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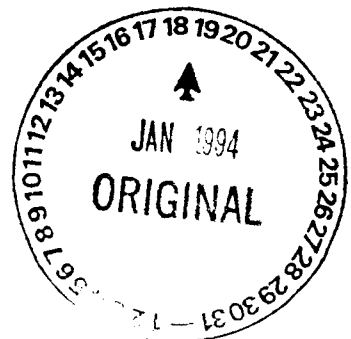
A REPORT ABOUT THE ROLE OF A POLICE OFFICER  
AS CONCEPTUALIZED BY  
YOUNG LAW ENFORCEMENT HOPEFULS

A RESEARCH PAPER  
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MODULE III

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## INTRODUCTION

Without adequate police services, anarchy would reign in the United States. While a majority of Americans would agree with this tenet, probably few would agree on the ways in which police personnel should perform this necessary function.

For all its importance, a definition of roles for police officers in the United States has traditionally been a vague concept shrouded by public apathy. This situation has been complicated to a great degree by the increasing number of tasks required of law enforcement to promote the social good. However, as evidence mounts that all is not well within the system, a greater concern for the proper role of the police has taken root.

James Sterling (1973) addressed the confusion regarding police roles in an assessment that is still true today:

...one of the most frequently mentioned views of the police officer is that he is a man in the middle, caught in a chaos of conflicting expectations.

He is truly the "man in the middle." He stands between the lawless and the law abiding and between the rioter and society. And no matter what course of action he takes, ...one side will always take him to task.

The intra-role conflict arises out of the differential expectations held by various reference groups about the role performance of the police. (1)

Perhaps the basis for the problem of police roles and police role conflict rests in the improper role expectations on the part of one of these reference groups, the prospective law enforcement hopeful.

This paper is designed to specify the role of a police officer as conceptualized by young law enforcement hopefuls making application to a small town police department. A review of pertinent literature reveals that the role of the police officer is in a state of flux. The traditional authoritarian concepts are being broadened to include needed public service roles.

It is suggested by this study that young law enforcement hopefuls harbor some significant misconceptions regarding their chosen profession. Their perception of a police officer's role as the "guardian of society" and "instrument of the law" is in keeping with the traditional viewpoint. Their perception of the police officer as "peace keeper" and "public servant" is at best vague and relegated to a position of low priority as "real police work!"

Research in this area is beneficial for a better understanding of the comparative newness and complexity of this topic. This research can be used and shared with those having the responsibility of dealing with perceptions of "new hires," especially in the areas of recruitment and training.

## A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of related history regarding police roles reveals this topic inquiry as relatively new. Ward (1973) asserts that in the twenty-five year period from 1945-1970 only a handful of articles remotely concerned with police were published. This obvious lack of data, as well as public interest in law enforcement, has led a number of scientists, sociologists and psychologists to examine police work in the United States. These inquiries, however, have offered little in the way of a clear-cut definition of police roles. This present writer confirms Ward's observation, since the store of current materials offers at best an ambiguous assessment of "today's" police roles. (2)

An initial problem seems to be that of definition, for the entire area of role definition has historically been difficult. Biddle and Thomas (1966) state:

"Perhaps the most common definition is that role is the set of prescriptions defining what the behavior of a position member should be. But this much agreement is at best but an oasis in a desert of diverging opinion. A careful review of the definitions reveals, however, that there is one nearly universal common denominator, namely that the concept pertains to the behavior of particular persons." (3)

Milton Yinger (1969) defines "role" as a unit of culture referring to the rights and duties, or normally approved patterns of behavior for the occupants of a given position. Examining the police role in this light inevitably leads to a

conclusion of great diversity -- the role of a policeman in a small town may be far different from that of one in a large metropolitan area. (4)

Samuel Chapman (1970) offered the following general analysis of the traditional role of a police officer in American society:

In a democratic society, order is preserved by the police force. They maintain order so that people may live safely in their homes, pursue their lawful business, and take their chosen relaxation. Their fundamental task is the preservation of law and order and maintenance of the public peace.

The police are those agents of society who are charged with curbing irresponsibility and countering the trend toward growing lawlessness. ...However, not all crime and public annoyances are preventable. Consequently, the police must be prepared to deal with occurrences which are reported, investigate them, and take immediate action to restore the peace and apprehend offenders. (5)

Richard Ward (1973) echos this complexity of police roles in his observation:

Because of its complex nature, the police role has become an almost indefinable concept. In fact, in a recent survey... better than 85% of the officers responding agreed with the statement: "It is difficult to define the role of the policeman in today's society." (6)

A study conducted by Johnson, Misner, and Brown (1981) traces the concept of the police officer's role in relation to community and subculture expectations. These authors suggest that the role of the police is to preserve and enhance democratic values within a systems framework between the police and their community. (7)

D.G. Dutton (1986) believes the police role cannot be defined because of ever-changing social values. He contends

these changes in emphasis require a change in roles. (8)

Can an increasingly complex, urban society conceptualize and implement a police officer's comprehensive role which is capable of dealing with obvious tendencies toward lawlessness in modern society as well as meet the need for social services which police officers increasingly are called upon to perform? Consequently, prospective law enforcement hopefuls may well be the victims of role misconceptions prior to actual work experience.

Some studies, despite the lack of clear definitions, do offer some general guidelines regarding a developing concept of police roles.

Perhaps, promoted by increasing concern for police effectiveness in the turbulent 1960's, the traditional authoritarian approach was stressed. Aubry (1961) and Earle (1967) assessed law enforcement roles as protection of life and property and the detection and apprehension of violators of the law. Public order, and the regulation of non-criminal conduct was also emphasized. (9&10)

A. C. Germann, Day and Gallati (1962) also took the traditional approach that police roles refer to two major objectives: first, the prevention of crime and disorder and second, the protection of life, property and personal liberty for individual security. (11)

The traditional type concepts (supra) underwent some revision as the role of police officer was increasingly viewed

in terms of complexity. A rather general observation of the diversity of police roles was offered by a Task Force Report compiled by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967).

...the police have come to be viewed as a body of men continually engaged in the exciting, dangerous, and cooperative enterprise of apprehending and prosecuting criminals. Emphasis upon this one aspect of police functioning has led to a tendency on the part of both the public and the police to under-estimate the range and complexity of the total police task.

A police officer assigned to patrol duties in a large city is typically confronted with at most a few serious crimes in the course of a single tour of duty. He tends to view such involvement, particularly if there is some degree of danger, as constituting real police work. But it is apparent that he spends considerably more time keeping order, settling disputes, finding missing children, and helping drunks, more than he does in responding to criminal conduct which is serious enough to call for arrest, prosecution, and conviction. This does not mean that serious crime is unimportant to the policeman. Quite the contrary is true. But it does mean that he performs a wide range of other functions which are of a highly complex nature and which often involve difficult social, behavioral and political problems. (12)

Samuel Chapman (1970) also proposed a more diversified police role suggesting five basically different police functions as combating violations of the traditional law (murder, rape, robbery, arson, etc.); combating violations of temporary convenience norms (traffic and health regulations, etc.); performing a miscellaneous group of service functions (operating ambulance service, operating a jail system, escort service, etc.); controlling or suppressing opposition to the government in power; and maintaining forces for the possible repelling of military aggression against the states. (13)



An impressive attempt at a more comprehensive definition of police roles was made by Elmer H. Johnson (1973) in a study entitled "Police: An Analysis of Role Conflict." The author contends that the key roles of police officer's fall into various points along a continuum ranging from control functions to supportive functions.

The first role defined by Johnson is the guardian of society. This is the clearest application of the traditional concept of police work. In this role an officer is viewed as a bulwark against crime, and therefore, is most indicative of the control function. When in this role, the police officer is most likely to have a positive self-image and high morale since he/she regards this as "real police work."

Another role tending toward the control function is that of peace keeper. In the act of preserving order in the community, the officer fluctuates between coercion and meditation as he/she performs a variety of tasks such as enforcing traffic regulations, responding to/settling family disputes, or dealing with disturbances.

In yet another role, as an instrument of the law, the possibility of coercion is still present but mediation activities dominate. In this role the police officer becomes the means by which the impact of legislative statutes are felt. Acting as an agent of the law, the officer tries to accommodate conflicting interests in preserving order in such incidents as automobile accidents, family disputes, and

matters concerning social and racial unrest.

The most supportive in nature of police roles is that of public servant. As police officer's try to meet the needs of individuals in crises, they may become involved in such activities as finding lost children, convoys and escorts, or referring individuals for social services. Since other community agencies usually do not provide around-the-clock services, especially for the under-privileged, law enforcement agencies fill an institutional vacuum. As Johnson stated:

"in crises where the middle-class member of the community is likely to call on the family physician, clergyman, or attorney, the lower status person becomes a "client" of the policeman." (14)

In his research, M.C.J. Hageman (1979) conducted a study concerning motivating factors for recruits joining the police force, an analysis of the data suggested that the "new breed" of individuals joining the force do so because of a desire to accomplish something worthwhile and to help the public. These people were less authoritarian and socially isolated, and desire greater involvement with their communities. Therefore, it appears that the predominant reason for joining the police force was altruistic as opposed to the more traditional or non-altruistic. (15)

J.L. Maghan (1988) examined the processes of socialization of 1900 police recruits and hypothesized that conceptions of policing were significantly modified with training. Recruits with strong enforcement orientations and

those with strong service commitments moved toward a common perspective and definition of the police role that incorporated both dimensions. (16)

As should be apparent, the research literature regarding police role studies has not been voluminous. The materials available range from the traditional concepts to more modern ideas which attempt to deal with an urbanized society.

Of the materials procurable, some is said to be flawed. K.R.C. Adlam (1982) contends that a review of the studies of police personalities and social attitudes affecting the police role reveals a sparseness in comprehensive data. Adlam believes research designs, and the images of police the researches have assumed are useful as analytical tools but are too limited for dealing with the actual police officer. (17)

### THE JOHNSON MODEL

For the purpose of this study, Johnson's (1973) observations seem to offer a definitional scope of evaluating the diversity of modern police roles. Therefore, his model has been selected for interviewing young law enforcement hopefuls regarding their perceptions of their future career role.

## METHODOLOGY

The sample for this research project was selected from young law enforcement hopefuls making application at a small town police department in North Texas during the summer of 1993.

Out of a pool of twenty-two applicants, eighteen participated in the project. Selection was made on a voluntary basis with four applicants being unwilling or unable to participate in the study. Of the eighteen participants, thirteen young men and five young women, filled out a questionnaire regarding their estimation of how police officers spend their time on the job. They were also interviewed on various aspects of their backgrounds and their perception of the police officer's role.

As previously indicated, data gathering procedures required participants to complete a questionnaire (Appendix A) designed to determine their perception of the police officer's role as evidenced by time spent on various types of tasks which fit the Johnson model. The questionnaire was completed during a regularly scheduled job interview. The participants were not informed or consulted about one another.

A second set of data were obtained by utilizing an interview schedule (Appendix B) which was administered individually by the author in a private setting. Each participant was scheduled an appointment for an interview.

No time limit was established and each participant took as much time as needed to complete the interview. The average length of time was thirty minutes with the longest being forty-five minutes and the shortest being twenty minutes. The interview material was obtained principally through verbal expression. Some questions, as indicated in Appendix B, required participants to write their response. Participants were left alone for whatever additional time was needed to complete this portion of the interview schedule.

Any questions asked by participants were answered for clarification purposes only. The interviewer offered no personal views or opinions.

GENERAL PROFILE OF YOUNG LAW ENFORCEMENT HOPEFULS  
MAKING EMPLOYMENT INQUIRIES AT A SMALL POLICE DEPARTMENT

The ages of those interviewed ranged from 19 to 21. Four participants in the sample were currently married, thirteen were single and the remaining one divorced. The sample was made up of 13 men and 5 women.

Five respondents (Attachment 1) came from a metropolitan area of 100,000 or more. Eight were from small cities of 10,000 to 49,999. Two came from large cities of 50,000 to 99,000. Two grew up in open country and one from a small village.

Two-thirds of the respondents (Attachment 2) had made less than two major moves during their childhood and only one person had moved four or more times. Eight (Attachment 3) of the participants had lived at the same address for over five years and four had lived at the present address for less than a year.

In response to the question, "What kind of work experience have you had?" (Attachment 4) each of the women had held a different job, while the men had been involved principally in security or grocery store work. Practically all the jobs held by respondents were minimal wage jobs or employment which could be obtained with limited training or experience.

The family backgrounds of the participants were quite

similar since most of the parents had occupations and educational levels that would place them within the middle working classes. The fathers' occupations (Attachment 5) were predominantly farmer-rancher and salesman with the remainder falling into several different occupations. Only one father was a police officer.

The fathers' educational level (Attachment 6) revealed three with a college degree or partial college training. Among the fathers, nearly two-thirds were high school graduates, and three of the group had less than a high school diploma. Two of the participants did not know their father's educational level.

The mothers' occupations (Attachment 7) were dominated by secretaries and housewives. One respondent's mother had retired and one had never known his mother.

The educational level of the mothers (Attachment 8) was equivalent to that of the fathers as a whole. Two of the mothers had college degrees and two others had partial college. Nine mothers graduated from high school, five had less than a high school education, and one mother's educational level was not known.

As indicated by this evidence, the families of the participants were, with few exceptions, basically of the middle class socio-economic status. Parents of the participants were also within a medium educational level. One of the most revealing observations of these



interviews was the evidence of one parent being absent from the home environment due to divorce or death. Although the author has not been able to substantiate a direct correlation between one parent homes and the law enforcement profession, some possible connection is indicated by the preponderance of one parent homes among the participants (Attachment 9). Of the eighteen participants interviewed, eight (44%) had divorced parents. Two of those interviewed had deceased fathers. Eight (44%) of the participants' parents were still married to each other.

Certainly, the similarity of family background is significant and tends to indicate that police work is a status position among working class groups. The educational levels of respondent's parents perhaps accounts for the acceptability of a law enforcement career by parents and participants alike who may view the police profession as vocational-technical. Further, the prevalence of divorce might offer an interesting hypothesis that the stability and authoritarian aspects of police work appeals to applicants from less than stable family backgrounds.

Another area of personal data collection concerned the individual attitudes of participants regarding the selection of law enforcement as a career. There were for participants who always wanted to be law enforcement officers (Attachment 10) and this was the largest career area indicated. Business (3) teaching (2) secretarial (2) and engineering (2) all drew

over one response as fields of endeavor previously considered.

Career information is supported by the response to the question "At what point in your life did you decide to become a police officer?" (Attachment 11). Although five of the participants (27.77%) indicated that they had wanted to be a police officer for some time, over one-half (61.11%) had made their choice within the last year. This would indicate, as shown in Attachment 10, considerable interest in other fields.

The reasons for going into police work varied, but thrills, excitement, and interesting work were the lures for seven (38.88%) of the respondents (Attachment 12). Two (11.11%) wanted to be in a position to help people, three (16.66%) needed a profession and two (11.11%) offered no real reason. This was in keeping with the responses to the question "Who played the most important part in your decision to select the occupation of police officer as a career?" The respondents (Attachment 13) had no clear concept of who influenced their decision in one-half (9) of the cases while relatives (5) police officer (3) and high school teacher (1) made up the remaining responses.

While only five of the respondents (Attachment 1) had lived in a metropolitan area of over 100,000, there were seven (38.88%) (Attachment 14) who eventually wanted to go to work in cities of that population size. Only five actually wanted to work in a town of more than 5,000 people, of which they were now applying. Those who wanted to go to metropolitan

areas (Attachment 15) were seeking good pay (1) job opportunity (4) and more excitement than a small town could offer (2).

Two people wanted employment in a city between 50,000 and 99,000 because it was large enough for job opportunity yet not so large as to produce a feeling of alienation. and the other one-half of the participants wanted a city of less than 50,000. Reasons given for this choice were "easy to know people," (4) large cities as being unfriendly (1) and one viewed the larger cities as being too dangerous. One participant, a parent, indicated preference for raising children in a smaller town.

## INQUIRY INTO ROLE PERCEPTION AMONG PARTICIPATING LAW ENFORCEMENT HOPEFULS

The author used three major criteria to determine the respondents perceptions of police roles. First, within the interview schedule (Appendix B) two questions were designed to inquire about attitudes regarding role perception. In one question, the respondent was asked to name the single major role along with some other major roles of police officers and the second question asked the participant to indicate the single most important role along with some other important roles. Second, each respondent was asked to briefly describe in a written narrative a typical day's work for a police officer. Third, each police officer hopeful was asked to fill out a schedule depicting how he/she "thought" a police officer would spend their work time. Each respondent assigned percentages of time to various tasks that were reflective of the four major police roles (Appendix A) indicated in the Johnson Model.

Each respondent was asked the question "What do you think is the major role of a police officer?" After the initial answer the respondent was then asked if there were any other roles that needed to be considered. All of those interviewed (Attachment 16) gave a first and second major role while eleven gave a third and five named a fourth role. By far the major role, as seen by these aspiring young police hopefuls,

was that of crime prevention (8) (44.44%). Of the nine other roles mentioned, protecting people, keeping peace, enforcing laws, serving the public and writing reports followed in that order.

After naming the major role of the police officer, each person was asked the question "What do you think is the most important role of a police officer?" Again, the respondent was permitted to mention other important roles if he/she wished. Each selected a most important, twelve selected a second role and six indicated a third. While some of the participants could see no difference between the major role and the most important role, a surprising number made a distinction (Attachment 17). As evidenced by the following example, preventing crime (3 first and 1 second) which had been ranked first as a major role was lowered to third in importance behind protecting society (7 first and 3 seconds) and patrol and observation (3 first and 3 seconds). Other important roles mentioned included enforcing laws (2 and 1) controlling traffic (2 and 1) and keeping the peace (1 and 2).

Although not conclusively established by this study, differentiation in nomenclature (supra) may reveal significant attitude changes. The traditional roles, viewed in the Johnson Model as guardian of society and instrument of the law tended to be ranked as "major" roles. However, the more modern roles of a police officer, indicated as peace keeper and servant of society in the Johnson Model, were

perceived as "most important" roles. As corroborated by other findings in this study, this attitudinal change is at best subtle and not perceived at a highly conscious level by the great majority of respondents.

The second criteria (Appendix A) for determining the respondent's role perception was asking each participant to assign percentages of time to be spent performing tasks. These tasks were designed to depict the four major classifications of police work suggested by the Johnson Model. Five tasks were assigned to each of the four larger role concepts with additional consideration made for the categories of desk work and "other". As evidenced in Attachment 18, the "other" category seemed to be the catch-all for whatever percentage points were needed to total 100 percent. Desk work ranked second (7.61%) behind patrolling and observation (30.72%) in the participants estimates of time spent.

As indicated previously, the four broad categories established by Elmer Johnson's study were used by the present writer as a device for ascertaining the role perception of the participants. By categories (Appendix A) the total responses were: instrument of the law role (21.50%) guardian of society role (15.61%) peace keeper role (43.61%) and public servant (19.28%).

By far, the most popular concept of the police officer's role is that of patrol and observation with 30.72% of one's time devoted to this endeavor. Patrol and observation was

placed in the peace keeping role since it may be viewed in a less coercive sense as indicated on the Johnson continuum. As will become more obvious in the subsequent analysis of participants' narrative descriptions, most of the respondents did not view patrol and observation in terms of this more modern, less authoritarian manner. Rather, they tended to see this task within the context of the more coercive "instrument of the law" role. Of major importance is a recognition of the time accorded observation and patrol duties. Regardless of the category within which this task had been placed, it would have been dominant. This single idea regarding role perception, offers strong evidence of the respondent's lack of perception regarding the complex realities of the police officer's roles.

The peace keeper role (13.89%), the instrument of the law role (21.50%), and the guardian of society role (15.61%) were not that far apart when patrolling and observation is categorized. It should also be pointed out that two instrument of the law tasks, enforcing liquor laws and enforcing drug laws combined were larger (10.21%) than the entire role of public servant (9.39%) when excluding desk work and "other". This is the most indicative of the very meager perception of this increasingly important role. Such role perceptions substantiates the long time contentions of Germann, Johnson and others that police, although frequently called upon to act as public servants, actually have very limited self images

regarding their involvement in this type of role.

Although not totally consistent, the general outlines of role perception indicated in the work schedules was collaborated by the narrative descriptions offered by the participants.

One of the most revealing portions of the interview schedule was the participant's written response to the statement: "Briefly describe a typical day's work for a police officer," (Attachment 19). These narrative comments strongly support the observation that most role perceptions among those young participants studied in this project follows the traditional concept of the police officer as an enforcer of the law.

Without exception, each participant placed strong emphasis upon following proper established procedure. Respondents noted such procedural matters as reporting in on time, keeping one's equipment in good order, and filling out the proper reports near the beginning of each description which would indicate a high priority for procedural matters. The following comments selected from several of the narratives indicate this slant toward traditional procedure. Corrections in grammatical construction and spelling were made when necessary for understanding:

A typical day's work starts with checking in with your department and supervisors.

First you should be on time for role call.



I would go to the police station and log in. I would talk to the other officers and the dispatcher for a while.

The officer comes to the department and checks out all the events of the previous shift. If there is anything major it should be noted.

You would check in for assignment.

A police officer would check in first thing. ...He must check in every so often and also give his whereabouts... At the end of the shift he would go to the station and fill out any required reports.

When you start duty you have to make sure the car is ready for patrol. You must clean it and check all the equipment. Be sure all paperwork is done by the end of your duty

You would make arrests, write reports and go to court.

I suppose a police officer would do whatever the day's duty called for.

Another area of consensus among the participant's was that of patrolling and observing. Significantly, no respondent mentioned "foot patrol" but rather invisioned driving around the community in the patrol car. In the argot of the prospective law enforcement officials, all respondents anticipated spending a great deal of time "hitting the streets!"

You should hit the streets and look for anything unusual.

I would check in and then start driving around.

The major part of the day would be spent on patrol and answering calls from citizens.

Most of my time would be spent in the patrol area. This is where you really have to be alert and ready for anything to happen.

He hits the streets driving around in order to prevent any crime that he can.

Usually associated with the task of patrolling an area is the idea of monitoring traffic flow and working traffic accidents. Seven participants noted the necessity for observing school zones to insure safety of pedestrians and five indicated the probable necessity of issuing citations. Although most comments were fairly similar, the following selected examples are typical:

At 8:00 o'clock stop at the school crossing and make sure the people go slow and stop for kids. ...If nothing happens go out and make the rounds. Maybe stop and observe a certain stop sign or traffic light. If anyone violates the stop sign or traffic light, stop them and give them a ticket.

The same things happen every day like taking in drunks, stopping speeders and issuing tickets for red lights and other violations of the law.

You make your usual daily rounds in between regulating traffic and answering calls.

At about 7:30 A.M. you hit the streets watching for traffic violators. ...I would most likely give at least five traffic citations.

At noon I would try to patrol the high school to watch for speeding kids and pedestrians. ...I would try to write 5 or 6 tickets a shift.

Within the traditional concept of police roles, four participants offered suggestions indicating a passive role for police officers, the possibility of eavesdropping to gain information, and the usual type tasks of serving warrants and appearing in court. These tasks are revealed by the following excerpts:

Sit around the station and wait for calls to come in.

You may possibly have to appear in court briefly.

Listen in on any conversation possible. You might be able to gain some useful information this way.

Start your patrol duties including any kind of warrants or other paper business.

Only a minority of those interviewed (27%) indicated some grasp of the modern realities of police work in terms of meeting social needs of the community. At best the participant's concept of this increasingly important social service task of police officers was vague. One person indicated "Then go on patrol until called to go help someone." While another who presented an essentially traditional view of police roles did suspect that he might be called upon to "rescue a cat from a tree" or "help a disturbed juvenile." Still a third individual anticipated being asked to perform escort services. The following observations seem to contain a glimmer of recognition for the modern police roles:

Go out in my district and not just look for violators of law but also look for people to help. Maybe help people with car trouble, give assistance to people who need directions. When making arrests, not to be a tough guy but to try and be a friend to the public even though you have to enforce the law against them.

Of course an officer might be asked to get a cat out of a tree, render first aid, handle dangerous family violence calls, talk with juvenile offenders and make decisions all day long that involve people and their problems.

Two participants (11.11%) at least mentioned the possible responsibility of a police officer in "off duty" situations:

While off duty an officer should be present at most of

the community activities to show the people you are one of them.

When you remove the uniform and leave work you don't leave your responsibilities as a peace officer behind. The uniform doesn't make the officer, it's the person wearing it. You have to remember your responsibilities 24 hours a day to gain the public's trust in you as a protector and a servant.

These prospective police officers offered evidence of being attracted by excitement popularly associated with police roles. Even so, there was an elementary recognition that "real police work" does not occur every day. Two sample comments reveal this anticipation of excitement yet acceptance of some usual tasks:

Go ride in a car...expecting to find a few things wrong such as minor traffic violations, a few traffic accidents, and occasionally a hold-up or assault or something exciting like that. ...I wouldn't expect it to be constant excitement like on TV.

Your unit might arrive on the scene of an armed robbery in progress with a hostage. In this situation the officer must ask questions like, do I shoot or not? Can a special weapons unit be brought in? How much time do I have? What if he kills the hostage? How can I help the hostage? There are ten thousand questions that may have to be answered in any minute. An officer has only seconds to respond to a situation that a judge may have weeks to look at. Of course this does not happen every day. There are days that the most exciting thing that happens is investigating a traffic accident or stopping a drunk driver.

Significant insights into the role perceptions of the respondents are offered by these narratives. The participants were mainly traditionalists, yet in some instances they seemed to at least perceive the expanding role of the police officer in modern society.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The central task of this paper has been to examine role perceptions among young law enforcement hopefuls. A review of relevant literature shows that police roles, when considered at all, have usually been perceived in a traditional authoritarian context. However, some research has come to examine the less traditional adventure-oriented roles of police officers in terms of a more modern service-oriented role.

Some observable characteristics of police officer hopefuls have been delineated. The average young prospective law enforcement hopeful applying at a small town police department is a high school graduate, under 22 years of age and from a working class socio-economic background. The hopeful's place of residence is a varied environment. The selection of a law enforcement career was made after considering several other fields of endeavor, and the possibility of excitement seems to be a key factor in determining the choice. The prospective young police officer anticipates working in a larger city, although now making employment inquiries at a smaller one.

The pattern of role perceptions is quite cohesive. The average hopeful views a law enforcement career in traditional terms with major areas of responsibility perceived as being "guardian of society" and "instrument of the law". The

specific task most associated with the execution of these roles is patrol and observation. The prospective police officer possesses, at best, only a rudimentary concept of the modern realities of police work which emphasizes "peace keeper" and "public servant" as increasingly important roles. The hopeful does not tend to perceive these latter roles as "real police work" and, therefore, does not assign great importance to them.

From these implications of role perception among these young hopefuls, five areas of further research become apparent. First, the prevalence of divorce in the background of these participants warrants more inquiry. Second, a similar inquiry for comparative purposes should be conducted among those hopefuls hired, after they complete a year of police service. Third, the dominance of patrol and observation within the authoritarian context might well be investigated to determine if such a pattern of perception still exists among acting police officers. Fourth, in future research, the use of the task of patrol and observation, to measure role perception, should be used with great care. To insure greater validity of the findings, some clear definition as to the implications of this terminology should be included. Fifth, to ensure the least biased approach, population should be randomly selected. This will help in choosing a sample that is "representative" of the population.

The modern realities of police work increasingly impose

the acceptance of social service roles which might be better served by other agencies. Afterall, modern service-oriented policing is not a "social" program. However, an instrumental gap has been created by the failure of social agencies to perform these tasks adequately. Subsequently, the burden falls on the "crime fighter". The prevalence of crime suggests some positive relationships between these uncared for social problems and crime situations. Equipped with realistic recruitment perceptions regarding potential roles and encouraged by adequate training for these responsibilities, the police hopeful may be better able to confront the expanded social roles of "real police work" with foresight and confidence.

## ATTACHMENT 1

Responses To The Question: "What would you estimate the population to have been of the community in which you grew up?"

=====		
Categories	Frequency	Percentage
=====		
Open country	2	11.11
Small Village (less than or equal to 999)	1	5.55
Large village 1,000-2,499	0	0.00
Small town 2,500-4,999	0	0.00
Large town 5,000-9,999	0	0.00
Small city 10,000-49,999	8	44.44
Large city 50,000-99,999	2	11.11
Metropolitan 100,000 or more	5	27.77
=====		
Total	18	100.00



## ATTACHMENT 2

Responses To The Question: "How many major moves (changing schools) did your family make during your lifetime?"

=====		
Number of moves	Frequency	Percentage
=====		
None	6	33.33
One	6	33.33
Two	2	11.11
Three	3	16.66
Four or more	1	5.55
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 3

Responses To The Question: "How long have you lived at your present home address?"

```
=====
```

Length of residence	Frequency	Percentage
All life	2	11.11
10-15 years	5	27.77
5-9 years	1	5.55
2-4 years	3	16.66
1-2 years	3	16.66
Less than 1 year	4	22.22
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 4

Responses To The Question: "What kinds of work experience  
have you had?"

```
=====
```

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
=====		
Male (13)		
Security	3	16.66
Grocery store	3	16.66
Retail	1	5.55
Farming	1	5.55
Repair parts	1	5.55
Sales	1	5.55
Mechanic	1	5.55
Laborer	1	5.55
Student (never worked)	1	5.55
Female		
Printing shop	1	5.55
Waitress	1	5.55
Child care	1	5.55
Bookkeeping	1	5.55
Security	1	5.55
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 5

Responses To The Question: "What was your Father's occupation  
for the major portion of his life?"

```
=====
```

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farmer-Rancher	3	16.66
Sales	3	16.66
Editor-newspaper	1	5.55
School teacher	1	5.55
Engineer	1	5.55
Driller (oil)	1	5.55
Police officer	1	5.55
Restaurant manager	1	5.55
Radio station manager	1	5.55
Mechanic	1	5.55
Realtor	1	5.55
Disabled	1	5.55
Unknown	2	11.11
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 6

Responses To The Question: "What was the level of your  
Father's education?" Highest grade completed

```
=====
```

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Graduate-professional training	1	5.55
College or university undergraduate	1	5.55
Partial college	1	5.55
High school graduate	10	55.55
Partial high school	1	5.55
Jr. high school	1	5.55
Less than 7 years of school	1	5.55
Don't know	2	11.11
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 7

Responses To The Question: "What was your Mother's occupation  
for the major portion of her life?"

```
=====
```

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Secretary	6	33.33
Homemaker (housewife)	5	27.77
Sales	2	11.11
Cook	1	5.55
Attorney	1	5.55
Nurse	1	5.55
Retired	1	5.55
Unknown	1	5.55
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 8

Responses To The Question: "What was the level of your  
Mother's education?" Highest grade completed

```
=====
```

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Graduate-professional training	1	5.55
College or university undergraduate	1	5.55
Partial college	2	11.11
High school graduate	9	49.99
Partial high school	2	11.11
Jr. high school	1	5.55
Less than 7 years of school	1	5.55
Don't know	1	5.55

```
=====
```

Total	18	100.00
-------	----	--------

## ATTACHMENT 9

Responses To The Question: "What is the marital status of  
your parents?"

```
=====
```

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Divorced	8	44.44
Married to each other	8	44.44
Father deceased	2	11.11
Total	18	100.00

```
=====
```



## ATTACHMENT 10

Responses To The Question: "What other careers did you  
consider before law enforcement?"

Response	Frequency	Percentage
None (always law enforcement)	4	22.22
Business	3	16.66
Teacher	2	11.11
Secretary	2	11.11
Engineer	2	11.11
Doctor	1	5.55
Farmer	1	5.55
Attorney	1	5.55
Social worker	1	5.55
Hair stylist	1	5.55
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 11

Responses To The Question: "At what point in your life did you decide to become a police officer?"

```
=====
```

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Within the last year	11	61.11
1-2 years	1	5.55
Over 2 years	5	27.77
Don't know	1	5.55
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 12

Responses To The Question: "Why do you want to be a police officer?"

```
=====
```

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Thrills and excitement	4	22.22
Interesting work	3	16.66
Want to help people	2	11.11
needed a profession (job)	3	16.66
Police officers are good people	2	11.11
Don't know-no real reason	3	16.66
No answer	1	5.55
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 13

Responses To The Question: "Who played the most important part in your decision to select the occupation of police officer as a career?"

```
=====
Categories                                Frequency      Percentage
=====
```

Relative	5	27.77
Police officer	3	16.66
High school teacher	1	5.55
College Professor	0	0.00
No specific person	6	33.33
Other	3	16.66
=====		
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 14

Response To The Question: "If given a choice, in what size community would you like to go to work as a police officer?"

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Open country	0	0.00
Town with population less than or equal to 999	0	0.00
Town with population of 1,000-2,499	0	0.00
Town with population of 2,500-4,999	0	0.00
Town with population of 5,000-9,999	5	27.77
City with population of 10,000 to 49,999	4	22.22
City with population of 50,000 to 99,999	2	11.11
Metropolitan area with population of 100,000 or more	7	38.88
Total	18	100.00

## ATTACHMENT 15

Responses To The Question: "Why did you select this size  
community?" (To work as a police officer)

```
=====
```

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Metropolitan area with population of 100,000 or more.....	(7)	(38.88)
breakdown of responses:		
good salary	1	5.55
easier to get a job	4	22.22
small town too boring	2	11.11
City with population of 50,000 to 99,999	(2)	(11.11)
not so large as to feel alienated	2	11.11
City of less than 50,000	(9)	(50.00)
easy to know people	4	22.22
like smaller towns	2	11.11
large city too dangerous	1	5.55
large city unfriendly	1	5.55
good place to raise children	1	5.55
Total	18	100.00

```
=====
```

## ATTACHMENT 16

Responses To The Question: "What do you think is the major role of a police officer?"

Categories	First Response	Second Response	Third Response	Fourth Response
Prevent crime	8	1	0	0
Protect people	3	4	1	0
Keep peace	3	1	3	1
Enforce laws	3	2	0	0
Develop community relations	0	2	1	1
Serve the public	1	4	3	1
Catch criminals	0	2	3	1
Protect property	0	1	1	1
Write reports	0	1	0	0
Total	18	18	11	5

## ATTACHMENT 17

Responses To The Question: "What do you think is the most important role of a police officer?"

Categories	First Response	Second Response	Third Response	Fourth Response
Protect society	7	3	1	0
Patrol and observe	3	3	1	0
Prevent crime	3	1	1	0
Control Traffic	2	1	0	1
Enforce laws	2	1	0	0
Keep peace	1	2	1	1
Court appearance	0	1	0	0
Be honest	0	0	1	0
Report writing	0	0	0	1
Total	18	12	6	3



## ATTACHMENT 18

Responses To The Question: "In a typical work week of 35 hours (exclude meals and breaks) how much time would you expect to spend doing the following tasks?" (Appendix A)

Peace Keeper Role		Instrument of Law Role		Guardian Role		Public Servant Role	
Task	Time	Task	Time	Task	Time	Task	Time
family disp.	4.39%	traffic dir.	2.56%	inves. burg.	3.61%	escort	1.72%
inves. f/arms	2.33%	inves. accids.	5.67%	inves. intox.	3.33%	find lost	2.11%
inves. dist.	3.50%	enfor. mv.law	3.06%	inves. asslts.	2.55%	refer-ring	1.61%
inves. veh/com	2.67%	enfor. l.laws	5.66%	cha/cap crims.	2.22%	give dir.	1.89%
patrl.& obser.	30.72%	enfor. drugs	5.66%	inves. arm/rob.	4.00%	asst. car tro.	2.06%
							9.39%
						desk work	7.61%
						other	2.28%
Total	43.61%		21.50%		15.61%		19.28%

## ATTACHMENT 19

Analysis Of Narrative Responses To The Statement: "Briefly describe a typical day's work for a police officer."

=====		
Categories	Frequency	Percentage
=====		
Total Traditional Responses	18	100.00
Breakdown of Traditional Responses:		
concern for procedural matters	18	100.00
concern for patrol duty	18	100.00
concern for issuing tickets	5	27.77
monitor traffic & work accidents	7	38.88
waiting for calls	1	5.55
eavesdropping to gain information	1	5.55
appearing in court	1	5.55
serving warrants	1	5.55
=====		
Total Social Need Responses	7	38.88
Breakdown of Social Responses:		
recognition of social need		
aspect of police work	5	27.77
after duty interest	2	11.11
=====		
Total Responses Indicating Attraction Or Excitement	9	50.00
Breakdown of Responses Indicating Excitement:		
general statements regarding excitement of work	7	38.88
indication of excitement associated with tv concept	2	11.11

## APPENDIX A

Name (optional):

Date of Birth:

Sex:

Address:

High School Graduation Date:

Marital Status:

In a typical work week of 35 hours (exclude meals and breaks) how much time would you expect to spend doing the below listed tasks: (Base your answers on percentage of time which must add up to a total of 100% on the bottom line of this questionnaire)

Assisting people with car trouble	-----	%
Chasing and capturing criminals	-----	%
Escort service	-----	%
Desk work	-----	%
Directing traffic	-----	%
Enforcing drug laws	-----	%
Enforcing liquor laws	-----	%
Enforcing motor vehicle laws	-----	%
Finding lost children	-----	%
Giving directions	-----	%
Investigating accidents	-----	%
Investigating armed robberies	-----	%
Investigating assaults	-----	%
Investigating burglaries	-----	%
Investigating disturbances	-----	%
Investigating vehicle complaints	-----	%
Investigating firearms reports	-----	%
Investigating intoxicated drivers	-----	%
Patrol and observation	-----	%
Referring people to service agencies	-----	%
Responding to family disputes	-----	%
Other, please specify:	-----	%

Total ----- %  
Should= 100 percent

## APPENDIX B

Name (optional):

Date:

Time Interview Started:

Time Interview Completed:

INTERVIEW  
THE ROLE OF THE POLICE OFFICER

What kind of work experience have you had? (Most recent to least recent):

Father's occupation for the major portion of his life?

Father's education: Highest grade completed (check one)

- Graduate - professional training
- Undergraduate college or university
- Partial college
- High school/GED graduate
- Partial high school
- Jr. high school
- Less than 7 years schooling
- Don't know

Mother's occupation for the major portion of her life?

Mother's education: Highest grade completed (check one)

- Graduate - professional training
- Undergraduate college or university
- Partial college
- High school/GED graduate
- Partial high school
- Jr. High school
- Less than 7 years schooling
- Don't know

What is the marital status of your parents?

Past residence size: Estimate the population of the community in which you grew up. (check one)

- Open country
- Small village - less than or equal to 999
- Large village - 1,000-2,499
- Small town - 2,500-4,999
- Large town - 5,000-9,999
- Small city - 10,000-49,999
- Large city - 50,000-99,999
- Metropolitan area of 100,000 or more

How many major moves (changing schools) has your family made during your lifetime?

How long have you lived at your present address?

At what point in your life did you decide to want to become a police officer?

Was law enforcement your first choice for a career?  
What other career areas did you consider?

Who played the most important role in your decision to select the occupation of police officer as your career? (check one)

- Relative
- Police officer
- High school teacher
- College professor
- Friend
- No specific person
- Other (please specify)

If given a choice, in what size community would you like to go to work?

- Open country
- Town with population of less than or equal to 999
- Town with population of 1,000-2,499
- Town with population of 2,500-4,999
- Town with population of 5,000-9,999
- City with population of 10,000-49,999
- City with population of 50,000-99,999
- Metropolitan area with population of 100,000 or more

Why would you select this size community?

Briefly describe a typical days work for a police officer.

What do you think are the major roles of a police officer?

What do you think are the most important roles of a police officer?

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