

The unwritten code essay



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The Unwritten Code The Police “ Code of Silence” is an unspoken rule among many police agencies in the country. It is a code of “ honor” in the police brotherhood where giving information about another police officers wrongdoings is considered an act of betrayal. Other terms for the code include: “ The Thin Blue Line,” and “ The Wall of Silence.

” Police academies across the nation are close-knit communities of law enforcement. From the first day on the job to the last, every officer is supposed to count on one another for support. Time after time, we see stories on the news of officers committing criminal acts and being put on trial for it. Rarely, do we see officers put behind bars.

This is due to none other than “ The Code. ” If a police officer testifies, or in a sense “ rats out” another police officer, that police officer will be shunned from the brotherhood and will be an outcast of the police force. If there really is an unwritten rule among police officers that allows them to commit crimes with virtually no penalties, the question is how can we stop this? The “ Code of Silence” is not the only way police commit misconduct and show forms of integrity in our society. Spectacular scandals further prove the underlying issue of the quality and accountability of our public servants. The Diallo shooting in New York, the torture of a Haitian immigrant with a plunger in New York, The video taped Rodney King beating in Los Angeles, and the widespread corruption in the New Orleans police force are just a few prime examples of ongoing Police corruption in our society.

Currently, the Institute of Ethics has made the most extensive research to date on the Police Code of Silence. Between February, 1999 and June, 2000,

3, 714 officers and academy recruits from forty-two different states were asked to participate in a study held by the Institute. One part of the study was to determine the views of academy recruits on the code, while the other half was to interview cops who had committed the code and understand how and why it happened. The understanding of the Institute was that, if the Code of Silence can be effectively controlled, serious corruption cannot exist because many become aware of a scandal as it expands. The Institute interviewed twenty-five basic law enforcement academies from 16 states and 1, 016 confidential questionnaires were completed.

The findings concluded that: 79% said that the law enforcement Code of Silence exists and is fairly common throughout the nation, 52% said that the fact a Code of Silence exists doesn't really bother them, and 24% said the Code of Silence is more justified when excessive force involves an abusive citizen. The sampling of current officers was comprised of 2, 698 fulltime officers from twenty-one different states. A total 1, 116 of the 2, 657 officers asked to complete a confidential questionnaire, did so. An additional forty-one officers provided confidential interviews.

The following facts were revealed: 46% admitted they had witnessed misconduct by another officer, but they concealed it. When asked what they thought would happen if they didn't follow the code; the most popular answers were: I would be ostracized, the officer who committed the misconduct would be fired, I would be fired, I would be blackballed, and the administration would do nothing. The study also showed male and female officers had admitted to using the code. Through the data the National Institute of Ethics conducted, we can infer many things about the code such

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as: The Code of Silence does in fact exist, most often it will form in almost any agency, because it seems to be a natural occurrence, any attempt to stop it will be futile, and “ whistle-blowers” are generally not supported by the police administrations. Injustice is certainly still occurring today. In one particular case in San Francisco, three off duty cops had a brawl with a couple of drunks.

The DEA became involved and controlled the situation. The police chief, assistant chief, three deputies and five officers all awaited grand jury indictments. In an article in the “ Sunday Insight”, police officers were quoted, but every single one wanted to remain anonymous. One veteran of the force was quoted, “ What we’re going through now reminds me a lot of the Catholic Church. You have all these decent priests — or cops — keeping their nose clean, just trying to do their job.

But there’s enough of the Code of Silence mentality left, especially the higher you go up the chain of command, so that when some guys do have major problems, no one feels safe admitting it” (Salter 2003). Race and Power play roles in the Code of Silence. Generally the typical cop who does injustice will be an officer who commits a crime for a negligent reason, such as racism, boredom or just for a power trip. In a 1995 essay, former San Jose Police Chief Joseph McNamara was quoted, “ A corrupt, racist or brutal cop will abstain from misconduct only when he looks at the cop next to him and believes that the officer will blow the whistle if he hits the suspect. The police value system is what permits the ind of behavior that gets bad headlines” (McNamara 1995).

According to the Institute of ethics study, gender does not play a role. 449 out of the 532 officers who had admitted to seeing another officer commit misconduct and not reporting it were male, while the remaining 74 were female. In today's day and age, the Code should not exist. Neil Trautman, Director of the National Institute of Ethics came up with several ways of putting an end to the code. His first goal is to improve administrative commitment.

If an organization intends to make a genuine effort to prevent the Code of Silence from placing loyalty to people ahead of loyalty toward principle, its leaders must have and communicate a sincere commitment to integrity" (Trautman 2000). Integrity is the primary way that the code can be defeated. If officers have more integrity for their badge and what they do than their fellow officers and alliances, the code will cease to exist. His next idea of improvement focused on recruitment.

Even though the areas of recruitment and hiring are not immediately associated with sustaining a non-destructive Code of Silence, they should be. If an organization hires employees who already place loyalty to principle above loyalty toward people, both serious misconduct and the Code of Silence are much less likely to occur than in departments that ignore these important issues" (Trautman 2000). During the hiring process, it should be strictly addressed to potential officers that integrity would be the foundation of their job, so in that sense, the candidate for the job will think seriously about using the code. One of his last major points is to stop current agencies from using the code with Internal Training. " Even though the areas of recruitment and hiring are not immediately associated with sustaining a non-

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Once again Trautman is stressing the fact that officers and even potential officers should swear to the oath that puts principles of integrity on a higher pedestal than principles to loyalty. The ones responsible for putting an end to the code are police officers, from the level of chief, down to police in training at academies. The code of silence is so well spread because of fear of what will happen if one officer becomes a " whistle-blower". If more and more officers accept the fact that having a high level of integrity is more important than protecting their fellow officers for their wrongdoings, then the code will cease to exist.