THE SOCIOPATHIC POLICE PERSONALITY: IS IT A PRODUCT OF THE "ROTTEN APPLE" OR THE "ROTTEN BARREL?"

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The "Rotten Apple" theory states that deviant police officers are those who psychological testing fails to screen out. This concept is favored by police administrators because it offers a quick and easy solution to police deviant behavior. However, there is a growing body of literature that suggests that it is the stressful occupation that is policing that is the fertile soil from which police deviant behavior springs otherwise known as the "Rotten Barrel" theory. This article shall explore police deviant behavior from the perspective that it is the "Rotten Barrel" that leads to police deviant behavior.

Incidents involving police use of excessive force are witnessed across the country nearly every day, and seem to be unending. The roll call of such inhumanity include the following:

1) The beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles,

2) The killing of Freddie Vela, a Detroit youth shot while riding his bike by an intoxicated police officer that had been involved in a one-car traffic accident,

3) Malice Green, beaten to death by Detroit police officers who were later convicted of his murder,

4) Jose Iuralde, an unarmed homeless man shot several times by Detroit police officers,

5) Richard Tromer, who died from a severe beating and strangulation in July 1994 while in protective custody by Detroit Police,.

6) Jorge Guillen, a Latino under treatment for schizophrenia allegedly beaten by Chicago, police. He died from asphyxiation, left for dead in his own blood,

7) Abner Louima of New York City, who suffered unspeakable horrors at the hands of New York City police officers,

8) Franklyn Reed, a Black male 27, who was shot in the back by a Litchfield, Conn. police officer while on his knees and hands raised in January, 1999

9) and last, but certainly not least, Amadou Diallo, a Black immigrant from Guinea, who was unarmed but nevertheless died in a hail of 41 shots by New York police officers who had mistaken him for a rape suspect in February, 1999 just to name a few.

Unfortunately, police use of excessive force and involvement in other deviant behavior is not just a contemporary problem, and it does not appear to have a simple solution. The question here is the problem due to a few "rotten apples" in policing, or are these acts of deviance a result of the "rotten barrel?" That is to say, is it that psychological testing is incapable of weeding out unsuitable applicants as many have claimed (Neal, 1986; Shaw, 1986; Blum, 1964), or is it as others have claimed in that the working environment of policing promotes this brand of deviance (Van Laere & Geerts, 1984; Slovak, 1983; Barker, 1978; Barker, 1976; Barker & Roebuck, 1973; Kuykendall, 1971). The focus of this analysis will be on the sociopathic, or antisocial, personality manifest in many police officers. Attention will be given to environmental stresses which increase the likelihood of criminal behavior within police departments and the influence of the police subculture on new recruits.

THE SOCIOPATHIC PERSONALITY

The term sociopath was introduced in 1930 to describe individuals who had a "disposition to violate social norms of behavior" (Lykken, 1996, p. 29). In 1994 the American Psychiatric Association provided a more detailed definition in their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). The DSM-IV states that "there is a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others occurring since the age 15 years" (Schneiderman, 1996, p. 54) and can be identified through a combination of three or more of the following:
1) failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest
2) deceitfulness, as indicated by repeatedly lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure
3) impulsivity or failure to plan ahead
4) irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by physical fights or assaults
5) reckless disregard for safety of self or others
6) consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial situations
7) lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another (p. 54).

Two types of sociopaths have been identified, primary and secondary sociopaths. Primary sociopaths are individuals who are thought to be predisposed to antisocial behavior through their genotype. This means that they are born with a predisposition towards this behavior. Secondary sociopaths refer to those who become antisocial because of environmental factors (Mealey, 1995). External factors such as police subcultural norms, peer influence, and economic factors may lead some officers to believe that antisocial or deviant behavior is the most appropriate and most beneficial approach to their role as a police officer. The environment in which police officers work offers unlimited opportunities for corruption and deceit, and these environmental factors may lead to sociopathic behavior. With little or no supervision on the streets, each officer must

make the decision on whether or not s/he will abuse the power and authority vested in them (Kappeler et als., 1998).

The extent to which police officers may abuse their authority seems limitless as does the extent fellow officers will go to protect each other. The loyalty and "brotherhood" of the police that appeals to so many has caused many officers to neglect their primary duty: to protect and to serve (Kappeler et als., 1998).

THE ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY AND THE SECONDARY SOCIOPATH

Lykken (1996) described sociopaths as antisocial personalities whose behavior is a consequence of social or family dysfunction. This coincides with the previously described secondary sociopaths who become antisocial due to environmental and social factors (Mealey, 1995). The police subculture, which includes rules, norms and traditions, plays a significant role in how officers perceive their job. In a setting where deviance, misconduct and corruption are the norm, new recruits find themselves in a position where they must take part in these activities in order to be accepted by their peers. In reference to the informal sanctions within the police subculture, Kappeler et als., (1998) suggest that "police who step beyond the bounds of acceptable conduct may be isolated by their peers and, in some cases, may even be placed in life-threatening situations" (p. 17).

What is considered acceptable conduct varies from one department to another but may include a myriad of activities from accepting gratuities and fixing traffic tickets to engaging in criminal activity (Kleinig, 1996), or sleeping, drinking and having sex on the job (Kappeler et als., 1998). For example in 1973, 35 police officers were suspended from the Memphis Tennessee Police Department for being involved in a sex scandal in which as many as 200 officers may have been involved (Barker, 1978).

Barker (1978) identified three elements leading to occupational deviance: opportunity structure, socialization through occupational experiences, and reinforcement and encouragement from peers. He also pointed out the strong influence the police subculture has, especially on those who already have specific personality traits or are predisposed to deviant behavior. The infamous "blue wall of silence" and the emotional bonds between officers keep many of these instances of deviant behavior from being found out. Also, as time goes by, police begin to view the public as their enemies and this causes their antisocial behavior to increase.

In a study of police subculture, Herbert (1998) described six normative orders that structure the social world of the police: "law, bureaucratic control, adventure/machoism, competence, and morality" (p. 361). He pointed out that in order to understand the police subculture we must first explore the rules and practices that influence their decisions. Combining these factors, often which contradict one another, lead officers to turn to each other for support and understanding, strengthening and reinforcing the wall of silence already in place.

POLICE PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING

The list of psychological tests used to test the suitability of applicants for the job of police officer are legion. A list of 55 of the various psychological tests used in screening police officers are as follows:

16 Personality Factors Test
Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values
Army General Classification Test
Beta Test
California Psychological Inventory
Cornell Word Form - 2
Draw-a-Person Test
Edwards Personal Preference Schedule
F Scale
Flanigan Aptitude Classification Test
Goals & Ambitions Survey
Guilford-Zimmerman Interest Inventory
Inwald Personality Inventory
MMPI
Neiderhoffer Cynicism Scale
Otis Quick Scoring Mental Ability Tests
Police Information Questionnaire Test
Psychiatric Interview
Rokeach Preference Record
Rorschach Test
Skills and Attributes Inventory
State-Trait Anxiety Inventory
Strong Vocational Interest Blank
Taylor-Johnson Profile Analysis
Thorndike Aptitude Test
Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal
Wechsler-Bellvue Test
Work Environment Preference Schedule

Adams-Tepley Personnel Audit
Allport-Vernon Scale of Values
Bender-Gestalt Test
Bull Session Test
Cattell Intelligence Test
Culture Fair Intelligence Test
Drawings Personality Test
Eysenck Personality Inventory
Fear Index: Gross/Fine Motor Coord.
Forced Role Decisions
Gordon Personal Profile
House-Tree-Person Test
Kuder Preference Record - Personal
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
Nelson-Denny Reading Test
Police Aptitude Test
Police Opinion Test
Quick Test
Role Preferences
Sentence Completion Test
SPY Scale
Strong Campbell Interest Inventory
Szondi Test
Thematic Apperception Test
Thurston Temperament Schedule
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale
Wide Range Achievement Test

(Alpert, 1993; Baehr & Oppenheim, 1979; Johnson, 1983; Murphy, 1972; Spielberger, et al., 1979; Wrobleski & Hess, 1993.)

Despite the existence of all of these tests for screening out unsuitable applicants for the job of police officer, according to the "Rotten Apple" theory, unsuitable applicants still slip through. This raises the question, "Is the apple rotten before it enters the barrel, or does the barrel cause the apple to become rotten?"

THE COP/CRIMINAL CONNECTION

Reming (1988) studied the personality characteristics of habitual criminals and compared them to those of "supercops." In this study, supercops were described as a

"subgroup of officers who distinguish themselves by their sustained high productivity as measured by the number of self-initiated felony arrests" (p. 163). Reming found that these police officers responded to stimuli in a manner similar to those of habitual criminals. Based on these results, the characteristics of "supercops" were similar and perhaps even interchangeable with those of habitual criminals. Both groups were characterized as having dispositions toward control, aggressiveness, vigilance, rebelliousness, high energy level, frankness in expression, intense personal relationships, high self-esteem, feelings of uniqueness, extroversion, sociability, jealousy, possessiveness of sexual partner, tendency not to change opinion easily, philandering and a tendency to avoid blame (p. 166).

These police officers were held in high esteem by their peers for their arrest statistics and technical job performance. High arrest rates do not necessarily deter crime, leading one to question the criteria used to evaluate police job performance. An example of this type of officer was New York City Transit Police Officer Peter Marsala. Marsala was known as a hero and had been cited for bravery 12 times while he was on the job. During his career, he pulled nearly 20 people from between subway cars and saved 12 people from a burning building (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993). He was a hero to all until he assaulted a passenger for violating the anti-smoking regulation of the subway. Marsala was sentenced to 28 months in prison, because the man he attacked sustained permanent brain damage.

FACTORING IN THE CODE OF SILENCE

The level to which these activities occur is not known for several reasons, the major being "The Blue Curtain" (Goldstein, 1991). The loyalty officers feel toward each other frequently hides and covers-up police corruption and criminal behavior. In many cases when the public sees a police officer engaging in misconduct, they do not report it believing that those to whom they would make the report would be a part of the same police brotherhood. The public is aware of the police "The Blue Curtain" but are unwilling to risk their own safety by trying to eradicate it.

This code of silence is also strengthened by the considerable emotions that come with police work. Police officers are trained to be suspicious of everything around them. An officer who is not suspicious may overlook a criminal act which may lead to injury or death. With this suspicion comes cynicism, a deep-seated distrust of basic human goodness (Balch, 1972). Balch also found that 73% of the police officers interviewed thought that the public disliked the police, and that the media preferred to place them in an unfavorable light as well. It is these beliefs that police officers use to justify their behavior toward the public.

THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY

Comparable to the sociopathic, antisocial personality is the authoritarian personality. This police personality has been characterized as "conservative, aggressive, cynical and rigid" (Kappeler et al., 1998, p. 93). Police officers have also been described as being "submissive to superiors but are intolerant toward those who do not submit to their own

authority" (p. 94). This type of personality can be seen in all levels of police agencies. Rookies who have no superiority over anyone in their own occupational subculture can, in turn, impose their authority onto the public. This may lead to deviant behavior and abuse of authority, including use of excessive force and accepting bribes and gratuities. In an explanation of police authoritarianism, Balch (1972) indicated that authoritarian individuals enter policing by: 1) self-selection, 2) weeding out liberals, and 3) recruitment from an authoritarian class of people. Self-selection suggests that people who apply for police work already possess authoritarian characteristics. Balch noted that liberals do not tend to apply for police work. In socioeconomic terms, policing offers good pay, security and a possible advance in social status to many in the working class. Many applicants do not have a college education, and the policing occupation is an opportunity for them to become a figure of authority.

Balch pointed to the similarities between known personality traits of many police officers and the F-Scale which is used to define authoritarianism. The following are the elements of the authoritarian F-Scale:
> a. Conventionalism: rigid adherence to conventional, middle-class values.
> b. Authoritarian Submission: submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the in-group.
> c. Authoritarian Aggression: tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values.
> d. Anti-intraception: opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tender-minded.
> e. Superstition and Stereotypy: the belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate; the disposition to think in rigid categories.
> f. Power and "toughness": preoccupation with the dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower dimension; identification with power figures; overemphasis upon the conventionalized attributes of the ego; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness.
> g. Destructiveness and Cynicism: generalized hostility, vilification of the human.
> h. Projectivity: The disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outwards of unconscious emotional impulses.
> i. Sex: Exaggerated concern with sexual "goings-on." (p. 107).

Balch suggests that the only element of the F-Scale that has not been used in connection with police officers is superstition. Every other element has been used to describe police officers, many of which have already been discussed.

With the role of authority comes the possibility of abusing that authority, an example of which is the case of *Parrish v. Luckie* (Kappeler & Vaughn, 1997). Officer Donnell Luckie was on the scene of a drug arrest in which Parrish was involved. The arresting officer decided that Parrish would not be arrested but Officer Luckie falsely arrested her, locked her in his cruiser and raped her. After numerous complaints by Parrish, Luckie was brought to court where he pleaded guilty to first degree sexual abuse. Charges were also brought against Chief Dale Bruce and the City of North Little Rock. The court charged

Bruce with implementing "a policy of avoiding, ignoring, and covering up complaints of physical and sexual abuse by Luckie and other officers" (p. 358).

Prior to this incident, Luckie had been involved in felony child abuse charges, disorderly conduct, and complaints of sexual harassment by two other women. This case demonstrates not only the existing problem of police misconduct, but of administrative cover-ups previously mentioned. Indeed, the "The Blue Curtain" was maintained by every level of the police department including the chief of police himself.

BREAKING UNDER THE PRESSURE: STRESS AND ALCOHOLISM

In addition to the code of silence, there are numerous other on-the-job pressures that affect a police officer. Their routine involves unusual working hours, scattered weekends, excessive overtime, court appearances, and the constant presence of a gun (Territo & Vetter, 1981). It is only natural that police officers feel stress from dealing with emotionally charged situations every day. The stress can become overwhelming.

In order to deal with the people and situations with which they come in contact, police officers learn to suppress their emotions. In many cases, stress is known to lead to depression and suicide. In a 1950 study on occupational suicide, police were found to have the second highest rate of suicide (Territo & Vetter, 1981). Research has also shown that three-fourths of all heart attacks suffered by police officers are due to job-related stress (Territo & Vetter, 1981). Stress is also known to lead to alcoholism and broken marriages, problems very often encountered in the privates lives of police officers. Police officers suffering from alcoholism run into further complications. Some of these include:

> higher than normal absentee rate prior to and immediately before the officer's regular day off; complaints of insubordination by supervisors; complaints by citizens of misconduct in the form of verbal and physical abuse; intoxication during regular working hours; involvement in traffic accidents while under the influence of alcohol on and off duty; and reduced overall performance (p. 198).

CONCLUSION

Early intervention is crucial for officers showing signs of stress, anxiety, depression or any other negative behavior. While there is no way of eliminating stress from the lives of police officers, steps can be taken to recognize and reduce stress. Before police applicants are hired, they must pass physical, written and psychological tests. There appears to be some agreement that pre-employment psychological testing has been shown to screen out some applicants for the policing occupation. Additional emphasis on the post-hire psychological testing may well serve to detect those officers who either failed to be screen out by pre-employment testing or those who have become psychologically impaired by the day-to-day stress that is so much a part of policing. Also, those who are hired should receive stress management training in addition to learning policing techniques. Previous

examples have shown that police abuse of authority, corruption, and brutality are not caused by lack of police training, but a lack of emotional well-being and stability.

In order to minimize alcohol abuse, administrators and supervisors need to be aware of the warning signs of alcoholism and the effects alcohol has on an individual's personality. Some of the most prevalent warning signs of alcoholism, as described by the Psychological Services Unit of the Dallas Police Department include: sudden changes in behavior, increased sick time, erratic work habits, excessive worrying, fatigue and sexual promiscuity (Territo & Vetter, 1981). Recognizing these symptoms can lead to early intervention, thereby lessening the negative effect this officer will have on himself and the community.

As previously mentioned, stress is one of the primary factors leading to marital issues, depression, alcoholism and suicide in policing. Departments should also have in place services to aid officers with alcohol dependence or psychological problems. Many police officers do not feel comfortable speaking of personal issues with strangers, but an in-house program would be effective providing the problem is discovered and addressed in a timely fashion.

While all these suggestions are important, they will not be useful unless the officer recognizes the need for help, and those around the officer are sympathetic to what s/he is experiencing. With a reduction of job stress, or at least available resources to reduce job stress, job performance will increase as well as the officer's well-being, and this has the potential to translate into more positive police/citizen contact.

However, eliminating individuals with sociopathic tendencies, offering programs to reduce stress and encouraging alcoholic police officers to seek help is only the beginning. The amount of police officers who are already sociopathic and participating in criminal acts is undetermined. Yet, the longer these officers are allowed to continue their deviant behavior, the more legitimized it will become in their minds as well as in the minds of their confederates. If no attempt is made to cause them to cease their deviant behavior, they will assume that no one cares.

Police departments should provide ongoing education for their officers with regard to social and moral problems as they impact policing. Police supervisors must be more alert to the warning signs and work closely with their subordinates in order that they might detect any behavioral changes or problems before they manifest themselves as deviant behavior. Lax supervision is one of the main problems concerning police criminal behavior. Selection of qualified supervisors is essential if there is going to be a positive change in policing. Many of the situations involving police misconduct could be avoided if proper supervision was implemented and practiced.

Recognizing the signs of job stress, proper supervision, the breaking down of the blue wall of silence, educating officers and working closely with the public are positive steps. But beyond that, police officers must have a genuine desire to change, and seek the

counsel that will assist them in dealing with the pressures of their chosen occupation. With the increase of media exposure, the public has become more aware of police deviant behavior. If this deviant behavior is not addressed, this could very well lead to dangerous confrontations and unnecessary deaths.

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