

Police Officers II: On the Job

Chapter 6

Transformation

- “The day the new recruit walks through the doors of the police academy he leaves society behind to enter a profession that does more than give him a job, it defines who he is. For all the years he remains, closed into the sphere of rituals . . . he’ll be a cop forever.”

– Ahern

“Reality Shock”

- Encountering Citizens
 - Officer attitudes towards the public change significantly during the first weeks & months on the job
 - Changes are in part due to **hostility from citizens**
 - Complaints against officers
 - Police officers experience being stereotyped
 - React by primarily socializing with other officers
 - Attitude changes also from doing society’s “dirty work”
 - News media & public officials

“Reality Shock” (cont.)

- Encountering the Criminal Justice System
 - See how the system works from the inside
 - Generally, police officers believe the courts are too lenient
 - Officers also react negatively to the fact that they are not respected by lawyers, judges, & other actors in the system

“Reality Shock” (cont.)

- Encountering the Dept. (“Dept. politics”)
 - Affects decisions about assignments & promotions
 - Discover supervisors are incompetent & hard work is not rewarded
 - Many officers quickly conclude that the best approach is:
 - Do as little as possible
 - Avoid situations that could make trouble for them
 - Conflicts between rank/file & management

Initial Assignment

- Impact of the Seniority System
 - New officers
 - Usually assigned to patrol duty, high crime areas, night shift
 - Officers with more experience have first priority in requesting assignments
 - Eliminates favoritism and discrimination
 - But, least experienced officers get the most difficult assignments
 - Leads to the younger officers being better qualified and trained than older officers

The Idea of a Unique Police Subculture

■ Subculture

- “A group within a culture which holds ethnic, regional, or occupational significance & from which people derive distinctive values & norms.”

■ Is there a unique police subculture?

The Original Concept

■ William Westley's research

- Found a distinct subculture among police officers
 - Emphasized secrecy, solidarity, & violence
 - Police officers viewed the public as the “enemy”
 - Believe that they are justified in lying to protect other officers from criticism by citizens

Concept of a Police Subculture (cont.)

- Westley argues that police attitudes are a product of selective contact with the public
- In the face of perceived public hostility, officers believe that they can only count on other officers in times of crisis
 - Group solidarity

Consequences of Group Solidarity

- Secrecy – serves as a shield against the attacks of the outside world; justifies lying
 - Westley found that most officers believed that “illegal action is preferable to breaking the secrecy of the group”
- Violence – justifies violence against citizens
 - Officers feel a need to maintain respect in encounters with citizens

Code of Silence

- When officers refuse to testify against other officers who are accused of misconduct
- Widely recognized as the most serious obstacle to:
 - Police accountability
 - Reduction of corruption
 - Reduction of excessive force

“Working Personality”

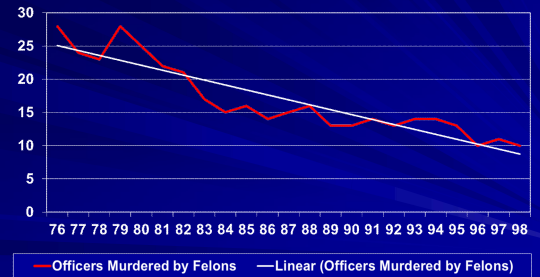
■ Jerome Skolnick

- Found that police officers develop a “working personality” shaped by:
 - Danger
 - Become routinely suspicious of people
 - Authority
 - Unique powers
 - Capacity to exercise authority further isolates officers from the public

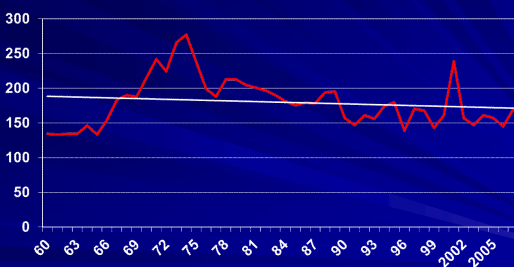
Danger: Potential vs. Reality

- Police work is dangerous
- Skolnick argues that the *potential* for danger shapes police subculture
- How dangerous is police work?
 - Not the most dangerous occupation in the US
 - However, danger is different than other occupations
 - Felonious killings of police officers
 - 1973 – 134
 - 2010 – 56

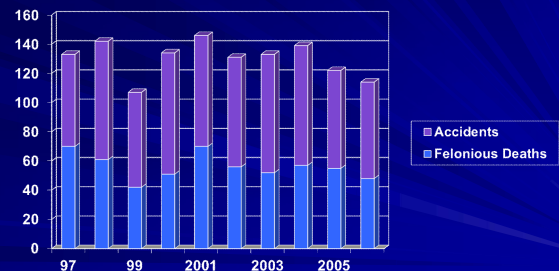
Felonious Death Rates per 100,000 Officers



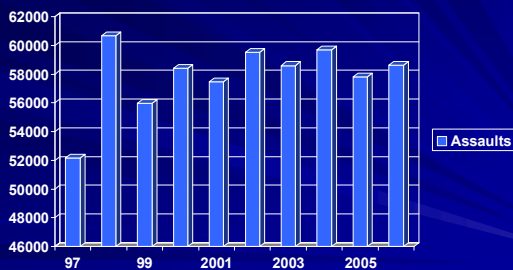
Police Office Line of Duty Deaths 1960-2007



Police Officer Deaths – Line of Duty: 1997-2006



Assaults Against Police Officers – 1997-2006



Officers Killed in the Line of Duty

- More than 18,000 police officers have been killed in the line of duty
- 1,635 died in the line of duty 1996-2006
 - An average of 163 per year
 - An average of one every 53.5 hours
- The 1970s was the deadliest decade in law enforcement history
 - An average of 274 per year
 - 1974 was the deadliest year when 275 officers were killed
- 2016
 - Line of duty deaths down 3% (97 so far this year)
 - **Gunfire deaths up 50%**

The Law vs. Pressure for Results

- Officers are under pressure to get results
- *However*, the law limits police powers
- Officers feel pressured evade or bend the rules to get the job done
 - Crime control values vs. due process values

Criticisms of the Traditional Police Subculture Concept

- Studies are flawed
 - Based on small samples
 - Imprecise in the specifications of key concepts
 - Most of the research is out of date; fails to take into account significant recent changes in police employment

New Perspective on the Police Subculture

- “Police officers are far less unified today and far less likely to have an us-them view of civilians”
- Herbert’s Dimensions of Police Subculture (factors that shape/help explain officer behavior)
 - 1) The law
 - 2) Bureaucratic control
 - 3) Culture of “adventure/machismo”
 - 4) Safety
 - 5) Competence
 - 6) Morality

The Changing Rank and File

- Women
- African Americans
- Hispanics
- Gay & lesbian officers
- Intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, & sexual identity
- Levels of education

Changing Rank and File: *The Impact of Women Police Officers*

- Breaking up the traditional solidarity of the work group
- Attitude of men toward women officers varied
 - Traditionals
 - Moderns
 - Moderates
- Percentage of women among sworn officers remains around 12%
 - “Glass ceiling” at entry level & in terms of promotion?
- Style/performance of work the same as men
- Receive fewer citizen complaints
- Less likely to use force
- Sexism & sexual harassment still an issue

Changing Rank and File: *African-American Police Officers*



- Different attitudes on police use of excessive force
- More likely to support citizen oversight
- More likely to support community policing
- More likely to live in area where they work
- Do not perform differently from white officers

Changing Rank and File: *Hispanic/Latino Officers*

- Increasing significantly in recent years
- Dual identities:
 - Police officers
 - Members of Hispanic community
- In some dept.s they are the majority
- Minority Hispanic police officers believe they are discriminated against in salary & promotions



Changing Rank and File: *Gay & Lesbian Officers*

- A number of police officers are gay or lesbian
- Some are open; have formed own organizations
 - Gay Officer Action League (GOAL) of NYC
- By 1992, at least 10 depts. openly recruited gay & lesbian officers
- Choose law enforcement for the same reasons people have traditionally chosen it
- Many experience discrimination on the job
 - Homophobic talk by other officers
 - Barriers in assignment

The Intersection of Gender, Race, Ethnicity, & Sexual Identity

- Relationships among officers of different races, genders & ethnicities are extremely complex
- Tension & conflict among different gender/race/ethnic groups
- Pattern of self-segregation
 - Limited interaction between officers of different races/genders
- “There is no credible evidence that officers of different racial or ethnic backgrounds perform differently during interactions with citizens *simply because of race or ethnicity*”
 - National Academy of Sciences

Education & Performance

- Education levels of officers have been rising
- Does education make a difference?
 - Is a police officer with a college education more effective than one with a high-school education?
- No strong evidence that educated officers perform better than officers with less education
- One study did find that college-educated officers receive fewer complaints

Cohort Effects & Organizational Effects on Performance

- Cohort effects
 - Officers hired in one decade will have different ideas and lifestyles than officers hired in later decades
 - Old street cop culture vs. new bureaucratic style
- Organizational Effects
 - The informal culture of a police organization affects officer attitudes toward certain important subjects
 - Ex: Community Policing

The Relationship Between Attitudes & Behavior

- Little evidence links attitudes to behavior
- Several factors mediate the effect of attitudes on behavior:
 - Police officers are constrained by police bureaucracy & the CJ system
 - Possibility of citizen complaint or lawsuit
 - Supervisors advice against prejudicial statements that are contrary to the values of the dept.

Styles of Police Work

- **Active officers**
 - Initiate more contacts with citizens
 - Back up officers on other calls
 - Assert control of situations
 - Make more arrests
- **Passive officers**
 - Initiate few contacts with citizens
 - Respond only to calls to which they are dispatched
 - Make few traffic stops/ field interrogations / arrests

Moving Through Police Careers

- **Salaries & Benefits**
 - Job security
 - Salary increase through promotion
 - Incentive pay for college education
 - Overtime
- **In-Service Training**
 - Pre-service academy training
 - Field training program
 - Regular in-service training

Career Development

- **Promotion**
 - Severely limited
 - Irregular intervals
 - Formal testing
- **Assignments to special units**
 - Discretion of chief & seniority constraints
 - Coveted assignments
 - More challenging
 - May lead to promotion
- **Lateral entry**
 - The opportunity to move to other police dept.s
- **Outside Employment**
 - Supplement incomes

Performance Evaluations

- **Effective performance evaluations systems are critical**
 - Establishes who should be promoted
 - IDs problems
- **However, evals not always accurate**
 - Definitions not clear
 - Halo effect
 - Rating of all officers tend to cluster around one numerical level
 - Tendency to rate everyone highly

Job Satisfaction

- **5 categories of job satisfaction:**
 - 1) Nature of police work
 - 2) Organizational factors such as:
 - Perceived support from leaders
 - Relations with fellow officers
 - Opportunities for career advancement
 - 3) Relations with the community
 - 4) Relations with the media & the political establishment
 - 5) Personal or family factors that influence a person's job

Job Stress

- **Sources of Job Stress**
 - Threat of danger
 - Citizen disrespect & challenge to police authority
 - Police dept. itself
 - For female officers, sexual harassment & sexism
- **Coping with Job Stress**
 - Many departments have programs to help officers cope with stress & other personal problems
 - EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
 - CIMT (Critical Incident Management Team)

The Rights of Police Officers

- Same constitutional & civil rights as other citizens
 - Garrity
- Protected by 1st Amendment to belong to unpopular religious or political groups
- Police Officer's Bill of Rights
 - Protects officers under investigation for alleged misconduct
- Turnover/attrition
 - Approx. 5% of officers leave police work per yr