Defining the Ideal Applicant: Examining patrol officer perspectives on police organizational recruitment standards

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Previous research has examined the psychological, psychophysical, and physical traits of police officers and police recruits, however little is known about individuals who aspire or intend to become a police officer. By examining an online law enforcement-based internet community, this study seeks to identify the traits and attributes that patrol officers find important for applicants to possess and how those traits and attributes align with official recruitment criteria. The findings suggest that those attributes that patrol officers find appropriate are nearly identical to those that police services have in their official recruitment criteria. The results depart from past research in that the conceptualization of the ideal applicant suggests that there may not always be a cultural divide between patrol officer and supervisory culture.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis first and foremost to my family: my parents Grzegorz and Lucyna, and my siblings Mateusz and Emily. Thank you for supporting me and for continuing to support me in my journey through life.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my boys: Mateusz Sycz, Martin Dasko, Omar Ganai and Louis Owen Li. Without you, this experience would not have been as enjoyable as it was.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"To some, a policeman is a "fucking pig", a mindless brute working for a morally bankrupt institution. To others, a policeman is a courageous public servant, a defender of life and property, regulating city life along democratic lines" (Van Maanen, 1974, p.53). An integral element of police work is fostering a positive relationship between the police and the people that they protect and serve. Police officers are held to a higher standard and at times, the actions of police officers come under intense scrutiny. This intense scrutiny is due to a misunderstanding of police work; in which the police culture is partly to blame (Sparrow, Moore, & Kennedy, 1990).

A culture is the composition of thoughts, values, attitudes, and norms that exist within a group of people. Police occupational cultures contain "accepted practices, rules, and principles of conduct that are situationally applied, and generalized rationales and beliefs" (Manning, 1995, p. 472). The general public often has a lack of understanding of police work, is unsupportive, and is unreasonably demanding (Sparrow, et al., 1990). Many studies focused on the organizational culture of policing have resulted in negative connotations. According to these studies, police culture serves as a barrier to reforming the police (Chan, 1996; Dean, 1995; Paoline, 2003; Skolnick, 1975); endorses the misuse of police authority (Kääriäinen, Lintonen, Laitinen, & Pollock, 2008; Micucci & Gomme, 2005; Stoddard, 1968); and ensures that police accountability is met with resistance (Chin & Wells, 1997; Paoline, 2003; Skolnick, 2002).

Police officers and recruits have been extensively studied in the literature, however we know little about individuals who aspire or intend to apply to become a police officer. The recruiting process is complex and demanding for the both the

applicant and the police service (Griffiths, 2008). The applicant must complete an array of activities such as entrance examinations, interviews, physical testing, and psychological testing before being granted the opportunity to join the service. As a result of his or her acceptance, the recruit gains access to an organization that is viewed as being secretive, suspicious of outsiders, and characterized by strong in-group solidarity (Paoline, 2003; Skolnick, 1975). Currently, few research studies have explored the pre-recruitment process which involves a person developing an interest in the profession, submitting an application, and the selection process.

Recruit selection is an important element of police organizations for a number of reasons. Due to the intense scrutiny that officers' actions undergo, police services strive to select the best applicants who can not only perform well, but also maintain a positive public image. Furthermore, the police recruit must be able to socialize properly into the organization; accepting its rules, regulations, and practices (Paoline, 2003). This research study will investigate the traits seen as desirable by officers to improve an applicant's chances of being hired by a police service as posted by officers on a law enforcement-based internet discussion forum.

Statement of Purpose

Studies indicate that the nature of police work and the organizational culture of policing play a significant role in affecting the attitudes, personality-based attributes, and physical characteristics of police officers (Burbeck & Furhnam, 1984; Newman & Lyon, 2009; Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge, 2007; Sanders, 2008; Sarchione & Cuttler, 1998; White, 2008). Others examine psychophysiological-based attributes, such as neuroticism, extraversion, and electromyographic response of muscles to stressors (Burbeck &

Furnham, 1984; Salters-Pedneault, Ruef, & Orr, 2010). Studies focused on organizational

fit and performance of police recruits examine the effects of education on officer

performance (White, 2008). Others, using psychologically-based questionnaires have

attempted to predict officer performance in relation to departmental guidelines (Burbeck

& Furhnam, 1984; Newman & Lyon, 2009; Ones et al., 2007; Sanders, 2008; Sarchione

& Cuttler, 1998). What research has yet to identify are traits and attributes of applicants

that are seen as desirable by fellow officers. It will be argued that officers are aware

based on their experience which traits are important to possess in the line of duty. It is

well known that candidates in employment situations strive to make their applications

competitive, and present themselves in a positive light in order to increase their chances

of being hired (Weiss, Weiss, Cain, and Manley, 2009). Research in this area has also yet

to focus on perceptions of police officer recruitment criteria and policies. Many of the

standards imposed on recruiting have been developed in conjunction with senior officers

who at times may be out of touch with what is happening on the street (Chan, 1996;

Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Skonick, 1975). This study will have the ability to inform applicant

decision making when applying to law enforcement as well as provide insight into officer

opinions of recruitment criteria.

The following research questions will be used to guide the study:

How do police officers socially construct the ideal police applicant? How do these social constructions align with official recruitment policies and practices?

Questions:

(a) Which traits are acceptable versus unacceptable among law enforcement applicants?

(b) How do members of the law enforcement community interact with individuals who they deem appropriate versus inappropriate? Appropriateness will be determined by analysing discourse.

(c) What can interactions between the law enforcement community and applicants tell us about the nature of the police culture?

This study has the potential to make an original contribution to knowledge by providing officers' perceptions of an ideal applicant in comparison to official police recruitment material, creating a working set of attributes that may influence police services in determining an appropriate organizational fit, and analysing the discourse among officers and applicants to gain a deeper understanding of police culture. The research was conducted on Blueline, a law enforcement-based internet forum where textual interactions between police officers and applicants were observed.

This study will begin with a review of existing research that pertains to police officer attributes and socialization. The review will then examine applicant traits outside of the context of policing. Next the paper will describe the research methods, and present and analyze the findings. The last section of the paper will draw conclusions from the findings and provide areas for future researchers to explore.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review is divided into three major sections. The first section examines previous research that has been conducted pertaining to traits exhibited by police recruits and officers. This section highlights research in: (1) Police organizational fit and performance measurement, and (2) the effects of the workplace. Performance measurement plays an important role in officer selection as police recruiters attempt to select the most appropriate applicants for the job. Performance measurement in conjunction with personality, educational, and psychological screening allows recruiters to determine the various traits that successful officers may exhibit. Research suggests that aspects of police work may have a negative effect on police officers psychological, mental, and physical health. This, examined along with officer traits, informs human resource personnel of trends in personality assessment which may be used in screening potential officers in order to select ones that can be more resilient to the nature of the workplace. The second section is devoted to examining the elements of the police culture and the function that it plays within police organizations. Police culture informs the applicant selection process as potential officer success from the perspective of supervisors, is related to the ability to adhere to general policies and procedures as well as norms that may or may not be officially codified. The third section reviews research conducted on human resources and recruitment outside of policing. This section highlights research conducted in areas such as: applicant traits and selection, organizational fit, and general employability in order to provide a perspective of employee standards outside of the realm of policing.

Previous Research Pertaining to Police Officer Traits

Police Organizational Fit and Performance Measurement

From a bureaucratic perspective, an important aspect of the applicant recruitment process is the selection of applicants who exhibit traits that are thought to be predictive of successful police officers once they have completed their recruit training. Police organizations have long tried to define and measure success. However, there is often a discrepancy in defining success among the ranks in a police service. Patrol officers may view success as being able to stabilize the area that they are patrolling. A supervisor's measure of success may include the number of arrests made and the number of public complaints that an officer has (or has not) collected (Manning, 1977; Moskos, 2008; Skolnick, 2008).

The importance of education in policing is an issue which has been met with much negativity (White, 2008). Research prior to White's (2008) indicated the importance of training as a means to improving police officer performance (Memory, 2001; Pollock & Becker, 1995). After examining an academy class, White (2008) came to a number of conclusions. Race and reading level were predictors of officer success. A twelfth grade reading level was a strong predictor of superior performance in the academy. White and Asian applicants were more likely to succeed in the academy compared to Black and Hispanic applicants. Unfortunately, studies based on academic performance as an indicator of success in the field are flawed in their own right. They fail to account for how individuals act in the classroom compared to the real-world. Examining other variables such as: "self-defence, firearms and weapons, driving, and scenario-based training" (p. 35) may be better indicators of police performance than

educational achievement. More studies need to be conducted to examine the difference between the values of the academy and the values in everyday performance before any valuable conclusions can be drawn.

There is a lack of consensus among researchers as to which characteristics are desirable of prospective police officers. Sanders (2008) made an attempt to measure performance by means of personality characteristics by utilizing the Big Five Traits Inventory which includes: extroversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. The first trait extroversion, is also known as assertiveness, is characterized by, "positive response to stimuli and general sociability and happiness" (Sanders, 2008, p. 133). Its opposite is known as introversion. The second trait of the scale is neuroticism. It is associated with "tension, irritability, and higher anxiety levels" (p. 133). Individuals who are more neurotic are more likely to pay attention to negative events, are prone to more negative events, and have been known to be less satisfied with their careers (Sanders, 2008). The third trait, agreeableness, is characterized on a continuum. On the one hand, you have individuals who are soft-hearted, tolerant, forgiving, and at the other extreme there are individuals who are cynical, rude, and suspicious of others (Sanders, 2008). Openness, the fourth trait, is characterized by those who are "imaginative, curious, original, broad minded, and artistically sensitive" (p. 133). Individuals with low scores in the openness category are seen as being less intelligent, and closed to new experiences. Lastly, conscientiousness is a measure of an individual's "degree of organization, persistence, and motivation in goal-directed behaviour" (p. 133). In terms of predicting job performance, conscientiousness was thought to be a predictor of performance because previous studies have determined that conscientious people work harder, get more tasks

accomplished, and have higher levels in life satisfaction (Sanders, 2008). The Big Five

Traits Inventory, however, was unable to predict officer on-the-job performance,

irrespective the measures used (Sanders, 2008).

The Big Five Traits Inventory was compared to a "police performance score" that

was given to individual officers by their supervisors. This included measures such as

attendance, job knowledge, quality of work, dependability, as well as other variables. The

results indicated that none of the Big Five traits had an effect on supervisor-defined job

performance. Age, however, demonstrated a curvilinear relationship among performance

scores: younger officers were seen as poor performers because of their lack of experience

and job knowledge, middle-aged officers were seen as the best performers, and older

officers were seen as the worst performers in terms of quality of work and dependability

(Sanders, 2008).

Burbeck and Furnham (1984) used the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)

to examine if personality played a role in personnel selection. Successful applicants

differed significantly from unsuccessful applicants in that they were less neurotic and

more extroverted (p.260). The rationale behind this was that more neurotic individuals

may find it difficult to cope with job-related stress and individuals who are less-

extroverted are typically less suitable for a job that deals with face-to-face contacts with

people than their extroverted counterparts.

There are a number of limitations in these studies on police performance. First is

the issue in generating a supervisor-based measuring instrument of on-the-job

performance. There exist differences in police occupational cultures between patrol

officers and their supervisors (Loftus, 2010; Moskos, 2008). As a result, the personality

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traits that are valued for potential applicants may differ between supervisors and officers. The consequences of senior management hiring applicants who do not possess the necessary traits to be successful may include: higher number of complaints and higher occurrences of misconduct which will ultimately tarnish the vital relationship that police services have with the community.

Second, although scholars have made previous attempts, it is still extremely difficult to measure to measure police performance. Arrest rates, traffic tickets, and license plate checks are inadequate measures of performance because they do not reflect the true nature of police work which is more akin to public order maintenance (Bayley & Bittner, 1984; Fyfe, 1999; Lipsky, 1980; Moskos, 2008; Muir, 1977; Thompson, 1983). A second erroneous measure of performance is the number of complaints filed against an officer. Many officers may receive complaints as a result of his or her behaviour which may be a direct result of more police-citizen interactions rather than misconduct (Moskos, 2008). Acceptable forms of conduct, which in these cases are determined by those who the officer interacted with, do not always oppose those set out of official police guidelines.

There has been much debate on whether personality assessment should be used to predict employee success in organizational settings. Ones, Dilchet, Viswesvaran et al. (2007) strongly support the use of personality measures in staffing decisions. Their study concluded that faking a test did not "ruin the criterion-related or construct validity personality scores in applied settings" (p. 1020). Using a sample of university students, Weiss et al. (2009) attempted to test whether or not individuals can manipulate personality-based tests to improve the impression of themselves to the interviewing

organizations. The project consisted of two rounds of testing. In the first, the respondents were asked to complete the test without any other instructions. In the second round, the participants were asked to complete the test as they would if they were applying to a police force and would like to look most favourable. The results from the study indicated that the tendency to present a positive impression increased in the police candidacy employment situation than in the first test (Weiss et al., 2009).

The Effects of the Workplace

In an attempt to recognize the importance of selecting appropriate law enforcement officers, past research has examined the effects of organizational socialization on recruits' and officers' attitudes, personality, and psychological traits as a means of predicting whether a recruit will be successful compared to departmental guidelines once placed in the field (Burbeck & Furhnam, 1984; Newman & Lyon, 2009; Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran, & Judge; Sanders, 2008; Sarchione & Cuttler, 1998; White, 2008). Researchers are also exploring the psychological toll that police work has on officers. Van Maanen (1975) conducted a study that showed that officers' attitudes, although highly motivated before beginning their career, significantly regressed after working in the field. This study was among the first to examine the relationship between the nature of police work and how it may affect an individual's personality.

More recently, Williams, Ciarrochi, and Deane (2010) set out to investigate whether the nature of police work affected officers' mental health. Policing has been considered to be among the most stressful of occupations. The way a police officer acts is largely due to the actions of his or her more experienced colleagues; "if being rational, non-emotional and in control is the behaviour modelled by senior officers, it is likely that

these attitudes and behaviours will become the norm for junior police" (p. 275). The study followed sixty police recruits at the New South Wales Police Service from the admittance phase to one year of service. The results indicated that officers who did not have any mental health issues prior to entering the work force experienced mental health problems along with depression after working for ten to twelve months. Depression was attributed to how the officer's coped with occupational stress. Those who were able to disclose their issues, such as stress and anxiety, to fellow officers were less likely to suffer mental health problems. This was attributed to their supervisors' encouragement of such behaviour. Others, who were not as encouraged, suffered from depression as well as other mental health problems. The study is just an example of how important positive socialization is to police recruits.

The process of socialization also affects attitudes towards departmental policies. Haarr (2001) surveyed police recruits four times during a sixteen month period that consisted of their academy training as well as their work in-the-field. The study yielded mixed results. First, police officers' views of community policing were generally more positive following the completion of their academic training. However, working with a field training officer resulted in the decline of those positive attitudes (Haarr, 2001). Moon (2006) examined police officers' acceptance of community policing after working in the field in South Korea. The results indicate a positive association between the degree of organizational socialization and attitudes towards community policing. When asking new recruits their reasons for joining the police service they overwhelmingly cited the chance to fight crime as their main motive and not activities related to community policing (Moon, 2006). The results sparked a reform of policing methods implemented by

top ranking police officials in South Korea who emphasize citizen-oriented policing, a positive relationship with citizens and crime prevention as new strategies to be adopted.

Obst, Davey & Sheehan (2001) examined the effects of police occupational stress on alcohol abuse. Police rookies were surveyed at three separate times: the first day at the academy, six months in the academy, and after a six month field placement. The results suggest that entering the occupation of policing was positively correlated with an increased risk of harmful drinking habits whereby "six percent of new recruits displayed a risk of serious dependency when assessed on their first day of the academy" (Obst et al., p. 355). Age also played a role in drinking habits as younger recruits were more likely to be involved in heavy drinking than their older colleagues. Considering these results, the researchers concluded that the rise in alcohol dependency was due to a mix of work-related stress and the enculturation in the police force.

Previous Research Pertaining to Police Culture

Functional Elements of Police Culture

The police culture is important to applicant selection as it plays a role in informing applicant selection and determining which traits are seen as desirable versus undesirable. It is essential to police services that applicants reflect the organization's beliefs, and abide by the police service's accepted practices, rules, and principles of conduct (Manning, 1995). According to the current knowledge, there exist three negative functional elements in the police culture: serves as a barrier to reforming the police; endorses the misuse of police authority; ensuring that police accountability is met with resistance. Dean (1995) studied the bureaucratic nature of police services and the difficulties of reforming police services. Whenever police services attempted to change and adopt a new mandate, they

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ultimately fell back to their old system. Skolnick (1975) suggests that this normal and a result of police cultural norms where the norms often overshadow exogenous policies in shaping police behaviour. Chan (1996) argues that difficulties to reforming police services are due to cultural elements such as secrecy and strong in-group solidarity.

Others have argued that the culture of policing endorses the misuse of authority (Kääriäinen et al., 2008; Micucci & Gomme, 2005; Stoddard, 1968). Stoddard (1968) attributes this to the police's informal code of deviance which consists of a "united group working to protect all fellow patrolmen from prosecution" (p. 210). In regards to reporting misconduct, it is known that officers with moderate levels of experience are less likely than rookies or veterans to report excessive use of force as a serious offense that is worthy of discipline (Micucci & Gomme, 2005, Skolnick, 1975). Other research, however, has indicated that officers are willing to report the misconduct of themselves and their fellow officers when it is done in an anonymous context (Kääriäinen, et al., 2008). This questions whether the official code of police conduct is influential or persuasive given the circumstances.

The culture of policing resists police accountability. Chin & Wells (1997) argue that the code of silence in police occupational culture is a deeply ingrained problem in police services. The code of silence often results in officers committing perjury in the court of law. With officers rarely willing to testify against their brothers and sisters in arms, external agencies are unable to properly conduct investigations of misconduct (Skolnick, 2002).

Human Resources and Recruitment outside the Policing Field

One area of research that organizational sociologists have investigated is how recruiters attempt to predict employability and personality characteristics from examining resumes (Cole, Field, Giles, & Harris, 2008). Data collected from 244 recruiters unrelated to policing indicated the method of predicting applicant characteristics based on their resume alone was invalid. However, the study's results did indicate that a recruiters assessment of an applicant's extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness were most important when assessing employability for applicants (Cole et al., 2009). When attempting to assess applicant employability, the level of educational performance measured by grade point average was directly related to the applicant's level of mental ability and the amount of extra-curricular activity was positively associated to the applicants extraversion scores (Cole, Field, & Giles, 2003) . All of these traits have previously been associated with emergency service personnel such as law enforcement officers and firefighters (Salters-Pedneault, Ruef, & Orr, 2010). One can therefore assume that these traits may play an influential role in the recruiting process as they may be crucial for potential applicants to possess.

Organizational culture plays an important role in distinguishing between desirable versus less-than desirable applicants. As such, the relationship between the applicant's ideal organizational culture compared to the organization's culture, and the applicant's notions of organizational fit have been shown to be important (Judge & Cable, 1997). Objective person-organization fit, characterized by congruence between the applicant's culture preferences and the organizations reputed culture, and the subjective fit of the applicants are related to organizational attraction. When the applicant's views on the

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ideal organizational culture are similarly aligned to the culture of the organization applied to, they were more likely to be attracted to the organization and vice versa. The study also concluded that individuals who believed they were a good fit for the organization were more likely to apply to the organization than those who believed they were not (Judge & Cable, 1997).

Another characteristic that has been shown to be influential in the application process is the applicant's interview skills (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002). When it comes to determining person-organizational fit, recruiters were more likely to rely on the values and personality traits of applicants rather than the applicant's knowledge, skills, and ability for the job in question (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Perhaps an important trait that may be valuable for an applicant to possess would be to develop and perfect interviewing skills, as the interview stage is very important in assessing an applicant's person-organizational fit. Here applicants who exhibit traits such as extraversion, self-promotion, and positive non-verbal behaviour gain an advantage over other applicants (Kristof-Brown et al, 2002).

Other research placing a heavy importance on the interview stage has investigated the use of impression management techniques and their impact on the employer's perceived applicant job-fit as well as organizational fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002). Results from a sample of 72 participants concluded that applicants who were extroverted were more likely to use impression management techniques such as self-promotion. What is important to note is that traits such as extroversion and self-promotion were highly important in determining an applicant's job-fit which increases an applicant's chances of being hired by the organization. Therefore, traits that may make an applicant more

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successful in the process may include: extraversion, inter-personal skills, non-verbal skills, and a mastery of interview skills - which may be similar, if not the same, for applicants applying for a police service. Other research that has focused on general organizational fit and employability has stressed the importance of traits such as general mental ability, goal orientation, interpersonal skills, and extroversion in an attempt to predict individual hiring from the human resource's perspective (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Lievens, Highhouse, & Corte, 2005; Rynes and Gerhart, 1989). In these studies, education, specifically grade point average, had no effect on recruiter's person-job fit or organizational-fit perspective of the employee.

If police officers believe that potential recruits should possess these traits in order to improve their chances of being hired, than it will be an indication that many of the traits that make a recruit successful are not limited to policing. It may also be possible that education will not necessarily be an important quality from the patrol officer's perspective. This may speak to the transferability of the findings further than the context of policing.

The current research contributes in various ways to our understanding of police culture. First, the study is among a select number of studies that examines police applicants. To this point, research has only examined those who have already applied. Second, the study makes an original contribution to the literature by examining potential officer traits from the police officer's perspective. Research until this point has yet to examine the opinions of fellow officers when pertaining to the ideal traits of the police applicant. Third, the research may be transferrable to fields of employment that have a similar organizational structure and culture to the police. Some of these may include:

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correctional services, border services, as well as the military. Fourth, by examining the

opinions of police officers, the research may be able to inform policy makers of

performance indicators from the police officer's perspective.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The purpose of the research is to understand how police officers construct the ideal police applicants. Therefore, it was only appropriate to conduct the study from the lens of social constructivism. The study was conducted on a law enforcement internet forum where textual interactions were analysed. Using the method of grounded theory, forum notes, memos, and analytical field notes were analysed for the purpose addressing the research questions.

Social Constructivism and Grounded Theory

Social constructivists examine how meanings and artefacts are constructed through processes of interaction. To social constructivists, knowledge is created through experiences, which are attained through social interaction with the world, people, and things (Ackermann, 2001; Charmaz, 2006). These processes of interaction create intersubjectivity, which is "a shared understanding among individuals whose interaction is based on common interests and assumptions" (Kim, 2001, p. 2). When individuals interact, they share their experiences and knowledge which are combined to form new social meanings and understandings (Kim, 2001). Learning therefore is a social process only developed by engaging in social activities (McMahon, 1997).

In the context of police culture, the process of constructing the ideal police applicant occurs in two stages. The first stage involves the individual officer's experiences and relationships which are affected by: their experiences, the people that they interact with, and what they learn from those interactions. The second stage involves patrol officers bringing their individual experiences together and discussing them to form social artefacts, or in this case the ideal police applicant.

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Grounded theory is an inductive, systematic approach to data collection and

analysis to develop a theory emerging from the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

A number of similarities with other qualitative research methods include: data collection

methods as well as the possibility to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods for

data analysis. The difference is that researchers who utilise grounded theory do not begin

their research with an overarching theoretical perspective that attempts to explain the

data. Instead, theory is generated through a comparative analysis of the data.

Grounded theory calls for an iterative process of data collection and analysis. The

grounded theorist engages in a constant comparative method of analysis and in theoretical

sampling, or "the process of data collection […] whereby the analyst jointly collects,

codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them,

in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Data

collection and analysis only conclude after the researcher has reached theoretical

saturation or, "[where] gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights nor

reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113).

Therefore, the substantive theory that emerges is an illustration of what he or she has

systematically come to know about the data.

Setting, Sample, Participants, and Sampling

The research project's setting was on Blueline.ca, an online law enforcement building

community. The forum's actors are composed of law enforcement officials including, but

not limited to; municipal, provincial, and federal police officers, border services officers,

private security officers, and correctional officers; and civilians (e.g. family members of

current law enforcement officials, law enforcement applicants, and others). Blueline.ca

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provides civilians as well as members from the law enforcement professions a forum

where they can anonymously discuss matters pertaining to case law, education and

training, firearms, the use of force, and applying to law enforcement.

The research was conducted on the public side of the forum because of the

difficulties in gaining access to the private side of the forum. In order to gain entry to the

private side of the policing forum, the individual must be a member of a police service.

The process for applying involves: the requesting member email the website's

administrator using his or her work email address along with the police service's human

resource department's contact information (Huggins, 2007). The administrator then

contacts the human resource department to confirm the requesting member's authenticity,

and only then does he or she gain access to the private side. As the researcher is not a

police officer, it was not feasible to gain access to the private side. Therefore, only the

public side of the forum was examined.

The participants for this research project were sampled from Blueline's law

enforcement applicants' thread. The sample included police officers of all ranks (e.g.

retired officers, current and former patrol officers, as well as recruiters). The threads also

included law enforcement applicants who ranged from high school students to

accomplished professionals (e.g. plumbers, computer technicians, etc.). The unit of

analysis for the proposed research was the thread, which is a collection of posts in a

particular topic or in relation to a police service. In a thread, posts are often displayed

from most recent to oldest. The number of posts sampled was determined by the level of

theoretical saturation. The number of discussions sampled was 12, which included four

police service-specific discussions (Toronto Police Service, Edmonton Police Service,

Calgary Police Service, and Ottawa Police Service), eight general law enforcement applicant discussions (Entitled: What Exactly can I Do to Build Myself?; The Sad Truth; How Many Police Forces Did You Apply to?; Worried About My Academic Integrity Record; What You Need to Know for OPC; Can I Still be a Police Officer?; and Are Personality Traits Lower Priority in Hiring), all of which combined to a total of 800 posts/replies.

Two sampling methods were used in this study: purposeful sampling and theoretical sampling. Purposeful sampling is a method employed by researchers who wish to select potential participants that display certain characteristics or attributes that pertain to the project's subject matter (Berg, 2001). The sampling was limited to specific threads and interactions that were among law enforcement applicants and police officers. After initial codes were developed, the second method was theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is similar to purposeful sampling where the researcher selects cases that exhibit certain qualities, however it is different in that the researcher's purpose of selection is to develop emerging theories (Charmaz, 2006).The researcher samples to "develop the properties of… [a] category until no new properties emerge" (p. 97). When no new properties emerged, the researcher reached theoretical saturation.

In order to be included in the study, the threads needed to meet two selection criteria. The first was that they must have been recent. The police-service specific discussion must have had discussions within the previous six months of the research commencing. The remaining applicant discussion threads were extended to one year prior to the research commencing. Any threads that did not fall within this timeline were treated as archival data and were not be used in the study. Second, the threads must have

concerned seeking employment as a police officer. Applicant standards and organizational culture vary from one law enforcement branch to the other, therefore in order to avoid unnecessary confusion, the research only focused on municipal/regional police officers, thereby disregarding threads associated with: border services officers, private security personnel, and provincial police officers.

The research focuses on municipal/regional police officers because styles of policing are often a reflection of the relationship between the police and the community. Police in urban areas are often seen as outsiders, whereas rural officers play an integral role in the communities in which they work (Weisheit, Wells, & Falcone, 1994). According to Kowalewski, Hall, Dolan, and Anderson (1984), both urban and rural officers have many of the same concerns when it comes to policing. However, urban officers feel less respected and less supported by citizens. Officers in rural areas note feeling more public support and are more inclined to work in partnership with community members than officers working in urban environments. Policing styles and the nature of the relationship between the community and the police may play a role in deciding which personality traits and attributes are important for potential recruits. For example, interpersonal skills may be more highly valued by rural officers who employ a community approach versus municipal officers who are more likely to employ an order-maintenance approach (Weisheit et al., 1994). To avoid any conflict that may have arose as a result of this, the study only examined municipal/regional police officers.

Internet-Based Research

Advancements in technology have made our social worlds progressively more digital (Kozinets, 2010; Van den Hoonaard, 2012). As a result, virtual communities have

become places for individuals to gather and discuss issues pertaining to their subject of choice. These online social worlds are defined as, "social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on […] public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993, p. 5). Virtual communities benefit participants by providing them a chance to meet others with the same interests and hobbies.

Nearly three decades of research has given academics the understanding that gatherings in online communities follow the same basic rules as groups that gather in person. In addition, characteristics such as anonymity and accessibility provide members with unique opportunities for a distinctive style of communication that is not present in face-to-face interactions (Kozinets, 2010). These interactions take place on a forum, which is a series of text-based exchanges organized around particular shared interest often facilitated by a moderator (Kozinets, 2010). The text-based exchanges are carried out in a 'post', which is housed in a thread (Kozinets, 2010). It is important to note that these communities are not 'virtual' in the sense that they are fictitious. They are composed of real people, with real feelings, discussing real issues. Virtual communities, "teach us about real languages, real meanings, real causes, [and] real cultures" (p. 15). This has made them indispensible for researchers attempting to understand certain phenomena or aspects of behaviour of hard-to-reach populations.

Arranging meetings in person after being involved in online conversation is not entirely uncommon. Fifty six percent of individuals who are involved in online communities have met members of their community in person (Kozinets, 2010).With that being said, social scientists are beginning to realize the importance of incorporating the

internet and computer-mediated communications into their studies (Kozinets, 2010). As a result, internet-based research has begun to emerge.

Membership in the Online Community

Two elements explain membership in online communities: investment in the subject matter, and investment in social relationships in the online world. The first pertains to the relationship between the person and the activity that he or she is engaged in (Kozinets, 2010). Online surfers are rational actors, the more that a person believes that he or she will benefit from the community's articles and discussions, the more likely he or she will join, remain, and participate in that community.

The second element on membership in online communities concerns the social relationships of actors within the community. Some characteristics of online communities are more likely to promote close social relationships. For example, social networking sites such as Facebook are founded on pre-existing relationships. Therefore, establishing close-tied relationships would not be difficult given the fact that the members are already acquainted outside of the online community. Other online communities, such as SingleTracks.com (a mountain biking site) are composed of members who may or may not have prior knowledge of each other but are brought together by similar interests in the subject matter (Kozinets, 2010). Websites such as this provide opportunities to develop social relationships.

When it comes to divulging personal information, Kozinets (2010) notes that there is a positive relationship between the time spent in a community and the likelihood of giving personal information. This is due to the fact that individuals, although online, become better acquainted with other group members which results in higher levels of

trust. Similar to how groups would operate in face-to-face interactions, online group dynamics involve social roles as well as norms that are followed within the online community. For instance, one role is that of the *administrator* who is responsible for the operation of the internet forum. The *moderator's* purpose is to oversee communication activity on the internet forum by deleting inappropriate posts such as profanity and locking discussions when they venture off topic. The *troll* is an individual in an online community whose creates conflict and ruins the forum's dynamic.

Before an individual becomes a member of an online community, he or she learns about the community through a process of watching and reading, also known as lurking. If the *lurker* is interested in the subject matter, they are potential *members* of an online community (Kozinets, 2010). Apart from lurkers, there exist four types of community members: the *newbie,* the *mingler,* the *devotee,* and the *insider*. The *newbie* is characterized by a lack of strong social ties to the group; and maintains superficial or passing interest in the subject matter of the community (Kozinets, 2010). Individuals often find social communities by searching for the same social interests. If an individual is further interested, he or she will join the community and begin membership as a newbie. The second idealized member of the social community is the *mingler*. *Minglers* are described as "socializers who maintain strong ties with members of the community but who are only superficially interested or drawn to the central consumption activity" (p. 33). A *mingler's* main purpose is to establish social relationships rather than engage in the subject matter of the forum. The *devotee*, is the reverse of *mingler*. Individuals who belong to this category are characterized by shallow social ties with community members, however maintain a strong interest in the subject matter and are also

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characterized by a "refined skill and knowledge set" (p. 33). The last type of online community member is the *insider*. *Insiders* are both immersed in the subject matter and have strong ties with the community and individual members.

The officers that participate in forum activities would be labelled as *insiders*. Officers on the forum are immersed in the subject matter as well as develop relationships with other members of the forum. Applicants who write on the forum would change from their identity as *lurkers* and become *newbies* the moment they sign up and post onto the forum. They have weak ties to other community members and are only interested in having their questions answered by the forum police officer members. The previous are only possible explanations for typologies of group membership as they are next to impossible to identify without interacting with participants.

Types of Online Communities

This section will explore the four types of online communities and will identify the type of online community that is consistent with Blueline.ca – the building community. There exist four types of online communities; *cruising, bonding, geeking, and building*. *Cruising* communities, are characterized by "weaker social relationships and the low centrality of any particular kind of consumption activity" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 35). What is meant by consumption activity is the main subject matter or theme of an online community. Examples of cruising communities include the forums at RedFlagDeals.com, chat rooms such as chathour.com, and virtual worlds such as those that exist in the video game The Sims.

The second type of online community is the bonding community. Bonding communities are "online locations that are known to have and create very strong ties

between members, resulting in deep and long-lasting relationships, but whose members are not particularly focused on a shared or unifying consumption behaviour" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 34). The purpose of these communities is to foster and maintain social relationships. Examples of bonding communities include social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and dating sites such as eHarmony.

Communities characterized by "online gatherings where the sharing of information, news, stories, and techniques about a particular activity is the community's raison d'être […]" are known as geeking communities (Kozinets, 2010, p. 34). These communities offer their members and readers detailed information on a particular subject of interest, however they do not provide an opportunity to engage in meaningful social relationships. Examples include Carforums.com (automobiles), Singletracks.com (mountain biking), and Computerforums.com (computer hardware and software).

The last type of community outline by Kozinets (2010) are building communities characterized as places where members are able to build meaningful social relationships as well as acquire and distribute detailed information and intelligence about a central subject or activity. Some examples of building communities include forums.officer.com which is a law enforcement forum for American police officers, forums.gradcafe.com which allows graduate students to ask questions and express themselves on issues surrounding graduate school, and battle.net in which discussions pertaining to video games occur and relationships are facilitated by members engaging in games together. The mode of interaction in these types of communities is both informational as well as relational (Kozinets, 2010). Blueline.ca is a building community. Members of the

community discuss various topics pertaining to policing, as well as form both online and offline relationships, which is evident in forum interactions.

Netnography/Content Analysis

Ethnography is an approach used by qualitative sociologists to observe, record, and analyse a particular group in their natural setting or social world (Charmaz, 2006). Since the expansion of the internet in the 1990s, the virtual environment has provided spaces where communities have formed and developed (Van den Hoonaard, 2012). The result was an examination of online social groups, and the development of a methodological approach that is known today as the virtual ethnography or netnography.

Netnography requires the same labour intensive, systematic approach as ethnographic research. One of the goals of the online ethnographer is to "discern the distinctive characteristics of the particular culture, its norms, and its social hierarchies" (Van den Hoonaard, 2012, p. 161). Similar to ethnographic research, netnography places a heavy focus on the researcher who is both the data collection instrument and analyst. This method of research has be conducted by means of multiple qualitative methods which include but are not limited to online interviews (Kulavuz-Onal & Vásquez, 2013), discourse analysis (Alavi, Ahuja, & Medury, 2010; Mkono, 2011), and participant observation (Berger, O'Reilly, Parent, Séguin, & Hernandez, 2008; Nelson & Otnes, 2005).

One of the fundamental elements of ethnographic research is immersing oneself in the participants' environment and thoughtfully observing, noting, and analysing what is occurring. There exist four levels of participant observation: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer (Creswell, 2009;

Van den Hoonaard, 2012). When a researcher takes upon the role of the complete

participant, he or she completely immerses his or herself in the community or group that

he or she is studying. The researcher becomes a full-fledged member of the group. There

are inherent advantages and disadvantages of this role. Complete participation may

provide an unobstructed view into participants' lives but there are ethical issues when

researchers become over-involved which clouds the researcher's objectivity (i.e. going

native). In conducting netnography, the researcher joins the online group, lets it be known

that he or she is conducting research, and becomes a full-fledged member of the group,

engaging in discussion and identifying with group members.

The second level of participant observation is the participant as observer.

Researchers assuming these roles make their presence known to the group and attempt to

form relationships with its members (Van den Hoonaard, 2012). This method is most

appropriate when the researcher shares something in common with a group. An example

would be a researcher in his or her twenties studying the nightclub scene. When

conducting research online, the researcher allows him or herself to be known to the group

as a researcher and participates in discussion. A disadvantage is that the community may

be more cautious in sharing information because of the known presence of the researcher.

Also, the researcher risks getting barred from the community by exposing his or her

status as a researcher.

The researcher adapting the role of the observer as participant informs the

members of the research setting that he or she is conducting research, however carries out

a less-involved role (Van den Hoonaard, 2012). This role is often employed by a

researcher when he or she is too different from the participants in the setting, (e.g. a

young individual conducting participant observation in a geriatric care management facility). Similar to the participant as observer, the researcher approaches the online community and allows his or her role as a researcher to be known prior to beginning research. The researcher however, does not participate in discussion as he or she is not familiar with the content in the forum. He or she instead observes and notes what is happening.

The last level of observation is the role of the complete observer. The researcher does not interact with the members of the setting, and may or may not reveal that he or she is conducting research to the group. The role of the complete observer is undertaken when conducting research in public settings such as coffee shops or public forums on the internet (Van den Hoonaard, 2012). In netnography, the researcher finds a forum, and observes the social interactions on the forum without allowing members to know that he or she is conducting research. This method arguably allows the researcher to observe interactions in their most natural setting (Berry, 2004).

One can argue that for research to be considered netnographic the researcher must be involved in interaction with members of the online community (Kozinets, 2010). Conversely others argue that the role of a complete observer is still possible in internet-based research (Charmaz, 2006; Van den Hoonaard, 2012), and have even conducted netnography from the role of the complete observer (Beaven & Laws, 2007; Füller, Jawecki, Mühlbacher, 2007; Hewer & Brownlie, 2007). In the current research the role of the complete observer adopted because of the difficulties in gaining access to police populations.

Very rarely do researchers conduct a pure netnography which involves the researcher interacting with participants in real-time, often researchers use a variety of techniques of data collection and analysis to supplement their observation in the online social world (Kozinets, 2010). For the purpose of this research, content analysis was conducted in conjunction with Netnography. Content analysis is an interpretative approach to data analysis in which researchers examine text which can be seen as "a collection of symbols expressing layers of meanings" (Berg, 2001, p. 239). Researchers who engage in content analysis are more likely to have an interpretative orientation - in which they "organize or reduce data in order to uncover patterns of human activity, actions, and meaning" (Berg, 2001, p. 239). The content analysis was conducted by examining the nature of the data in two ways: by its manifest content or those elements that are physically present and countable, and its latent content - interpretative reading of the symbolism that underlies the physical data (Berg, 2001). This method conducted in conjunction with netnography was able to provide a holistic account of what was observed in the research setting. What differentiates the research project from a content analysis is that the study examines on-going discussions on the forums rather than data that have not been active for an extended period of time.

Analysis

The data collected for this research project were analyzed using MAXQDA 10, a qualitative data analysis software. MAXQDA was utilized because of its reputation in superiority of establishing closeness to the data, ease of coding, and memoing capabilities (Kuş Saillard, 2011). The data were collected from the internet browser and stored in Microsoft Word. The data were then transferred to MAXQDA for the analysis.

Data analysis by means of coding for the textual data was conducted in two stages. At the first stage, open coding involved line-by-line coding where the data were examined and labelled line-by-line. The purpose of open coding was to develop initial codes and categories to which the data could be further analysed. The codes were examined and grouped into similar concepts. At this point, a temporary code-book was formed in order to define the concepts and prepare the data for the next stage of coding. Although some researchers may notice that certain themes or answers to the research questions begin to emerge after this first stage, it is important that interpretations and analyses be left for the following stage where the researcher has the ability to specify the findings (Berg, 2001, Charmaz, 2006).

The second stage of coding in the research project was categorical coding. The purpose of this stage was to organize the initial codes into categories. The codes and conceptual categories were then sorted and organized in order to inform the creation of larger thematic categories where theoretical constructs, such as the ideal applicant emerged. Although theoretical constructs began to surface, data was continually collected, analysed and placed into thematic categories in order to reinforce the theoretical constructs. Data collection ceased only after the thematic categories and constructs reached theoretical saturation, or when no new findings were emerging from the collected data.

There were two separate sections in which data analysis was conducted: (1) Blueline.ca, and (2) Official Recruiting Criteria. First, textual interactions were copied verbatim from Blueline's law enforcement applicants section. The study analysed a total of 12 discussions which contained 800 posts/replies which ended up with 218 coded

segments. Police services that were included in this study are the: Edmonton Police

Service, Calgary Police Service, Toronto Police Service, and Ottawa Police Service.

These police services were chosen based on the amount of information that was present

in the threads. The eight themed threads were selected because the data present in the

threads reflected the research questions. After collecting and analysing the data from

blueline.ca, the research than moved onto examining official recruitment criteria.

Information was collected from the previously mentioned police services' official

websites that contain recruiting information under their hiring sections. These were

compared and contrasted for any similarities and differences to address the research

questions. It was not possible for the researcher to determine the sex/gender of the

individual respondent based on his or her responses and username. Therefore from this

moment forward, applicants will be referred to as males in order to avoid any ambiguity

or confusion.

Ethics

Article 2.2 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement Two (TCPS2) states, "research that

exclusively relies on publicly available information does now require REB review when:

(a) the information is legally accessible to the public and appropriately protected by law,

or (B) the information is publicly accessible and there is no reasonable expectation of

privacy" (TCPS2, 2010, p. 17). In the case of Blueline's forums, the data that will be

collected is considered to be in the public domain. Therefore the proposed research

project would fulfil the first requirement of being excluded from gaining the approval of

a research ethics board.

The second argument made by the TCPS2 is that the information must be publicly accessible with no reasonable expectation of privacy. There has been considerable discussion in the literature in regards to what is publicly accessible (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002; Berry, 2004; Donelle and Hoffman-Goetz, 2008; Flicker, Hanns, & Skinner, 2004). At one side of the spectrum there are researchers who consider forums on the internet and chat-rooms as areas where the information posted should be considered in the public domain (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002; Flicker, Hanns, & Skinner, 2004). The argument made by these researchers is that chat-rooms and forums by their very nature are public, and therefore should be considered as such. This would relinquish the responsibility of the researchers in obtaining consent when conducting research in these online communities.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, researchers argue that there exists a distinction between technical accessibility and publicness (Berry, 2004). Although the data is technically accessible, it does not mean that the potential participants of the study have consented to their discussions being used for the purpose of research. Donelle and Hoffman-Goetz (2008) argue that researchers do not need to gain consent from the participants when analysing archived data. However when discussions are on-going, they are off limits for researchers who do not wish to gain consent.

Regardless of the two arguments, the nature of the data placed on the internet is public and it is the responsibility of the administrators of the websites to inform and warn their users of the potential consequences of posting messages on public forums (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002). Such is the case on the Blueline law enforcement forum. The administrator of the site writes:

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> When you post, you're PUBLISHING to the INTERNET. Your posts will NEVER be deleted, nor would deleting them do anything since Google and other search engines keep a public cache of every indexed page on the Internet. No, not even if your job suddenly depends on it, sorry. (Huggins, 2007)

Based on this information and the guidelines provided by the TCPS2, the approval of an ethics research board was not required for the proposed research project. Furthermore, given the public nature of the data, gaining the consent of possible participants was also not required.

Two important issues arise when conducting internet-based research: identity and anonymity. Article 2.3 TCPS2 (2010) states that the clearance of a review ethics board is unnecessary when conducting participant observation in public places where,

> (a) It does not involve any intervention staged by the researcher, or direct interaction with the individuals or groups; (b) individuals or groups targeted for observation have no reasonable expectation of privacy; and (c) any dissemination of research results does not allow identification of specific individuals. (p. 18)

The research was conducted using participant observation with the researcher assuming the role of a complete observer. The method will not involve any intervention by the researcher. Also, the participants do not have any reasonable expectation of privacy as they waived them by registering on the forum.

The last criteria that the TCPS2 (2010) outlines in reference to the anonymity and confidentiality of participants is that the dissemination of the research results should not identify specific participants as it may pose a risk to them. There exists a widespread consensus that when publishing results from a study, participants should remain anonymous, and special consideration should be made for members of vulnerable groups such as teenagers (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002; Berry, 2004; Donelle and Hoffman-

Goetz, 2008). Blueline's site administrators explicitly state that individuals should not use their real names and instead create an anonymous username "consider using an anonymous name that other people wouldn't be able to identify you with. It's your identity and your job to keep it secure, should you wish" (Huggins, 2007). With this being said, the onus is on the forum participant to keep his or her identity anonymous thereby relinquishing the researcher's responsibility to keep participants anonymous. Furthermore, members of the forum were not considered a part of a vulnerable group. As an extra measure, the collected data was stored in two separate locations, a secure laptop computer, and an encrypted external hard drive in order to protect the identity of officers and potential recruits. The data will be retained for five years after which it will be permanently deleted from the two storage locations.

CHAPTER FOUR: BACKGROUND

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader a context in examining the inner working of recruitment in the police organization from the perspective of the four police services sampled. The first section will examine official police recruiting processes, and compare the stages by which police applicants must traverse before being offered a position in the organization. The second section of this chapter will examine and compare the official recruitment criteria of the police services sampled.

Official Police Recruiting Process

Police services in Ontario require candidates to complete four assessment stages in the application process. Progression in the following stages is dependent on the applicant passing the previous stage. The first stage requires applicants to pay a non-refundable fee and complete four tests: (1) the Police Analytical Thinking Inventory (PATI), which is a measure of the applicant's deductive, inductive, and quantitative reasoning; (2) the Written Communication test which tests the applicant's ability to analyse information in a coherent manner; (3) the medical/physical test which includes both a visual and hearing evaluation as well as the Physical Readiness Evaluation for Police (PREP) test which evaluates a candidate's motor skills, cardiovascular endurance, as well as upper body strength; and (4) an interactive video simulation in which candidates are exposed to a number of scenarios that they would encounter in public and are evaluated on how they respond to these scenarios (Griffiths, 2008; Police Prep, 2012). Only candidates who pass stage one are invited to participate in stage two of the application process. The Ontario Constable Selection System is administered by Applicant Testing Services Inc. and the applicant is expected to cover the costs of the testing.

The second stage of the application process involves a competency interview and personal questionnaire which focuses on how candidates have behaved in the past in various situations at school, work, and in the community (Griffiths, 2008). Apart from being judged on their personal characteristics and habits, candidates are evaluated on their analytical thinking skills, self-confidence, communication skills, flexibility and their ability to value diversity, self-control, and their relationship building skills (Griffiths, 2008; Police Prep, 2012).

Upon successful completion of the second stage, the third is the post-interview assessment which involves a background investigation that may include, reference and credit checks, verification of education documents, and the verification of employment history. The post-interview assessment also includes the completion of a personality test, and an interview with a psychologist (Griffiths, 2008; Police Prep, 2012). The fourth stage involves the collection of the previously mentioned documents and the review of those documents in comparison to selection criteria. If the applicant is selected, he or she will be given a conditional offer of employment which will be dependent on a full medical examination. Recruits then attend the Ontario Police College for thirteen weeks after which they complete the mandatory on-the job training provided by the police service (Griffiths, 2008; Police Prep, 2012).

The Calgary and Edmonton Police Services have an eight stage application process. The applicant first submits the required application form from the respective police service. After the application has been received, the applicant is contacted and invited to write two written competency tests: the Alberta Communication Test (ACT) and the Alberta Police Cognitive Ability Test (APCAT) (Calgary Police Service, 2014;

Edmonton Police Service, 2014). Successful completion of this stage allows the applicant to progress to the third stage.

The third stage of the application process evaluates the physical readiness of the applicant. The Alberta Physical Abilities Readiness Evaluation for Police Officers (A-PREP) is an assessment tool that assesses the physical suitability of police constable applicants (Edmonton Police Service, 2014). The A-PREP is composed of three parts: a medical screening questionnaire, (2) a pursuit/restraint circuit; and (3) an aerobic shuttle run. The applicant must pass this stage in order to be accepted to the fourth stage of the application process.

The Personal Disclosure Interview is the fourth stage of the application process. Here, the applicant is interviewed by a personnel selection officer to review their personal disclosure form[1]. In this interview, the candidate's honesty is vital. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to be truthful about any past mistakes they may have made before considering applying to become a police officer (Calgary Police Service, 2014; Edmonton Police Service, 2014). After this stage is completed, the applicants move on to the behaviour descriptive interview. The philosophy of this interview is that past behaviour is a strong predictor of future behaviour (Calgary Police Service, 2014; Edmonton Police Service, 2014). The interview is designed to evaluate the applicant's character in relation to: (1) adaptability/decisiveness, (2) initiative/perseverance, (3) interpersonal skills, (4) organizational skills, (5) stress management, and (6) valuing service and diversity (Edmonton Police Service, 2014). Applicants who successfully

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[1] The personal disclosure form is a survey that is administered to applicants that asks applicants about prior activities which include previous driving offenses, involvement in criminal activity, criminal charges and offenses (Edmonton Police Service, 2014).

complete both the personal disclosure interview and the behavioural descriptive interview are able to proceed to the next stage of the process.

The sixth stage of the application process is the polygraph. The purpose of the polygraph is to verify the validity of the information on the applicant's application and their abilities throughout the entire recruitment process. If an applicant has made a mistake in the previous section of the application process, it is important that he or she makes that aware to the individual conducting the polygraph prior to the examination so that he or she is not deemed ineligible for employment (Edmonton Police Service, 2014). Only applicants who are successful at this stage will move on to the seventh stage of the application process.

In the seventh stage the applicants will be required to pass a psychological examination which includes the Inwald Personality Inventory-2, as well as the 16 Personality factors questionnaire. Tests are carried out by psychologists (Calgary Police Service, 2014; Edmonton Police Service, 2014). At this stage of the recruiting process, applicants also undergo a thorough medical examination by a physician.

The eighth stage of the application process involves a background investigation in which an applicant's social media accounts are examined, enhanced security and credits checks are undertaken, as well as character references examined in which various people from the applicant's life are interviewed including, but not limited to, family members, friends, neighbours, and present and past employers. After this stage, applicants' packages are submitted and applicants are either selected or not based on the police service's needs. The training of officers is conducted in-house by both the Calgary and Edmonton Police Services.

Official Police Service Recruiting Criteria

One of the major aspects of the study was to examine the relationship between official

recruiting criteria on police services' websites, and compare that to the opinions of

officers on Blueline.ca. Aside from the standard physical requirements that every

applicant must possess prior to submitting an application (e.g. vision, hearing, and

cardiovascular endurance), listed in Table 4.1 are additional applicant traits specified by

the police services analysed in the discussion forum data:

Table 4.1 Police Service Recruiting Criteria

	Calgary	**Edmonton**	**Ottawa**	**Toronto**
Physical Demands	High degree of physical fitness	Physically able to perform duties of the position, excellent physical condition	Physically able to perform duties of the position: cardio endurance, upper body strength	Physically able to perform duties of the position
Mental/ Psychological requirements	Pass psychological screening	Pass psychological screening	Psychological screening, mentally able to perform duties of the position	Psychological screening, mentally able to perform duties of the position
Educational	Minimum Grade 12 diploma	Minimum Grade 12 diploma	Four years of secondary school or equivalent	Four years of secondary school or equivalent
Volunteer Experience	Not necessary but encouraged	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified

Character	Six core values: Respect, Honesty, Integrity, Fairness, Compassion, Courage Applicants cannot have been involved in any criminal activity (detected or undetected) within the three year period before applying No criminal convictions for which a pardon has not been granted	Adaptability/ decisiveness, Initiative/ perseverance, Interpersonal skills, Organizational skills, Stress management, valuing service and diversity Good moral character is fundamental. Applicants cannot have been involved in any criminal activity (detected or undetected) within the three-year period before the date of application to the EPS No criminal convictions for which a pardon has not been granted	Good moral character and habits; trustworthiness and integrity; Self-confidence, self-control, values diversity, relationship building No criminal convictions for which a pardon has not been granted	Good moral character and habits; trustworthiness and integrity No criminal convictions for which a pardon has not been granted

As outlined in Table 4.1, the Calgary Police Service (CPS) and Edmonton Police (EPS) Services' recruiting criteria required applicants to possess a high degree of physical fitness prior to applying. The Ottawa Police Service's (2014) (OPS) physical requirements sought applicants who possessed good cardio endurance and well as upper body strength, and the Toronto Police Service's (2014) (TPS) recruitment required individuals to be physically capable of performing the duties that the job entailed. The only recruiting website that outlined physical capabilities such as upper-body strength

and cardio endurance was the OPS. In addition to passing the organization's vision and

hearing standards, potential officers were required to complete a PREP test which

pursuit/restraint circuit in which the candidate must run an obstacle course and an aerobic

twenty-meter shuttle run. To meet mental/psychological requirements, all four police

services require applicants to pass a psychological screening. However, only the OPS and

TPS explicitly stated in the minimum requirements recruiting page that applicants must

be mentally capable of performing the duties of the position. Concerning education, all

four of the police services required individuals to have at the least a high school diploma

or its equivalent. On the other hand, volunteer experience was only officially sought after

by the CPS. In regards to additional character traits and attributes, all four police services

desired applicants to possess similar traits. Honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness were

common across all four police services while other traits included self-confidence, self-

control, fairness, interpersonal skills, and valuing diversity.

In summary, the four police services sampled indicated similar traits required

from their applicants. There were no significant differences between recruiting criteria of

police services in Ontario, compared to those sampled in Alberta. Therefore, the traits

outlined in Table 5.1 above will be used to compare to those that police officers on the

forum found desirable in applicants.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As investigated in the previous chapter, there do not exist any significant differences in the recruiting processes, and the official recruitment criteria of the four police services sampled. This chapter will be devoted to presenting the findings as well as discussing any implications that the findings present. The first section will be devoted to answering research question (a) "Which traits are acceptable versus unacceptable among law enforcement applicants?" In the subsequent section, the police-applicant interactions are examined to address research questions (b) "how do members of the law enforcement community interact with individuals who they deem appropriate versus inappropriate?" and, (c) "What can interactions between the law enforcement community and applicants tell us about the nature of the police culture?"

Applicant Traits

The following section of the chapter will be dedicated to examining the traits and characteristics that were seen as desirable by police officers on blueline.ca. This section will answer the following research questions and sub-research questions: (1) How do police officers socially construct the ideal police applicants? How do these social constructions align with official recruitment policies and practices? (a) Which traits are acceptable versus unacceptable among law enforcement applicants? The section will be divided into three categorical themes: (1) Self-improvement, (2) The application process, and (3) Additional personality characteristics.

Self-improvement

      Volunteering. In contrast to the application criteria on police services' websites, volunteering was associated with self-improvement which was a sought after trait by

officers on the forum. One of the main findings is that applicants were encouraged to

volunteer in areas that were non-policing related. The forum's police officers argued that

the wealth of experience in other areas exposed the applicant to people from different

walks of life, thus making the applicant a better-rounded individual which improved his

or her chances of getting hired. As *TO_Hopeful* wrote,

> When it comes to volunteer work and other extracurricular activities: branch out. More and more police services are looking for well-rounded people with a wide array of life experiences. You'll be working with/for civlians [sic] from all walks of life so it's important to have experiences with all kinds of different people.

Bihard added, "you'll find yourself all too busy before long, and setting yourself up for

diversity in your pursuits will help keep you balanced, and will expose you to interesting

people outside of the field you're working towards."

Volunteering outside the occupation of policing was also sought by police officers

on the forum as being advantageous in the interview stage of the recruitment process.

Cannon fodder wrote,

> Volunteering anywhere is never a bad thing, but in the interest of being a better applicant I second branching out of your volunteer work. As an example I volunteered for the St. John ambulance [sic] brigade and provided first aid at events and those experiences assisted me greatly in my interview stage.

Although volunteering may not always guarantee a place in the police service, it is a

sought after trait by both police services in their online criteria (e.g., EPS) and police

officer members of the forum.

The data suggest one reason applicants were encouraged to pursue volunteer

experience in areas other than policing is to experience diversity. Diversity was

operationalized by police officers on the forum as cultural diversity, or exposure to

individuals who belong to different cultural backgrounds and traditions that may also possess different cultural norms and values. The nature of the policing profession has officers interacting with people from different walks of life. Volunteering was viewed as providing applicants an opportunity to interact and become familiar with different individuals, something that would be experienced once on the job. Experiencing diversity would be an asset given nature of community-based policing model that many police services have embraced (Griffiths, 2008). Police service in their official recruiting criteria recommended that applicants acquire the skills and attributes that volunteering provides prior to applying. In terms of diversity, valuing diversity (e.g. volunteering with new immigrant groups) was also seen as an important trait for the applicant to possess by police organizations. Therefore, the opinions of the officers on Blueline.ca aligned with those of official recruitment criteria.

Volunteer organizations often require members to obtain a criminal records check prior to the beginning of a placement. Volunteers can therefore be perceived as having a higher degree of integrity and trustworthiness, a trait that recruiters seek in successful applicants. Moreover, individuals who volunteer exhibit high scores in personality traits such as agreeableness and extraversion (Carlo, Okun, Knight, & de Guzman, 2005), that have been linked to success in application processes (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Lievens, Highhouse, & Corte, 2005; Rynes and Gerhart, 1989).

Education. Posts in both police service-related and non-police service-related discussions on the forum were concentrated on whether or not to pursue a post-secondary degree, and if so, which degree to pursue. Many of the members of Blueline agreed that having a post-secondary education was a valuable trait for applicants. *Torontonian17*

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asked how he could improve himself in the context of being a better future officer when he asked,

> The post-secondary degree is a specific question I would like all of your opinions on. I know the police foundations program that is offered isn't... quite worth it, so I was looking into Criminal Justice at Ryerson. When I was picking a degree, I had the question in mind of what would make me a better police officer and what would help me serve the general public better.

In replying to the question *TO_Hopeful* wrote, "I think you're right to focus [on] your education as you've stated". Furthermore, many members of the forum believed that a post-secondary education was advantageous in the application process as it provides applicants with transferrable skills, as well as the opportunity to be involved in diverse situations in order to gain valuable life experience.

If education is important, than which path should an applicant take to be successful in the process? There were three separate paths of education that emerged from the eleven discussion threads analysed. The first was a Police Foundations (PF) diploma which applicants can complete in a two year time period. None of the members in the threads sampled advised applicants to pursue a diploma in PF. The second was a university degree in either criminology or criminal justice (Crim/CJ). Applicants would be able to attain this credential within a four year period. Approximately thirty-one percent of the officers of the forum in the threads sampled advised applicants to pursue the Crim/CJ major. The last path mentioned by 69% of the members sampled on the forum was the notion of pursuing a non-policing related major.

In relation to PF, forum members generally viewed it negatively. PF is a program offered at community colleges in Ontario that has a policing based curriculum where students learn about various aspects of law enforcement such as case law and

investigations. The general consensus on the forum was that PF was to be avoided.

Whistler22 summarizes well the reason that many forum members were against PF,

> The reason people say what they do about Police Foundations is because:
> 1. If you get hired, police college will teach you the hands on stuff you need to know for the job. 2. Graduating with a PF diploma will benefit you in two career paths: Police/other Law Enforcement, or Security Guard type work. So if you don't get your police job the skills you learn in PF only really benefit you in security type work which is relatively low paying (and which you would be able to get with a pulse and a high school diploma anyway). Some people think that police foundations programs are "required" to get into policing/LE, or will guarantee you get hired. PF programs are neither.

According to this officer, many applicants believed that they must study PF in order to be eligible for work in policing. However according to the forum members, PF was not seen as being able to increase ones chances of being hired because the material that students learn in PF is taught to officers in police college. Furthermore, it was viewed as being fruitless, as applicants would learn policing-related matters at the police college after being hired on as recruits.

An alternative to attending PF for many applicants was to pursue a degree in criminology or criminal justice. Attending university to study the two degrees was looked upon more positively than PF, however was not seen by all officers as the most ideal route to take. The university degree was valued more than PF by the members of the forum because of its applicability outside the realm of policing. Individuals who acquired a university degree majoring in criminology or criminal justice developed more transferable skills than their college counterparts. *Whistler22* wrote,

> Criminal Justice/Criminology is a different story. Mainly because it is not a "hands on" type program which is aiming you to only a police career. In fact, it is probably aiming you more towards a career somewhere else in the

9-5 justice system (e.g., law school, parole/probation, social work). University degrees by nature are a lot broader and less specific than college diplomas. Not to say they are better or worse, but you come away with a much different experience.

Crim/CJ opened the applicants up to more possibilities in the event that they were not selected by the police service of their choice. *Whistler22* writes,

So, if you […] don't get hired you have plenty of options with that degree anyway. You might take it and decide you want to be a crown prosecutor and end up in law school, who knows. Also, take advantage of those placements, because they will most likely be what gets you a well-paying job right out the door (if you don't get into policing right away).

However, not all believed that a university degree in Crim/CJ would be beneficial in the recruiting process. *Argyll* wrote, "I've seen no real evidence that a Crim degree helps either with getting on or with promotions". When it came to choosing between PF and the university degrees, forum police officer members were more likely to support the university route (0% versus 31%).

One interesting finding is that applicants were most encouraged to consider alternate fields of education rather than those that were policing-related. For example, *Argyll* wrote, "I'll leave others to comment on some other things in your post (which I know they will) but in regards to the university/college thing, take what you would want to do if you had just been told that you could never be a copper". Having a 'backup plan' was often mentioned to applicants on the forum as the application process does not always end in the applicant becoming a police recruit. *Darwin* wrote, "it looks like you are doing everything right but as others have said get an education that you can fall back on". In terms of promotions *Whistler22* wrote,

As for promotions down the road, I can't really answer that, but I suspect if that is what you want that you would be better off in some sort of

management/program manager type program... once people get a white shirt and a Blackberry to play with, their job is all numbers, pie charts, and politics anyway, doesn't matter if they are working for the police, another govt [sic] agency, or IBM.

Members of the forum pushed the notion of attaining a degree in something non-related because of the physical nature of police work. The chance of having a career-ending injury was considered as being fairly high in the police profession. For this reason, applicants were encouraged to study something that they could fall back on.

> If I were to do it again I would have taken a trade or finished by [sic] BA before getting into the force. This would have allowed for a backup plan if something were to happen if I was hurt or anything like that. I always tell people to stay away from policing specific programs. First of [sic] they teach you what you will be taught at your academy anyway. Second of all if your [sic] hurt or not suitable for a policing job it doesn't leave many other options than a security or a feeder agency. (PHB)

Recceguy added, "you are one blown knee or stupid decision away from never becoming a police officer and are now stuck with a degree that is relatively useless in helping you find meaningful employment".

The value of diverse experience seen for volunteering was also found in education where it was viewed as an opportunity for increasing an applicant's employability.

Brihard wrote,

> Some gratuitous advice: A very directed focus on policing is not necessary. I'm not saying to avoid criminology- my crim degree didn't hinder me in getting a badge - but make use of and have fun with your electives and your free time. You'll find yourself all too busy before long, and setting yourself up for diversity in your pursuits will help keep you balanced, and will expose you to interesting people outside of the field you're working towards.

The data suggest attaining a more general university degree or a vocational diploma provides applicants with a backup in the event that they were not hired by a

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police service. Further, *Darwin22* writes that individuals should not only focus on one

law enforcement agency. Applicants should keep the doors open to other law

enforcement organizations if that is truly what they would like to pursue in life,

> If you like helping people check out social work related programs. If you
> are really interested in pursuing something in public safety/security I know
> Humber has a criminal justice degree that offers a coop term. A few of the
> guys and gals at my old gig did that program and the coop placement really
> helped them find gigs in the corrections field (Parole, probation, half way
> house, CO^2/CX^3). That can open doors for CSC^4, $CBSA^5$, etc.

Having a diploma that is non-law enforcement related also had advantages in

terms of being well-acquainted with fellow colleagues. For example, a degree outside the

confines of policing presents rookie officers an opportunity to fraternize with their fellow

colleagues. *Redfields Apprentice* wrote,

> I work with guys who were HVAC installers, plummers [sic], electricians,
> heavy equip operators, mechanics. All the guys with trades certs make cash
> on the side doing work for coppers. I basically work 6 months of the year.
> Helping guys out with AC installs or brake jobs makes you some quick cash
> and lots of friends! Plus you have a plan B if policing is a no go…

Pursuing an education in any of the three paths had its advantages and

disadvantages. Ultimately, members of the forum encouraged applicants to pursue a post-

secondary education in any field of interest. Programs in PF or criminology were not

viewed as improving the applicant's chances of being hired. However, what was most

important was that applicants pursue a post-secondary education, irrespective of the field,

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[2] Correctional Officer
[3] Alternate acronym for Correctional Officer
[4] Canadian Securities Course
[5] Canadian Border Services Agency

Recceguy wrote, "Police services couldn't care less what your degree is in, they just want to see a commitment to continuing education in some facet".

According to the data, the ideal applicant must have attained an education beyond the high school level by the time he or she submits the application. The specific degree or diploma was not as important as the willingness to pursue further education and better oneself. The officers on the forum did not explicitly state any reason why the attainment of an education beyond the high school level was seen as being desirable. However, members of the forum agreed that pursuing an education outside of policing allowed applicants the opportunity to fall back on an alternate career in the event that they were not selected. Having an education in a trade was seen as advantageous because it provided recruits the opportunity to establish relationships with fellow officers and socializing outside of work.

When compared to official recruiting criteria, police services require applicants to possess at minimum a high school diploma in order to be seen as desirable for employment. There is evidence to suggest that most applicants have completed at least two years of post-secondary school prior to applying to a police service (Griffiths, 2008, p.117). Previous studies suggest that individuals with at least a college education outperform their high school graduate counterparts when working the same job (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Also, individuals who succeed in college have been viewed as being more likely to exhibit conscientiousness, a trait that has been previously seen as being most important in terms of predicting job performance (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003).

Police officer attitudes on the forum depart from those of official police recruitment criteria. It may be that the officers on the forum are speaking from their personal experience, having attained a post-secondary diploma or degree. A high school diploma is only the minimum required by police services, and the officers believe that a post-secondary school diploma or degree will increase an applicant's chances of being hired.

The Application Process

The application process to a police service is a long and arduous process. Applicants must go through an array of tests of their physical and mental ability before being given the chance to become a police recruit. The discussion turns to examining the data collected on the forums in relation to the application process itself. The section describes some of the difficulties that applicants face and presents the traits that the officers on the forum believe are important in order to be successful in the process.

Applying. Members of the forum spoke of the difficulties and uncertainties of the application process. In respect to applicant hiring, members were quick to offer advice by emphasizing that not many officers were hired the first time they apply. *Brihard* wrote, "very rarely does a first time applicant get hired on right away. It does happen though and those applicants are generally exceptional people and get lucky". Given this perspective, one can conclude the officers on Blueline.ca believe that the majority of the applicants who apply to police services are turned away the first time.

For those who were unsuccessful their first time applying, the police officers on the forum encouraged them to be persistent and reapply. *Supahduck* wrote "To the OP...... keep on trying, eventually something will stick". *Supahduck* encouraged the applicant to

keep applying and he may receive an offer based on the pool of applicants at the time. *Facetha* added, "so, don't give up if it doesn't work the first few times, My friend is at OPC[6] now for a GTA[7] Police service, his formal attempt to enter policing in Ontario was in, get this, 2000! 13 years! So, it ain't over till its over". Furthermore, applicants were also encouraged to update and upgrade their skills in order to improve their chances of being hired the next time they applied. *TO_Hopeful* wrote, "[…] apply again if this is something you really want. Take that time to improve yourself for the position: do more volunteer work, learn another language, take up BJJ[8] or something and stay fit, and stay out of trouble". Therefore according to the officers on the forum traits such as the mental resilience to push through defeat and the ability to improve oneself were seen as positive for applicants to possess.

The lottery. The members of the law enforcement forum compared the hiring process to a lottery, or a sense of 'being in the right place at the right time'. According to forum members, in the recruitment process applicants often possess the same traits, had the same employment/volunteer experience, and one of the applicants was chosen over the other. According to the police officers of the forum, the application process comes down to timing and chance. Timing referred to when an applicant submitted his or her application because police services are looking to hire a different number of officers each time. Applicants who apply during a time of higher intake increase their chances of being hired versus ones who apply during times of a smaller intake. *Hired Goon* wrote, it "also has to do with timing. If a suitable applicant comes along and there are vacancies for a

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[6] Ontario Police College
[7] Greater Toronto Area
[8] Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

class just around the corner, the process will be accelerated". In terms of chance, *Devilwoman* wrote that the application process was a lottery, "it's a lottery. Sometimes your number (aka skills, experiences, interests) doesn't come up with one but does with another". However, not all agreed with the sentiment that the recruiting process was attributed to chance and timing. *Dempsterjim* wrote that the recruiting process was not as random as the forum's applicants were lead to believe by the serving members,

> Finally I don't believe in the "being in the right place at the right time" or "lucky ones" this isn't a lottery!!! I actually find it to be insulting to recruiters in policing. I'm confident that those who are in recruiting are only hiring the ones who have the meat and potatoes to make sure that myself and platoon mates get home to our family's at the end of a shift.

Luck was seen as members of the forum as a contributor to success in the application process.

Staffing problems, shifting winds, what happens happens. According to officers on the forum, there are aspects of the application process to which applicants have no control over, one of which is the adjudication process. *Cityblue*, wrote on how applicants only really had control over the physical and academic testing stages of the application process, "I think that's because it's the most involved of the stages - as in you have the most control over your success in it. The rest of the stages are straight forward - you're either fit or not; you either pass the tests or not (can't really "game" them); you're truthful or not".

Another aspect that applicants were seen as being able to control was their volunteer experiences. *Jframer7* mentioned that adding experience to one's resume was the best option in terms of making oneself more desirable: "the decision ultimately lies in other people's hands, your [sic] judged on past actions, not present or future. Put your

best foot forward and what happens, happens". *SupahDuck* commented on how the individual preparedness of the candidate was only half of the picture when it came down to hiring decisions. The system is very bureaucratic.

> Your personal preparation as a candidate is only half of the staffing picture.... the other half is the vagaries and black magic of the staffing department itself, and the corporate staffing needs they are trying to satisfy...... things change on the fly, that are COMPLETELY outside anyone's control, and it's a difficult job at the best of times to try and match staffing processes with these shifting winds.

Staffing processes refers to the desirability criteria that police services look for when deciding on hiring new officer recruits. Communities are becoming more diverse, as a result police services must hire officers to emulate these trends (Griffiths, 2008). For example, if a police service requires an applicant to cater to a certain community because of a language barrier, than the service will be more likely to hire an applicant who speaks the language being sought after.

Often, individuals overestimate their ability to control situations, including those that they have no influence over (Thompson, 1999). Internalizing the notion that some things are out of your control can be a very important trait for an applicant to possess. Given the nature of police work, officers are often finding themselves in situations in which they are unable to control the outcome. Individuals develop an illusion of control (Thompson, 1999). The illusion of control is most prevalent in situations where factors are present such as "personal involvement, familiarity, foreknowledge of the desired outcome, and success at the task" (p. 188). The policing profession presents the opportunity for officers to find themselves in situations in which they are trained to achieve the desired outcome, but are unable to due to other factors. For example, when an

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officer attends to a dying victim of a motor vehicle accident the officer is trained in life-saving techniques, but might not be able to achieve the desired outcome of keeping a victim alive. Previous research suggests that individuals who exhibit high illusions of control are more likely to develop helplessness as well as depression (Donovan, Leavitt, and Walsh, 1990).

Therefore, according to the officers of the forum a trait that would be helpful for future officers to possess would be the ability to control one's emotions in the form of not worrying about the things that one cannot control. Previous research has indicated that situations that officer's cannot control have the potential to take both a physical and psychological toll on officers (Burbeck & Furhnam, 1984; Newman & Lyon, 2009; Ones et al., 2007; Sanders, 2008; Sarchione & Cuttler, 1998; White, 2008). Therefore, applicants who are better able to control their emotions would be more suitable for the position. In comparison, all police services officially required applicants to pass a psychological screening test to be considered for employment. Only the OPS and TPS had the ability to mentally perform the duties of the position as a requirement and EPS listed stress management as an essential trait for applicants to possess. Therefore, police officers of the forum were in line with official recruiting criteria in the sense that the mental ability, as defined by the examples given was seen as desirable among applicants.

Additional Personality Characteristics

This subsection is devoted to examining the traits and experiences that were unable to fit into one specific category. This section will explore: the notion of the ideal applicant, applying to multiple police services, the ability to accept criticism, and the consequences

dishonesty and prior criminal behaviour on the chances of an applicant being hired by a police service.

Confidence, initiative and the perfect applicant. One of the purposes of this research project was to attempt to determine the traits that would help applicants be successful in the recruiting process. Many applicants on the forum had a sense of inferiority in terms of their traits in comparison to other applicants. *SuraSub* was a prime example of this sense of inferiority when he wrote, "I just have it in my head, that everyone who is applying has super skill sets. Sorta [sic] like applying to post-graduate schools where we assume everyone is a 3.7 GPA and such".

The officers on the forum commented in saying that there did not exist 'one' perfect applicant. Instead, applicants may have several different traits that are favourable to recruiters. *8ch* wrote that through his experience, there was no ideal applicant that he could have compared himself to, "from what I understand, there's no perfect applicant, and they come from all different walks of life. That means there's not an exact 'template' of the perfect applicant you can compare yourself with". To further that notion, *PHB* added that police recruits come from all walks of life and that many different traits could be seen by recruiters as being advantageous in the recruiting process.

> There is no magic pill that you can take that will guarantee a hire onto a policing agency. If you look at the backgrounds of the last class of TPS recruits they will all be different. Some will volunteer some wont [sic], some will be in the military and some could be textile workers.

The question arose, which traits should applicants possess to be successful in the recruiting process? The response on the forum was that there was no one answer to that question. What separated the successful versus unsuccessful applicants, according to

Vansmack are additional qualifications that may not be specified in official recruiting criteria. *Vansmack* wrote,

> Being successful in every step of the hiring process doesn't automatically result in you getting hired. Being competitive means that you can stack your qualifications up against everyone else who has successfully completed every step of the hiring process and have more going for you and less going against you than everyone else does. Ultimately there could really be nothing wrong with you, but there would be 20 spots to be filled and you're the 21st ranked applicant.

Thus, applicants were encouraged to gain as much life experiences and qualifications in order to be successful in the hiring process. For example, *IWannaBeACop* wrote of qualifications that he attained in an attempt to succeed in the application process, "I've taken a Suicide Intervention Course through the Canadian Mental Health Association, child car seat technician courses and various e-learning courses through work". *Recceguy* responded, "times are terrible right now for getting hired[…] Just keep doing what you're doing". Police applicants must accumulate as much life experience and qualifications in order to improve their chances in the application process.

   Applying to more than one police service. Applicants on the forum discussed concerns that simultaneously applying to more than one police service would hinder their chances of being hired. *Ms76* mentioned that because of the competitiveness of the process, applicants should apply to more than one service, but not every service.

> It's a competitive process and if you really want to get in you need to apply. I don't think services can shun you for trying to get hired for a position that you are going to make a career out of. Having said that, I think if you apply everywhere and anywhere then it may not look that good. For example, if you live in Toronto and you apply to Windsor and Ottawa and everywhere in between it may look excessive. Personally I applied to 5 that were close enough that I wouldn't mind driving there every day.

In contrast, many of the police officers on the forum encouraged applicants to apply to services that the applicant would be comfortable working in. *Basketcase* wrote, "apply wherever you're willing to work. There's nothing wrong with applying to a bunch of services. I applied to about six or seven and was hired by three of them." *PHB* added to this sentiment writing, "Apply anywhere you would be willing to work then go from there. I applied to about four different agencies and was in the process with three when I got hired on with my current employer".

Applying to more than one service was not seen as something hindering an applicant in the application process. *Scott90* wrote,

> I applied for two services, both asked if I had any active applications, but did not have any issues with it. They spoke to each other constantly throughout my applications and I ultimately ended up getting offers from both a few days apart.

Therefore, the ability to possess the initiative to apply to multiple services is looked upon positively by the officers of Blueline.ca and they believe it results in an increased chance of being hired by a police service.

The ability to accept criticism. Police officers play a unique role in society where they have the legal right to exercise authority over the general population. As such, officers' actions are often heavily criticized and held to a higher standard. One important aspect of the application process that transfers into the role of the police officer is the individual applicant's ability to accept criticism and change their behaviour accordingly. Seeking feedback from a recruiter in terms of a failed application was seen as desirable by the police officer members of the forum. *GPZ* wrote, "As others have said, seek some real feedback from a recruiter. I'm not really familiar with the process in Ontario but around here, we will tell you if further applications would be welcome or not and if

you're wasting your time we'll tell you". Seeking feedback from a recruiter was seen as a

testament to an individual's ability to find faults in him or herself. However, the seeking

of advice does not stop at the application stage as *PHB* writes, "[…] the attitude that you

displayed is the kind that is needed in policing. Someone that recognizes mistakes and

improves on them. Believe me if you get into polcing [sic] lots of mistakes will be

made". Therefore, the ability to accept criticism based on attitude and improve on your

mistakes was recognized as a desirable trait in the application process by the serving

police members on the forum.

   Dishonesty and prior criminal behaviour. According to the forum officers, an

important personality trait on the forum is integrity. Integrity as defined by the police

officers on the forum is notions of trustworthiness, credibility, and honesty. This was best

illustrated after an applicant, *Rufuswins* posted a question regarding cheating in college

and being hired by a police service.

> I am worried about my recent academic integrity record at the university
> which I attended for 4 years. During my last year of studies, I fell off the
> wagon because it was an extremely difficult year, and I took many shortcuts.
> I was found to have plagiarised 2 times. The first offence had to do with
> paraphrasing a paragraph, and the second was during the final "take home"
> exam, where my answer was similar to that found online. After my second
> time I was placed on academic suspension for 1 year.

The immediate reaction that followed from the forum's community members was

negative and hostile. *Recceguy* wrote,

> When I was at the academy....integrity was EVERYTHING. The first hint
> at a lack of integrity and you were gone. Now that I'm on the road, integrity
> is everything. The first hint at a lack of integrity and you're going in front
> of a panel to explain why you should keep your badge.

Another reaction to the post was followed by *Basketcase* who wrote, "Police services have fired people for cheating at police college. You cheated. Plain and simple. How do you think it will play out? You're a cheater so you're likely fried would be my guess".

One of the concerns on the forum with integrity was with relapsing to prior criminal behaviour. *K-B* wrote, would hate to see what you would do if you got stressed and 'fell off the wagon' if you got the job! This job is unique in that integrity means everything... Court would be a nightmare if you had to explain that to a judge after a defence lawyer found out".

Radfields Apprentice added, "when life gets tough you going to take short cuts again? Take a little bit of drug money? Little bit of extortion perhaps to make ends meet? Cheat on your promotionals [sic]?" What became evident was these officers place a heavy value on integrity and the likelihood of this applicant being hired on by a police service was considered to be slim to none.

In a separate post, a student asked the forum members if it would be possible to become a police officer after having an addiction to marijuana. *MitraJ* wrote, "I vaporized marijuana quite often (once a day). The feeling of vapor was so pleasant it didn't feel like the typical harsh foggy mind that "stoners" may get, and it helped me relax right before bed". Engaging in illegal habitual behaviour was viewed very negatively by the community. *Chambo* wrote,

> I know plenty of people that have done some dumb, stupid (illegal) stuff and gotten hired. But the difference is that they're disclosures were mistakes i.e. something that they can prove isn't typical of their normal behaviour. Smoking weed 500 times in a 2 year period isn't a mistake, it was a conscious decision you made to break the law every day.

Engaging in prior criminal activity may also affect investigation outcomes once the applicant gets hired. *Sk82* wrote, "If you're on the stand as the arresting officer for a drug file and defence counsel asks you if you have ever tried drugs. It's going to be a huge credibility issue that you have used drugs that many times. That will always be reality no matter how long it's been". The findings suggest integrity manifested in trustworthiness and honesty were important personality characteristics for applicants to possess according to the police officer members of the forum.

Integrity was also seen as a very important trait for officers to possess given the public service nature of the profession. Police services attempt to select officers with high levels of trustworthiness in order to reduce the likelihood of officer misconduct. Previous research has linked leadership style and opportunity for misconduct as being conducive to officer wrongdoing (Huberts, Kaptein, & Lasthuizen, 2007; Ivkovic, 2002; Sellbom, Fischler, & Ben-Porath, 2007). Other research indicates that prior behaviour has a tendency to repeat itself in future behaviour (Oullette & Wood, 1998). The more the police services can select individuals with a high degree of integrity, the more likely they will avoid officers who would be inclined to participate in disreputable conduct. As a result of strict selection criteria, only one-half to one percent of police officers and civilians potentially engage in corruption (Miller, 2003). Examples of corruption by both civilians and sworn personnel include leaking confidential information to the public, conspiring with criminals and committing crimes, fraud, theft, and domestic violence (Miller, 2003).

Police officer attitudes aligned with official recruiting criteria in that integrity was an important character trait for the applicant to possess. Trustworthiness and honesty are

determined in the last stage of the recruiting process in both police services in Ontario and Alberta. The background investigation stage involves the police service verifying the applicant's application, as well as interviewing individuals that the applicant interacts or interacted with previous, as well as the viewing of their social media page. Integrity was included in a list of attributes that were labelled as being of good moral character and habits. Toronto Police Service (2014) defines this as, "[being] an individual other people would look upon as being trustworthy and having integrity. You must follow the core values of the Toronto Police Service: Honesty, Integrity, Fairness, Reliability, Respect…". The data suggest the forum's police officers were therefore aligned with their respective police services in viewing integrity as an essential character trait for applicants to possess in the application process.

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Police – Applicant Relations

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Sub-research question B pertained to interactions on the forum, and how police officers interacted with applicants who they deemed appropriate for a law enforcement career versus those who they defined as inappropriate candidates. Interactions observed between applicants who were considered appropriate and police officers were generally positive. Those applicants were often encouraged to apply or keep on trying in the application process. For example, in response to an applicant not being hired after multiple tries, *Recceguy* wrote, "Times are terrible right now for getting hired. Budgets are down and most services have cut their number of hires (assuming they are even still hiring at all). Just keep doing what you're doing…" In another post where an individual was not able to get hired, *TO_Hopeful* wrote, "It's said the TPS likes to see people who are determined and don't give up. In 3 years you'll only be 26". When it comes to age, the average age of

police recruits in the Toronto Police Service in 2005 was 28 years old (Griffiths, 2008, p. 118). Therefore, encouraging the applicant to apply at the age of twenty-six is fairly appropriate considering the average age of a police recruit in the Toronto Police Service.

At times, forum members also provided advice to applicants in order to aid them in the application process. *Shawshank* brought up the issue of interview skills when an applicant was not able to get past the interview stage of the application process, "It may be your interview skills. I know I had problems with articulating and I wasn't sure how to answer a number of questions". Therefore, forum interactions between members who believed that the individual was an appropriate applicant and aligned with the values, beliefs, and the police occupational culture were likely to support that applicant and by providing advice.

Interactions observed between applicants who were viewed as being inappropriate differed greatly from those officers on the forum found to be suitable candidates. These less suitable applicants based on their posts often had issues with integrity, criminality, honesty, and ultimately trustworthiness. In an response to *Rufuswins* academic integrity problem (see above), *Recceguy* wrote,

> YOU will have to disclose the fact you got put on academic probation as they ask you that exact question in your pre background questionnaire [sic]. Planning to try and lie? I can tell you that's not an advisable course of action. There are literally thousands of applicants without integrity issues....like I stated previously....I'd start looking for a new career.

Another member *Basketcase* added, "You didn't make a mistake. You developed a habit and continued with it despite being illegal. To answer your question, an alcoholic and a pill user would not be hired either. You're a fool to think otherwise". Others were more respectful in their approach where they suggested that the applicant search for a new line

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of work. *Court Officer* wrote, "I can't see how you'd have any chance at a policing career. I would start taking a different direction in your career goals".

In another example where an applicant admitted to having previously used marijuana, the applicant was scolded and informed not to continue with the application process. *VanSmack* wrote, "your past is most certainly an indicator of future behaviour, and when people's lives and liberty are at stake it's usually best to hire people who haven't shown a pattern of poor decision and moral flexibility when it comes to the law". Applicants who were seen as less-than desirable to the forum's officers received negative criticism when asking about their chances of being hired on as a police officer. Those who were seen as desirable, were given the opportunity to ask further questions, given advice in the application process, and were treated generally better than their counterparts.

Discussion

Throughout the analysis, there is evidence to suggest that posts by police officers are mostly aligned with official recruitment criteria. Volunteering was viewed by the police officer members of the forum as an asset when applying to police services. Official recruiting criteria encouraged applicants to gain a wealth of volunteer life experience prior to applying to a police service. In addition to this, officers on the forum found traits such as the mental resilience to push through defeat and the ability to improve oneself as positive attributes for applicants to possess. Furthermore, officers on the forum recognized the ability to accept criticism and improve on one's mistakes as a desirable trait in the application process. In regards to education, the officers' views departed from official recruiting criteria in that they expected applicants to have at least a post-

secondary education prior to applying to a police service. Lastly, honesty and integrity were recognized as the most important assets for applicants to possess in the application process. However, a disjuncture exists between patrol officers' and official recruitment criteria in respect to definitions of integrity. Police officers operationally defined integrity as an absence of previous misconduct whereas official recruitment criteria defined integrity as being of good moral character and habits and an absence of criminal behaviour in the previous three years. In regards to police-applicant relations, officers on the forum were more likely to offer positive criticism and advice to applicants who they defined as having an opportunity to being hired by a police service based on forum posts. Those who were viewed as having no chance in the application process were dissuaded from applying to a police service and encouraged to pursue other lines of work.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the police culture by examining the social construction of the police applicant by current police officers in an online forum. The study identified the different traits that are seen as desirable in applicants by current police officers, compared those traits to official police recruiting criteria, and examined the substantive content of interactions between officers and applicants. Prior research has examined the traits of police officers and police recruits (Burbeck & Furhnam, 1984; Newman & Lyon, 2009; Ones et al., 2007; Sanders, 2008; Sarchione & Cuttler, 1998; White, 2008); however, there was little that was known about individuals who aspire or intend to become a police officer.

The research objective was make a contribution to the literature by providing officers' perceptions of an ideal applicant in comparison to police service recruitment materials, creating a working set of attributes that may influence police services in determining an appropriate organizational fit, and analysing discourse among officers and applicants to gain a deeper understanding of police culture. This chapter concludes with an overview of the empirical findings of the study, and a discussion of the theoretical implications. These are followed by limitations, and areas for future research.

Empirical Findings

The empirical findings suggest three major conclusions. First, police officer social constructs of the ideal applicant mostly align with police service official recruiting criteria. Second, officers are more likely to interact positively with applicants who they define as suitable candidates versus those who are viewed as having little chance in the application process. Finally, examining the social construction of the ideal police

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applicant provided a deeper look into the socialization of police officers in Canadian law enforcement, however, did not generate any valuable conclusions on the socialization process.

Alignment of recruiting criteria

The first conclusion is that many of the traits that police officer social constructions of the ideal applicant aligned with official recruiting criteria. Police officers on blueline.ca constructed the ideal applicant as a person who volunteers thereby gaining diverse experiences, must also have the ability to be in control of his or her emotions, be confident, possess the ability to accept criticism. The ideal police applicant must also be educated. Here, police officers' constructions diverged from official recruitment criteria in the sense that their expectations exceeded those of their police services. Police services require their applicants to have completed at least a four year high school diploma. According to the officers on the forum, the ideal applicant has completed post-secondary degree in criminology, criminal justice, or a non-policing major at the college or university level. Degrees and diplomas unrelated to the field of policing were viewed more favourably than those related to policing.

Integrity defined as trustworthiness and honesty were valued by both police services and police officers on the forum, police service attitudes differed from those of official recruitment criteria. One could argue that from the data, police officers on the forum operationalized honesty and trustworthiness as having an absence of previous misbehaviour. However, the examples given on the forum of prior misbehaviour may have been to the extreme. In both instances, the applicants were involved in extreme forms of misbehaviour – cheating compulsively at university, and having a history of

habitual drug use. In terms of cheating, the applicant was planning on not disclosing that information on his/her application form when applying to a police service. This kind of behaviour could possibly lead to serious issues of integrity in the future if the officer is hired and exhibits the same behaviour on duty.

Second, the four police services sampled require that applicants not have criminal charges pending through the courts, have no criminal charges that have not been granted a pardon, and that applicants have no criminal activity in the last three years that can be both detected or undetected (Calgary Police Service, 2014, Ottawa Police Service, 2014, Edmonton Police Service 2014, Toronto Police Service, 2014). Technically speaking, the applicant who was a habitual marijuana user could wait three years and attempt to apply to a police service of his or her choice. However, officers questioned the integrity of the applicant because of the habitual nature of his or her drug abuse. Officers believed that this also may pose issues of integrity in the future. The data did not provide sufficient evidence to suggest a major disconnect between the opinions of officers on the forum and official recruitment criteria.

Although the police officers belonging to the sampled services are employed in two separate provinces in Canada, all of their constructions of the ideal applicant appeared to be consistent with one ideal applicant. Therefore, the data suggests the potential for a consistent definition of the ideal applicant sought by police officers. After examining the data, it can be concluded that what truly separates recruits who are successful in the recruitment process from those less successful are their individual experiences represented by their education, previous employment, and past volunteer experience.

Previous studies identify a disjunction between patrol and supervisory police cultures (Chan, 1996; Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Skonick, 1975). However, this separation, apart from educational traits, was not significant when examining the social construction of the ideal police applicant. This may be an indication that police supervisors are working more closely together with their street-level colleagues in developing recruiting standards. The similarities in recruiting criteria may also be explained by examining police organizational promotion standards. If officers who are tasked with examining recruitment standards and criteria were selected because of their street-level orientation they would be better aware of the challenges that front-line officers face out on the street.

Another option that may have caused the similarities in recruiting standards may attest to the success of police recruiting strategies. Police services may simply be hiring applicants who exhibit the required traits and characteristics. In past studies, a disjuncture may have been present because of the newly developed organizational standards and hiring practices were not present in the officers sampled. Regardless the possibilities, the results are indicative that there exists a similar opinion between patrol officers and official recruitment criteria. This may be an indication that the opinions of street-level officers play a role in the bureaucratic process of establishing recruitment criteria.

Applicant-Officer Interactions

The second main finding of this research study was that officers were more likely to interact with applicants who were defined as suitable candidates versus those who were viewed as having a slim chance in being successful in the recruitment process. When applicants posted questions regarding employment after admitting to drugs use, issues of academic integrity, all posting officers recommended that those applicants not apply to

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become a police officer. Previous research has suggested that police services have struggled with issues of integrity among their officers (Huberts, Kaptein, & Lasthuizen, 2007; Ivkovic, 2002; Sellbom, Fischler, & Ben-Porath, 2007). Due to the close-knit relationships in the police culture (Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Skonick, 2002), officers responded negatively to those who thought they were able to gain access to these organizations, but had issues with integrity as defined by the officers on the forum. The findings from this study indicate that the police culture, characterized by its suspiciousness of outsiders (Skolnick, 1975) is still very real. Outsiders, in the context of the data, could be defined as individuals who participate in criminal or other misconduct behaviour that raises questions about their integrity. It is of no surprise then that police officers were extremely wary of individuals who based on their characteristics, felt they could not trust.

This suspiciousness of outsiders in the cases on the forum may be indicative of the still thriving retributive justice, 'us' versus 'them' mentality in patrol officer culture. Perhaps the data is an indication that the crime-fighting mentality is still engrained in patrol officer culture, despite the changes that have been implemented in police services towards a community-based policing model. Though the data does not provide significant evidence to ascertain this conclusion, it is worthwhile to note.

Socialization in Police Culture

Lastly, the third conclusion is that the resulting social constructions present to us the results of socialization within police organizations. Police occupational cultures contain the "accepted practices, rules, and principles of conduct that are situationally applied, and generalized rationales and beliefs" (Manning, 1995, p. 472). One of this study's main conclusions is that there does not appear to be a significant disjunction between which

traits police officers believe are required for successful applicants versus those that official recruiting criteria expects applicants to possess. A possible explanation for this finding may be the effectiveness of officer socialization into the police organizational culture. Socialization into the organization is essential for new recruits so that they become accustomed to the organization's rules, regulations, and practices (Paoline, 2003). Therefore identification of traits which are aligned with official recruitment criteria may be explained through the officer's adaptation of the organization's cultural values and norms.

Organizational theorists attribute this process of learning to what they call collective experience where learning is the result of "environmental jolts or surprises" such as new technologies or new demands (Marsick & Watkins, 2003, p. 135). When officers begin working in a new environment, they adapt to the organization's values and norms in which the culture of the organization acts as a foundation (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). As the organization's success is dependent on its members' ability to act cohesively, officers adopt these new meanings, some of which may be the traits that successful applicants should possess in order to be successful officers (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). It may be that as a result of positive socialization, officers are able to adapt the norms and values of the organization which are reflected in their definitions of suitable candidates and unacceptable applicants.

The divergence in views on the pre-recruitment stage between patrol officers and the official criteria may be an indication that the police culture is more dynamic than the dichotomy suggested by Reuss-Ianni (1983) of a patrol and supervisory culture. Perhaps this disjuncture is due to further distinctions between the content (i.e. ideas and values)

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and the socialization process into the police culture. Both the content and process of the police culture evolves but at the same time continue to espouse foundational values that serve as parameters for acceptable behaviour (e.g., integrity) (Schulenberg, 2006; 2013).

Theoretical Implications

Previous research has identified the divide between patrol officers and their supervisors in their occupational cultures (Loftus, 2010; Moskos, 2008). The findings of this study depart from past research in that the conceptualization of the ideal applicant by patrol officers was to some extent, related to that of official recruiting criteria – which is established by senior-ranking officials. This finding is suggesting that there may not always be this cultural divide. The findings have the potential to offer a new perspective into the recruiting process, a facet of police organizational culture that has yet to be explored. Further research in this area would add to the literature regarding recruiting processes. Exploring this facet further, future researchers can examine other occupations that have similar structures to police services in Canada. Some of which may include: Correctional Services Canada, the Canadian Forces, the Canadian Border Services Agency, as well as other EMS professionals such as fire fighters and paramedics. These studies would provide valuable insight into the culture of organizations that have yet been explored in the literature.

The findings suggest support for using the psychological tests of the Big Five Traits Inventory and the Eysenk Personality Questionnaire to predict success in the application process. Volunteering was a trait sought after by patrol officers because of its relation to gaining diverse experiences thus making the applicant a better-rounded individual. Previous research has noted that individuals who volunteer exhibit high scores

in personality traits such as agreeableness and extraversion (Carlo et al., 2005), which have been linked to success in application processes (Kristof-Brown et al, 2002; Lievens et al., 2005, Rynes and Gerhart, 1989).

Previous research has also demonstrated that individuals who complete college or university are more likely to exhibit conscientiousness, a trait that has been viewed as important in terms of predicting job performance (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003). Furthermore, the ability to control ones emotions was a key trait for officers to possess. A high score in neuroticism for example would be problematic as it would impede an officer's ability to do so, negative affecting his or her mental health. Although previous studies have failed to recognize the link between these traits and performance measurement, the presence of these traits can be applicable to predicting success in the police constable application process.

The results from this research also provide theoretical implications in the realms of vocation-based training. The dismissal of police foundations in lieu of university and a diversity of experiences accumulated through volunteering contradicts the rhetoric about applied vocation-based programs. It appears that in the context of policing, these programs do not meet their goals in training individuals adequately to become successful in the police application process. The dismissal of such training as appropriate for an applicant to possess in order to be successful raises interesting questions about the utility of applied degrees for law enforcement.

Limitations of the Study

There are four major limitations to bear in mind when interpreting the findings. The first limitation in the study is that a small number of players often have the tendency to

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overpower those voices that do not agree with the status quo (Kitzinger, 1995). This phenomenon was exhibited on the forum where a handful of police officers would reply to questions posed by potential applicants. It may be that other officers simply agreed with the forum replies and decided not to post. Another explanation is that individuals who expressed dissenting views from the status quo were labelled as being trolls[9] and were exiled from the forum by the moderators, unable to participate in any further discussions.

Second, an important limitation that emerges when conducting internet-based research is determining the authenticity of both, the members and the answers provided. Internet forums are places where individuals can register and be anonymous. Applicants can theoretically register by two different names and initiate conversation between those identities. The chance of an individual registering under multiple aliases was anticipated to be extremely low therefore it did not pose an issue for the study.

The third limitation of the study is concerned with interpreting text on the internet. In contrast to face-to-face interviews and focus groups, it is quite difficult to judge a person's attitude when examining online texts unless it is followed by an emoticon or explicitly stated that the individual is being serious or sarcastic. This limitation creates the potential for misinterpreting the data if it is not situated in the entire context of the conversation. This is complicated by the fact the researcher adopted the role of complete observer. These types of situations have the potential of having the researcher make judgement errors in his or her interpretation of the data. In order to

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[9] This was determined by observing interactions on the forum.

minimize this risk, the data collected was carefully examined and analysed within the context of the conversation.

The fourth limitation of the study is concerned with the generalizability of the findings. As with research conducted on specific communities, generalizability may be difficult to all police agencies in Canada. Although municipal police services were sampled from both Ontario and Alberta, it may also be difficult to extend the findings to encapsulate more police services in Canada such as provincial and federal police services. Furthermore, generalizability to police services in other countries such as the United States, as well as others would be difficult considering both legal and socio-cultural differences. The findings would most accurately be generalizable to the officers on Blueline.ca and the services to which they belong.

Future Research Directions

This study provides the foundation for future researchers to examine different subjects in the area of policing from a police officer perspective using an unobtrusive method. Prior to this study, no research has been conducted on police-related forums. The reason may be that researchers are unaware that police officer-related discussion forums exist in the online world. It would be very beneficial to explore these online worlds as internet-based research provides police officers an anonymous environment to voice their opinions on various facets of the trade. Apart from police officer-based forums, there also exist forums for: fire fighters, soldiers, paramedics, and other emergency service personnel. The forums are also not only exclusive to Canada, but exist in other countries, such as the United States. Future researchers can explore these online forums to acquire new insight into subjects that have yet to be answered in the academic sphere. For example, topics

such as post-traumatic stress disorder could be studied among emergency service personnel that would provide an anonymous, stigma-free environment for participants to voice their concerns.

Although previous research has examined the effects of organizational socialization on recruits' and officers' attitudes, personality, and psychological traits as a means of predicting whether a recruit will be successful compared to departmental guidelines once placed in the field (Burbeck & Furhnam, 1984; Newman & Lyon, 2009; Ones, et al., 2008; Sarchione & Cuttler, 1998; White, 2008), research has yet to examine the ability of recruits adapt to organizational norms and values. For example, by means of a longitudinal analysis, future researchers could explore whether individual attitudes towards recruiting criteria change based on the duration of a recruit in the profession. Future researchers could conduct longitudinal analyses examining these phenomena in officers from their recruit stage to after the officers have has exposure to the field. Future findings may be able to explain facets of police officer misconduct or mental health issues that have not yet been explored.

In an attempt to minimize the limitation of not experiencing dissenting opinions because of the nature of group research, future researchers could utilize methods such as face-to-face interviews with police officers. Interviews would minimize the intimidation factor that participants experienced on the forum because of being pressured to adhere to the status quo. One-on-one interviews could be held in confidence and completely confidential, something that would improve the validity of the answers. Lastly, to increase generalizability, the results from this study can be used to inform quantitative research. Future researchers may be able to use the findings in this study, apply them to

quantitative research methods such as a survey questionnaire, and distribute them among a greater amount of police services. If more officers agreed with the above traits as being beneficial for applicants to possess, than it would not only increase the external validity of the findings, but it would also increase the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, the study has to potential to provide input into how employee opinions compare to organizationally-sanctioned standards. It appears that no research to date has examined an employee's ability to adapt the organization's norms, values, and beliefs. Future research can examine the relationship between employee attitudes in comparison to organizational goals, and expand the literature regarding employee input on different organizational processes. It may be so that dissenting opinions on organizationally-sanctioned standards could be an indication of larger problems in the organizations themselves.

This study sought to determine how patrol officers socially constructed the ideal police officer applicant. According to the officer's sampled, the recruitment process does an adequate job in accepting applicants who are not involved in illegal activity in order to curb future misconduct. However, the study was not able to overtly cover aspects of the mental abilities and requirements for officers to possess in order to be successful on the job. Perhaps future research could examine the opinions of officers in relation to mental health requirements in an attempt to improve an aspect that has become an issue among Canadian first responders (Armstrong, 2014).

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