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Correctional Service
Canada

Service correctionnel
Canada

RESEARCH BRIEF

LITERATURE REVIEW:
THE EFFECTS OF
UNIFORMS IN CORRECTIONS

February 1989

no. B-02



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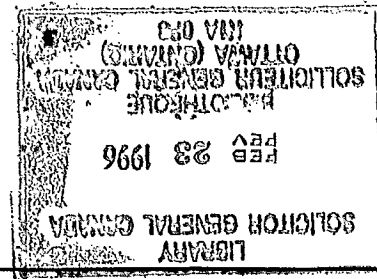


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RESEARCH BRIEF

COMMUNICATIONS AND CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT

**LITERATURE REVIEW:
THE EFFECTS OF
UNIFORMS IN CORRECTIONS,**

Prepared by:

**Research Branch
Communications and Corporate
Development**

FEBRUARY 1989

THE EFFECTS OF UNIFORMS IN CORRECTIONS

In order to provide some research-based analysis to assist the committee examining the role of uniforms in the Correctional Service Canada, the Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Corporate Development commissioned a review and bibliographic inventory of the topic. The literature search focussed on the issue of uniforms and their reported impact on organizational structure and behaviour, on performance, motivation, discipline and productivity in the field of corrections. The initial search discovered some references but largely of a historical or anecdotal nature. As a result, the scope of the search was expanded to include dress codes, standards and their reported impact in corrections-related activities such as policing, the military, business, education and other domains where uniforms or uniform attire play a role. This expanded search proved more fruitful in that a number of relevant reports were discovered.

When extended to organizational behaviour in correctional settings, the conclusions derived from the literature review are derivative and perhaps tentative. However, the literature is meaningful in that it is illustrative of the efforts to identify cause and effect relationships relating to policy issues on attire.

In the following sections, the review of this literature is organized according to organization-specific areas and a brief summary of the relevant findings of specific articles uncovered to date is provided.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The evolution of corrections in Canada borrows considerably from both the American and British experience. Historians point to an evolution through four consecutive stages: capricious, paramilitary, rehabilitative and anarchic (Thomas, 1981). The second of these stages, the paramilitary, evolved after 1877, and is characterized by a centralized prison structure with staff graded into a pyramidal hierarchy and the introduction of uniforms complemented with rank badges. The uniform is seen as a vital

component of the paramilitary structure and a number of criminologists have argued that examples of anarchy within the American and British prison systems can be attributed to the erosion of this paramilitary tradition accelerated with the advent of the rehabilitative ideal.

The uniform itself is endowed with considerable force (Howton, 1969), and is seen as the source of "the correctional officer's strength, the vivid symbol of intense occupational solidarity and a high level of organization within the occupation". While admittedly the uniform creates stress in the operations of a prison it also provides, according to Howton, an occupational kinship between the correctional officer and other "specialists in violence", soldiers and policemen.

In a poignant laboratory simulation of a prison setting (Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, 1973), it was found that normal, stable male university students when placed in uniform and instructed to adopt the role of guard, adopted aggressive and seemingly sadistic behaviour to secure compliance and restrict the liberty of their surrogate captives to a degree that surprised even the experimenters. While this simulation has never been replicated, the Stanford Prison Experiment remains an influential illustration of how staff and inmate roles in corrections are perceived as clearly divergent.

THE POLICE EXPERIENCE

The research on the impact of uniforms on police roles and policing strategies provides the most relevant implications and a potential focus for further examination of policy directions in corrections. There is a consensus that the traditional and historical underpinnings of policing are inextricably woven - quite literally - in the fabric of the uniform. Whereas attire in general provides subliminal cues as to the values and judgement of the wearer (Shaw, 1976), the military, police or correctional uniform visually expresses in a symbolic but nonetheless forceful manner the role, authority and rank (Joseph and Alex, 1972) of the individual. The uniform articulates role

identity for the wearer (Howton, 1969) and facilitates role performance (Bickman, 1974, 1974).

Niederhoffer (1976) describes the policemen as a Rorschach in uniform.....clothed in a mantle of symbolism that stimulates fantasy and projection". The nature of the projection can take on a heavy moral significance (Shaw, 1973) as evidenced by the following advice provided to new recruits to the New York State Police training program:

"The first thing the recruit is taught at the State Police Academy is that the very colour of the uniform - grey - has meaning. There's black thread for bad next to white thread for good and together they make grey."

The characteristics that are attributed to our own red-tunicked R.C.M.P. illustrate the profound effects the uniform can elicit and, when steeped with tradition and folklore, the functions it can serve to establish group cohesion and an "esprit de corps".

The uniform has been demonstrated to affect compliance (Bickman, 1974), as well as trigger aggression against the wearer (Wrightsmann, 1977). While on the one hand it may be seen as a force for impelling "occupational solidarity" it is also assuredly an instrument of alienation. Furthermore, Zimbardo (1969) suggests that a process of "deindividuation" takes place wherein the uniform attenuates the wearer's sense of moral responsibility resulting, at times, in aggressive interpretations of one's role. Conflict resolution can become more difficult and attitudes towards the non-uniformed wrong-doer can harden.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of the influence of uniforms to affect or alter role perspective is reported in the "Uniform Experiment" (Tenzel and Cizanckas, 1973). In 1969, the Chief of Police of the California community of Menlo Park, in the interest of professionalising the role of police and improving community relations, embarked on a program whose most apparent feature was a change in the style of police attire. The police of Menlo Park shifted from the typical blue, military style uniform to a civilian green blazer. The results were dramatic, both on the attitudes of the police and the community.

Tenzel and Cizanckas found that stripped of the established symbols of authority, police began to develop new patterns of relating to the community and gradually adopted the role of police as "public service officer". In later years, this shift away from the militaristic model of authority led to the elimination of rank altogether and its replacement by a more horizontal organizational structure.

In follow up studies (Tenzel, Storms, Sweetwood, 1976) it was found that assaults on Menlo Park police officers decreased by 30%, citizen injuries resulting from arrest decreased by 50%, morale rose, and the staff turnover rate dropped from 25.5% in the year prior to the shift in uniforms to 2% three full years into the program. Finally, community approval of the blazer experiment rose from 69% following their introduction to 80% by 1975 (Cizanckas and Feist, 1975).

While later reports (Mauro, 1984) have raised some doubts about the specific effects of a change in uniforms in the Menlo Park experiment, the study remains an important illustration of the potential impact of changes in police attire and strategies. Unfortunately, no such large-scale study has been conducted in a correctional setting.

DRESS CODES IN EDUCATION AND BUSINESS

The educational experience with dress codes, applied to both teachers and students, sheds some light on the effect of attire on academic performance. There are widely held views, supported by recent research, that suggests conservatively dressed teachers achieve higher academic performance and receive fewer disciplinary problems from students (Armstrong, Lang, Bragg, 1978; Lang, 1986). Better performance and behaviour is attributed to the modelling effect of appropriately attired teachers. Similarly, business success has been closely associated with dress standards. The proliferation of "dress for success" formulae appearing in the popular journals (Fortune, 1983; Business, 1971; Time, 1966) serves to demonstrate the widespread acceptance of the importance of attire. The conviction that attire influences corporate culture has given rise to what

has been described as the "corporate uniform" or "career dress". In the service sector, particularly for employees at the front-end of service delivery, standardized dress represents an important statement of corporate identity, unity of purpose and corporate allegiance. Finally, the concept of the corporate image has entered the top levels of management wherein board meetings are described as awash in a consistent sea of corporate colours and "regimental ties" (Time, 1966)

SUMMARY: IMPLICATIONS FOR CORRECTIONS

The foregoing discussion dealt with the impact of uniforms and dress standards in a number of domains with variable relatedness to corrections. For the most part, the reported investigations have taken place in foreign jurisdictions.

"What relevance or implications do these studies have with respect to a Correctional Service Canada policy on correctional uniforms?"

The review of the literature, albeit preliminary, yields a number of conclusions, the following of which merit consideration:

i) The uniform can express and communicate a prevailing correctional philosophy and in so doing influence the manner in which the wearer executes his or her authority and the manner in which those confronted by the uniform respond to that authority;

ii) The Correctional Service of Canada has experienced a number of philosophical and organizational re-orientations, some of which were accompanied by policy shifts with respect to uniforms. The introduction of the Living Unit concept in the mid-sixties led to the complete abandonment of the uniform for many uniformed officers in the belief that social barriers between staff and inmates would be softened. Shortly thereafter, in the mid-seventies a new olive-coloured tunic was introduced along

with the militaristic regalia and ceremonial practices in an attempt to instill an esprit de corp and professionalism throughout all organizational levels. In both efforts, the position on uniforms in and of itself was only marginally effective in producing the desired results;

iii) The uniform can reinforce group cohesion and provide a common identity and role perspective among those in uniform. As a potential consequence, however, it can also alienate non-uniformed staff complements. Many Living Unit institutions in their initial stages of development experienced intra-staff conflicts that split according to a uniform-civilian clothing dimension;

iv) Depending on the nature of the uniform and uniformity of attire, a continuum of impacts could be hypothesized. A military styled uniform could be expected to affect an authoritarian structure that in turn will impact on staff-inmate relations. On the other hand, the total abandonment of uniform attire and/or dress code standards may precipitate an erosion of the respect for authority that is necessary in a correctional setting.

v) A shift in uniform styles can be expected to have varying effects on both staff and inmates depending upon the extent of the shift and the extent to which the uniform change is made to articulate the goals and objectives of the organization.

While the literature review does not provide clear conclusions as to the most appropriate design for a correctional uniform it does suggest that attire can influence the performance and behaviour within an organization. Furthermore, it suggests that careful analysis of the interrelationship between goals, values and policies and the manner in which these can be articulated by the selection and style of a uniform could pay important dividends.

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