
Police Training Strategies and the Role Perceptions of Police Recruits

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There has been much debate regarding basic police training and its effect on the attitudes of police recruits. Some critics argue that academy training creates negative attitudes in police recruits that favor arrest and crime attack orientations. The data presented in this article suggest that police recruits from a large urban police training program possess attitudes unfavorable toward crime attack or strict enforcement policing roles. The article examines a Los Angeles Police Department recruit training class, and the perceptions these recruits have toward selected policing roles. The study suggests police recruits do not perceive their role as simply being one of crime attack and strict enforcement.

Introduction

It is vitally important that police selection procedures be able to identify individuals who can handle the social

and physical demands of law enforcement. It is no less a concern to assure that those persons selected are trained so they can balance the ideals of due process and proper decision making with aggressive crime control. The police role has repeatedly been cited in the literature as one in which service or peace-keeping activities dominate over so-called arrest and apprehension roles (Wilson, 1968; Reiss, 1971; Banton, 1964; Preiss and Ehrlich, 1966; Misner, 1967). It therefore becomes important to focus attention on the relationship of basic academy training to a recruit officer's role perception.

The police academy is the first sustained contact with the police subculture, raising questions regarding the transforming or socializing effect of the training on naive recruit officers. Research has suggested that recruits go through a socialization process during training which can change their view of policing (Westley, 1970; Neiden-

hoffer, 1967); thus, recruits often learn how to be authoritarian, suspicious, and enforcement-oriented of others even before being exposed to actual policing (Gilsinan, 1982). The initial law enforcement training program can influence the recruit officers' attitudes and views of policing (Stratton, 1978). The question of how to train persons to be police officers has ignited much debate (Harris, 1973; Saunders, 1970; President's Crime Commission: The Police, 1967). Questions also have been raised regarding the relationship of police training to role performance. Goldstein (1977) argues that much of what is offered in training academies is both demeaning and boring; thus, the abilities and interests of new officers must be considered in developing training programs. While these debates will undoubtedly continue, many police training programs are struggling to find the best pedagogical approach. The purpose of this study was to assess the role perceptions of a selected police recruit class on entering and completing the Los Angeles Police Department training academy.

Police Training: The Los Angeles Experience

Los Angeles has become a center of attention due to the film industry and the 1984 Olympiad. The city is very heterogeneous, with many residents being of Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent. The Police Department has moved away from a "discipline oriented" police training program to one that encompasses multi-media, self-paced training approaches. The academy stresses community-service oriented training in preparing its officers for the delicate tasks of policing. To further this concern, the Police Commission has mandated that conversational Spanish and certain other culturally oriented topics be included in the training curriculum. A morato-

rium on "choke holds" has been imposed on the department due to citizen injuries and complaints. Patrol vehicles are equipped with non-fatal "taser guns" (i.e., stun guns) which are used on combative suspects under the influence of drugs. These developments are suggestive of a trend to decrease the use of physical force techniques to gain citizen compliance.

California mandates a minimum of 400 hours of preservice training for peace officer certification (Peace Officer Standards and Training Manual, 1983); however, agencies may increase the minimum-hour training requirement to accommodate specific needs. The Los Angeles Police Department requires recruits to complete 960 hours (six months) of academy instruction including such topics as Jewish culture, Spanish culture, the etiology of homosexuality, labor relations, interpersonal relations, and conversational Spanish. As with most basic police academies in California, there are 13 functional training areas covered within the curriculum (see Figure 1).

A unique feature of the academy is the Multimedia Instruction for Law Enforcement (M.I.L.E.) training program, developed in 1973. It is a curriculum of personalized self-paced instruction for recruit officers, with video tape cassettes, audio tape cassettes, programmed workbooks, lectures, performance training, ride-alongs, and situational simulations featured during the six-month academy. The training program stresses recruit decision making by allowing each recruit to actively participate in simulated situations. For example, the importance of decision making in the use of force and weaponry is stressed. Recruits are not only trained in how to administer force, but the legal and moral implications of excessive force. A shooting simulator is used to train recruits on target discrimination and

Figure 1. The Los Angeles Training Program

Functional Training Areas	Curriculum Format	Total Hours
1. Professional orientation	Carrel room	69
2. Police-community relations	Study hall/testing	38.5
3. Law	Scheduled courses	28.5
4. Rules of evidence	Situation simulation	50
5. Communications	Spanish	108
6. Vehicle operations	Ride-alongs	32
7. Force and weaponry	Ordinance (weaponry)	107
8. Patrol procedures	Driver training	28
9. Traffic	Physical fitness and self-defense techniques	159
10. Criminal investigation	Holidays	40
11. Custody		
12. Physical fitness and self-defense	Total	960
13. Administration		

decision making. The development and evaluation of firearms training (DEFT) simulator teaches decision making under stress. Recruits fire wax bullets at four life-sized filmed crime enactments, placing them into simulated shoot/don't shoot situations which require immediate decisions. Scores are transcribed by a computer, and the recruit's performance is video taped for immediate review and critique. Those who experience difficulty in these simulations may be subject to remedial training or possible termination. Recruits also learn to identify the range of situations that are likely to induce a victim's feeling of being victimized and learn how to effectively manage these situations in a manner that will assist the victim's recovery.

Recruits also receive approximately 108 hours of instruction on Spanish culture and mores, with most emphasis on basic conversational Spanish.

Ninety-seven video-taped modules, along with the more than 60 programmed workbooks, provide the recruits with a broad-based understanding of the police role and the many sensitive decision making expectations. The training stresses the range of dispositional options available, such as

mediation, negotiation, arbitration, and referral, for resolving disputes.

Regardless of the training area, recruits must provide evidence of their learning through performance testing and simulation exercises. To add realism to the training program, several buildings have been constructed on the academy grounds resembling a movie set. The set is used to act out many of the simulation exercises. Before recruits participate in these exercises, they receive lectures, view simulated enactments on video tapes, and complete programmed workbook assignments pertaining to a particular situation. During the tenth week of training, for example, recruits are taught the basic theory for handling attempted suicide cases. Recruits are expected to demonstrate this knowledge by acting out situations from the moment they receive a radio dispatch until arriving at an appropriate conclusion; thus, results are judged on tactical and safety procedures as well as their mediation or resolution abilities.

There are many other situations provided throughout the training, each with its own predicaments and each requiring technical as well as humanistic involvement. A typical daily sched-

ule for a recruit during the first 12 weeks consists of:

- 1 to 2 hours in the carrel room viewing cassettes, etc.
- 2 to 4 hours in lecture, study hall, or other activities
- 2 hours of shooting practice.

The purpose of the training is to provide a broad-based learning experience to enable recruits to perform more effectively as a police officer. The training philosophy is individualized, allowing each recruit a degree of autonomy in learning. The intent of the training program is to retain as many recruits as possible. Thus, for every subject covered in the academy, recruits are given three opportunities to pass an examination. Video tapes provide recruits the opportunity to review selected topics at their own pace. Instructors are also available for remedial training and counseling. Academy instructors are carefully selected from Department ranks. All instructors have at least five years of experience as field officers and possess undergraduate degrees, with several holding graduate degrees and one with a law degree. All instructors have completed a State Department of Education teaching program. The academy also staffs a psychologist and chaplain to assist recruits and their families experiencing personal or academy-related problems. Thus, the academy is concerned not only with professional achievement but also with personal development.

Methodology

To determine the recruit's role perceptions, a questionnaire was administered to a recruit training class.¹ The questionnaire consisted of 7 items following a 5-point Likert response scale. The items were scaled and grouped into two clusters for analysis. This process of reduction into clusters allows for a more empirical identifica-

tion of a particular set of variables, objects, or concepts, which are closer to each other than other items outside the cluster (Kerlinger, 1973). The two clusters were termed crime attack (CA) and strict enforcement (SE). A crime attack orientation was concerned with questions dealing with law enforcement without regard to due process and individual rights. Emphasis is on catching or convicting criminals at any cost, even if the arrest violates a person's civil rights. Items 5-7 were concerned with strict law enforcement (SE). These items attempted to determine if recruits perceived their role as one basically oriented toward arrest and apprehension. How recruits responded to these items may indicate whether recruits perceived their role as one opposed to order maintenance and service; thus, letter-of-the-law versus spirit-of-the-law enforcement is analyzed.

Following a pretest posttest design, questionnaires were administered to recruits during the first training week and readministered to the remaining recruits during the last week of training (approximately six months later). The use of a control group was precluded due to academy restraints such as staff utilization. Recruits with prior law enforcement experience were omitted from the study. The study was undertaken to determine if recruits favored strict law enforcement and crime attack roles upon leaving the academy. The following two hypotheses were tested:

- H₁ - After training, recruits will be less crime-attack oriented.
- H₂ - After training, recruits will be less oriented toward strict enforcement roles.

Findings

There were 72 recruits present for the first week of training with 62 completing the academy; thus, 86% finished the training. During the first training week, recruits were issued a questionnaire (T₁)

containing crime attack and strict enforcement questions. At the end of the training, recruits were again tested (T_2) to determine if any change occurred in their role perceptions. The following 5-point weighted Likert scale was used: 1=strong disagreement; 2=disagreement; 3=neutral; 4=agreement; 5=strong agreement. Tables 1 and 2 depict the means, standard deviations and T -scores of the CA and SE items.²

In reviewing the data in Table 1, recruit perceptions were less crime attack oriented at T_2 than T_1 . The mean between the two tests decreased indicating further disagreement to crime attack strategies. The crime attack cluster mean at T_1 (10.540) represented a neutral response, indicating that some recruits were unsure of their role; however, the mean at T_2 decreased to 9.4516, indicating a shift toward further disagreement in crime attack policing. In examining the specific questions,

recruits disagreed with using any method in obtaining evidence, but were unsure about the propriety of keeping secret files on citizens.³ In Item 3, recruits feel that "bugging and wiretapping practices" were more undesirable at T_2 than at T_1 . Recruits also disagreed more at T_2 with lying as a means of convicting certain criminals. Significance was found at the .05 level, suggesting that recruits were less crime attack oriented upon completing the academy.

In reviewing strict enforcement perceptions (Table 2), there was less change than depicted in the crime attack items. The scores pertaining to the items in this cluster remained relatively neutral between T_1 and T_2 ; however, there was a tendency for recruits to favor non-arrest orientations in role performance at T_2 ; thus, recruits are less favorable toward high arrest rates and letter-of-the-law enforcement roles.

TABLE 1. Cluster I: Crime Attack Perceptions

Items	T_1 ($n=72$)		T_2 ($n=62$)	
	\bar{x}	sd	\bar{x}	sd
1. Any method the police use to obtain evidence about criminal activities is justified.	2.736	1.2	2.145	1.038
2. Secret police files kept on citizens who have <i>not</i> been convicted of crimes is often a necessary practice.	3.097	.891	3.000	1.116
3. "Bugging" and wiretapping are desirable police methods of detecting crime.	3.347	1.009	2.677	1.098
4. In order to convict a hardcore criminal, it is sometimes necessary for a police officer to lie under oath.	1.333	.557	1.629	.794
Total	10.5400		9.4516	
Standard error $T_1 = .319$ $df = 61$ Standard error $T_2 = .326$ t value = 3.37 One-tailed probability = .00005 $p < .05$				

Recruits disagreed on performance standards being based upon the number of arrests, raising questions that police performance requires more than arrest production. Recruits were generally neutral on how citizens want the law enforced and when to arrest an offender. Yet, between T_1 and T_2 , significance was found at the .05 confidence level.

The data depicted in Table 1 indicates that recruits tend to be less crime attack oriented upon leaving the academy, suggesting that the first hypothesis is true. The data contained in Table 2, pertaining to the second hypothesis, indicates recruits hold views that favor less arrest and apprehension role behaviors.

Conclusions

There appears to be some evidence to suggest that academy training in this study influenced a police recruit's role perception. However, the study cannot

claim that the training approaches discussed in this study will change a recruit's attitudes because other variables may be interacting to affect their perceptions. Yet, it is remarkable that crime attack and strict enforcement attitudes of recruits were absent. It must also be noted that recruits entering the academy do not possess strong attitudes favoring crime attack or strict enforcement roles either. It is expected, however, that time on the job or the type of assignment will affect a police officer's role perception (Neidenhoffer, 1967). What takes place after training is another issue, but it is important that recruit training programs incorporate broad-based learning experiences where discretion and the rights of others are stressed, rather than just high discipline, one-dimensional structured approaches to learning. Police officers must not graduate from a recruit academy harboring attitudes which could be detrimental to the police role.

TABLE 2. Cluster II: Strict Enforcement Perceptions

Items	T_1 ($n=72$)		T_2 ($n=62$)	
	\bar{x}	<i>sd</i>	\bar{x}	<i>sd</i>
5. The most important way of measuring a police officer's performance is by the number of arrests made.	1.931	.718	2.226	.948
6. Generally, citizens want the police to enforce the law strictly as it is written.	3.097	1.513	3.048	1.093
7. Given a choice of arresting or releasing a person who has committed a minor crime, it is always best to arrest that offender.	2.986	.971	3.145	1.006
Total	8.014		8.419	

Standard error $T_1 = .257$

Standard error $T_2 = .277$

One-tailed probability = .0525

$df = 61$

t value = 1.65

$p < .05$

Thus, how a police officer perceives his/her role may be related to the training received and the quality of instructors providing the training. Police training must incorporate academic as well as humanistic experience. This is not to suggest that training in the technical areas (i.e., firearms or self-defense) be reduced; but training should allow the recruit to maintain individuality, rather than employing fear strategies in the name of learning.

Police training can have profound implications in the administration of justice. As suggested in the literature, the primary role of policing is one of service or order maintenance; therefore, the training provided at the recruit level

should incorporate curriculum and strategies that mirror these concerns. If one of the missions of policing systems is to recruit and train humanistic- and discretion-oriented officers, then it seems appropriate to structure training programs to develop these desirable traits. Accordingly, if police agencies are going to recruit higher educated, older, and more culturally diverse officers,⁴ then training (as suggested by Goldstein earlier) must account for these divergent abilities and interests. It is recognized that further study needs to be done on police training strategies, because training in any organization reflects personnel effectiveness.

Notes

¹Questions were developed with the assistance of the training academy staff. The questions reflected current areas of controversy regarding police department enforcement policies. (A series of media editorials have accused the police department of promoting civil rights violations and arrest quotas.) The questions attempted to address those concerns at the training level.

²The following *T*-test formula corresponds to study samples that are correlated or non-independent. This type of design is frequently used to measure change or gain. The scores in this *T*-test are paired because there is a set of scores for each recruit, one set for the beginning of the academy (T_1) and one set at the end (T_2).

$$t = \frac{\bar{D}}{\sqrt{\frac{\sum D^2 - [(\sum D)^2 / N]}{N(N-1)}}}$$

³The second item has been an area of controversy between the city council and the police department, resulting in a complete reorganization of the police department's intelligence division due to allegations of over-zealous spying on private citizen groups.

⁴The Los Angeles Police Department, as with most police agencies in California, offers salary bonuses for college educated recruits. There is no maximum age requirement for recruit officers. There is also recruitment emphasis on hiring females and minorities.

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