OFFICER RETENTION PATTERNS: AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION CONCERN FOR POLICE AGENCIES?

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Until recently, most American police agencies were staffed almost exclusively by white males. The 1967 President's Commission, the 1968 Kerner Commission, and other blue-ribbon panels emphasized the need for greater racial diversification among sworn personnel. The subsequent influx of minorities into the rank and file met with considerable resistance from white incumbents (Alex, 1969; Bannon and Wilt, 1973; Bayley and Mendelsohn, 1969). However, despite formidable opposition, blacks have managed to attain a sizeable presence in many departments (Hochstedler et al., 1984; Reaves, 1989; Walker, 1989; Warner et al., 1990).

The absorption of women into law enforcement, on the other hand, has proceeded at a snail's pace. Despite affirmative action mandates and a plethora of studies showing that women make capable patrol officers, females still account for less than 10 percent of all municipal officers in this country (Martin, 1991; Reaves, 1992; US Department of Labor, 1989). It is no secret that female officers face much hostility and resentment from male co-workers (Balkin, 1988; Belknap and Shelley, 1992; Charles, 1981; Herrington, 1993; Martin, 1980; Townsey, 1982). Even today, female officers confide that sexual harassment is a daily occurrence (Zahm, 1994). This negative reception surfaces as a major cause of stress for female officers (Hochstedler, 1984; Poole and Pogrebin, 1988; Timmins and Hainsworth, 1989; Wexler and Logan, 1983).

Some observers have commented that law enforcement is notorious for its reluctance to embrace meaningful personnel reform (Guyot, 1979; Hale and Wyland, 1993; Walker, 1985). In terms of gender

integration, many agencies have hesitated to initiate corrective actions on their own, relying instead on external prodding (Hochstedler, 1984: 231; Martin, 1991). This air of indifference has produced a steady stream of court mandates. Along these lines, Martin (1990: 50) reports that 15 percent of the agencies in her national survey have come under a consent decree.

A consent decree is a tool for adjusting agency rosters so that the police reflect more accurately the racial and gender composition of the local community. Typically, the court prescribes a plan which specifies hiring goals for members of protected classes. The Blake consent decree involving the Los Angeles Police Department is one such example. It stipulated that 25 percent of all incoming sworn employees were to be women. This strategy was to continue until the female presence within the agency stabilized at 20 percent of all officers (Felkenes et al., 1993: 34).

The effort to achieve equity via judicial intervention has stimulated organizational change. Many agencies have redesigned recruitment strategies to lure prospective job candidates (Felkenes et al., 1993: 35-36, 40-42; Hochstedler, 1984; Kaminski, 1993). Some departments have instituted such perks as take-home cars, permanent shift assignments, bonuses for college graduates, and salary incentives for officers enrolling in college courses during off-duty hours. Others have found it necessary to revamp rookie training programs so as to replace outmoded practices (Doerner et al., 1989; Felkenes et al., 1993; Felkenes and Schroedel, 1993). For example, fledgling officers now work their way through a standardized training curriculum. Senior officers must undergo specialized instruction about their supervisory roles before assuming training responsibilities. Evaluations based on actual job performance have supplanted antiquated subjective rating devices. While all these reforms are intended to insulate agencies from further criticism, they also strive to place newcomers on equal footing.

At first glance, these remedies appear impressive and somewhat effective. The percentage of women in law enforcement is on the rise. Unfortunately, such monitoring efforts unwittingly focus on just the front end of affirmative action campaigns. Studies that look at the ratio of police officers who are female (Felkenes et al. 1993; Hochstedler, 1984; Martin, 1990; Poulos and Doerner, 1995) amount to little more than demographic "bean counting". While periodic tabulations regarding the composition of agency members may be informative to the uninitiated,

these aggregate figures can mask the more important issue of long-term employee retention.

The actual number of women officers who remain in continuous employment from one year to the next remains unknown. Although men and women are attracted to policing for similar reasons (Hageman, 1979; Lester, 1983; Meagher and Yentes, 1986; Poole and Pogrebin, 1988; Timmins and Hainsworth, 1989), women relinquish their positions under very different circumstances. In many instances, they have grown disconcerted with the constant barrage of sexist barriers which run the gamut from inadequate supervision and hostility from male co-workers to a lack of promotional opportunities (Bartol et al., 1992; Fry, 1983; Herrington, 1993; Poole and Pogrebin, 1988; Wexler and Logan, 1983).

Under these conditions, a troubled agency will record a relatively high female officer turnover rate. However, if that agency quickly replenishes its roster with other women, the "bean counting" strategy will generate the mistaken impression that affirmative action is making firm inroads. To avoid such a misperception, one must move beyond the shallow issue of recruitment and focus on long-term employee retention patterns.

Given this orientation, the purpose of the current study is to examine turnover among sworn personnel in one municipal police department. More specifically, the intent of this inquiry is twofold. First, attention will be paid to characteristics of "stayers" and "quitters" in an effort to explore turnover patterns by race and gender. Second, the possible ramifications of differential turnover for the organization will be discussed.

THE RESEARCH SITE

The Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) is located in Florida's capital city, which is home to two major state universities and a community college. In 1980, the city population hovered around the 60,000 mark. TPD had an authorized strength of 152 sworn personnel and patrolled roughly 23 square miles. Today, the urban population exceeds 130,000 inhabitants, the agency has a capacity of 320 sworn positions, and the city encompasses an area of more than 60 square miles. Both serious personal and property crime rates continue to surpass state averages.

TPD agreed to abide by the provisions of a consent decree as part of a lawsuit settlement in 1982. The plaintiff in that case, a woman who had been denied employment as a sworn police officer, contended that the agency rejected her application solely because she was a female, an invalid occupational qualification. Agency personnel figures at that time revealed that the agency employed six women and 25 blacks out of 152 sworn positions.

The consent decree had four major provisions. First, the 70 members of the class action suit were entitled to monetary damages. Second, the agency would extend preferential hiring rights to any member of the class action suit still interested in becoming a TPD officer. The court would monitor the hiring process to ensure that the plaintiffs received a fair and impartial evaluation. Third, seniority rights, salary increases, pension benefits, vacation leave and promotional credit would be restored to every class member who became hired as a sworn TPD officer. Finally, a third of the next 90 hires were to be women.

This slate of new hires ushered in many dramatic changes for the department. Females accounted for 36 percent of the recruits and nonwhites made up 40 percent of the newcomers. As far as overall agency composition went, white male officers declined from 87 percent of sworn personnel in 1976 to a 63 percent representation in 1985.

THE STUDY GROUP

The present study is a continuation of a series of studies focusing on rookie police officers and their initial training experiences (Doerner et al., 1989; Doerner and Patterson, 1992; Wright et al., 1990). The original data were compiled from agency personnel files dating from January 1981, when the TPD Field Training Officer (FTO) Program was implemented, through to March 1986. A total of 134 recruits satisfied state certification requirements and entered the TPD FTO program during this window.

Officers who remained in continuous service from their initial appointment date until June 30, 1994, were classified as "stayers". Officers who severed full-time employment ties with the agency fell into the "quitter" category. An intermediate group, dubbed "switchers," contained officers who interrupted their agency careers to take jobs elsewhere. However, they eventually returned to TPD. This handful of officers were treated as "quitters" since they had exited from full-time

agency status at some point during their TPD careers. The exclusion of two officers who died during the study period (one white female and one Hispanic male) meant that the "stayer" group numbered 67 officers while the "quitters" registered 65 officers.
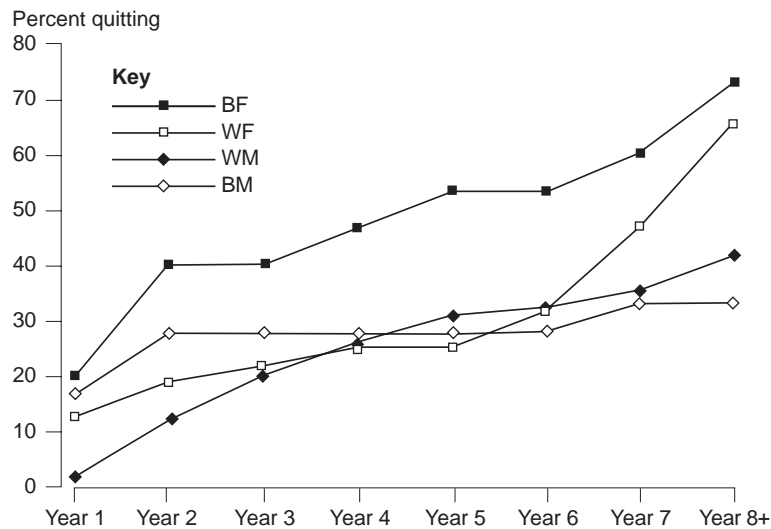
RESULTS

A preliminary examination of turnover rates for this cohort reveals differential employee retention patterns. In terms of race, 48 percent ($n = 47$) of the white officers and 51 percent ($n = 18$) of the black officers hired during the 1981-86 period were no longer on the active duty roster. While 39 percent ($n = 33$) of the male officers had left the agency by July 1994, the departure rate was 67 percent ($n = 32$) for female officers. Gender clearly emerges as a crucial item. While not directly comparable, annual voluntary turnover rates are regarded as excessive when they surpass the 10 percent mark in law enforcement or correctional agencies (Dantzker, 1992; Fry, 1983; Martin, 1990; Wright, 1993).

Figure 1 consolidates annual data into a more versatile format. Instead of tracking officers by calendar year, it organizes career records demographically by years of service. The graph reveals that white recruits exhibit lower attrition rates than do minority members during the first few years of service. Around the fourth year, departure rates converge for all rookies, with the exception of black females. They continue to exit the agency at a much higher rate. Starting in about the seventh year of service, the exodus becomes distinctly gender-based. Quit rates for white females also break away from the earlier trend and mimic the black female pattern.

Given these observations, the decision was made to conduct an *ex post facto* exploratory analysis to determine whether pre-employment psychological testing could accurately isolate stayers from quitters. While the hiring protocol consisted of the CPI, the MMPI, and an oral interview with a psychologist, the agency exempted applicants with prior experience ($n = 13$) from the written portion. In addition, the psychological records of one recruit were misfiled and, therefore, not available for the present study. Thus, Table 1, which presents CPI and MMPI scores for stayers and quitters is based on a somewhat reduced sample size.

The scores in Table 1 do not evidence any systematic differences between stayers and quitters. Other demographic comparisons yield

Figure 1:
CUMULATIVE ATTRITION RATES BY OFFICER DEMOGRAPHIC
CHARACTERISTICS AND YEARS OF SERVICE

Percent quitting

similar results.[1] There are no patterns of significant differences between stayers and quitters who are black, white, male, or female.

Reasons for leaving TPD were gleaned from department files and appear in Table 2. In terms of race, black recruits are much more likely to depart involuntarily during the initial FTO training phase than are white academy graduates. White officers have a much better chance of landing a state or federal law enforcement position than do their black counterparts. As far as gender is concerned, males are more likely than females to relocate to a state or federal agency in a sworn capacity.

Two considerations regarding this observed gender difference emerge here. First, it is not known whether male and female application rates to state and federal law enforcement agencies were comparable. One possibility is that females simply have little desire to transfer to other agencies. Second, movement to the civilian sector is not necessarily a sign of downward mobility. The prospects of higher salaries, a five-day working week, and weekends off are enticing benefits. Furthermore, moving about in a relaxed atmosphere where one does not have to worry constantly about personal safety may be a welcomed change for some

Table 1
CPI AND MMPI SUBSCALES BY OFFICER EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Pre-employment Psychological Scale	Stayers		Quitters		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	*t*-value
CPI:					
Dominance	62.33	8.23	61.95	8.62	0.248
Cap for Status	55.35	6.32	56.38	7.82	–0.785
Sociability	57.15	6.66	60.07	6.40	–2.428
Social Presence	59.50	8.35	60.14	8.06	–0.422
Self Acceptance	59.53	7.51	58.79	8.31	0.507
Responsibility	53.12	6.33	51.50	6.68	1.349
Socialization	53.53	6.28	51.35	7.38	1.732
Self Control	53.87	7.06	53.90	8.25	–0.021
Tolerance	56.00	8.51	54.85	8.75	0.727
Achievement v. Conformity	61.03	5.58	59.50	6.48	1.375
Achievement v. Independence	57.73	7.63	57.71	7.85	0.018
Intellectual Effect	55.70	7.57	56.10	7.70	–0.287
Psych Mindedness	59.63	6.60	58.47	8.12	0.855
Flexibility	51.77	9.50	53.16	9.67	–0.786
Femininity	44.57	8.65	41.86	10.09	1.561
Well Being	55.00	5.83	54.14	7.14	0.717
Good Impression	54.28	9.51	56.12	8.74	–1.093
Communality	56.88	6.53	54.12	7.66	2.105
MMPI:					
Hypochondriasis	49.20	4.96	48.26	4.08	1.128
Depression	48.05	6.51	48.03	6.37	0.013
Hysteria	54.93	6.68	54.57	5.96	0.312
Psychopathic Deviation	57.75	8.58	58.43	6.63	–0.483
Masculinity Femininity	55.70	7.51	53.91	8.46	1.211
Paranoia	51.72	7.21	51.19	7.89	0.378
Psychasthenia	51.80	6.72	49.59	5.51	1.959
Schizophrenia	54.08	6.40	52.64	5.40	1.327
Hypomania	58.57	7.77	59.71	8.37	–0.766
Social Introver	46.87	11.60	44.76	11.29	1.001
F Validity	48.37	3.03	47.79	3.03	1.030
L Lie	50.70	7.54	51.17	7.39	–0.343
K Correction	61.85	7.26	62.83	7.10	–0.740
Sample Size	60		58		

• A *t*-value of at least 1.659 is necessary to attain significance at the 0.05 level, two-tailed, with 116˚ of freedom.

Table 2
TERMINATION REASONS BY OFFICER AND GENDER

Reason for Leaving TPD	Officer Race		Officer Gender		
	White %	Black %	Male %	Female %	Total %
FTO Casualty	17	50	24	28	26
Went Civilian	38	28	27	44	35
Went Sworn Local	6	11	3	13	8
Went Sworn State	23	6	27	9	18
Went Sworn Federal	13	0	15	3	9
Unknown	2	6	3	3	3
Total %	99	101	99	100	99
N	47	18	33	32	65

people. Thus, it may be that affirmative action has expanded career options in the private sector by allowing women to compile a more pertinent work history.

Table 3 summarizes the promotion history of this cohort. Both races have similar upward mobility records within the agency. The figures show that females lag slightly behind male officers. However, one of the deceased officers whose file was eliminated from the study group was a white female who had attained the rank of captain during her tenure. When this omission is taken into account, advancement opportunities appear to be distributed equitably.

Table 3
HIGHEST RANK ACHIEVED BY OFFICER RACE AND GENDER

Highest Rank Held	Officer Race		Officer Gender		
	White %	Black %	Male %	Female %	Total %
Officer	86	86	85	88	86
Sergeant	11	9	11	8	10
Lieutenant	4	6	5	4	5
Total %	101	101	101	100	101
N	97	35	84	48	132

DISCUSSION

A class action lawsuit directed against TPD culminated in a court ruling that the agency had engaged in questionable hiring practices. Female applicants received very little, if any, serious consideration when they sought employment as sworn police officers with the city. This discriminatory practice eventually brought the agency under the watchful eye of federal authorities. Over the next few years, the department revamped its hiring procedures and incorporated more women into the agency. Once TPD had assembled a critical mass of female officers, the agency's affirmative action efforts were deemed sufficient and further judicial monitoring ceased. However, this paper suggests that the apparent gains pursuant to affirmative action pressures were short lived and quickly swept aside by differential employee departure patterns.

Although the issue of voluntary employee turnover has not been a major focal point for many police researchers, several facets of this topic have surfaced in the literature. Police typologies, for example, acknowledge a category of officers who display behavior matching what human resource managers call "employee turn-off" (Roseman, 1981). These officers have soured or burned out and do as little work as possible. Whether one labels this group "rule-appliers" (White, 1972), "realists" (Broderick, 1977), "avoiders" (Muir, 1977), or "shirkers" (Hochstedler, 1981), the outcome is the same. There is a recognition that a readily identifiable group of police officers exists who do not see the agency's mission as their primary task.

Human resource specialists concur that turnover can be a healthy development (Gardner, 1986; Price, 1977, 1989, 1992). An excessive departure rate, though, may reveal some fundamental flaws within the organization. While some police researchers chastise their colleagues for being preoccupied with unearthing gender differences (Worden, 1993), one cannot ignore important empirical distinctions when they do surface. For instance, women typically enter law enforcement with higher educational levels than do males (Carter et al., 1989: xiv). Furthermore, college-educated officers are more likely to grow disenchanted with their positions as they gain time on the streets (Dantzker, 1992). Thus, it may be that the turnover observed among female officers in this study reflects this process.

Perhaps another helpful theoretical concept that could influence job satisfaction is cynicism. Dorsey and Giacopassi (1986) find that female officers display elevated cynicism scores in comparison with their male counterparts. Whether this effect intensifies for black females and

eventually becomes manifested in job departures remains an open question.

Studies of voluntary attrition among correctional officers suggest that many quitters compile a very impressive evaluation record before moving elsewhere (Wright, 1991, 1993). While trying to understand why extremely competent officers would decide to relocate is an area ripe for study, a more immediate concern is the employee pool which is left behind. Do stayers make a conscious decision to remain in law enforcement or do they become "careerists" by default? Do these veterans feel trapped because they lack competitive skills to land meaningful jobs elsewhere? Are disillusioned "careerists" more likely to cling to misanthropic views? Do these attitudes detract from agency goals? What impact would a large body of stayers have on service delivery? Would they impart a similar infectious sentiment to rookies as they enter the ranks? As one can see from these comments, further investigation into police turnover and retention has the potential to shed much light on how agency climate, especially with respect to employee morale, sets the tone for police-citizen interation

CONCLUSION

Most studies which address agency compliance with affirmative action mandates tend to resort to a simple "bean counting" strategy to document the gains attained by members of protected classes. The current project rejects this front end view as too self-serving and, instead, redirects attention toward long-term employee retention patterns. Tracing employment histories and separating officers into "stayers" and "quitters" reveals pronounced attrition rates for women, especially black females. This finding implies that corrective hiring plans may not be achieving their intended affirmative action purposes in the long run.

NOTES

1. Comparisons between female stayers and quitters, male stayers and quitters, black stayers and quitters, and white stayers and quitters are not displayed here to conserve space. However, they are available on request.

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