

## SELF-REPRESENTATIONS, BURNOUT SYNDROME, AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

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The present study examines the relationship between self-representation discrepancies (future self vs. correctional officer), the burnout syndrome, and job satisfaction among a sample of correctional officers. Results showed that burnout decreased job satisfaction. Furthermore, self-representation discrepancies between future self and correctional officer decreased job satisfaction and increased burnout levels. Finally, burnout mediated the relationship between self-representation discrepancies and job satisfaction. Higher discrepancies decreased satisfaction with one's job through increasing burnout levels.

Key words: Prison staff; Correctional officers; Possible selves; Job satisfaction; Job burnout.

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Correctional officers work daily to guarantee not only the safety of inmates but also to promote their rehabilitation through treatment activities. These conflicting roles and goals might expose correctional officers to highly stressful situations (Blau, Light, & Chamlin, 1986; Cheek & Miller 1983; Prati & Boldrin, 2011; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006). Indeed, correctional workers experience high levels of stress and burnout due to several factors. Main factors are prison overcrowding, lack of shift flexibility, role conflicts, and conflicts with administrators (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Walters, 1996). High levels of stress and burnout lead to job dissatisfaction, physical diseases, or family problems, which make prison officers unable to perform effectively their functions (Cheek & Miller, 1983; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). While most of the studies on burnout among correctional workers focused on organizational and environmental factors (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000), literature on burnout syndrome among helping professions (e.g., teachers and nurses) showed that some individual factors (e.g., self-representations) play an important role on burnout development (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; VanYperen, 1998). Self-representations drive cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvalo, 1989; Ruvalo & Markus, 1992) and can have positive effects on burnout (Cao, Chen, Tian, Diao, & Hu, 2015) and job satisfaction levels (Cowin, Johnson, Craven,

& Marsh, 2008). Specifically, distance among self-representations affected emotions (Hart, Field, Garfinkle, & Singer, 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989), and behaviors (Hart & Fegly, 1995). Few studies focused on the relationship between self-representation distance and job-related factors (Reich & Rosenberg, 2004; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997).

Previous research on burnout mainly focused on helping professions (e.g., teachers and nurses), and the few studies related to correctional officers focused mainly on environmental factors (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). Thus, the present study aimed to extend previous literature, examining the role of individual factors and considering correctional officers, that is, a sample which is quite difficult to reach. Specifically, the present study explored, for the first time to our knowledge, the role of self-representation discrepancies (future self vs. correctional officer representation) on burnout syndrome and job satisfaction, among a sample of Italian correctional officers.

#### THE BURNOUT SYNDROME AMONG CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

Freudenberger (1975) used for the first time the term burnout, referring to a sense of exhaustion and incapacity to deal with work demands. Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined burnout as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism” (p. 99) with psychological, behavioral, and physically negative outcomes for employees. The burnout syndrome is a reaction to continuing interpersonal and emotional job stress and is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal and professional accomplishment (Maslach, 1981; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), and finally, a sense of disillusionment, as a loss of enthusiasm and passion (Santinello, 2007). Burnout syndrome has been found especially in the context of helping professions, like nurses, teachers, and among correctional officers (Garland, 2002; Griffin, Hogan, & Lambert, 2012; Pines & Aronson, 1988; Prati & Boldrin, 2011).

Scholars have studied both consequences and antecedents of the burnout syndrome. Focusing on its consequences, researchers found that burnout is linked to both psychological and physical health symptoms. Regarding physical health problems, burnout has been found to be related to symptoms, such as headaches, insomnia, fatigue, and nightmares (Belcastro, 1982; Elman & Dowd, 1997; Maslach, 1981). Burnout negatively affects also psychological well-being. In particular, the burnout syndrome has been related to feelings of guilt, depression, anxiety, negative self-esteem, irritability (Belcastro, Gold, & Grant, 1982; Elman & Dowd, 1997; Honkonen et al., 2006; Maslach et al., 2001; Schulz et al., 2011).

Besides psychological and physical consequences of the burnout syndrome, researchers found that burnout has several negative effects on job quality, too. Indeed, the burnout syndrome negatively affects job satisfaction (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Shanafelt et al., 2009; Soler et al., 2008; Wolpin, Burke, & Greenglass, 1991; Ybema, Smulders, & Bongers, 2010), work performance (Shanafelt et al., 2009; West et al., 2006), absenteeism (Borritz et al., 2006; Duijts, Kant, Swaen, van den Brandt, & Zeegers, 2007; Maslach et al., 2001), intentions to leave the job, and turnover (Leiter & Maslach, 2009; Soler et al., 2008).

Fewer studies explored the consequences of burnout among prison staff. Burnout among correctional officers increases turnover (Belcastro et al., 1982; Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Lambert, Barton-Bellessa, & Hogan, 2015; Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010), absenteeism (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010), physical symptoms (Belcastro et al., 1982), and decreases satisfaction with one's own life (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Lambert et al., 2015). Several research-

ers instead focused mainly on the antecedents of the burnout syndrome among correctional workers, linking it to several work stressors. Main factors were prison overcrowding, lack of shift flexibility, role conflicts, and conflicts with administrators (Cheek & Miller, 1983; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). Furthermore, burnout among correctional workers has been linked to organizational and work environment factors, such as promotional opportunity, formalization, and instrumental communication (Dollard & Winefield, 1998; Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, 2010). Lack of social support both from managers and from coworkers showed to be another important antecedent of the burnout syndrome (Cieslak, Korczynska, Strelau, & Kaczmarek, 2008; Garland, 2004; Neveu, 2007; Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, 2010). Finally, some characteristics of the job, like variety and autonomy, increased burnout levels (Griffin et al., 2012; Lambert, Hogan, Dial, Jiang, & Khondaker, 2012).

Although most of the antecedents of burnout syndrome have been linked to organizational and environmental factors (Dollard & Winefield, 1998; Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, 2010), some researchers explored how some individual factors (Cowin et al., 2008; Thomsen, Soares, Nolan, Dallerder, & Arnetz, 1999; Villa & Calvete, 2001) might affect positively the burnout syndrome by carrying out the function of coping factors. In particular, an interesting and promising field of research focused on the role of the self-representation. How professionals perceive and represent themselves can affect several work-related outcomes; for example, a positive self-representation increased job satisfaction levels, job performance, and decreased both turnover and intentions to quit among nurses (Cowin et al., 2008; Takase, Maude, & Manias, 2006). Positive self-representation was also related to less burnout in both nurses (Cao et al., 2015; Cao, Lu, & Liu 2010; Consiglio, Borgogni, Vecchione, & Maslach, 2014; Thomsen et al., 1999) and teachers (Liu & Qin, 2005; Villa & Calvete 2001).

#### SELF-REPRESENTATION DISCREPANCIES

Behaviors, thoughts, and emotions, are affected and shaped by the representation that each individual elaborates about him/herself. Representations may refer to several domains, for instance, beliefs about ideal self, ought self, undesired selves, or future selves (Hart et al., 1997; Hewitt & Genest, 1990; Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1985; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ogilvie, 1987; Strauman & Higgins, 1988). Representations about one's own future self refer to a set of knowledge related to what one might become. When people think of or describe themselves, they will use not only knowledge about traits and characteristics they think they actually possess, but are also able to project themselves into a future dimension. In this sense, the possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) represent that set of representations about how someone will/might become in the future, or is afraid of becoming in the future. Self-representations guide thoughts, emotions, and actions, and facilitate performance through focusing on specific aims and implementing relevant strategies and plans (Castiglione, Licciardello, & Rampullo, 2015; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989).

Based on the semantic space approach (Hart et al., 1997), multiple self-representations are organized in a semantic space. One way to define the location of self-representations in the individual semantic space is based on the similarity of descriptors of self-representations. The more similar they are, the closer two representations will be in individual semantic space (Hart et al., 1997; Higgins et al., 1985).

Proximity between actual and ideal self may positively affect emotions (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989), behaviors (Hart & Fegly, 1995), and self-esteem (Hart et al., 1997), whereas proximity between self- and other-representations may positively affect social relationships (Field, Hart, & Horowitz, 1999). Instead, discrepancies (Higgins et al., 1985) and incongruences (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Rogers, 1961; Turner, 1978) between self-representations increase negative emotions, like disappointment, sadness, stress, anxiety, and depression (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989), and decrease life satisfaction and commitment to one's occupational role (Reich & Rosenberg, 2004; Sheldon et al., 1997).

#### AIM AND HYPOTHESES

The present study focuses on the relationship between discrepancies regarding self-representations, the burnout syndrome, and job satisfaction, among Italian correctional officers. Longitudinal studies on the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction have shown that the burnout syndrome is an antecedent of job satisfaction (Wolpin et al., 1991; Ybema et al., 2010). Thus, our first hypothesis was that burnout would decrease job satisfaction levels.

Another important predictor of job satisfaction is related to the self-representations. Indeed, the self-representation guides thoughts, emotions, and actions (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989; Ruvolo & Markus, 1992), and may have positive effects on burnout (Cao et al., 2015) and job satisfaction (Cowin et al., 2008), carrying out the function of a coping factor. Self-representations closeness increases positive emotions (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989) and prosocial behaviors (Hart & Fegly, 1995), whereas distance (Higgins et al., 1985) increases negative emotions (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989). Thus, our second hypothesis was that discrepancies between self-representations (future self vs. correctional officer representation) should decrease job satisfaction and increase burnout levels. Lastly, our third hypothesis was that the relationship between self-representation discrepancies and job satisfaction is mediated by burnout levels. In particular, we predicted that the discrepancy between self-representations should decrease job satisfaction by increasing burnout levels (see Figure 1).

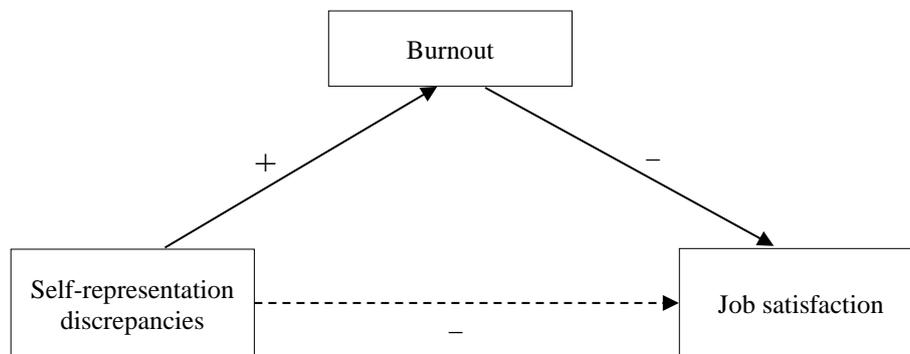


FIGURE 1

Model in which the discrepancies between future self and correctional officer predict job satisfaction through the mediation of burnout.

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## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were recruited within an Italian correctional facility; a psychology student, under supervision, collected data using a questionnaire administered in individual sessions. Participants completed an anonymous questionnaire with informed consent presented in the first page. The average time of completion was 15 minutes. The sample consisted of 87 correctional officers. Participants were 79 males and 8 females, with an average age of 44.06 years ( $SD = 7.58$ ; range 25-59) and an average of 19.81 years of work ( $SD = 7.33$ ; range 2-34).

### Measures

For data collection, the instruments used were the following.

*Link Burnout Questionnaire* (LBQ; Santinello, 2007) to measure burnout levels ( $\alpha = .96$ ). The scale was composed of 24 items about psychophysical exhaustion (e.g., "I feel physically exhausted from my work"), relationship deterioration (e.g., "My inmates seem thankless"), professional inefficacy (e.g., "I feel inadequate to face the problems of my inmates"), and disillusion (e.g., "I doubt that what I do has any value"). Items were rated on a 6-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*everyday*). Higher scores refer to higher burnout levels.

*Self-representation discrepancies* (future self vs. correctional officer). Two semantic differentials were used to measure the representations of future self and correctional officer (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1978). They were made up of 34 7-point bipolar scales (e.g., strong-weak) (Castiglione, Licciardello, Mauceri, & Rampullo, 2012; De Caroli & Sagone, 2012). The concepts were "Future self" (as I will be) ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and "Correctional officer" ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Based on the semantic space approach (Hart et al., 1997), the location of self-representations in the individual semantic space is based on the similarity of self-representation attributes (Hart et al., 1997; Higgins et al., 1985). Thus, discrepancy was operationalized as Euclidean distance (Hafsdahl, Panter, Gramzow, Sedikides, & Insko, 2000; Kirchler, Palmonari, & Pombeni, 1994) between descriptors of the future self and the correctional officer. A value of zero indicates identical descriptions of future self and correctional officer, higher values refer to higher discrepancies between them.

*Job satisfaction* was measured using a single item (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997), self-report measure. Participants were asked how much they were satisfied with their job (i.e., "I am satisfied with my job"); answers were given on a 7-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*).

*Background questionnaire*. Questions were used to collect information about age, gender, years of work.

## RESULTS

Zero-order correlations, means, and standard deviations for discrepancies between self-representations (future self vs. correctional officer), burnout, and job satisfaction are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
 Means, standard deviations, and correlations

	1	2	3
1. Future self vs. correctional officer discrepancies	1		
2. Burnout	.56**	1	
3. Job satisfaction	-.44**	-.76**	1
<i>M</i>	2.07	3.39	3.75
<i>SD</i>	0.85	1.40	2.42

Note. Burnout, range 1-6; Job satisfaction, range 1-7.  
 \*\* $p < .001$ .

To test our hypotheses we conducted a series of regression analyses. Finally, we tested mediation using Preacher-Hayes bootstrap approach (Preacher & Hayes, 2004); nonparametric bootstrap analyses are actually suitable for small samples (see also Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; Hayes, 2009). Firstly, we predicted that burnout would decrease job satisfaction. In line with our hypothesis, burnout significantly decreased job satisfaction for our participants,  $b = -1.32$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t = -10.805$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .57$ ,  $F(1, 85) = 116.747$ ,  $p < .001$ . We also predicted that discrepancies between self-representations (future self vs. correctional officer) would decrease job satisfaction and increase burnout levels. In line with our predictions, self-representation discrepancies significantly decreased job satisfaction,  $b = -1.26$ ,  $SE = .26$ ,  $t = -4.534$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .20$ ,  $F(1, 85) = 20.557$ ,  $p < .001$ , and increased burnout levels,  $b = .91$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t = 6.181$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .31$ ,  $F(1, 85) = 38.201$ ,  $p < .001$ .

When self-representation discrepancies (future self vs. correctional officer) and burnout were entered simultaneously in the model,  $R^2_{adj} = .58$ ,  $F(2, 84) = 197.464$ ,  $p < .001$ , the effect of burnout on job satisfaction was still significant,  $b = -1.29$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t(2.84) = -10.462$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that burnout significantly decreased job satisfaction after controlling for self-representation discrepancies. After controlling for burnout, self-representation discrepancies were no longer a significant predictor,  $b = -.07$ ,  $SE = .24$ ,  $t < 1$ , indicating that burnout mediates the relationship between self-representation discrepancies and job satisfaction (our third hypothesis).

To test mediation, we used bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The indirect effect ( $-1.19$ ,  $SE = .23$ ) of self-representation discrepancies on job satisfaction did not include zero, 95% CI  $[-1.68, -.75]$ , thus confirming that burnout mediates the relationship between representation discrepancies (future self vs. correctional officer) and job satisfaction (see Figure 2).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Correctional officers may experience high levels of burnout with several individual and organizational negative outcomes affecting their performance (Cheek & Miller, 1983; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). While most of studies among correctional workers

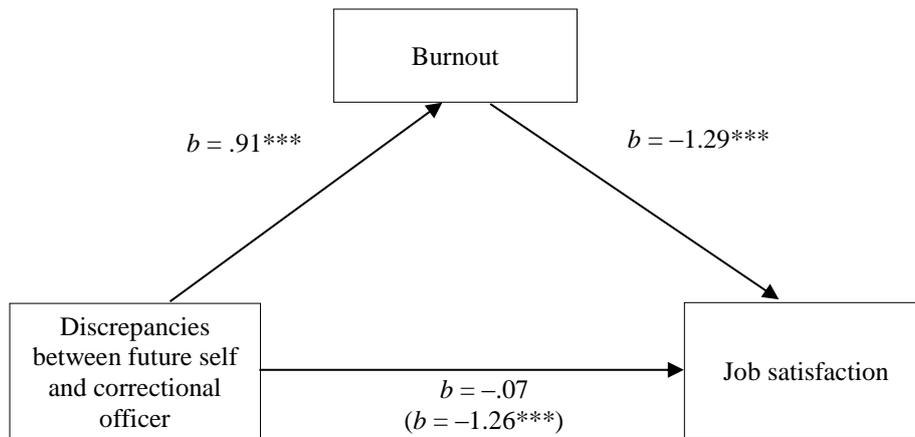


FIGURE 2

Model in which burnout mediates the relationship between self-representation discrepancies and job satisfaction.

The coefficient in parentheses refers to the total effect of representations on job satisfaction.  $***p < .001$ .

focused on organizational and environmental dimensions (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000), some individual factors (e.g., self-representations) might play an important role (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; VanYperen, 1998). Self-representations guide thoughts, emotions, and actions (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Furthermore, higher closeness between self-representations showed to affect positively individual at an emotional and behavioral level (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003), while higher distance (Higgins et al., 1985) has negative effects on individuals through increasing the experience of negative emotions (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989), and decreasing life satisfaction (Sheldon et al., 1997). Thus, the present study focused on the relationship between self-representation discrepancies, burnout syndrome, and job satisfaction among a sample of Italian correctional officers.

We predicted that burnout would decrease job satisfaction levels. We also predicted that discrepancies between self-representations (future self vs. correctional officer) would decrease job satisfaction and increase burnout levels. Lastly, we predicted that the relationship between self-representation discrepancies and job satisfaction would be mediated by burnout levels.

Confirming our first hypothesis, burnout significantly decreased job satisfaction levels. This result is in line with literature on the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, showing that the burnout syndrome may be an antecedent of job satisfaction (Wolpin et al., 1991; Ybema et al., 2010). In line with our prediction, self-representation discrepancies between future self and correctional officer decreased job satisfaction and increased burnout levels. Both results are coherent with literature on distance between self-representations (Hart et al., 1997; Higgins et al., 1985; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Previous researchers indeed showed that self-representation discrepancies are related to less satisfaction with one's own life and with negative emotions, like anxiety and depression (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989; Sheldon et al., 1997). Finally, results confirmed our third hypothesis that burnout mediates the relationship between self-representation discrepancies (future self vs. correctional officer) and job satisfaction.

Higher discrepancies between the two representations decreased satisfaction with one's job by increasing burnout levels.

A first limitation of the present study is that job satisfaction was measured using a single item. Even if the single item approach is a robust method (Nagy, 2002; Wanous et al., 1997), future studies should use other scales to deepen the relationship between self-representation discrepancies, burnout, and job satisfaction. Another limitation refers to the correlational design. Previous research addressed the causal paths from self-representation discrepancies to negative emotions and satisfaction (Hart et al., 1997; Heppen & Ogilvie, 2003; Higgins, 1989; Sheldon et al., 1997), and from burnout to satisfaction (Wolpin et al., 1991; Ybema et al., 2010), implementing other research designs (e.g., longitudinal). However, to deepen causal relationships, researchers should also consider experimental designs. Finally, our sample was mostly composed of male correctional workers. Considering the role of gender on burnout levels (Purvanova & Muros, 2010), and job dimensions (Castiglione, Licciardello, Sánchez, Rampullo, & Campione, 2013), future studies should evaluate the effect of gender on the relationship between self-representation discrepancies, burnout, and job satisfaction.

Our findings show that self-representation discrepancies increase burnout levels and decrease job satisfaction. More importantly, our results support the hypothesis that burnout mediates the relationship between self-representation discrepancies and job satisfaction, extending previous knowledge on the relationship between self-representation and burnout, and on discrepancies related to the self. These results also seem important for literature on burnout among correctional workers which has so far focused on consequences and organizational antecedents. Indeed, interventions based only on organizational factors should be extended to include individual difference variables and strategies should be implemented aimed at reducing self-representation discrepancies. Professional psychological counseling could be focused on both improving one's self-representations and supporting a positive representation of correctional officers as a group.

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