

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

- 1 Describe which personal qualities and characteristics make good officers.
- 2 Explain why hiring diverse officers is important for police-community relations.
- 3 Define police subculture and explain how it impacts officers and the profession.
- 4 Describe the state of education in policing.
- 5 List the sources of occupational stress in policing.

## KEY TERMS

Police cynicism

Police subculture

Occupational stress

Peace Officer Standards  
and Training

Symbolic assailants

Successful democratic policing requires additional attention to the recruitment, selection, and training process. The need is for diverse men and women who can deal effectively with the realities of the job as a guardian of democracy rather than as a warrior in some kind of “war” on crime. This means recruiting individuals who are smart, reasoned, and service-oriented. The selection of the right individuals, combined with the proper training and enculturation process can be the difference between a department that garners a high degree of public trust and legitimacy, and one that lacks public confidence and spends a lot of time defending itself and its officers against allegations of impropriety and abuse of power.

In the review questions for the previous chapter, we asked you to take a look at official agency Web sites, in part to see whether the imagery presented by these agencies matched their stated missions. If you took up this challenge, your textbook authors are willing to bet that you saw some pretty interesting things as you surfed around—everything ranging from departments with

elaborately produced recruitment videos that highlight SWAT team members being inserted by helicopters and “pie-ing” the entryway of a building with laser-sighted automatic weapons, to departments using the images of smiling actors in police uniforms posing on a city sidewalk with diverse and happy members of some fictitious community. Reality lies somewhere between these extremes. Do you think that this kind of imagery has any relationship to the pool of potential recruits that a department tends to attract, the subsequent quality of enforcement, and/or the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of the public?

In this chapter, we explore the recruitment, selection, and training process. We also look at the personal qualities and characteristics that make good officers, why the hiring of diverse and educated officers is important, and how diversity and education have impacted policing. In addition, we examine how officers change between recruitment and retirement and look at the impact that occupational stress has on officers and their families.

## THE JOB OF POLICE OFFICER: FACT VERSUS FICTION

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A time-persistent “problem” for the police has been dealing with the myth of the crime fighter—the idea that the police are first and foremost crime fighters who, were it not for their constant vigilance, prevent society from rapidly devolving into a chaotic world ruled by crafty, murderous criminals. The police are the “thin blue line” between order and chaos. These crime fighter police spend their entire shifts spotting crimes in progress, chasing and arresting criminals, as well as stopping crimes before they actually occur. All other activities are incidental. If they stop for lunch, they will drop their sandwich and coffee on the ground as soon as a call comes over the radio so they can get back into the fray. They do not have lives outside of their crime fighting role and their only off-duty activity is sleeping in preparation for another day of crime fighting. The lines between patrol officer and detective are blurred; forensic evidence of some type is utilized in every situation, but is still no match for physical crime fighting in the form of dramatic foot or car chases, gun play, and danger at every turn.

We put “problem” in quotes because at various times this crime fighter image has actually been quite useful for the police. For example, the crime fighter image serves the police quite well when they need to argue for additional resources. Recall also from the chapters on police history that there was a time that the police actively sought to portray themselves as crime fighters in order to help burnish their public image as detached, professional law enforcers. The police and popular media have occasionally managed to align their interests, with the police department seeing a public relations benefit and the media seeking increased viewership (and/or readership). The old television show, *Dragnet*, popular in the 1950s and again in the late 1960s, is a classic example of such cooperation.

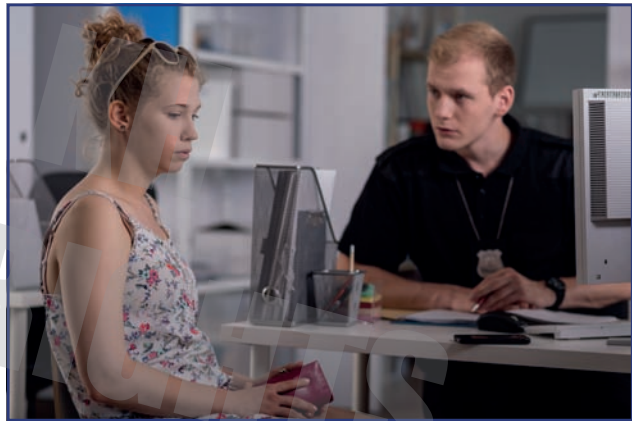
Who doesn’t like a good television police drama? The fact that there are so many police dramas being supplied by television producers tells you that there is a substantial public demand for them. *Hawaii Five-O*, *Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue*, *COPS*, *Law and Order*, *CSI*, *The Wire*, just to name a few. Some of these shows are more realistic than others, but certainly all of them must emphasize the dramatic aspects of policing. Who would want to watch police officers fill out paperwork for an hour (or 2 hours, split into two exciting episodes)? Would it be any more interesting if in the second episode you got to see them standing around, talking to some people on the street? Maybe seeing them negotiate with and ultimately assist a mentally ill, homeless

person to find a safer place to sleep and then connect them with available services? How about watching them clean the vomit out of the back of their patrol car after transporting an intoxicated person to the precinct?

The reality is that most of what the police do all day is not “crime fighting,” but more of the order maintenance and service functions that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. As such, while it is certainly important that potential recruits be suited for, and trained and equipped to handle potentially violent situations, make arrests, and “catch bad guys,” it is arguably more important that they be suited for, and trained and equipped for *service*. The more a potential recruit understands about the reality of policing, the more likely they are to successfully self-select into the profession. When there is a substantial disconnect between the image and the reality of policing, the potential exists for an unsuccessful recruitment and training process, as well as subsequent poor performance and negative behavior on the street. But the burden does not fall entirely on the potential recruit; much of the burden falls on the police themselves who bear some responsibility for “truth in advertising” in their recruitment process, as well as in the design of academy training.

In his classic study of **police cynicism**, Arthur Niederhoffer (1967) sought to explain why some officers “go wrong” during the course of their careers, especially in light of the increased standards for selection, better training, and high performance standards that came with the police professionalism movement. He proposed what is essentially a strain theory to explain the generation of cynical attitudes among police officers: police officers experience frustration and disillusionment when faced with this disconnect between the “ideal” expectations they pick up in the academy and the “reality” of police work on the street

(where they are told to forget the academy and rapidly learn how policing is really “done”), which generates cynicism and, without return to professional commitment, eventual apathy and alienation, or anomie. He argued that this process occurs over the course of officer careers, beginning with the contrast between academy training and initial field experience, and later as an effect of continued exposure to a police administration perceived as out of touch with street-level policing, the perceived failures of the criminal justice system, as well as contagion effects from other cynical officers (Niederhoffer, 1967). In its worst form, an advanced stage of “aggressive cynicism” may develop; this is marked by overt hostility toward the sources of frustration and rejection of the goals or objectives that cannot be attained. Cynical attitudes will manifest in problem behavior as officers “act out” their frustrations in the course of their daily interactions with citizens and other officers (Niederhoffer, 1967). This cynicism, along with other ramifications of the selection process and the disjuncture between the myth and the reality of the job, help explain the existence and perpetuation of a distinctive police subculture—an issue that is discussed later in this chapter.



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**While police officers perform a variety of duties, their ability to provide service is possibly most important.**

## PATROL OFFICER JOB DESCRIPTION

Individuals are often drawn to police work because of the variability of the job. This variety makes the job of patrol officer very difficult to conceptualize and describe, more so than possibly any other occupation. Baehr and colleagues (1968) conducted comprehensive field observations and developed a behavioral analysis of a patrol officer's job and a list of the most important attributes required for success in the field. Although the behavioral analysis is more than 40 years old, it is still applicable today.

1. Endure long periods of monotony in routine patrol, yet react quickly and effectively to problem situations observed on the street or to instructions issued by the dispatcher.
2. Know the assigned patrol area, not only its physical characteristics but also of its normal routine events and behavior patterns of its residents.
3. Exhibit initiative, problem-solving capacity, effective judgment, and imagination in coping with the many complex situations he or she is called to face, such as a family disturbance, a potential suicide, a robbery in progress, an accident, or a disaster.
4. Make prompt and effective decisions, sometimes in life-and-death situations, and be able to size up a situation quickly and take appropriate action.
5. Demonstrate mature judgment, as in deciding whether an arrest is warranted by the circumstances or when facing a situation in which the use of force may be needed.
6. Demonstrate critical awareness in discerning signs of out-of-the-ordinary conditions or circumstances that indicate trouble or a crime in progress.
7. Exhibit a number of complex psychomotor skills, such as driving a vehicle in emergency situations, firing a weapon accurately under extremely varied conditions, maintaining agility, endurance, and strength; and showing competence in self-defense and apprehension.
8. Perform the communication and record-keeping functions of the job, including oral reports, formal case reports, and departmental and court forms.
9. Endure verbal and physical abuse from citizens and offenders while using only necessary force in the performance of his or her job.
10. Exhibit a self-assured professional presence and a self-confident manner when dealing with offenders, the public, and the courts.
11. Be capable of restoring equilibrium to social groups (e.g., when restoring order in a family fight, in a disagreement between neighbors, or in a clash between rival gangs).
12. Tolerate stress in a multitude of forms, such as meeting the violent behavior of a mob, coping with the pressure of a high speed chase or a weapon being fired, or assisting a woman bearing a child.
13. Maintain objectivity while dealing with a host of special-interest groups, ranging from relatives of offenders to members of the press.
14. Maintain a balanced perspective in the face of constant exposure to the worst side of human nature.
15. Exhibit a high level of personal integrity and ethical conduct.

Adapted from Baehr, M.E., Furcon, J.E., & Froemel, E.C. (1968). *Psychological assessment of patrolman qualifications in relation to field performance*. Department of Justice, pp. 11.3–11.5. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

*Law enforcement officers should have the wisdom of Solomon, the courage of David, the patience of Job, and the leadership of Moses, the kindness of the Good Samaritan, the diplomacy of Lincoln, the tolerance of the Carpenter of Nazareth, and finally, an intimate knowledge of every branch of the natural, biological, and social sciences.*

—August Vollmer

In the opening chapter of this textbook, we introduced the idea of democratic policing and highlighted some innovative training going on at the centralized training academy in Washington State. This shift in their training model seeks to emphasize core democratic values and transition the police culture away from the warrior mentality (i.e., police as urban warriors equipped and trained for battle) and toward the idea of police officers as protectors and guardians of democracy (i.e., police as community guardians with a strong focus on procedural justice) (Rahr & Rice, 2015). As this guardian model of policing continues to accumulate national support, what kinds of characteristics are police leaders seeking in police recruits? Consistent with the broader emphasis on procedural justice, police leaders tend to emphasize critical thinking and independent decision-making skills, as well as the ability to socially engage with humans in a respectful manner, and to be effective at de-escalating conflict.

Critical thinking refers to the ability to objectively analyze a particular issue and independently form a conclusion or judgment about the issue. It is best thought of as a general way of thinking, not as a tool that can be applied to solve particular problems. Your professors are probably somewhat obsessed with critical thinking, since we are often evaluated on our ability to stimulate critical thinking in the classroom. We tend to approach critical thinking by encouraging students not to take things at face value; not to presume that something is so, simply because someone has said so or because it appears in a book; to dig deeper, try to free yourself from any preconceptions, do your own research, and come to an informed decision on your own. This is important in policing for a number of reasons. While police culture tends to emphasize adherence to policy and procedure, most would agree that memorizing the policies and procedures manual and attempting to follow it to the letter and apply it in every situation is a recipe for disaster. We need officers who can think on their feet and are comfortable with the exercise of discretion in unique and dynamic environments; if we wanted strict application of the policies and procedures manual, we could replace the officer with a robot—there would be no need for a reasoning human. In addition, officers who are good critical thinkers are open minded and empathetic, and as such they actively seek out different perspectives, different sources of information, and creative approaches to problems. When faced with a problem, good critical thinkers aren't looking for the "easy" answer, nor are they necessarily looking for the "right" answer—they seek the "best" decision given the information that is available to them.



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**Officers who are good critical thinkers are able to creatively approach problems.**

Good critical thinking is essential to the guardian model of policing because of the increased importance placed on officer discretion, as well as the increased amount of discretion, necessary to fulfill the focus on procedural justice. Ultimately, the behavior of the police and the legitimacy of the police as an institution in the eyes of the public will be contingent on the perception of fundamental fairness in their use of coercive authority. As noted in Chapter 1, the intelligent use of coercion is the key; we need to ensure that the police are adequately trained to intelligently exercise discretion in their use of coercion, and seek to minimize unnecessary physical coercion. In addition to improved interactions with the public, as well as improvements in perceived legitimacy, there is also a benefit to officers in terms of increased safety. As Rahr and Rice (2015:5) note,

*... much recruit training focuses on physical control tactics and weapons, with less attention given to communication and de-escalation skills. The reasoning for this approach is the sacred mantra of officer safety. We train relentlessly—as we should—in physical tactics for the high-risk, low-frequency attacks. Less instructional attention is focused on human behavioral science. Yet seasoned cops and statistics tell us that the officer’s intellect and social dexterity are often the most effective officer safety tools. For the sake of safety, voluntary compliance should be the primary goal in resolving conflict, with physical control reserved for those who present an immediate threat and cannot be managed any other way.*

## THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS

Law enforcement agencies invest a considerable amount of time, money, and effort in selecting and hiring the highest quality candidates possible. The process to become a police officer is more extensive than almost every other job out there. There are stringent age, physical, and medical requirements as well as a battery of tests that reveal an applicant’s suitability for the job and which may predict the applicant’s likelihood of success.

### ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Because of the physically demanding nature of the job, police departments are generally looking for physically fit candidates between the ages of 21 and 38. Although there is not usually a stipulated maximum age, the minimum age is usually between 19 and 21 (depending on the state and the agency). Even though someone may meet the minimum age requirement, that is often not enough. Law enforcement agencies are looking for mature individuals with life experience, something that many candidates in their early twenties lack.

Beyond age, recruits must have good vision which is defined by each agency and is sometimes stipulated by the state **Peace Officer Standards and Training** office (POST). Departments also require candidates to meet minimum physical fitness standards which usually, though not always, involves meeting a specified height/weight ratio (or Body Mass Index), passing a medical test, and/or passing a physical agility test. Some departments require recruits to possess a 2-year or 4-year college degree but these are the exception rather than the rule. Most agencies only require candidates to have a high school diploma or equivalent (more on this). Finally, some departments have residency requirements which means that officers must reside in a specified geographical area for a defined period of time (possibly, the person’s entire career); some departments extend this rule to recruits and only accept applications from individuals who live within the specified boundary.

## TESTING AND SCREENING

The selection process also involves multiple stages of testing and screening, which serve as a weeding out process so that only the most mentally stable, morally upright, and qualified candidates become officers. In addition to a personal interview, criminal records check, drug test, and driving history check, which almost every recruit in America must pass, many recruits are also subjected to a psychological evaluation, a written aptitude test, and/or a drug test. Credit history checks and personality inventories are also common. Surprisingly, only about a quarter of agencies require candidates to pass a polygraph exam (Burch, 2012; Reaves, 2010). Each of these screening devices gives the agency unique information about the candidate. For example, the driving history check tells the department whether the applicant is a safe driver who can be trusted with agency equipment (multiple tickets can indicate an unsafe and immature driver who places others' lives at risk unnecessarily and could be a liability for the department). The credit history check, on the other hand, tells the agency how well the applicant manages her money—whether she lives within her means and pays her debts. This not only provides information about the applicant's character but also indicates whether she might be tempted to steal evidence or take bribes on the job. The larger the agency, the more likely it utilizes most or all of these screening devices. Figure 6.1 shows which screening tools are most popular in the United States.

Other than the physical agility test and written aptitude test which are performed prior to any personal interview, the other tests are generally conducted as part of the background investigation process which happens after the agency has decided they are interested in hiring the applicant. These specialty tests are designed to predict whether a candidate will become a successful officer or whether they are likely to fail out of the grueling training program or become a liability for the department. Intelligence tests, in particular, are controversial because minority candidates tend to score more poorly than white candidates and there is much debate about whether or not they actually identify better qualified candidates. Even though many question the utility of personality tests and criticize their high false positive rate, the strongest predictor of job performance has been found to be the California Personality Inventory test.

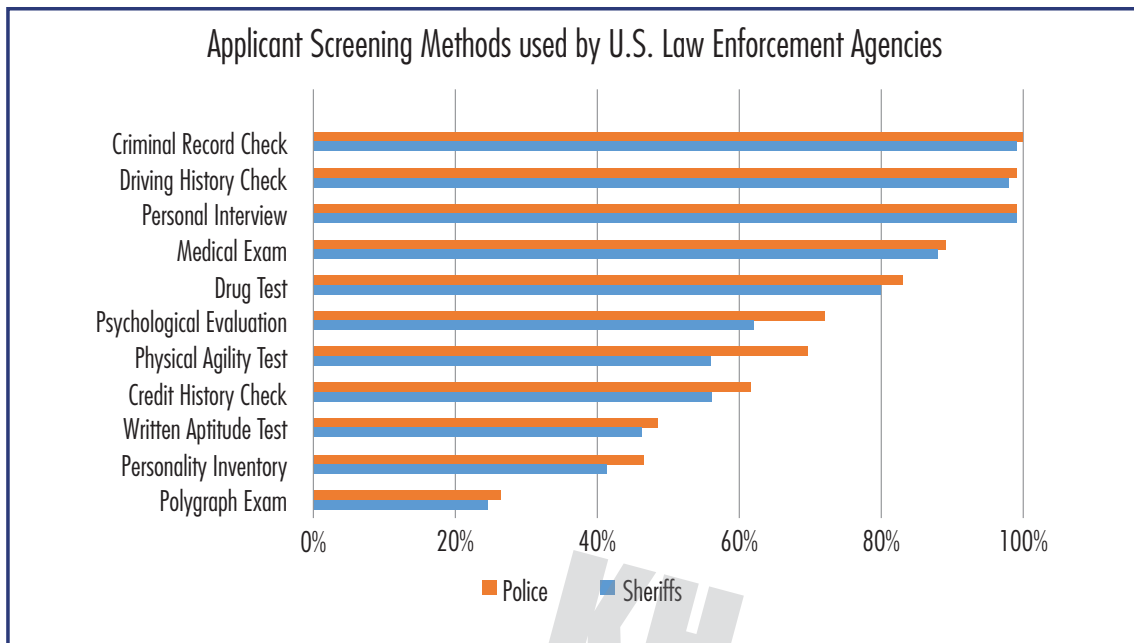
Another important part of the process is the personal interview. These interviews are often panel interviews in which two to four officers of varying ranks question the job candidate. The point of the interview is to assess applicant qualities that are not easily evaluated through other means, such as an applicant's poise and demeanor, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills. Interviewers also assess a candidate's ability to communicate and think in a high-pressure environment, and whether he/she is easily provoked to anger. It is common for candidates to be given scenarios and asked how they would respond to the situation. Whether an interview is indicative of future job performance is up for discussion but interviews do help agencies determine which qualified candidates are good fits for the department.

The final stage of the process, the background investigation, happens after agency representatives have decided they want to hire a candidate. It involves an extremely thorough search into a



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**There are a variety of tests that an applicant must undergo to determine whether that person will be suitable for the job of police officer.**



**Figure 6.1 Applicant Screening Tools**

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2010, December). *Local police departments, 2007*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 35–36. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. And Burch, A.M. (2012, December). *Sheriffs' offices, 2007-Statistical tables*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 8–9. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

candidate's background to assess their character. Family members, past and present roommates and friends, current and previous employers, military colleagues and supervisors, and sometimes even instructors are contacted to verify the candidate's reputation, level of maturity, and integrity. This is the final check of trustworthiness and it takes months to complete.

## TRAINING NEW RECRUITS

The Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted its first national study of law enforcement training academies in 2002, and updated the study in 2006 (Hickman, 2005; Reaves, 2009). The landscape of law enforcement training, much like the landscape of law enforcement in general, reflects the history and tradition of State's rights and local control. As such, law enforcement training across the states is done a little bit differently, depending on where you live. While there are no national standards for law enforcement training, there is a major professional association for those who are involved in establishing State-level training standards and administering law enforcement academies, the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training, or IADLEST, [www.iadlest.org](http://www.iadlest.org). These individuals are generally associated with the many state POST agencies, boards, and/or commissions that determine the training standards for their states.

In the 2006 study, BJS identified 648 law enforcement training academies across the country providing basic training to entry-level recruits. In some states, all basic law enforcement training is conducted at a centralized state academy. Washington State is an example, where all basic law enforcement training is conducted at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission facility, which is also the state POST agency (the exception is the Washington State Patrol, which operates their own basic academy). In other states, training is decentralized to the county-level, regional areas (including multiple counties), or to college, university, or technical school



programs. Some larger municipal law enforcement agencies and sheriff's offices operate their own academies, and there are about 200 of these.

Excluding any field training component of academy curricula, the average length of basic recruits training programs was about 760 hours, or roughly 19 weeks. About a third of academies included a field training component, and this added about 450 hours on average to the total training time. Recruits typically had large instructional blocks related to learning firearms skills (the median instruction time is 60 hours) and self-defense skills (about 50 hours) (see Table 6.1). The next largest instructional block was health and fitness training (46 hours). Also common to all academies was training related to patrol procedures, investigations, and emergency vehicle operations (typically 40 hours each). You can see the wide variety of instructional areas and median instructional time listed in Table 6.1; consider these in light of Rahr and Rice's (2015) concerns regarding the lesser attention given to training in communication and de-escalation skills. It will be important to incorporate better measures of training in these areas in future iterations of the BJS training academy study.

More than 90% of academies also provided basic training on community policing topics in 2006. Very common topics included identifying community problems (provided in 85% of academies), and the history of community policing (83%) (Reaves, 2009). More than half of academies provided training on the environmental causes of crime (62%), prioritizing crime problems (62%), using problem-solving models (60%), and organizing/mobilizing the community (54%) (Reaves, 2009).

During 2006, an estimated 57,000 recruits started basic training in academies across the country. About 1 in 6 recruits that year were female, and in terms of race/ethnicity categories about 70% were white, 13% black, 13% Hispanic, and 4% in other categories. About 49,000 of the recruits who started basic training, or 86%, completed training and graduated from the academy (Reaves, 2009).

Completion rates varied by type of academy, with state police academies having lower completion rates on average as compared to other types of academies. Some of this may be explained by the academy training environment. Academy training environments can generally be characterized as falling along a continuum ranging from "stress-based," military boot-camp style academies, to "non-stress based" academies that may be more like academic campuses. According to the BJS study (Reaves, 2009:10),



**A New York City Police Officer graduate takes his oath.**

*The more traditional stress-based model of training is based on the military model and typically includes paramilitary drills, intensive physical demands, public disciplinary measures, immediate reaction to infractions, daily inspections, value inculcation, and withholding of privileges. Proponents of this approach believe it promotes self-discipline in recruits resulting in a commitment to follow departmental policies, better time management, and completion of duties even when undesirable.*

*The non-stress model emphasizes academic achievement, physical training, administrative disciplinary procedures, and an instructor-trainee relationship that is more relaxed and supportive. Proponents of this approach believe it produces officers better able to interact in a cooperative manner with citizens and community organizations, and therefore more suited to the problem-solving approaches of community-oriented policing.*

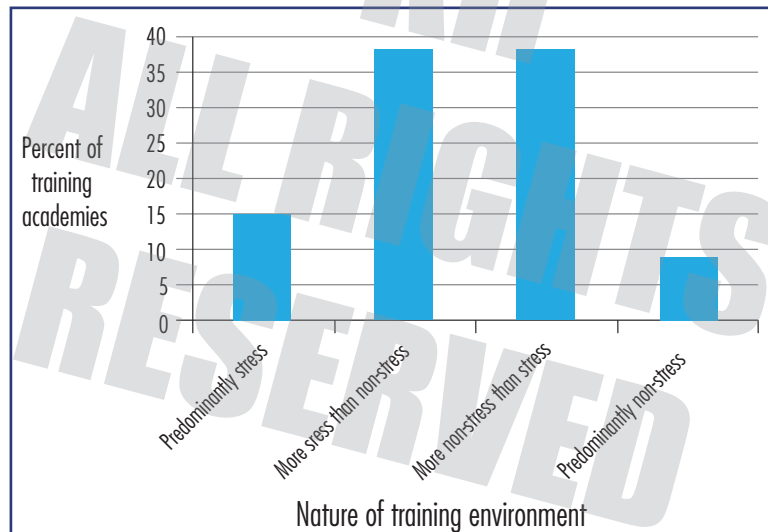
**TABLE 6.1** Topics Included in Basic Training of State and Local Law Enforcement Training Academies (2006)

Topics	Percent of Academies with Training	Median Number of Hours of Instruction
<b>Operations</b>		
Report writing	100%	20
Patrol	99%	40
Investigations	99%	40
Emergency vehicle operations	99%	40
Basic first aid/CPR	97%	24
Computers/information systems	58%	8
<b>Weapons/self-defense</b>		
Self-defense	99%	51
Firearms skills	98%	60
Non-lethal weapons	98%	12
<b>Legal</b>		
Criminal law	100%	36
Constitutional law	98%	12
History of law enforcement	84%	4
<b>Self-improvement</b>		
Ethics and integrity	100%	8
Health and fitness	96%	46
Stress prevention/management	87%	5
Basic foreign language	36%	16
<b>Community policing</b>		
Cultural diversity/human relations	98%	11
Basic strategies	92%	8
Mediation skills/conflict management	88%	8
<b>Special topics</b>		
Domestic violence	99%	14
Juveniles	99%	8
Domestic preparedness	88%	8
Hate crimes/bias crimes	87%	4

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2009). *State and local law enforcement training academies, 2006*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

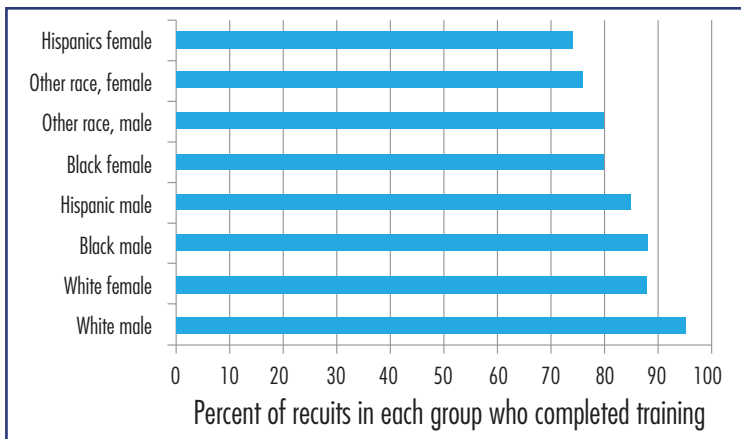
The BJS data show that state police academies are more likely than other types of academies to fall into the stress-based end of the continuum, and this may contribute to the lower completion rates observed among recruits in those academies. Figure 6.2 below shows the distribution of training academies in terms of their training environment: 15% indicated a predominately stress-based environment, 38% more stress than non-stress based, 38% more non-stress than stress based, and 9% predominately non-stress based.

Academy completion rates in 2006 also varied by the race and gender of recruit. Males had higher completion rates (87%) than females (80%), and Whites had higher completion rates (87%) than Hispanics (82%) and Blacks (81%). In terms of race and gender interactions, white males had the highest average completion rate (about 95%), followed by white females and black males (about 88% each); Hispanic females had the lowest completion rates (see Figure 6.3). A related implication for stress-based training models is that there does appear to be a gender effect in completion rates. The BJS study found that in academies having a “predominantly non-stress” training environment, male and female recruits had an equivalent completion rate (89%). As the academy training environment moved toward an increasingly stress-based model, academy completion rates declined for both genders but at an accelerated rate for female recruits (see Figure 6.4). In academies having a “predominately stress” training environment, male recruits had a completion rate of 81% while female recruits had only a 68% completion rate.



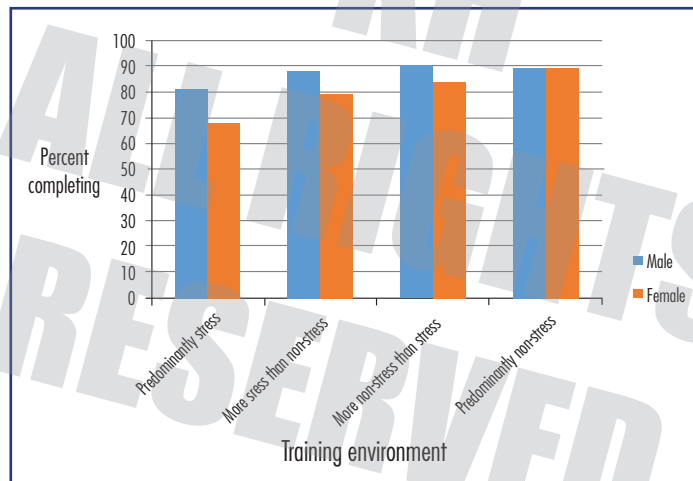
**Figure 6.2 Training environment of state and local law enforcement training academies, 2006**

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2009). *State and local law enforcement training academies, 2006*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



**Figure 6.3 Completion rates for recruits in state and local law enforcement training academies, by race and gender, 2005–2006.**

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2009). *State and local law enforcement training academies, 2006*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



**Figure 6.4 Completion rates for male and female recruits in state and local law enforcement training academies, by type of training environment, 2005–2006**

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2009). *State and local law enforcement training academies, 2006*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

## THINK ABOUT IT

Recall from Chapter 1 that some of the innovative changes going on at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission to support the Warriors to Guardians transition are aimed at reducing some of the militarization of the training environment, for example, eliminating “bracing,” replacing the “tune-up” day with coaching, and generally moving away from the boot camp model. What do you think is the optimal training environment to support democratic policing?



## THE EXTENT AND IMPACT OF DIVERSITY IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

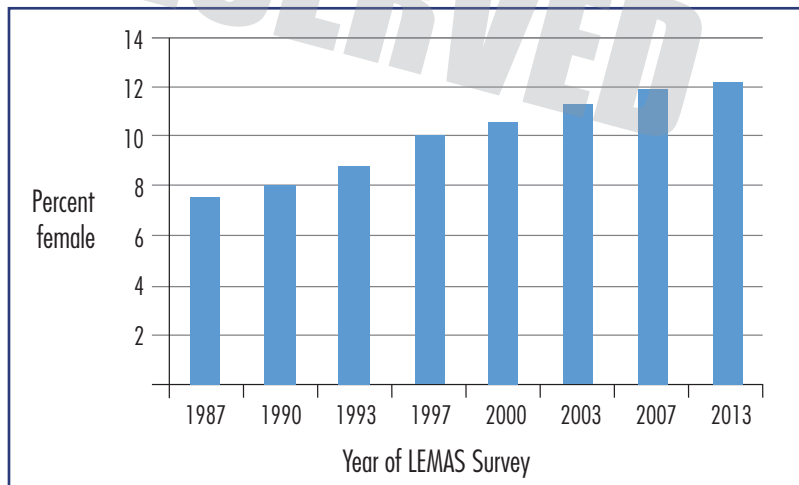
As should be evident by now, becoming a police officer is a difficult process and not everyone makes the cut. It takes strength of character, integrity, sound judgment, and a variety of other traits to be selected for the job. Once selected, it takes commitment, tenacity, and about 12–24 months to make it through the background investigation, academy training, and field training before a new officer patrols the streets on her own. Who makes it through? Do the successful applicants and academy graduates who become law enforcement officers reflect the population at large? The answer is: it depends on where you live, but probably not.

Today, 1 in 8 officers (12.2%) are women. This represents an approximately 160% increase since 1987 when only 1 in 13 officers (7.6%) were women (Reaves, 2015). In fact, the proportion of female officers has grown every year since BJS began tracking this information (see Figure 6.5). As indicated in Table 6.2, the percentage of female officers is greatest in our largest police departments, where more than 16% of officers are female (that's 1 in every 6). While this is encouraging, women comprise almost 50% of the workforce, reminding us that women are still very much underrepresented as sworn officers. Females are also underrepresented as supervisors and chiefs. In 2013, only 9.5% of first-line supervisors and 3% of chiefs were women even though they comprised 12.2% of officers (Reaves, 2015).



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**The number of female officers continues to grow each year.**



**Figure 6.5 Female representation among full-time sworn personnel in local police departments, 1987–2013**

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2015, May). *Local police departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, & Practices*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 4. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

**TABLE 6.2** Sex of Full-time Sworn Personnel in the United States

Population served	Male		Female	
	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs
1,000,000 or more	82%	85%	18%	15%
500,000–999,999	84%	86%	16%	14%
250,000–499,999	85%	86%	15%	14%
100,000–249,999	88%	88%	12%	12%
50,000–99,999	90%	90%	10%	10%
25,000–49,999	91%	91%	9%	9%
10,000–24,999	92%	92%	8%	8%
2,500–9,999 <sup>a</sup>	93%	94%	8%	6%
Under 10,000 <sup>b</sup>				
Under 2,500	94%		6%	
ALL SIZES	88%	88%	12%	12%

<sup>a</sup>—police departments, <sup>b</sup>—sheriffs' departments \*may not equal 100% due to rounding

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2015, May). *Local police departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, & Practices*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 4. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. And Burch, A.M. (2012, December). *Sheriffs' offices, 2007-Statistical tables*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 11. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

As indicated in Table 6.3, the proportion of racial and ethnic minority officers has grown at a similar pace as female officers. In 1987, about one in seven officers (14.6%) identified as a racial/ethnic minority, today more than one in four officers (27.3%) identify as a racial/ethnic minority (Reaves, 2015). Black/African-American officers represent the largest minority-status group with 58,000 officers (12.2%). Hispanic/Latino officers are next with 55,000 (11.6% of all officers). The percentage of African-American officers has grown slowly from 9% to 12.2% over the past 26 years while the percentage of Hispanic/Latino officers has more than doubled (from 4.5% to 11.6%) in the same time frame. Members of other minority groups account for approximately 3% of all officers today, which is about a 400% increase since 1987 when they accounted for 0.8% of all officers (Reaves, 2015).

Does it matter that women and minorities are underrepresented in policing? Remember, police officers are not just people paid to enforce the law and keep the peace; they are visual symbols of the criminal justice system and of government. In poor, disadvantaged communities of color, that means that police officers are “the tangible target for grievances against shortcomings throughout [the criminal justice] system: Against assembly-line justice in teeming lower courts; against wide disparities in sentences; against antiquated correctional facilities; against the basic inequities imposed by the system on the poor—to whom, for example, the option of bail means only jail” (Kerner Commission Report, 1968 as cited in Vila, 1999, p. 190). For this reason, it is important that officers are able to relate to the community, not only to encourage law-abidingness but also so that community members will trust and support the police in their endeavors to protect the public’s safety. Insofar as minorities are able to generate higher levels of trust among community members than white male officers, improving diversity is beneficial to departments.

As you learned in Chapter 3, there was deep-seated distrust and hostility between police and “ghetto communities” in the 1960s. This hostility resulted in numerous civil disturbances and riots during the decade. At this time, police officers were almost all white men. Both the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice and the Kerner Commission

**TABLE 6.3 Race and Ethnicity of Full-time Sworn Personnel in the United States**

Population served	White		Black/African American		Hispanic/Latino		Asian/Other Pacific Islander		American Indian/Alaskan Native		Two or more races	
	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs
1,000,000 or more	564	66%	17%	12%	25%	19%	4%	3%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
500,000–999,999	60%	77%	23%	11%	10%	11%	5%	1%	<1%	1%	2%	<1%
250,000–499,999	67%	83%	19%	10%	11%	6%	2%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
100,000–249,999	74%	88%	12%	8%	11%	3%	3%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
50,000–99,999	80%	91%	8%	6%	9%	3%	2%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
25,000–49,999	86%	88%	6%	8%	6%	4%	1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%
10,000–24,999	88%	88%	5%	9%	6%	2%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%
2,500–9,999 <sup>a</sup>	89%	91%	4%	3%	4%	5%	<1%	–%	1%	1%	<1%	<1%
Under 10,000 <sup>b</sup>	85%	85%	6%	5%	5%	5%	<1%	<1%	3%	<1%	<1%	<1%
All Sizes	73%	81%	12%	9%	12%	8%	2%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

<sup>a</sup>—police departments, <sup>b</sup>—sheriffs' departments

\* may not equal 100 % due to rounding

Adapted from Reeves, B(2015, May). *Local police departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, & Practices*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 4. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. And Burch, A.M. (2012, December). *Sheriffs' offices, 2007-Statistical tables*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 10. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

addressed the low number of minority law enforcement officers in their reports. The Kerner commission discovered that, in those cities that experienced significant civil unrest and disorder, the percentage of minority officers in the police department was dramatically lower than the percentage of minority community members. In spite of the importance of hiring minorities, The President's Commission recognized that "inducing qualified young men from minority groups to enter police work" was going to be a difficult task "in view of the distrust for the police felt by members of minority groups, especially by young men" (1967, p.102). Toward this end, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973) set criteria to help agencies achieve increased minority and female recruitment to mirror the makeup of their surrounding community.

All else being equal, research consistently demonstrates that cities with a large minority population have more minority police officers than cities with a small minority population. Interestingly, research from public administration also shows that having a black or Latino mayor or city council members generally increases minority representation in the police force (Gustafson, 2013; Sharp, 2014; Zhao et al., 2005). Having a minority police chief and being the subject of a consent decree are also associated with greater police diversity (Gustafson, 2013). Agencies that want to increase department diversity must take affirmative steps to recruit women and minorities. This means developing recruitment materials that appeal to these groups as well as advertising in places that are likely to draw these groups.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FEMALE AND MINORITY OFFICERS

Are women effective officers? Yes. Two major studies, and several smaller studies, have shown women to be just as effective on patrol as men (Bloch & Anderson, 1974; David, 1984; Morash & Greene, 1986; Rabe-Hemp & Schuck, 2007; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005; Sichel et al., 1978; Stalans & Finn, 2000). For example, research has found no differences in arrest rates or conviction rates between male and female patrol officers, but has found that women receive fewer citizen complaints, are charged with improper conduct less often, and are seen by the community as more pleasant, respectful, and competent than men, which might explain why women are more likely than men to receive community support. A study of New York police officers found that men and women react very similarly to violent confrontations but that women are more emotionally stable and better able to deescalate potentially violent situations. Women are also less likely than their male counterparts to use a firearm, cause physical injury, or become physically injured on the job. In terms of improper behavior, women are significantly underrepresented in complaints, sustained use-of-force allegations, and agency civil litigation payouts. A review

of LAPD civil litigation costs from 1990 to 1999 revealed that payouts for excessive force for male officers surpassed payouts for female officers by a ratio of 23:1 even though male officers outnumbered female officers by only 4:1 (National Center for Women & Policing, 2002).

Unlike the plethora of studies that have examined women as police officers, there is very little research on the performance of minorities as police officers. A recent study examined whether minority representation in government and in police agencies translates to police practice and found that black



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**Cities with a larger minority population tend to have more minority officers.**



political representation reduces black order maintenance arrests but black representation on the police force does not (Sharp, 2014).

Additionally, a few studies have examined differences in attitudes between white and non-white officers and found some dissimilarities. For example, black officers are generally more supportive than white officers of community policing, citizen oversight, and police innovation in general. It has also been found that black officers take quality of life policing issues more seriously and place more importance on neighborhood conditions and fear of crime than their white counterparts (Boyd, 2010). One of the issues that affect black male officers more than any other demographic is the threat of being killed on the job by friendly fire. In particular, when African-American officers work plain clothes undercover assignments, they are at increased risk of being mistaken for a criminal and killed by a uniformed officer unfamiliar with the undercover officer.

## THE PUSH FOR COLLEGE-EDUCATED OFFICERS

Although August Vollmer introduced the idea that education could improve policing in the 1920s, it was not really until the 1960s–1970s that the issue was debated in earnest in the United States. The increasing crime rate and urban riots of the 1960s pushed the issue to the forefront (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). The President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967) advocated for college-educated officers as a solution to the growing crisis of confidence in policing. In response, Congress passed the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (OCCSSA) of 1968.

### CHECK IT OUT!

We discussed this bill in Chapter 2. Can you recall why it is important?

OCCSSA created the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) (and within it the Law Enforcement Education Program) and provided money for education, research, and equipment. As a result of newly available federal funding, the number of colleges offering police science or criminal justice degree programs increased exponentially. Unfortunately, the quality of the programs was not uniform and many programs were nonrigorous extensions of police academies (Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Sherman & the National Advisory Commission on Higher Education for Police Officers, 1978). This hurt attempts to increase education standards for entry-level officers. While poor quality instruction is no longer a pervasive issue, research on police education has yet to produce the clear, unequivocal results that many U.S. police leaders desire in order to change policy. Still, the value of a college-degree for officers holds much appeal; especially in light of the varied and complex tasks that today’s police officers are expected to perform (tasks that were not expected of officers 30 years ago).

## DOES A COLLEGE DEGREE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Research evidence on the value of a bachelor’s degree for police officers is somewhat mixed; some studies find positive benefits but other studies find no correlation. On the whole, more research indicates positive effects than no correlation or negative consequences. Even though they typically receive higher salaries, research suggests that college-educated officers (those with a bachelor’s degree or higher) save departments money. This is because research has found that college-educated officers take fewer sick days, have fewer on-the-job injuries and accidents, and have fewer individual liability cases filed against them (Carter & Sapp, 1989; Cascio, 1977; Cohen & Chaiken, 1972). They also may be better employees; college-educated officers are better report writers, more innovative, more reliable, more committed to the agency, more likely to take on leadership roles within the department, and more likely to be promoted than officers without

a college degree (Carlan & Lewis, 2009; Cohen & Chaiken, 1972; Krimmel, 1996; Trojanowicz & Nicholson, 1976; Whetstone, 2000; Worden, 1990). If degree-holding officers are truly better report writers, that could translate into better investigations, higher court case filings, fewer evidentiary constitutional challenges, fewer false confessions or wrongful convictions, and/or more successful prosecutions.

It also has been found that college-educated officers are less resistant to change and more likely to embrace new methods of policing (Roberg & Bonn, 2004). They also have fewer citizen complaints filed against them, have fewer disciplinary actions taken against them, use force less often, and use less force than officers without a college degree (Chapman, 2012; Cohen & Chaiken, 1972; Fyfe, 1988; Kappeler et al., 1992; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001; Manis, Archbold, & Hassell, 2008; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010; Wilson, 1999). These last benefits may be particularly valuable for agencies which serve majority-minority communities where police-public relations are often strained. There are also benefits for agencies committed to community policing, problem solving, intelligence-led policing, as well as other newer policing strategies.

Balanced against these benefits are research findings that suggest that college-educated patrol officers may be less satisfied with their jobs, hold less favorable views toward management, and are less public service-oriented than their non-college educated peers (Paoline et al., 2015). Furthermore, college-educated officers are more likely to see police work as a “job,” instead of a “calling” like their non-college-educated colleagues (Carlan & Lewis, 2009). Whether, or how, this impacts their service delivery is unknown.

## MINIMUM EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Despite these known benefits, only the state of Minnesota and a handful of agencies in other states require applicants to possess more than a high school diploma. As Table 6.3 shows, only 1% of police departments and no sheriffs’ departments in the United States require a 4-year college degree for employment as a police officer (Burch, 2012; Reaves, 2010). Fully 82% of police and 89% of sheriffs’ agencies across the nation only require a high school diploma (or equivalent). Interestingly, higher education requirements are more popular among state police agencies than local agencies. In fact, 19 of the 50 primary state police agencies require at least some college (of those, four require a B.A. and five require an A.A.; the rest have a “units completed” requirement) (Burriesci & Melley, 2001). LEMAS (Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Survey) data tell us that larger agencies often have more stringent education qualification requirements than do smaller agencies. For example, 36% of police departments and 22% of sheriffs’ departments that serve a population size of 1,000,000 or more require at least some college (Burch, 2012; Reaves, 2015). While a college degree is usually not required to become a police officer, it is required to promote through the ranks. A recent study of California law enforcement agencies found that merely one-third of agencies would promote an officer with only a high school diploma to sergeant and most agencies in the study required a 4-year degree to promote to lieutenant (Gardiner, 2015).

Why do so few agencies require a college degree to get hired? There are several reasons. One reason is because agencies generally have to pay a higher salary to attract college-educated officers and some agencies are unable to offer the competitive salaries necessary to recruit college graduates. Agencies with a small tax base (residential areas that serve predominately poor communities) have an especially difficult time offering competitive salaries. Another reason is because agencies do not think it is necessary to require a 4-year degree to recruit high quality candidates. Some think it would unnecessarily limit their ability to hire high quality candidates without degrees (e.g., individuals turning to policing as a second career or after military service).

**TABLE 6.4** Education Requirement for New Hires in the United States

	High School Diploma		Some College		2-year College Degree		4-year College Degree	
Population served	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs	Police	Sheriffs
1,000,000 or more	64%	78%	7%	15%	29%	4%	0%	–%
500,000–999,999	70%	83%	19%	8%	7%	6%	4%	4%
250,000–499,999	70%	90%	15%	2%	9%	6%	7%	2%
100,000–249,999	78%	81%	8%	5%	10%	13%	3%	–%
50,000–99,999	75%	85%	8%	3%	12%	10%	4%	–%
25,000–49,999	75%	89%	4%	2%	18%	7%	2%	–%
10,000–24,999	81%	89%	6%	3%	12%	6%	–%	–%
2,500–9,999 <sup>a</sup>	86%	94%	2%	2%	9%	4%	1%	–%
Under 10,000 <sup>b</sup>								
Under 2,500	86%		3%		9%		–%	
All Sizes	84%	89%	4%	3%	10%	7%	1%	–%

<sup>a</sup> – police departments, <sup>b</sup> – sheriffs' departments

Adapted from Reaves, B. (2015, May). *Local police departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, & Practices*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 7. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. And Burch, A.M. (2012, December). *Sheriffs' offices, 2007-Statistical tables*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p. 8. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Finally, some agencies are concerned about being able to recruit qualified minority or female candidates (Gardiner, 2015). The latter concern is unwarranted, as two recent studies have found that agencies with higher education requirements employ higher percentages of female officers than do agencies which only require a high school diploma (Gardiner, 2015; Schuck, 2014).

## HOW MANY COPS HAVE A COLLEGE DEGREE?

Fifty years ago, in 1960, only 3% of officers held a 4-year degree (in comparison, 7.7% of U.S. residents 25 and older did) (Rydberg & Terrill, 2010; U.S. Census, 2006). By 1988, 22.6% of sworn officers in the nation were college graduates and for the first time, the percentage of officers with degrees was higher than the general population, which was at 20.3% (Carter & Sapp, 1990; U.S. Census, 1989). Unfortunately, we do not have a current, nationally-representative dataset that can tell us what percentage of officers nationwide have a college degree. We do, however, have several small studies that are informative and reveal two things about the state of education in policing: (1) the percentage of college-educated officers is increasing, and (2) there is great variability between departments. Of the departments which have been recently studied, the percentage of college-educated officers ranges



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**Less than half of officers across the nation have a college degree.**

from 11.6% in three medium-sized, majority/minority communities in New Jersey to 65.2% in a medium-sized mid-west police department which requires at least some college to get hired and serves a 97% white population (Gardiner, 2015).

On average, it appears that between 25% and 45% of officers across the nation have a college degree. However, it is important to keep in mind that the percent of college-educated officers in a department is dependent on several factors, including:

1. The agency's minimum education requirements—agencies which require some college or an AA have a much higher percentage of officers with a BA;
2. Geography and demographics—in California, agencies located in urban areas with a high cost of living and an educated populous had more than twice as many officers with a college degree than did rural areas with a low cost of living and non-educated populous;
3. The size of the agency—larger agencies employ a higher percentage of college-educated officers than do smaller agencies;
4. Starting salary—though not a perfect relationship, the percentage of officers with a college diploma increases with starting salary (of course, starting salary is dependent on cost of living, type of county, surplus/deficit of qualified job candidates, and many other factors), and
5. Promotion requirements—departments that require a bachelor's degree to promote to lieutenant employ a higher percentage of college-educated officers than do agencies without this requirement (Gardiner, 2015).

## POLICING: BLUE COLLAR OR WHITE COLLAR?

In the early days, policing was considered a blue-collar job. Depending on where you live in the country, this may no longer be true. Today there are many college-educated police officers earning high salaries and great benefits.

In California, many entry-level police officers make more money than college professors! What do you think—white collar or blue collar? Does knowing that you could make a good living change how you feel about possibly pursuing a career as a police officer? Should officers get paid more than professors? Why? Why not?

## POLICE SUBCULTURE

Is there a distinct police “subculture?” Are police officers somehow different than people in the general population? Do they see the world differently than the average citizen? Do they behave or interact with other members of society differently than if they were teachers, engineers, or store clerks? Many scholars think so and research supports this view.

The term **police subculture** refers to the accepted norms, values, attitudes, and practices that are shared by officers. William Westley was the first scholar to propose a distinct police subculture in 1970. Based on his observations of police officers in Gary (IN), he suggested that the police subculture was defined by loyalty, secrecy, and a strong desire to help others in need. Since then, many scholars have studied and elaborated on the components that comprise the police subculture. As a result, we now consider a desire for adventure and excitement, a strong sense of mission, a macho attitude,



political and ideological conservatism, authoritarianism, cynicism, and bravery to be among the traits shared by officers throughout the western world (Reiner, 1992; Waddington, 2008).

One of the most famous police scholars to write on this issue is Jerome Skolnick, who argued that the police subculture is shaped by three defining features of a police officer's job that are not found in the same combination in other jobs: *danger*, *authority*, and *efficiency*. According to Skolnick, these three occupational traits explain how officers develop a "working personality." First, recruits are taught the importance of being suspicious and developing a "sixth sense" to identify **symbolic assailants**—people who are unusual or look out of place, people who could cause harm to the officer—so that they (officers) may remain safe in a potentially dangerous job. The other defining aspect of the job, authority to enforce laws, puts officers at odds with many members of the society and exposes them to allegations of hypocrisy. According to Skolnick, officers become cynical and develop a "we vs. they" mentality because, by virtue of their job, they must be skeptical of all people, trusting no one except their fellow officers (*after* they have been vetted and passed the test). A situation made worse by a conceptualized "war on drugs" and "war on crime," which causes officers to see themselves as fighting against a specific enemy, further solidifies the cynical "us vs. them" mentality. This cynicism makes officers isolate themselves from others and increases group social solidarity, which is manifest in the police subculture. In addition to the cynicism and suspiciousness, officers feel a constant need to be efficient—to clear a call quickly so they can be available for the dispatcher and any other officer or member of the public who might need them at a moment's notice. Together, these three elements of the job push officers closer together and cause them to isolate themselves from the general public who, in their perception, "doesn't understand" the things they see and deal with every day.

While individuals who apply to become police officers are not much different than the rest of us, by the time they hit the streets in uniform they have begun to transform into the "thin blue line." Several studies have confirmed that a change in values takes place during academy training. Van Maanen (1973) and Harris (1973), for example, found that solidarity emerges during academy as recruits are taught the shared norms and values of the subculture, socialized into the depersonalized and defensive atmosphere of the job, and trained to take this interpersonal style to the streets (recall the discussion in Chapter 1 about changes made to Washington State's academy to transform the academy atmosphere from one that produced warriors to one that now produces guardians). The change in values happens through both enculturation (learning the system) and socialization (learning the rules of the game) not only during academy and field training especially, but also throughout one's career (Ruess-Ianni & Ianni, 2008). Researchers have documented that officers become more cynical after academy as the reality of the streets hits and they start to lose friends due to shift work and the nature of their chosen career. Their cynicism continues to grow during their first several years on the job but begins to decline in their mid-career years, possibly due to promotion or salary increase and as they begin to look toward retirement (Neiderhoffer, 1967). War stories are one of the main socialization tools used by veteran officers to teach recruits and newer officers about potential sources of danger, citizen complaints, and administrative difficulties (Waddington, 2008).

It used to be thought that police culture was homogeneous and stable but that view is no longer held, as research has affirmed that police culture has indeed changed as the workforce has become increasingly diverse and found that some agencies and specialty units develop their own unique subcultures (Waddington, 2008). While the "cop's code" that gives such pieces of advice as to not trust a new guy until you're sure about him, don't make waves, be aggressive but not too eager, and don't give up another cop (Ruess-Ianni & Ianni, 2008) still exists, it does so with more nuances and less conformity. For example, researchers have found distinct police cultures in rural and urban agencies, between routine patrol officers and community police officers, police paramilitary unit officers, and detectives. Research also indicates that subculture varies between officers of different races, different sexes, and different educational levels (Waddington, 2008).

Additionally, there are unique subcultures for middle managers and command staff, who arguably have different concerns than patrol officers (Ruess-Ianni & Ianni, 2008). It has been proposed that individual officers, rather than assume the entire police subculture as their own, now select the features they agree with from a pseudo-list of subculture characteristics and adopt only those elements that are congruent with their views and goals (Waddington, 2008).

The police subculture, which is sometimes viewed as negative, is functional and necessary in a job that is always unpredictable, often alienating, and sometimes dangerous (Chan, 2008). It gives meaning to officers' experiences and provides occupational self-esteem in a job that is largely invisible and autonomous (Waddington, 2008). It is also important because culture determines action and helps explain why officers support some policies and practices while ignoring or subverting other policies or innovations. How an officer sees herself (guardian or warrior; conflict negotiator or crime fighter) impacts how she approaches the job and interacts with her fellow officers and members of the community, both law-breaking and law-abiding. The warrior mentality is ingrained in the traditional police subculture and ethos which means that it may be quite difficult to shift officers who identify completely with this subculture toward a guardian, or community-oriented, philosophy. This suggests that in order to move away from a warrior/crime-fighter mentality toward a guardian mentality (or any other innovative practice that is not aligned with the traditional police subculture), police executives may need to first change the subculture. Besides orienting job performance, subculture can be a source of **occupational stress** for the growing number of officers who view themselves as "outside" of the subculture—an issue that will be discussed in the next section (Rose & Unnithan, 2015).

## POLICE STRESS

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There is little doubt that police officers experience occupational stress. The CareerCast.com annual jobs report usually ranks "police officer" among the top 10 stress-producing jobs in America. In addition to the typical personal stress that most individuals experience, as well as the standard organizational and administrative stressors that many working adults experience, officers are exposed to unique operational stressors by the nature of their job. But is this stress significantly greater than the level of stress experienced in most other jobs? And what effect does it have on officers and their families?

Oxford dictionary defines stress as "a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances." There are five types of occupational (or workplace) stress—organizational structure/climate, interpersonal work relationships, career development, role in the organization, and factors unique to the job (Murphy, 1995).

- *Organizational structure/climate stress* results from the quasi-military, hierarchal structure of police agencies, and police work. In particular, the irregular working hours associated with shift work, having to work holidays, not having control over ones schedule (i.e., not being able to count on ending a shift on time) and inability of officers to participate in major decision-making or having influence over their general work activities contribute to officers' occupational stress.
- *Interpersonal work relationship stress* arises from problematic relationships and interactions with coworkers, administrators, or subordinates in the workplace. For example, antagonistic relationships between various work groups (such as command and line staff, separate specialty units, or officers on different shifts) but also work environments that

include harassment, discrimination, bullying (from superiors or colleagues), threatened violence, rumoring, and intentional humiliation by others.

- *Career development stress* occurs when one feels “stuck” in their job. It can result from, among other things, job insecurity, being passed over for a promotion, being in a position with little potential for promotion, and lack of career development opportunities.
- *Role in the organization stress* occurs when one must perform multiple job duties due to short staffing or other issues and from role ambiguity. Employees feel particularly stressed when there are excessive work demands placed upon them or they are unclear about their job, their responsibilities, or how to satisfy their supervisor(s).
- *The factors unique to the job stress* category includes some of the job dimensions described above—unpredictability, the potential for danger, having to use force, perceived lack of support, the routinely negative interactions with the public, mediating other people’s disputes, and needing to show courage in dangerous situations and to always be observant and attentive to evolving situations. It also includes the stress that results from the unique demands and constraints of the criminal justice system and its various actors.

Which factors cause officers the most stress? It turns out that it is a difficult question to answer. New York officers ranked killing someone in the line of duty, experiencing the death of a fellow officer, and being physically attacked at the top of their list of police stressors (Violanti & Aron, 1995) (see Table 6.5). Officers in Illinois, however, identified organizational factors (including interpersonal work relationships) as the most stress-inducing and concerns over occupational danger less stress-inducing (Crank & Caldero, 1991). Other studies have similarly found that officers report that organizational factors are more aggravating than job/task-related stressors (Buker & Wiecko, 2007; Gershon et al., 2009; Morash et al., 2006; Shane, 2010).

Why do these, and other, studies report divergent findings? One reason is different samples. The New York officers in Violanti and Aron’s study worked for a large police department, and large departments are often located in urban cities with higher-than-average violent crime rates and higher perceived dangerousness. The Illinois officers, on the other hand, all worked for medium-sized departments which may have been perceived as less dangerous. Timing is another factor to consider—gang violence was near its height in the early 1990s when Violanti and Aron conducted their research and may have influenced their findings.

Another main reason the findings from multiple studies may differ is research methods—how a study is conducted. Most studies on police stress use a self-report survey approach that asks officers to rank order a variety of possible stressors according to the degree of stress the officer thinks each causes. There is very little direct measurement of stress in real-world settings (Hickman et al., 2011). This is important because stress induces psychological and physiological responses in the body. Acute stress, for example, activates the body’s fight-or-flight response which triggers a complex set of physiological responses, including increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure,



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**Many different circumstances in the job cause stress for police officers.**

**TABLE 6.5** Highest Ranked Police Stressors

Stressor	Mean Score	Stressor	Mean Score
Killing someone in the line of duty	79.4	Insufficient personnel	58.5
Fellow officer killed	76.7	Aggressive crowds	56.7
Physical attack	71.0	Felony in progress	55.3
Battered child	69.2	Excessive discipline	53.3
High speed chases	63.7	Plea bargaining	52.8
Shift work	61.2	Death notifications	52.6
Use of force	61.0	Inadequate support (Supervisor)	52.4
Inadequate department support	61.0	Inadequate equipment	52.4
Incompatible partner	60.4	Family disputes	52.0
Accident in patrol car	59.9	Negative press coverage	51.9
		Overall mean score of 60 stressors	44.8

Adapted from Violanti, J. & Aron, F. (1995). Police stressors: Variations in percent among police personnel. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 23(3), 287-294.

increased blood flow to the muscles, increased production of glucose, and elevated cortisol levels. Some of the physiological responses that indicate the body is under stress, especially those that continue for a prolonged period after the “danger” has subsided or those can be caused by other factors (such as headache, fatigue, inability to concentrate, muscle aches, etc.), go undetected by or are dismissed by the officer as not stress-related. Chronic stress can have some of the same effects on the body and is even more likely to go undetected or ignored. Thus, an officer’s actual stress triggers may differ from her perceived stress triggers.

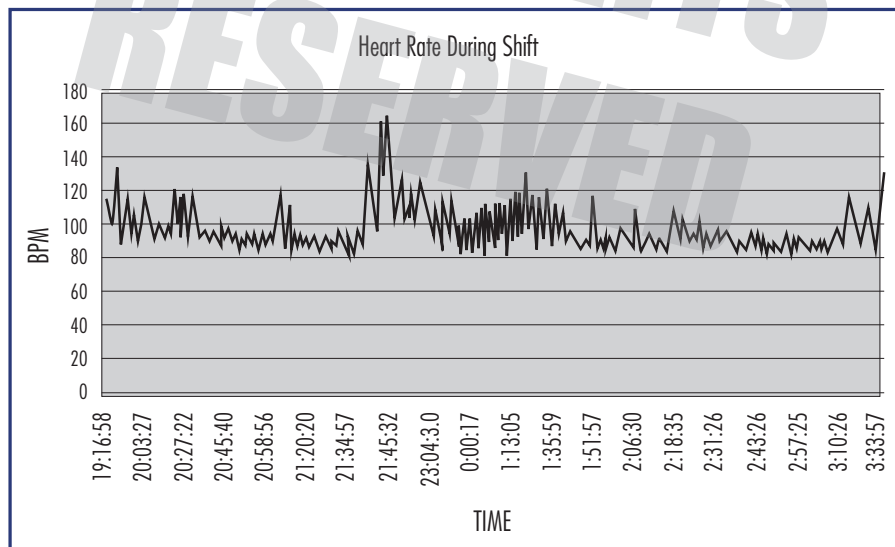
To date, it appears that only one study has used heart rate monitoring to directly and systematically measure police stress during a regular work shift. Anderson and colleagues (2002) studied 76 Canadian officers from 12 municipal police departments during their 12-hour shifts. They found that officers’ heart rates were higher during their shift than before or after their shift. They further found that officers’ average “above-resting” heart rates were highest at the beginning of their shift and lowest at the end of their shift (validating the idea that police work, in and of itself is stressful). Additionally, above-resting heart rates were highest when officers were wrestling with or handcuffing a suspect and elevated when an officer placed a hand on his gun, responded to a call to back up another officer, or drove “code 3” to an emergency call. Moreover, the researchers found that although officers’ heart rates dropped after “critical incidents,” their heart rates continued to be elevated for 30–60 minutes after the incident which indicates that officers remained in a hyper-vigilant mode long after the immediate threat subsided.

Hickman et al. (2011) expanded on this study by adding a GPS component to the real-time measurement of officer heart rates. One of the goals of the study was to be able to place the measurement of police stress in a space-time context so they could understand both when and where officers were likely to experience stress. Using monitoring units that simultaneously record heart rate as well as latitude and longitude enabled mapping of the stress data, and on a theoretical level, it would be possible to generate valid “hot-spot” style maps, although such maps would depict



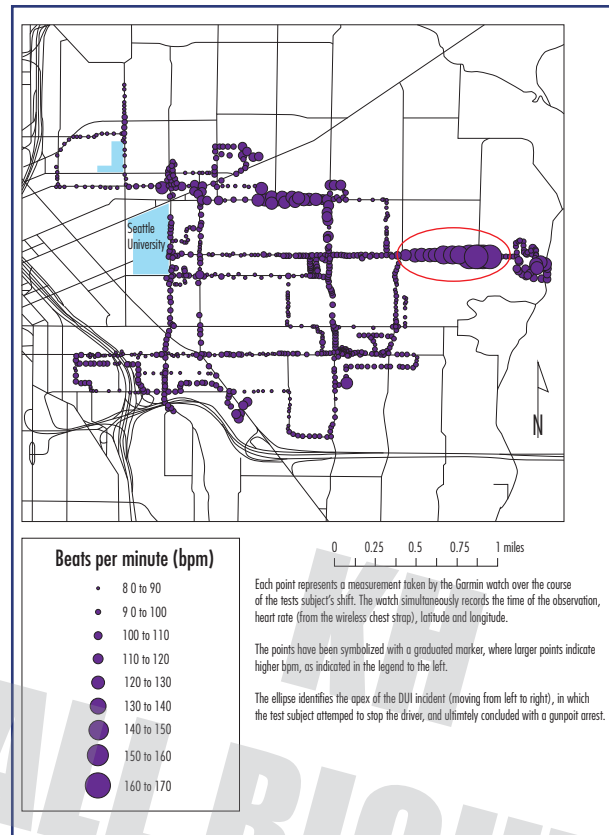
average officer heart rates (in density terms) instead of crimes. Figure 6.6 shows the heart rate trace of a test officer during his shift. The major “peak” in the chart corresponds to a particularly stressful incident. The initial call was for a “hit-and-run” by a pick-up truck that had hit several vehicles and stop signs. The test officer located the vehicle and pursued, but the driver did not respond to lights and siren. After some distance, the driver finally stopped his vehicle by means of hitting a curb. The test officer issued repeated commands over the PA system to the driver to turn off the ignition and throw his keys on to the pavement. The driver was nonresponsive. The test participant exited the cruiser and drew and pointed his service weapon at the suspect vehicle’s driver compartment; at this point, his heart rate peaked at 165 bpm as depicted in the trace. The test officer advanced on the driver’s vehicle, repeatedly issuing commands to the driver to put his hands out of the window. When the test officer arrived at the driver’s window, he issued a command to unlock and open the door. The driver was again nonresponsive. Finally, the test officer opened the door and assisted the driver out of the vehicle, at which point the driver—obviously intoxicated—simply collapsed onto the ground. The test officer then rolled the driver onto his stomach and handcuffed him.

Figure 6.7 shows the mapped heart rate data from the officer’s shift. As noted, the ellipse drawn within the map identifies the conclusion of this hit/run call that evolved into a DUI arrest at gunpoint. As the officer chased the vehicle through the city and began to realize that he was dealing with a non-compliant, potentially intoxicated and dangerous subject, his heart rate steadily increases. After the vehicle was stopped and several opportunities for compliance were offered, the officer’s heart rate maximized at the exact moment that he decided it was necessary to draw his sidearm and began advancing on the vehicle. This is depicted in the map by the largest graduated point marker to the right side of the ellipse. Other notable incidents from the officer’s shift included a call to assist a repo-man confronted by an angry car owner wielding a baseball bat (due East of the DUI incident described above), and a call reporting screaming and a possible knife within a Seattle Housing Authority apartment building (Northwest of the DUI incident).



**Figure 6.6 Heart rate recording of test officer**

Adapted from Hickman, M., Fricas, J., Strom, K., & Pope, M. (2011). Mapping police stress. *Police Quarterly*, 14(3), 227–250.



**Figure 6.7 Map of Point Data Collected via GPS-Enabled Heart Rate Monitor**

Adapted from Hickman, M., Fricas, J., Strom, K., & Pope, M. (2011). Mapping police stress. *Police Quarterly*, 14(3), 227–250.

Stress mapping on a more systematic basis may enable hot-spot style analyses that could inform beat/district modification, with an eye toward balancing stress, and could assist departments in thinking about how officers are deployed in order to minimize repeated exposure to highly stressful situations. It could also inform stress inoculation training (SIT). Much like the inoculations delivered in the medical field to prevent the onset of more serious forms of disease, the idea here is that by exposing an individual to mild forms of stress you can improve their ability to cope with more severe forms of stress (e.g., Meichenbaum & Novaco, 1978; Novaco, 1977). Police training is designed to some extent with this process in mind; simulated stressful conditions are a common part of academy training that prepares recruits for real-world stressful condition (often referred to as “survival stress” training), particularly with regard to use of force (Hickman, 2005; Reaves, 2009). SIT models view stress as the product of the interaction between individual and environment; as such, knowledge of the micro-geography of police stress may assist with the design of survival stress training for individual police departments (as well as individual SIT treatments delivered by clinicians).

Do female officers experience stress differently than male officers? Yes and no. Whereas earlier studies showed distinct differences between male and female officers, recent studies show more similarities than differences. In general, the literature suggests that women and men have different

views on what constitutes stress and different methods for coping with the stress (He et al., 2015). Women police officers encounter higher levels of harassment and overt hostility than male officers and this has led to higher levels of workplace stress (Kurtz, 2012). Research has also found that the higher stress levels reported by female officers are often caused, not by work-related experiences, but rather by family and marital issues; specifically the “second shift” of household chores and family responsibilities that await women (more so than men) after their official shift (Kurtz, 2012).

Are there any differences in how officers of different races experience stress? Research found that Latino and Black officers experience greater levels of polarization and discrimination by their fellow officers and fewer opportunities at work which can translate to higher stress levels (Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). There is also evidence that African American males report fewer symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression than their white male counterparts and that African American male and female officers use more constructive coping strategies than their white counterparts (He, Zhao, & Ren, 2005).

This stress impacts both the officer and the officer’s family. Some research has found that officers frequently employ negative coping mechanisms (such as drinking, smoking, and social isolation) and have higher rates of alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide, and health-related problems than the general public. But not all research studies concur, there is a lot of variation and some studies have found lower than average rates of these problems. One study of more than 4000 officers found that, although officers did not drink alcohol more often than the average adult, they did binge drink more frequently (Davey, Obst, & Sheehan, 2000). Further, 30% of the officers drinking behavior placed them in the “at-risk” for harmful alcohol consumption category and another 3% were classified as “alcohol dependent” based on their reported behavior. Surprisingly, 25% of these officers admitted to drinking alcohol while on-duty. Although research studies vary as to the amount, there is consensus that police officers commit suicide at elevated rates when compared to the general public and other government workers (Violanti, 2007); however, some of the precipitating factors (depression, alcoholism, divorce/separation, suffering a negative life event) are similar to the general public. Finally, current research on health-related issues suggests that it is officers’ unhealthy lifestyles and diets that lead to health problems, not necessarily their occupational stress (Richmond et al., 1998). Despite the many occupational factors that place strain on officers’ marriages and family life, research indicates that divorce rates among officers are similar to, and often lower than, the general population (McCoy & Aamodt, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of hiring the right people to become police officers. Individuals who are service-oriented and compassionate guardians who recognize how their actions and responses affect not only citizens’ willingness to follow established laws and provide assistance to law enforcement, but also affect the legitimacy of their department as well as their profession. We also examined how the academy format can impact which individuals graduate and how those graduates exercise discretion and perform their job in the field. While representation of women and minorities in policing is growing, neither of these groups is fully represented in policing as yet. There has also been major growth in the proportion of college-educated officers and this has had an effect on how we view policing as a profession and how officers see and experience the police subculture. Finally, we explored some of the realities of policing in the form of police occupational stress.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. What types of occupational stress do police officer experience and which categories do officers identify as most problematic?
2. What are some of the benefits of a college education for police officers?
3. How does the reality of policing differ from the myth of policing?

## GLOSSARY

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**Occupational stress** mental or emotional strain that results from circumstances that develop in or are related to a person's workplace or occupation.

**Peace Officer Standards and Training** organizations (usually state-level) that set eligibility and training standards for peace officers.

**Police cynicism** an attitude that develops among officers that they must be skeptical of all people and can trust no one.

**Police subculture** the accepted norms, values, attitudes, and practices shared by law enforcement offices.

**Symbolic assailants** an individual whose dress, behavior, and gestures indicate suspicion and possible danger to a police officer.

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