PART **ONE**

FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

Police and Society

CHAPTER OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION: WHY POLICE?

More than 30 years ago, Jerome Skolnick posed the fundamental question, "For what social purpose do police exist?"[1] Why do we have police? What purpose do they serve? What do we want them to do? What do they do that other government agencies do not do? How do we want them to do these things? These are basic questions related to the police role in society.

Too often the answers to these questions are vague and simplistic. People say the police should "protect and serve," or "enforce the law." Such answers, however, avoid all the important issues. Policing is extremely complex, involving difficult questions

about the police role, treating citizens fairly, police organizations, and the recruitment, training, and supervision of police officers.

The Goals of This Book

Several new innovations in policing such as community-oriented policing, problem-oriented policing, and zero-tolerance policing have raised new questions about the police role. These new strategies represent a different role for the police compared with the "professional" style of policing that prevailed as a result of the professionalization movement (1900–1980).[2] It reopens all of the basic questions about how we should organize and deliver police services, whom we should recruit, and how we should evaluate them.

The purpose of this book is not to argue for or against any one of these new innovations in policing. It is to provide the necessary background information about policing to help you, the reader, discuss these innovations intelligently. It seeks to describe what police do (Chapter 4), the many problems that arise such as the exercise of discretion (Chapter 8), police–community relations (Chapter 9), how police officers are selected and who police officers are (Chapters 12 and 13), and how police organizations operate (Chapter 14). It seeks to describe what policing has been in the past (Chapter 2), what it is like today, and what it could be in the future (Chapter 7).

Myths, Realities, and Possibilities

At the outset it is necessary to sort out the myths, realities, and possibilities of policing. The myths include the many erroneous ideas about what the police do and what they should do. The realities include what the police in fact do on a day-to-day basis, and the role they play in society. The possibilities include the ways in which policing could be different from what it is today.

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MYTHS ABOUT POLICING

Policing is surrounded by many myths and stereotypes.[3] One of the enduring myths is that police are primarily crime fighters. According to this view, police devote most of their efforts to enforcing the criminal law: patrolling to deter crime, investigating crimes, and arresting criminals. Some people believe that this is what the police *should* do. A lot of the rhetoric about the police reflects the crime-fighter image: the idea of the police as a "thin blue line," fighting a war on crime.[4]

The crime-fighter image, however, is not an accurate description of what the police do. Only about one-third of a patrol officer's activities are devoted to criminal law enforcement (Chapter 4). The typical police officer rarely makes a felony arrest, and almost never fires a weapon in his or her entire career. Most police work is best described as peacekeeping, or order maintenance, or problem solving (Chapter 5).

Sources of the Crime-Fighter Image

The myth of the crime fighter endures for many reasons. The entertainment media play a major role in popularizing it. Movies and television police shows feature crime-related stories because they offer drama, fast-paced action, and violence. Think for a moment about the latest Hollywood cop movie: How many car chases were there? How many shoot-outs? The typical domestic disturbance, which in real life is a common police situation, does not offer the same kind of dramatic possibilities.

The news media are equally guilty of overemphasizing police crime fighting. A recent study of crime and the news media concluded that "crime stories are frequently presented and prominently displayed," and the number of these stories is "large in comparison with other topics."[5] A serious crime is a newsworthy event. There is a victim who engages our sympathies, a story, and then an arrest that offers dramatic visuals of the suspect in custody. A typical night's work for a patrol officer, by way of contrast, does not offer much in the way of dramatic news.

The police perpetuate the crime-fighter image themselves. Official press releases and annual reports emphasize crime and arrests. Crime fighting is a way for the police to tell the public they are doing something and doing something important. Peter Manning argues that the police deliberately adopted the crime-fighter role image as a way of staking claim to a domain of professional expertise that they, and they alone, could control.[6]

Consequences of the Crime-Fighter Image

Because it does not present an accurate picture of what the police do, the crime-fighter image creates a number of serious problems.[7] Most important, it ignores the order maintenance and peacekeeping activities that consume most police time and effort (Chapters 4 and 5). This prevents us from intelligently evaluating police performance. The emphasis on crime fighting also creates unrealistic public expectations about the ability of the police to prevent crime and catch criminals. Movies and TV shows strengthen the impression that the police are highly successful in solving crimes, when in fact only 21 percent of all reported Index crimes are solved (Chapter 6).

The police themselves suffer from this distorted image. Police chiefs cannot effectively manage their departments when so much attention is given to only one small part of their activities. The crime-fighter image also creates role conflict for individual police officers. By placing a premium on detective work and devaluing patrol work it creates a contradiction between what patrol officers value and what they actually do.[8]

THE REALITIES OF POLICING

The reality of policing is that the police play an extremely complex role in today's society. This role involves many different tasks. Herman Goldstein warns that "anyone attempting to construct a workable definition of the police role will typically come away with old images shattered and a new-found appreciation for the intricacies of police work."[9]

Many studies of police work document the complexity of the police role. The Police Services Study (PSS), for example, examined 26,418 calls for service to the police in three metropolitan areas.[10] As the data in Table 1-1 indicate, only 19 percent of the calls involve crime, and only 2 percent of the total involve violent crime.

The data in Table 1-1 also illustrate how ambiguous police work is. The situations in the category of interpersonal conflict, for example, may involve a potential crime (e.g., assault), or pose a serious risk to the officer or another person (e.g., a mentally disturbed person with a gun), or merely be an argument and some noise.

One of the most important aspects of policing is that officers exercise enormous discretion in handling these situations (Chapter 8). Take, for example, the case of Mr. and Mrs. Jones. One night the neighbors overhear the couple arguing and call the police. After the police arrive and are faced with the dispute, should they warn Mr. and Mrs. Jones, ask one of them to leave the premises, arrest one of them, or try to mediate the dispute? These are difficult choices, requiring good judgment and human relations skills. It is not a simple matter of making an arrest, as the crime-fighter image suggests.

The American Bar Association's *Standards Relating to the Urban Police Function* illustrates the complexity of the police role by identifying eleven different police responsibilities (Figure 1-1).[11]

The ABA list illustrates three ways in which the police role is extremely complex. First, it involves a wide variety of tasks. Only a few deal with criminal law enforcement.

Second, many of the tasks are extremely vague. Resolving conflict, for example, raises a number of difficult questions. What kinds of situations represent conflicts that require police intervention? What is the best response to a conflict situation? Should officers always make arrests in domestic disputes, for example? If not, what should they do?

Third, different responsibilities often conflict with each other. Police are responsible for both maintaining order and protecting constitutional liberties, for example. In the case of a large political demonstration, the police have to balance the First Amendment rights of the protesters and the need to maintain order and protect the rights of other people to use the streets and sidewalks.

As Goldstein points out, "The police, by the very nature of their function, are an anomaly in a free society."[12] On the one hand, we expect them to exercise coercive

TABLE 1-1   CITIZEN CALLS FOR POLICE SERVICES, BY GENERAL
PROBLEM TYPES AND SUBCATEGORIES

Type of Problem	Number of Calls	Percent of Total	Percent of Category
Violent Crimes	642	2	
1. Homicide	9		1
2. Sexual attack	26		4
3. Robbery	118		18
4. Aggravated assault	74		12
5. Simple assault	351		55
6. Child abuse	38		6
7. Kidnapping	26		4
Nonviolent Crimes	4,489	17	
1. Burglary and break-ins	1,544		34
2. Theft	1,389		31
3. Motor vehicle theft	284		6
4. Vandalism, arson	866		19
5. Problems with money/credit/documents	209		5
6. Crimes against the family	29		1
7. Leaving the scene	168		4
Interpersonal Conflict	1,763	7	
1. Domestic conflict	694		39
2. Nondomestic arguments	335		19
3. Nondomestic threats	277		16
4. Nondomestic fights	457		26
Medical Assistance	810	3	
1. Medical assistance	274		34
2. Death	38		5
3. Suicide	34		4
4. Emergency transport	203		25
5. Personal injury, traffic accident	261		32
Traffic Problems	2,467	9	
1. Property damage, traffic accident	1,141		46
2. Vehicle violation	543		22
3. Traffic-flow problem	322		13
4. Moving violation	292		12
5. Abandoned vehicle	169		7
Dependent Persons	774	3	
1. Drunk	146		19
2. Missing persons	318		41
3. Juvenile runaway	121		16
4. Subject of police concern	134		17
5. Mentally disordered	55		7
Public Nuisances	3,002	11	
1. Annoyance, harassment	980		33
2. Noise disturbance	984		33
3. Trespassing, unwanted entry	302		10

TABLE 1-1   CONTINUED

Type of Problem	Number of Calls	Percent of Total	Percent of Category
Public Nuisances (continued)			
4. Alcohol, drug violations	130		4
5. Public morals	124		4
6. Juvenile problem	439		15
7. Ordinance violations	43		1
Suspicious Circumstances	1,248	5	
1. Suspicious person	674		54
2. Suspicious property condition	475		38
3. Dangerous person or situation	99		8
Assistance	3,039	12	
1. Animal problem	755		24
2. Property check	616		20
3. Escorts and transports	86		3
4. Utility problem	438		14
5. Property discovery	240		8
6. Assistance to motorist	154		5
7. Fires, alarms	112		4
8. Crank calls	114		4
9. Unspecified requests	425		14
10. Other requests	99		3
Citizen Wants Information	5,558	21	
1. Information, unspecified	248		5
2. Information, police related	1,262		23
3. Information about specific case	1,865		34
4. Information, nonpolice related	577		10
5. Road directions	189		3
6. Directions, nontraffic	55		1
7. Requests for specific unit	1,362		25
Citizen Wants to Give Information	1,993	8	
1. General information	1,090		55
2. Return of property	156		8
3. False alarm	176		9
4. Complaint against specific officer	105		5
5. Complaint against police in general	350		18
6. Compliments for police	20		1
7. Hospital report to police	96		5
Internal Operations	633	2	
1. Internal legal procedures	63		10
2. Internal assistance request	134		21
3. Officer wants to give information	298		47
4. Officer wants information	132		21
5. Other internal procedures	6	—	—
Total calls	26,418	100	1

force: to restrain people when they are out of control, to arrest them when they break the law, and in some extreme cases to use deadly force. At the same time, however, we expect the police to protect the individual freedoms that are the essential part of a democratic society. The tension between freedom and constraint is one of the central problems in American policing.[13]

Factors That Shape the Police Role

Several factors contribute to the complexity of the police role. Most important is the fact that police services are available 24 hours a day. The telephone makes it possible to call the police at any hour and for any problem. The police, moreover, have encouraged people to call and have promised to respond to those calls. Goldstein argues that the police end up handling many problems "because no other means has been found to solve them. They are the residual problems of society."[14] Policing involves society's "dirty work": the tasks that no one else wants to do.[15] People call the police when everything else has failed.

The public wants a general-purpose emergency service, available to handle problems that arise. This job falls to the police. It would be extremely expensive to maintain a number of additional specialized agencies, for example, one that deals only with domestic disturbances, or one that responds only to mental illness situations. The 24-hour availability of the police gives them an extremely heavy workload. Many calls do not necessarily require a sworn police officer with arrest power. Also, some of these calls require someone with professional expertise (some mental health incidents, for example). As a result, the police are generalists, expected to handle a wide range of situations, but with only limited training and expertise in family problems, mental illness, or alcohol and drug abuse.

The complexity of the police role was not really planned. For the most part, it just happened. The police acquired many responsibilities simply because they were the only

SIDEBAR 1-1   THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC POLICING

As a result of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the warring factions and several other interested parties came together in Youngstown, Ohio, to discuss the principles to guide the development of a new police force in the country. As part of what was later called the "Youngstown Accord," seven principles were established to guide policing in both established and emerging democracies across the world. These seven principles were:

1   The police must operate in accordance with democratic principles.
2   The police as recipients of public trust should be considered as professionals whose conduct must be governed by a professional code.
3   The police must have as their highest priority the protection of life.
4   The police must serve the community and consider themselves accountable to the community.
5   The police must recognize that protection of life and property is the primary function of police operations.
6   The police must conduct their activities with respect for human dignity and basic human rights.
7   The police are expected to discharge their duties in a nondiscriminatory manner.

1   In groups of four or five, discuss whether you think American policing is characterized by democratic principles.
2   Discuss which principles you believe are more closely adhered to in American policing.
3   Should these principles be adopted by all law enforcement agencies in the United States?

Source: Adapted from Jeremy Travis, 2000, "Policing in Transition," *Police Practice & Research: An International Journal,* 1(1): 31–40.

agency available. The telephone made it convenient for people to call the police, and so they did (Chapter 2). The debate over the police role today raises basic questions about whether we really want the police to do all these things.

The Authority to Use Force

The authority to use force is one of the most important factors shaping the police role. In this crucial respect, the police are different from other professionals: teachers, social workers, doctors. In one of the most important essays on policing, Egon Bittner argues that the capacity to use coercive force is the defining feature of the police.[16] Force includes the power to take someone's life (deadly force), the use of physical force, and the power to deprive people of their liberty through arrest.

Bittner quickly adds that the authority to use force is not unlimited. First, it is limited by law. The police cannot lawfully shoot to kill anyone. The power to arrest is also limited by the law. Second, officers may use force only in the performance of their job.

They may not use force, for example, to settle a private dispute. Third, officers may not use force maliciously or frivolously. They may not arrest, harass, or abuse citizens for personal spite or amusement.

The authority to use force has implications that go far beyond its actual use. Bittner argues that it is latent and ever present, defining relations between officers and citizens. He observes: "There can be no doubt that this feature of police work is uppermost in the minds of people who solicit police aid." [17] People call the police because they want an officer to settle a problem: to arrest someone, to get someone to calm down, or to have someone removed from the home. People generally defer to police authority. In the vast majority of situations, citizens comply with police officer requests, suggestions, or threats. [18]

The Police and Social Control

The police are part of the system of social control. Morris Janowitz defines social control as "the capacity of a society to regulate itself according to desired principles and values." [19] Control, in this sense, is not the same as repression or enforced conformity. The distinguishing feature of a democratic society is the existence of mechanisms for peaceful political change. Constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech, press, and assembly facilitate peaceful change by allowing new and controversial ideas to be heard. As the ABA list of police tasks indicates (Figure 1-1), preserving constitutional rights is part of the police role.

The police contribute to social control through both their law enforcement and order maintenance responsibilities. Their task is to preserve the norms of society by deterring crime and arresting people who violate the criminal law, which embodies those norms. The police presence in society is also intended to preserve order by serving as a deterrent to misconduct and by providing a quick-response mechanism for potential or low-level problems.

The capacity of the police to exercise complete social control is extremely limited, however. As we will learn in Chapter 4, routine patrol has only a limited effect on crime, and as we will see in Chapter 5, the ability of the police to identify and arrest criminal suspects is extremely limited.

Experts now recognize that the police are heavily dependent on citizens in carrying out their responsibilities. Police depend on people to report crimes, to provide information about suspects, to cooperate in investigations, and so on. For this reason, many experts refer to citizens as "coproducers" of police services. [20]

In the colonial era (1600–1840s), before we had the modern police, citizens were the primary agents of social control. Behavior was regulated by comments, warnings, or rebukes by family, friends, and neighbors. [21] The creation of the modern police, as a large professional bureaucracy, transferred that responsibility away from citizens (Chapter 2). The community-policing movement is an attempt to restore and develop the role of citizens as coproducers of police services.

In important respects, the police are the last resort in the system of social control. We call the police when everything else has failed. The primary social control mechanism is the family. Peer groups, community groups, religious institutions, and the schools are

also important. When these mechanisms fail and a person breaks the law, we call the police.

The Police and Social Control Systems

The police are part of several different systems of social control. First, and most important, they are the "gatekeepers" of the criminal justice system. The decision by a police officer to make an arrest initiates most criminal cases. The decision not to arrest keeps the incident out of the system.[22] Thus, the police determine the workload for the criminal justice system. At the same time, police efforts are deeply affected by the actions of other criminal justice agencies.

Second, the police are an important part of the social welfare system. They are often the first contact that official agencies have with social problems such as delinquency, family problems, drug abuse, and alcoholism. The police often refer individuals to social service agencies. The police are also an important part of the mental health system. Patrol units are routinely called to situations where someone is believed to be mentally ill. The officer has the responsibility of determining whether the person is in fact mentally ill and requires hospitalization. Goldstein argues that we need to recognize the fact that this is what police actually do, and we should develop alternatives to the criminal justice system for dealing with these situations.[23]

Third, the police are an important part of the political system. In a democratic society, the political system ensures public control and accountability of the police: The people, acting through their elected representatives, determine police policy, such as community policing, or not? Aggressive enforcement of traffic laws, or not? In the case of the sheriff, the people directly elect the top law enforcement official (Chapter 3).

Political control of law enforcement agencies represents one of the central dilemmas of policing a democratic society. On the one hand, the people have a fundamental right to control their government agencies. At the same time, however, politics has historically been the source of much corruption and abuse of law enforcement powers (Chapter 2). Striking the balance between popular control and professional standards is another one of the basic tensions in American policing.

In important respects, the police are symbols of the political system. They are the most visible manifestation of power and authority in society. The badge, the gun, and the billy club are potent visual reminders of the ultimate power of the police in maintaining the existing social and political system. As a result, attitudes toward the police are influenced by people's attitudes toward the political system generally. Arthur Niederhoffer describes the police officer as "a 'Rorschach' in uniform." People project upon the officer their attitudes about a wide range of issues.[24]

POSSIBILITIES

The form of policing we currently have is not the only one that is possible. The idea that the police do not and cannot change is a myth. The history of the police indicates that they have changed dramatically over the years (Chapter 2).[25] In *Police for the Future,* David H. Bayley argues that we have a choice—a political choice about different

possibilities for policing.[26] The real question is, "What kind of policing do we want to create?"

Bayley argues that we should take the crime prevention role of the police seriously. He believes the police, as traditionally organized, cannot effectively prevent crime. But he does see the possibility of more effective crime prevention if we choose to decentralize police departments and give more responsibility to neighborhood police officers (NPOs). This approach takes police departments and stands them on their heads, giving more decision-making responsibility to the officers at the bottom of the organization. Executives at the top of the organization would coordinate rather than command, as they do in the traditional quasi-military-style organization.[27]

Is Bayley's proposal sound? Would it achieve its goals without doing more harm to society? The purpose of this book is not to provide prescriptive yes or no answers to these questions. Instead, our purpose is to provide a factual, up-to-date description of policing today so that we can make informed decisions about the choices that are available—choices that are based on evidence, not subjective beliefs.

Let's consider some of the alternative possibilities for the police.

Functional Specialization

In 1967 the President's Crime Commission proposed dividing current police tasks among three different specialties within police agencies. Community service officers (CSOs), apprentices between the ages of 17 and 21, would work under the supervision of a regular police officer. They would be responsible for nonemergency calls for service. Police officers would perform most of the patrol, investigation, and enforcement tasks currently handled by the police. Police agents would concentrate on criminal investigation, with subspecialties focusing on homicide, rape, and so on.[28]

The Crime Commission's proposal represents a functional specialization approach. Most other professions operate in this way. Professional educators, for example, specialize in preschool, elementary, and secondary education, and college and university teaching. Within levels of education, moreover, there are area specialties: mathematics, biology, history, and so on. Lawyers specialize in criminal defense, tax law, personal injury, and the like. Also, most professions delegate less critical tasks to paraprofessionals, such as teaching assistants, law clerks, and nurses.[29]

Some police departments have experimented with part of the Crime Commission's proposal, using police cadets or aides for nonemergency tasks. An evaluation of a CSO-type program in Worcester, Massachusetts, found it to be highly effective. The officers, called police service aides (PSAs), handled "cold" crimes—those that are not discovered or reported until after they have been committed. The PSAs took crime reports, transported suspects, and provided information and miscellaneous nonemergency service to the public. The evaluation found that the PSAs handled 24.7 percent of all citizen calls directly and assisted in another 8.2 percent. Citizens, PSAs, and regular police officers expressed satisfaction with their performance.[30]

The Crime Commission's full proposal has not been adopted by police departments, however. The basic problem is that it does not resolve the issues surrounding the complexity of the police role. Police officers would still be called to many situations where

they would have to determine what is happening and make difficult discretionary decisions about the best response.

Problem-Oriented Policing

Herman Goldstein's concept of problem-oriented policing (POP) represents a different approach to the complexity of the police role. He argues that the police should disaggregate their workload, identify recurring problems, and develop strategies to reduce or eliminate those problems. Instead of thinking in terms of general categories of crime and disorder, the police should identify particular kinds of crime (drug dealing, drunk driving) and disorder (rowdy juveniles, chronic alcoholics in the neighborhood) and develop appropriate responses. POP represents a proactive approach, very different from the reactive approach of simply responding to 911 calls. It involves research and planning, and a shift from individual calls for service to a concern with underlying problems. The category of disorder, for example, would be disaggregated into separate problems: domestic disturbances, juvenile rowdiness, and chronic alcoholism on the street. A different strategy would be developed for each one.[31]

One of the first experiments in problem-oriented policing occurred in Newport News, Virginia, in the mid-1980s. The program focused on burglaries in the New Briarfield apartments, one of the worst low-income housing units in the city. The project began by analyzing crime patterns in the area and conducting an opinion survey of apartment complex residents. The survey discovered that deteriorated buildings contributed to many burglaries: windows and doors were easily broken into, vacant apartments created havens for criminals, and deteriorated conditions created an atmosphere of despair and powerlessness among the residents.[32]

Police officers assigned to New Briarfield responded by attempting to improve the physical condition of the buildings. One officer negotiated the settlement of a dispute with the private trash hauler that resulted in the removal of accumulated garbage. Abandoned refrigerators and other dangers to children were also removed. The police department organized a meeting of government agencies that had some responsibility for the housing project: the fire department, the Department of Public Works, the Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and so on. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a coordinated strategy to improve conditions in the complex. One officer organized a tenants' group to pressure city officials into making short-term improvements in the apartments.

POP in Newport News represented a new role for the police. Officers functioned as community organizers and brokers of government services, mediating between citizens and other agencies.

Today, police departments around the world practice problem-oriented policing. To facilitate its practice the San Diego police department and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) have cohosted the International Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) Conference every year since 1990. At the conference are hundreds of representatives from police agencies and academic institutions who come together to discuss the direction of problem-oriented policing and to share information about problem-oriented policing strategies.[33] Each year the Herman Goldstein Award is presented at the

conference to recognize the most innovative and successful problem-oriented policing project implemented by a police agency. Recent award winners have been the Boston police department (1998), the Green Bay police department (1999), and the San Diego police department (2000). The award was created to honor Herman Goldstein, who developed the concept of problem-oriented policing.[34]

Community Policing

The most popular new approach to policing today is community policing. Community policing alters the basic philosophy of policing. It holds that the police should work closely with community residents, instead of being an inward-looking bureaucracy; that they should emphasize crime prevention, as opposed to law enforcement; and that they should decentralize the decision-making authority to rank-and-file officers, as opposed to the top-down military-style organization.[35]

Community-policing programs take many different forms.[36] Some emphasize disorder and quality-of-life issues, while others focus on serious crime. Some primarily address drug-related crime.

In Chicago, the police department has instituted CAPS (Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy). At the root of the CAPS plan is the idea that the whole police department, and not just a specialized unit, should become intimately involved with and partner with the community. As part of this strategy officers are permanently assigned to neighborhoods to enhance their knowledge about the community in which they work and to allow the officers and the neighborhood residents to get to know one another on a personal level. Under CAPS the police department requires officers to meet with neighborhood residents regularly to discuss problems in the community and to develop strategies to solve them. Once neighborhood residents identify problems, officers mobilize the necessary resources to address them. While there are a number of obstacles to implementing CAPS, independent research is beginning to show that the strategy has been successful in reducing crime and fear of crime and is successful in building a stronger relationship between the police and the community.[37]

In Oakland, California, the SMART (Specialized Multi-Agency Response Team) program involved many different government agencies working closely with the police to tackle drug-related problems. City housing inspectors, for example, cited suspected drug houses for building code violations, landlords were encouraged or coerced into cleaning up blighted properties, while the police engaged in standard law enforcement tactics. Lorraine Green's evaluation of SMART found that it not only reduced drug activity but also diffused the positive benefits to surrounding areas.[38] SMART is an example of the community-policing philosophy of the police working closely with other agencies and using noncriminal justice system strategies.

Zero-Tolerance Policing

New York City adopted a policy of zero-tolerance policing in the 1990s. This approach concentrates on relatively minor quality-of-life issues, such as urinating in public and "fare-beating" (jumping over the subway turnstiles to avoid paying the fare). George

Kelling and Catherine Coles argue that tough enforcement on minor crimes directly contributes to a significant reduction in serious crime. Some fare-beaters, for example, were found to be carrying weapons in violation of the law. The weapons were then seized and the persons were arrested on more serious gun charges. The crime rate in New York City began to fall dramatically in 1992, and by 1997 it was at the lowest level in 30 years.[39]

Critics of the zero-tolerance policy, however, argue that it encourages police abuse of citizens. And, in fact, complaints against New York City police officers increased in the 1990s. From 1994 through 1996 the police department paid out over $70 million for police misconduct.[40] These allegations raise the question of whether it is possible to have tough law enforcement while at the same time respecting the rights of citizens.

Honest Law Enforcement

One of the options identified by Bayley in *Police for the Future* is "honest law enforcement." Under this approach, the police would continue to do what they now do well, but be honest with themselves and the public about it. They would continue to patrol neighborhoods, answer calls for service, intervene in problem situations, and try to apprehend offenders; but they would not claim that they are preventing crime. This approach represents low expectations for what the police can do, but it does have the virtue of being honest about it. As Bayley points out, too much of contemporary policing involves "dishonest law enforcement," making unjustified claims for effective crime prevention.[41]

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE

It is easy to talk about dramatic changes in policing. For example, advocates of community policing believe that it represents a new era in American policing. Translating ideas into practice is extremely difficult, however. Consider, for example, the case of team policing. It was a radical innovation in the early 1970s, involving restructuring police operations along neighborhood lines and decentralizing decision-making authority. At one point a large number of police departments said they were doing team policing.[42] And then, suddenly, the team-policing movement collapsed and it vanished.[43] Obviously, something went wrong. Most analysts conclude that team-policing experiments were poorly planned, with little attention given to important operational details.[44]

No matter what a police department decides to do—community policing, problem-oriented policing, zero-tolerance policing, or traditional-style policing—a number of basic issues must be faced.

• **Mission.** What is the primary mission of the department? Law enforcement, order maintenance, service, crime prevention, or some combination of all four? How is that mission expressed? How do citizens know what it is? How do officers know what it is? Does the department have a written mission statement? If so, what does it say?

• **Patrol Operations.** What is the place of basic preventive patrol operations in the mission of the department? Is it the central aspect of departmental activities? Or is it only

one part of a multitasked mission? If it is central, how efficiently is it currently being operated? What improvements need to be made? These issues are covered in Chapter 4.

• **Calls for Service.** Does the department respond to each and every call for service? Does the department attempt to manage the call for service workload through differential response? These issues are also covered in Chapter 4.

• **Discretion.** What policies does the department maintain to control police officer discretion? What is the current policy on use of deadly force? Is there a written policy on handling domestic violence incidents? Is there a written policy on dealing with mentally ill citizens? These issues are covered in Chapter 8.

• **Police–Community Relations.** How are the department's relations with racial and ethnic minority communities? Is there a high level of tension and conflict? What kinds of programs does the department maintain to improve police–community relations? These issues are covered in Chapter 9.

• **Corruption.** Does the department have a reputation for corruption? If it does, what evidence is there to support this reputation? Does the department have a specific anti-corruption program? These issues are covered in Chapter 10.

• **Accountability.** What accountability mechanisms exist in local law enforcement agencies? Is there a citizen review board? Does the police chief have civil service protection, or can he or she be fired at will? What kind of data are published in the annual report? Does this report provide information that allows you to make a meaningful judgment about the performance of the department? See Chapter 11 for a discussion of these issues.

• **Personnel.** What are the minimum recruitment standards for a law enforcement agency? What is the educational level for the department as a whole? How long is the preservice training program? Does the curriculum contain a section on ethics? Is there a field training component? Is the training program consistent with the stated mission of the department? What is the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of the different departments? Does the composition of particular departments match the composition of the local population? Personnel issues are covered in Chapters 12 and 13.

• **Organization.** What is the organizational structure of the department? Is it consistent with recommended standards? If there is a community-policing program, is it departmentwide or carried out by a special unit? Does a recognized police union represent the rank-and-file officers? How powerful is the union? What influence does it have over department policy? These issues are covered in Chapter 14.

SUMMARY

Why do we have police? Jerome Skolnick's question, with which we opened this chapter, cannot be avoided. As this chapter has indicated, we cannot be satisfied with simplistic answers like "protect and serve." The police role is extremely complex. First, we must decide which tasks we want the police to emphasize: law enforcement? crime prevention? order maintenance? Second, we need to decide how we want the police to carry out those tasks. Third, we need to decide what kind of officers we want for these tasks, including what selection criteria we want to use, what kind of training they will

receive, and how they will be supervised. We need to decide how we are going to hold the police accountable for the tasks we ask them to carry out.

All of these questions are extremely complex. This book is designed to provide a basic introduction to the police in America so that we can discuss policing in an informed manner.

CASE STUDY: REALITY-BASED POLICE TELEVISION: DOES "REALITY TELEVISION" DISTORT REALITY?

Beginning in 1989 with the television debut of *Cops,* reality-based police shows have been in the forefront of "reality" television, paving the way for other live action, uncensored documentary programs. These in-depth programs look into law enforcement—with their use of real-time video footage, featuring real cops and criminal suspects—and appeal to many viewers, as indicated by their consistently high ratings. Some proponents of these programs contend that they help the public to understand police work and the criminal justice system. However, some critics believe that reality-based police shows are more interested in high ratings than pursuing a journalistic truth and that they present violent, one-dimensional depictions of law enforcement.

The National Television Violence Study found that for three straight television seasons (1994–1998), every reality-based police show contained visual violence. Today, these programs continue to show live footage or dramatic reenactments of violent events, which leave many researchers concerned about the effects this content has on viewers. In addition, the number of reality specials that combine unusually violent video clips under sensationalistic program topics has risen, and they often feature fatal police car chases and police shoot-outs that highlight the dangerous, and often tragic, elements of police work. Murder, aggravated assault, and robbery are also depicted on police programs at a much higher rate than they actually occur in real life.

Reality-based police programs have been criticized for distorting the truth by offering a one-sided view of events to television audiences, usually from the police officer's standpoint. Although police programs feature real stories and use live footage, critics argue that the editing process produces overly positive portrayals of law enforcement officers and their work. For example, studies show that reality police programs overrepresent the percentage of crimes that are cleared or solved by law enforcement personnel. More than 60 percent of crime stories featured on shows are solved, but success rates for police departments are typically much lower. Police work is also portrayed as continually exciting; rarely does television depict the job's day-to-day tedium, such as paperwork and other office duties. Audiences are only afforded a look into dramatic moments captured during active duty while in the squad car, receiving radio calls, or at a suspect's home ready to execute a search/arrest warrant.

Some people are skeptical about the portrayals of officers featured on reality police programs, claiming that they are acutely aware of being filmed and may conduct themselves accordingly. Their meticulously professional and solicitous behavior can be perceived as an act, rather than a true representation. Furthermore, reality-based police shows depend on police departments' voluntary participation, so the programs have an interest in maintaining favorable relationships with the police. Casting officers in a negative light would jeopardize that rapport.

Others criticize police shows for how they portray certain ethnic groups. Studies have found that programs tend to underrepresent African Americans and overrepresent whites as police officers. Minority groups are also portrayed as committing a greater share of crime on television than they do in real life, while white people are rarely portrayed as criminal suspects. Such ethnic representations may contribute to and perpetuate racial stereotyping.

Source: Adapted from *Reality-Based Police Programs.* 2000. Issue Briefs. Studio City, CA: Mediascope Press; or it can be viewed at **http://www.mediascope.org/pubs/ibriefs/rbpp.htm.**

FOR DISCUSSION

1 Divide into groups and discuss the various functions/roles that the police play in communities. Which functions should the police continue to perform and which functions should be eliminated? How much time should the police devote to each function?

2 Discuss the question raised by Jerome Skolnick: "Why do we have police?"

3 Discuss how the police are part of the system of social control.

4 Discuss how the myths of policing impact the public's expectations of police work.
5 What factors influence the police role?

INTERNET EXERCISES

Exercise 1 Many police departments have placed their mission statements on the Web. Locate the websites for several departments. Which ones have mission statements? How do they compare?

Exercise 2 Check out the websites **www.officer.com** and **www.leolink.com.** They offer a number of resources to the public and police officers on issues relating to policing, including information on your local police department, police associations, and employment opportunities. Examine the sites closely; they will provide you with a number of Web links that you will need to use over the course of the semester.

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