



123 Use of Police Culture and Ethics as a Decision Making Resource in Forensic Pre-Employment Psychological Evaluations of Police Officer Applicants

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The goals of this presentation are to introduce attendees to the police cultural factors that may compromise, increase vulnerability, or call into question the person being evaluated. Second, involves risk assessment for three types of misconduct that include malfeasance, misfeasance, or nonfeasance. Third, a forensic case study as a practical example of using police ethics during an actual evaluation will be presented.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by virtue of attenuation in the quality of recommendations coming from forensic examiners that ultimately result in the selection of police officers with lower risk assessment ratings for areas of concern.

Forensic psychologists conducting pre-employment psychological, second opinion, outside evaluations, and fitness-for-duty evaluations are expected to have substantial understanding of the law enforcement culture. Forensic skills used in these evaluations can use awareness of police ethics in formulating opinions while making recommendations to the hiring authority. Ethics pose a major leadership and training challenge within the police culture. For example, one of the elements of the police culture is a high level of allegiance and loyalty that functions as a framework that motivates an officers' willingness to risk personal safety to protect and serve the public. A culture of allegiance and loyalty can also reinforce the "Blue Code" or an unwanted cognitive schema that includes the belief that questionable actions or misbehaviors must somehow be covered up. As a result, this cognitive framework could result in unprofessional and even illegal behavior to be accepted out of a misguided sense of loyalty. It must be emphasized that most psychologically screened police officers are ethical and honest. Police officers are members of a distinct work culture. It is a culture that reinforces certain personality traits that have been covertly endorsed as necessary for this type of work. For example, police officers begin to develop a belief in an "us/them" framework that informs officers that while fellow officers are trustworthy (us), they should be cynical and ever cautious of non-police (them). Law enforcement training reinforces the inherent potential dangers stemming from police work (e.g., misconduct and poor quality of judgment). A forensic examiner is charged with the responsibility for evaluating for indicators that rule out those without or vulnerable to lapses in this particular police mindset. Unfortunately, high profile cases of police misconduct still occur. Such cases reduce public confidence and trust whenever questionable ethical misbehavior takes place.

In this presentation, several forensic psychological factors related to ethics as they apply to fulfilling the duties of an armed police officer are examined. There are three primary learning objectives of this presentation. The first learning objective includes introducing attendees the police cultural factors that may compromise, increase vulnerability, or call into question the person being evaluated. For example, these factors may include behaviors inconsistent with the police culture's norms or values, corruption, favoritism, mistake prone, and misconduct.

The second learning objective involves risk assessment for three types of misconduct that include malfeasance, misfeasance, or nonfeasance. The police culture is theoretically intended to shield individual officers. The culture is supposed to function as a base for all officers and protect them from erosion in their judgment. Lapses largely due to carrying out day-to-day duties while managing a boundary separation from distractions coming from the demands in their personal life. The third learning objective, the author presents a forensic case study as a practical example of using police ethics during an actual evaluation. Attendees are expected to be able to operate with an increased sensitivity to the role knowledge of police culture and ethics can have on the selection process of which forensic examiners are a part.

Forensic Psychology, Police Culture, Blue Shield