

# Special Training Programs are Necessary to Combat Police Cynicism That Hamper the Success of Community-Centered Policing Efforts

Renee A. Pistone\*

Legal Studies Department, Wilmington University, Dover, Delaware, U. S. A.

## Abstract

This article examines the role of occupational cultures and the socialization of the police workgroup as it studies police behavior and cynicism, in particular. Skolnick (1994) discussed the symbolic assailant and the influences of geographic area on police perception of events. While, Haberfeld and Cerrah (2008) highlighted the reasons why strong community-centered policing depends largely on support from community leaders. The setting where policing takes place influences police behavior that fuels cynicism that results in less police discretion. A decrease in police discretion proves harmful to perceptions of police professionalism and will undermine efforts to increase community-centered policing programs. This article chronicles findings in key studies and concludes that training programs are needed to combat the harmful effects from growing police cynicism.

## Keywords

Police Behavior, Discretion, Community

Received: May 25, 2015 / Accepted: May 31, 2015 / Published online: July 9, 2015

© 2015 The Authors. Published by American Institute of Science. This Open Access article is under the CC BY-NC license.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

## 1. Introduction

The composition of police workgroups are a main factor that influences law enforcement viewpoints. Haberfeld and Cerrah (2008) explained that workgroups provide information about the environment that police officers work in. These group interactions lead officers to be less trustful of people who are not part of the law enforcement community (Skolnick, 2011). Workgroups help shape the officer's attitudes and procedures for carrying out the job (Bayley & Bittner, 1984). Workgroup socialization can also impact the officer's choices when to employ discretionary measures and when not to. Communities are impacted by an officer's decision to employ discretion because the choice directly impacts relations between community leaders and the law enforcement community (Brown, 1988). It is important to study these contexts because fostering good relations

between law enforcement and the communities they serve is of primary importance for both parties wellbeing. The future training and development programs should consider the many aspects along with any barriers to implementing a community-centered policing strategy.

## 2. Bias in the Workgroup or Agency Culture

The issues associated with law enforcement and their marked distrust of community members continues to be studied and documented (Haberfeld & Cerrah, 2008). According to Skolnick (2011), law enforcement tends to be exposed to supervisors who have strong views about communities. In fact, the bias that stems from the workgroup culture becomes less individualized as the officer becomes fully immersed in the group (Paoline, 2001). The trend, post-911, appears to be that police work is increasingly becoming more tied to

\* Corresponding author

E-mail address: [rpistone@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:rpistone@fas.harvard.edu)

policing strategies that are more community-centered (Sparrow, 1992). Using community-centered crime reports, this study will examine law enforcement attitudes. Here, it is stressed, as a future recommendation, that changes should be made, since effective community policing largely depends on community support.

### **3. Changing Agency Culture Through Training**

Proposed changes should try to generate a shift in agency culture by attempting to focus on the socialization process. Therefore, changes will likely only come about through learning, training, and development. And the carriers of the culture, the established and more senior officials, would have to embrace new concepts for any shift to take hold (Cochran & Bromely, 2003). It is of primary importance to coordinate training programs that develop officers as individuals (DeJong, 2004). These specific training activities may be more likely to lessen the promulgation of occupational attitudes that stem from the agency's culture. That socialization process is replaced, through increased training and development, with a more community-centered approach. This form of specialized training places the value of establishing a rapport with the community as more centrally important and vital than anything else. This helps the officer to bond more with the community and can save lives through mutual understanding. It is further argued that setting influences police behavior adding to cynicism that will prove harmful to police professionalism and impact everyone's safety.

### **4. Occupational Attitudes**

The growing police cynicism results from frequent and increased interactions with occupational cultures and leads to decreased police discretion within the particular community being served. Empirical research that had been conducted focused primarily on the correlations between attitude and behavior (Manning, 2005). We have learned that gender and race contribute to an officer's attitudes about police work. This trend encouraged an agency to move in the direction of recruitment of more minorities and females. According to Carlan (2007), this diversity affects officer's occupational attitudes. These attitudes are what come to explain the differences in most officers' actions out in the field working with members of the community. A lack of diversity will explain why police officers employ discretionary measures within the community. This requires a closer examination of the relationship between an officer's own attributes or background and the occupational attitudes that he or she

holds. According to a study by Moon and Zager (2007), the most fundamental place to begin is with an officer's perceptions. The officer's unique perceptions could provide details about why there are differences in an officer's discretionary actions depending upon the setting (Moon & Zager, 2007).

### **5. Gender, Race, and Context**

DeJong (2004) used data from over 6,135 encounters from the Project on Policing Neighborhoods (POPEN) study. There were two departments studied and the focus was on the officer's characteristics including gender and race as a way to determine the officer's viewpoints (DeJong, 2004). This study concluded that gender was not a direct correlation for the officer's distrust of citizens in the community. In short, the study concluded that non-Caucasian males and college-educated females were more likely not to trust community members. Meanwhile, Worden (1993) conducted a study of 740 officers that included 24 departments. It targeted specific officer characteristics that included: race, gender, and length of service. It had revealed that male minorities and females favored legal control and regulation over police work as opposed to other officer's with different racial backgrounds. Interestingly, Worden (1993) had concluded that there was a marked failure of gender to truly explain the variation in occupational attitudes that were examined. Clearly, there is something else going on with this paradigm that needs to be understood through further investigation by updating prior studies that were mentioned here. The studies that were done previously prove to be encouraging because their conclusions leads to the assertion that it is the socialization process that impacts an officer's behavior and cynical attitudes. The officer's background is not the controlling factor and therefore, any efforts to change behavior, and to instill more desirable behavior that is community-centered is more likely to be successful. Therefore, training and development programs can take hold with this population because the attitudes are not as firmly entrenched. It could be posited that the officers are following what Supervisors told them to do. Also, the exhibit standard occupational workgroup attitudes that are less individualized. The workgroup attitudes stem from shared frustration with the work.

### **6. Growing Individuals: Empowering African-American Officers**

Once we work to change that culture, it should flow from the top down, just like it does, in a corporation. Corporations change cultures all the time as new Chief Executive Officers

come in and move the company in a shifting direction (Pritchett, 2008). Top managers accomplish this organizational goal by shifting the structures in the organization and then the culture shifts (Connors & Smith, 2011). The aforementioned policing studies make it seem possible to try the same strategy in an agency. It is important to try to impact culture from the top down and to tailor the training so that it is officer specific. It is necessary to customize training programs so that they are officer specific in order to take into account how race can alter perceptions. According to Sun (2003) race did have an appreciable impact on attitudes towards citizens, police work, and legal restrictions on criminal procedures. African-American officers were found to be much more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be less selective in enforcing laws (Sun, 2003). Therefore, it was more likely that a perpetrator would have to commit a serious transgression to feel this officer's wrath. This officer would be more likely to employ discretion and this discretion, when used properly, becomes a useful source of community empowerment. It can forge a lasting partnership between law enforcement and influential upstanding community members that can help to keep everyone safer.

And this approach would likely yield better relationships with upstanding community members and civic leaders who would be more likely to view the officer as more trustful. Clearly, not every offense should be punished on the street, just like Prosecutors have discretion to decide which cases should be prosecuted. Each professional considers the circumstances and the greater good or harm from his or her own decisions.

## 7. The Impact of Past Abuse

While, Caucasian officers in the department were not in favor of legal regulations on criminal procedure, African-American officers held positive attitudes toward legal regulations (Sun, 2003). The possible cause for this marked variation in attitudes between African-American and Caucasian officers may stem from past abuse (Moore, 2010). Certainly, the African-American officer would be more sensitive to the repercussions from past police abuse and brutality (Moore, 2010). The African-American officer was more likely to witness such police abuse or be the victim of it, in his or her own community (Moore, 2010). Such negative experiences would lead one to be more in favor of legal restrictions on police work, since, it is more likely lead to the Constitutional safeguarding of individual rights. Carlan (2007) conducted a study of sixteen departments that amounted to 1,114 officers. The study sought to document job satisfaction based on race, gender, age, education, and length of service (Carlan, 2007).

An important finding was that the demographics did not reveal a strong enough correlation for researchers to see any appreciable differences in the responses based on demographic information. It leads us to believe that there is something more at work here. What is truly impacting officer attitudes if demographic information provides little differences in an officer's view? The only direct demographic change responsible for making a strong impact in an officer's view was race. And it only mattered when it came to two very important questions, according to Sun (2003). The first related to more regulation of police work and the second was the selective enforcement of laws. With these two key areas, racial background mattered and these two areas help to lay the groundwork for community centered policing.

## 8. A Mandate for Community-Centered Policing

According to Haberfeld and Cerrah (2008), community centered policing is essential within a democratic society. It features a no tolerance policy for aggressive law enforcement tactics including: racial profiling, random pat downs, and excessive use of force. These three tactics directly lead to the destruction of relations between law enforcement and their respective communities. They are counter-productive and tend to result in serious alienation propelling us to search for a better way to serve the most important goals of safety for all and crime prevention. It is necessary to stop the feelings of a lack of confidence and trust in law enforcement. These are the communities that need services the most. These will be the communities that rely on law enforcement and will also prove to be the deadliest communities to work in. Therefore, it is better to foster a collaborative approach between law enforcement and communities to end resentment and bitterness. Surely, it is almost impossible to successfully conduct police work without trust and support from the community. How can law enforcement officials create and foster more trustful relationships with their communities? And, more importantly, what can the agency do in order to help effectively train law enforcement personnel to further help legitimize our criminal justice system. Our system still suffers from inequities as more minorities continue to be targeted and incarcerated (Walker, Spohn, & Delone, 2011). In short, social scientists can use the research garnered from the studies referenced here in order to develop training programs. There is no perfect study and some of the information is old. These studies are not done that often due to costs and logistics. Researchers rely on the information and try to make reasonable extrapolations based on it taking into account that there are limits associated

with it. We do not live in a perfect world but there are law enforcement officials who are better at community-centered policing than others.

## 9. Conclusions and Recommendations for Deeper Engagement

Community leaders tend to find that their respective communities already demand community-centered policing principles and policies. Police scholars have documented the problems associated with these studies because it is limited (Klinger, 2004). Many studies are extremely old making the information seem less reliable. Training and development programs should be designed to carry out community centered policing since it is essential within a democratic nation. The purpose and goal of the training program is to develop the officer as an individual who develops a loving concern for the community that is being served. It is not always possible to recruit law enforcement personnel from the community directly but that would be the best way to carry out the process. The advantages of recruiting and retaining personnel from the community are numerous. The process of community centered policing requires that the community become engaged and informed. And it can only work through continuous outreach efforts. The officer training programs have to be updated, targeted, and proactive. For many departments, it starts with some type of new vision that is conceived of and developed. The Chief of Police will oversee the implementation process and provide support and encouragement for these plans and activities. For many departments, it requires the implementation of drastic changes that have never been tried or even contemplated. The next phase will involve and include building trust. There are many ways to do this but it usually occurs when community leaders work with law enforcement on small projects that are visible and meaningful. It can mean sponsoring neighborhood events so community members feel respected, acknowledged, and helped. One main problem is that the department may have to overcome negative perceptions associated with past transgressions. It should do this in a concerted and directed way indicating that it plans to work to make amends and be better in the future. The major phase of the strategic plan will be centered on officer training. The officer now has a new role in the community. We should consider how technology including riding around in cars has changed the dynamic relationship between the officer and the community. There are simply more artificial barriers between them. The days are gone when you had a beat cop walking around and talking with people in the neighborhood. Most officers ride around in vehicles and use technology that can

be oppressive to people. The use of tasers can have a devastating and lasting negative impact on community members. The success can come from increasing diversity and striving to hire law enforcement officials who genuinely mirror their communities. It is not always easy to develop the best message in order to reach these community members and to get them interested in a career in law enforcement. There will be significant backlash from officers in the department that resist these changes because they feel threatened by them. Organizational change makes people feel uneasy and their restless feelings need to be addressed and dealt with. It is also needs to be made apparent that anyone who cannot follow the new direction and strategy will be left behind. Departmental members must realize that it is in their best interests to accept the flow of things and to help others to do the same. There are many facets to this strategy that must be implemented but the rewards are clear. The results could mean that more people are safer and crimes are being prevented.

## References

- [1] Bayley, D., & Bittner, E. (1984). Learning the skills of policing. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 47 (4), 35-39.
- [2] Brown, M. (1988). *Working the street: Police discretion and the dilemma of reform*. New York, NY: Sage.
- [3] Carlan, P. (2007). The search for job satisfaction: A survey of Alabama policing. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 32 (4), 74-86.
- [4] Cochran, J., & Bromley, M. (2003). The myth of the police subculture. *Policing*, 26 (1), 88-117.
- [5] Connors, R., & Smith, T. (2011). *Change the culture, change the game: The breakthrough strategy for energizing your organization and creating accountability for results*. New York, NY: Sage.
- [6] DeJong, C. (2004). Gender differences in officer attitudes and behavior: Providing comfort to citizens. *Women and Criminal Justice*, 15(3), 1-32.
- [7] Haberfeld, M., & Cerrah, I. (2008). *Comparative policing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- [8] Klinger, D. (2004). Environment and organization: Reviving a perspective on police. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 59 (3), 119-136.
- [9] Manning, K. (2005). The study of policing. *Police Quarterly*, 8 (1), 23-44.
- [10] Moore, L. (2010). *Black rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina*. New Orleans, LA: Louisiana State University Press.
- [11] Paoline, E. (2001). *Rethinking police culture: Officers' occupational attitudes*. New York, NY: Scholarly Press.

- [12] Pritchett, P. (2008). *Culture shift: The employee handbook for changing corporate culture*. New York, NY: Pritchett Publishing.
- [13] Skolnick, J. (2011). *Justice without trial: Law enforcement in Democratic society*. New York, NY: Quid Pro Publishers.
- [14] Sparrow, M. (1992). *Beyond 911: A new era of policing*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books.
- [15] Sun, I. (2003). Police officers' attitudes toward their role and work: A comparison of black and white officers. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 28(1), 90-108.
- [16] Walker, S., Spohn, C., & DeLone, M. (2011). *The color of justice: Race, ethnicity, and crime in America*. New York, NY: Wadsworth Publishing.
- [17] Worden, P. (1993). The attitudes of women and men in policing: Testing conventional and contemporary wisdom. *Criminology*, 31 (2), 203-241.