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# Police Academy Socialization: Understanding the Lessons Learned in a Paramilitary- Bureaucratic Organization

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## Abstract

Even as community policing has emerged as the dominant paradigm, research indicates that police agencies continue to be highly militaristic and bureaucratic in structure and culture. This article reports findings from an observational study of recruit training at a police academy that had introduced a new curriculum emphasizing community policing and problem solving. The article explores the socialization that takes place there to see how the tension between traditional and community policing is resolved. The authors found that despite the philosophical emphasis on community policing and its themes of decentralization and flexibility, the most salient lessons learned in police training were those that reinforced the paramilitary structure and culture.

## Keywords

police training, paramilitary organizations, occupational socialization, participant observation

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North American police departments have long been characterized by a paramilitary style. As with other complex organizations, they have also become increasingly bureaucratized, especially since the “reform era” when police leaders struggled to combat extensive corruption problems (Kelling and Moore 1988). Even in the era of community policing, police departments continue to be highly specialized, with complex divisions of labor, vertical authority structures, and extensive rule systems (Kraska and Cubellis 1997; Maguire 1997; Weber 1946/1958; Willis, Mastrofski, and Weisburd 2004). In fact, recent developments like COMPSTAT<sup>1</sup> (New York City’s effort to hold officers and precinct commanders responsible for crime and quality-of-life issues) are thought to have extended the bureaucratic structure (Weisburd et al. 2003; Willis, Mastrofski, and Weisburd 2004). The diffusion of SWAT units to smaller departments signifies the continued centrality of paramilitary organization (Kraska and Cubellis 1997). Finally, some argue that the new emphasis on homeland security is leading to an increase in militarism in police agencies (Kraska 2007).

The paramilitary-bureaucratic structure (both its organization and culture) may be ill suited to fulfill the role that is expected of it, including implementing community policing (Angell 1971; Bayley 1994; Fogelson 1977; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993; Willis, Mastrofski, and Weisburd 2004). Community policing advocates that police and citizens should work together to solve problems and improve the quality of life in communities. The main tenets of community policing include problem solving, community involvement, organizational decentralization, and crime prevention (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux 1990). Essentially, critics argue that a job as diverse as policing requires a structure that facilitates flexibility and autonomy (Mastrofski 1998; Skogan and Hartnett 1997), especially as community policing has emerged as a dominant paradigm. The community policing philosophy promotes horizontal communication and increased authority of line officers—two characteristics that seem antithetical to a paramilitary-bureaucratic style and structure. Regardless of how functional or dysfunctional the paramilitary-bureaucratic structure might be for modern policing, its organization and culture are salient features of law enforcement. Historically, its presence was felt already in training (Kraska 1996).

Reflecting the shift toward community policing, the content of many training academies has changed to incorporate the new paradigm (Haarr 2001; Glenn et al. 2003). Despite the formal shift, we may expect some traditional organizational and cultural emphases to be carried over from the past and to be encouraged by prominent paramilitary features that thrive in modern agencies. If so, we may also expect to see some tension between

those emphases and community policing ideals that are now stressed in some of the formal academy curricula. This article examines police training in a police academy that pioneered a curriculum incorporating community policing and problem solving into a scenario-based format. Though scholars have long discussed the importance of “flattening” the bureaucratic structure to assist the implementation of community policing (Maguire 1997; Mastrofski 1998; Skogan and Hartnett 1997), no studies to date have directly demonstrated how the tension between community policing and paramilitary organization is handled in this generation of police academies. Thus, a police academy, with an emphasis on community policing and problem solving, was a strategic site for investigating how training deals with the changes that are occurring in law enforcement.

### **Paramilitary-Bureaucratic Structure and Recruit Training**

Classic treatments of bureaucracy (see Weber 1946/1958) highlight such organizational features as command hierarchy, explicit rule systems, and complex divisions of labor or specialization. All of these features are found in law enforcement departments. They are also characteristic of military organizations. Kraska and Cubellis (1997) point to one other feature: paramilitary organizations are said to foster an *us vs. them* mentality, something we may expect to begin during training (Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004).

To be accepted into either a police department or the military, new recruits must endure an intense training and adult socialization process to prepare them for the realities of potentially dangerous jobs that incorporate the use of force. Training for both law enforcement and the military emphasizes physical training; performing under stress; and the mastery of defensive tactics, weapons, and the use of force. Indeed, police academies are characterized by many of the same rituals as boot camp in the military, such as stress, an emphasis on chain of command, and group punishments and discipline. Such socialization experiences are known to strip individuals of their personal characteristics so that they can embrace the “*esprit de corps*” of the organization (Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Griffiths, Klein, and Verdun-Jones 1980; Skinner 1983). Because new police recruits tend to be young and impressionable, the academy is able to mold them to accept the organizational culture. According to Hodgson (2001, 528), “The individual who joins a paramilitary . . . organization must be prepared to give up personal liberty and become a part of or an expression of the organizations’ social self.” Furthermore, Van Maanen (1973, 297) observed,

It is no exaggeration to state that the “in the same boat” collective consciousness which arises when groups are processed serially through a harsh set of experiences was as refined in the [police academy] as in other institutions such as military academies.

Paramilitary organizations want new members who are prepared to submit to the intense rules and authority structure that characterize such organizations. Those who make the decision to join these organizations are also likely aware of the required limits on their individuality and liberty (Hodgson 2001). Although police academies are not monolithic (see Manning 1994; Paoline, Myers, and Worden 2000; Reuss-Ianni 1982), new recruits are probably somewhat “like-minded” and prepared to embrace the values and beliefs of the organization. If they are not, they will be less likely to succeed in such an environment (Britz 1997; Conser 1980).

Clifton Bryant (1979), in his study of deviant behavior in the military, discussed the socialization process of military recruits. The parallels to police training and socialization are striking. The socialization process in the military, not unlike the police academy, is demanding and intense and aims to “effectively convert the civilian into a non-civilian in terms of values, beliefs, and perspectives, as well as behavior” (Bryant 1979, 55). The police academy in particular is intended to isolate recruits from their outside responsibilities (Conti and Nolan 2005). Police recruits are subjected to extensive rules and regulations. They must abide by strict schedules put forth by their superordinates and endure physical and mental/emotional stress (Lundman 1980). According to Bryant, coping with such rigidity is made easier by a supportive peer group. Thus, the intensity of the formal training works to increase solidarity and strengthen relationships with work-peers.

## **Community Policing and Recruit Training**

Training at the police academy where the study was conducted was similar to that conducted elsewhere in the United States. It was administered by a public safety institute operated by a local community college in Florida. During data collection, the academy moved to a new curriculum, known as the Curriculum Maintenance System (CMS), based on community policing and the SECURE<sup>2</sup> problem-solving model. CMS was a completely new curriculum, including all new lesson plans, support materials, and examinations.

While traditional police academy training focused primarily on the technical and mechanical aspects of policing (e.g., marksmanship, driving

skills, defensive tactics), the goal of newer models is to “provide officers with a level of understanding that will allow them to effectively employ problem solving and community engagement techniques in their daily work” (Peak and Glensor 2004, 166). Community policing training requires the addition of new topics (e.g., diversity, community relations, problem solving), as well as a new delivery style based on adult learning (or andragogy). While police training that uses a pedagogical approach fosters an environment in which the focus becomes the chain of command, discipline, rules, and procedures (Birzer and Tannehill 2001), adult learning is more interactive and learner-centered (Knowles 1990).

The changes instituted in Florida mirror the four elements deemed fundamental to successful community policing academy training in a study of the Los Angeles Police Department, including contextualized learning, integration of topics throughout the curriculum, scenario building, and debriefing (Glenn et al. 2003). According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), the new curriculum incorporates a problem-solving focus, a scenario-based format, and a focus on “application of learning rather than memorization.” For example, CMS integrates topics such as problem solving, community policing, and officer safety throughout the curriculum. Integrating key topics, or “threading,” means that selected important themes will be discussed in relation to each substantive topic or module (i.e., woven throughout the curriculum). For instance, communications lessons (or diversity training or officer safety) can be reinforced in arrest scenarios, in crowd control exercises, and in community relations material. Integration helps recruits draw connections among multiple subject areas, which facilitates mastery over the curriculum and prepares recruits for problem-solving challenges when they enter the field.

The new curriculum also incorporates scenarios as the basis for all training. Scenarios help align a curriculum with the main tenets of adult learning: learning by doing, reflecting real life, and making the learning interactive and self-directed (Glenn et al. 2003). Scenarios inherently require the integration of topics, transforming abstract knowledge into understandable, practical, and applicable skills. Finally, debriefing was incorporated into the CMS curriculum. Debriefing is an effort to inform recruits about how they have performed in a given scenario and how they can improve. Recruits have an opportunity to discuss and reconsider their performance and to use their experience as a springboard for further learning. This reflection is important for adult learning. It prepares recruits for the feedback loop that is an inherent part of problem solving models like SARA or SECURE (see Glenn et al. 2003).

Research indicates that training has been slow to adapt to community policing (Dantzker et al. 1995). The transition is especially difficult given the conflicting values and practices between traditional policing and current policing. Mastroski and Ritti (1996) warn that the effects of high-quality training can dissipate once officers are exposed to the powerful effects of the organization and the occupational culture of more experienced and veteran officers. Other researchers have recognized that instructors who have strong internalized preferences for traditional training can be a challenge to the effectiveness of community policing training (Dantzker et al. 1995; Ford 2003). Haarr (2001) conducted a study of police recruits in Arizona who had completed academy training based on the community policing philosophy. She surveyed police recruits at four different time periods and found that although attitudes initially became more favorable towards community policing and problem solving, those attitudes dissipated after exposure to the departmental culture.

Another body of research has identified a “hidden curriculum” that emerges in police training programs that ostensibly espouse democratic and problem solving ideals (Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004; Prokos and Padavic 2002; White 2006). In particular, several studies recognize how the reproduction of the paramilitary environment (Hodgson 2001) and the maintenance of the traditional police subculture (Ford 2003) undermine the formal teachings of the academy. Similarly, several researchers (Buerger 1998; Ford 2003; Reuss-Ianni 1982) have recognized how the role of “war stories” contradicts the formal messages of the police academy. In fact, Ford (2003) found that 83 percent of the war stories told in the academy supported the police subculture.

## **Data and Method**

To learn how police recruits become acculturated into a police academy that has incorporated community policing into its curriculum, the lead author observed five different recruit classes (or cohorts) over the course of three years. Each class consisted of twenty to thirty police recruits. The lead author usually went to the academy two or three days a week and spent four to six hours per visit. In the beginning of her research, she would introduce herself before each class she attended (as a student doing research), but eventually, she became a “normal” part of the class. Both recruits and instructors knew her and appeared to be comfortable with her presence. The lead author conducted participant observation of courses on human diversity, interpersonal skills and communications, defensive tactics, first

responder, investigations, traffic skills, high-stress driving, high-risk traffic stops, patrol activities, community policing, scenarios, report writing, death investigations, and law. The second author had reviewed the materials that incorporated community policing, problem solving, and scenarios that were interwoven through much of the classroom training and observed some of the classes that were being piloted.

Not only did the first author observe the coursework, she also observed field exercises and spent time with the recruits informally. For example, she interacted with them when they were on breaks, and she went to lunch with them occasionally. She engaged in unstructured field conversations with them about what it was like to be in the police academy, why they wanted to be police officers, and what their backgrounds and career goals were. She also talked to them about other matters, such as school, hobbies, and family life. Talking with recruits and instructors during breaks and “downtime” occupied a large part of her time and contributed significantly to her understanding of the academy and its people.

The lead author met with training staff (e.g., director, assistant directors) on numerous occasions—sometimes at the academy in formal meetings and other times in informal meetings (e.g., lunch) to discuss the research project. She also spent time at the academy while collecting quantitative data and reviewing recruit personnel files. This allowed her to get to know the administrative staff and recruiters and hear stories about famous (or infamous) recruits. This further secured her place in the police academy culture: it was an unusual status at the academy—neither an instructor nor a recruit. Both recruits and instructors, however, appeared to accept her into their culture.

During the study, the lead author’s role was usually more of an observer, but occasionally it tilted toward participant. She was often invited to participate as a recruit, especially in physical-type exercises, such as physical training and defensive tactics (but usually dress prevented that type of activity). Other times she was asked by the instructors to help in scenarios, and she often participated in this capacity. For example, she played a domestic violence victim in a traffic stop exercise and an unconscious victim in a first responder scenario. The first author regularly participated in group work during classroom lectures. She tried to immerse herself into their culture. The fact that she was relatively young (and therefore close to the age of the recruits) facilitated this process. The lesson pioneered by Becker et al. (1961, 4) in their in-depth analysis of socialization in medical school rings true: “To be accepted, one must have learned to play the part.”

Taking notes while attending academy classes was fairly simple during classroom lectures because the researcher was just another “student” in the

class. When detailed note-taking was not possible (i.e., field exercises), the lead author would write down memos upon returning to her vehicle and use those notes to write detailed field notes when she got to her office or home computer. She also took notes after meetings with the training staff. The nature of such research and the context of field exercises often only allowed for “jotting down” of keywords that provided the framework for more detailed notes to be typed after she left the field. Recording long quotations during observations and in meetings would have threatened her acceptance into the police culture, an acceptance that was crucial to gaining (and maintaining) *entrée* in this type of environment. Van Maanen (1978, 311) addressed the issue of obtaining and maintaining access in researching the police. He said, “Access is continually problematic for the field researcher. Entry into the police system is no guarantee that one will be allowed to remain” (also see Adler and Adler 1987).

The first author always typed detailed field notes after leaving the training center and returning to either her office or home (see Lofland and Lofland 1995). Thus, the observational data could be analyzed while they were being collected (Glaser 1969). Periodically, the lead author would read through her notes and generate thoughts and memos about emerging patterns and theoretical concepts (Patton 1990). She would also meet with the second author to discuss the observations. These experiences helped refine and clarify the research goals as observations continued. The analytic strategy involved manually color coding field notes for themes that occurred frequently or seemed especially important (Noaks and Wincup 2006). Clear and concise themes were developed, and they are used to organize the findings.

## **Results: Understanding the Lessons Learned in Recruit Training**

The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate what is learned during training about *being* a law enforcement officer in an academy that incorporates community policing and problem solving. With regard to the paramilitary-bureaucratic structure, three salient themes emerged from the observations. First, recruits learned about positional authority and the command hierarchy; they learned what discipline and deference meant in law enforcement. Second, the recruits learned about law enforcement’s emphasis on loyalty, solidarity, and reliance on fellow officers. Third, the academy structured stress into the regimen so that recruits would learn to expect stress and how to perform under stress.



## *Command Structure—Learning Discipline and Deference*

Paramilitary-bureaucratic organizations have clear formal authority structures. There is an explicit chain of command, and incumbents of positions in that hierarchy enjoy authority over those holding lower positions. Recruits must learn that structure, understand the discipline that it requires, and internalize how to defer to what is required. The police academy was structured to teach these lessons, and in the process it sought to alter association patterns and interactions in and out of the academy.

The formal command structure of the military was reproduced in the academy—officers deferred to sergeants, officers and sergeants deferred to lieutenants, and all of these lower ranks deferred to captains. Because the academy drew its instructors from various law enforcement agencies in the area, recruits saw firsthand how the deference attached to the rank and not the agency to which the person belonged. In fact, the command authority and ranks of police agencies trumped the organizational positions within the academy. For example, the academy's class coordinator was a sergeant from a local sheriff's office. Although he was "in charge" of the class, he showed the respect and deference to the rank of the particular instructor of any of the curriculum units no matter the agency affiliation of the instructor. A captain coming from a local municipal police department to teach outranked him, and the sergeant respected that difference. "Captain" would be the noun of address.

One day, one of the instructors (of patrol officer rank) was lecturing about report writing when the recruits appeared bored. The instructor asked them if they wanted to talk about something else. One of the recruits asked, "Why don't you tell us about some of your best car chases?" So, the instructor told a few war stories, including one about chasing a "bad guy" in his car and then on foot, finally catching him and "taking him down." As the story became interesting, and the recruits were laughing and enjoying this opportunity to hear about "real police work," the class coordinator walked in, appearing visibly disturbed that the instructor was not covering the material from the curriculum. The instructor was obviously taken aback and quickly finished his story, summing it up, "The best car chases are the ones where no one gets hurt or shot." This illustrates the importance of the chain of command, not only between instructors and recruits, but between different members of the academy staff. It also points to the importance of informal lessons (often through war stories) and how students may be highly receptive to them.

Recruit classes were organized by the sergeant who served as the class coordinator. He was responsible for scheduling and organizing the classes and dealing with discipline problems. Occasionally, the class coordinator would teach if the scheduled instructor was absent. Being in charge, he was the disciplinarian—both in name and in practice. His punishments included teasing, insults and threats, physical exercise, extra assignments, and dismissal. He would come into the classroom on occasion and “act tough” to the recruits. For example, in one of the recruit classes, the class coordinator was secretly listening to one of the early classes on legal material taught by a civilian attorney. He entered the room, called the class out for its obnoxious behavior, and made them all run. The class coordinator essentially kept the recruits “in line” for the rest of the instructors. Deference is owed to all instructors, even nonsworn personnel.

When recruits entered the academy, discipline was exerted from the top down—as would be expected in a quasi-military and bureaucratic organization. If a recruit violated a rule, he or she was disciplined by the class coordinator. As the class matured and learned the ropes, the recruits took over responsibility for their own discipline. To accomplish this, the class coordinator chose several recruits to help lead and organize each class. These recruits became the “ranking officers” of the class, and it was observed that those with military and/or previous law enforcement experiences,<sup>3</sup> familiarity with chain of command, or discipline were often chosen (see Conti 2009). Thus, knowledge of militaristic rituals was defined as important and formally rewarded at the academy.

As the academy class progressed, the class assumed responsibility for its own discipline through its ranking officers. When a recruit broke a rule (e.g., tardiness), he or she was disciplined by the ranking recruit (e.g., class lieutenant). This had two consequences. One function was to learn the chain of command. Failure to adhere to the chain of command in the class would lead to discipline (e.g., complete a paper, do twenty push-ups, run a mile). A recruit who took a complaint directly to the class coordinator without first consulting with the ranking class officer violated the chain of command and was disciplined by the class coordinator. For example, one female student made a complaint of sexual harassment to the class coordinator (she most likely believed that this complaint was serious enough to “skip” the chain of command). This was a violation, and she was required to write a paper on the importance of the chain of command. The importance of adhering to the chain of command was modeled by the instructors and reinforced as recruits used the chain of command in their own class.

A second function of the evolving disciplinary system was that recruits began to take responsibility for each other's actions. Recruits would learn that the vertical formal hierarchy was supplemented by an informal, more horizontal pattern of relationships where they could protect the group and themselves by checking one another. In the words of one of the instructors, "Your people will rally behind you, even if they know you screwed up." To bring the point home, he related a war story about the support for an officer who faced a thorough review for an action that resulted in someone's death. The officer shot and killed a civilian during a high-risk traffic stop. Regardless of whether the officer was at fault, the department took the officer's weapon (routine in such circumstances). However, his fellow officers offered him their weapons as a token of loyalty immediately after his own weapon was taken by the department. Thus, the formal command structure (and its discipline) was honored but counterbalanced by a sense of belonging to a group that would support its own.

The academy stressed collective responsibility in other ways as well. Academy discipline was often collective. The whole class would be punished if one recruit was tardy. It was not unusual for the entire class to be required to run a mile when one recruit disrupted the lecture (by talking, laughing, or yawning—all of which violate notions of deference). Every recruit had a learning opportunity about discipline whenever anyone in the class violated the rules (see Braithwaite 2007). Everyone had a stake in everyone else's behavior and conduct, and in time, recruits learned to help each other stay out of trouble to avoid punishment.

Recall that recruits who had military or prior law enforcement exposure were more likely to be tapped to fill roles as class officers. They were important to academy training in other ways, too. Recruits who hailed from or thrived in the quasi-military environment enjoyed social approval by the instructors and others at the academy. They served as object lessons for teaching about the command structure, deference, and discipline. For example, "Brad" worked prior to and during the academy in a nonsworn capacity for a local law enforcement agency. He had more familiarity with the occupation than did most of the other recruits. He was friends with many law enforcement officers; he was already "one of them." In fact, he knew some of the instructors at the academy from his department. Brad was athletic, already knew how to shoot and clean a firearm, was a class officer, and was a good driver. He often told stories in class about recent crimes that occurred because he sometimes had the opportunity to be on the scene due to his job. He was well-liked, and the other recruits looked up to him. The instructors

did not tease him; they used him in examples and practice scenarios because he had “experience” (Harris 1973). Brad is still a law enforcement officer with the agency where he worked as a nonsworn employee. He became a peer role model for the class.

Other recruits serve as “negative” models; they represent what not to do. In each class, there was usually at least one recruit who failed to “fit in” and who was constantly the butt of the class coordinator’s barbed jokes and sarcasm. Once a recruit earned a negative reputation, it was nearly impossible to change that reputation. For example, there was a recruit named “Tom.” Tom did not excel in most areas of the academy other than in academic units. He was not particularly athletic; nor did he perform well with a firearm or in defensive tactics. More important, he was not well liked. Failure to pay attention in class violated norms of deference, and this was one of the ways in which Tom didn’t fit in. To teach that lesson, the instructor would always call on Tom, drawing others’ attention to his lack of attention. If Tom asked a question in class (often one that did not “fit”), instructors would make him feel like it was a bad or “dumb” question. Recruits followed suit, and soon Tom had the reputation as the “screw-up.” He became the negative model, helping to define *what not to do*. He also provided the opportunity to learn about deference and discipline—paying attention and asking relevant questions are forms of deference to the academy organization.<sup>4</sup>

The academy utilized other means to instill discipline and deference in the recruits. One of the techniques was to manipulate distance. Both social distance and spatial distance were important in training. For example, as the lowest persons in the academy hierarchy, police recruits were required to park their personal vehicles in designated parking spaces (farthest from the building complex), and they could only go in specific areas of the academy building. They were not permitted to use elevators (they had to use stairs), and they were only permitted to use restrooms designated for recruits. Recruits were also required to march in military form each morning before their classes began (see Conti 2000, 2009; Harris 1973). According to Bryant (1979), the purpose of marching is to instill obedience. We think the lesson goes beyond obedience. Marching also required recruits to know their place and to develop solidarity. They were confined to space, moved together in space, had to respect each other’s space. Sloppy marching led to discipline.

Recruits had to “post” (that is, they had to stand at attention when a civilian or ranking officer passed by). They also had to rise when an officer entered the classroom and generally defer to their superiors. Both authors, who were at the academy to observe training features and wanted to remain

as unobtrusive as possible, tried to create a “posting” exception for themselves. In one instance, a recruit posted in the hallway upon being approached. When told he could relax, he remained at attention, tried to glance both ways to make sure no one was around, shook his head ever so slightly, and mouthed “can’t.” Other recruits just whispered, “We have to.” The authors quickly learned to accept recruits’ deference even though it ran contrary to preferred research roles. Posting and other deference rules defined the chain of command and reinforced the recruits’ status as the lowest persons in that hierarchy.

Recruits were also required to adhere to dress codes. They wore a khaki uniform to academic classes and a uniform consisting of a gray shirt and black pants for physical-type training (defensive tactics, firearms training, etc.). They had to wear a hat when they were outside of a building and remove it while inside (see also Hodgson 2001). Violating the dress code would lead to discipline. For example, several recruits were required to do twenty push-ups for forgetting to remove their hats upon entering the building. Dress set the recruits apart, made their behavior more visible and salient, and made them vulnerable to discipline. Bryant (1979, 137) argues that, in the military, the uniform served as “symbolic control”: “Control over the clothing worn by members of the organization represents control over their behavior . . . [it] also insures social distance from outsiders.”

Recruits were expected to learn how to maintain social and spatial distance with others, too. Positioning and placement were stressed in the formal instruction, for example, in teaching about traffic stops and arrests. Recruits were also taught about how to use an assertive tone of voice, how to develop a “police presence,” and how to use their authority to make citizens defer. At times, the message was blunt and graphic: “Think like dirty dancing . . . this is my dance space and that is yours. If you violate my dance space, I’ll kick the shit out of you.” When spatial distance cannot be maintained, instructions about how to use force were also designed to send a message about authority and presence. For example, while practicing the use of handcuffs, one of the instructors insisted that the recruits should make it hurt: “Make ’em squeal, make ’em say ‘Ow!’”

The academy was part of a “public safety institute” and was only informally referred to as a training academy. Members of this institute were instrumental in the development and piloting of the new CMS curriculum that was adopted. Much attention was paid to the “high-liability” areas of training—they were termed “high liability” because they were areas that entailed higher risk of injuries and damages and because poor training could increase vulnerability to lawsuits. The new curriculum inserted units on

crowd control and on bombs and explosives and added fourteen more hours of firearms training. It also added sixteen more hours of training on vehicle operations. The reasons are telling. One key contributor from the academy insisted that there were “no such things as [traffic] ‘accidents,’” instead insisting that they be called “crashes.” The implication was that “crashes” had causes. Training was an important way to instill discipline that could counter those causes, prevent crashes, and keep officers safe.

As part of a team that reviewed many units of the proposed curriculum during its development, one of the authors saw firsthand how key players in this academy hammered home the centrality of officer safety in their meetings with others on the task force. It was no mistake that the problem-solving model incorporated into the new curriculum was modified from the commonly accepted SARA approach and given a new acronym, SECURE, or that the first letter of that acronym stood for “safety.” SECURE was a direct reflection of the influence of members of this academy, and its organizational culture, on curriculum development. A conscious and conscientious effort was made to “thread” safety issues throughout the curriculum and training based upon it. Safety was considered in each and every module covered in the CMS curriculum. For example, one component of the CMS curriculum was the inclusion of scenarios to illustrate important lessons in each module (or training segment). Recruits had a textbook that included scenarios; the instructors would require recruits to get into groups and work through the scenarios. After they worked together, each group would present how they would handle the given scenario. Their presentation was based on the SECURE model. The instructor’s first question was always, “How would you deal with officer *safety* in this scenario?”

Safety concerns were a salient part of the organizational culture, and its importance was not lost on instructors or recruits. As a “public safety institute” providing extensive training in “high-liability” areas, everyone’s safety mattered, even that of perpetrators. Nevertheless, officer safety received utmost priority, and that view was articulated clearly during training. “I’d rather see fifty dirt bags die than one officer. I know that’s not politically correct and the liberals would be mad, but that’s the way I feel.”

The previous quotation reveals a possible consequence of the emphasis placed on positional authority. In the academy, people fall into categories that are not neutral. In the formal organizational structure, recruits are subordinate (lesser) just as officers are subordinate to those of rank; in the real world, officers have a position that is viewed as preferable to other categories (e.g., the position of “officer” is contrasted with other categories—“dirt bags,” “liberals”—both of which are disparaged). Recall that Kraska and

Cubellis (1997) argued that paramilitary organization fosters an *us vs. them* mentality, one that Albuquerque and Paes-Machado (2004) linked to training.

Many other categories that were used in the academy had legal relevance. Recruits had to learn how to categorize suspects and separate those for whom they will have probable cause from those for whom they will not, or those for whom they can articulate grounds for suspicion from those for whom they cannot. Indeed, learning to distinguish among categories was an explicit part of the training units for law, arrest, traffic, and so on. Often, categories that recruits were encouraged to adopt went beyond legal categories but had occupational significance. The categories could be given broad characterizations. Recruits were reminded that “most dangerous people are not predictable.” They were told to assume that “there’s a bad guy on every call” and to assume that “there’s one more backup bad guy than you see” and that “someone who appears to be dead may just be playing possum; they should be handcuffed anyway.” Some of these stereotypes had questionable validity. For example, the recruits were told that when addicts “are ‘cracked up,’ they are crazy and they can’t feel any pain.” For training that emphasizes officer safety, even a fable could have a heuristic moral.

Perhaps it is inevitable for officers to develop labels for what Van Maanen’s (1978) policing research referred to as the “assholes.” Negative labeling clearly began in training. Suspects were referred to as “dirt bags,” “perps,” “bad guys,” or “animals.”

Sometimes the professional reasons for categorization blurred with informal labels, and these lessons were also communicated to recruits. For example, one instructor discussed how to cultivate a “snitch.” “Even bad guys know when police need to know. [Those who you regularly bust] will be your best snitches.” Another instructor said he got lots of good vice information “because he’s nice to the prostitutes, buys them cigarettes, talks to them and they know what’s going on as far as who’s got drugs, etc.” Note that the lesson being taught is that, rather than being basic to professionalism, respect is a kind of currency—it can be manipulated to get something of value for the officer.

There was also tension surrounding differences and similarities between law enforcement officers and others. On one hand, recruits were told that you “must follow laws outside of work” and “must not think you’re special.” On the other hand, recruits picked up lessons that they were different. “When you catch me speeding, you won’t write me a ticket.” “You [an officer] may break arms but as long as you do it correctly, or somewhat correctly, it’s okay.”

In one way, the academy put this kind of tension into stark relief. Recruits were required to practice “moral behavior,” a term also used in screening applicants for the police academy. “Moral behavior” was loosely defined as holding oneself to a higher standard than required by law. Abiding by the law was not enough; officers were expected to possess a higher personal standard of behavior. For example, when recruits reacted with laughter to a dirty joke, they were told their reaction was “inappropriate.” “Moral behavior” was consistently operationalized in two ways at the academy: recruits were not allowed to curse, and they were not permitted to smoke cigarettes. Indeed, recruits who did smoke cigarettes were regularly teased and mocked by instructors and peers (especially if it could be related to poor physical performance, such as running slowly, inability to do pull-ups, etc.).

Morality separated the “good guys” from the “bad guys”; it was another manifestation of the *us vs. them* dichotomy that was taught during training. It defined the “bad guys” as the “other,” something that helped to justify police actions in many lessons. The meaning of morality and good moral behavior was formally defined in classes, informally defined through war stories, reinforced through teasing and insults, and modeled by superiors and incumbents at the police academy.

Morality, however, was sometimes situational or relative; hence the tension. “[If] you’re gonna body slam somebody and his head [hits] the ground . . . , remember to call it a ‘modified’ arm take down [in your report].” “If you screw up, remember to call it a ‘modified’ whatever and say it was legal.” The implication was that a little deceit was justified. One instructor showed a videotaped detail that he was involved in to catch prostitutes—a kind of war story approach. In the video, you could see him drinking beer and offering it to the prostitutes. When a recruit confronted him about drinking and driving, the instructor responded, “Oh yeah, it is a misdemeanor to have an open container, but that’s how I get them to believe I’m not a cop, sometimes I go through a six pack doing it.” Obviously, “us” (law enforcement officers) were different from “them” (prostitutes), so the end seemingly justified the means.

### *Learning Lessons of Loyalty, Solidarity, and Reliance on Fellow Officers*

Inherent to any *us vs. them* orientation would be some sense of solidarity and loyalty among the in-group members. Paramilitary environments, in general, promote solidarity among their members (Encandela 1991). According to Skolnick and Fyfe (1993, 122), the police have a “rare degree of camaraderie and group loyalty.”



We have already discussed several issues that conveyed lessons about loyalty and solidarity. Recall the role of uniforms in training. Bryant (1979) argued that the uniform maintained the solidarity of the group and prevented individuals from expressing their personal characteristics. Also recall that the academy used collective sanctions. Recruits learned that if they made a mistake, the entire group would suffer the consequences. Group punishments built and reinforced group solidarity and loyalty. Furthermore, the role of stress in the academy (discussed in detail below) to teach lessons about police work and performance also contributed to solidarity and loyalty. The stress forced recruits to rely on each other for support. The shared experiences of dealing with stress further increased solidarity of the work-peer group. The structure of the academy forced the recruits to rely on each other and trust each other. Loyalty among peers flourished due to the evolving disciplinary system and the “in the same boat” mentality. Recruits were told that their peers would stand behind them even if they made mistakes. This was important because it taught recruits that loyalty to the profession and to peers was most important; their own safety and that of others required it. They would be expected to put their lives on the line for each other (Brown 1981; Herbert 1998). There is a clear parallel with what Bryant (1979) observed in the military; training fostered reliance on the peer (occupational) group because members must count on each other for survival.

As classes advanced through the academy, recruits quickly developed strong bonds with each other. They spent an extraordinary amount of time together, not only during academy hours, but outside of the academy as well. Studying together for exams was encouraged. Some of the recruits became roommates and/or carpooled to the academy together. The recruits were encouraged to break ties with former “nonpolice” friends (Albuquerque and Paes-Machado 2004). “In a few years, all your friends will be cops.” “It is your fellow officers that are your friends, confidantes and supporters.” Instructors defined this by explaining that recruits would feel uncomfortable around their former friends because their friends may break the law and they (as officers) would be put in difficult positions. Some of the recruits took the advice one step further. For example, one recruit announced that he would “bust Dad for DUI” and his sister “for smoking pot” and that he “can’t wait to bust his friends [who are] on his list.” Breaking away from former ties and embracing work-peers as friends were defined as necessary to the policing occupation by instructors. Instructors modeled this behavior by making it clear to recruits that their peer group was made up of fellow police officers. For example, instructors made it known that they hunted, fished, and exercised together in their free time.

Instructors told the recruits that they should discuss their problems only amongst themselves; discussing their problems with outsiders would cause them to be viewed unprofessionally. "Only police officers understand what you're going through." Recruits were given the opportunity to practice what was preached during the academy. When recruits had internal conflicts during class, the instructor would leave the room to allow the recruits to resolve it among themselves. They were told to work it out among themselves without taking it "outside the family." The family metaphor was adopted to signify the sense of solidarity and loyalty among recruits. They sometimes referred to themselves as "family." In fact, the first author was even referred to as "little sister" by the recruits in one of the classes.

A "class culture" (Haarr 2001) developed. The specifics of that culture varied somewhat from class to class, but there were commonalities across recruit cohorts. A shared set of values and beliefs about personal and professional morality and the police profession was created. Recruits kept things that occurred in the police academy from their families and "former" friends. Secrecy and isolation from outsiders were defined as good and necessary. Of course, isolation and associated secrecy in the policing occupation have long been acknowledged in the literature (Alpert and Dunham 1997; Westley 1956). A recruit quoted a common saying: "What happens in the academy stays in the academy."

The norms of loyalty, solidarity, and reliance are well documented in the policing literature (Niederhoffer 1967; Skolnick 1966/1994). Such norms were not only defined formally in the academy curriculum but were also defined informally and reinforced through war stories. The camaraderie among instructors/superiors was obvious, and it provided a model for the recruits to follow. Furthermore, group marching, "posting," uniform dressing, and group punishments reinforced group solidarity and cohesion. These rituals ensured that recruits identified with each other. Indeed, the development of the police subculture began day one in the academy.

### *Learning to Perform under Stress*

Lundman (1980) refers to law enforcement training facilities as "stress-academies." From what the authors saw in this academy, the descriptor is apt, and the stress is intentional. The stress played a role in socializing the recruits into the profession. Solidarity and support from others in law enforcement was presented as a way to help deal with stress. For example, one instructor said, "Talk to your fellow officer when you're upset."

The instructors defined policing as a high-stress occupation and emphasized that recruits must learn how to cope with it effectively. Some instructors discussed the importance of dealing with stress and suggested ways to combat it (e.g., exercise). But they did not ever bend academy rules (such as those about attendance and tardiness) to lessen stress for individual recruits, even if a recruit was confronting unusual circumstances (e.g., death in the family, illness). Moreover, some of the most critical job demands like use of deadly force were presented as occurring under great stress (even if infrequently). Much of the training addressed high-stress situations (which probably overlap with “high-liability” areas) because training and discipline were needed so that appropriate actions and reactions will be automatic—conditioned—and will be effective and safe. A defensive tactics instructor expressed concern about recruits who screwed up in scenarios. He argued that “they would revert to bar fighting techniques for years, unless they took . . . training seriously.” Safety in the face of stressful situations was seen as one reason why recruits needed to learn to perform under stress at the academy.

The academy was structured to be stressful; it forced recruits to be emotionally, mentally, and physically present (and under constant scrutiny) every day for almost six months. The physical training was especially stressful for some recruits. Recruits had to perform in other classes even if the physical training and long hours wore them down. There were no excuses. Although this academy was not as strict as the military, instructors routinely teased and criticized the recruits if their performance suffered due to stress (see also Lundman 1980).

External strains (e.g., family issues, transportation problems, and financial matters) also put extra stress on some recruits. This academy allowed recruits to complete training before securing a law enforcement job. Only about 20 percent of the class was hired by agencies and paid while attending the academy. Many recruits had families to support, and being in the academy meant that they were without an income for six months. Some recruits had to share a vehicle with their spouse. They were forced to deal with the stress of regular examinations, homework, and other school-like stressors, in addition to adult stressors like financial strains or family matters. Though many recruits had financial support (e.g., loans, help from parents) while attending the academy, several recruits were forced to balance a multitude of stressors.

The academy instructors showed little sympathy to those experiencing external stress. Their strict stance established what behaviors are expected

in times of stress in a paramilitary environment. For example, one recruit named “John” was married with a small child. He was suffering financially because he was not being paid to attend the academy. He and his family lived in a small town about an hour away from the academy. Every morning, he had to take his child to school, take his wife to work, and be sure to arrive at the academy in time for marching. He was tardy a few times and was disciplined. After the academy, he had to pick up his wife and child from work and school and find time to do homework and study for exams. He was given no special consideration. John accepted his situation without complaint. When he violated the rules (no matter the reasons), he took his punishment. There were no excuses. His deference and acceptance showed him to be a “good soldier.” He was respected for that; he could handle stress and clearly had a strong desire to become an officer. The recruits learned that they would be held to a higher standard and that they needed to take responsibility rather than provide excuses even in difficult circumstances.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research was conducted in an academy that was undergoing transition. The first recruit classes that were observed were piloting the new CMS curriculum, a curriculum that took some time to settle in. Although the academy leadership was instrumental in the development of that curriculum, the instructors and staff members had to learn it. The academies that had trained them had not featured many of its problem-solving and community policing themes; the instructors’ early field training and formative years in patrol had not emphasized community policing elements either. In this context, some tension between paramilitary training and the goals of community policing could be expected. We conclude by discussing that tension and raising considerations about how to improve academy training in this era of community policing.

The main goal of community policing is to enhance the quality of life in our communities; its main tenets include problem solving, community involvement, organizational decentralization, and crime prevention (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux 1990). The community policing paradigm, however, adds to the challenges of policing rather than displaces traditional concerns. Developing good relations with a community to secure its involvement in problem-solving strategies to prevent crime and secure order does not preclude more traditional crime-fighting occasions. Law enforcement officers will still have to make traffic stops; they will still have to respond to reports of serious crime, some of which will be crimes in

progress. Stress will be present in parts of the job. There will still have to be accountability to some level of supervision guided by departmental policies and procedures, even if the chain of command is flattened. Officers will still need to work with one another, so community policing is also served by occupational solidarity. In other words, many of the lessons that are tied to paramilitary training remain important even in the age of community policing.

The demands placed on officers in community policing are much broader than in traditional policing. Paramilitary models may be good at teaching how to assert authority and how to use threats of coercion to make arrests and gain compliance among the “bad guys,” but learning skills important to other forms of authority relations may enhance job performance in community policing. When officers partner with citizens or outside agencies (public and private), the lines of authority blur; they are no longer top-down. Hierarchical authority gives way to more horizontal relationships. For example, according to Chappell, Lanza-Kaduce, and Johnston (2005, 84-85),

Expertise, rather than the symbols of power and coercion will be the basis for partnerships in community outreach. . . . Traditional policing that emphasizes top-down authority relations, where police have “ownership” over crime problems, needs to give way to community involvement and partnerships. Success will depend on training that teaches and demonstrates how to share power and authority, how to gather information and suggestions, how to work through conflict to build consensus, and how to cooperate and coordinate with others.

Elsewhere, we have noted how the formal curriculum in this academy sought to bridge into community policing:

The first 94 hours of CMS training deal with knowledge areas [e.g., diversity, law, communications] rather than the acquisition of skills [e.g., defensive tactics, firearms, vehicle operations]. Knowledge bases, such as law and diversity, were well integrated into most of the modules, including those focusing primarily on skill building. Scenarios helped to pull both skills and knowledge bases together in an integrated and synthesized fashion. For example, instructors encouraged recruits to use information learned in diversity and interpersonal communication in a module on defensive tactics. (Chappell, Lanza-Kaduce, and Johnston 2005, 80)

The bigger challenge proved to be in the instruction itself. The structure and culture of the academy do not always fit well with community policing. The structure remains almost exclusively paramilitary and the recruits learn authority relations that reflect that. The culture supports and fosters the *us vs. them* orientation that marks paramilitary organization. Where the formal curriculum incorporates community themes and emphasizes working coactively to solve problems, the informal lessons on authority relations revert back to categories and relations that separate officers from others.

The paramilitary culture reinforces that separation. “Real” police work remains tied to crime-fighting action, defensive tactics, car chases, and arrests. Instruction on community, communication, diversity, problem solving, and partnerships does not capture the imagination of recruits in the same way. It does not form the basis of war stories and does not elicit excitement or interest. Indeed, the academy culture encourages instructors to go beyond the formal teaching materials, and when instructors talk about their experiences (i.e., tell war stories), they provide potent informal lessons. Many of those lessons undercut the formal curriculum.

The critical role of war stories warrants further examination. War stories (see Alpert and Dunham 1997; Marion 1998; Van Maanen 1973) were a significant part of the academy and captured the attention of the recruits better than the lecture material and formal illustrations did. Instructors often drifted into stories about time on the street (either last night or ten years ago) that exemplified the traditional crime-fighting cop. War stories invariably involved the physical side of policing—foot chases, car chases, or drug busts—rather than problem solving, maintaining order, or serving the community (see Ford 2003). They were seldom apt illustrations of particular lessons. The context of war stories shifted the setting; it became informal and relaxed—both for the storyteller and the listeners. War stories were “times out” from the usual discipline that was expected (see Van Maanen 1973). The recruits were allowed to laugh and enjoy themselves. The relaxed storytelling defined what was truly valued in police work and in the police culture. Through stories and casual discussions, recruits began to understand the nature of policing and how they were supposed to act (Peak 2006). In comparison, the formal lessons were seldom associated with such pleasant consequences; they were “boring.”

We believe the greatest challenge for academy training that seeks to integrate community policing elements is three-pronged. First, academy training could reexamine its paramilitary structure. It may consider augmenting the hierarchical authority relations it presents to sensitize recruits to the horizontal relationships that occur in many community policing activities.

For example, the informal models of how instructors from different agencies and ranks (including nonsworn instructors) relate to each other in cooperative ways could become part of the formal lesson for forming partnerships and enhancing community-wide cooperation. The expertise becomes an important reason for the deference, not just the rank or position. The rational-legal structure of most bureaucracies (Weber 1946/1958) deals with chain of command issues; organization members learn it without some of the extreme features of paramilitary hierarchy.

Second, the academy will have to find ways to align informal instruction with the formal curriculum. With time, more law enforcement officers at all ranks will have more experiences with community policing. Those experiences, which can blend traditional policing with community policing goals, could be catalogued and tied to the formal curriculum to provide apt illustrations of important community policing themes. For example, one of the authors recalls a problem-solving report presented by officers attending a regional community policing training center. Once those officers made a strategic arrest of a charismatic youth who was at the center of a network, they successfully disrupted what was an emergent gang structure. Their previous arrests had cleared various crimes but had not solved the deeper problem. By learning something about the youth network (which required good relations with the neighborhood), they learned whom to target to have a lasting impact. Carefully selected examples can bring to life the formal community policing modules and show the connection of problem solving and community involvement with more exciting features like sting operations and arrests.

Third, an academy could reexamine its culture, both in terms of how it defines police work and in regards to the *us vs. them* mentality. Most police work falls outside of the more exciting high-liability activities, which are not the sine qua non of “real” police work if community policing is incorporated. Problem solving with community involvement is hard work that takes professional skill and requires a bigger tool box than does crime fighting. When community policing is successful, a recurring problem is diminished—something that is more effective than “shagging” another call or clearing another crime with an arrest.

The academy may especially want to address head on the ways in which it engenders the *us vs. them* mentality. Democratic values (e.g., the separation of powers and the presumption of innocence) mean that all members of the public, including the suspects and the “perps,” should be dealt with professionally. Categorization of people is necessary to accomplish that, but categories that have legal or occupational relevance need to be used. Diversity training has added significance in community policing in this regard. Its

role in academy training warrants further investigation, especially given the informal lessons we observed.

Our observations illustrated the permeation of paramilitary-bureaucratic structure and culture in law enforcement training in an academy that incorporated community policing and problem solving. Paramilitary features undercut the notion that community policing is “real” police work. The continued emphases on the authority structure and deference, the in-group solidarity with its *us vs. them* orientation, and performing under stress seem to play important roles in teaching about officer safety, so there is understandable tension between traditional approaches and the newer demands of community policing. Nevertheless, the paramilitary emphases seemed to override units and themes in the formal curriculum that integrated community policing. Relatively little training augmented the paramilitary emphases with the kinds of models and lessons to equip recruits with the tools needed to do community policing well. Ironically, the paramilitary themes may have been “threaded” best across all aspects of the training; they were certainly tied into the noncurricular components (e.g., marching, posting, dress, discipline, war stories). We question how much of the lessons on community policing were actually absorbed by the recruits. We hope that others will study law enforcement training from the academy into field training and through in-service training. We wonder how much the paramilitary themes we observed are salient across different types of training and across sites. Research should also be done to see how much the training affects the work that officers do. Both process and outcome evaluations of training features, including paramilitary features, will help us understand their effectiveness in maintaining safety as well as for establishing community involvement and solving problems in this era of community policing.

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### **Notes**

1. COMPSTAT represents computer statistics.
2. SECURE represents Safety, Ethics, Community, Understanding, Response, and Evaluation and is similar to the more popular SARA model (Scan, Analyze, Respond, Assess) (see Eck and Spelman 1987).



3. A small percentage of recruits had previous law enforcement experience in another state or jurisdiction. Other recruits had experience as correctional officers, noncertified police, or security personnel.
4. Tom's behavior may have been predictive. He had a short stint with a local law enforcement agency but was eventually terminated.

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