

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**The Importance of Educating the Cop**

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**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In today's modern police agency, professionalism of a police department is of utmost importance. At times, society can paint a grim picture of a police agency due to a variety of issues. An issue that plagues agencies can produce complaints by the citizens that they represent whether it is perceived ethical or unethical. Some might argue that lack of education and failure to train its officers are reasons for a rise of citizen complaints. For example, consider the recent trend in officers shooting dogs. This topic is not new but is an issue that agencies must address due to public pressure.

Addressing the perceived ethical behavior through training, education, recruitment, and policies of police officers should be that of the most crucial objective of police administrators. This is a critical issue for police departments as one objective of police work is to have the trust and respect of the community. Trust, respect, and professionalism of officers are critical to take into account when agencies deal with hot related topics within the community. Citizens need to have assurances that a police agency will exhibit many traits to show transparency, honesty, and professionalism. Because of such issues, agencies across the nation deal with complaints on officers. Police agencies can decrease the complaints received by citizen if those agencies follow and introduce an advanced thought process and implementation of methods in specific areas within recruiting, education, policy, leadership, and training.

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## INTRODUCTION

For purposes of alleviating or decreasing police complaints, it is critical that there is an understanding of why police complaints arise from the public. Simply put, one must understand the problem in order to correct the problem. The first thought that comes to mind when the subject of police corruption becomes the topic is the actual relevance in the presence of police corruption. Police misconduct or corruption does exist and not only does it exist, but it is prevalent throughout every agency in the United States in some form or fashion. Agencies must determine how prevalent misconduct is within the agency and how the police administration addresses and corrects this problem is crucial.

To gain a broader understanding of the topic of decreasing complaints, it is worth mentioning that misconduct in itself for law enforcement is not just a myth. In fact, there is an abundance of resources to prove that corruption is ever prevalent within the police subcultural. For example, there was a report conducted by the Mollen Commission that spent approximately two years on police corruption on the New York City Police Department. The report stated that corruption is more than just a bad apple infecting a bushel, but a cultural act that distinguishes loyalty over integrity ("Corruption in uniform," 1994). This finding explores that police misconduct is not necessarily one bad cop infecting a whole department but rather that the brotherhood comes first within the police culture at almost any cost, thus a creation of good cops not reporting bad behavior. This has nothing to do with a bad officer corrupting a good officer, just the neglect to report unethical or criminal behavior.

Police work requires numerous amounts of training, long hours, commitment, trust, and loyalty to name just a few. Officers, over time, with fellow unethical officers, can develop some bad traits. Additionally, because of officer's position of authority, their behavior can be characterized by a percentage of the population as either raciest, badge heavy, and/or abusive. Officers can develop an attitude that isolates their culture from the rest of the world. In other words, officers feel as the whole world is against their crime fighting efforts and them (personally) in general ("Corruption in uniform," 1994). This very mindset from officers can prove to be dangerous as it alienates the officers from considering themselves as a normal productive citizen or as an equal to members of the community. Some might say that these same officers view themselves at a higher level within the human gene pool. The phrase used to describe this mentality of this type of officer is often referred to as "the us versus them," attitude.

The corruption study also alluded to the facts that officers do not necessarily intend on becoming corrupt but opportunities within their employment arise for misconduct to take place. For example, when people think of corruption of an agency such as the New York City Police Department, it is not the old corruption schemes of officers taking bribes to overlook criminal activity but officers actively being involved in corruption of drug trafficking ("Corruption in uniform," 1994, para 4). Research explained that the corruption of the individual cop days is not as prevalent as in past times. Specifically, it is the corruption of groups of cops that seems to plague agencies. This of course is not true in every case but seems to be the case specifically for the New York Police Department study. The same report also identified that the New York

Police Department could use help to alleviate corruption within the agency by stricter recruitment and training efforts.

To illustrate the camaraderie among officers, “The code of silence and disciplinary fairness, policing,” studied 450 line officers and 150 supervisors referencing the code of silence with police agencies. The code of silence simply means officers are not willing to share information or report misconduct of fellow officers. This code of silence commonly referred to as other names such as the blue wall of silence, the thin blue line, and the code of silence, all meaning the same thing. Simply, those officers keep quiet on misconduct at some level. One might believe that officers who are sworn to uphold the law would report misconduct if those officers were present during the commission of such conduct. Certainly, officers are not crooks just because they do not report all violations but in some cases, this may be true. It seems that officers might be reluctant to report violations because some misconduct could be viewed as minor and not really worth reporting (Ivkovic & Shelley, 2010).

For example, a policy for officers dealing with drug paraphernalia might require that officers to turn in any evidence of a drug nature in the property room. An officer could violate this policy simply because of high call load or just plain laziness. Regardless of reason, if a fellow officer views this violation of policy, it is likely to go unreported due to the consideration of the minor infraction that is implied as minor. This minor infraction would meet criteria of misconduct but just not in a serious nature. The whole study concluded that overall, officers typically are not willing to report misconduct of fellow officers (Ivkovic & Shelley, 2010). This is somewhat surprising due to the nature that 150 of those surveyed were leaders of the departments that oversaw

the daily activities of those officers. If these supervisors are not willing to report misconduct then who will report the ethical violations of the police? The Mollen report supports this statement as well by stating that the New York Police Department supervisors encouraged unethical behavior by one such incident where a supervisor stated that if anyone was caught doing anything wrong to just be quiet ("Corruption in uniform," 1994). The article goes on to describe another country to prove the theory that police misconduct is present within the law enforcement community. The article compared the views of officers from the Czech who were line officers as well as supervisors. The question was whether officers viewed the code of silence and views of discipline fairness differently. In other words, it looked at whether there was a code of silence just between line troops or if the silence went further up the chain of command to the supervisors.

Consider the study by Ivkovic and Shelley (2010) of the 450 line officers and the 150 supervisors; the information seems relevant since supervisors are the ones who should be reporting the violations of misconduct and discipline of those who are violating the rules. Supervisors, after all, are responsible for the actions of their subordinates. The study's findings support the notion that police regardless of their position of an officer or supervisor will not report misconduct at some level. To illustrate further, consider the country of Russia: an article by Gerber and Mendelson (2008) demonstrated the theory that police misconduct is not just a United States law enforcement issue but relevant in many countries. Again, this is reiterating that this is a police subcultural attitude regardless of geographic location. Seriousness of police misconduct is in the eye of the beholder. Different cultures determine what is serious.

What is serious misconduct in the United States may be less serious in other countries or vice versa.

## **POSITION**

Understanding now that misconduct is alive and well in the modern policing subculture, agencies have a duty and a desire to find out what are the causes and cures for the epidemic of police misconduct. After all, this is the cause of complaints. First, administrations must identify the differences and seriousness's of such events. However, there are degrees of differences among misconduct and the approach to each event shall be dealt with by the administration dependent on the facts of each individual situation. Some such ways might be as easy as in house discipline of the problematic employee. This discipline can simply be corrective actions taken within the agency itself. Some correction methods that agencies implement are oral reprimands, written reprimands, up to and including termination and incarceration. Again, the variables and degree of misconduct will determine the appropriate action. Typically, such events start first by a complaint by the public or member of the police force. Next, administration officials must determine the characteristics of the complaints that the agency receives. In order to combat police misconduct administrators must understand the dilemmas that face their respective agency.

Many characteristics play a part in the reasons officers receive complaints. Some are trivial in nature and some are serious allegations. These complaints are based on many reasons. A study by Hassell and Archbold (2009) titled "Widening the scope on complaints of police misconduct", included factors of race, sex, age, education and years of service on officer's characteristics and the frequency of allegations of

police misconduct. Agencies report complaints differently throughout the country. Thus, differences in the process of how complaints are received can skew the numbers and make it difficult to isolate the issues to any specific issue. This information is important to understand when trying to determine how to correct the problem. The study conducted by Hassell and Archbold (2009) tried to determine specifically what factors led to police officer complaints and why people complain.

One should understand that the duties of officers who displays a position of authority is likely to be unpopular at times and receive complaints. With that said, the Hassell and Archbold (2009) study outcome broadly supported that complaints from citizens come at least in two ways. Those ways are the formal and the informal complaints. Formal complaints is the process where citizens initiate a complaint process that is recorded by the agency and hopefully followed up upon by the agency for investigation. The informal complaint described by Hassell and Archbold (2009) is a process where a citizen speaks to an officer in a venting process and no other action needs to be taken by the agency. Many mitigating factors will lead a citizen to make a complaint on an officer. Some example or reasons an officer receives complaints vary from such things as simple as discretion of a citation, written warning, or a physical custodial arrest. The study showed that the aggressive officers in terms of an active officer who made arrests compared to an officer who made little or no arrest received more complaints. Some of the factors that determined these complaints were based on race, sex, age, and years of experience of officer. There is an abundance of reasons why and officer can be complained on but one fact is certain, education is one area that agencies can decrease complaints (Hassell & Archbold, 2009). Hassell and Archbold,

(2009) referred to past research of other researchers on this topic and agreed that most research concludes that education is a way to decrease complaints against police officers. This information proved useful in ways for agencies to determine how to address potential complaints in the future by identifying characteristics of officers (Hassell & Archbold, 2009).

The duties of administrators to address unethical behavior are very important for specific reasons. A public servant such as a police officer has a wide range of authority. This very authority given to police officers by legislators in order to promote the well-being and safety of the community in which that officer represents. This authority is powerful as it gives officers the right to take two of the most important elements of a United States citizen away, that being life and liberties of individuals. Because officers are demanded to make decisions that can determine life and death, they are given some latitude in the decision process. The Dutch research indicated that this latitude usually is scrutinized at all levels well after the fact of such decisions (Lamboos, 2010) that receive and categorize police complaints. It is important that processes exist for communities to record and investigate complaints of all levels so that agencies can determine where officers are lacking in ethical areas. The Lamboos research (2010) shows the importance of agencies setting up ways to combat and deter police misconduct by accountability.

Identifying where and why the misconduct is occurring are of great importance as knowing where the issues are gives agencies an opportunity to address and correct the problem as to decrease the process and amount of complaints. The report by Johnson (2004) "Citizens expectations of police behavior," describes that most complaints occur

for police officers are that of traffic stops (p. 487). This theory would make sense, considering that the traffic stops are likely the biggest ratio of calls that officers can conduct. Traffic stops may typically be minor in nature but the study shows this is where a good majority of police complaints takes place due to the perception or actual discharge of rudeness. Complaints at any job are a part of life and expected, so it should be no surprise that officers who are in a position of authority will receive complaints but how agencies decrease complaints seems to be the underlying question.

Verbal judo is another preferred training method taught to police officers to help deter complaints in the field (Johnson, 2004). Verbal judo is defined in a nine-step process that gives an officer a guide on what to do with an encounter during a traffic stop. The theory is that every officer uses this nine-step process, which gives the appearance that everybody is treated equally. Not only is this nine-step process implemented, but the officers are taught to talk in an empathetic manner. The results in the Johnson study support the use of verbal judo for all agencies as a way to deter complaints (Johnson, 2004).

Research by Kim and Kunzman (2001) suggested that police education in respects to post high school education is essential in decreasing police complaints. For example, in Texas, citizens applying for positions in law enforcement are not always required to have a higher education degree for employment. This standard is set by each hiring agency, though the state does regulate a minimum high school education for all potential applicants. Law enforcement agencies today are plagued with the question of whether to stipulate to higher education standards for applicants and current

officers. The argument of post high school education and the absence of a post high school education go back and forth amongst even current officers and administrators.

A study by Lersch and Kunzman (2001), cited by Roberg (1978), theorized that college-educated officers perform better than non-college educated officers. This report suggested that officers with a post high school education are better equipped through education to deal with the real aspects of the duties of police officers. This suggests that officers, through wisdom of education and experience, are likely to exhibit a more mature attitude towards the duties of law enforcement. This, in turn, would afford the officer a different outlook on the action needed and because of the education received, the officer would have more options available and the hopes of picking the best option would literally be more favorable. Further, the report states that police officers are involved in many interpersonal and non-enforcement activities which dictate that an officer is more than driving fast in a police unit and shooting at the bad guys as suggested by today's television dramas (Smith & Aamodt, n.d.). In fact, officers devote only 10-20% of their time conducting actual law enforcement patrol duties; the remaining time is on a variety of activities and functions that are traditional in law enforcement but non-traditional of counterparts in the professional (corporate) environment (Roberg, 1978). Skills used by officers are more about the role of a social worker, family therapists, psychologist, and mediator to name just a few.

Studies also support that people in general, not just police officers whom have a college education tend to be more flexible, less authoritarian, and less dogmatic in their beliefs (Smith & Aamodt, n.d.). This information suggests that officers overall are more open to an array of items that change within the law enforcement realm such as

schedule changes (fixed shifts vs. rotating shifts). As trivial as that may sound to some, few specifics such as changing from fixed shifts to rotating shifts can be detrimental to officers. Officers are also more likely to adapt to change, more acceptable of the implementation of changes, such as community policing, and overall job tasks. This eliminates the old adage of “that’s the way we have always done things.” These researchers showed that other studies concluded that police officers with a college education are less likely to have complaints filed against them compared with police officers with a high-school education due to being open minded and a greater ability to deal with people of diverse cultures. The research of the two studies of Smith and Aamodt (n.d.), and Roberg (1978) seem to continually be repetitive with the same message referencing education as an important attribute for officers. In support of this argument, the Mannis report (2008) as well as the Hassell and Archbold report (2009) agreed that officers with a college degree are less likely to receive a complaint than an officer who does not have a degree. The report does address and admit that there is little or no comparison of a two-year degree verses a four year degree in matters of decreasing complaints for agencies, though this too is debatable. This report goes on to suggest that there are other factors that could play a role in complaints that will not be listed in this writing. It is further noted that the research shows that education also plays a significant role for the amount of complaints that an officer receives. Another matter to point out is that the degree major of officers with a post high school education seems to be no indication of decline in complaints, just that a higher education is paramount to decreasing complaints.

Recruitment also combined with other areas can be a fix to the issue of decreasing complaints. The reading from this government website supported that recruitment of applicants with past ethical issues should not be hired as police cadets (Fitch, 2011). Though this might make common sense on the surface, it is a different approach of the hiring agencies viewing this conduct under a different microscope than previously viewed. For example, the article suggested that a viable solution to current officers who have ethical issues while on the job should be rooted out. Rooting out bad cops and hiring ethical people is a good way to prevent future misconduct. Fitch introduced a different approach of thinking that agencies should consider when looking at applicants. This thought process states that agencies should look at three specific realms of the applicants with a different view than past practices. They are past social learning, moral development, cognitive rationalization, and culture of ethics (Fitch, 2011).

If agencies look into the background of each applicant with a moral compass and the other factors listed, the agency is likely to gain an ethical employee. This result will enable the agency to mediate the complaints and decrease the complaint process. Agencies should keep in mind that recruitment alone will not necessarily produce the best officer but the combination of traits of education, recruitment and the like.

The Wilson study (1999) finds that citizens hired with different levels of post high school education are less likely to receive complaints than those officers with less college credits, (associate degree verse bachelor's degrees). Though this particular content is unfounded in an earlier studied mentioned, it is not crucial for this research. Wilson concluded that education requirements exist to prove that a higher education for

police brings a higher degree of good job performance (Wilson, 1999). Hence, evidence again supports the theory that a post education for police officers can decrease ethical dilemmas for agencies and that officers with advanced degrees tend to receive fewer complaints than those without degrees. It is best summarized by Lersch and Kunzman (2001) as: all things being equal, the college-educated individual is more qualified and better prepared than the high school graduate. The college-educated person has more experience with the life's events. The college-educated person has life experience with individuals of numerous races and cultures based on the experiences within the college world (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001).

### **COUNTER POSITION**

Critics such as the typical street cop have long argued that officers do not need a post high school education in order to have the maximum desired result from officers on the street. Some argue that an officer should have cynicism and authoritarianism as a trait; so that officers will not be considered gullible by the people within the community (Smith & Aamodt, n.d.). This thought process denounces the thought that an education is an important element in decreasing complaints. After all, college educated officers can be unethical as well. Officers in the past, specifically smaller agencies had always accomplished the mission of policing without the necessity of a college degree, so education is not in itself necessary. The Williams article suggests that officers who pursue post high school degrees limit their options compared to other professions. Officers are doing a more dangerous work than other degree areas that would likely pay more, thus officers are limiting their options.

Though a college degree requirement can be argued for both realms, the effects of such requirements of education and strict recruitment processes could prove difficult to fill in the slots of employment. In retrospect, it would seem to be difficult to fill open positions if the standards are set higher for applicants. This void will never the less need to be filled. In addition, an educated cop does not mean that the officer will be better, (Bear & Rieken, 2012) stated that officers should be better oriented towards the community, thus eliminating the actual need of a college education. Sure, an education is favorable, but this is not the best way to resolve the issue. This arguably will have an effect on the amount of qualified people to apply for open positions. In fact, Wood (1998) suggested, when he cited Carter, Sapp, and Stephens, that smaller agencies have concerns with filling positions due to the competing interest of larger departments. Certainly, this can be an issue for some agencies, but understanding and targeting police complaints should be weighed and determined for what fits the hiring agency.

To further the rebuttal that post high school education is not relevant, is the article by Bostrom (2005), who states that in his research that there is some findings that point to the conclusion that an officer with a college degree influences a positive work environment and habits. This statement or theory makes relative sense, as most would conclude that a happy employee will result in satisfactory work. Bostrom (2005), further showed in a diagram of the article under "commendations per officer," that an officer with a Master's Degree is more likely to receive more commendations (Fig 7).

Education, training, leadership, recruitment, and adoption of policy and procedures can be of great importance when it comes to decreasing complaints. Totaling all elements, specifically a post high school education seems to be the theme.

Most agencies seem to buy into this practice as well as state and federal regulators. The proof is in the amount of continuing service training required by such entities. Ethics training, updates to legislature changes to name two. Additional training is also attractive to agencies as it helps protect against civil suits. By implementing departmental wide policy and procedures, studies suggest that this can reduce the opportunity for officers engaging in misconduct and corrupt practices to help target accountability for officers, through integrity checks (Gottschalk, 2011). Policies and procedures are specifically helpful only because some minor ethical issues are addressed that can be debatable.

For example, gratuities are a hot topic amongst some agencies and the question of ethical behavior should gratuities be accepted. Oftentimes, minor ethical issues that seem harmless can be a catalyst for future and broader unethical behavior by police officers. In other words, at first, officers start with accepting gratuities only to later offend bigger with other larger issues. Effective leadership is critical in the process of decreasing complaints. Rothwell and Baldwin (2007) demonstrated and supported the theory that an ethical and strong leader promotes whistleblowing for police misconduct. A leader who does not tolerate misconduct and is a leader known for not dealing with unethical behavior by reporting misconduct demonstrates a leader who will help alleviate complaints (Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007).

Professionals will argue that such a requirement is the duty of administrations to recruit the best of society. The point seems to be that post high school education and training are heavily involved in shaping how officers think and react to situations. The officer's attitudes, values and beliefs are altered in a way different from that of an officer

without a higher education. (Christie, Petrie, & Timmins, 1996). In simplest terms, officers with no formal education or training are more closed minded, not because they want to be but are not necessarily acclimated to the changes needed to be a more efficient officer. So in essence, the college degree is necessary in order to break away from the old way of doing things. Lessor trained and educated officers by the statistics support that a higher education should be part of the norm by agencies. Consider the following diagram:

	High School	Some College	Bachelor's Degree
No Force	32.2%	44.1%	43.3%
Force	67.8%	55.9%	56.7%

(Paoline & Terrill, 2007)

The diagram from Paoline and Terrill (2007) demonstrates that officers who possess no college experience are more likely to use force than those officers whom have college hours and/or degrees. The numbers easily demonstrate that officers with high school only experience show a 67.8% chance of using force compared to the educated class of 55-56.7% use of force. The no force statistics imply the same that officers with higher education degrees are more likely to use no force compared to their counterpart officers with no post high school education. Consider that the International Associations of Chief of Police report using a study of a Florida Police department showing that from 1972-2002 officers with only a high school education were disciplined at a higher rate of 75% compared to those with a college degree of 11% (Johnson, 2006).

## RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, there are many ways agencies can deter the amount of complaints. With that said, agencies around the country are implementing different ideas on how to correct and decrease the complaint department. It is important for agencies to be concerned with complaints as this is more than just an image for a department but can be costly. Agencies with high complaints can cause political headaches, costly civil suits, community unrest, and unwanted media attention. This writing shows that if specific areas within the department are addressed and practiced, that it could have a significant impact on decreasing complaints.

During the recruiting stages, agencies can use every day ethical dilemmas as a measuring tool for applicants. Weighing these on a case by case basis might help in selecting the appropriate candidate during the hiring process. Departments can implement in home inspections to determine the geographical culture where the applicant resides to help determine diversity. The main indicator is that education can be the biggest impact on complaints. Officers who have a college education are proven statistically to have a less likely hood of being complained on by citizens and peers. Agencies are trying to eliminate complaints and or ethical issues from recruiting desirable people, and this is accomplished with a preference of an educated applicant as well as other mitigating factors. There are many variables to this conclusion but the facts support this idea.

Additionally, agencies can incorporate these findings by slowly implementing college education requirements by first using education as a tool to promote within the agency. This accomplishes two major areas: first, promoting demonstrates to the

department that an education is favored by the agency; second, the education requirements are given to the leaders who will practice good traits and hopefully pass on to the subordinates. Other recommendations that agencies can implement are a monthly payment incentive for officers with degrees. For example, an agency can offer its employees who have an associate's degree an increase of \$50 a month, or bachelor's degree with increase of \$100 a month. Other incentives could be coordination with local community colleges offering discounted rates for public servants or reimbursement for classes taken that are job related. To reiterate, police agencies can decrease complaints by introducing such requirements of applicants during recruiting and by educating, training, and leadership.

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