

4

The Police Culture

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the various ways in which the police subculture conflicts with the official norms and values of policing.
- Compare and contrast the various forms of an organization's culture.
- Identify and elaborate on variables that influence police officers' acceptance of the subculture.
- Describe the positive aspects of the police subculture.
- Identify the sources of *police stress*.
- Highlight the various strategies that both organizations and individual officers can implement to mitigate the negative effects of job-related stress.
- Describe the ways that the police subculture and stress are related.
- Identify and provide examples of the ways in which community policing can both increase and decrease stress levels among police officers.
- Describe the characteristics associated with the phenomenon of police *burnout*.

In Chapter 4, we focus on organizational and administrative aspects of policing, on the formal structure and the impact of police leaders. While these formal considerations are crucial to an understanding of the police role, there are two other contributing factors that must be considered in our attempt to understand policing as an occupation: the police subculture and the pressures and stresses of police work. Police administrators and the law specify the broad parameters within which officers operate,



❖ **PHOTO 4.1** This patrol officer is attempting to explain to members of his department’s administrative committee on traffic safety why the traffic accident he was involved in was unavoidable.

but the police subculture tells them how to go about their tasks, how hard to work, what kinds of relationships to have with their fellow officers and other categories of people with whom they interact, and how they should feel about police administrators, judges, laws, and the requirements and restrictions they impose.

Combined, the effects of formal pressures and the pressures generated by the police subculture often lead police officers to experience a great deal of stress in their occupational, social, and family lives—resulting in cynicism, burnout, and retirement, as well as a host of physical and emotional ailments. Further, many officers, at least initially, fail to recognize the extent to which the police subculture and their chosen occupation affect the way in which they view and act toward others.

According to Inciardi (1990), police officers develop resources to deal with the isolation from the community that results from the job and the police socialization process. These police subcultural attributes include “protective, supportive, and shared attitudes, values, understandings and views of the world,” which result in a *blue wall of silence* (p. 227), or closed police society. Furthermore, this process of socialization or the creation of a blue fraternity begins at the police academy, but as with most forms of occupation socialization, it is an ongoing process throughout the police officer’s career.

These factors interact and are reinforced by other officers, eventually leading to the development of attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions that reflect the dominant beliefs of almost all police officers. Ultimately, police officers cope with their organizational environment by taking a “lay low” or “cover your ass” attitude and adopting a crime-fighter or law enforcement orientation (Paoline, Myers, & Worden, 2000, p. 578). They quickly discover that when they are recognized, it is usually for a mistake or a violation, rather than for an achievement or effective policing, and they learn that hard work entails the risk of exposure and sanction. “Some believe that the professionalization of the police (i.e., removing politics from policing, scientific advances, and anti-police misconduct strategies) has been the catalyst for this isolation and the strengthening of the us-versus-them attitude associated with the police culture” (Paoline, Myers, & Worden, 2000, p. 579). Thus, the police culture is often viewed negatively, and the blue wall of silence has resulted in police officers not being held accountable for misconduct (Frye, 2006). However, it is important we realize that an organizational culture can have many positive effects and can actually reduce anxiety and uncertainty in human relationships and communicate the ideology that defines what the organization is all about (Champoux, 2006). Most agree that the organizational culture of a police department affects the behavior of the officers. Thus, the establishment of a professional, moral, ethical culture in a police organization can control, prevent, and punish misconduct and corruption. Of course the establishment of this type of culture relies in part on the organization’s hiring, retention, promotion practices, leadership, and socialization process for new police officers.

❖ The Police Subculture

According to the seminal work of William Westley (1970), the **police subculture** is a crucial concept in the explanation of police behavior and attitudes. The subculture, in his view, characterizes the public as hostile, not to be trusted, and potentially violent; this outlook requires secrecy, mutual support, and unity on the part of the police. Manning (1977) suggested that the inherent uncertainty of police work, combined with the need for information control, leads to police teamwork, which in turn generates collective ties and mutual dependency. Traditional characterizations of the police culture have focused on describing the shared values, attitudes, and norms created within the occupational and organizational environments of policing (Paoline, 2004, p. 205). However, some research has begun to investigate the assumptions associated with a single police culture. Paoline (2004) proposed the existence of different attitudinal subgroups of police officers. For example, although some groups of police officers represent many of the negative attitudes of the traditional culture, others often possess attitudes that would be considered polar opposites. In other words, as police departments have become more heterogeneous, a single cohesive police culture could be expected to give way to a more fragmented occupational group (Paoline, 2003). This expectation is supported by the representation of racial minorities, females, and college-educated personnel who bring to policing different outlooks and attributes based on past experiences that may affect the way in which police collectively interpret the world around them (Paoline, Myers, & Worden, 2000).

We must emphasize that the presence of an organizational culture in policing is not unique. Almost all organizations have a form of culture associated with the values, beliefs, and norms that are unique to the occupation and even to the individual

organization. In most cases, police officers are influenced by formal organizational structures and expressed organizational values and also by informal values, beliefs, norms, rituals, and expectations of other police officers that are passed along through the organizational culture (Adcox, 2000, p. 20). For example, a new police officer learns at the academy the laws and formal rules required before initiating a traffic stop on a motor vehicle. However, beyond these formalities, new officers quickly learn the importance of tone of voice, posture, and initial approach to a hysterical, threatening, or often apologetic driver. Veteran police officers in many cases have refined through many years of traffic stops a ritual or standard approach and accompanying explanation for almost all drivers.

POLICE STORIES

During your lifetime, it is likely you will be stopped by the police while driving a vehicle. Every driver is different, and even off-duty police officers admit they are sometimes nervous when a police car follows their vehicle. I have observed drivers watching a marked police vehicle in the rearview mirror almost collide with the vehicle in front of them. Other drivers upon observing the police, attempt to quickly fasten their seatbelt and often either run off the road or swerve into the approaching lane of traffic.

Often, drivers stopped by the police are nervous, angry, or remorseful. Some honestly admit their violations, while others lie to the police. I was taught to decide whether to write a ticket before you approach the vehicle and not let the emotions or statements of the driver influence the decision to arrest or issue a verbal warning. While this advice has merit, it is often not reality.

I stopped a person for driving 29 mph through a busy park that was posted 20 mph. Given the number of persons present watching whether I was going to ticket the driver and the fact that the driver had exceeded the speed limit by 9 mph, I decided to issue a speeding ticket before I exited the vehicle. However, as I completed the traffic stop, the driver quickly exited the vehicle and began running back toward my police car. At this point it became evident that the driver had not placed the car in park, but in reverse. The vehicle barely missed seriously injuring the driver and sustained major damage after crashing into a large tree. Needless to say, I completed an accident report and decided to not arrest the driver for speeding.

For a variety of reasons, a police officer may decide not to enforce the law. The exercise of discretion involving individual choice and judgment by police officers is a normal, necessary, and desirable part of policing.

Champoux (2006, pp. 70–91) discovered different but related forms of organizational culture: artifacts, values, and basic assumptions. The **artifacts** are the most visible parts of the organizational culture and include sounds, architecture, smells, behavior, attire, language, products, and ceremonies. Police culture is in part transmitted and

defined by certain artifacts. For example, police recruits quickly learn police jargon, how to address superiors, how to communicate on the radio, a writing style for police reports, and a host of other behaviors unique to policing.

Another form of police artifact is the patrol officer's uniform, which is a symbol of law and order and allows members of society to readily identify a police officer. Some departments have researched the use of blazers or a more casual form of dress to encourage police–community interactions and avoid the paramilitary style of uniform. However, today, almost all police departments have uniformed patrol divisions patrolling in squad cars.

The second form of organizational culture involves the values embedded in the organization. Champoux (2006, pp. 70–91) indicated that the in-use values are the most important because they guide the behavior of the organization. For example, new police officers often complete months of training on the street with an Field Training Officer. We cannot overemphasize the role of an FTO, especially in conveying the values of respect, integrity, honesty, and fairness to a new police officer. However, in policing, as in many occupations, conflicts often exist between values. For example, Pollock (2008, p. 291) concluded that if a police officer feels isolated from the community, her loyalty is to other police officers and not to the community. The following hypothetical scenarios ask you to consider the concept of loyalty in the police culture.

YOU DECIDE 4.1

1. You are on patrol and discover one of your fellow officers asleep in their squad car. What action would you take? Why?
 - a. Wake them
 - b. Wake them and tell them their behavior is unacceptable
 - c. Notify your supervisor
 - d. Take no action
 - e. You would take another action (Explain)

2. During routine patrol at approximately 3:00 a.m. you observe a vehicle driving erratically. There is no traffic present and you stop the vehicle, conduct field sobriety tests, and believe the driver is intoxicated above the legal limit of .08 BAC. At this point, the driver shows you identification that he or she is a state police officer who resides in your village.

What action would you take? Why?

- a. Immediately place the driver under arrest for driving under the influence
- b. Notify your supervisor
- c. Allow the driver to call someone on their cell phone to take them home
- d. Allow them to lock the vehicle and take them home in the squad car
- e. You would take another action (Explain)

The third and final form of organizational culture involves the basic assumptions of the organization. According to Champoux (2006, pp. 70–91), veteran employees of an organization are not consciously aware of the basic assumptions that guide the organization's behaviors. These assumptions develop over the history of the organization and include many aspects of human behavior, human relationships in the organization, and relationships with the organization's external environment. In most cases the assumptions are unconscious and are often difficult for veteran police officers to describe to new police officers. Often police officers comprehend these assumptions by observing the behaviors of other police officers in a variety of different situations. For example, Nelson and Quick (2006) described the presence of certain **organizational assumptions** or deeply held beliefs that guide behaviors and communicate to members of the organization how to perceive and think about things. Gaines, Kappeler, and Vaughn (2008, pp. 327–330) described the presence of a police **ethos** (fundamental spirit of a culture). They identified three concepts of the utmost importance in policing: bravery, autonomy, and the ethos of secrecy. Crank (2004) defined *secrecy* as follows:

A cultural product, formed by an environmental context that holds in high regard issues of democratic process and police lawfulness, and that seeks to punish its cops for errors they make. Secrecy is a set of working tenets that loosely couple the police to accountability, that allow them to do their work and cover their ass so that they can continue to do the work they have to do without interfering oversight. (p. 278)

Evidence of secrecy is clearly articulated in postulates which say, “Watch out for your partner first and then the rest of the guys working,” “Don’t give up another cop,” “Don’t get involved in anything in another cop’s sector,” “If you get caught off base, don’t implicate anybody else” (Reuss-Ianni, 1983, pp. 14–16).

Many police officers view themselves as teammates linked together by portable radios and cell phones, part of a team that is no stronger than its weakest member. As members of the team, they feel a good deal of pressure to live up to the expectations of other team members and support the practice of secrecy. Among the attitudes and values identified as characteristics of a police culture are adhering to a code of silence, with grave consequences for violating it, and maintaining loyalty to other officers above all else.

The police subculture, or blue fraternity or brotherhood, consists of the informal rules and regulations, tactics, and folklore passed from one generation of police officers to another. It is both a result and a cause of police isolation from the larger society and of police solidarity. Its influence begins early in the new officer's career when he is told by more experienced officers that the “training given in police academies is irrelevant to ‘real’ police work” (Bayley & Bittner, 1989, p. 87).

What is relevant, recruits are told, is the experience of senior officers who know the ropes or know how to get around things. Recruits are often told by officers with considerable experience to forget what they learned in the academy and in college and to start learning real police work. Among the first lessons learned are that police officers share secrets among themselves; that these secrets, especially when they deal with activities that are questionable in terms of ethics, legality, and departmental

policy, are not to be divulged to others; and that administrators cannot often be trusted. This emphasis on the police occupational subculture results in many officers regarding themselves as members of a “blue minority” (Cox & Fitzgerald, 1996; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993).

In many cases, police officers tend to socialize with other officers (not unlike members of other occupational groups) and come to realize (unlike members of many other occupational groups) that their identities as police officers sometimes make them socially unacceptable, even when off-duty. That is, in some circles at least, there is a kind of stigma attached to those who are perceived as being “too close” to police officers; and police officers themselves are sometimes suspicious of the motives of non-police who become too friendly. In other words, the dangers associated with policing, which we will discuss in the next section, often prompt officers to distance themselves from the chief source of danger—other citizens (Terrill, Paoline, & Manning, 2003, p. 5). The authority provided to police officers also separates them from other citizens. Thus, police officers who are socially isolated from the public, and rely on each other for support and protection from a dangerous and hostile work setting, are said to develop a “we versus them” attitude toward the public and a strong sense of loyalty toward other officers (Terrill et al., 2003, p. 5).

While everyone agrees police work is dangerous, Cullen, Link, Travis, and Lemming (1983) identified a paradox of policing concerning the perception of danger and the actual danger encountered by police. In many instances it was not the actual danger that resulted in fear but the potential for danger that was constantly present (Crank, 2004, p. 158). Cullen et al. (1983) concluded that the fear of danger by police was both functional and dysfunctional. The very real hazards of police work require that police be alert to the risks of the job. However, the constant concern over danger can contribute to increased levels of stress and burnout, which we will discuss later in this chapter.

When officers divide the world into we-versus-them, the former consists of other police officers; the latter encompasses almost everybody else. To be sure, members of other occupational groups also develop their own subcultures and worldviews, but often not to the same extent as the police (Skolnick, 1966). In his classic text, Skolnick (1966) noted, “Set apart from the conventional world, the policeman experiences an exceptionally strong tendency to find his social identity within his occupational milieu” (p. 52). Postulates indicative of the we-versus-them view include the following (Reuss-Ianni, 1983):

- Don’t tell anybody else more than they have to know; it could be bad for you, and it could be bad for them.
- Don’t trust a new guy until you have checked him out.
- Don’t give them (police administrators) too much activity.
- Keep out of the way of any boss from outside your precinct.
- Know your bosses.
- Don’t do the bosses’ work for them.
- Don’t trust bosses to look out for your interests.
- Don’t talk too much or too little.
- Protect your ass. (pp. 14–16)

Skolnick (1966) indicated that factors inherent in police work contribute to this tendency. Among these factors are danger, authority, and the need to appear efficient.

Danger, Authority, and Efficiency

Although police work is not the most dangerous occupation, danger is always a possibility. Who knows when the traffic stop at midday will lead to an armed attack on the police officer involved? Who can predict which angry spouse involved in a domestic dispute will batter a police officer (or for that matter, whether both spouses will)? Who knows when a sniper firing from a rooftop will direct his shots at the windshield of a patrol car? Under what circumstances will a mentally disordered person turn on an officer attempting to assist? Will drivers approaching an intersection heed the flashing lights and siren of an officer's car? Does the fleeing youthful burglar have a firearm under his shirt? Danger is always a possibility in policing, and it is highly unpredictable except in certain types of situations. (See the Case In Point that follows.) "The potential to become the victim of a violent encounter, the need for backup from other officers, and the legitimate use of violence to accomplish the police mandate all contribute to a subculture that stresses bravery, which is ultimately related to the perceived and actual dangers of policing" (Gaines, Kappeler, & Vaughn, 2008, p. 327). In fact, because of the unpredictable nature of danger in policing, police officers are trained to be suspicious of most, if not all, other citizens they encounter. Police are encouraged to treat other citizens they encounter as *symbolic assailants*, to approach them in certain ways, to notify the dispatcher of their whereabouts when making a stop, to wait for additional officers or backup to arrive before proceeding in potentially dangerous cases, and so on (Barker, Hunter, & Rush, 1994; Skolnick, 1966). Even though violence occurs in a low percentage of police–civilian interactions, "the highly unpredictable and potentially dangerous persons, who cannot be dependably identified in advance, conditions officers to treat each individual with suspicion and caution" (Johnson, Todd, & Subramanian, 2005, p. 4). Examples of symbolic assailants include two men walking in a quiet residential neighborhood at 3 a.m. or a police officer receiving the description of a person approaching a subway station carrying a "suspicious package." In other words, police officers create in their mind an image of what they perceive to be the behaviors of a threatening person. This image is based on training, past experiences, and sharing of war stories by veteran officers, and this image is ever changing depending upon the perceived threat to the safety of the officer and the community.

CASE IN POINT 4.1

Officer Joe Brown recently graduated from the police academy after 21 years in the Marine Corps. In an interview he discussed his perception of the dangers of being a police officer. "We are all warriors in this job, and every day when we are out on the streets, the possibility exists that we might not come home at night."

Another graduate Brian Perris believes police officers cannot take anything for granted. “Nothing is routine in this job, and you must keep these incidents (three officers were killed at a domestic violence call and four were fatally shot while working on computers in a coffee shop) in the back of your mind.”

Perris has never doubted his career switch to policing. “This is what I want, and I think I can make a difference.” Similar thoughts were echoed by Trooper Stanford Webb who says he does not “soft-peddle” to potential police officer candidates. “I don’t paint a rosy, perfect picture. It is dangerous, and you might have to take someone’s life or have your life taken. But the world today is dangerous in general.”

Source: “Police Rookies, Recruits Believe Doing Job Trumps Danger,” by J. K. Greenwood, 2009. *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* (PA). Record number 657574. Available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>

During everyday contacts with the public, police officers believe they can minimize the potential danger they will confront, as well as properly display their coercive authority, by always being prepared—or “one-up”—on the public (Rubinstein, 1973; Sykes & Brent, 1980). Van Maanen (1978) explored this attempt to identify people with whom police must interact and identified three types: “suspicious persons,” “assholes,” and “know-nothings.” Suspicious persons include those persons who are most likely about to commit or might have already committed an offense. The assholes include those individuals who disrespect the police and do not accept the police definition of the situation. These individuals often receive some form of *street justice* or “a physical attack designed to rectify what police take as a personal insult” (p. 310). The know-nothings are the typical citizens who interact with the police when they request service.

Academy instructors teach police officers to assess others with whom they are involved in terms of their ability to physically handle these individuals if it becomes necessary and to be aware that, in most instances, their encounters with other citizens will be perceived as creating trouble for those citizens. They teach them that they work in an alien environment in which everyone knows who they are, while they lack such information about most of the people with whom they interact (Rubinstein, 1973).

In addition, of course, as representatives of government, police officers are told they have specific authority to intervene in a wide array of situations. They are equipped with a Taser, firearm, handcuffs, a portable radio, backup officers, and a uniform to be sure that their image as authority figures is complete and unmistakable. And they are told that when dealing with a dispute in progress, their definition of the situation must prevail, that they must take charge of the situation. Police are taught that, as a part of their role, they must give orders, exercise control over law enforcement and order maintenance situations, place restraints on certain freedoms, enforce unpopular laws and ones they do not agree with, conduct searches, make arrests, and perform a number of other duties (Alpert & Dunham, 1997, p. 109).



❖ **PHOTO 4.2** The officer above bears the authoritarian tools of his trade.

What is not routinely stated to police officers, but what they learn very quickly on the streets, is that other citizens, not infrequently, resent their intervention. And other citizens, when treated suspiciously by the police, may react with hostility, resentment, contempt, and occasionally, physical violence. Nor are police officers routinely taught that certain segments of the population hate them or hold them in contempt simply because they wear the badge and uniform. If members of these groups challenge the authority of the police, the police will, based on their training, often resort to threats of force or the use of force to impose their authority, which often escalates the level of danger in the encounters. On those relatively rare occasions in which the challenge to authority is prolonged or vicious, danger may become the foremost concern of all parties involved, and the capacity to use force, including deadly force in appropriate circumstances, becomes paramount (Bittner, 1970). Under the circumstances, the need for police solidarity and the feelings of isolation and alienation from other citizens become apparent. Alpert and Dunham (1997, pp. 112–113) sug-

gested that police unity bolsters officer self-esteem and confidence, which enables the police to tolerate the isolation from society and the hostility and public disapproval.

At the same time, Skolnick (1966) argued, we expect the police to be efficient, and the police themselves are concerned with at least giving the appearance of efficiency, if not the substance, because performance evaluations and promotions often depend on at least the former. Concerns with efficiency and the resulting pressures they produce have increased dramatically with the computerization of the police world and other technological advances. Simultaneously, taxpayers have begun to demand greater accountability for the costs involved in policing and the addition of well-educated (and therefore more costly) police personnel. The resulting “do more with less” philosophy has led many police executives to emphasize even more the importance of efficient performance. According to Carey (1994), “Citizens expect professional police behavior, respectful treatment, maintenance of human dignity,

responsiveness, and a high value on human life. In addition, these increasingly sophisticated taxpayers also insist that the police achieve maximum effectiveness and efficiency in the use of their tax dollars” (p. 24).

However, in some cases, the police subculture has established standards of acceptable performance for officers and resists raising these standards. Officers whose performance exceeds these standards are often considered *rate-busters* and threats to those adhering to traditional expectations. For example, fueling the patrol car, in some departments, is an operation for which the officer is expected by the subculture to allot 20 to 30 minutes. Because the operation may actually take less than 5 minutes, administrators concerned about accountability, totaling the amount of time lost in this operation for, say, 10 cars, recognize they are losing two to three hours of patrol time if they fail to take action to modify the fueling procedure. At the same time, however, officers concerned about accountability who wish to patrol an additional 15 to 20 minutes and fuel the car in less time make those officers adhering to the 20 to 30 minute standard look bad, and they are under considerable pressure to conform to the established standard. Similar expectations and conflicts exist with respect to the number of drunk drivers who can be processed in a shift, the number of felonies that may be processed, the number of subpoenas that may be served, or the number of prisoners who may be transported. Officers must make choices as to whose expectations are to be met and sometimes operate in a no-win situation, in which meeting one set of expectations automatically violates the other, leaving the officer under some stress no matter how she operates.

Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy (1992) argued that the police subculture creates a set of truths, according to which officers are expected to live. Note that there is some basis in fact for each of these subcultural truths and that each makes integrating the police and the citizens they serve more difficult.

- The police are the only real crime fighters.
- No one understands the nature of police work but fellow officers.
- Loyalty to colleagues counts more than anything else.
- It is impossible to win the war on crime without bending the rules.
- Other citizens are unsupportive and make unreasonable demands.
- Patrol work is only for those who are not smart enough to get out of it. (p. 51)

As discussed in previous chapters, society has witnessed major changes in the concept of police in the past decades. Accordingly, the police culture has experienced change. For example, Paoline, Myers, and Worden (2000, p. 581) believed that the adoption of and experimentation with community policing may have altered both the occupational and organizational environments of policing, and within these environments, the stresses and strains experienced by police officers. They cited the greater attention to officers' efforts to reduce disorder, solve problems, and build rapport with the public that could modify the us-versus-them outlook. Some similar issues related to the police culture are also found in other countries (see *Around the World*).

AROUND THE WORLD

The impact of conflict on police culture was explored in the three African states of Uganda, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. Baker (2007) found the following common patterns:

Cooperation of the public is vital in providing intelligence to the police, keeping law and order, and in implementing anti-crime strategies.

Divergences exist between cultures of command, middle management, and lower ranks.

All three governments embraced the “community policing” and “sector policing” approach but in “none has it taken hold seriously, mainly due to suspicion among the middle and lower ranks.”

A major change in the police culture may occur “when the state police realize that they do not have a monopoly on policing and never will—when they learn to work in security networks with the other agencies.”

Source: From *Conflict and African Police Culture: The Cases of Uganda, Rwanda, Sierra Leone*, by B. Baker, 2007. In M. O’Neil, M. Marks, and N. Singh, (Eds.), *Police Occupational Culture: New Debates and Directions*, Oxford: Elsevier Science. Available online at: <http://www.ssrnetwork.net>

❖ The Police Personality: Myth or Reality?

Some have suggested that the impact of police work and the police subculture itself lead to the development of a distinctive police personality. Berg (1999, p. 297) concluded that the police personality was a combination of characteristics and behaviors that are commonly used to stereotype the police. Often, these characteristics included a “desire to be in control of the situation, assertions, cynicism, authoritarian attitude, a wish to be aloof from citizens, an increased solidarity with other police officers and a tendency to be physically aggressive” (Berg, 1999, p. 297). How does such a personality develop? Is it a predispositional model of personality, or does it develop from the work itself (an organizational socialization model) (Twersky-Glasner, 2005, p. 56)? Some believe policing attracts individuals who possess a certain type of personality, while others propose that the exposure to violence, corruption, and danger creates an elusive personality.

Over the years, the literature on the police has characterized them as more authoritarian and prejudiced than other occupational groups. Authoritarian personalities tend to be conservative, rigid, punitive, and inflexible, and they tend to emphasize authority and rules (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Prejudice (in this case, unfavorable attitudes toward a group or individual not based on experience or fact) appears to be more common among those with authoritarian traits. Prejudiced individuals tend to develop and adhere to stereotypes based on race, ethnicity, occupational group, and other factors. Police actions based on such stereotypes

are discriminatory and clearly inappropriate in a democratic society. Because these stereotypes and prejudices are attitudes and cannot be directly observed, they are difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate among police officers—as well as among the general public. Discriminatory actions, however, are observable, and steps to prevent such actions can and must be taken. The extent to which prejudices and stereotypes translate into discriminatory action remains an empirical question, though there is no doubt that it does sometimes happen.

It may be argued that these characterizations are based in part on the previous history of the police. As we noted in Chapter 1, the 1960s was a time of civil unrest and of protests against the police amid accusations of police brutality. However, most agree recent changes in policing have likely had a significant impact on the characterization of the police personality and culture. These changes include a more diverse police organization through the attraction of women and minorities, more educated police officers, and technical sophistication (Siegel, 2009, p. 280). In addition, because of the changes in the police role, departments began seeking officers with the personalities and characteristics that were consistent with quality-of-life issues and problem-solving expertise (Carter & Radelet, 1999, p. 183). One of the main reasons for the changes in today's police culture may be the implementation of community policing, which has dissolved some of the barriers between the police and the community (Dantzker, 2005, p. 279). **Cynicism** is another feature of the police officer's working personality that is addressed by students of the police. As defined by Niederhoffer (1967, p. 96), cynicism involves losses of faith in people, of enthusiasm for police work, and of pride and integrity. Niederhoffer and others (Regoli & Poole, 1978) found that cynicism peaked in the 7th to 10th year of police service, and the latter noted that the level of cynicism varied with the organizational style of the department and the type of department (urban or rural). Similar findings were proposed by Gould (2000), who concluded that "although most individuals entering police work are idealistic, service-oriented and outgoing, by about the fifth year in the profession some officers tend to develop attitudes that are cynical, defensive, alienated, authoritarian, and often racist" (p. 41). However, Niederhoffer's classic 1967 study found that cynicism set in shortly after graduation from the police academy. What causes these changes in a police officer's personality that would result in these types of attitudes?

According to Graves (1996), this is related to the "reality of the streets, particularly in large cities that have high crime rates and more anonymity—which shocks the new officers, causing them to lose faith in others and only trust other police officers" (p. 17). In another study, cynicism was found to vary inversely with rank and preferred assignment (day shift) and in a curvilinear fashion with the police officer's length of service (Dorsey & Giacopassi, 1987, pp. 1–16). This curvilinear relationship between tenure and cynicism was later replicated by Hickman, Piquero and Piquero (2004). However some argue that the changes in a police officer's personality are the result of a socialization process. This process results in rank and file police officers who begin to view their administrators as dangerous outsiders to the patrol subculture and somewhat personally and professionally threatening (Kappeler, Sluder, & Alpert, 1998). This tension between police officers and police administrators is primarily due to the discrepancy between what patrol officers are commanded to do and what they can realistically be expected to accomplish (Bennett & Schmitt, 2002, p. 494). Gould (2000)

also found that race and gender influenced cynicism and that white female police officers were the least affected group and black females were the most affected group. In addition, black male officers were apparently more affected by their exposure to policing compared with white male officers. Thus, Gould (2000) concluded that the race of the officer followed by the gender of the officer influence the strength of the effect.

Niederhoffer (1967) defined four stages that lead to police cynicism:

- Stage One—Pseudo Cynicism: New recruits are idealistic, their desire is to “help people.”
- Stage Two—Romantic Cynicism: Involves the first five years of police work; these officers are the most vulnerable to cynicism.
- Stage Three—Aggressive Cynicism: Failures and frustrations, resentment, and hostility are obvious and prevalent at the tenth-year mark.
- Stage Four—Resigned Cynicism: Detachment, passiveness, an acceptance of the flaws of the system. (p. 95)

Within different police subcultures, cynicism is thought to involve different issues, including the public, the police administration, the courts, training and education, dedication to duty, and police solidarity (Bouza, 1990). Alpert and Dunham (1997) concluded, “There is some evidence for the existence of a police working personality. Most of the evidence points to the influence of socialization and experiences after becoming a police officer as the main source of the unique traits” (p. 112). Broderick (1987, pp. 22–115) believed there were four working personalities of police: enforcers, idealists, realists, and optimists. Enforcers emphasize the law enforcement function, while idealists focus on individual rights. Realists place little emphasis on social order and individual rights. Optimists view policing as an opportunity to help people (Broderick, 1987). Each of these working personalities involves a different level of cynicism. For example, the Enforcer is a crime fighter rather than a problem solver and becomes easily frustrated with the criminal justice system, the public, and others.

In contrast, Terry (1989) reviewed numerous studies that found essentially no differences between police officers and those in other occupations with respect to either authoritarianism or prejudice, and studies that have found police officers to be intelligent, emotionally stable, and service oriented. Carpenter and Raza (1987) reported that police applicants differ from the general population in several positive ways: “They are more psychologically healthy than the normative population, as they are generally less depressed and anxious, and more assertive and interested in making and maintaining social contacts” (p. 16). Terry (1989) conceded that while some of the research on police personalities does appear to distinguish certain traits, no one has been able to “disentangle the effects of a person’s socioeconomic background from the demands that police work and its subculture places upon individual officers” (p. 550). Johnson (2007, p. v) agreed and concluded that the study of police cynicism reached its zenith in the 1980s, but it has slowed in the present day, leaving many questions unresolved. In other words the research does not support the existence of a single dominant personality type among police officers. Yarmey (1990) stated, “There is no evidence for such a thing as a typical police personality showing a cluster of traits that is constant across time and space” (p. 42).

❖ Stresses and Strains of Police Work

Previously, we discussed the formal police organization and the police subculture, both of which contribute to the stress levels experienced by police. The effects of formal pressure from police organizations and pressures generated by the police subculture often lead police to experience a great deal of stress in their occupational, social, and family lives, resulting in cynicism, burnout, and retirement on the job, as well as a host of physical and emotional ailments. We also know that those police officers who reported higher levels of stress reported more acts of deviance. Correspondingly, as the stress levels of police officers were reduced through reassignment from high stress duties, the reported deviance decreased (Arter, 2008).

The Personal Costs of Police Work

In spite of the fact that there does not appear to be a cluster of personality traits that distinguish police officers from other occupational groups, there is no doubt that the nature of police work and the subculture in which it occurs creates difficulties for officers, their families, and friends. The need to perform under stress is a concern in many professions; policing is probably not as stressful as some other occupations. However, according to Adams (2007, p. 473), stress is one of the most common of all occupational hazards for police and can be extremely debilitating, leading to early onset of stress-related illness. Of course, the cost associated with a stressful event is a function of how each individual perceives the event (Waters & Ussery, 2007, p. 3). In other words, what may be viewed as very threatening to one police officer may be perceived as simply an exciting challenge by another police officer who experienced the same event. Since many individuals are capable of venting their feelings and discharging their emotions, they do not suffer as much from stressful events (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

According to Nelson and Quick (2006), stress is one of the most creatively ambiguous words in the English language. For most people, stress has a negative perception and is something to be avoided. However, stress is a great asset in managing legitimate emergencies and achieving peak performance. Champoux (2006) proposed that “a person experiences **stress** when an event in their environment presents a constraint, an opportunity, or an excessive physical or psychological demand” (p. 380). Nelson and Quick (2006, pp. 217–221) used four approaches to define stress. These approaches, which emphasize demands or sources of stress in organizations, include task demands, role demands, interpersonal demands, and physical demands.

Task Demands

Task demands or the lack of task demands can impose high stress levels on police. Quantitative input overload is a result of too many demands for the time allotted, while qualitative input overload is the result of complexity and limited time (Whisenand, 2001, p. 206). These two types of input overload are known as *hyperstress*. Quantitative overload occurs when police officers experience stacking of calls or when more calls are being received than can be answered. Emergency calls are prioritized by 911 systems,

but minor theft cases, criminal damage to property cases, trespassing violations, and other nonemergency calls are answered in the order in which they are received. In other words, an officer on a busy shift might respond to 25 calls for service, with little time for patrol or personal breaks. Obviously, with this number of calls, the quality of the police interaction with the public can suffer. However, investigators assigned a large number of cases more readily experience quality overload. Each case must follow case management criteria and may include interviews, interrogations, evidence collection, search warrants, and numerous reports. The number of cases assigned by supervisors and the pressure generated by prosecutors to complete an investigation affect the quality of investigation and the extent of overload experienced by individual officers.

Whisenand (2001, p. 206) found that low levels of mental and physical activity cause *hypostress*, which is the result of quantitative and qualitative input underloads. Police officers who work a third shift with no calls experience high levels of boredom when the only activity is random patrol and personal breaks. Furthermore, as we have discussed in previous chapters, answering service call requests, one of the primary roles of a police officer, is often seen by officers as routine, mundane, and at times boring.

Role Demands

Role demands develop two types of role stress in the work environment: role conflict and role ambiguity (Nelson & Quick, 2006, pp. 217–221). **Role conflict** is a result of the inconsistent or incompatible expectations communicated to the person. A role conflict can occur when society's expectations of police behavior conflict with certain police principles, beliefs, and behaviors. For example, for many decades, society has condemned the use and sale of illegal drugs. However, the police are limited in their ability to successfully reduce drug abuse. Thus, Crank (2004) concluded the following:

Cops must avoid the harsh glare of the external observation which would reveal (1) that they were frequently in violation of the law, and (2) that they were doing exactly what the public wanted them to do, generating arrests for drugs the only way they can—fabricating evidence, dropsy, lying on the witness stand, entrapment, in a word, by being more criminally sophisticated than the criminals. (p. 298)

Thus, the perceptions of society and the actual behaviors of police performing undercover drug enforcement can generate high levels of stress, especially for police who must become a part of the drug culture, appear in court as a professional police officer, and still maintain relationships with spouses, children, and other family members.

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity is the confusion a person experiences related to the expectations of others (Nelson & Quick, 2006, pp. 217–221). For example, according to Manning (1977), the police are seen by the public as “alertly ready to respond to citizen demands, as crime-fighters, as an efficient, bureaucratic, highly organized force that keeps society from falling into chaos” (p. 100). However, as we have seen in other chapters, this is an exaggeration of actual police work. Manning concluded that “most

police work resembles any other kind of work: it is boring, tiresome, sometimes dirty, sometimes technically demanding, but it is rarely dangerous” (p. 100). And to add to the role confusion, the public has demanded an even higher level of the crime fighting activities which are grossly exaggerated in books, movies, electronic games and television shows.

Interpersonal Demands

Abrasive personalities, sexual harassment, and the leadership style in the organization are interpersonal demands for people at work (Nelson & Quick, 2006, pp. 217–221). Even with general support by the public, police typically encounter individuals with abrasive personalities. According to Alpert and Dunham (1997, p. 105), many citizens feel the police are just a little above the evil they fight or believe that the police are against them and misuse their right to use force to uphold the law. The police often perceive an extreme negative evaluation by citizens, leading to increased levels of occupational stress.

In most cases, besides the on-duty demands on police officers there are also off-duty requirements that affect the stress levels of officers and their families. For example, language similar to the following can be found in most police department policy manuals: “A police officer’s character and conduct while off-duty must be exemplary, and maintain a position of respect in the community” (University of Oklahoma Police, 2008). To an extent, police are never off-duty, which generates high levels of stress in police officers and their family.

Leadership styles are another interpersonal demand that can create stress in the work environment. Management styles play an important role in work environment stress levels. Lind and Otte (2006) found significant differences in employee stress levels among management styles. Furthermore, when management styles were included as a predictor variable, the styles were one of the primary predictors of stress in employees. This is especially true in police organizations that are characteristically authoritarian but attract college-educated personnel. Roberg, Crank, and Kuykendall (2000, p. 414) concluded that college-educated police would be less willing to work in, and be less satisfied with, authoritarian departments and managerial practices.

Physical Demands

Extreme environments, strenuous activities, and hazardous substances create physical demands for people in the work place (Nelson & Quick, 2006). While once believed to be a very high-stress occupation, more recent research suggests that policing may not be as stressful as originally believed (Roberg, Crank, & Kuykendall, 2000, p. 466). This change may be in part due to different hiring processes, stress-reduction training classes, and individual characteristics of the officers. However, police, on a regular basis, are exposed to situations rarely experienced by other members of society. Death, extreme physical abuse, and fear of the unknown have significant affects on the physical and mental health of police. Stevens (1999, pp. 1–5) found that the top five stress producers for police officers are child abuse, the killing of an innocent person, conflict with regulations, domestic violence, and killing or hurting a fellow police officer. Johnson (2010), in a more recent study, confirmed that the largest stressor for police involved crime and incidents against children. For example, a police officer

responding to a trouble call finds that the father has shot his two young children, his wife, and then himself. The public will read only a short abstract about this tragedy in the newspaper, but the image of the young child gripping her doll just before being shot in the head with a shotgun by her father will remain with the officer forever.

❖ Forms of Police Stress

According to Zhao, He, and Lovrich (2002), the central attention of research on police stress has focused on the violent nature of the work and the organization structures found in almost all police agencies. For example, Garcia, Nesbary, and Gu (2004) found that the top-ranked stressor was concern for fellow police officers being injured or killed. However, Zhao, He, and Lovrich (2002) concluded that other research failed to demonstrate a clear association between the dangers of police work and the level of stress experienced among officers. With respect to the dangers of police work, a report by the Los Angeles Times (“California Sees,” 2009) indicated the number of police officers killed in the line of duty in 2009 was one of the lowest in 50 years.

Research concerning stressors in policing tends to view police organizational structures and various management practices as one of the primary sources of stress (Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2002). For example, Golembiewski and Kim (1991) concluded that the quasi-military nature associated with police organizations often breeds alienation among street officers, who are required to utilize high levels of discretion while being tightly controlled by supervisors and administrative rules. Additional **stressors** identified by Garcia, Nesbary, and Gu (2004) included public criticism, family demands, career stages, and working the late shift. To this list we might add excessive paperwork, red tape, lack of participation in decision making, and competition for promotion, among others. One study found new and more severe sources of stress for police: increased scrutiny and criticism from the media and the public and anxiety and loss of morale as a result of layoffs and reduced salary raises (National Institute of Justice, 2000). The National Institute of Justice concluded that even positive changes, such as the movement to community policing, have caused increased levels of stress for many officers. Today, the increasing response to or the threat of terrorism is also a police stressor (Dowling, Moynihan, Genet, & Lewis, 2006).

Peak (2009) divided stressors experienced by police into the following five major categories:

- Stressors originating within the organization: Poor supervision, absence of career development opportunities, inadequate reward system, offensive policies, and paperwork (pp. 377–378)
- Stressors external to the organization: Absence of career development (not able to transfer to another department), jurisdictional isolation, seemingly ineffective corrections system, courts, distorted press accounts, derogatory remarks, and adverse government actions (pp. 378–379)
- Stressors connected with the performance of police duties: Role conflict, adverse work schedules, fear and danger, sense of uselessness, and absence of closure (pp. 379–380)
- Stressors particular to the individual officer: Feeling overcome by fear and danger, pressures to conform (p. 380)
- Effects of critical incidents (p. 381)

In addition, Carter and Radelet (1999) devised a typology of seven police stressors that selectively interact with a police officer's job activities, decision making, and organizational life:

- Life-threatening stressors (ever-present potential of injury or death)
- Social isolation stressors (cynicism, isolation, and alienation from the community; prejudice and discrimination)
- Organizational stressors (administrative philosophy, changing policies and procedures, morale, job satisfaction, misdirected performance measures)
- Functional stressors (role conflict, use of discretion, and legal mandates)
- Personal stressors (police officer's off-duty life, including family, illness, problems with children, marital stresses, and financial constraints)
- Physiological stressors (fatigue, medical conditions, and shift-work effects)
- Psychological stressors (possibly activated by all of the above and the exposure to repulsive situations). (p. 292)

An additional classification of police stress was proposed by Waters and Ussery (2007), which involved three primary types of stress:

- **Explosive:** crimes in progress, natural disasters and terrorist attacks such as September 11, 2001. In most cases police suppress their reactions and emotion to fulfill their role as a police officer. However, the effects of exposure to explosive levels of stress can be long-term and result in posttraumatic stress syndrome.
- **Implosive:** internal conflicts and inability to solve all problems the police encounter over the course of their career.
- **Corrosive:** daily tensions that erode the confidence and wear away at the individual's hardiness and resiliency. In many cases these authors believe police officers fail to engage in self protective behaviors and police departments trivialize the negative consequences of police work. "The implication is that only the weak suffer from stress related symptoms." (p. 172).

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2000, p. 19) concluded that today's police are experiencing new levels of stress based on a perceived increase in public scrutiny, adverse publicity, and a perceived decline in police camaraderie. Fear of contracting air- and blood-borne diseases (TB, HIV, hepatitis), the focus on cultural diversity and political correctness, and the transition to community policing have also increased stress levels, according to the Institute. Furthermore, these newly perceived stressors have serious emotional and physical effects on police. The NIJ concluded that the consequences of stress reported by police include cynicism, suspicion, and emotional detachment from everyday life. In addition, stress leads to reduced efficiency, increased absenteeism, and early retirement, as well as excessive aggressiveness, alcoholism, and other substance abuse. Marital and family problems (extramarital affairs, divorce, domestic violence) and posttraumatic stress disorders are yet other products of stress.

Stages of Stress

All occupations involve stress, but stress need not always be harmful. In fact, moderate stress appears to be positively related to productivity. Elimination of all stress is neither possible nor desirable. However, the effects of prolonged high levels of stress

are clearly dysfunctional, producing both debilitating psychological and physical symptoms. In part, the damage caused by stress occurs because of the **general adaptation syndrome** identified by Selye (1974). In the first stage of this syndrome, the body prepares to fight stress by releasing hormones that lead to an increase in respiration and heartbeat. In the second stage, the body attempts to resist the stressor and repair any damage that has occurred. If the stress continues long enough and cannot be successfully met through flight or fight, the third stage, exhaustion, occurs. Repeated exposures to stressors that cannot be eliminated or modified by the organism eventually lead to stage three.

Often, a police officer's career is divided into significant phases, according to the development of stress at various periods of his career. "These stages include the initial phase, which involves academy training; the middle phase, which deals with years of working various assignments and promotions; and the final stage, which examines the time immediately preceding retirement and the subsequent return to civilian life" (Flynn, 1997, p. 1). Police officers experience such stressors repeatedly in the performance of their duties as well as during off-duty time (carrying an off-duty weapon).

According to Violanti and Marshall (1983), four transitory stages exist in a police officer's career:

- Alarm Stage (0–5 years). Stress increases as the officers adjust to new experiences, including death, an authoritarian style of management, and the dangers of policing. The officer quickly learns that the academy training, education classes, and television do not truly reflect the street environment.
- Disenchantment Stage (6–13 years). Stress levels continue to increase in this stage as the officer realizes that crimes do not have easy resolutions and that many of the problems they encounter do not have a resolution.
- Personalization Stage (14–19 years). During this stage, there is a substantial decrease in the stress levels experienced by police officers. In all sizes of department, the officer has become somewhat comfortable with the job and has seen almost every type of call.
- Introspection Stage (20 years and over). Stress continues to decrease during this stage. Police officers are concerned about retirement and personal issues and are very secure in their job. If the officers experience frustration, they can retire at any time. (p. 3)

Source: Reprinted from Violanti, J. M., & Marshall, J. R., "The police stress process" in *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, 11, 389–394.

From this study, it is apparent that stress-reduction training should be provided early in a police officer's career. The National Institute of Justice (2000) reported that this can be performed during the initial training period because police recruits are a "captive audience" (p. 22) and because the information may remain with them throughout their entire police career. However, others believe that recruit training is not the most effective time or approach because most academy attendees are not experienced enough to recognize the stresses of the job. They believe the optimal time to reach a new police officer is after she has worked the street for six to eight months.

Burnout

The inability to find a way to relieve stress may lead to **burnout**, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Individuals unable to cope with stressors reflected in psychological, behavioral, and physical symptoms are said to manifest burnout (Johnson, Todd, & Subramanian, 2005, p. 6). Repeated exposure to high levels of stress results in emotional exhaustion. Depersonalization of relationships follows emotional exhaustion as a coping response. Police suffering from these stages view victims and complainants as case numbers—and with little empathy or individual attention. An additional contributor to burnout is the fact that police often suppress their emotions. This begins when new recruits observe police academy instructors, field training officers, and veteran officers, and they learn or are told directly to control and hide their emotions, particularly when they are in public view (Johnson et al., 2005). This control is referred to as displaying a “court room face” or a face with no emotion.

The final stage of burnout involves reduced personal accomplishment, in which the officer loses interest in the job, performance declines, and motivation is lacking. It is important that police administrators understand the implications of burnout because research has revealed that elevated levels of stress and associated burnout in police officers can decrease job performance (Goodman, 1990). Scaramella, Shannon, and Giannoni (2005) reported that the benefits of higher education and critical reflection by police on their career showed great promise for alleviation or mitigation of the symptoms of burnout.

More (1998) argued that the onset of burnout occurs through five stages:

- Honeymoon, enthusiasm phase. New police officers are excited, ready to help people, and want to save the world from crime. If a coping mechanism is not in place, these officers move to the next stage.
- Stagnation stage. Police in this stage expend less energy, new challenges have disappeared, and police work becomes boring and routine.
- Frustration stage. Police exhibit anger and resentment, and begin to withdraw from the job.
- Apathy stage. Officers become obsessed with the frustrations of the work environment.
- Hitting the wall/intervention. Burnout becomes entwined with alcoholism, drug abuse, heart disease, and mental illness. (pp. 248–249)

As noted, officers experiencing such stress sometimes turn to alcohol or other drugs, physical aggression, and even suicide in attempting to alleviate it. The literature has theorized that police officers consume more alcohol than the general population (Lindsay, Taylor, & Shelley, 2008). The authors indicated that most believe the consumption of alcohol by police is related to stress or social camaraderie issues. However, Lindsay et al. (2008) found that most of the officers surveyed reported drinking levels equivalent to those reported by the general population. Furthermore, they asserted that the generally accepted notion that an alcohol problem exists “seems to be a classic example of Quinney’s (1970) famous distinction between reality and social reality—between what is true and what is merely thought to be true” (p. 596). It can also be argued that stress symptoms experienced by police officers influence other members of the family. We will discuss the effect of stress and burnout on police families in the next section.

Perhaps an example of the incidents occurring in the first few hours of a police officer's tour of duty will help clarify the stressors to which officers are routinely subjected. Shortly after reporting "in service," the officer receives a call that another officer requires immediate assistance. The officer responding to the call for help turns on red lights and siren and drives as rapidly as possible to reach a colleague. On the way, he prepares for the possibility of a physical struggle or armed resistance, and the physical changes described are taking place. The officer is tense and excited, but also frightened. The fear experienced may have to do with anticipation about what will happen when he arrives at the scene, but it also has to do with what other drivers, noting the red lights and siren—or failing to note them—will do. Will they yield at intersections? Will they pull off to the right? Will they pull to the left? Will they stop in the middle of the street? Will they slow down or speed up? What will happen if the officer is involved in an accident?

Arriving at the scene, the officer finds the situation under control, a suspect in custody, and the colleague uninjured. As the officer gets back into the patrol car, another call comes from the dispatcher. This call involves an accident with serious injuries. The officer proceeds to the scene (with the same set of concerns about arriving safely). As the first emergency officer to arrive, he finds that several people have been seriously injured and an infant killed. After the accident has been handled, the officer gets into the police vehicle and is told to come to the station to meet with the chief. His concerns on the way are somewhat different but perhaps equally stressful. For the next several hours and, in some cities, for the next several days, weeks, and years, these scenarios are repeated. The ups and downs of police work take their toll, and the officer experiences repeated stress, anxiety, and perhaps burnout.

The literature on police stress is extensive and suggests that the interaction of personality and situational factors often determines the amount and type of stress experienced by the individual. In some cases this could lead to suicide, and according to psychologist Audrey Honig, suicide rates for police officers (at least 18 per 100,000) are higher than the general population (as discussed in Ritter, 2007, p. 3A). Similar beliefs are held by psychologist Elizabeth Dansie, who believes many police suicides in the past were ruled as accidents and that the statistics are much higher than records indicate due to the shame factor (as discussed in Ritter, 2007). In another recent study, Chambers (2008) discovered that police officers were at least 8 times more likely to die from suicide than from accidental death. Crosby and Sacks (2002) suggested that suicide ideation, planning a suicide, and attempts to commit suicide were more likely to occur when individuals were exposed to the suicide of another person. In most cases police are one of the first responders at the scene of a suicide and are required to perform an investigation. Thus, police officers have a much higher exposure to the act of suicide compared to the general population. However, Gaines, Kappeler, and Vaughn (2008, pp. 345–346) claimed that comparing suicide rates of the general public and police may be deceptive since drastic differences often exist between the two groups. These differences include male domination in policing, all are over 21 years of age, have access to firearms, and most police officers work in urban areas. Further, they concluded that besides the stress of police work, other factors contribute to police suicides. Among these are abuse of alcohol and drugs, involvement in deviance and corruption, depression, and working in a male-dominated organization. Family and economic problems, alienation, and cynicism associated with the police culture; role conflict; and physical and mental health problems are other contributing problems (Gaines, Kappeler, & Vaughn, 2008, p. 346).

Stress and Police Families

Yet other studies have focused on the effects of police work on the police family. For example, Picanol (2009) reported that a police officer's level of emotional exhaustion was related to the level of job satisfaction, depersonalization, and marital distress. Furthermore, Prabhu and Turner (2000) concluded that domestic violence committed by police officers against their intimate partners occurred at the same rate when compared to the general population. However, apart from the fact that most families will not air dirty laundry, domestic violence by police officers was often not detected due to the officer's strong adherence to a code of secrecy, commitment to camaraderie, and resistance to external intrusion (Klein, 2000). Similarly, Johnson et al. (2005) argued that individuals who marry a police officer marry into the police family and are expected to follow the values and norms of the subculture.

Family-related stress has the potential to adversely affect the job performance of employees. Police officers not experiencing job stress can be adversely affected by problems in the home environment. Several sources of stress commonly cited by police officers' spouses are as follows:

- Shift work and overtime
- Concern over the spouse's cynicism, need to feel in control in the home
- Inability or unwillingness to express feelings
- Fear that officer will be hurt or killed in the line of duty
- Police officer's excessively high expectations of their children
- Avoidance, teasing or harassment of the officer's children by other children because the parent is a police officer
- Presence of a weapon in the residence
- Perception the police officer prefers to spend time with other officers rather than with the family
- Perception the officer is paranoid, excessively vigilant and overprotective
- Problems in helping the officer cope with work-related problems
- Critical incidents or officer's injury or death on the job (Borum & Philpot, 1993, pp. 122–135).

One of the greatest risks is that police “become so inflated, narcissistic, and self-involved that they chance alienating their real families by over investing their time and energy in the work family, which all too frequently turns out to be fickle and unsupportive” (Kirschman, 2000, p. 247).

In 1985, Blumberg and Niederhoffer, in discussing the police family, stated:

The police profession is a jealous mistress, intruding in intimate family relationships, disrupting the rhythms of married life. The danger of police work arouses fears for the safety of loved ones. The revolving schedule of a patrol officer's “around-the-clock” tours of duty complicates family logistics. . . . Although wives adapt to the pressures of the occupation on family life, they, nevertheless, gripe about the injustices and inconsistencies. They resent the “secret society” nature of police work that obstructs free-flowing communication between spouses. Paradoxically, although they are treated as aliens in the police world, their family lifestyle is scrutinized by a curious public. (p. 371)

❖ Police Shootings and Critical Incidents As a Source of Stress

On average, one law enforcement officer dies in the line of duty in the United States every 53 hours, and since the first known line-of-duty death in 1792, approximately 19,000 U.S. law enforcement officers have been killed (National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund [NLEOMF], 2009a, 2009b). In 2009, the number of police officer deaths declined by 6%, the fewest line-of-duty deaths since 1959. The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) (2009a) attributed this decline to a reduction in traffic-related deaths. However, they also found that the number of firearms-related fatalities of police officers increased compared to 2008. Contributing to the increase in police shootings was the fact that several officers were killed in groups: four officers each in Lakeland, Colorado and Oakland, California and three officers in Pittsburgh (“Numbers,” 2009).

It is important to note that even with an increase of police firearm fatalities in 2009, the number of officers killed is still lower than all but three years for the past five decades (NLEOMF, 2009, p. 2). The factors that likely influenced these results include the use of body armor or bullet-proof vests, better communications, increased training, better police practices, and improved medical care. The majority of police fatal shootings involved the officer responding to domestic disturbance calls.

In any case, the stress of actually being involved in a shooting, whether as shooter or victim, is very real. In many cases, prior research argued that officers involved in a shooting experienced **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**. Symptoms associated with this emotional disturbance included numbing of emotions, insomnia, nightmares, aggression, depression, fear, and obsessive behaviors (Dumont, 1999). However, recent research from the National Institute of Justice (2006) found that few police officers involved in shooting incidents suffer long-term negative emotional or physical effects. In fact, “following about one-third of the shootings, officers reported feelings of elation that included joy at being alive, residual excitement after a life-threatening situation, and satisfaction of pride in proving their ability to use deadly force appropriately” (NIJ, 2006, p. 3). Thus, according to the NIJ report, these findings call into question the appropriateness of training that stresses the emotions of guilt and depression that accompany a police shooting. Training that focuses on responses by police officers that occur infrequently could be seen as misleading and even counter-productive in some cases.

Most research involving police stress has involved police shootings. More recently, however, the research has expanded to include stress induced by critical incidents. A critical incident is an event that has a stressful impact sufficient enough to overwhelm the usually effective coping skill of an individual (Kulbarsh, 2007, p.1). Critical incidents involve very powerful events, and almost every police officer will experience a marked reaction during and after a critical incident event. Examples of critical incidents include officer-involved shootings, hostage standoffs, a mass suicide, an infant at the bottom of a pool, a family trapped in a burning vehicle, school shootings, and natural disasters (Kulbarsh, 2007). Additional examples of critical incident hazards include terrorist bombings, exposure to toxic chemicals, and biological or



❖ **PHOTO 4.3** The photo shows the aftermath of the off-duty officer who took his own life using his service weapon, the most serious consequence of police burnout.

radiation hazards (Paton, 2006). The importance of a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team to address such occurrences was reported by the San Jose Police Department (Benner, 1994). For example, during 1972 and 1987, when the Team did not exist, 52 police officers were involved in shootings and 17 left the department. However, according to Benner, after creation of the Team, 122 officers were involved in shootings and none left the department. Obviously, a number of limitations exist that could have affected the outcomes of this comparison, such as training and individual differences among officers.

❖ Attempts to Combat Police Stress

Recognition of the fact that police work can exact a high toll in personal costs has led to numerous attempts to identify and deal with such stress. Many of the factors identified as related to police stress have been discussed previously. This section examines the attempts to lessen the impact of these factors, keeping in mind our earlier statement that stress cannot be entirely eliminated and, unless it is prolonged and severe, serves some useful function. There is no exact formula for stress reduction. Individuals differ markedly in the events they define as stressful, in the ways they react to pressure, and in techniques for dealing with stressful events that will be successful (Ellison, 2004).

Torres and Maggard (2003 pp. 1–7) summarized various managerial attempts to address police stress. These attempts are made to help police officers better manage the stresses they encounter.

1. Provide employee assistance programs, including services to officers and families.
2. Orientation programs for the new officer's transition into the police culture.
3. Pre-academy programs that emphasize physical conditioning.
4. Teach coping mechanisms related to crime, death, boredom.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is an example of an agency that has developed an organizational consultant program designed to provide police supervisors with the tools needed to recognize and remedy police officer stress (Higginbotham, 2000, pp. 1–3). The program takes a proactive approach to stress and trains supervisors in prevention and early intervention. The Sheriff's Department's program teaches police supervisors how to deal with difficult people, how to manage police stress, and strategies for counseling police officers. Another example for dealing with stress is the Spousal Academy. The Collier County, Florida, Sheriff's Office offers training to spouses and other domestic partners of deputies and recruits who are enrolled in the regular training academy (NIJ, 2000, p. 21). The program includes an introduction to law enforcement work and discussions concerning the effect policing will have on family lives. In addition, spouses discuss the structure of the department, stress management, and conflict resolution techniques.

The movement toward community policing also may be important in the reduction of stress among police officers. If a good deal of the stress officers experience results from constant contact with the criminal elements in the community, and from constantly working in an environment in which the police are regarded as causing trouble for other citizens, then increasing contact with law-abiding citizens under positive circumstances should help alleviate stress. To some extent, this gain may be offset by the additional problem-solving responsibilities placed on community policing officers, but if the administration accepts risks and occasional failures as part of the growing process in community-oriented policing, this stress, too, can be reduced.

Dealing With Stress in Police Organizations

In summary, it is clear that policing can be a stressful occupation. Whether it is more stressful than other occupations is debatable, but the point is that efforts should and can be made to reduce stress in the interests of the officer, the department, the officer's family, and the public. Police officers often either fail to recognize the signs of stress or fail to seek help when they do recognize the symptoms. This may be due, in part, to the influence of the police subculture, which holds that "real" police officers can handle their own problems and do not need the help of "shrinks," employee assistance programs, clergy, or other outsiders (Bouza, 1990).

To the extent that stress results from discrepancies between the official expectations of police administrators and the unofficial expectations of the police subculture, these discrepancies need to be confronted. Because both official and subcultural

expectations will continue to play roles in policing, efforts must be made to reduce existing differences between the two. To the extent that stress is created and sustained by administrative policies that frustrate and befuddle officers, revisions need to be made. As an example, according to Gershon, Barocas, Canton, Li, and Vlahov (2009) “progressive police departments actively implement innovative strategies (e.g., providing peer counselors, encouraging officers and couples to enter confidential counseling, making structural administrative changes, adding diversity programs, changing hiring and training practices, adding critical incident programs, etc.) to help minimize the risk of work stress among police” (p. 286).

❖ Chapter Summary

All organizations have cultures and subcultures that to some extent influence the behavior of employees. Many of these cultures and subcultures are consistent with legitimate goals and serve as a positive influence on the operations of these organizations. However, the police culture can involve police adhering to a code of silence and extreme loyalty to other police officers.

Additional influence of the police culture often involves feelings of isolation from the communities that they serve and a mistrust of supervisory ranks. Perhaps the most powerful influence cited is the one pertaining to the desire to be accepted by the group. Unfortunately, one of the ways in which this aspiration is met is by turning a blind eye to the misdeeds of their colleagues. This aspect of the subculture has a powerful and long-lasting effect on organizational attempts to mitigate incidents of misconduct by police officers.

Stress is another factor affecting police officers, the sources of which are both real and perceived. The isolation feature or the us-versus-them attitudes are key examples of stressors. Policing involves numerous stressors, both individual and organizational in nature.

How officers deal with these various stressors is more important. Many police officers cope with stress well by performing daily fitness routines and maintaining their commitment to the legitimate goals of the law enforcement profession. Officers that exhibit responses to stress associated with the negative aspects of the police subculture are much more likely than their counterparts to fall victim to a phenomenon referred to as police burnout. Burnout, in a general sense, is characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

In order to combat the negative influences of the police subculture and the subsequent forms of stress, police administrators must be vigilant in their efforts to identify behaviors exhibited by officers.

❖ Key Terms

blue wall of silence

police subculture

artifacts

organizational assumption

ethos

symbolic assailants

police personality

predispositional model

organizational socialization model

prejudice

cynicism

stress

hyperstress

hypostress

role conflict
role ambiguity
general adaptation syndrome

burnout
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
critical incident

❖ Discussion Questions

1. What is the police subculture, and in what ways does it conflict with the official mandates of police work?
2. What are the forms of organizational culture? Give an example of each form.
3. Why is it so difficult for police officers to avoid getting caught up in the subculture? Give specific examples.
4. Is subculture affiliation unique to the police? If not, should we be concerned about participation in and support of a subculture? If so, why?
5. Is policing a stressful occupation? Why and in what ways?
6. What are some of the major sources of police stress? How might some of these stresses be alleviated? Can they be eliminated?
7. What are the relationships among police stress, alcohol use, suicide, and family disruption?
8. How are police stress and the police subculture interrelated?
9. Discuss the ways in which community policing may help to reduce police stress. Can community policing also increase stress levels among officers? Explain.

❖ Internet Exercises

1. Go to the Internet and search for information about *suicide-by-police*. Is this a recent phenomenon, and how often does it occur? How does involvement in a suicide-by-police affect the officer, the family, the police department?
2. Most agree that police officers experience high levels of stress. Using your favorite search engine, go online and search for information on the effects of chronic stress and cardiovascular disease in police officers. How can police officers improve their cardiovascular health? Should police departments require all applicants to complete a cardiac stress test?