

## Reasons for Choosing a Correction Officer Career

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Correction officers represent a growing segment of the U.S. workforce, with more job openings today than there are applicants. However, there is scant scholarship on this subgroup of law enforcement personnel. In this study, 256 correction officer candidates completed a brief measure regarding their reasons for choosing a correctional career. We sought to (a) identify the reasons for choosing a correction career and determine whether these reasons differed from those identified in studies of police recruits, (b) determine whether race or gender played a role in career choice for correction officer candidates, and (c) evaluate the factor structure and psychometric validity of a scale that was previously used with police samples. Our results indicated that correction and police officer candidates diverge in terms of their reasons for seeking careers in law enforcement. Correction officer candidates placed greater importance on financial motivators, whereas police recruits indicated service as a primary factor in career choice. The scale demonstrated good initial estimates of psychometric validity, and the factor structure in the current sample differed from those found in studies with police recruits.

*Keywords:* correction officers, career choice, law enforcement, vocational psychology, career counseling

Law enforcement professionals represent a significant and growing (Foley, Guarneri, & Kelly, 2008) segment of the workforce in the United States (U.S. Labor Department, 2005). As a result, vocational psychologists and career counselors need to understand the unique needs associated with people who pursue these lines

of work. In fact, there has been a fair amount of research conducted in the area of law enforcement and vocational psychology. Looking specifically at correction officers, the extant research has largely focused on stress and burnout (e.g., Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Morgan, Van Haveren, & Pearson, 2002; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000), perceptions of and interactions with inmates (e.g., Callahan, 2004; Tewksbury & Collins, 2006), and job performance (e.g., Sevy, 1988; Sproule & Berkley, 2001). An extensive literature review yielded no empirical studies on the reasons for seeking a career as a correction officer.

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The opinions expressed here are solely those of the authors and not that of the City of New York or the Department of Correction. We are grateful to the New York City Department of Correction for assistance in gathering the data for this study and to Robert D. Morgan for his helpful comments on a draft of this article.

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This lack of contemporary literature is especially striking given the call of early researchers (e.g., Holland, Heim, & Holt, 1976) in the then-nascent area of correction officers. Holland et al. (1976) purported that “there is a critical insufficiency of information about the psychological variables involved in the choice of and later performance of those in the field of correctional work” (p. 786). Given that (a) prisons have been a part of society since 1787 (Reid,

1982) with the inception of incarceration as punishment for violating society's norms, and (b) the correction industry employs more than 400,000 individuals (Pastore & Maguire, 2003), it is curious to note the lack of extant research on why people choose careers as correction officers. We did, however, locate two studies looking at reasons for seeking a career as a police officer (Foley et al., 2008; Lester, 1983).

More than 30 years ago, job security, pension, and early retirement were the primary reasons for choosing a police officer career (Niederhoffer, 1967). In 1983, Lester sought to understand the motivations for choosing a career as a police officer and found that the top five reasons were the opportunity to help people, camaraderie with fellow officers, job security, the prestige of the profession, and fighting crime. In their 20-year follow-up study, Foley et al. (2008) found that these reasons had changed only slightly: the opportunity to help people, job security, the excitement of the work, fighting crime, and the prestige of the profession. Factor analytic work on the questionnaire used in both of these studies supported a five-factor solution.

Contextual variables also may play a role in career choice, as law enforcement careers may seem more attractive during periods of greater unemployment. For example, the New York City Police Department had 51,655 applicants take the exam for police officer in 1973 when there were only 6,000 positions available. In 2007, there were more openings for police (and correction) officer positions than there were applicants. Based on our own experiences having conducted pre-employment psychological screenings for more than 10,000 applicants for law enforcement positions, we have observed that (a) having one or more family members "on the job" (i.e., employed in a law enforcement position) might influence a person to select a law enforcement career, and (b) individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses might seek a law enforcement career to be more upwardly mobile.

These data and clinical observations provide us with some preliminary ideas regarding why people become correction officers; this is because the work of correction and police officers shares some similarities (e.g., peace officer status, paramilitary structure). At the same time, however, the essential job functions of police and correction officers are very different. For

example, police officers work to keep the public safe and secure. In contrast, correction officers must ensure the safety and security of the correctional environment. A common misconception is that the correctional facility is a controlled environment. It is true that there are often long periods of time in which the officers handle mundane, repetitive tasks with mostly cooperative inmates. However, there are also unpredictable periods of crisis in which officers have to deal with violent and aggressive inmate behavior. It is for precisely this reason (i.e., erratic shifts in arousal levels associated with changes in the environment) that correction officers may be prone to burnout (Morgan et al., 2002). For comparison's sake, police work is "dynamic, complex and stressful," and they are involved with "crime prevention, incident management, investigation and community policing"; hence, the "scope of work is very wide" (Luen & Al-Hawamdeh, 2001, p. 312). Because of the differences between police and correction officers, an empirical investigation is warranted into understanding reasons for choosing a correction officer career.

There were three purposes for the present study. The first was to identify the relative importance of reasons for choosing a correction career, and to determine whether these reasons differ significantly from those identified in studies of police officers (e.g., Foley et al., 2008; Lester, 1983). As part of their work, Foley et al. (2008) uncovered differences in reasons for career choice among police officers based on race and gender. To that end, the composition of the correctional staff in the United States has shifted from a traditionally Caucasian male to a more diverse force (e.g., more women and people of color; Jackson & Ammen, 1996). Thus, the second purpose was to evaluate whether race or gender played a role in career choice for correction officer candidates. The final purpose was to evaluate the factor structure of Lester's (1983) scale, which was designed for use with police recruits, with a sample of correction officer candidates. We also wanted to provide beginning estimates of psychometric validity for this scale in terms of its use with correction officer candidates. Given the lack of research in this area, we did not postulate formal hypotheses. We did not believe, however, that correction officers would differ significantly from police officers regarding their reasons for

career choice. This is because many applicants at the agency where we collected our data apply for correction and police officer positions simultaneously.

### Method

#### Nature of the Correctional Setting

Because there are a variety of correctional settings, it is important to describe the nature of the facility in which our participants work. Specifically, our participants work in jails that are populated with three groups of inmates. The first are those being held for pretrial detention, the second are those serving brief sentences (i.e., less than 12 months) for lesser crimes, and the third are sentenced inmates awaiting transfer to a long-term facility. As a result, the population is highly transient; by comparison, prisons tend to house inmates who are serving much longer sentences for more serious offenses. Both male and female adolescents and adults populate the jails in question. Our jails are located in an urban area and our officers, who are a highly diverse group (i.e., approximately 85% people of color), largely live in the same area. As a result, our correction officers might encounter inmates whom they have known previously. This dynamic is certainly different from a long-term facility, which is often located in a rural area—where Caucasians compose the majority of the officer corps. In terms of level of security, the jails in which our participants work are best classified as medium security. However, there are some units within the jails that are best described as high security.

#### Participants

The sample included 256 candidates who applied to be correction officers with a large north-eastern city correction agency. The majority of the candidates were male (58.6%,  $n = 150$ ), with 99 (38.7%) female officer candidates; seven participants (2.7%) did not identify their sex. Participant ages ranged from 20 to 57 years, with an average age of 30.06 years ( $SD = 7.57$ ). Racial/ethnic backgrounds were as follows: 148 (57.8%) African American, 52 (20.3%) Latino/a, 37 (14.5%) Caucasian, and 3 (1.2%) Asian American; 3 (1.2%) indicated “other” and 13 (5.1%) failed to provide their

racial/ethnic background. With regard to education, 81 (31.6%) reported that they had a high school diploma (or GED), 112 (43.8%) had completed some college, and 57 (22.3%) had a bachelor’s degree; 6 (2.3%) failed to provide information regarding their level of education.

#### Measures

Participants completed Lester’s (1983) questionnaire, which was originally designed to measure reasons for choosing a police career. We modified this scale to assess the reasons for choosing a correction career. Twelve items were applicable for this population as they were written, so they were retained. Two items needed only minor modifications; “opportunity to help people” became “help the inmates” and “friends/relatives are police officers” became “friend/relatives are correction officers.” One item (i.e., “fight crime”) was deleted because it did not apply to the work of correction officers; in its place, we added “opportunity to keep the community safe,” as this more accurately reflects what candidates perceive as one of the primary functions of correction officers. This perception is based on the first author’s experience conducting more than 1,000 pre-employment psychological screenings of correction officer candidates. We also added four new items to the questionnaire based on our experiences working with correction officers and officer candidates. The new items included “the job is safer and more predictable than that of a police officer,” “opportunity to carry a firearm,” “opportunity to wear a uniform and carry a badge,” and “interest in becoming a lawyer.” The format of the questionnaire remained unchanged; participants responded to the 19 possible reasons on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = *unimportant*, 3 = *somewhat important*, and 5 = *very important*. Participants also provided demographic data.

#### Procedure

The measure and demographic questionnaire were administered just prior to the beginning of the written psychological examination to become a correction officer. That examination includes objective measures of psychopathology (i.e., Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory—2, California Psychological Inventory, and the Cornell Index) and biodemographic information (e.g.,

education, work, and legal histories). Participants were informed that they could choose to participate or not, that they would be able to participate anonymously, and that their decision about participation would have no bearing on their psychological screening (i.e., choosing not to participate would not be a factor in their being found “qualified” or “not qualified” psychologically for the position of correction officer). To ensure the participants’ anonymity, a staff member who was not part of the research team nor had any role in the psychological screening process collected the research measures separately from the written psychological materials performed this task. All candidates who presented for a written psychological examination during our period of data collection were afforded the opportunity to participate. Of the 262 possible candidates, 259 participated in the study, yielding a 99% response rate. There were incomplete data sets from three respondents, bringing our total usable sample to 256.

## Results

### Reasons for Seeking Correction Career

The first purpose of the present study was to determine whether the relative importance of

reasons for choosing a correction career differed significantly from those of police officers and police officer candidates. In Table 1, the reasons for choosing a correction career are compared with the means from a recent investigation into why people choose police careers (Foley et al., 2008). The top five reasons for choosing a correction career were job security, opportunities for advancement, early retirement with good pay, job pays well, and provides opportunity to keep the community safe. For comparison’s sake, the top five reasons for choosing a police career were the opportunity to help people, job security, the excitement of the work, fighting crime, and the prestige of the profession (Foley et al., 2008).

Compared with the Foley et al. (2008) sample (see Table 1), independent samples *t* tests indicated that correction officer candidates placed greater importance on opportunities for advancement, early retirement with good pay, job security, and job pays well. In addition, they were more likely to report a lack of other job alternatives and less likely to report the excitement of the work as a reason for becoming a correction officer. There were small yet statistically significant differences between the samples on the military structure of the job, autonomy of

Table 1

*Comparison of Reasons for Choosing a Correction Career With Recent Sample of Police Officers and Police Officer Candidates (Foley et al., 2008)*

Item	Police mean	Correction mean	<i>t</i>
1. Opportunities for advancement	4.08	4.75	20.55***
2. Structured like the military	3.43	3.23	-2.59*
3. Early retirement with good pay	3.90	4.66	18.77***
4. Excitement of the work	4.37	3.96	-6.65***
5. Opportunity to help people/help the inmates	4.55	3.76	-11.95***
6. Job security	4.41	4.80	13.58***
7. Fight crime/opportunity to keep the community safe	4.26	4.39	2.6**
8. Profession has prestige	4.12	4.07	-0.82
9. Work on own/have a lot of autonomy	3.65	3.47	-2.49*
10. Enforce laws of society	4.09	4.29	3.65***
11. Job pays well	3.90	4.49	13.37***
12. Good companionship with coworkers	4.03	4.25	3.88***
13. Friends/relatives are police/correction officers	2.29	2.60	3.40**
14. Job carries power and authority	2.59	2.95	4.38***
15. Lack of other job alternatives	1.59	2.15	7.41***
16. The job is safer and more predictable than that of a police officer	N/A	3.07	N/A
17. Opportunity to carry a firearm	N/A	2.11	N/A
18. Opportunity to wear a uniform and carry a badge	N/A	2.65	N/A
19. Interest in becoming a lawyer	N/A	2.14	N/A

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .  $Df = 385$ .

the job, companionship with coworkers, friends/relatives on the job, and power and authority of the position. There were no differences between the two samples in the importance of the prestige of the profession.

In looking at the two items that were modified from Lester's (1983) original scale, some statistically significant findings were evident when comparing police and correction officer candidates. Specifically, police recruits were much more likely to endorse "opportunity to help people" than correction officer candidates were to endorse "help the inmates" as an important factor in career choice. In addition, there was a small difference between "fight crime" (police) and the "opportunity to keep the community safe" (correction), with correction officer candidates placing slightly greater emphasis on this function as a career motivation.

### Race and Gender Differences

The second purpose of the present study was to determine whether any differences were evident based on race or gender in terms of reasons for selecting a correction career. In terms of race, three small, yet statistically significant differences were found. Specifically, candidates of color valued the (a) opportunity to carry a firearm,  $t(242) = 2.21, p = .028$ , (b) opportunity to wear a uniform and carry a badge,  $t(242) = 2.99, p = .003$ , and (c) interest in becoming a lawyer,  $t(242) = 2.58, p = .011$ , more than did their White counterparts. It is important to note, however, that these three reasons were rated very low overall. Hence, relatively speaking, these variables were not very influential with regard to choosing a correction officer career. With regard to gender, two small differences were evident. That is, female participants placed greater emphasis on the opportunity to keep the community safe,  $t(247) = -2.57, p = .011$ , and to enforce the laws of society,  $t(247) = -2.57, p = .011$ , than did their male counterparts.

### Factor Structure

The third purpose of the present study was to conduct a factor analysis and determine whether the factor structure for police officers (Foley et al., 2008; Lester, 1983) would emerge in a similar manner for our current sample of cor-

rection officer candidates. Bartlett's (1950) test of sphericity was used to determine whether our data set had a normal distribution. This test was significant,  $\chi^2(171, N = 256) = 1404.07, p < .001$ , suggesting that factor analysis was indeed appropriate for this data set. In addition, the Kaiser-Meyer-Okin measure of sampling adequacy was examined and found to be acceptable at 0.84. On the basis of the results of these two preliminary tests, it was determined that factor analysis could be used on this data set.

We performed a principal factors (maximum likelihood) analysis of the scale using a varimax rotation. This method was chosen because it is ideal when the goal is to detect the underlying factor structure (Gorsuch, 1997). We used several criteria for determining the factor solution that best fit the data, including Kaiser's criterion (selection of eigenvalues  $> 1.0$ ), Cattell's scree plot, the proportion of variance accounted for by the factor solution, and the proportion of variance accounted for by each factor within that solution. We used Kaiser's criterion as an initial means for extracting a possible factor structure (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987). The scree test was also examined—the point on the scree plot where the curve "elbows" is used as an estimate of the correct number of factors to extract (Cattell, 1966; Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987). In addition, we considered the proportion of variance accounted for by each factor solution and the factors within that solution to determine the solution that best fit our data set.

After careful inspection using the above-mentioned criteria, the five-factor solution was deemed the most parsimonious and practical description of the data set. This factor solution accounted for 45% of the total variance. From these results, the following factor labels were designated: Service, Power and Status, Predictability and Familiarity, Safety, and Pay and Security. The factors accounted for 11%, 10%, 8%, 8%, and 8% of the total variance, respectively. The factor loadings for the items are presented in Table 2. The factor structure shared some similarities, yet also displayed some important differences, with the most recent investigation of Lester's (1983) scale (Foley et al., 2008). The factors identified in the Foley et al. (2008) study were Service, Pay and Security, Power and Status, Friendship, and Military Structure. The Pay and Security subscale comprised the same items across samples, while the



Table 2  
*Factor Structure of Measure With Current Sample*

Item	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Opportunities for advancement	.282	.037	-.082	.219	<b>.390</b>
2. Structured like the military	<b>.499</b>	.104	.057	.215	.133
3. Early retirement with good pay	.089	.050	.128	-.059	<b>.464</b>
4. The excitement of the work	<b>.663</b>	.267	-.028	.055	.100
5. Provides an opportunity to keep the community safe	.350	.180	-.097	<b>.549</b>	.125
6. Job security	.035	.034	-.073	.148	<b>.650</b>
7. To help the inmates	<b>.552</b>	.017	.126	.177	.074
8. The profession has prestige	<b>.439</b>	.088	.066	.334	.387
9. You work on your own a lot; have a good deal of autonomy	<b>.435</b>	.103	.363	.114	.157
10. To enforce the laws of society	.339	.022	.056	<b>.931</b>	.119
11. The job pays well	.194	-.044	.199	.046	<b>.579</b>
12. Good companionship with your coworkers	<b>.545</b>	.076	.163	.127	.175
13. Friends/relatives who were/are correction officers	.216	.261	<b>.395</b>	-.021	.017
14. Job carries power and authority	.205	<b>.559</b>	.352	.027	.095
15. Lack of other job alternatives	.088	.267	<b>.622</b>	.022	.057
16. Job is safer and more predictable than that of a police officer	-.002	.248	<b>.593</b>	-.040	.086
17. Opportunity to carry a firearm	.035	<b>.712</b>	.381	-.051	.039
18. Opportunity to wear a uniform and carry a badge	.105	<b>.800</b>	.221	.104	.090
19. Interest in becoming a lawyer	.167	<b>.374</b>	.118	.127	-.048

Note. Values in bold correspond to the factors upon which the items load.

items loading on the Service and Power and Status subscales differed across samples.

### Discussion

First, we discuss the reasons for pursuing a correction career and compare our results with those from a recent study of police recruits. Next, we highlight the factor structure of Lester's (1983) scale when used with correction officer candidates. Finally, we close with some implications for counseling and suggestions for future research.

#### Reasons for Pursuing a Correction Career

Our results indicate that correction and police officer candidates are not the same in terms of their reasons for seeking careers in law enforcement despite the similarities in remuneration across professions. We observed significant differences between our sample of correction officer candidates and the police officer sample used by Foley et al. (2008) with regard to their career choice motivations. As evidenced by four of the top five reasons for selecting a correction career, the officer candidates in the current sample voiced that the primary draw to entering a

career in corrections is that the position affords long-term fiscal security via consistent, well-paying employment with opportunities for advancement and an early pension. By comparison, police officer candidates endorsed items related to service as primary motivations for their career intentions (i.e., opportunity to help people, fighting crime, and excitement of the work).

One potential explanation for this finding is that correction officers may be less externally reinforced (e.g., by the public) for their work. This may simply reflect the "invisible" nature of correctional work; that is, there is very little daily interaction between correction officers and the general public. In addition, candidates for law enforcement careers may view correctional work as more predictable and repetitive than police work; this may lead those seeking excitement to gravitate more toward police work. Current data support this notion—candidates from our sample were less likely to report the excitement of the work as a reason for becoming a correction officer than their police counterparts from the Foley et al. (2008) study.

It is also possible that the cultural demography of the samples played a role in the differences between the samples. Specifically, the

police sample in Foley et al. (2008) was largely White (86%) and male (89%), whereas our current sample of correction candidates was more gender balanced (58% male) and predominantly people of color (79%, with 58% of the sample identifying as African American). Statistically speaking, people of color are much more likely to be from lower socioeconomic statuses than Caucasians (Liu et al., 2004); as a result, it is not that surprising to find financial security as a primary motivation for our correction candidates. In fact, Foley et al. also found that people of color valued opportunities for advancement more than their White counterparts.

Relatedly, perhaps the nature of the two samples (i.e., urban vs. suburban) played a role in the differences between Foley et al.'s (2008) study and ours. That is, perhaps financial motivations are more salient for people living in an urban area where the cost of living is much higher than a suburban area. It is also possible that our participants reported financial reasons as primary because these incentives were highlighted in both departmental recruiting advertisements and new candidate orientation sessions. Finally, correction officer candidates with family members "on the job" might be keenly aware of the salary and pension because of past discussions with those family members.

Although correction officer candidates cited financial motivations as primary, it is important to note that the fifth most frequently reported reason for choosing a correction career was a desire to keep the community safe. It is interesting that the analogous item (fight crime) ranked second among police officers (first for police officers was the opportunity to help people). Therefore, despite some differences in primary motivations for seeking law enforcement careers, there is a common element of service that cuts across police and correction samples.

As stated earlier, the essential job functions of police and correction officers differ in significant ways despite both operating from a paramilitary structure. The differences in motivation between police and correction officer career choice may be tied to respective job duties and their ascribed psychological value. For example, the opportunity to help people was identified as much more important to the police recruits in Foley et al. (2008) than helping inmates was to correction candidates in the cur-

rent sample. One possible explanation is that the correction candidates did not see helping inmates as an important job function, and some may not consider this to be part of their job at all. Hence, these candidates may view correctional work as only providing security. This supports the idea that service is relatively less important to correction officer candidates than it is to police recruits with regard to reasons for choosing their careers. At the same time, not endorsing an interest in helping inmates does not equivocate with a lack of interest in doing so. It is possible that candidates are generally unaware of the rehabilitative aspects of their job (e.g., helping inmates deal with the pressures of incarceration) or are unaware of how exactly they could help the inmates. One additional interpretation could be the cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) elicited by the notion of helping an inmate, who, by definition, either has done something wrong or has been accused of wrong doing.

In addition, it is logical that correction officers, as compared to police officers, placed less emphasis on the excitement of the work. This is because of the inherent differences between the job functions of police and correction officers, with police officers having to deal with a wider scope of duties than correction officers. In sum, correction officer candidates are not choosing this line of work for its excitement potential. In addition, as noted previously, the work of correction officers is largely invisible to the public. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude, in conjunction with the current data, that correction officer candidates' primary motivations for entering their careers are related to finances and job security, followed by other salient factors of law enforcement, namely service, power, and status.

### **Race and Gender Differences**

Very few differences were evident based on race or gender. With regard to race, candidates of color seemed to value power and authority a bit more than the White candidates in our sample. However, these reasons were relatively unimportant to our entire sample, regardless of race. One possible explanation for the difference lies in the inherent racism present in the United States (Sue, 2003). That is, Whites do not need external reinforcements (e.g., badge,

gun, uniform) to be respected (McIntosh, 1998). In contrast, people of color must contend with racism on a daily basis (Sue et al., 2007), and as a result, might seek out a position with power and authority as a means of earning respect from others.

In terms of gender, the only difference within our sample was that female participants placed greater emphasis on aspects of service (i.e., opportunity to keep the community safe, enforcing the laws of society) than did the men in our sample. Indeed, women who work in law enforcement settings tend to adhere to more traditional masculine gender norms (e.g., Detrick, Chibnall, & Rosso, 2001), and our results in this area are consistent with that previous work. One possible explanation is that female correction officer candidates may assume that they have to be tougher and more masculine to survive and thrive in the correctional facility, which is often physically dangerous.

### Factor Structure

Results from the current data set support the use of Lester's (1983) questionnaire with correction officer candidates. This statement was supported by the initial estimates of psychometric validity falling in the acceptable range (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987). It is important to note, however, that our factor structure was not identical to that found by Lester (1983) and Foley et al. (2008). Pay and security, service, and power and status were the core common themes that emerged across these two subgroups of law enforcement candidates. The two groups also differed in meaningful ways, with correction officers valuing predictability, familiarity, and safety, whereas police officers placed importance on friendship and military structure as reasons for their career choice. It is also important to note that while the constructs were somewhat consistent across police and correction samples (i.e., pay and security, service, and power and status), the manifestations (i.e., items) of these constructs were different. The differences in factor structures may represent subtle, yet importance distinctions between police and correction officer candidates. Perhaps there are aspects of the candidates' personality structure or career interests that lead them to opt for a particular career within the law enforcement arena. At the same time, the differences in

factor structures could be attributed to perceptions of differences in job functions themselves (e.g., assumed predictability of police vs. correctional work). Hence, the differences suggest that we cannot view police and correction officer candidates as identical when it comes to assessing reasons for career choice, and these differences may actually be useful with regard to career counseling (see below).

### Implications for Counseling and Policy

As suggested by Foley et al. (2008), career counselors working with individuals who are considering a law enforcement career may use Lester's (1983) instrument to facilitate the career decision-making process. Specifically, the client could complete the scale with the intent of making mean or profile comparisons with the police (Foley et al.) or correction officer (current data set) samples (see Table 1). Furthermore, a values assessment could provide the client with additional information for making a career choice. That is, clients could determine whether (a) a law enforcement career is generally a good fit for them, and (b) if so, which setting (i.e., police or correction) would be more personally value congruent. Finally, the differences between police and correction officer candidates described above could facilitate the client's decision of setting (i.e., police or correction) after law enforcement has been identified as a preferred field.

The findings of the current study also have broader implications related to pre-employment screening for law enforcement positions. Currently, we typically assess suitability only vis-à-vis the pre-employment screening process (i.e., is the person psychologically qualified for the position?). Including or giving more consideration to the fit between the person and the position may increase positive outcomes (e.g., job performance, job satisfaction) and decrease deleterious consequences (e.g., absenteeism, burnout, turnover). This, in turn, would likely also result in better operations in law enforcement institutions.

The findings from the current study also provide potentially useful data regarding why people want to become correction officers. Correctional facility administrators can use this information to refine their correction officer candidate recruitment efforts. In addi-



tion, knowing people's motivations for choosing a correction officer career may assist in explaining other correction officer behavior (e.g., altruism, stress management).

### Suggestions for Future Research

Although Lester's (1983) scale evidenced good beginning evidence of psychometric validity with the current data set, more research is needed using this scale with other samples of correction officer candidates. Conducting a confirmatory factor analysis would be an excellent next step. In addition, researchers could examine intersecting factors such as geographical location (i.e., urban vs. rural) and nature of facility (i.e., level of security and type of inmate). Furthermore, understanding how dimensions of personal identity interact with those variables would be important as well (e.g., being a White correction officer working in a rural setting populated primarily by people of color who have been convicted of fairly serious crimes). Future inquiry should investigate the relationship between reasons for choosing a correction career and career satisfaction. It might also be interesting to investigate whether the reasons for continuing a correction career differ from those on entry and to make these assessments at various points throughout officers' careers (e.g., 5, 10, and 15 years posthire). These data could be useful in assisting mental health professionals who provide employee assistance program services for the officers. For example, perhaps there is a unique developmental trajectory of correction officer careers—and understanding this course could facilitate the provision of more relevant employee assistance program treatment. Finally, it would be meaningful to determine whether reasons for choosing a correction officer career (a) were related to job performance or (b) could differentiate those officers who complete a career in corrections (i.e., 20 years of service) from those who leave prior to earning their full pension (i.e., are these reasons related to career longevity?).

### Limitations

The current study is limited by the demography of the candidates who seek correction officer positions within the agency where we collected our data. That is, there were very few

Asian American individuals and a relatively small number of Caucasians in our study. Given our extremely high response rate, however, it could be argued that our sample is representative of the population of people who seek correction careers in our geographic area. When compared with the demographics of our home community, it appears that Caucasians and Asian Americans are somewhat underrepresented among those seeking correction officer careers. Hence, the results might not generalize to other parts of the country where the cultural demography of the correction officer corps differs significantly from that of this region. In addition, our results might not generalize to suburban or rural samples of correction officer candidates; this would be a natural extension of this study for future research. Finally, there are inherent differences between police and correction officer job functions that precluded an exact comparison with the past studies. Specifically, the opportunity to help people and fight crime (police officer) may not be directly comparable to the opportunity to keep the community safe and help the inmates (correction officer). Future research should investigate additional correction officer samples, which can be compared with the current data set to determine the relative importance of these motivations for seeking a career as a correction officer.

### Conclusion

In sum, it appears that correction and police officer candidates are not the same in terms of their reasons for seeking careers in law enforcement. As noted, there are some similarities across the two groups, but there are significant differences as well. Hence, it is important to consider correction officers and police officer candidates' unique needs and values in the provision of psychological services and future research in the area of law enforcement careers.

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