

Police culture: overview

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Introduction

Policing, is an occupation described as hours of boredom, followed by extreme moments of fear and terror, with coffee and donuts thrown into the mix at times. It is also a culture perceived by the public as corrupt, aggressive, racist, and above the law which empowers them. In an occupation where these extremes exist, it is necessary to have characteristics to reinforce the collective and impersonal nature of the work.

Cultural characteristics by definition are: the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time : a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc. : a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business) . Officers close ranks when one of their own is suspected of a crime. Officers believe this is an attack on the structure which provides safety to the public, and like the military it is an unwritten rule to rat on your brother. This is a structure that is not perfect, but it is efficient. Most officers are doing the right thing, but those who are not having a warped sense of entitlement and will eventually get arrested and be disciplined for their actions.

Police Discretion

One of the most controversial areas of the criminal justice system that has launched numerous debates from the public and the government is police discretion. Police discretion gives a police officer the freedom to decide what should be done in a particular situation, such as whom to stop for a traffic violations, whom to question, whom to arrest, and how to efficiently deal with public concerns and complaints. Police discretion is an essential aspect

of law enforcement because police officers on an individual basis are required to deal with a wide range of problems and situations, many of which are not regulated by law. Some external or internal factors that may affect a police officers' discretion are as follows: 1.) The type and severity of the offense or crime committed.

Being one of the most important factors that exist in an officer's discretion. The influence of an officer's discretion depending on the type and severity of the offense is critical when dealing with the importance as it relates to minor and major crimes or law violations that dictate for arrests and those that do not dictate for arrests. 2.) Attitude of the suspect, how a suspect reacts to being stop or questioned, has a significant impact on an officer's discretion to arrest. Disrespect in a police encounter is considered much the same as "contempt" in a courtroom hearing. Disrespect in the eyes of the law is often considered a challenge to authority and often hinders such an individual from doing their job. 3.)

Characteristics, position, and preference of the victim, is found be also significant in a police officer's discretion to arrest. A study of police attitudes towards rape victims, which reveal that some police officers are less likely to arrest a suspect when the police officers disapprove of the victims or the victim's lifestyle in any way. 4.) Relationship between the suspect and the victim, another part in police discretion to arrest, has the ability to affect a police officer especially when a police officer determines the relationship is close, such as husband and wife. The officer feels there is little chance that the victim will testify against the suspect, which an arrest would be irrelevant to a conviction.

When relationships are close, such as husband and wife, police officers have developed several reasons for not arresting the suspect, which are: a strong possibility that the suspect will reoffend as a means of revenge to the victim for making the complaint; an arrest would deprive a family of its major income earner and the complainant does not actually want the suspect arrested, but just wanted to scare them. 5.) Evidence of the offense, another key factor in police discretion to arrest a suspect. Police officers are more likely to arrest a suspect when the evidence of any wrongdoing is clear. 6.) Minority status of the parties to the offense, the most controversial part, also contribute to the result of police discretion. Studies have shown that African Americans are more likely to be stop and arrested than whites, and more likely to be subject to police use of force.

In conclusion, majority of an officer's discretion is a result of their personality, which has many influences; such as childhood background, education background, societal culture, and work culture. Also affected by these factors are homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgenders. So depending on a police officer's degree of tolerance involving different kinds of people and their preferences will determine how a police officer exercises their discretion.

Women and Minorities in Policing

Throughout the growth of America, racial tensions have lingered throughout the course of our rise. This holds true for women. As racial and gender discrimination took hold early in our history. The first known African American police officer served in Washington D. C. in 1861. New Orleans was the first state to recruit African American officers. This is due in part to the

large African American community. African Americans were hired for the sole purpose of patrol their own communities. The number of African American officers dropped from 177 in 1870 to 27 by 1880. This was due to the reconstruction of amendments by the Supreme Court.

By 1910, African American officers no longer existed. This lasted until 1950. In the 1880's women began to be introduced to the police force and became known as police matrons. These were upper middle class women performing duties such as visiting the sick, searching women and juveniles, going to houses of prostitution, and making lunches. The first documented female officer was Alice Stebbin Wells who joined the Los Angeles Department. During WWII, the hiring of women increased but still underrepresented until the civil rights movement in the 1960's.

Women and African Americans began to take on equal roles within the law enforcement community. Alice Stebbin Wells founded the International Association of Policewomen in 1915 to help address issues of professionalism and the work of policewomen. Due to the race riots of the 1960's black officers were increased by nearly 11 percent. Affirmative action and civil rights movement additional helped the critical shortage of black officers and helped to improve the police community relations in the minority communities.

Stress in Police Work

Police culture is something the average person does not think about unless they are the family member of a police officer or the officer themselves. This culture is in the way of thoughts, beliefs, and behavior of officers serving in the line of duty. Throughout the United States, each organization has its own

way of connecting to their communities they serve. The attitude is us in contrast to the criminals, victims, and citizens. This thought process is vice versa too. This is the vibe amongst bigger police department while smaller departments have a better connection to the community and the community to them.

Effective leadership and respect determine whether or not the agency will have a good relationship with its officers. Management like police captains, chief of police, and first line supervisors have to walk a thin line making sure to uphold the law and not bend. Promoting based on favorites or the good ole boy system is a sure way to lower morale, thus setting in resentment toward each other and lower performance.

To see what an officer sees every day patrolling the streets turns them numb to showing kindness and not taking a chance that the average citizen can be innocent. It is guilty until proven innocent in the eyes of the law and not the other way around for police officers. This is the daily grind for officers who leave the training academy bright eyed and with their oath of office still memorized only to report for duty and realize it is not the same world as before becoming an officer. Officers deal with stresses unparalleled to the average person (Welsh, 2011).

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