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War Stories and Occupying Soldiers: A Narrative Approach to Understanding Police Culture and Community Conflict

Don L. Kurtz[1] · Lindsey Upton[2]

Abstract Narrative theory and methods are gradually finding a place in the study of crime and its control. However vibrant narrative criminology has been to this point, narrative scholars have somewhat ignored policing, both in terms of the language and grammar of individual officers and the cultural life of the institution itself. In this article, we elaborate the importance of storytelling in the (re)production of contemporary police culture and the broader police power. While storytelling as cultural production is, of course, not the sole purview of police, they are uniquely positioned to shape the broad social, cultural and political imaginaries of crime and the realities of crime control and community interactions. Therefore, in paying close attention to the narratives of police and the cultural work accomplished through storytelling, we gain insight into the production and maintenance of police authority and culture.

> It is naïve to assume that what police officers say they do—the stories they tell—perfectly reflect the realities of their work (van Hulst 2013).

Introduction

On August 9th, 2014, Ferguson (Missouri) Police Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed an unarmed black teenager named Michael Brown. Some eye-witness testimony described Officer Wilson as hyper-aggressive and too quick to exercise deadly force, while

✉ Don L. Kurtz
  dlk3535@ksu.edu

  Lindsey Upton
  lupton@tntech.edu

[1] Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, Kansas State University, 209 Waters Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506, USA

[2] Sociology and Political Sciences, Tennessee Tech, Cookeville, TN 38505, USA

contradicting accounts described Brown as the antagonist who violently assaulted the officer. A less disputed fact, across all accounts, is that Brown was unarmed at the time his death. On November 24th, 2014, the St Louis County Prosecuting Attorney's Office announced that a grand jury decided not to indict Officer Wilson on criminal charges related to Brown's death (*Missouri v. Brown*). This contentious verdict resulted in public outcry over long existing issues of police and community conflict.

Following the fatal event, the city of Ferguson became a focal point for issues of policing and racial tension, highlighting recent hyper-aggression practiced by law enforcement in this community and beyond. Though the issues surrounding police use of force in the United States are not new phenomenon, the Ferguson case is among multiple recent police-citizen encounters in the U.S. that revisit the high tensions between some police organizations and the communities they serve. While overt and institutional discrimination by law enforcement are fruitful elements of academic research (Weitzer and Tuch 1999; Holroyd 2015), the current paper examines the way narrative development and police storytelling reproduces aspects of police culture.

Officer Wilson's grand jury testimony provided insight into how local police officers perceived relations with certain neighborhoods in Ferguson and during grand jury testimony Officer Wilson described the neighborhood where he confronted Brown in combative terms. He stated, "It is an antipolice area for sure. There's a lot of gangs that reside in that area, there's a lot of gun activity, drug activity, it is just not a well-liked community. That community doesn't like the police." Wilson further indicated that police were on high alert in this community, "Yes, that's not an area where you can take anything really lightly. Like I said, it is a hostile environment" (see *Missouri v. Brown*). While it may be easy to understand these comments as the musing of a man attempting to justify his deadly reactions to an unarmed teenager, such comments provide a useful window into the heart of this particular department and the institution of policing itself. The Ferguson case highlights the importance of analyzing narratives that may influence officer thinking and behavior; however, this case serves as a flashpoint example and not the primary focus of this paper.

Narrative approaches to understanding human interactions and behaviors serve as a framework for analyzing police culture in this paper. The narrative methodological approach is used in a number of fields including anthropology, psychology, and criminology (Briggs 1996; Mattingly and Garro 2000; Riessman 2008; Gubrium and Holstein 2009). Moreover, narrative approaches are an emergent, albeit limited, subset of criminological theory (Presser 2009, 2010) and recently applied to understanding criminal behavior and desistance from criminal offending (Maruna 2001; Youngs and Canter 2012), the exploration of therapeutic reconstruction of the personal identity of criminal offenders (Stevens 2012), and as a critique of media constructed accounts of criminal identity and/or action (Peelo and Soothill 2000; Peelo 2006; Linnemann 2010).

This paper, however, applies narrative approaches to the understanding of identity-making found among criminal justice practitioners by extending the narrative approach to police officers. Important to our study is an analysis of how police stories influence ideological frames that underpin police culture and police action more broadly (Waddington; van Hulst 2013). Specifically, this study draws upon interviews collected with police officers in several police departments located in the Midwest region of the United States. Our findings indicate storytelling and narratives in the context of American police culture frequently draw upon conceptions of community hostility and frame policing as comparable to foreign military service and relates to Kraska and Cubellis (1997) work on the growing militarization of policing. The militaristic narrative is an important theme

of this paper, which is focused on the cultural power of war stories, militaristic language, and narratives that envision officers as occupying soldier. Particular attention is paid to the role of police storytelling and narratives in the (re)production of police culture with specific attention on the role that stories might play in the transformation from culture to action.

Much like van Hulst (2013), we seek to understand police storytelling beyond the police station, to record the work it does, to identify interconnected ways militaristic identity represented in stories and narratives potentially shapes law enforcement culture, and observe how these identities are ultimately developed in the process. For example, this approach provides a unique lens for understanding perspectives held in the fatal encounter between Officer Wilson and Michael Brown. Officer Wilson's testimony implies pre-conceive notions of conflict in a neighborhood he identified as anti-police and he clearly articulated constructed beliefs about enemy boundary lines and a sense that he and fellow officers were occupying unwelcoming space in this neighborhood. Prior policing research argues "informal ideologies" that structure police culture have tremendous influence on the working environment in police organizations (Loftus 2008). Our findings connect to emerging literature that identifies the importance of storytelling and narrative development as an aspect of law enforcement and the significant role narratives may play in the (re)production of contemporary police culture across time and space. In the context of the contemporary discussions surrounding that of Michael Brown and similar stories across the United States, this narrative approach provides insight into the ways in which officers like Darren Wilson understand their environments. This paper is also situated in literature that seeks to understand the long existing masculinity found in American police culture and the shift towards the building of a hyper-aggressive police state. We find that stories perpetuate beliefs about violence that do not necessarily match reality of the risk of deadly assault for officers—rather they fit within existing police cultural narratives. Such stories are often simplified and reproduced through the storytelling process, even when an officer's personal experience does not match the narrative.

Narrative Criminology

Narrative criminology is an important approach used to frame this study. Presser (2009: 178) defines narrative criminology as "an emergent paradigm with forerunners in theories of neutralization and drift, cognitive error, identity, and situational interpretation." Presser (2009: 178) further argues "narrative criminology is poised to clarify the nature of both criminal behavior and criminalization—including court decisions, media accounts of crime and scholarly analyses of crime." Criminologists generally approach narratives as one of three analysis subcategories. First, narratives are frequently conceptualized as a record or formal account of events, and while subjectivity may bias a narrative record, they are generally considered facts in a positivistic sense. Second, narratives are interpretations of events emerging from an individual's perceptions and a criminological narrative approach focuses on the essence of these stories rather than viewing them as a "factual" recounting of events. Third, narratives may shape behavior as meanings assigned to situational dynamics may influence future action or inaction. It should be noted that the veracity of stories are less consequential to narrative approaches that focus interpretations or narratives as shapers of future action because both narrative subtypes can derive from stories regardless of their authenticity. In essence, the meaning an individual attaches to events or subsequent behavior is not dependent on the validity of the original account.

Certain criminological narrative approaches extend self-narrative techniques, developed in psychology and other related disciplines, to focus on the power of language, storytelling, and narratives in shaping self-conception (Crossley 2000; Stevens 2012). Youngs and Canter's (2012) explored narratives of offenders to explain and predict criminal action, specifically arguing that within any given culture only a few narratives exist, thus offering a limited collection of offender storylines and roles. Youngs and Canter (2012: 247) further argue that, "particular narratives operating through offence roles, act positively to drive specific criminal action patterns; that different offending styles are underpinned by different narrative processes". Their work connected cultural narratives and cognitive psychology by exposing processes that occur between criminal identity, emotional components, and cognitive distortions (see Youngs and Canter 2012: 240).

Criminological narrative approaches have also extended this to include media coverage of crime connected to social and/or political action. In one study of a murder trial, Peelo and Soothill (2000) explored newspaper reporting as a dominant form of social narrative construction. The authors noted prepackaged social narratives found in the media "contribute to the shaping of group responses to the public enactment of law" (Peelo and Soothill 2000: 145). These public accounts of unusual and extreme cases such as murder and other violent crimes utilize "fictional knowledge" as a way to restore a stability following events that threaten social and moral order. Importantly, media coverage utilizes "fairy tale logic and detective drama format" (Peelo and Soothill 2000: 145) as a way to simplify the complexities of a case in a manner palatable to the public.

Scholars have applied the narrative approach to both understand victims and offenders in criminological theory. Peelo (2006) examined victimhood reports found in newspaper accounts of murder cases and argued that sensational reporting contributes to the development of public narratives in criminal cases. Specifically, Peelo (2006: 170) stated, "newspapers both echo and shape this aspect of the public narratives regardless of the experience of actual victims…Exploitation and ownership of victimhood, within this framework, are far removed from the experience of actual victims." In another study that focused on the depiction of methamphetamine users in a sample of Midwestern newspaper article, gender was identified as an important narrative device in these constructed media accounts (Linnemann 2010). Linnemann (2010: 99) states, "If we pay attention to the cultural script of drug panics and make connections between crises of the present, like crack and meth, a new narrative appears. Here meth is not a new drug epidemic, but a particular face emerging from the monolithic backdrop of crisis." While narrative criminology is clearly used to examine both offenders and victims, this approach is rarely extended to those employed in the criminal justice system.

The construction of narratives and the work they do to reproduce cultural scripts about existing state power and agency can be applied specifically to the criminal justice system. Whether it is the criminals, victims, witnesses, or criminal justice practitioners themselves, narrative criminology approaches provide unique understanding of the processes that exist within criminal justice institution and among people working within the system. In this case, the reproduction of American police culture and broader police power are situated in narratives produced by the police themselves and interconnected within various social contexts over time and place. Whereas previous scholarship has examined other powers in the construction of knowledge, such as media studies outlined above, there is room in the field for scholarly contribution focused specifically on the narratives of police and their role in the (re)production of masculinity and hyperaggression found in American police culture.

Narrative Development and Storytelling in Police Culture

Narrative criminology provides an important theoretical connection to existing literature of police culture. In previous work, Skolnick (1967) explored police culture and behavior, particularly deviance and undesirable actions both on and off the job. He believed in a strong connection between police culture and individual officer behavior. Other studies identified specific characteristics of police culture, finding it excessively masculine, action oriented, politically conservative, socially isolated, cynical, and marked by extreme loyalty among officers (Reiner 1985; Campeau 2015). Loftus (2008) further noted that despite years of equal opportunity policies, law enforcement remains a male-dominated, white, heterocentric occupation. Amidst changing social structures toward equality in policing, the culture has become increasing resentful of efforts to change this dominant culture (Loftus 2008). Narrative criminology offers an approach to better understand informal mechanisms found in police culture and the ways they shape officer identity and behavior.

Police storytelling is an "understudied" element of police culture despite the identified function and power narratives might play in police organizations (Fletcher 1996; Waddington 1999; Ford 2003; van Hulst 2013). Fletcher (1996) argued storytelling serves an important role in law enforcement including continuing education from police academies, promotion of station-house unity and police cultural values, and to provide acceptable venues to manage work stress. Police organizations may significantly benefit from many of these functions of storytelling, as they are an integral part of police culture and may serve as "an essential part of an officer's equipment" (Fletcher 1996: 36). However, storytelling shapes organizational behavior in ways that potentially counter formal policy implemented at structural levels. This process can reproduce negative aspects of police culture, including longstanding social issues in law enforcement such as inequality found in structured gender arrangements and contentious police-community relations. A departmental narrative can substantially differ from the broader community and may simultaneously assist, and yet reject, the community it serves. Others note that "Policemen generally view themselves as performing society's dirty work. Consequently, a gap I created between the police and the public. Today's patrolman feels cut off from the mainstream culture and stigmatized unfairly" (Van Maanen 1973b: 3). This belief can result in discourse often reproducing and magnifying "us versus them" rhetoric and practices. van Hulst (2013: 636) argues storytelling is powerful in understanding the informal mechanisms of police culture, as it reveals "what stories are told; where and how storytelling takes place; and what work stories do."

An important category of police storytelling takes the form of what police officers frequently term as "war stories." The function of war stories remains debatable in the literature with explanations that range from the development of the famed police working personality (Ford 2003), to fortify policing as a masculine occupation (Fletcher 1996), and, according to van Hulst (2013: 13), to help "officers get a sense of what is going on in the district." War stories commonly occur when officers discuss critical work events, frequently exaggerating details, in a ways that highlight humor and remove emotions (Fletcher 1996; Ford 2003; Kurtz 2006; Van Maanen 1973a). Ford (2003: 3) describes war stories as "a recounting of idealized events, entertaining humor, or police-related social commentary. They carry a message celebrating police values or techniques…War stories deal with the heroic, the extreme, and the cynically humorous." Van Maanen (1973a) found the war stories more effectively captured the attention of new recruits than standard

training or lecture material. The telling of war stories is well documented as an essential element to police culture and these stories serve a myriad of functions (van Hulst 2013).

At face value, terming storytelling sessions as "war stories" may seem rather benign, but the language coincides with critical scholarship on the increased militarization of policing. Kraska and Cubellis (1997) found an expansive growth in paramilitary policing with both ideological and material changes for police work. In addition to more obvious signs of police militarization (e.g., military grade equipment, weapons, and technology), discourse surrounding police work also shifted toward militarization. Kraska (2007) argued that language and shared beliefs found in this shift may represent a more important cultural aspect of police militarization (Kraska 2007). Thus, war stories as a type of police storytelling, contribute to existing police militarization literature and critical analysis of language and discourse in American police culture.

Some researchers view police storytelling as an important, albeit more informal, aspect of police training in which officers learn essential practices or develop specific tactics needed for professional law enforcement (Shearing and Ericson 1991; Ford 2003; van Hulst 2013). Others argue that storytelling may present a distraction from the more mundane aspect of police work and offers a social backdrop to construct police identities more aligned with popular culture representations (van Hulst 2013). Waddington (1999) called this informal, backstage setting the "canteen culture." Shearing and Ericson (1991: 487) argued that storytelling offers an essential tool in learning the "craft" of policing as the job cannot be understood as purely a scientific endeavor because officers work environment "is too diverse and complicated to be reduced to simple principles." The authors contend that storytelling explains police action and decision-making because officers struggle to articulate the rules that guide their actions. However, the authors argue that the same stories are so commonplace that they cannot be taken as accurate accounts of the law enforcement work environments and more accurately viewed as police parables or folklore.

Parables are stories told to teach a truth or higher moral principle and provide a broader meaning while folklore includes stories passed inter-generationally through a community. As a community, law enforcement appears have a number of unique examples of these narrative devices. An exemplar of police folklore is Fletcher's (1996: 40) conception of a "core story" and she argued it reinforces police values and behaviors because it became engrained in the mythology of law enforcement across organizational boundaries. While her story was specific to gendered elements of policing, it provides a prime example of how certain stories gain "almost the statues of folklore." Viewing storytelling as parables and not factual accounts further highlights the importance of these narratives in the transmission of police values and worldview as they allow new officers to assimilate to police culture and acquire expected commonsense knowledge (Shearing and Ericson 1991; McNulty 1994; Fletcher 1996; Ford 2003). While this may serve an important process for organizational cohesion and the development of the police "craft" it also has a darker element that effectively "shuts out outsiders" (Fletcher 1996: 41).

Fletcher's account fits with research on the importance of storytelling in the transition of organizational values and behaviors. Prevailing stories or organizational narratives may maintain power structures by marginalizing certain practices while reifying others (Humphreys and Brown 2002). Furthermore, stories may prevent social change by further reinforcing dominate organizational values and behavioral practices (Murgia and Poggio 2009). Näslund and Pemer (2012: 91) wrote that "dominate stories exercise power by fixing meaning…giving words and concepts a certain, local meaning, which restricts the storytelling possibilities in that organization." However, stories never become unchangeable and are more aptly envisioned as an "ongoing process whereby meaning attributed to

past and present organizational events is defined and redefined" (Näslund and Pemer 2012: 90).

The language and specific narratives born of police storytelling represents an understudied and important aspect of the (re)production of contemporary police culture and could also illuminate officers' assumptions of work-related risk and beliefs about community relations. Therefore, by paying close attention to the narratives of police and the cultural work accomplished through storytelling, we offer insight into the production and maintenance of police authority and culture. Using officer interviews this paper explores the importance of police storytelling, the unique language born of these narratives that officers utilize to understand their role within the community, and the potential influence of these narratives on actions of police officers.

Methods

This paper utilizes information obtained from 65 in-depth interviews with officers in six Midwest communities. The data and interviews were collected as part of two police related doctoral dissertation projects that explored officer perceptions associated with differences in urban and rural policing, aspects of gender in the work place, and police work stressors. All interviews were transcribed by a paid transcription service. The focus on stories arose organically during officer descriptions of community decay, stress management, and general organization behavior—further illustrating the important aspects of police storytelling and narrative development.

The first sample includes data collected from 28 semi-structured qualitative interviews from three Midwestern departments in the United States. The data was part of a doctoral dissertation that explored how gendered behavior influences police stress and burnout and the interviews were conducted in the spring of 2006. The departments were selected for the original research based on size, accessibility and willingness of administration to allow access to officers. The departments represent organizations of various sizes within a reasonable proximity of the researcher and in order to maintain confidentiality we withhold the names of specific departments and officers. The original data collection processes for the broader project included in-depth semi-structured interviews with officers that typically lasted an hour or more and were transcribed verbatim for analysis by paid service. The largest department in this sample was the most bureaucratic and diverse and had rough 800 employees at the time of data collection. The middle-sized department in this sample had slightly more than 100 sworn officers at the time the interviews. The most rural department for this sample employed few officers, but maintained a Chief of Police, one sergeant, three corporals, and seven patrol officers. For this sample over fifty officers were phoned or emailed interview request and face-to-face interviews occurred with 28 officers. This final sample included seven women and 21 men. Only three of the participants were racial or ethnic minorities (For a detailed description of the departments and data collection see Kurtz 2006).

Sample two included 37 total interviews with officers from four police departments and interviews were conducted in the fall of 2010 as part of a doctoral dissertation. This project was concerned with differences between urban and rural policing and officers' assessments crime and disorganization in the communities they patrolled. The research sites in this project approximated a continuum from urban to rural communities. The most urban site in this data included the same city and police department as sample one. This sample included

a number of rural communities identified as hot spots for methamphetamine activity, a focal point of the original project. The transcribed interviews were provided to the authors of this paper by the original researcher but were scrubbed of identifying information (For a detailed description of the original data collection for this sample see Linnemann 2011).

From a methodological standpoint, Presser and Sandberg (2015: 86) offer several distinct points of possible analysis appropriate to narrative criminology, several of which our employed in the current study. The five strategies identified by the theorist include: (1) the major parts of a narrative, (2) the subject's choice of words particularly verbs that may represent level of agency, (3) the particular genre, (4) narrative coherence, and (5) the context of storytelling. While these theorist focus primarily on offender narratives, the analysis points are quite appropriate to police storytelling and are employed in various degrees to our analysis. Language and story choices like ethnographies can also "display the intricate ways individuals and groups understand, accommodate, and resist a presumably shared order. These portraits emerge from global constraints among nations, societies, native histories, subsistence patterns, religions, language groups, and the like" (Van Maanen 2011: xviii).

Research coding was built on traditional qualitative processes and analysis of interviews involved identifying initial codes, specific categories, responses patterns and finally larger themes (Kim 2015). Initial coding identified specific terminology and brief phrases used in officer statements, followed by exploration of coded statements that resulted in identifiable patterns and recognizable themes. The current paper is not all inclusive of themes and patterns found throughout the paper, rather the paper is an in depth focused discussion on selected themes and patterns found. For example, statements about the hazards of policing, treatment by dangerous community members, and specific military terminology were identified in coding and became the basis for the occupying soldier and war stories themes detailed in the findings of this paper.

During coding storytelling emerged as an important aspect of police culture and this theme grew from descriptions of how officers interact on and off the job. While some interview questions illicit information regarding interaction between officers and/or general social aspects of police relationships, no original questions focused on storytelling or narrative development per se. This limits some information on officer's perceptions of the importance of storytelling but also underscores the merit of narrative development and storytelling in police culture as numerous officers mentioned stories during these interviews. Additionally, the narrative research process allows analysis of the officer accounts within the context of their unique work environment without necessarily exploring concerns of generalization beyond perceptions of their lives.

Findings

The analysis of these interviews should not be perceived as an interpretation of purely factual accounts of the officer's environments in a positivistic driven analysis. In fact, one value of narrative criminology is the usefulness of storytelling and narrative construction even when factual verification is not possible. Many narrative researchers will approach analysis by using both an "interpretation of faith" and an "interpretation of suspicion" to appropriately understand distinctive narratives (Kim 2015). Within the scope of narrative criminology, we analyzed officers' unique accounts, the importance of storytelling in police culture, and the idea that narratives can structure police culture and individual

behavior. Sandberg (2010: 462) states, "instead of always searching for 'the truth' one should appreciate the multitude of stories present in social context." Sandberg (2010) further argues that we must not confirm the accuracy for a story to merit study and even "obvious lies" can reveal the complexity of social situations and isolated subcultures. Furthermore, Youngs and Canter (2012: 246) posit that narratives have explanatory power regardless of their veracity because "behavior is the enactment of the narrative; pursuit of the narrative itself the motivation." We believe this methodological approach allows for appreciation of these stories and a more significant understanding of the role of narratives in the context of law enforcement culture and their potential to influence officer behaviors.

Police Storytelling

According to van Hulst (2013), police storytelling does "all kinds of work" and police officer across the various departments in this sample indicated a wide-range of storytelling behaviors in multiple law enforcement contexts. The breadth of storytelling referenced by officers in these interviews speaks to the complexities of using Presser's models of criminological narratives to examine police storytelling. Stories can represent an officer's narrative or official account of an event, unique interpretation of their environment (possibly specific to certain shifts or departments) and/or provide a potential framework for understanding future behavior because stories are expressions of police cultural norms or departmental values. It is noteworthy that the context of the storytelling seems important to officers as narrators and consumers of the story and understanding the context also fits seamlessly with the analysis strategy identified by Presser and Sandberg (2015). In other words, the context is important to the story itself and shapes the lens of analysis. Narration of the same event could dramatically shift depending on the context and many officers referenced that belief in these interviews.

Officers understand the diverse contexts for storytelling and differentiate war stories that emphasize work-related incidents told in a grandiose or humorous manner, from more factual based storytelling aligned with a narrative record. Yet, the setting of the story may play a significant role in both the content and the stories ongoing culture importance. The exchange of war stories frequently occurs during binge drinking and other social occasions outside the reach of formal organizational rules, which represents an essential site for the (re)production of specific narratives that potentially shape officers beliefs and actions.

Fitting with McNulty's (1994) idea that police stories pass on commonsense knowledge and generate interactive law enforcement scenarios, several officers discussed storytelling in an educational context or as an a more informal avenue to address difficult or troubling calls. In particular, officers discussed processing challenging calls at the conclusion of shifts in the type of storytelling that highlight the "ambiguity of situations regularly faced by officers and the danger stemming from a lack of clear or inherent situational meaning" (McNulty 1994: 284).

The following officer's statement provides an example of such storytelling.

> I think when we exchange our stories about what we did, whether it be a car chase, a big fight downtown, a foot chase or whatever, I think all of us, in our minds are saying well what would I have done in the same situation or what could I have done better?

This type of verbal exchange also corresponds with what Shearing and Ericson (1991) described as storytelling that occurs during the "flow of action" and may represent one important context for understanding police narrative development. However, this type of

storytelling allows officers to codify cultural responses to "types" of calls that may not acknowledge or fully conform to organizational imperatives. Another male from an urban department described this formula for storytelling as occurring during or directly following a shift.

> Usually on that shift, at the end of that shift, everybody talks about the call that Joe Blow was on. We did this and we did that or the suspect did this. We replay our calls with each other. *Usually by the end of the shift everybody's aware of all of the good calls that everybody was on that night.*

We highlight the last sentence of this statement in italics to emphasize an important stated aspect of rehashing work calls during or directly following a shift—it allows officers to supplant the more mundane aspects of daily policing with the sensational and uncommon. This behavior may heighten the perceived danger of law enforcement and could influence negative community interactions as the collective memory of violence supplants the often uneventful routines of policing. Additionally, the course of action storytelling may also provide examples of how officers select verbs and utilize other language choices that determine the level of agency (Presser and Sandberg 2015). However, the retelling of the most exciting and dangerous aspects of a shift certainly heightens the perceived danger of law enforcement an excellent example of how community relations in policing become "both unrecognized and undervalued" (Martin 1999: 124) because shifts stories rarely appear to focus on service or community relations calls. In our interviews officers discussed flow-of-action stories as a communal aspect of policing but did not provide many specific examples of the actual stories.

War Stories

Generally, the settings of "war stories" are quite different than "shift" storytelling and they mostly occur in informal social settings. During these off duty hours, war stories dominate officer interactions and many acknowledge that social circles become predominantly restricted to coworkers. As one officer stated, "job talk never goes away." Another urban patrol officer stated, "We talk about work a lot, you know and we will make fun of each other a lot about the stuff we do at work, but it's, you know we tell the same stories over and over again." A similar statement is offered by another field officer from the large urban department, "Yes, I think that anytime you get a bunch of people that work together outside of work, the conversation usually goes back to work." Officers openly acknowledge the importance of storytelling for camaraderie and social interaction but offered little suggestion of their potential influence on police culture or behaviors.

Several factors distinguish the type of "work" storytelling exchanged during or directly following a shift from narratives and war stories that emerge over time. War stories transform into tall-tales or parables becoming further exaggerated with time and officers within this sample were keenly aware that war stories are told more for dramatic flair and/ or humorous effect and not illustrative of factual events. In this fashion, the war story and other collective narratives clearly detach from official police records, transcending unmistakably into unique parables seemingly providing some level of moral reasoning or rational for the police worldview. A 40 year-old male officer offered the following statements regarding the factual merits of war stories. "The talk is almost all work related, and it's usually war stories…I'll say the calls were embellished, but it was *kind of* telling about your day." This officer's statement underscores the exaggerated character of war stories and the fact that officers understand they do not represent factual events as much as

a yarn "kind of" born from police work environments. This officer's statement affirms Bayley and Bittner's (1984: 46) assessment that police stories "should probably be taken with a grain of salt. The same stories crop up too often, suggesting that they have become part of the mythology of policing passed on uncritically from officer to officer." Further, the officer's statements reiterate the complexities of police culture, as war stories are "employed to produce meaning within a particular moment", extending how various cultural scripts found within policing "uncover a more dynamic process where considerable shifting can occur" (Campeau 2015: 677).

Jokes, dark or gallows humor, and absurdity are hallmarks of war stories as they frequently highlight the absurd and often grotesque consequence of criminal behavior and even the victims of criminal offenses and circumstances. In the words of one female detective, "I think people have to (use) humor sometimes about the stuff on their job." Another description is provided in the following statement from a male patrol officer: "We sometimes talk about cases after hours, but it's more in a funny or joking way." Yet another example is noted by this officer's statement: "They sort of make fun of those situations in some instances, not a joke, but not really as serious as it was. I think officers like dark humor at times." The officers acknowledge that gallows humor viewed through the wrong lens could appear insensitive or disrespectful, but believe it benefits the officers in a number of ways. In this vein officers report finding humor in the tragedy of their work and seem to reference this as an appropriate way to manage psychological aspects of the job. However, it is important to note that officer amputate emotion and psychological stress replacing them with hyper-masculine attributes of fearlessness, heroism, and humor in the face of danger. These dark-humor war stories then become an inside joke for officers with the community, offenders, and victims a like, representing the folly of the story. While dark humor is common in multiple professions (Watson 2011) and may appear harmless, it can also desensitize officers the needs of community and foster the "us versus them" mentality prevalent in policing. Finding such humor offensive may signal to other officers that the offended party is unfit for policing (Vivona 2014).

Language matters as a point of analysis in narrative criminology and speakers communicate through linguistic choices (Presser and Sandberg 2015). The choice of language is important and officers' utilization of the term "war stories" underscores the military perception of their jobs. While it may seem subtle, this paper treats the words and specifically stories of police officers seriously because they illuminate the ideological frames that underpin police culture. This terminology also corresponds with emerging literature on the blurring boundaries between traditional law enforcement and military operations (Kraska 2007). The "war story" jargon fits with emergent paramilitary culture that is further buttressed by increased utilization of military tactics, equipment, and even language in policing (Kraska and Cubellis 1997; Haggert and Ericson 1999). It is common for police departments to use paramilitary terms like forward operating base, tactical operations center, battle dress uniform (BDU), tactical firearms unit, and civies (short for civilian uniform) to provide a few examples. Additionally, law enforcement policy and procedure frequently reinforces the paramilitary perception of policing which then influences officer language, storytelling, and specific narrative frames.

Occupying Soldier Narrative

The occupying soldier narrative frequently appeared in interviews with officers and this theme focused on defining the differences between officers and the communities they patrol. The occupying soldier narrative highlighted perceived risk of managing dangerous

classes of individuals or certain neighborhoods and some officers described them as "war zones." This specific narrative builds on preexisting social constructs and appears to "assign broad parameters of meaning" (Presser and Sandberg 2015: 93) easily employed in various communities. Like an occupying army, these officers describe policing in terms of controlling a generally hostile community in order to establish law and order in unfriendly territory. It also highlights the assumed differences between officers and citizens and further develops an "us versus them" mentality among officers. Officers are leery of most community members and describe them as if they are patrolling "enemy" territory. Specific stories emphasize tensions between officers and the community, fear of violent attack, and the ever-present watchful eye of community activist. In essence, officers believe they are controlling an insurrection of criminal and violent elements without the trust of the public and indicate little ability to differentiate between the average citizen and an enemy combatant. Military language, tactics, and equipment further reinforces this militaristic narrative.

An important aspect of the occupying soldier narrative is the ever-present tension associated with policing communities perceived as dangerous and officers describe patrolling certain neighborhoods like combat patrols in a war zone. One officer stated that, "there are times where, as a patrolman, you don't have time to breathe" in reference to the aspect of risk on the job. Officers, at times, differentiate between sections of the city identified as safer and those more associated with criminal elements. As one male officer stated, "sometimes it's like a war out there, you don't know what to expect." Another officer directly referenced a particular segment of his city as a "war zone" because of the influx of gang activity and illegal immigrants. An officer patrolling the largest community referenced the fear of assault from a community member even during his of duty hours. Consider the following statement.

> It's always in the back of your mind. You always want to be ready. You always want to be what's called 'condition yellow.' Your awareness conditions. Like most people run around and they're in 'condition white.' I don't know if you've ever heard this analogy. So you know what I'm talking about. I try to carry my duty weapon off duty whenever I can. Sometimes I don't, but I need to do it a lot more, but in 17 years I've never had a confrontation but I could walk out of here today and go get my civilian clothes on and walk out of my house and some guy knows where I live and wants to do something stupid. So you just never know.

The risk narrative was highly present in this officer's quote and it described how it even influenced his off-duty behavior but he admits that in 17 years on the force he was never confronted in off-duty hours.

The described tensions partially arise from a belief in mutual distrust between the community and police officers—an important element of the occupation narrative. One aspect is the awareness of the ever "watchful" and potentially dangerous eyes of community actors. A patrol officer offered the following assessment of his patrol work. "I mean you're constantly mindful that you're being watched. If you're on a quick trip getting a cup of coffee, people are sizing you up, they're watching you." Another officer offered a similar concern regarding community observation of their patrol practices and community interactions. "People pay attention to law enforcement, so even your body language, whether you smile at somebody, or just walk past them without saying anything, all comes into play when you deal with the public."

The anxiety related to public observation seems, in part, built on the perception of difference and the concerns of minority citizens provide an undercurrent for mutual

distrust. Another patrol officer described his perception of community distrust in the following statement.

> I work in a largely minority community. I think they expect the worst. They expect harassment, racial profiling. They expect you don't care, and you're not going to do anything. Every bad image of a cop there is, that's what they feel like is going to happen to them.

While the officer acknowledged the grievances of minority citizens in his statement, he also eluded to these community concerns as the source of distrust and negative interactions with law enforcement without regard to social and historic factors that might account for such distrust. Instead, the officer addresses distrust as an inherent part of patrolling difference and ultimately such thinking leads to social isolation and an "us versus them" mentality as a hallmark of police culture. Another field officer's statement acknowledges how, over time, the differentiation of officers and community members can foster negative consequences.

> I think that it's almost an us against them, and it turns into the officers against the public, and it's really hard to straddle that line. When they get into that mentality it's sorta like every regular person who is not an officer is a criminal, or all young kids who wear the urban type clothing are gang bangers.

The core of the occupying soldier language and narrative concentrates around fear of attack or violence from community members and corresponds with beliefs about the risk associated with law enforcement and the potential negative consequences for taking such concerns lightly. Consider the following description in this male patrol officer's statement about the importance of remaining alert during community patrols.

> I'd say it would have to be unpredictability of people. You just never know. They tell us, it doesn't matter if you're going to a house for a simple noise complaint. You walk up to that house and you walk up to that house tactfully. You're always looking. You're looking for ways out. You're looking for your escape route if things go to hell, you know. And they can and I've seen it happen.

Several officers identified risk of deadly assault as a daily tension in policing and that apprehension about their daily work environment can influence beliefs about the job. An officer patrolling the largest city in our sample provided the following statement. "I think probably what is most stressful is that little voice in the back of your head that says, 'This could be it today.' That fear of being hurt or not being able to go home at the end of your shift." While the city he patrolled may, at times, offer such risk, we notice the similarity with the statement from the following officer that patrolled an extremely rural and relatively crime-free area. "For me, its always the—I guess you could say the fear of the unknown, that any minute while you're working, something very serious could happen." This type of statement was commonplace among respondents across the six communities. One officer noted that, "You're more on edge, that type of thing, but I mean anything can go bad in a heartbeat." This defined tension relates to a dynamic police cultural belief that officers are daily, or at least frequently, targets of violence from unsupportive communities that they patrol. One officer stated, "Each day is a different day. You don't know what to expect. You don't know where it's going to come from, who it's going to involve. It keeps you on your toes."

The occupying soldier narrative also reinforces a number of underlying assumptions about the ideal make-up of police officers, for example masculinity as an important

component of the soldier narrative for police (Kraska 2001). A significant body of research indicates officers often highlight the need for physical prowess and strength in policing at the exclusion of other important skills and traits (Martin 1996; Brown 1998; Chan et al. 2010; Kurtz et al. 2012). This belief is distinctly detailed in Fletcher's (1996: 40) description of a "core story" that focuses on a female officer's inability to control "the 250 lb man in an alley." The anecdote was so present in her research that she considers it as an example of how certain stories gain "almost the statues of folklore." The "core story" fits with the soldier narrative as it focuses on physical violence as a defining factor of policing and paints women as unfit for patrols and comparable to combat. In this narrative genre, the hero is masculine and women are generally envisioned as victims or in need of protection—a modern law enforcement spin on the classic damsel in distress genre.

Several officers used the specific language of the core story during their interviews in reference to the skills of women officers. The following officers describe the pervasive nature of the core story within in his department and the corresponding influence on officer assignments. "I had a partner that walked with me in [section of the city]. She was the first female cop ever (assigned walking patrol in this area). Yet, I know for a long time that there was a lot of resistance from a lot of people because is she going to be able to fight off the 250 lb. drunk that gets into a fight." Another male officer detailed an example of the core story with the following statement "I think in terms of strength. I am going to put you [woman's name] there fighting a three hundred pound gorilla down in [name of college bar district]." The folklore element of the core story is quite notable as specific occurrences of the failure of women officers to control criminal suspects was difficult to locate. One officer was pressed for particulars and he stated "I can't think of one off hand, but I've heard of it happening."

The core story exemplifies the notion that specific storylines, genres, and constructed narratives can influence organizational and individual behavior. The idea that women are unfit for "combat" results in some limitations from the most militaristic assignments. Several women officers indicate they are explicitly excluded from assignments like search warrant execution teams and swat units, despite requests for such assignments. They generally believe administrators utilized some beliefs similar to the "core story" to justify these practices. During an interview one female patrol officer stated, "Yes, they very rarely take a female on a search warrant; they will take a man in case something goes wrong. I have repeatedly asked Lieutenant [Name] if I could go assist on a search warrant and he always picks a guy, even when I go to him and specifically request that I want to go help." This description seems to provide a strong example of how an organizational narrative may shape the behavior and decision-making of administrators within departments.

While we included brief statements of officers patrolling six communities in the Midwest that support the soldier narrative, it should be noted that the occupying soldier narrative appears entrenched in policing as a profession and the war narrative is likely buttressed by increased militarization of the job in terminology, equipment and tactics. Consider the excerpt that appeared on the law enforcement website PoliceOne.com written by Sergeant Glenn French of the Sterling Heights (Mich.) Police Department. In his guest column he writes, "Cops on the beat are facing the same dangers on the streets as our brave soldiers do in war. That is why commanders and tactical trainers stress the fact that even on the most uneventful portion of your tour, you can be subjected to combat at a moment's notice" (French 2013).

The occupying soldier narrative then espouses (the possibly growing) cultural beliefs that officers are patrolling communities that actively seek to harm them the minute they "let their guard down." While we do not dismiss the risk of violence and confrontation

with criminal elements, officers' narratives can, at times, paint entire segments of the community in a particularly negative vein and justify the exclusion of women from certain job assignments. But the recent high profile incidents notwithstanding, an officer's daily work environment does not appear to fully conform to the risk described with the occupying soldier narrative. The actual risk of deadly assault during work hours has mostly declined in the last few decades and according to the FBI's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) 2013 report, 27 officers were feloniously killed in the line of duty in 2013. Additionally, the risk of death in law enforcement does not indicate policing as a particularly risky profession and according to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries 2014, policing ranks well below many professions. For example, policing has a fatality rate of 10.6 when including all work related deaths which is significantly below professions like farming and ranching with a rate of 21.8, roofers at 38.7, truck drivers 22.0 and extraction workers at 46.9. While these statistics do not dismiss the risk officers face as part of their work environment, they do suggest that aspects of the soldier narrative are not fully representative from daily risk.

Discussion

The narratives born of police culture are unique as the structural positioning of law enforcement within society affixes police narratives power not assigned to the majority of other social actors within a community and certainly the most power of street level actors. Narrative approaches to understanding law enforcement appear an important area for exploration. Presser's (2010) first level of narrative conception is a formal record or account of specific events; police officers have extensive influence in the construction of these narratives, even in the face of conflicting and divergent accounts in criminal cases. Police reports, written affidavits and court testimony by officers carries considerable power in defining the formal records of accused defendants. Certainly we expect such authority of law enforcement officers but must also acknowledge that these narratives are not infallible and even the "formal accounts" often prove inaccurate. However, this research is most interested in the interpretive and action elements of police narratives and the power generated from police stories.

At first glance, it may appear important to assess the veracity of police stories in order to understand the perceived work environment of these officers. In other words, do their stories accurately describe the dangers of daily policing? Are women officers frequently unable to manage violent offenders? Are large segments of the population actively seeking to harm officers? From our research standpoint the truth of these stories hardly matters—it is clear that these narratives have the power to shape the worldviews of officers and quite likely their professional behavior. That being said, many of the simple stories told by these officers appear as parables or allegories that offer a valuable lesson from a police cultural standpoint. These messages attach fixed meanings to the behaviors of community members, bystanders, and officers themselves. Officers reference the retelling of stories over and over. And they likely become condensed accounts of reality that transfix into the collective memories of police subculture. Over time, the actual details become lost and many stories condense into one moralistic account or a multitude of similar stories affix the same message. The stories add coherence to police culture and such collective stories "helps a group of people to know itself as a group" (Presser and Sandberg 2015: 94).

Officers utilize the occupying soldier and other narratives to interpret the behavior of citizens and other officers alike, and thus narratives developed in the station-house, canteen, and/or the pub likely influence later understandings and reactions to street-level events. Previous research supports the idea that the same or strikingly similar stories come-up too often to be considered factual accounts and they seemly take a life of their own (Bayley and Bittner 1984). Furthermore, van Hulst (2013) states, "It is naïve to assume that what police officers say they do—the stories they tell—perfectly reflect the realities of their work."

The officers interviewed strongly believed aspects of the occupying soldier narrative but also indicated that some types of stories told by officers were embellished or fictionalized. The stories and narratives developed in law enforcement circles often focus on excessive risk and become further supported by military tactics and equipment. Law enforcement stories may increase the perception of collective social value of officers and the occupying soldier theme fits with broader "hero" narratives in general culture. Stories may also present a pleasant distraction from the more mundane aspect of police work and further construct police identities more fitting with popular culture representations of law enforcement from television, cinema and literature. The soldier narrative also likely builds esprit de corps between officers and a belief in unity earned through "combat." The stories also lock in police values in specific ways and may prevent social change by further reinforcing organizational beliefs and behavioral practices (Murgia and Poggio 2009). These dominant stories then exercise organizational and police cultural values by affixing meaning to the actions of officer and members of the community which may also restrict alternative stories born from the community or even other officers (Näslund and Pemer 2012). We believe the "core story" demonstrates how some organizational narratives dominate police culture while simultaneously suppressing alternative storylines.

While specific stories and larger narratives may offer an important interpretation of officers' experiences, they are also vital to understanding how stories may shape future behaviors. The occupying soldier narrative may provide a prime example of how police accounts and worldviews are likely to produce certain behavioral responses. For example, much research has already demonstrated that beliefs and stories about the physical ability of women mold police organization dynamics (Fletcher 1996; Martin 1996; Brown 1998; Chan et al. 2010; Kurtz 2006). However, other aspects of this narrative are also likely to affect officer decision-making and street level behavior. The ever present concern described as the core of the soldier narrative—the belief that officers are patrolling war zones and at constant risk of enemy attack—surely corresponds to how officers estimate threat and respond to the public. This belief is likely amplified when officers interact with citizens from different backgrounds or patrol identified as criminal neighborhoods. Kraska (2001: 15) argues that the "the role of the war metaphor in crime campaigns in U.S. history and, an example of the power of language through examining military analysts' reframing of the crime problems as one of 'insurgency' requiring 'counterinsurgency' measures". Kraska (2001) further states that language matters in understanding police behaviors. Treating citizens as insurgents surely influences officer use of force and daily interactions in a number of ways and the occupying soldier narrative indicates that officer stories are a fruitful source to understand their future behaviors.

We started this paper by describing the flashpoint events involving the death of Michael Brown as the result of the decision making of Officer Darren Wilson (see *Missouri v. Brown*). We believe Wilson's description of the neighborhood in which he confronted Brown is emblematic of the occupying soldier narrative and thus his assessment of risk was likely elevated during this confrontation. In fact, the general tone of Wilson's description

of sections of Ferguson clearly proffered justification for his general approach and psychological state prior to the shooting. He also indicated concern that the entire community would single him out for assault if he could not return to the station after the shooting. Yet, community reports that followed the incident offered an alternative narrative—that of police hyper-aggression.

Following the death of Michael Brown, the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ 2015) conducted a comprehensive investigation of Ferguson Police Department and determined that the FPD supported a systematic and deep-rooted culture of harassment and hyper-aggression toward the Ferguson community. The report (USDOJ 2015) further states:

> This culture within FPD influences officer activities in all areas of policing, beyond just ticketing. Officers expect and demand compliance even when they lack legal authority. They are inclined to interpret the exercise of free-speech rights as unlawful disobedience, innocent movements as physical threats, indications of mental or physical illness as belligerence. Police supervisors and leadership do too little to ensure that officers act in accordance with law and policy, and rarely respond meaningfully to civilian complaints of officer misconduct. The result is a pattern of stops without reasonable suspicion and arrests without probable cause in violation of the Fourth Amendment; infringement on free expression, as well as retaliation for protected expression, in violation of the First Amendment; and excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment.

This statement underscores the value of the narrative approach to understanding officer behavior, as it appears that the behavior of officers within the department were significantly shaped by police cultural narratives about the Ferguson community. This, perhaps, epitomizes how narratives shape both interpretations of events and future actions within the proposed narrative criminological framework (Presser 2009). The competing narratives of the FPD and the community represent a social scientific version of a Susskind Paradox—they seemly represent alternative versions of reality based on structural position in society. The power of law enforcement allowed the narrative born from the FPD to dominate and suppress community viewpoints until new narratives emerged from the outrage following Brown's death.

Our own research included descriptions of neighborhoods "unfriendly" to law enforcement across many jurisdictions and it appears that war narratives permeate police culture. These police war narratives are increasingly important to scholarship on police culture, particularly in the context of police militarization. As previously noted, officers' risk of murderous assault have mainly declined, along with crime in general, over the past few decades. Yet, officer values, stories, organizational behavior, priorities, and even equipment actually support the belief that policing and soldiering are akin. More importantly that these tactics are justified given the level of community aggression. The occupying soldier narrative also supports a number of behaviors that focus on environmental order and control functions of policing while minimizing extensive service and community aspects of the job. The occupying soldier narrative provides an example of how values presented through the storytelling and narratives of field officers are fortified by formal organizational goals. Field and patrol officers utilize war stories and the soldier narrative to construct an image of policing that is in line with law enforcement organizational efforts to secure military grade equipment like armored vehicle and other equipment. This provides a clear example of how an organizational narratives can influence behaviors on multiple levels.

As noted in the methods section, no interview questions in either of the original research projects asked questions about storytelling or specific narrative scripts. While some questioned asked about officers' work environment and understanding of crime and disorder, no officers we asked to detail specific stories. Many officer referenced the importance of storytelling and provided some details of story elements but interviews did not explore these specific narratives in detail. This limitation does restrict some of the potential power of our findings but narrative analysis also allows an exploration of different parts of these fragmented stories, the word choice and the clearly detailed context of the storytelling. Future research could more actively seek-out specific stories told and retold by officers.

Lastly, any examination of war stories and officer narratives must, at least, acknowledge the potential influence of popular cultural crime storylines on the interpersonal narratives, organizational stories, and belief patterns that emerge in law enforcement. Popular crime television shows and police procedurals, movies, novels and even music may provide cultural pretext that also influences the way officers view their work environment. For example, Aiello (2013) explored the conception of the "hotshot" officer as a common character in popular crime movies. The hotshot cop was generally depicted as hypermasculine, violent, reckless, and indifferent to citizens' rights among other traits. It is logical to assume that media representations such as these shape some aspects of police storytelling and culture. Many of the storylines told in police organizations are likely built from prepackaged popular cultural crime narratives similar to the manner in which print media used these cultural scripts to describe specific crimes (Peelo and Soothill 2000). Furthermore, Youngs and Canter (2012) suggest a limited number of social narratives exist within a culture that shape individual storylines. It is logical to assume that macro-level cultural beliefs about policing conform to a limited subset of cultural narratives and certainly the soldier narrative fits existing hero genres in pop culture. In a making-sense process built on prepackaged social narratives officers likely arrive on the job with a number prearranged narratives built upon "fictionalized knowledge." In a dialectical relationship with popular culture, officers interpret their observations, shape their stories, and adjust their behaviors based upon exposure to a limited number preexisting sociocultural genres. The influence of cultural level themes and beliefs on officer narratives appears a particularly interesting avenue for future criminological research.

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