Beginning Police Work

Reality Shock: The astonishment a new police officer experiences during the first weeks and months on the job when encountering the unpleasant aspects of dealing with the public, the criminal justice system, and the department.
Encountering Citizens
- Officers rank importance of “listening attentively when the victim expresses feelings” lower after only 4 months on the job
- Hostility (~10% of all encounters)
- Politicians
- Media
- Citizen complaints
- Worst of humanity -- violence, atrocity, people with problems (not much contact with average person)
- Lack of respect from public
- Being stereotyped
- Uncomfortable reactions of public to badge, gun, power

----> Lead to socializing with other police, formation of exclusive subculture
Reality Shock

**Encountering the Criminal Justice System**

- Police officers as “insiders”
- See the reality of the system
  - Cases dismissed, plea-bargains, incompetence
  - Cynical about ability of the system to be fair or effective
  - Belief that courts are too lenient
  - Lack of respect from attorneys and judges
    - Education
    - Attempts to discredit, embarrass

**Encountering the Department**

- Department politics
  - Assignments and promotions
  - Hard work is not always recognized or rewarded
  - Incompetence and lack of trust in superiors
Initial Assignment

Impact of the Seniority System
- Officers with more experience have first priority in requesting assignments
  (+) Eliminates favoritism and discrimination
- Least experienced officers get the most difficult assignments
  (-) Patrol, worst areas, busiest shifts, weekends, holidays
  (+) New officers gain great deal of experience
The Idea of a Unique Police Subculture

- A particular set of values, beliefs, and acceptable forms of behavior characteristic of a group

- William Westley: occupational sociology study
  - Distinct police subculture exists that emphasizes
    - Group solidarity (grows from common experiences)
    - Violence (ability to use and justify)
    - View that public is the enemy (grows from selective contact)
    - Secrecy, “Code of silence” (consequence of group solidarity and public hostility)
  
  - Code of silence prevents
    - Police accountability
    - Reduction of corruption
    - Detection of corrupt/violent officers
Code of Silence

- Also known as the “blue curtain,” or “blue wall”
- Code of honor among police officers whereby officers refuse to testify against corrupt colleagues, creating a veil of secrecy around police actions.
- Secrecy: In this context, it is the attitude displayed by police officers to the rest of the world. Police officers keep secret the misbehaviors of other police officers.

- What happens to officers who break the code of silence?
The Idea of a Unique Police Subculture

**Jerome Skolnick**
- Develop “working personality” shaped by danger and authority
- Suspicion of all people, on-guard
- Develop “visual shorthand” to size up level of danger based on sex, age, race, apparent income level, style or dress
- May lead to stereotyping and racial profiling

**The Capacity to Use Force**
- No other occupation has power to take away liberty through force

**Danger: Potential versus Actual**
- Threat of injury or death by criminal means (vs accident in other professions)
- Lack of control
- *Potential* for danger is high, though police work has become safer in the last 20 years

**Conflicting demands: Law versus Order**
- Pressure to bend or evade the rules to get evidence or confessions
Number of LEO deaths by gunfire in U.S. since 1960.
New Perspective on the Police Subculture

- David Sklansky: “Police officers are far less unified today and far less likely to have an us-them view of civilians”
  - Education, professionalization (less macho, less cowboy), more accountability
- Criticism of Westley & Skolnick’s work as “primarily mere opinion”
- Police are really more average, less different than previously thought
  - Slightly more conservative than general population
  - Slightly more idealistic (recruits)
New Perspective on the Police Subculture

Steve Herbert’s Dimensions of Police Subculture at LAPD

- Six factors shape & explain police officer behavior
  - **The law** defines boundaries of permissible actions
  - Subject to *bureaucratic control* by members of department and justice system
  - *Culture of “adventure/machismo”* fosters respect of aggressive police work
  - Concern for one’s own safety
  - **Competence:** officers take pride in their own competence and respect other officers who are competent
  - **Moral judgments:** those whom police judge to be “good” moral people deserve better treatment than those whom police judge to be “bad” moral people

- Identification with and empathy for “good” people -- lack of empathy for “bad” people
New Perspective on the Police Subculture

- Herbert
  - morally neutral factors shape police attitudes
  - subculture exists but is not unique, distinct or pathological

- Westley & Skolnick
  - Negative factors shape distinct subculture

Which theory do you believe is most correct?
Which aspects do you most agree and disagree with?
Are these theories adequate? If not, what are they missing?
Are there any logical extensions you can make from the theories?
The Changing Rank and File

- Women
- African Americans
- Hispanics
- Asians
- Gay & Lesbian Officers
- Levels of Education

- Emphasis on diversity
The Impact of Women Police Officers

- Susan Martin:
  - Breaks up the traditional solidarity of the work group
  - Different outside interests, expression of traditional male characteristics, friendships
- Attitude of men toward women officers varies
  - Traditional / Moderns / Moderates
- Percentage of women among sworn officers remains around 13-14%
  - “Glass ceiling” at entry level and in terms of promotion
- Style of work the same as men
- Receive fewer citizen complaints
- Less likely to use force
- Sexism and sexual harassment still an issue
  - More subtle than in early years
The Impact of Women Police Officers

- What is sexual harassment?
  - Unwanted sexual advances
  - Offensive or demeaning sexually-related behavior
  - Discrimination in assignments or promotion

- Responses of female officers to sexual harassment
  - Under-reporting
    - Tendency of departments to not investigate complaints or to not discipline officers
  - Deflection
  - Direct protest to offending person
African-American Police

- Different attitudes on police use of excessive force
- NBPOA published a pamphlet urging officers to report incidents of misconduct and brutality
- More likely to support citizen oversight
- More likely to support community policing
- More likely to live in area where they work
- No significant difference in policing or conduct between African American and white officers
Hispanic/Latino Officers

- Increasing significantly in recent years
- Dual identities: both police officers and members of Hispanic community
- In some departments, they are the majority
- Minority Hispanic police officers believe they are discriminated against in salary and promotions
Gay and Lesbian Officers

- Gay Officer Action League (GOAL) of NYC (1982)
- By 1992, at least 10 depts in US actively recruited gay and lesbian officers
- NYC: police union and religious organizations tried to block the recruitment of gay & lesbian officers
- Choose law enforcement for the same reasons other people have traditionally chosen it
- Many have experienced discrimination on the job
  - Homophobic talk by other officers (67%)
  - Barriers in promotion (22%)
  - Barriers in assignment (17%)
The Intersection of Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Sexual Identity

- Relationships among officers of different races, genders, ethnicities and sexual identities are extremely complex
- Tension and conflict among groups
- Pattern of self-segregation
  - Limited interaction between officers of different groups
- “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
Levels of Education

- Education level of officers has been rising

- Education generation gap between younger, better-educated officers and veteran officers with less education

- No strong evidence that higher education leads to better performance on the street
Effects on Performance

- **What is a cohort?**

- **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
  - Ex) 1960’s cops and Supreme Court decisions

- **Organizational Effects**
  - The culture of a police department affects officer attitudes toward certain important subjects
  - Ex: Community Policing, searches and seizures, *Miranda* rights, etc.
The Relationship Between Attitudes and Behavior

- It is not necessarily true that people who express prejudicial *attitudes* also express prejudicial *behaviors*.

- Several factors mediate the effect of attitudes on behavior:
  - 1. Police officers are constrained by police bureaucracy and the criminal justice system.
  - 2. Possibility of citizen complaint or lawsuit.
  - 3. In a professional department, supervisors advise against prejudicial statements that are contrary to the values of the department.
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 and Benefits**
  - Benefits, job security, overtime
  - Salary increase through promotion, tied to rank
  - Incentive pay for college education, bilingualism, hazardous duty, shift differential

- **In-Service Training**
  - Preservice academy training
  - Field training program
  - Continuing professional training (x number of hours/year)
    - Perishable skills, updated policies, new laws, firearms re-certification
Career Development

- Promotion
  - Limited opportunities
  - Irregular intervals
  - Formal testing
  - Few openings

- Assignments to special units
  - Discretion of chief
  - Seniority constraints
  - Politics of dept

- Coveted assignments
  - More challenging
  - May lead to promotion and recognition of ability

- Lateral entry
  - The opportunity to move to other police departments is very limited

- Outside employment
  - Supplemental income
  - Private security
  - Any problems with this?
Performance Evaluations

- Annual evaluations are meant to identify and reward good performance and correct poor performance

- Problems
  - Definition of “effective police work”
  - Inconsistency / lack credibility
  - Incident --> reputation --> halo effect
  - Rating of all officers tend to cluster around one numerical level
  - Tendency to rate everyone highly
  - Insufficient or no mechanism for evaluating conflict defusion
Job Satisfaction

- Job satisfaction or lack thereof
  - Nature of police work: working with people, serving the community, excitement, action
  - Organizational factors: recognition for good work, perceived support from leaders, relations with fellow officers, and opportunities for career advancement
  - Relations with the community: cooperation from citizens, presence or absence of conflict
  - Relations with the media and the political establishment: positive or negative portrayal and support
  - Personal or family factors: presence or absence of conflict b/t job and family, presence or absence of family problems
Job Stress

Sources of Job Stress

- Threat of danger
- Citizen disrespect and challenge to police authority
- Police department itself
- For female officers: sexual harassment and sexism
- Coping with Job Stress: many departments have programs to help officers cope with stress and other personal problems
The Rights of Police Officers

- Same constitutional and civil rights as other citizens
- Protected by first amendment to belong to unpopular religious or political groups
  - Political or religious activity on the job is not permitted (as in most professions)
- Police Officer’s Bill of Rights
  - Entitled to procedural due process: informed of charges, right to an attorney
  - May not be fired or disciplined without adequate cause
  - Protects officers under investigation for alleged misconduct
Attrition

- Turnover: about 5% annually
- Retirement, death, dismissal, layoff
- Voluntary resignation
  - Career stagnation, intense and accumulated frustration, lack of fulfillment, family considerations, conduct of coworkers, departmental policies, new employment opportunities
- Women: 6.3% annually
  - Inadequate pregnancy leave
  - Environment more hostile