

Policing: Roles and Styles

Police as ‘the state agency with the omnibus mandate of order maintenance’ (Reiner, 2010: 6)

Policing ‘implies the set of activities aimed at preserving the security of a particular social order, or social order in general’ (Reiner, 2010: 6)

Policing is a feature of all societies...not just human societies

E.g. ‘worker policing’ by honeybees and ants (Ratnieks and Wenseleers, 2005)

Social Order: ‘an irreducible minimum confidence in the future that allows groups and individuals to engage in routine activities, including the promotion of change’ (Marenin, 1982: 382)

‘Without social order, there can be no agriculture, no industry, no trade, no economic investment, no technological development, no justice, no art, no science, and no human advancement.’

(Hechter and Horne, 2009: xiii)

Security

- Security is often assumed to be necessary for maintaining ‘order’
- Policing is associated with the provision of security
- But what is security?

An objective condition? (i.e. ‘the condition of being without threat’)

A subjective condition? (i.e. freedom from anxiety or fear?)

Legitimacy

- Do people believe recognize the authority of the police?
- Do they see the police as acting in a just and fair manner?
- Do people agree with the rules or the laws that the police are enforcement?

Key idea:

policing which is viewed as legitimate is more likely to be just and effective

A history of policing

- Many historical accounts of ‘modern’ policing glorify the institution and its societal function.

E.g. Sir Robert Peel and *London Metropolitan Police 1829*

- Peel’s Principles emphasized:

Preventative ‘mission’

Need for public approval

Need for cooperation and voluntary observance of law

Minimum and proportionate use of physical force

Impartiality

‘police are the public and the public are the police’

Alternative Histories (England)

- Modern policing as a source of class repression
- Unpopular with the middle class
- Historically corrupt, unprofessional, violent and politicalized

Early Australian Policing

- Consider the context:

Convict society;

Indigenous resistance;

Gold-rush/rapid migration; and

Large geographical distances

- Implications:

Police more heavily armed
Involved in colonisation and appropriation of lands
More militarised and violent approaches

Australian policing today

- Functions evolved as society changed but police in Australia today retain elements of this colonial legacy (Cunneen 2001)

E.g. Indigenous people are estimated to be approximately 27 times more likely to end up in police custody than non-indigenous people. Over-policing is part of the problem.

- Role(s) and function(s) of police today as well as their relationship with different groups must be understood in historical context.

Functions of the Police:

- Crime-fighting
 - Law enforcement
 - 'Order' maintenance / Peace-keeper
 - Emergency call-out response
 - Investigating crimes
 - Notifying families of deaths and injuries
 - Gathering evidence
 - Prosecuting people in court
 - Maintaining police image
 - Community relations
 - Working with the media
 - Managing accident /crime scenes
 - Search and rescue
 - Arresting people
 - Coordinating natural disaster and major emergency responses
 - International relief work
 - Helping people
 - Traffic management
 - Issuing Fines / warnings
 - Crime prevention / deterrence
 - Keeping records
 - Recording and analysing data
 - Signing Statutory Declarations
 - Enhancing safety and perceptions of safety
- Police work is 'polymorphous' meaning it can take many forms (Wright, 2002: 33)
 - Police take on new functions over time and this can have implications for their capacities and their relationship with the public

Enforce the law

'...when one looks at what the police actually do, one finds that criminal law enforcement is something that most of them do with the frequency located somewhere between virtually never and very rarely.' (Bittner, 1990 in Newburn, 2005: 154)

Discretion

'The situation in which an official has latitude to make authoritative choices not necessarily specified within the source of authority which governs [their] decision making'

- Why does it matter?

Police work is low visibility

Police officers must make choices

To stop?

To search?

To arrest?

To charge?

To confiscate?

To use force?

What Factors Influence How Police Exercise Discretion?

- Societal Factors
 - Social norms/expectations
 - Presence or absence of legislation
 - Technology
 - Political climate
- Organizational Factors
 - Cultural norms and values
 - E.g. institutionalized racism
 - Rules and regulations
 - Quotas and performance targets
- Individual Factors
 - Personality
 - Biography
 - Lived experiences

Consequences of Police Discretion

- Complexities & ambiguity in the law
- Need to prioritise
- Avoid harsh consequences & enhances justice
- Discretion open to abuse
- Linked to discrimination & corruption
- Some groups overly targeted

This raises questions about fairness and equality

BUT, also consider that discretion also allows officers to divert individuals from the criminal justice process

Community Policing

‘A style of policing the emphasises a conciliatory approach to police work. It seeks to move away from the authoritarian nature of traditional approaches, focusing instead on a co-participatory model that accepts that the community has a legitimate, active role to play in the policing process.’

(White and Perrone 2015: 352)

Aims of Community Policing

- Re-establish legitimacy of police in the eyes of community
- Re-activate community as a source of social control
- Identify and address local problems through partnerships

Examples:

- Dedicated community policing teams
- School education programmes
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Blue-light discos
- Establishing local crime prevention groups/committees

Zero Tolerance Policing

3 Guiding Principles

1. ‘Nip things in the bud’...to ensure that potentially anti-social elements do not think that they are in charge...
2. Make sure that control is enacted even against seemingly trivial violations...
3. Reducing petty crime and disorder through the above two approaches will help to prevent more serious offences.

Criticism of Zero Tolerance Policing

- Aggressive and potential harmful to police community relations
- Disproportionate impact on certain groups and neighbourhoods

- Increases alienation
- Is it actually effective in reducing serious crime?
- Relies too heavily on quotas and targets which can have a problematic impact on discretion.