

Principles of law enforcement



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Blue of Silence The Blue of Silence is the notion that police officers do not report violations of the law or police procedure when these occur involving police officers. Instead, they stay loyal to their department and fellow officers and develop this "us against them" mentality. The reason this happens is because policeman want to stick to their own and if they were to tell about a policemen's errors, misconduct or crime, they would be seen as disloyal (Wikipedia).

According to Robert Reiner in the book, *The Politics of Police*, police have to understand that the strength of the police culture is based upon a mission and anything that is done in pursuing that mission is serving the greater good of the community (Reiner as quoted in Hall, 2002, p. 1). One of the reasons why this situation exists is because police officers are in such a difficult and sometimes hostile environment. In order for them to work well, it helps when they have the assurance that other officers will have their back if something happens. Since the world of police work is unpredictable, it helps police have peace of mind when they know that the other officers will help them in external and internal investigations by keeping silent. According to Hall (2002) there are eight reasons why the Code of Silence exists. Here are a few::

1. Self protection -- officers who go against this code will be ostracized and many of them will risk retaliation from other officers; they will not be supported if something happens for them.
2. Emphasis on team work -- they are always told to work as a team and this brings group loyalty to the process of policing.
3. The Erosion Theory -- the more officers are around crime and "the lower aspects of our society" it is easier to accept criminal behavior or justify

shortcuts.

(Hall, p. 2).

With this information in mind it is easy to see why this Code of Silence is an integral part of law enforcement. The interesting issue about this is that each officer decides how much of this they will do and it is usually based on their own moral code of ethics. In research done by The National Institute of Ethics in 2000, it was found that 52% of officers were not bothered by the Code of Silence (as quoted in Hall, p. 3). In other words, they were fine with it. Hall also suggests that the root of this comes from the fact that we were told as children not to tell on our siblings and the fact that we were punished if we did. Walker (2001), in his book on police accountability says that the reason this Code of Silence exists is because " officers learned that there was no risk of punishment for backing up fellow officers responses no matter how credible the tale." (Walker, p. 109).

Another issue that comes up for officers is that some have compassion for people who have experienced brutal crimes. Because of this, they may begin to think that since the public wants to get rid of an individual like this, whatever they do to get rid of the individual will be seen as the right thing to do. They ignore due process for the perpetrator because they have done something terribly wrong (Hall, p. 5). To them, they are receiving mixed messages -- on the one hand they are supposed to uphold the law, but on the other hand there are certain situations where the law is blurred. They become frustrated when a situation can be legally " fixed" and they decide that the easiest thing to do is to take the law into their own hands. All of these things that we have discussed have a heavy impact on how police

officers carry out their duties.

Another issue for police officers who are involved with the Code of Silence is that it brings about stress on a daily basis. Officers have to create within themselves the "person" that can deal with life on the street and with doing whatever they have to do in order to make it. Terry (n. d.) suggests that a reason for the stress is because the officers work on a tribal code that creates challenges for them. He says this is particularly difficult for new officers because they already have the "authority system" instilled in them. The emphasis on the police family", "the police brotherhood", and "the blue code of silence" purposely are there to bring them into the tribe.

References

Blue Code of Silence. (2008, August 21). In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 26, 2008, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Blue_Code_of_Silence&oldid=233277163.

Hall, R. G. (2002). A Brief Discussion of Police Culture and How It Affects Police Responses to Internal Investigations and Civilian Oversight. Winnipeg Police Service, Retrieved August 26, 2008 from <http://www.cacole.ca/Resource%20Library/Conferences/2002%20Conference/2002%20Presentations/Hall,%20R.%202002.pdf>.

Terry, R. (n. d.). Police Stress The Police Tribe: Code of Silence. Real Police. Retrieved August 26, 2008 from <http://www.realpolice.net/police-stress-code-of-silence.shtml>.

Walker, S. (2001). Police Accountability: The Role of Citizen Oversight. Belmont, CA.