

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

Romantic Relationships Within the Same Agency

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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October 2020**

ABSTRACT

Marital or dating relationships among law enforcement officers from within the same agency seems to be more common in current times than before due to the law enforcement field seeing more and more female officers in the law enforcement profession. Some department heads do not support interrelationships due to the fact of the many issues that could arise from it. One issue that department heads may face are during promotional periods and possibly receiving negative feedback from whom was selected for promotion if the person promoted is with someone already in a supervisory position, which in turn could create moral issues. Although there are many issues that one can imagine about interrelationships, there are also advantages for all involved including the department, community and the officers themselves.

One advantage to allowing the interrelationship, is the individuals involved form a strong bond and are able to communicate on the same level with complete understanding of each other's outlook and feelings of any given incident whether the incident is a positive or negative outcome. Relationships within the same agency can help the department with this by knowing all officers involved are as content with their personal lives as they are while on duty. Therefore, agencies should accept and support marital or dating relationships within the same agency.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	3
Counter Position	6
Recommendation	8
References	11

INTRODUCTION

The law enforcement profession has changed tremendously since the beginning of time. One of many things that has changed the face of the law enforcement profession are females working in the field where before only males were in the profession. Crooke (2013) stated, "Yet, despite progressive legislation aimed at procuring gender equality in the United States, women today make up only 13 percent of the force, most significantly in larger departments" (p. 1). Law enforcement officers spend just as much time, if not more, with their law enforcement family versus the ones involved in their lives outside of work. Because of this, friendships and bonds are created among fellow law enforcement officers within the same agency, which can include but not limited to female and male officers confiding in each other. More and more law enforcement agencies are facing dating and marital relationships within the same agency because of the friendships and bonds developed. Which in turn, causes divorces or break ups to be common within the law enforcement profession when law enforcement officers are dating or married to a civilian.

With that being said, once the choice is made to become a peace officer, there are multiple of things that the law enforcement officer is exposed to during their tour of duty. Law enforcement officers are exposed to other persons marital issues, sexual assaults, injuries to others, and death. These are just a few issues a law enforcement officer faces throughout his/her career. Being a law enforcement officer has different levels of stress, which depends on the individual officer himself or herself. Of course, every law enforcement officer handles what he/she is exposed to differently than the next law enforcement officer. With that said, law enforcement officers are not always

comfortable or able to communicate openly with their significant others that are civilians as they are with their fellow law enforcement officers, whether it be a male or female, about things that are bothering them. Which in turn can cause the law enforcement officer to have an emotional disconnect with their significant others, rather it be a spouse or person they are dating. Thus causing the law enforcement officer to be more apt to only confide in other fellow law enforcement officers, because they feel more comfortable to discuss the situations with them. Bond (2014) states, "Officers have a tendency to want to protect their spouse from the reality of their job so they choose not to talk about their work or the dangerous situations they find themselves in." (p. 1). This alone has developed additional stress upon those that have chosen this profession to protect the communities within the law enforcement officer's service area and with their own family life and/or relationships. This is one of the main reasons issues arise about trust in law enforcement officer's romantic relationships with civilians versus officers dating or married to other officers. It is also considered a reason for the lack of communication with the officer's significant other.

Romantic relationships within the same department are becoming more common in current times. Law enforcement agencies are not only dealing with multiple issues within the community but are being exposed to relationships developed within the same agency. Department heads in law enforcement agencies are being forced to understand how to deal with the fact they are unable to prevent such relationships being developed within the same agency. Paul and Townsend (1998) states, "Unfortunately, there are few guidelines for understanding the conditions under which outside-of-job interaction between men and women coworkers is classified as personal or job-related"

(Introduction section, para. 2). Department heads have to make sure the image of the department is respected by the community and continue to develop that bond with the community. Relationships within the same agency can help the department with this by knowing all officers involved are as content with their personal lives as they are while on duty. Therefore, agencies should accept and support marital or dating relationships within the same agency.

POSITION

Marital and dating relationships within the same law enforcement agency can help a department become stronger in many areas. Meyer (2013) stated that “Romance in the workplace is nothing new, and neither are the problems that can result. But not all workplace romances cause problems, and in many cases they actually improve productivity and morale” (p. 1). With two law enforcement officers involved by being married or in a dating relationship romantically outside of work, the law enforcement officers are able to confide in each other because the officers are able to talk and relate to each other with issues dealt with at work.

As previously stated there are multiple stressful incidents law enforcement officers are exposed to which most civilians do not understand because civilians look at situations differently than what law enforcement officers have to consider and examine. By having two law enforcement officers within the same agency in a relationship together, the law officers are able to vent and discuss the incidents faced with each other and not have to explain to the other what the issue is at hand. Not only that, but the two law enforcement officers are both on the same page and under the same policies and code of conduct for the same agency. With being able to confide in each

other, each officer can give the other insight or even ideas or tips on how to manage the incident the other may not have considered because of the other's levels of experience, training, and specialties in certain areas that the other officer may not have.

By being able to confide in each other leads to the law enforcement officers who are couples within the same agency to have a better support system compared to other law enforcement marriages who are married to civilians. By having a support system at home and at work is comforting and makes it easier for the officer to continue what they love to do or chose to do, which is to serve and protect others within their community and give back to the communities in which they serve. Meyer (2013) states, "Far from being harmful, many romances actually improve work performances. They add a dynamism and energy that translates into enhanced morale, communication, creativity and even productivity." (p. 1). Without having a support system outside of the agency, law enforcement officers can become secluded from the outside world and begin developing depression. Kulbarsh (2010) states, "Officers with a history of depression or anxiety are identified as the weak-link, the guy who folds under pressure. So the officer tries to solve his problems personally and quietly, often with disastrous results" (para. 9). Thus, having two officers who are married or in a dating relationship builds a support system not only at work but also at home. This support system between will be a bond that will be stronger than any other bond other married law enforcement couples have who are married to civilians. This bond will also help the officer's deal with the additional stress law enforcement faces during their professional career.

Stress is one of the leading causes in law enforcement officer's profession, which could lead to many situations for the law enforcement officer to face. As mentioned

before, stress is a common factor that law enforcement officers face on a day to day basis which in turn ends up causing problems in their personal lives outside of their day to day jobs and maybe even post traumatic stress disorder, more commonly known as PTSD. According to "The Badge of Life" (www.badgeoflife.com), "The numbers are only the tip of the iceberg. For every police suicide, there are at least 1,000 police officers suffering from some symptoms of PTSD. An officer commits suicide every 81 hours. More officers die of suicide than die of shootings and traffic accidents combined" (para. 3). Thus, creating the law enforcement officer to become involved in break ups or even divorce because of lack of communication and trust between the couple that has a partner with a civilian versus a law enforcement officer. Bond (2014) states, "Couples who fail to communicate often drift apart and seek an emotional connection elsewhere that can lead to infidelity and ultimately divorce" (p. 1). With that being said, the increase of divorce and break ups can lead to police officer suicide because the officer's self-worth can start playing mind games on him/herself. Khan (2013) states "Approximately one quarter of the officers who are married will still be married to that same spouse at the end of their careers. One quarter" (p. 1).

By having two law enforcement officers working in the same agency that have this bond, it can ultimately help the law enforcement officer cope with their day to day stressors that the law enforcement profession provides on a daily basis because they have someone whom they work with and have a home life with. Heidel (n.d.) states, "When you spend this much time with someone, you get to know them on an intimate, day-to-day level. You get a feel for their intelligence, personality and ethic and this can create a type of chemistry that could lead to something more" (p.1 para. 3).

COUNTER POSITION

As stated earlier, law enforcement officers spend a lot of time at the office whether it be to work a shift, attend court hearings, or departmental meetings, just to mention a few. In return of spending so much time at the office, the officer has a second family who is loved and cherished as the family at home. "With more employees working longer days and spending so much of their time on-the-job, romantic relationships at work are developing more frequently" (Wilson, Filosa, & Fennel, 2003, para. 1).

In order for this second family to be functional, department heads at agencies are forced to realize that friendships and romantic relationships are developing. Department heads are now struggling to juggle and accept the fact this is actually happening because relationships within the same agency whether, it be romantic or just a friendship, they know there will be issues that arise. Law enforcement officers are looked at as something other than normal humans but they are just that, normal humans just like civilians. Civilians have their own opinions on different topics and do not always agree which can cause some friction. Therefore, having two law enforcement officers dating or married in the same agency can face several different issues.

One issue that could be faced by the agency is the fact that the relationship between the two law enforcement officers can come to an end, meaning a break up or even a divorce. Department heads are then dealt with how to keep the agency functional with the two officers remaining employed by the same agency and not allowing the break up or divorce affect the job at hand. In order for a dating or marital

relationship to work within the same agency, the two officers who are involved in the romantic relationship must be able to conduct themselves in a professional manner. According to results from the Organizational and Individual Polices, “Among the most frequently mentioned conditions was that participants in workplace romances act professionally (59%; e.g., participants do not demonstrate signs of affection towards each other at work)” (as cited in Brown & Allgeier, 1995, p.1). The officers will need to understand while they are at work, attending or participating in a law enforcement activity they must act and carry themselves in a professional manner at all times and not allow their personal life to affect the job at hand, which is to serve and protect the community.

Another issue could arise for department heads when they have two officers involved in a romantic relationship, is when it comes to the point in one of the officer's course of performance that an internal investigation needs to be conducted in order to resolve an issue. As mentioned prior, a romantic relationship between two officers within the same agency build a bond that is quite strong and they have a strong support system with each other. When it comes time to an internal investigation, department heads need to understand that the internal investigation needs to remain confidential and not allow interference from the other officer to play any part of the internal investigation. Michelson, Hurvy & Grunauer (2010) states “Employee attitudes are also explored as these might influence the attitudes and subsequent actions taken by HR professionals” (Introduction section, para. 4). In addition, the two officers involved in a romantic relationship must remain neutral with the internal investigation and not allow it

to affect their own job performance or attitude towards the department because of the internal investigation.

Department heads can also have staffing or scheduling issues when the agency has two officers involved in a romantic relationship. Usually, two officers become involved in a relationship because the officers work on the same shift and are able to be there for each other in multiple forms and fashion. Rampenthal (2012) states, "As companies grow and add employees, you will often see signs of budding workplace relationships. According to the CareerBuilder survey, some industries are more prone to inter-office dating than others" (p. 2).

Once the romantic relationship is developed, department heads face the conflict of staffing and scheduling. Although this is not always easy to do especially when the department is short-handed within the same division. This is where the department head has to make the decision to allow the officers involved work together under those circumstances. However, in order to help the department function more smoothly, it is common for the two officers involved in the relationship to be placed on different shifts or even opposite shifts and possibly even in different divisions to prevent any issues between the officers involved.

RECOMMENDATION

When working in the law enforcement profession, law enforcement officers are surrounded with just as much if not more with their department family versus the family at home. By allowing two law enforcement officers within the same agency to have a romantic relationship it allows the law enforcement officers to deal with everyday stress along with work related stress. Although department heads normally frown upon these

types of job related relationships, the romantic relationship can work and help all involved. The law enforcement profession has a very high stress level because of the incidents law enforcement officers face on a daily basis throughout their careers. Being involved romantically with another officer from the same agency can help develop a better support system outside of the department for the officers involved. Not only does the romantic relationship develop a support system but it also helps the individual officer have someone who is trusted and capable of confiding in with understanding of the incident.

When an officer is involved in a healthy romantic relationship, it helps the officer cope better and helps prevent the desire of suicide and can help prevent the law enforcement officer from secluding himself or herself from the outside world. Becker (2016) states, "Police officers will open up and be more communicative with other officers." (p. 1 para. 20).

Although two law enforcement officers involved in a romantic relationship that are employed by the same agency can raise issues, there are not many ways of preventing it from happening. When issues arise it will take all that are involved including but not limited to department heads, other law enforcement officers, and the two officers that are romantically involved to help the department not suffer from productivity and service to the community. Law enforcement is a profession where professional appearance comes with the territory because of the standard that law enforcement officers are held to by the society.

There is no easy way to plan for or for that much prepare for this to happen within the agency. A suggestion for preparation would be to keep an open mind that it

could happen within the agency rather than trying to avoid it because it is becoming more and more common in the current times. Another suggestion to department heads would be to handle the two officers involved in a romantic relationship as any other law enforcement officer within the agency. Relationships within the same agency can help the department with this by knowing all officers involved are as content with their personal lives as they are while on duty. Therefore, agencies should accept and support martial or dating relationships within the same agency.

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