

## Students, Media, and Fields Trips to Correctional Facilities

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*Abstract: Because correctional facilities are closed environments, perceptions of prison and jails are largely informed by the media; unfortunately, those perceptions are often inaccurate. Faculty in criminal justice programs often strive to combat inaccurate media images, including offering criminal justice students the opportunity to tour a prison or jail. In this study, undergraduate criminal justice students were surveyed about the sources of their corrections information prior to attending a tour of a prison or jail. After the tour, students wrote a reflective essay comparing their perceptions before the tour to their actual experiences on the tour. In the survey and in their essays, students pointed to the media as a major source of their information about corrections. While a few students noted similarities, most students commented about the differences in what they observed on the tour versus what they expected to see. These findings indicate the important role the media plays in shaping student perceptions and how short-term experiential learning opportunities like field trips can counteract stereotypes. We discuss implications for instructors planning field trips in relation to the study results.*

*Keywords: prison tour; media; student perceptions; experiential learning; cultivation theory; corrections, field trips; criminal justice*

Experiential learning is an important component of education. Research in criminal justice shows that students develop a deeper understanding when exposed to the reality of the criminal justice system (Austin and Irwin, 2001; Smith et al., 2010; Stacer et al., 2017). In earlier work utilizing a mixed methods approach involving surveys and essays, we found that taking students on tours of jails and prisons positively changed some student perceptions of corrections (Stacer et al., 2017), positively influenced how they felt about correctional officers and careers in corrections (Stacer et al., 2019) and influenced their thinking about the social and physical environments of correctional facilities (Stacer et al., 2020). During the initial analysis of the reflective essays that students wrote about going on a jail or prison tour, we discovered the large role the media played in shaping the students' perceptions, prompting us to focus on this specific topic. While a significant body of literature has been developed on experiential learning since Freire's movement against oppressed pedagogy (1970), research is needed to explore how preexisting notions of crime and criminals as embedded in one's culture influence students' perceptions. Television shows<sup>1</sup> about crime have proliferated (Lynch, 2015), and there is a host of research exploring how these shows impact what people think about crime and violence (Bennett, 2006; Byers and Johnson, 2009; Jarvis, 2006; Jewkes, 2007; Mason, 2003; Surette, 1998) and how correctional facilities are represented (Bennett, 2006; Wilson and O'Sullivan, 2004).

This study examines the role of the media as a major influencer shaping students' perceptions of the correctional system and explores the potential for short experiential learning opportunities such as jail and prison tours to act as a catalyst for student reflection. Pre-tour survey data and reflective essays regarding their experiences on a jail or prison tour were analyzed. Our

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<sup>1</sup> The term "television show" is used in this study to refer to programs on broadcast television as well as programs that are available solely on streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu.

results indicate how students implicated the media in what they expected to experience and how the tour impacted their thinking about corrections and that students' perceptions of corrections derive largely from media sources. While a few students noted similarities between media depictions and the jails and prisons they toured, most students were surprised at the differences. We conclude with suggestions for the use of field trips as short-term experiential learning activities.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

One theory cannot by itself explain the complexity of experiential learning in a dynamic world within a culture that is collectively and continuously reshaped through social interactions. Thus, two theoretical perspectives frame this research: Cultivation Theory and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Cultivation theory explores how media provides students with a unique frame in the process of experiential learning (Carver, 1996). ELT guided the development of the larger study in which students were exposed via a short experiential learning field trip to the reality of the correctional system and then directed to reflect on their observations. In this section, we first describe cultivation theory and ELT and then review the relevant literature that directed the creation of this research study.

### *Cultivation Theory*

Learning is a socially constructed experience that is embedded in the social environment in which it exists (Carver, 1996; Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2000). Media and mass communication contribute to the evolution of cultural values and students' perceptions of the world. According to cultivation theory, television uses strategies based on repetition of patterns that describe social regularities such as relationships, myths, and ideologies. It is through repetitions that television affirms and legitimizes a view of the world that defines the social order. Gerbner (1998) focused on the idea of dynamic processes whereby people interact with symbols, messages, contexts, etc. as viewed on television and in their own lives. There is not a uniform impact of the media on audience members. Instead, audience members bring their own characteristics and experiences with them and interpret media images through these lenses. Gerbner (1998) posited that television appeals to the masses by creating illusions, cultivating a social symbolism that viewers can use to interpret reality (Hughes, 1980). Normalization happens because television creates the illusion that we know more about reality than we do (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). Cultivation theory has evolved over time to include the effects television and other media have on society as a whole, both directly through individual consumption and indirectly through interactions with other people (Gerbner et al., 2002). Because television and other media are instrumental in shaping popular culture, the symbolic structure generated is easily reproduced in commercial advertising, music, and other media outlets. This widespread acceptance of symbols becomes legitimized across multiple media sources and is absorbed by everyone, even those who spend less time interacting with media.

Cultivation theory can be useful for understanding the way students create misperceptions about the correctional system. Students come to class with their own perceptions of corrections and we believe these are largely formed through their media consumption.

### *Experiential Learning Theory*

ELT posits that the value of education is found in the process that links practical experience with education, where activities are followed by mindful reflections (Dewey, 1938, 1963). ELT has become an influential pedagogical perspective emphasizing experiences inside and outside the

classroom to enhance learning by engaging the learner (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). The six principles of experiential learning developed by Kolb and Kolb (2005) focus on the idea that learning can best occur by “doing.” These principles include the ideas of “re-learning,” which occurs when students review their own beliefs and ideas and “re-adjust” these based on their new learning, and the idea that “learning is the process of creating knowledge” (Kolb and Kolb, 2005, p.194), whereby the learner incorporates what they have learned in a constructivist way by creating their own personal representations of objective reality.

### *Media Portrayals of Corrections*

Crime is a popular topic in the media. Gerbner and colleagues (2002) estimate that since the 1990s, crime on television has been featured at least ten times more prevalent than it really is. Further, Gerbner created the “Mean World Index” which postulates that people who watch a lot of violence on television believe the world to be more dangerous than it really is. People who rely on information from mass media sources also are not as knowledgeable about punishment (Pickett, Mancini, Mears, and Gertz, 2015). Cheliotis (2010) argued the mass media contributes to public punitiveness by overstating the likelihood of victimization and portraying criminal justice agencies as ineffective. Mason (2006) claimed that over-reporting of violent and sexual crime in the media, coupled with fictional prison shows, was related to the increase in the prison population in the United Kingdom. After watching movies and television shows that contain inaccuracies, some individuals believe they possess factual knowledge about crime, criminals, and the functioning of the criminal justice system (Cecil, 2015). Unfortunately, such inaccurate portrayal of crime on television has led to the misunderstanding that crime is worse than ever and that it continues to rise; a common misperception among students as well (Cecil, 2015; Jarvis, 2006).

As for institutional corrections, it must be noted that most people do not have direct knowledge of prisons or jails, as these facilities are not visible to the public, a reality that leads many to rely on media to learn about the experience of inmates (Cecil, 2015; Cheatwood, 1998; Mason, 2003). Media highly influence people’s perceptions of inmates, correctional officers, and correctional facilities. Most representations are thrilling or interesting but include distorted images of these facilities and the people working or confined therein. Although media portray people and events in correctional facilities in ways that are both accurate and inaccurate, it is impossible for the media to show a direct representation of reality (Cecil, 2015). Television tends to portray prison negatively, and even documentaries are not a direct representation. Those who create programming, fictional or documentary-style, select what would be most entertaining, not the most factual information or most common (Cecil, 2015).

Wilson et al. (2004) see opportunities for the media to turn over a new leaf and better represent the reality of corrections. They illustrated that some films and television shows attempt to give voice to prisoners or act as a critique of the system. This could contribute to what they call “penal reform education,” whereby such media could be a resource for the general public to learn more accurate information about crime and punishment.

### *Field Trips in Higher Education*

Although many types of experiential learning exist, field trips are a short-term activity that can provide many benefits in terms of learning. In higher education, field trips are often used in physical science courses and involve trips to museums or natural environments. Criminal justice is also a field in which field trips are common, typically involving tours of jails or prisons.

Some scholars have advised caution in the use of field trips. For instance, Grobman (1992) discussed how contemporary museums focus on entertainment rather than education, and simply taking students to field trips does not guarantee that learning occurs.

As early as 1940, scholars wrote about the importance of learning experiences that can engage students. Marcy (1940) explains that “[f]ield trips have developed extensively in recent years to take advantage of students’ phenomenal memory for facts and things seen and heard in strange surroundings and under unusual conditions” (p. 204). For most students, going on a correctional facility tour also means experiencing unusual situations, making this kind of field trip particularly impactful. Field trips can also be more memorable than classroom learning, which can be related to lifelong learning (Rohlf, 2015). Field trips can also promote and enhance interaction between the instructor and students and among students, creating and fostering relationships that can promote learning (Walker, 1994). Most discussions about field trips promote the advantages of experiential learning. According to Rohlf (2015), field trips are likely to provide students with experiences that cannot be recreated in the classroom. Through field trips, students may develop a range of skills, both cognitive (reasoning, collaboration, and leadership) and physical skills. Field trips become true opportunities for growth; something that Brody and Wright (2004) discuss as a process of “self-expansion” (p. 14).

In criminal justice education, experiential learning opportunities not only enhance student learning, but provide practical experiences to improve post-graduation outcomes. Internships and service learning can provide students with skills and experiences to facilitate their hiring upon graduation (George et al., 2015); the networking that students engage in can also be fruitful. Short-term experiential learning like field trips can also shape students’ career interests (Stacer et al., 2019) and impact their thinking about corrections and inmates (Stacer et al., 2020). These out of class experiences can provide opportunities for students to see roles acted out and to experience concrete examples of what they have learned in the abstract (Mooney & Edwards, 2001).

### *Correctional Facility Tours*

Students, like most people in society, usually do not have direct knowledge of prisons or jails, as these facilities are closed off. Tours of correctional facilities can be one way to expose students to the reality of the correctional environment and challenge incorrect stereotypes. Given these students will be the next generation of criminal justice professionals, it is imperative they have a realistic understanding of the criminal justice system. Although correctional facility tours have been hailed by educators as unique learning experiences (Rockell, 2009; Smith, Koons-Witt, and Mead, 2010; Smith, Mead, and Koons-Witt, 2009; Wilson, Spina, and Canaan, 2001), some critics argue tours are degrading to inmates and act as entertainment (Dey, 2009; Nagelsen and Huckelbury, 2009; Piche and Walby, 2010). Some scholars point out that correctional administrators have control over the tours and can frame them to the administration’s advantage, to show the facility in the best light without considering the inmate perspective (Piche and Walby, 2010). Despite limitations, researchers have demonstrated tours can help students correct misperceptions and stereotypes about correctional institutions and those who are incarcerated or work there. Calaway, Callais, and Lightner (2016) found when students were able to tour a prison and interact with inmates, they were more likely to support rehabilitation and have more positive attitudes regarding parole and community corrections, while Stacer et al. (2017, 2019) found that jail and prison tours allowed students to think more positively about correctional officers and to consider corrections as a career option. Smith, Meade, and Koons-Witt (2009) demonstrated how students changed their views after going on a prison tour, with more students identifying rehabilitation as a correctional philosophy and recognizing the inaccurate stereotypes they held about inmates and prisons. In the current study,

we examined students pre-tour disclosure of their sources for information about corrections and their written reflections about their jail or prison tour, and how the media informed their expectations of the tour, allowing them to consider the accuracy of their perceptions via a short-term experiential learning experience.

## **The Present Study**

Drawing from Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 2002) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT; Dewey, 1938, 1963; Kolb, 1984; Kolb and Kolb, 2005), we address the following questions: (1) To what extent did students attribute their perceptions of jails and prisons prior to the tour to the media? (2) What perceptions of corrections did students have based on the media? (3) In what ways did a short-term experiential learning experience, in this case, a field trip involving a tour of a jail or prison, impact students' perceptions of corrections as related to their expectations based on their preconceived ideas from the media?

## **Methodology**

### *Data*

The data for this project come from a larger research project utilizing a mixed methods design involving pre/post correctional tour surveys and a reflective essay assignment (Stacer et al., 2017, 2019, 2020). Undergraduate students from one Midwestern university who were enrolled in one of three classes: Prisons, an elective, Gender and Crime, an elective, or Introduction to Corrections, a required class for criminal justice majors, were invited to participate. Data were collected during the Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Fall 2014, and Spring 2015 semesters. The pre-tour survey asked students about their perceptions of inmates, corrections, and correctional officers and the source of those perceptions. In this study, we only examine the pre-tour survey question regarding the sources of their perceptions of corrections prior to their participation in a correctional facility tour. Essays were only obtained from students in Introduction to Corrections and Prisons, but not Gender and Crime due to a different assignment. A total of 172 students were enrolled in these courses, though there were a few students who were enrolled in more than one course in the same semester and for whom one set of surveys was obtained. The sample for the pre/post surveys was 109, a 63% response rate (109/172). The sample size for the essays was 80, a response rate of 51% (80/156). After the pairing of the pre/post surveys, the identification codes facilitating the pairing were destroyed, and thus we are unable to pair the survey data with the essay data.

### *The Context of the Field Trips*

The field trips to jails included a walk-through of intake and booking, housing units, medical facilities, and other parts of the jail. Jail tours were conducted by uniformed correctional officers, while prison tours were conducted by facility administrators. The field trips to prisons included viewing housing units, recreational yards and facilities, dining facilities, and medical facilities. Some prison tours included observation of the secure housing unit (SHU) and death row. During most tours, students were not allowed to interact with inmates. There was only one tour, at a medium-security men's prison, where it was planned for students to meet and talk with selected inmates. Unfortunately, there was only one student whose essay from this tour was included in the sample. There were plenty of opportunities for students to interact with staff. Tours lasted 1.5 to 2.5 hours.

Table 1 shows the tour type for the students who completed the pre-tour survey and the essays. Over two-thirds (68%) attended a field trip to a jail, while 32% went on a field trip to a prison. Of the 80 students whose essays were included, 17 (21%) attended a prison tour. The remaining 63 students (79%) attended a jail tour.

**Table 1. Type of Correctional Facility Toured.**

<i>Type of Tour</i>	<i>Pre-Tour Survey</i>	<i>Essays</i>
Prison	39 (32%)	17 (21%)
Jail	70 (68%)	63 (79%)
Total	109 (100%)	80 (100%)

*The Reflective Essay*

As part of the course, students were required to attend a field trip to a jail or prison and to write a 500-word essay about their experience. The assignment asked students to address three questions: “1) What were your perceptions of jail/prison life prior to the tour? 2) How did the tour impact your understanding of jail/prison life and jail/prison inmates? 3) During the tour, we also had the opportunity to interact with corrections officers, professional staff/supervisors, and/or inmates. How did those interactions help you understand better jail/prison life and roles within the institution?” These three questions were meant to guide students in their essay and to allow them to bring up what they believed were the most important issues. Thus, students were not specifically asked to discuss whether their perceptions came from media or any other source.

*Analytical Approach*

Our methodological approach for the essay data was inductive in that the directions for the essay were kept minimal, so that students were free to write about whatever they felt was most important to include in their essay. This allowed the researchers to examine the data without a priori ideas about what the students might focus on beyond the basics of the assignment. The first and second authors independently read each essay multiple times, utilizing open coding and axial coding. These two authors met to compare coding, develop categories by grouping codes together and revising codes as necessary, and eventually identifying themes. This method of qualitative content analysis allowed us to identify and provide meanings for the themes found directly within the essays (Cavanaugh, 1997; Cho & Lee, 2014; Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). We arrived at several major themes, including one theme regarding the media, noting what students had written about their perceptions from the media and how this was similar to or different from what they experienced on the field trips.

**Results**

First, we present the results from the pre-tour survey in which we asked students to indicate the sources of their knowledge about jails and prisons before going on the field trip. This sets the context for the qualitative analysis of the essays in which many students wrote about how the media influenced what they thought they would see on the field trip and comparing their tour experiences to their expectations. Per Kolb and Kolb (2005), learning experienced in a context of doing, such as

on a field trip to tour a correctional facility, allows students to review and adjust their beliefs and confront contradictory ideas.

*Survey Results*

Students were asked prior to the field trip on a survey: “Where do you receive information about jails/prisons from?” This question was open-ended, so students were free to write whatever they wanted. A variety of sources were noted, including books, class, movies, news, the internet, family members and friends who worked in corrections, television shows, ex-offenders, social media, etc. These open-ended responses were coded into categories. In many cases, a student’s response included multiple sources and could be included in multiple categories. Table 2 shows the coded sources by type of facility toured.

**Table 2. Sources of Information about Correctional Facilities, Surveys.**

<u>Source of Info</u>	<u>Type of Tour</u>		<u>Total*</u>
	<u>Jail</u>	<u>Prison</u>	
<u>School</u>	39 (55.7%)	36 (92.3%)	75 (68.8%)
<u>Media</u>	37 (52.9%)	28 (71.8%)	65 (59.6%)
<u>Friends/Family</u>	18 (25.7%)	8 (20.5%)	26 (23.9%)
<u>COs / Law Enforcement</u>	15 (21.4%)	0 (0%)	15 (13.8%)
<u>Internet</u>	6 (8.6%)	3 (7.7%)	9 (8.3%)
<u>Personal Experience</u>	6 (8.6%)	3 (7.7%)	9 (8.3%)
<u>Current and Former Inmates</u>	5 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	5 (4.6%)
<u>Total*</u>	70 (100%)	39 (100%)	109 (100%)

\*Percentages do not add up to 100% since students may have indicated multiple sources.

As indicated in Table 2, “school” was the largest source of information about corrections, with over half of those who toured a jail (N=39) and over 90% of those who toured a prison (N=36). This category included responses such as “class,” “college professors,” and “books,” with several students specifically mentioning the particular class in which they were enrolled. The second largest source of information about corrections was the media. Over half of those who toured a jail (N=37) and over 70% of those who toured a prison (N=28) mentioned the media. In this category, we included responses such as “movies,” “television,” “documentaries,” and “news.” Some students mentioned specific television shows, like *Beyond Scared Straight*, *Lockup*, and *Orange is the New Black*, or specific channels such as “Discovery Channel” and “National Geographic.”

Over 25% of those who went on a field trip to a jail (N=18) and 20% of those who went on a field trip to a prison (N=8) mentioned “Friends/Family” as a source of information about corrections. This included the terms “friends” and “family” and specific responses like identification of family members or friends who work in corrections or law enforcement. Over 20% of those who toured a jail (N=15), but none of those who toured a prison (N=0) mentioned receiving information from professionals, the category we labeled “COs/Law Enforcement.” Some of these responses were also included in the “Friends/Family” category due to overlap. Smaller categories included “Internet,” “Personal Experience” (which included internships and previous tours), and “Current and Former Inmates.”

Since every student was enrolled in a criminal justice class and many were criminal justice majors, it is not surprising that the most frequently mentioned source was school. The second

largest category, media, was a close second particularly for those who toured a jail and were in an introductory course, indicating many students were likely just getting started in the criminal justice major. Those who toured a prison were more likely to be upper-level students who had already taken other criminal justice courses and perhaps were not as likely to rely on the media as a source of information and could rely on their classes.

### *Essay Results*

In the essays, 45 students out of 80 (56.25%) mentioned the media as a source of their perceptions about corrections and/or compared what they experienced on the tour to what they expected based on media exposure. It is possible these students were frequent viewers of crime media and more attuned to discussing these types of images because it was more salient to them, but we lack data regarding the viewing habits of the sample. Additionally, it is possible some students' perceptions were impacted by media but they did not state this directly because they were not asked to do so. Given the freedom students had to write about various topics in their essay, it is likely that those who mentioned the media found it important to include that topic.

We coded four categories related to media: (1) overall perceptions, (2) specific ideas about what correctional facilities and inmates would be like based on media, (3) the idea that media is not accurate, and (4) the field trip confirmed what they knew from the media. We discuss these categories below using student quotations to illustrate the power of media images on what students expected to experience on a field trip to a correctional facility, illustrating cultivation theory and how students uniquely interpret reality based on the media they have viewed.

### *Overall Perceptions from Media*

Twenty-four students out of the 45 who mentioned something about the media in their essays (53.3%) mentioned an overall perception about corrections from the media, indicating the media is a main source for their knowledge about corrections. A female on a jail tour wrote, "...I just expected something that I would see on television." There were six students who said this was their first time visiting a correctional facility and specifically attributed their perceptions before the tour as coming from the media, with one student writing, "I had never been in a jail before so my perception of jails [was] based on watching TV."

A male student wrote, "I assumed that TV shows and movies that involved jails were a mere reflection of what it was really like to live life looking through bars." These comments illustrate some students' idea of corrections came from the media even if they did not elaborate specifically. Several students mentioned specific television shows. They thought jails and prisons would resemble the buildings in these shows and that they would witness behaviors they saw on these shows. A female student who toured a prison wrote, "Not surprisingly, I thought prison life was very similar to what is shown in movies and popular crime shows. I'm an avid watcher of *Snapped* and shows like that, so I expected something different." Another female student acknowledged, "The only time I had ever seen the inside of a jail was through over exaggerated shows such as *Scared Straight*; therefore, I did not know what to expect." These students indicated that their knowledge of corrections was generally shaped by the media but did not provide very many specifics.

### *Specific Ideas from the Media*

There were 18 students (40%) who wrote about specific ideas from the media indicating imagery they expected to see on the tour. Students wrote about many different things, including the



environment, the size of the facility, inmate behavior, etc. When it comes to the environment, seven students mentioned things like, “When I originally thought about a jail, the image that came to my mind was a loud room filled with obnoxious inmates shouting and carrying on, like you see on TV.” Four students mentioned the size of the facility, with a female student writing, “I never would have thought a county jail would be so big and have inmates actually making knives with toothbrushes, I thought that was just in shows like *Oz*.” Inmate behavior was mentioned by three students, with one female student writing, “I was somewhat surprised to learn that fights are not as common in prison as the media likes to portray it being.” One student mentioned the clothing inmates wear, writing, “I always had this idea that all of the inmates wore orange because that is what I always saw on TV.” Another student indicated her surprise to find the facility she toured did not have gym equipment. She wrote, “I guess a lot of movies and television shows have featured prisons and jails with inmates working out in weight rooms.” These students went further than a general attribution of their expectations being based on the media by providing specific details about what they thought they would see., imagery obtained from their media exposure.

### *Media Not Accurate/Different*

Twenty students (44.44%) indicated that media representation of institutions of corrections was inaccurate or different from what they witnessed on the tours. One female student wrote, “The tour impacted my understanding of prison life and inmates because it is not at all like what we see on television.” Many students claimed their only perceptions of corrections before the tours were what they learned from the media. A male student wrote, “My only view of jail prior to this tour...was from television shows... it was nice to see that jails are not as bad as they seem on television.” Some students saw things on the tours they were not expecting to see, with a male student writing, “Some of them [inmates] were watching TV, some were walking around to loosen up, and others were writing on notepads given to them by the jail itself. This was a strange idea for me because when you see movies portraying jails, they are not exercising any of these freedoms.” Some students seemed surprised or relieved to see their ideas of the correctional environment from media exposure were not what they saw on the tour.

There were four students who specifically stated their views of corrections had been clouded or corrupted by the media. One male student wrote, “I had no idea what really went on in prison and how the inmates acted. I was clouded by the media’s perception of how it was... In conclusion, today’s trip to [prison 1] and [prison 2] was very interesting and helped open my eyes passed the social media blinders of prison.” Because most of these students had not been on tours before, they viewed their media exposure as preventing them from being able to form accurate perceptions. Another male student stated, “Before the tour, most of what I had learned about jails had been corrupted by media and Hollywood films, but now that I have been able to see a brief life of an inmate my perceptions have been changed.” These students explicitly acknowledged the idea that media images are not accurate but took this idea a step further by indicating they had difficulty forming accurate perceptions due to the overwhelming influence of media imagery.

### *Field Trip Confirmed Media*

For a minority of six students (13.33%), media imagery proved to be accurate for them on the jail and prison tours. One male student wrote, “During my visit to the men’s facility, just like stereotypical books or shows would say, they all indeed looked like they should be criminals.” Other students mentioned what they saw was similar to correctional television programs. One student claimed, “I also found it interesting to see the inmates yelling at us from inside their cells. My

perception of that was actually right because they do that on the show I've seen." These students concretely matched specific imagery from their media exposure to specific things they saw or experienced while on the correctional tour.

Only six students (13.33%) mentioned similarities between what they expected of jail or prison based on the media and what they experienced, while 20 (44.44%) students mentioned differences. Although we do not employ a quantitative methodology, this may indicate differences may be more commonly noted by students than similarities.

## Discussion

We analyzed data from pre-tour surveys and essays written by undergraduate students regarding their experiences on a field trip to a correctional facility. Students implicated the media as a primary source for what they know about corrections, invoking both generic terminology as well as specific media sources and imagery. Some students illustrated specific behaviors they expected to see, exemplifying the main idea of cultivation. Other students discussed differences between the portrayal of inmates in the media and what they observed during the field trip. Students' comments about inmates moving inside the facility with minimal supervision are particularly relevant because it suggests students perceive all inmates in need of strict supervision based on media representations of offenders. A small number of students commented on the similarities between what they expected based on media and their direct observations, commenting on the unruly behaviors some inmates manifested during the tour (yelling) that resembled the representation of inmates in media. By providing a learning experience outside the classroom in which students were engaged within the correctional environment, they were able to compare their expectations from the media to what they experienced, the process of "re-learning" (Kolb and Kolb 2005), as well as deal with conflicting ideas.

Although we did not survey students about their specific consumption of media, the cultivation framework teased out relevant concepts, allowing for a more thorough analysis of students' reflections. Because media shapes mainstream popular culture, one's direct viewing is only partially the reason why certain beliefs become apparent in contemporary symbolic structures (Hughes 1980). Students also learn about corrections through interactions with other people who have been influenced by media. The widespread acceptance that crime and violence are a top priority as portrayed across media contexts (Hughes 1980) can lead to an interpretation of correctional institutions as the necessary evil to separate dangerous people from society. The study provides evidence that students are not a monolithic group and their views of corrections are influenced by other realities than just the media they consume. This supports a main premise of cultivation theories, that the impact produced by media is not uniform because media consumers have their own characteristics and experiences that influence their perceptions, which are the result of their personal interpretations of media images (Gerbner 1998).

A small number of students (N=6, 13.3%) indicated the field trip to a correctional facility confirmed what they expected to see based upon media images. This was not surprising, as many of the media about jails and prisons consumed by students have some basis in fact. The concern is really a question of whether those students attempt to accentuate the similarities to confirm their previously held beliefs about correctional facilities and ignored or refused to engage in facets of the tour that countered those beliefs. Without more data, it is difficult to truly gauge how the field trip impacted these students. In their research on service learning in which their students, who were mostly white, engaged in community gardening in a predominantly Black neighborhood, Becker and Paul (2015) found that the experience could act to "entrench[] racial stereotypes and bias" (p. 196), noting that there was little difference when the service learning activity was optional or required.

They further noted that student demographics, specifically race, gender, and class, were more strongly related to the students' use of "colorblind racial logics" (p. 196). Grant et al. (1981) utilized a day-long tour of Detroit as experiential learning in an introductory course on urban dynamics, noting the potential for the tours to provide a simplified version of reality that contributes to stereotypes. Both Becker and Paul's (2015) work and Grant et al.'s (1981) work illustrate how not all students may exhibit the kinds of learning expected and, as illustrated by a small number of students in our study, may cling to their preconceived ideas. Some experiential learning activities might reinforce existing stereotypes (Wright, 2000), threatening to reverse the intent of the activities as designed by the instructors. It may be even more difficult to address this during short-term experiential learning such as field trips, in which there is just a short window of time during which the field trip occurs and given its short nature, less time is necessary for preparation and debriefing than what might be appropriate for longer-term experiential learning. It should be acknowledged that students may respond differently to experiential learning; yet, these kinds of learning experiences can provide valuable and meaningful insights to students that challenge their ideas, given that in the current study, over 44% mentioned differences between what they expected to see on the field trip and what they actually experienced. As it is ascertained that students' stereotypes often come from media depictions, it is important to include activities that constructively highlight the dynamics of media productions. It is important to help students be critical of the fact that media outlets have an interest in selling a product that captivates as much audience as possible. Furthermore, redirecting students toward media that are more objective and geared toward social awareness might prove effective. It is our experience that students want to learn about a world they understand very little about because it is hidden to the public. Helping students become more selective and focused on educational programs might become a better way to keep them focused. For instance, activities that allow for viewing documentaries from multiple sources and comparing the reality TV style to publicly funded documentaries that aim to bring social awareness to the challenges of correctional life are an appropriate way to deconstruct some of the stereotypes nurtured through existing media outlets.

This study highlights the importance of media in shaping students' knowledge and the utility that experiential learning can have in presenting alternatives to media imagery. Our study illustrates the need for more experiential learning opportunities as a way to combat inaccurate ideas about corrections. Although instructors have little control over what students experience when visiting a correctional facility, these field trips nonetheless provide students with the unique opportunity to re-humanize those behind bars. Correctional tours can re-socialize students to the reality of incarceration and challenge stereotypes absorbed through media exposure (Gerber and Gross, 1976). Longer experiential learning opportunities may be ideal, such as internships and service-learning projects, but not all students are able to engage in such long-term, time-consuming activities. Short-term field trips, such as correctional facility tours, provide an opportunity for most or all students to engage in experiential learning that can dramatically impact their thinking, particularly when the experience is not an event they would not be able to engage in on their own. Faculty should consider the use of field trips to enhance learning within the traditional classroom. Such field trips can provide new insights that students would not otherwise glean, especially if the field trip involves going somewhere the students would not ordinarily go or interacting with people with whom students would not ordinarily interact, providing new perspectives.

It is critically important to connect field trips to the curriculum in concrete ways (Kisiel, 2006a, 2006b). Field trips must help facilitate students' own construction of knowledge by making them active learners, but this does not just happen by accident; planning and preparation is necessary. Rohlf (2015) discussed designing field trips with three phases, "the pre-trip, the trip itself, and the post-trip" (p. 520). During the pre-trip phase, the instructor should plan lectures, readings,

or activities in which students learn basic information related to the content of the field trip. When taking students to jails or prisons, this could include readings or lectures about the history of jails and prisons, the differing functions of these institutions, the types of inmates held in each facility, the different positions held by employees in these facilities, etc. The first author also includes a class discussion about how students might feel going into a jail or prison. Students should be made aware that they may feel uncomfortable or uneasy in this new environment; this knowledge can better help them prepare emotionally for the experience. The parameters of the trip itself are largely out of the control of the instructor, since each correctional facility tightly controls what is observed during the tour, but good relationships with administrators at the facility can ensure a good tour experience by communicating clearly the expectations the instructor has for the tour. Limiting the number of student participants on the tour is very important in order to facilitate more active learning by providing more opportunities for each student to interact with correctional officers, administrators and other staff. After the field trip has concluded, it is critical to include a post-trip phase. Students must process and reflect on their experience. Having a writing assignment is a wonderful way to get students thinking more critically about their experience; providing them with specific questions to address can help them reflect on what they have learned instead of having them merely summarize what they saw. Once students have opportunities to consider the experience in writing, class discussion should also occur. This provides students and the instructor the opportunity to reflect as a group, to consider again why the field trip was included as part of the course, and to allow students to consider the impact of the trip on their classmates. Post-trip reflections are also important for situations in which student preconceptions of the correctional environment are confirmed by the short-term experiential learning activity. Post-trip group reflections activities could become a buffer to help students dismantle established stereotypes.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

There are a few limitations to note. Students were not directly asked whether or how their perceptions of corrections before going on the field trip were influenced by their media consumption. Given the prevalence of students (over half) mentioning the media as the source of what they expected to see indicates that many students recognized the influence the media has on what they think about corrections. There may have been additional data had students been specifically prompted to discuss the media. Allowing the students to indicate the sources of their perceptions allowed them to reflect on what they thought was most important. Future research should specifically ask whether the participants think the media impact their perceptions of corrections and ask more generally why they choose to consume certain media and gauge the perceptions people have of the accuracy of media about the criminal justice system. Given the reliance of many people on social media for news and entertainment, examining the impact of social media specifically on people's perceptions of corrections is necessary.

#### **Conclusion**

Given the many stereotypes of jails and prisons, the people who work there, and the people confined within, examining whether and how the media impact undergraduate criminal justice student thinking about corrections and how those perceptions compare to correctional realities via field trips to jails and prisons are crucial for understanding what perceptions students bring with them into the classroom and how a correctional field trip can impact these perceptions by allowing a comparison. Most people do not receive an opportunity to tour a correctional facility and never have the occasion to compare their perceptions with what they see in a real jail or prison. Our study

illustrates the media is a major source of information about corrections for students, the ideas gleaned from the media about corrections are often inaccurate when compared to correctional facility tour experiences, and that, for many students, attending a jail or prison field trip allowed them to confront incorrect perceptions. Given the impact experiential learning can have on students, especially in a field like criminal justice, in which media images are not only prevalent but often quite misleading, this study illustrates the importance of incorporating short-term experiential learning such as correctional tours into criminal justice curriculum. Even a short experiential learning opportunity can dramatically enhance the engagement of students in the classroom and bring to life what they are learning about through the course materials. However, instructors must be aware of the potential negative effect of short-term service-learning activities that may confirm pre-existing stereotypes. It is our recommendation that instructors consider this potential effect in the design of the short-term experiential learning activity. The ELT framework offers a multitude of suggestions to create post-experience activities that can potentially work as a ‘buffer’ and redirect students to reflect on such stereotypes. Once again, this challenge confirms that instructors must focus on the theoretical design of experiential learning activities to safeguard the course learning outcomes.

As experienced instructors, the first and third authors continue to reflect on the design of experiential learning in the form of correctional field trips in criminal justice courses. Reflecting beyond this study’s findings is important in that it provides an overall idea of student responses to experiential learning activities. One important reflection is that the work we do in the classroom, before and after the field trip, is as important as the field trip itself in that it allows students to discuss their stereotypes, anxiety, and interests. In addition, offering more opportunities to visit different institutions that follow different approaches and correctional philosophies can help students dismantle pre-existing ideas and stereotypes, as students may have the opportunity to compare different correctional environments. Finally, creating opportunities to interact with incarcerated people allows for the re-humanization of offenders; in our experience, however, many correctional administrators are unwilling or reluctant to arrange these kinds of opportunities for students due to understaffing. It is also our experience that using educational documentaries, such as PBS Frontline and Independent Lens documentaries, before and after field trips can help students deconstruct what they have learned through media that aim at entertaining rather than providing social awareness. Additional exercises that provide comparisons between reality TV and educational documentaries can be an appropriate way to engage students while allowing them to dismantle those stereotypes one at the time, rather than “condemning” them for absorbing false stereotypes from entertainment media. We believe media can have positive effects on students, but students do need our guidance in selecting educational media sources, interpreting what they view, and comparing the messages they hear in the media to the experiences they have during field trips to correctional settings.

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