were routinized and regulated within the prison. In other words, these perfunctory actions were some ingrained that correctional workers found themselves engaging in them without the conscious decision to do so:

You all was talking about institutionalized. Yes, I can relate to that and it’s happening more and more each day. The patio door to the back of the house, I opened it up and I go out of it. Now I know that I opened that door and I know that I have closed it behind me, but I’ll go out there and stay on the deck. I’m waiting for it to be opened and I’ve done that more than a couple of times. Last night, I opened the door as soon as I walked through the door I automatically started taking everything out of my pockets and I was laying it there and my wife is like “what are you doing.” I don’t know I started takin everything out of my pockets and [then] putting it back in. I check doors. I check doors and locks as I pass them. Yeah even when I’m out somewhere I make sure the doors are locked. And then when you got to the store, going to the store for me can mess you up because by walking I’ll just keep walking if you’re walking towards me if you have a cart of whatever I will like stand there and then you get that look and I’m
like I’m sorry… [another focus group member] You’ve been in prison too long. You need a drink (Central, Veteran officers, p. 89).

As the correctional staff member recounts, their experienced prisonization—in this case, internalized behavior due to prison policies and regulation—not only impacted the psyche but embodied, subconscious movements through the space of other domains. The quote illustrates the individual carrying out routine correctional actions at home, such as waiting for the door to be unlocked, emptying pockets for the metal detector, and ensuring locked doors from increased safety from inmates.

As this bleeding effect has demonstrated, correctional instinct involves action—often subconscious—that are embodied adaptations in response to the harsh physical conditions of the prison. Ironically, after correctional staff learned and embodied survival instincts, they reported being unsurprised that they emerged in other domains. This was because correctional staff felt unsafe at home—with family who were not privy to embodying instincts to thwart danger—and instead reported feeling safer within the prison with other correctional staff. Such a phenomenon lends further support to how deprivation spurs correctional worker adaptations and codes, that then catalyze importation/exportation with other domains.

PRISONIZING FAMILY: “MY KIDS ARE INSTITUTIONALIZED”

(Central, Veteran Officers, p. 137-138)

Perhaps, the starkest example of a bleeding effect—or how prisonization influences conflict in other domains—is found in reports that correctional staff work to impose their (re)socialization upon others. Correctional staff lamented the difficulty in separating how they interacted with inmates versus how they interacted with family members. In line with these other bleeding effects, the prospect of extending one’s own experienced prisonization to their loved ones involves exporting the values of the prison into the home.
Correctional staff reported exporting values, processes and operations from prison into the home:

All day long I’ve been looking at people who are not doing what they’re supposed to do… and then dealing with the inmates that are disruptive, you try first to tell them to go lay down, they don’t lay down and then you go to the next step and then it builds up and then you get home and the kids are doing something. You nicely ask the kids because you’re getting out of that, you nicely ask the kids, kids do something, they don’t listen and then you get a little more stern they’re still not listening and that’s where the outside does kind of bleed over a little bit because all day long you’ve been telling people, do this and they’re not listening, well do this and then you do these penalties. It’s just like that it bleeds over into your personal life as far as that goes because then you’re like you know what I’m going in here take your TV (Central, Cross Gender, p. 38-40).

Whereas emotional (dis)connection identified how deprivation in the prison produced emotional and social isolation at home, correctional staff members also depicted how social interaction and relationships became infused with prison values and processes. For example, the previous staff member recounts how punitive response and authority relative to prison became exported into the home. For instance, when children refuse to listen the correctional staff member recounts their tendency to resort to tangible punishments common within the prison (e.g. taking the TV).

Correctional staff suggested that family members and loved ones can sense this exportation of prison values as it relates to authority and punitiveness. Staff recounted instances where family members confronted them for using their correctional persona at home:

My husband doesn’t like where I work…But occasionally you know I’ll raise my voice and not even know that I’m doing it and he responds with “I’m not one of those dumb bitches you work with down there so don’t talk to me like that.” I get that all of the time. Yeah and I don’t even realize I’m doing it. I was like “sorry I didn’t realize it.” I know your inmate voice. My husband is like he’ll call and he’ll be like it’s so funny I love hearing your voice change because you’ll be work, and then all of the sudden and your voice is like hey, it totally changes from you’re serious and then you’re on the phone and you have an event come up I can like totally see you on the phone, I need to talk to you now I want to be moved and then you hear that work person come back in the voice and then directly come back and he’s like I don’t understand how you do it (Central, Treatment, p. 110-111).
Although the identification of “prison voice” here is the same correctional staff member who earlier used the term “mom voice,” we did see the concept of voice reiterated throughout the focus groups by others. Multiple staff identified the general utility of generating a prison or inmate voice, in coaxing prisoners to abide by the rules for instance: “There are certain inmates you talk to like a kid, and other inmates you talk to firm. Or you raise your voice or lower your voice” (Central, Cross Gender, p. 20-21). Likewise, different tones and volumes were seen to be useful in deescalating violence in the prison: “They de-escalate inmates in numerous different ways, either with loud voices like I've done before or other times talking to someone quiet they can hardly hear me and they listen” (Eastern, Military, p. 212-213).

Although the concept of voice closely aligns with correctional instinct, different types of voice were likewise used to establish order or authority with family members. The concept of “voice” has been included in this section, because it is being used to construct order borne of authority at home which is akin to the prison environment. Regardless of its purpose within the prison, correctional staff often suggested that the use of prison voice emerged during routine interactions at home: “I have that same thing people tell me maybe daily when I get home, ‘you’re not talking to me like I’m an inmate.’ Sorry, I have to flip that back and use my normal tone of voice. But you didn’t realize you were doing it. No, you don’t I mean you have no idea it’s just normal to you” (Western, High Risk, p. 272-276). Although correctional staff suggested that they could voice switch once they entered different domains, they also attested numerous circumstances where they were caught engaging prison voice at home with loved ones unknowingly.

The concept of prison voice demonstrates how correctional staff internalized authority values and punitive responses in the prison and exported them to the home domain. Correctional
staff further identified that the process of mirroring the authority and punitive values of the
prison within the home had a noticeable influence on their loved ones. Although this could be
conscious (e.g. a means to establish order in the home), correctional staff also suggested that
children could mimic their prisonized behaviors and values:

You talk about institutionalized, my kids are institutionalized, I have set of
eighteen-year-old twins and some of the quirky things I’ve picked up, they picked
up also…You know, it’s not just the institution you know you learn a lot about
people and after I guess you guys are the same way I guess as I am I mean you
can kind of look at a person now and they don’t have to say nothing or anything
you can look at them and already tell about what type person they are (Central,

Building off the previous bleeding effect—correctional instincts—the staff member suggests that
they utilize a correctional lens to evaluate people and relationships outside of the prison. With a
social learning effect, the correctional worker suggested that their children have begun to imitate
and model this behavior and have begun to evaluate relationships and personalities with the
suspicion of a correctional lens. Where correctional staff members have internalized the survival
instinct of suspicion and paranoia within the prison, they reportedly have brought home and
transferred these values to their children.

The same correctional worker continues on:

…there’s no way [to separate work from home]. You can try to the best of your
ability to leave your work at the front door at home outside. It’s not going to
happen you’re going to take work home, you’re going to take personal stuff into
work. Like I said my children are institutionalized. I know that sounds crazy but
my youngest ones are starting to. I watched my brother do that with his kids and I
fought to keep myself from treating my kids like inmates because I watched my
brother do that at times. I don’t treat my kids like inmates but they were little
when I started so some of my mannerisms they have picked up on. I don’t treat
my children at all like inmates. Well it was more comments like inmates. I’m
like wait a minute you’re sounding like inmates and their children. I don’t do any
of that but some of my mannerisms, some of my little quirky stuff that I’ve done
like stand in the back of an elevator. Sit a certain way at the table, check the
doors that type of stuff. Watching your surroundings and stuff like that. Exactly.
They’ve picked up on that (Central, Veteran Officers, p. 141-142).
The correctional worker identifies two important themes in the passage. First, they suggest that children imitate the behavior of correctional staff parents. Thus, correctional staff believe that “quirky,” survival instincts they embody in the prison and use in other domains are transferred to their children. Second, they identify the tendency to treat children as inmates. Although the individual in the passage wavers back and forth introspectively, they assert that their “brother” certainly interacted with his children as if they were inmates.

In the continuing lens of prisonization, the admission that correctional staff are treating (or have witnessed others treat) their children as inmates at home is interesting. In previous bleed effects, we witnessed how experienced deprivation within the prison for correctional staff can lead to workers to reproduce deprivation in other domains (e.g. social/emotional deprivation at home). However, in this bleeding effect, we begin to see reports that correctional workers are not just exporting prison values, but prison processes and operations:

It’s just like that it bleeds over into your personal life as far as that goes because then you’re like you know what I’m going in here take your TV…I’m assigning you to this penalty, you know whatever it is. My husband and I because he did corrections of over ten years, and we had a teenager that was quite the handful and literally we did what we called a cell search on her room I mean there wasn’t one thing left in it and it was a good thing that we did it let’s just leave it at that. I mean there wasn’t one thing in her room. To keep her from coming into a cell. So much so literally I don’t know what TV shows she watched she had a reading book and I just picked it up and she had a center cut out in it, what is this, so yeah I mean your kids will push you and it will get to the point where you just literally do a cell search on their room. And then tell them they’ve got five minutes to clean it up (Central, Cross Gender, p. 38-40).

A “cell search” is an explicit example of how a correctional worker reproduces the operations of the prison, as well as the structural characteristics that constitute deprivation, within the home. It also demonstrates the process by which correctional staff interact with family and construct household order through an authoritative and punitive value system gained from the correctional
worker position. For example, the correctional worker in the previous passage who is a parent
even terms discipline at home through a correctional vernacular. In addition, the deprivation—or
cell search of the child’s room—spurned resistive action from the child. As the correctional
worker recalls, in the face of deprivation and reproduced prison techniques, the child attempted
to hide “paraphernalia” by removing the center of a book and placing items within it. Although
this is surely a resistive move imitated through popular culture on prisons, it does identify that
the correctional workers attempt to established prisonized order in the household resulted in the
child imitating inmate behavior.

This is quite different from the social deprivation constructed through emotional
(dis)connection, but literally resembles the structural deprivation of the prison. As the home is
operating as a prison, some correctional staff noticed the irony of reproducing deprivation at
home and prompting children to model inmates and imitate resistive behavior:

I think our career causes at times for our kids to be delinquent and I say that
genuinely because we invest in the department so much mentally and physically
into our jobs that sometimes we miss things with our children because we’re like
oh there are kids they’re doing good...You know I leave the house at five o’clock
and I don’t get home until seven o’clock and you expect me to raise two
boys...So I have to use scare tactics, I have to do things that meaner and more
aggressive, I have to make the consequences more extreme than I would if I was
at home in time to make dinner...You know I’ve started to see my oldest has two
F’s never brought home an F before so if he doesn’t have five B’s by the time he
gets his report card he may be in a juvenile center (Central, Cross Gender, p. 38-40).

Although prisonizing family can certainly involve intangible elements—such as a “voice” or a
“lens” in the family domain—in its more severe forms it can result in operating the home as a
prison itself. Yet, the irony is clear. The long shifts of a correctional officer leave less time for
parenting, and thus, correctional staff resort to “scare tactics” and prison cell searches. In turn,
the previous staff member reported wondering to what extent the combined effect of missed
parental guidance and conditioning their kids for prison life, is most literally prisonizing their children.

**TAKING THE PRISON HOME: “WHEN AN INMATE BLEEDS ON YOU”**

(Western, Treatment, p. 321-323)

To this point, we have taken prisonization to largely mean the extent to which prison values, codes or even processes become internalized within the psyche of correctional staff. However, as Clemmer (1940) and others have attested (Sykes, 1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1960), it is the initial physical experience of prison that can shock the newly admitted prisoner into readiness for prisonization. Thus, prior to accepting the general values and norms of the prison the individual is subject to the harsh—often physical—conditions of the prison. For inmates, this may consist of an array of different things—such as the visceral feeling of being caged, the cold and metal aesthetic of the prison, the violence that ensues due to interpersonal conflict between inmates, or violence used by correctional staff to assert order and authority. As we have noted, although the contingencies are certainly different, to some extent correctional staff have a similar experience. Correctional staff often report feeling as though they are also serving a sentence, and are similarly subjected to the cold aesthetic of the prison, and the violence of the institution.

Unlike previous sections that have been focused on how correctional staff internalize prison codes and values sets, this section evaluates how the harsh physical conditions of the prison are exported into other domains and create conflict.

Correctional staff were certainly concerned with being the subject of violent inmate attacks, but their primary worry centered around the implications of being exposed to diseases, which could be carried in the bodily fluids of inmates:

I mean he got me with a homemade knife. That day is not what bothered me okay, I went to the emergency room, got it treated and came right back to work. I was
mad, I was mad as heck because he made a promise and I let him see it through, I
got sloppy…It was the six months after that that took a toll on me because I had
to go back every month to get blood drawn to make [sure] this looney didn’t
infect me with hepatitis (Western, Treatment, p. 343-345).

In a prisonization framework, the tendency for correctional staff to interpret the potential for
violence through contracting disease can be read as an adaptation to the harsh, physical “pains of
imprisonment.”

Correctional workers often had a sense of inevitability when it came to being the subject
of violence and incurring some type of disease. They felt as though disease was so prevalent
among inmate populations and the exposure to bodily fluids so common, that they considered
their chances of becoming infected ubiquitous:

I mean it’s the going home and being scared to kiss your kids’ goodnight before
they go to bed for six months I mean that was the emotional toll on me. My
marriage, my home life just started going downhill for a while because you know
I didn’t know what I could do what I couldn’t do but I’m not going to go home
and put my kids in jeopardy you know by risking anything there. You know we
sit and wonder we’ve had inmates before with infectious diseases or whatever and
they’ll take feces and rub it all over the knife before they cut somebody. They
might not kill you today but they’re going to get you in the end. You know and
you’ve always got to worry about that in our business because of the infectious
diseases are going through corrections, I mean the hepatitis rate, the HIV rate it’s
through the roof. So, you go on a shift and you said well they just had this happen
on three cell some inmate through a whole cup of feces in an officer’s face. Now
we’ve got to worry about that, it’s not the fact that he through feces in his face,
it’s did he get him. I mean did he get him infected with anything. So, I mean the
day I went to the emergency room I bet they gave me 15 shots, they gave me a
shot for everything you could think of and I was glad to get them. I mean it’s a
routine thing (Western, Treatment, p. 343-345).

The physical deprivation of disease created a tangible means by which officers had to confront
what they might be taking home with them when they leave the prison. Thus, one element of
prisonization for correctional staff was found in the constant anxiety that they might be a carrier
for a disease. There were a couple implications. On one hand, they often had no idea which
disease they might have, and thus, physicians attempted to proactively treat them all. On the
other hand, if they were a carrier of disease there was a real possibility they could impart the
disease to other domains.

The likelihood to come into contact with bodily fluids was seen as inevitable and the
potential to contract disease was seen as highly likely. Thus, correctional workers reported a high
psychological awareness of the potential to be a carrier. In turn, correctional staff reportedly
engaged in an array of coping mechanisms to mitigate the potential to pass disease to those
outside the prison. For example, correctional officers often kept their distance after a shift:

You know and then even if it was clotting there’s still the loss of all of that blood
and then just the fear of wow this person cut herself, what kind of diseases is she
walking around with. I feel so dirty walking out of there. The first thing I do is
wash my hands when I get home and wash my face and you know try to
decontaminate things you know because I don’t want to go hugging on my
kids…then it’s like “oh man I have to sanitize my steering wheel because now
I’ve touched that and I’ve touched this and my water bottle.” So, all I see is a
contracting of germs and I’m not some kind of a big germaphobe or anything like
that. But you can’t take any chances. I have Clorox wipes at my desk.
(Central, Treatment, p. 117-119).

The correctional worker uses an array of cleansing routines to fight the anxiety of carrying
disease out of the prison. The internalized mindset—that the correctional worker may potentially
be a disease carrier—reportedly worked to prevent the correctional worker from important social
relationships—such as “hugging” children at home. Other correctional officers identified that
they would launder their clothes before returning home after a shift:

I can’t tell you how many times I wanted to strip in the parking lot because I
didn’t want to walk in with shit on me. Yeah, I went home with blood on my feet
yesterday. Walked out of my truck with drawers, t-shirt and my boots on. What
are you doing? Washing my uniform before I go home (Central, Cross Gender, p.
62-64).

Aligning with a deprivation model, correctional workers reported that the physical conditions of
the prison—replete with bodily fluid—resulted in an altered psyche, where workers were
hypervigilant about combating transmitting disease. Thus, the constant anxiety of contracting
disease within the prison was reportedly paralleled by the constant anxiety of spreading it to the home. In a sense, then, the “disease-carrier” mindset is carried with them and creates work-family conflict:

Ended up I was on HIV medication for 28 days. I had to wear protection when I had sex with my wife for 28 days. The HIV medicine I took for 28 days tore my stomach up. The inmate doesn’t have the disease, he is a carrier. I took this medicine it messed me up and all of this stuff, so that was pretty traumatic which I don’t really care about at the moment. So, I asked the commissioner where does inmates’ rights stop and mine begin. When an inmate bleeds on you, yours begin. (Western, Treatment, p. 321-323).

In contrast to the other bleeding effects, this section does not demonstrate the same fluidity. Whereas the other bleeding effects illustrated how deprivation was exported into other domains, and in turn, catalyzed importation, the current bleeding effect was limited to aligning with a deprivation model. Nonetheless, as we have seen here, correctional workers reported that the harsh conditions of the prison (e.g. disease) forced the workers to adapt and become hyper-vigilant in awareness and prevention in the case they were a carrier. This mindset also had ramifications for social and emotional relationships in other domains, as correctional workers detailed coping strategies that were described as routine and not as reactions to rare circumstances.

DISCUSSION

This study has sought to continue to depart from the “guard-as-villain” (Cullen et al., 1985) trope found in the correctional literature historically, and instead, to build on the new tradition started in recent decades to take a sympathetic and appreciative view of correctional staff. One way we have aimed to accomplish this goal is to investigate how correctional staff are prisonized and the ways in which that prisonization bleeds into other domains of their lives. However, this investigation cannot be successful without context. The sample for this study
consisted of correctional staff from all the prisons across one Midwest state and the majority of these prisons are located in rural, predominantly poor, towns across the state. A considerable proportion of our respondents in focus groups noted that the only available means to provide effective sustenance to raise a family—including salary and benefits—was to become a correctional worker. In fact, many of our respondents had previously taken jobs located hours away from family and had recently relocated and acquired a correctional position closer to home. In other words, correctional work was often the sole option for those who had families in these small, rural towns.

Although research on the dimensions of occupational stress started decades ago, researchers are recently discovering the extent to which correctional work promotes consequences outside of the prison. Specifically, researchers have recently found a great prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among correctional workers (CITE); that which exceeds PTSD symptoms among other similar professions, such as police officers and first responders (CITE). Research has begun to build a body of negative trauma-related outcomes that manifest for correctional workers outside of the prison environment, including staggeringly high rates of depression, suicide ideation, and disturbingly low life expectancy (CITE). Although researchers have begun to illuminate this grim picture of how prison work effects staff, the literature has little more to say about how prison work might affect workers across domains or negatively impact others in the community.

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the bleeding effects; or rather the process by which correctional workers embody values and import/export socialization processes across domains. Our sample of correctional workers provided the opportunity to explore the mechanisms of prisonization (i.e. deprivation, importation, exportation) through a bi-directional
lens. Through a bi-directional lens, we found that correctional workers report that socialization processes and values are exported from the prison to other domains and instilled in other environments. Correctional workers both re-socialized people around them (e.g. teach children to “read” others; treat children as an inmate) and installed operational processes from the prison into other domains (e.g. “cell searches” of child’s room). At the same time, correctional workers reported a value and socialization exchange. When correctional workers operated the home as a prison they constructed emotional barriers and catalyzed a loss of intimate relationships at home. In response, workers started to import home value and socialization processes into the prison (e.g. “my children behind the walls”). Although these findings are perceptual and not outcome-based, these findings build on the prisonization literature by demonstrating the fluid nature of importation/exportation between domains, and the way that deprivation manifests across settings.

We find that it is accurate to conceptualize importation/exportation as a fluid pathway, or feedback loop (Mitchell et al., 2017), by which elements of the prison are transferred into the community, and vice versa.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRISONS

These findings suggest a few logical implications for prisons and correctional workers. It is quite clear that there is a reciprocal relationship between the rehabilitation of prisoners and the well-being of correctional officers (CITE). For prisoners who will reintegrate, correctional workers are a part of the environment and compound, or mitigate, the “pains of imprisonment” (Sykes, 1958). For instance, high levels of stress and PTSD symptoms among correctional workers have been associated with increased aggression and excessive use of force (CITE). Indeed, our study demonstrates a range of ways that correctional workers reportedly embody elements of prison culture due to negative, often violence, experiences in the prison. It seems
wholly unhelpful to address the underlying issues of criminal behavior among offenders with a population of correctional workers themselves experiencing a range of traumatic symptoms. Furthermore, low life expectancy, minimal pay and high rates of burnout mean that the correctional worker population is not proportionately expanding to the number of those incarcerated. For this reason, understaffing is a pervasive issue in prisons and cyclically contributes to the burnout and PTSD symptomology of those correctional workers who still remain. For these reasons, prisons must have state and federal funding to implement resources for the purposes of addressing trauma symptomology and similar negative outcomes among staff.

In turn, we find in this study that the consequences of the bleeding effects negatively impact correctional workers alone as they do not occur in a vacuum. Numerous correctional workers reported that they fluidity of the bleeding effects catalyzed a number of negative outcomes for loved ones, including emotional disconnection and fear of passing disease. In addition, correctional officers reported re-socializing, and thus prisonizing to some extent, their family members with prison values. Worker perceptions of the negative effects on their loved one’s points to a troubling implication that prisonization is not restricted to experiences within the walls of the prison and those who work in the prison system. Thus, directing resources to address the trauma symptomology of correctional workers is not enough. Prisons need resources, and to implement programs, for the family members of correctional workers. Other first responder occupations provide family support groups at times, such as for the family of police officers or the military. Likewise, this study certainly points to need for similar programs among correctional workers.

CONCLUSION
This study has continued the tradition, started in recent decades, to provide a sympathetic view of correctional staff (Cullen et al., 1985). In turn, we draw from 18 focus groups across all the facilities in one state to understand prisonization among correctional staff in a bi-directional lens. Analysis reveals a set of bleeding effects; whereby correctional workers are experiencing an exchange of values and socialization processes between prison domain and home. These findings extend the prisonization literature by demonstrating the existence of exportation and its interconnection with importation across domains. In line with exportation, we find the troubling trend perceived by correctional workers that they are prisonizing environments outside the prison and loved ones at home. Furthermore, these findings lend support to the inquiries made by other researchers and demonstrates that one does not have to be in the prison to become prisonized.

REFERENCES


