

Police & Society

Chapter 1

Police and Society

- Why do we have police?
 - What purpose do they serve?
- What do we want them to do?
- What do they do that other government agencies do not do?
- How do we want them to do it?

What Are We Doing Out There?

- What should be the function of the police?
 - If we can't agree upon the function, how can we agree on how to do it?
 - Furthermore, if we can't agree on what the police are supposed to do, how do we know if they are getting the job done & doing it properly?

What is a Law Enforcement (LE) Agency?

- This course will focus on general LE agencies that engage in the following:
 - 1) Preventing crime
 - 2) Investigating crime & apprehending criminals
 - 3) Maintaining order
 - 4) Providing other miscellaneous services

Who is a Police Officer?

Police Officer vs Peace Officer

- A police officer is a nonmilitary person who:
 - is employed by a government agency and;
 - has the legal status of a peace officer
- A peace officer is a status granted to individuals who have certain powers not available to ordinary citizens & who are provided certain legal protections
 - Police officers
 - Probation/Parole officers
 - Corrections officers

1-5

Who Is a Police Officer? (cont.)

- Powers/status usually defined by statute
- Provides certain legal protections
 - Arrest
 - Use of Force
 - Protection from liability

Myths About Policing

- Crime-fighters myth
 - Police devote the majority of their time to enforcing criminal law
 - Some people believe this is what the police *should* do
 - Crime-fighter rhetoric
 - "Thin Blue Line"
 - "fighting a war on crime"



Myths About Policing – *Sources of the Crime-Fighter Image*

- Entertainment media
- News media
- Police themselves



Myths About Policing – *Consequences of the Crime-Fighter Image*

- Crime fighter image creates a number of problems
 - Ignores realities of police work
 - Order maintenance & peacekeeping
 - Creates unrealistic expectations of the police
 - Reality is that only 20% of index crimes are solved
 - Role conflict within police forces
 - Administrators focus on small part of activities
 - Patrol vs. Detectives

The Realities of Policing

- Reality of police work is that it is diverse & complex
 - Involves a variety of tasks; only a few deal w/criminal law enforcement
 - Many tasks are extremely vague
 - Responsibilities conflict w/each other
 - Protecting rights vs. maintaining order

Factors that Shape the Police Role

- Police services are available 24 hours a day
- People call the police when everything else has failed

Quote

- "People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf."
 - George Orwell (attributed, but unconfirmed)

The Authority to Use Force

- **Coercive force** one of the most important factors shaping the police role
 - Arrest
 - Deadly force
- Limited by law
- Only in the performance of their duties
- May not use force frivolously or maliciously

Authority to Use Force (cont.)

- The use of force, or the potential use of force is central to the police role in society
 - "Every conceivable police intervention projects the message that force may be, and may have to be, used to achieve a desired objective."
 - **"Police are nothing else than a mechanism for the distribution of situationally justified force in society."**
 - Bittner

Social Control

- "The organized way in which society responds to behavior & people it regards as deviant, problematic, worrying, threatening, troublesome or undesirable in some way or another
 - Primary – Private
 - Secondary – Parochial
 - Tertiary - Public

Police & Social Control

- Democratic societies
 - Key feature – mechanisms for peaceful political change
 - Police contributions – LE & order maintenance
- Capacity of police to exercise complete social control is extremely limited
 - Heavily dependent on citizens ("coproducers")
- Police called when other social controls fail

Police & Social Control Systems

- The police are part of several different systems of social control
 - Gatekeepers of the criminal justice system
 - Social welfare system
 - Political system
- Most visible manifestations of power & authority in society

Possibilities

- Police organizations tend to be top-down, quasi-military organizations
- Some alternate possibilities
 - Problem-Oriented Policing
 - Community Policing
 - Zero-Tolerance Policing

Basic Policing Issues - *Mission*

- What is the primary mission of the dept. ?
 - How is that mission expressed?
 - How do the citizens know what it is?
 - How do the officers know what it is?
- Does the dept. have a written mission statement?
 - If so, what does it say?

Basic Policing Issues – *Patrol Operations*

- What is the place of preventive patrol operations in the mission of the dept. ?
- Is it the central aspect of dept. activities?
 - Or is it only one part of a multitask mission?
 - If central, how efficiently is it currently being operated?
 - What improvements need to be made

Basic Policing Issues – *Calls for Service*

- Does the dept. respond to each & every call for service?
- Does the dept. attempt to manage call-for-service workload through differential response?

Basic Policing Issues – *Discretion*

- What policies does the dept. maintain to control officer discretion?
- What is the current policy on use of deadly force?
- Is there a written policy on handling DV incidents?
- Is there a written policy when dealing with the mentally ill?

Basic Policing Issues – *Legitimacy & Community Relations*

- Does the public trust & have confidence in the police?
- How are the dept.'s relations with racial & ethnic minorities?
 - Is there a high level of tension & conflict?
- What kinds of programs does the department maintain to improve police-community relations?

Basic Policing Issues – *Corruption*

- Does the dept. have a reputation for corruption?
 - If it does, what evidence is there to support that reputation?
- Does the dept. have a specific anticorruption program?

Basic Policing Issues – *Accountability*

- What accountability mechanisms exist in local LE agencies?
- Is there a citizen review board?
- Does the chief have civil service protection or can he/she be fired at will?
- What kind of data are published in the annual report?
 - Does the report provide info that allows for meaningful judgments about the performance of the dept.?

Basic Policing Issues – *Personnel*

- What are the minimum recruitment standards for a LE agency?
- What is the educational level for the dept. as a whole?
- How long is the preservice training program?
- Does the curriculum contain a section on ethics?
- Is there a field training component?
- Is the training program consistent with the stated mission of the dept?
- What is the racial, ethnic, & gender composition of the different depts.?
- Does the composition of the dept. match the composition of the local population?

Basic Policing Issues – *Organization*

- What is the organizational structure of the dept. ?
 - Is it consistent with recommended standards?
- If there is a community-policing style program, is it dept.-wide or carried out by a special unit?
- Does a recognized police union represent the rank-and-file officers?
 - How powerful is it?
 - What influence does it have over policy?

What Are We Doing Out There?

- What should be the goal of the police?
 - Fight crime (enforce the law)
 - Unrealistic?
 - Does a department, a city, a police culture, impact goals?