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The Changing Face of the Police Officer Occupational Socialization of Minority Police Recruits

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Introduction

Publicly supported police forces receive prominent attention from the communities they serve because they are the fundamental means by which order is maintained and life and property are protected. Until the racial turmoil of the late 1960s, the small number of minority police officers throughout the United States was often overlooked. Subsequently, some police agencies began to open their departments to minorities. Others procrastinated until forced to pursue minority recruitment by the federal courts or by affirmative action program pressure.

The recruitment and hiring of minority police officers has been approached by many police administrators with less than genuine enthusiasm. It has frequently been viewed by many within the police profession as a political necessity rather than a professional opportunity. Even the advocates of minority hiring have relied almost solely on moral and legalistic arguments to justify the hirings rather than emphasizing the unique contributions minority officers could offer their departments.

Minority officers have faced a host of difficulties in hiring practices, working conditions, and promotional opportunities. The resulting litigation over discriminatory treatment has almost completely obscured any meaningful examination of the differences minority police bring to the profession and the commonalties they share with nonminority officers. As a result, little is known about the occupational socialization of minority police officers.

This article will first explore some important factors in the occupational socialization of minority police officers. It will then describe a study that monitored

the occupational socialization of minority and nonminority police recruits by measuring various attitudes at both the beginning and the conclusion of their police academy training. Finally, the contribution of police academy training to the social and psychological processes of molding, shaping and building a new police identity is considered.

The Changing Job of a Police Officer

In the post-World War II era, numerous Supreme Court decisions have substantially affected law enforcement, order maintenance, and public service aspects of policing. Parameters for instigating and conducting a criminal investigation were defined by a number of rulings. *Mapp v. Ohio*, 367 U.S. 643 (1961) extended the exclusionary rule [An “exclusionary rule” is a rule that generally operates to exclude from admission at a criminal trial evidence obtained as a result of unlawful activity by law enforcement officers or their agents. The purpose of such a rule is to keep the judiciary from acquiescing to police misconduct and to deter the police from participation in unlawful activity. The exclusionary rule is most commonly used in situations of “unreasonable searches and seizures” and failure to invoke “Miranda warnings.”] to the states; *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436 (1966) stipulated that the accused must be informed of his or her rights at the time of arrest; *Escobedo v. Illinois*, 378 U.S. 478 (1964) established that a confession is inadmissible as evidence if made when deprived of counsel; *Terry v. Ohio*, 392 U.S. 1 (1968) and *Adams v. Williams*, 407 U.S. 143 (1972) upheld police authority to stop and frisk; *Bivens v. Six Unknown Agents of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics*, 403 U.S. 388 (1971) stipulated that illegal search and seizure by police can result in suits for damages. In the area of enforcement, *Robinson v. California*, 370 U.S. 660 (1962) prohibited police from arresting persons who are merely addicted to narcotics. *Papachristou v. Jacksonville*, 405 U.S. 156 (1972) set aside vagrancy convictions, holding that vagrancy laws were unconstitutionally vague. In response to such rulings, contemporary urban policing has required the police officer to place an increasing emphasis on preserving civil rights and providing services to a wider public, while restricting traditional approaches to enforcement.

The recent emergence of community-based policing is also changing the role of a police officer. Historically, police have contributed to the myth that they control crime by claiming that they represent the “thin blue line” between community chaos and community order. Community-based policing recognizes the many complex factors that produce and maintain crime; the role of police officer is characterized as more a community facilitator than a controller. This conceptualization is reflected in the remark by an urban police chief that police administrators are recognizing (belatedly) something that was common knowledge in this country two hundred years ago—that crime is a community problem, not just a problem of the police (Brown, 1985).

The Changing Face of a Police Officer

Racial and ethnic minorities in the United States often encountered the police as an alien, occupying force; relationships between police and minority community members were often abrasive, mortifying and humiliating (Walker, 1980). These factors mitigated against substantial minority participation in the departments. McCreedy (1980) observed that the brutalizing experiences and emotional tensions witnessed in the community which frequently involved the police discouraged minorities from deciding to pursue a police career. He writes:

In many Black communities, the police are viewed as representing the existing power structure and provide recollections of past oppression. Joining the ranks of the police is often not highly valued (1980:76).

As mentioned earlier, a combination of legal remedies and militant protests over the last three decades has opened up police departments to those people formerly ignored or prevented from advancement. Today, the stereotype of the police as a white, male institution is being challenged by the former victims of discrimination. Society is less tolerant of past traditions and practices that proscribed such inequities and prefers that the personnel of the police departments be representative of the communities they serve. Police departments that wish to be considered representative of the community attempt to hire and retain officers who reflect the racial makeup of the community (Jain, 1988; Tolley, 1989; Reynolds, 1981). As compared to the large number of white males who have historically staffed police departments, more and more recruits are black, Hispanic or Asian.

However, the intention to hire and promote minority officers has not been universally well received—particularly by other members of the department (Serrill, 1986; Stewart, 1985; Stroup, 1982). Goldstein (1984) reports that minority recruits have often found the traditional police environment uncomfortable and, in some cases, hostile. As a result, potential minority contribution to law enforcement work is curtailed.

Occupational Socialization of Police Officers

Occupational socialization, the process of full adaptation to a new job, is generally one of gradual transition which Becker (1964) refers to as a process of situational adjustment. Although the occupational socialization of police officers would seem to be an important topic, it has not been fully explored (McCreedy, 1980). The impact of the increasingly diverse police population has raised particular interest in the process by which minority officers are socialized into police work.

Even before the actual experience of occupational socialization, the recruit experiences “anticipatory socialization”—a conceptualization of the job of police

officer based on factors such as prior experiences with police or portrayals of police work in the media. Other contributing factors to anticipatory socialization are ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The occupation of parents or an individual's prior work experience also affect preconceived notions of police work (Maghan, 1988). Understanding these perceptions—which both modify and are modified by future experiences—will lead to a better understanding of the evolution of police officers.

The legacies of past discrimination against minorities linger in anticipatory socialization. As with any group of individuals with no history of involvement in a major social institution, the minority recruit officer's perception of the role of the police (as previously mentioned) is based upon historical experiences with the police. Clearly, the perceptions of minority citizens differ significantly from nonminority, middle-class citizens who see the police engage in service work as “guardians” and as public servants responding to emergencies. It should be expected then that upon entry to the job, minority recruits would be more disposed to view the role of the police officer as strictly an enforcer.

However, many nonminority recruits sometimes have trouble adapting to the police environment, especially when they are compared with police recruits of ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. For example, far fewer recruits today have had any military experience; thus they find the quasi-military organization of most police departments unfamiliar and unnatural. For all recruits, the image of the police officer portrayed in the mass media rarely reflects the service dimensions of the job or anything analogous to the actual everyday realities of police work.

Because of such distorted anticipatory socialization, it is naive to expect that the ideas of any recruit will correspond with the actual demands and duties of the police officer. For recruits entering into police work, tasks presented in training represent the initial states of occupational socialization. As the recruit undergoes police academy training and gains exposure to the job, previous perceptions seem faulty and inadequate. The training received in the police academy must uncover and correct whatever distorted anticipatory socialization has occurred and move the recruits toward the view of public service as the key defining dimension of the police officer's role.

The Police Subculture

Minority police may be considered one of many subgroups within the police subculture (Radalet and Reed 1973; Scott 1980). The concept of a police subculture draws attention to some of the many factors—internal and external—that influence occupational socialization.

The notion of a police subculture has come to embody the values and actions of administrators, supervisors and line patrol police officers. The subculture has been referred to as “The Blue Wall,” “The Blue Line,” “Police Family,” “The

Job,” or known through the motto “The Color Blue Binds.” The metaphors reflect a police subcultural mystique—to the extent that the occupational socialization of recruit officers at times takes on the characteristics of a ritual.

Police subculture also represents a distinctive set of attitudes and norms for behavior shared by and imposed on police officers (Goldstein, 1977). Like other occupational subcultures, the police subculture supports behaviors that preserve and protect the interests of its members. The notion of a police subculture includes the social relationships of police officers and imbues these relationships with solidarity. Finally, the police subculture also refers to both the internal and external social, political and cultural influences affecting the officer.

Importantly, no unidirectional causality is assumed by the term. It is not implied, for example, that the police subculture determines organizational practices or articulates the role of the officer. Conversely, organizational factors may, or may not, be determinants of the subculture. The specific causal relations are left open to empirical inquiry, case by case. The literature on the role of police officers is replete with accounts of the totality of effect on lives caused by choosing police work as an occupation (Niederhoffer, 1969; Rubinstein, 1973; Muir, 1977).

Attitudes as a Measure of Occupational Socialization

Occupational socialization has often been studied by an examination of the attitudes present during the process. In this context, an attitude is described as a favorable or unfavorable orientation to some object, concept, or situation and a readiness to respond in some predetermined manner.

Both orientation and readiness to respond have emotional, motivational, and intellectual aspects; they may, in fact, be unconscious reactions. Hence, an attitude entails several components—cognitive (consciously held belief or opinion), affective (emotional tone or feeling), evaluative (positive or negative), and assertive (disposition for action). All of these components combine to create the individual’s internal orientation.

Some research suggests that enduring attitudes develop from accumulated learning experiences related to other people (Allport, 1935). Because attitudes are so interwoven with affective and highly motivated experiences, they can become as stable as personality characteristics. A growing literature suggests that the attitudes of police officers are an important determinant of their performance as officers (Cascio and Valenzi, 1978; Van Maanen, 1975).

Attitudes Held by Police Officers

The attitudes held by police officers reflect other sources of influence. Police are part of a political and governmental social system operating in interrelated roles with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. Within the system, police are influenced in what they do and how they do it by federal,

state, and local lawmaking bodies; city managers, planners, and mayors; and the courts.

Undergirding these external factors are a broad and dynamic social system comprised of familial, educational, political, religious, and economic institutions including the mass media. What police do and how they do it is influenced by this vast network of social institutions (Radalet, 1973). Add departmental policies—supervisory practices, content and scale of training, specific police assignments, and department morale—to the external factors and it is easy to see how the many influences and expectations of the heterogeneous public domain (including the press, media, citizen complaint boards, and watchdog groups) affect the police role.

Previous research has determined that age, educational level (Weiner, 1974), military background, region of the country, type of police agency, race, sex, religion, ethnic and cultural values, and socioeconomic status are among the significant variables affecting the attitudes of police officers (Dalley, 1975; Broderick, 1973; Ellis, 1973). Other research has examined police attitudes toward crime and punishment (Fielding, 1991), violence (Walker, 1982), offenders (Mehrajuddin, 1981), capital punishment (Fagan, 1986), homosexuals (Bayley, 1974), unions (Reiner, 1976), Supreme Court decisions (Long, 1974), AIDS (Tennant, 1989; Samuel, 1990), loyalty (Ewin, 1990), minorities, and the mentally ill (Snibbe, 1974). Related research has attempted to identify police attitudes which influence job performance (Fabianic, 1979; Brooks, 1987). This research has asked, for example, if police who are residents of a community show more positive attitudes toward that community (Smith, 1980). It has also related police attitudes to styles of control (Barberis, 1985) and to managing verbal and physical abuse by police (MacDonald et al., 1985).

Attitudes Held by Minority Police Officers

Although the importance of attitudes on occupational socialization in general is better understood today, there is little specific research concerning the attitudes of minority officers (Teahan, 1975; McCreedy, 1980; Charles, 1981; Price, 1982, 1985; Pike, 1985).

The research which exists indicates that Asian communities do not generally see the job of police officer as either an appropriate or desirable one; becoming a police officer is not highly valued (Kozel & Tennant, 1992). A similar observation was made about Jewish communities (Niederhoffer, 1967).

The attitudes of minority recruit officers might be expected to reflect the home community valuation, and reports on the differing attitudes of minority officers are appearing (Wubnig, 1976; Pike, 1985). Equally important is the research which points out similarities in attitudes between minority and nonminority officers (Lundman, 1984).

Attitudes of minority officers in the New York Police Academy

In a recent study (Maghan, 1988; 1990), the attitudes of an entire police academy class were investigated. In the first phase of the study, biographical data was collected about the 2,253 recruits who made up the class. Of that number, 26.6 percent were minority recruits. Of the minority recruits, 43.7 percent were black, 51.48 percent of the minority recruits were Hispanic, while the remaining 5.0 percent of minority recruits were Asian, Pacific Islanders, American Indian, or other.

The minority recruits differed from the nonminority recruits in several ways. The average age of the minority recruits was 24.7 years; for nonminority recruits, the average age was 23.5 years. Compared to nonminority recruits, minority recruits were: 1) more likely to have never worked previously; 2) less likely to be living with their parents; 3) older in age; 4) less likely to be Catholic; 5) more likely to have served in the military; and, 6) more likely to have worked in sales, clerical, or computer-related positions before entering the police academy.

However, in many respects, the socioeconomic, familial, and marital status data of the minority recruits do not vary greatly from those of nonminority recruits. Generally the minority recruits represent segments of their particular ethnic group that are more socially and economically mobile and sufficiently educated to qualify for most occupations.

Importantly, substantially fewer minority recruits (6.8 percent) reported that they had police officer relatives compared with nonminority recruits (43.1 percent). This difference reflects the historical employment barriers confronting minorities desiring to be police officers.

NYPD Police Academy Training

The training given at the New York Police Academy was conceived as a crucial part of the occupational socialization of the recruits. Further, the training was recognized as an important opportunity to modify attitudes formed during the anticipatory socialization phase. Recruit training at the NYPD Police Academy focuses on three general work orientations: (1) the maintenance of public order, (2) deterrence of crime, and (3) the delivery of public service.

Academy training in the maintenance of public order and deterrence of crime emphasizes the prevention of crime, the investigation of all reported and suspected offenses, and the legal processing of offenders to the point where the courts and correctional agencies take over. Recruits are instructed in the criminal law and the tactics for handling a variety of offenses.

The public service component of academy training recognizes that the police officer does more than enforce laws. Recruits are trained in specific techniques for assisting the aged, the disabled, and those with alcohol or substance abuse

Figure 1: Attitude measurement

The recruits were administered a questionnaire. Many of the 117 statements concerned the recruits' conceptions and expectations of police work, in essence, their attitudes about police work. The study was diagnostic, attempting to identify sources of influence on attitudes. Responses to the questions were rated by the recruit on a four part Likert-type scale which ranged from 4 = Strongly agree to 1 = Strongly disagree, with three to five answer choices per question.

Results

Responses to the questionnaires were tabulated for minority and nonminority recruits. A factor analysis of the results identified five primary measures, or factors, around which all the responses clustered.

Factor 1: Reactivity

This measure indicated how strongly a recruit would react to the more confrontational police tasks. Recruits with a high score on this measure would strongly agree with such statements as:

1. Physical force is the only language some people really understand.
2. I often get angry with people too quickly.
3. When someone gets angry with me, I often get angry too.

Factor 2: Permissiveness

This measure indicated how strictly others should follow the rules and officers enforce the law. Recruits with a high score on this measure would strongly agree with such statements as:

1. All laws should be enforced at all times, otherwise people lose respect for the law.
2. If a law is on the books, it ought to be enforced, no matter what the consequences may be.
3. The best officer is the one who knows department procedures and sticks strictly to them.

Factor 3: Performance and perception

This measure indicated how well recruits have mastered everyday skills and how accurately real life events were perceived. Recruits with a high score on this measure would strongly agree with such statements as:

1. In certain areas in New York City, physical combat skills and an aggressive bearing will be more useful to a police officer on the street than book learning and a courteous manner.
2. I was capable of driving a car prior to employment as a police officer.
3. One of the good things about being a police officer is that it doesn't require much paperwork.

Factor 4: Academics

This measure indicated how important a recruit felt cognitive skills, academy training, and continued education were. Recruits with a high score on this measure would strongly agree with such statements as:

1. Five and a half months is too short a period of time to spend at the Police Academy.
2. Police officers should return to the Police Academy for refresher courses on a regular basis.
3. Most recruits upon entry to the Police Academy, lack the emotional maturity to function as police officers.

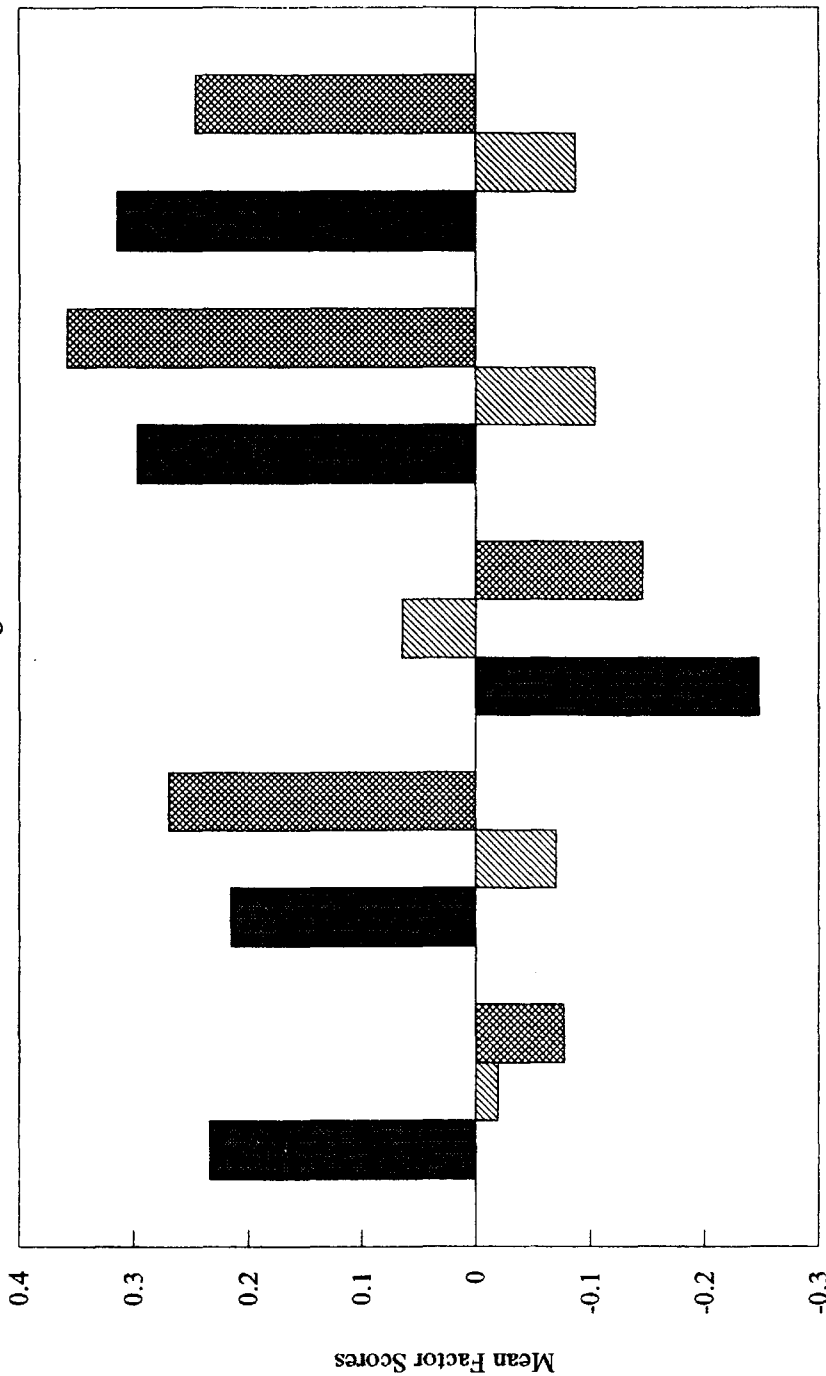
Factor 5: Job orientation

This measure indicated a degree of preference for law enforcement tasks over public service tasks. Recruits with a high score on this measure would strongly agree with such statements as:

1. Family problem solving is not a part of real police work.
2. The police don't have any business trying to resolve family disputes.

When considering these five core factors, recruits differed from each other significantly. Minority recruits differed from nonminority recruits, while recruits from each minority group differed from other minority groups.

**FIGURE 2. Mean Factor Scores Across Race Groups
Which Exhibited Significant Differences**



	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	FACTOR 4	FACTOR 5
BLACKS	0.234	0.215	-0.247	0.297	0.315
WHITES	-0.019	-0.070	0.064	-0.104	-0.087
HISPANICS	-0.077	0.269	-0.146	0.358	0.246

problems. They are taught intervention methods for various types of disputes.

There is a natural tension between these work orientations. While the public service aspects of the police role are important and occupy most of an officer's typical work shift, a police department cannot be justified on the basis of its public service functions alone. The chief justification for the maintenance of the police force lies in its authority to make arrests in order to control or to prevent crime.

A Repeated Attitude Measure

After the recruit class had completed the six months of academy training, the questionnaire was administered a second time, permitting a measure of any change in the recruits' attitudes. The responses showed that the training and experience received at the academy significantly modified the attitudes of the recruits. The strong enforcement orientation apparent in minority recruits prior to training moved toward a public service orientation. The primarily nonminority recruits who entered training with a strong public service orientation, meanwhile, moved toward an enforcement orientation. Although there remained tendencies for minority and nonminority recruits to differ in attitudes, the measured differences were no longer of practical or statistical significance. Instead, recruits showed a common perspective toward a role that must incorporate and integrate both orientations. Through training, the potentially disruptive impact of conflicting attitudes is greatly lessened; uniform police values and continuity of police procedures can thus be achieved. Training makes it possible for all recruits, minority and nonminority, to function together effectively.

Conclusion

In the year 2000, the NYPD recruits described above will have completed approximately fourteen years of service as police officers. It will be important to note if the moderating effects of their academy training have continued. Will their particular experiences as officers somehow push the attitudes of minority and nonminority officers apart again? Conversely, will their shared experiences make attitudes even more similar? Those who have worked to increase the number of minority police officers have generally assumed that a diversity of attitudes, work styles, and ethnic and racial backgrounds would somehow lessen the rigidity and conservatism of the typical police department. Studies such as this should help verify whether this supposition is correct.

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