

# Criminology essays - public corruption police



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## **Public Corruption Police**

### **Public Corruption for Profit**

#### **Police In America**

In Chapter 6, “ Public Corruption for Profit”, Delattre (2006) addresses some very important aspects of law enforcement and the policing environment that not only make police more vulnerable to corruption but also to public scrutiny. The author begins the chapter with a description of incorruptibility, suggesting that it is an inherent attribute of the individual with good character who would never think of compromising his or her integrity for profit or for personal gain (p. 63).

Delattre (2006) points to the clear connection between incorruptibility and the purposeful goal of acting in accordance with standards of excellence (p. 63-64). The public at large expects police officers to possess this attribute of incorruptibility as well as to manifest an observance of the highest standards of excellence, with anything less considered suspect and capable of putting their safety and their safety of their loved ones at risk.

Delattre (2006) submits that police officers are unfairly held to not only a fair and higher standard but also to a double standard that often puts them in the difficult position of negative public scrutiny. The author submits that some police officers use this claim as consolation for the greater public scrutiny they receive compared other officials however he also suggest that the double standard can be reconciled as a necessary evil that should not negatively impact police behavior.

For Delattre (2006), police officers must be educated on the difference between the imperative of living up to a higher standard than others and illegitimacy of unfair double standards, with an emphasis on the higher standard. Police officers operate in much closer proximity to the members of the communities that they serve than officials like politicians and lawmakers (p. 67). Delattre (2006) submits that this difference is sufficient reason for not only why the public will expect different behavior from police officers but will also respond to the behavior of police officers differently (p. 67).

Although the author concedes that police corruption exists at disturbing levels, there are issues that police officers must face on a regular basis that can challenge the character of even the most noble and trustworthy of their ranks. The author suggests, for example, that police officers are vulnerable to the causes of corruption in the same way that many individuals in positions of authority and control are and offers three hypotheses on those causes.

To support this contention, Delattre (2006) submits the society-at-large hypothesis, which has often been used to account for police corruption (p. 69). According to this hypothesis, the practice by public servants of receiving gifts or gratuities from all manner of individuals in society leads to larger gratuities or bribes that ultimately work to influence the receiver in the direction of serving the interests of the gift-giver(s).

This hypothesis points to the public response to police officers who are regularly disparaged for their real or perceived habit of accepting gratuities from individuals and entities throughout the communities that they serve.

Delattre (2006) underscores the influence of this hypothesis by reminding that the free cup of coffee is the symbol of the gratuity for police officers (p. 72). The author submits that the cause of corruption can also be attributed to the structural or affiliation hypothesis, which is somewhat similar to the society-at-large hypothesis, where the propensity for succumbing to corrupt behavior created or intensified by the influence of corrupt peers.

In the case of the police officer, that influence will often be manifested on the rookie officer by older or senior officers who are already participating in corrupt activities (Delattre, 2006, p. 72-73). The rotten-apple hypothesis goes even further to identify what Delattre (2006) calls the roots of corruption, where ineffective police recruitment procedures allow one or more unscrupulous hires to enter the department and, in turn, influence others to participate in corrupt behaviors. Although police officers are vulnerable to negative influence, Delattre (2006) also points to the role of departmental supervision in supporting the integrity of the police force and its officers.

Delattre (2006) examines three important hypotheses that can be used to explain corruption in general and among police officers specifically - the society-at-large hypothesis, the structural or affiliation hypothesis and the rotten apple hypothesis. The society-at-large hypothesis points to the influential role that the public plays on the ethical behavior of police officers, especially when it comes to influencing police officers to serve the interests of specific groups or individuals. This has been identified in the research showing that the dominant culture in a community will often use gratuities to influence police officers to address their interests with regard to minorities in

the community, which often translates to the serious ethical dilemma of racial profiling (Clayton, 2003, p. 1).

The structural or affiliation hypothesis submitted by Delattre (2006) is supported by the fact that the propensity for growth in the number of corrupt individuals in a group, including a police department, will increase proportionate to the benefits that can be generated by corrupt behavior over law-abiding behavior (Ivkovic, 2005, p. 66).

The research suggests that the rotten apple hypothesis is often used to draw attention away from the police department and the insufficiencies that contribute to police corruption. According to Callanan (2005), when the rotten apple hypothesis is used to frame police corruption in a particular institution, it works to avert any criticism of that institution, especially any question of its legitimacy (p. 64). At the same time, there is a significant body of literature arguing that it is just an inherent truth that some police officers are more likely than others to think and act in a corrupt way and that some of their peers will be influenced to corruption by their association (Ivkovic, 2005, p. 64).

Delattre (2006) does not neglect to identify the role of departmental supervision in mitigating the propensity or vulnerability of police officers to corrupt behavior. Where the structural or affiliation hypothesis can be interpreted to involve the influence of the corrupt structure or affiliation, it can also be interpreted to involve the supportive departmental structure. The research supports the role of departmental supervision, demonstrating

that it is instrumental to increasing police accountability and effective management within the police organization (Archbold, 2004, p. 2).

The research shows that the character of the police officer is one of the most significant components of his or her ability to serve and protect with honesty and integrity. In the past, an evaluation of a potential recruit's character included neighborhood checks, where as many as ten members of the community were questioned about his or her habits and temperament as well as through the distribution of questionnaires to past employers, schools, employers, military or draft and other official agencies (Bouza, 1972, p. 120).

The purpose of this comprehensive investigation was to establish that the recruit met the standard of good character necessary for appointment to the police department (Bouza, 1972, p. 120). Delattre (2006) establishes that the appointment of individuals of good character to positions of law enforcement is just as imperative today. In fact, it is fair to suggest that the incidence of police corruption and the increasing dependence on law enforcement as part of national security makes the good character and the embrace of high standards of excellence even more vital.

What is especially interesting about Delattre's (2006) look at public corruption for profit in Chapter 6 is that it is easier to imagine that public officials are more likely to be corrupt than law enforcement officers and more corrupt than police officers specifically. Nevertheless, Delattre's (2006) intent is to show that police officers are embodied, as much as public officials, within the "public" that is associated with public corruption. There is little to debate when it comes to the fact that corruption among police

officers exists and in substantial numbers however this reality can be obscured by fact that the public expects integrity and trustworthiness as character traits in police officers.

In terms of the double standard that Delattre (2006) addressed in this chapter, the preponderance of the research suggests that the phrase is more applicable to the practice of unscrupulous police officers perpetuating a double-standard that entails enforcing laws while breaking them than it is to a double standard that holds police officers to a higher standard than other public servants (Waddington, 1998, p. 164). It is interesting to note that the research points to the fact that police officers are often found to be in collusion with public officials, which works to blur the distinctions supporting the claim of a double standard even further (Weiss, 2004, p. 227).

One of the most compelling aspects of Chapter 6 is Delattre's (2006) examination of gratuities and their impact on the real and perceived integrity of police officers. Among the reasons that this issue is so compelling is that it spans a variety of aspects in the policing environment, especially those that are most vulnerable to corruption. At the same time, it is one of the topics addressed by Delattre (2006) that has generated the most substantial body of research.

The research suggests that some people will inevitably associate gratuities given to police officers with the goal supporting good police-community relations, especially when gratuities are the unequivocal expression of people's gratitude for police services that are appropriately carried out according to law enforcement protocol (Kania, 2004, p. 54). According to

once source that studied the opinions of police officers, gratuities are actually viewed as an entitlement of sorts, where gratuities offered voluntarily or without obligation are given in response to some service that was provided by the police officer (White, 2002, p. 20).

More frequently however, the public is likely to look at gratuities as the purposeful attempt to influence police behavior, which is compounded by the fact that the public also expects the evidence of high standards of excellence in police officers. A paradox exists therefore by the fact that, as much as the public expects good character and incorruptibility among police officers, it is the public that is a substantial source of the gratuities directed at police officers. Coleman (2004) argues that this irony, translated as a conflict of interest, is nevertheless difficult to address by police officers (p. 33).

Coleman (2004) points to the “slippery slope” to corruption identified by Delattre (2006), however he is even more emphatic that gratuities, whether a cup of coffee or a monetary bribe, are all corrupt and differ only by the degree of the corruption that is involved or might come out of that gratuity (Coleman, 2004, p. 34). Although it could be argued that there is a huge difference between the acceptance of a cup of coffee and “a six-figure bribe”, Coleman (2004) argues the opposite, even if that six-figure bribe is used to influence the police officer to look the other way during a robbery, an assault or even a murder (p. 34). Based on arguments like this, the researcher maintains that it is imperative that police officers say “No” to gratuities.



There research however supports the notion that it is acceptable for police officers to accept gratuities. In fact, one source argues that gratuities are essential to supporting the relatively paltry wage paid to many police officers (Ruiz & Bono, 2004, p. 50). One of the primary arguments is that gratuities work as building blocks of positive social relationships between police and members of the community (Coleman, 2004, p. 38).

Unfortunately, these building blocks are inherently larger and more prolific in areas of the community where gratuities are more easily made, such as more affluent and predominantly white areas. Add to this the fact that a generous gratuity comes with the expectation of “ a better than average service” from the officer in the future, and the prospects for corruption are increased exponentially (p. 38).

Delattre (2006) does a sufficient job of demonstrating that police officers face significant challenges when it comes to avoiding the temptations that they will face both within and outside of the police department. The majority of the evidence suggests that police corruption for profit, as an unequivocal example of public corruption for profit, is more of a collective activity than it is an individual one. This assertion is supported by at least two of the causal hypotheses examined by Delattre (2006) and in the research. Gratuities, the most prolific temptation that police officers face in the line of duty, however underscores the fact that it comes down to the character and embrace of a high standard of excellence that make the difference between a police officer who is and will remain incorruptible and the police officer who will ultimately succumb to corruption.

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