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Assignment #4: Cops: A New Look at an Old Profession

Fear, frustration, stress; these are just a few of the emotions that police officers face on a daily basis. Whether they're pulling over the average citizen or going after a dangerous criminal, an officer can never know what dangers the future will hold for him. Understanding the daily issues an officer must go through should unveil a newfound respect for the men and women in blue. Their real work is rarely seen, if ever. So that society can enjoy what a city can offer to the public, police officers clean the downtown streets of thugs, prostitutes, vandals, and those that would seek to do harm to the average citizen. Oftentimes it will be the police that is left to deal with society's rejects while everyone else turns a blind eye. It's a thankless job. A closer look at the issues and pressures officers face will hopefully put into perspective how valuable it is to have an agency full of men and women willing to serve their communities for the better of society.

In order to fully understand what an officer must deal with on a day to day basis, it is important to understand what is expected of an officer. Mark Baker, in his book *Cops: Their Lives in Their Own Words*, describes this best:

A police officer deals with the desperate, the disturbed and all those people out there who are just plain lonely in the middle of the night. His duties

put him on intimate terms with the bizarre things people are doing to each other and to themselves behind all closed doors and drawn shades in the community. While the rest of us look the other way, he carts away the societal offal we don't want to deal with – suicides, drunks, drug addicts and derelicts. We call it keeping the peace, but the policeman often thinks of himself as humanity's garbageman. (41)

The average person sees daily the police performing what most would assume to be fairly routine work: setting up speed traps for speeders, clearing accidents from the roadways, and aiding in domestic disturbance situations, to name a few. But when asked for personal experiences, most officers won't refer to any of these. When asked, an officer will most likely tell of a once in a lifetime event. Something he or she has prepared for ever since they began basic training at the academy; something that lasted only a few seconds. When asked, a reader or listener would probably hear of a quick draw and a shoot out, a large drug bust, a life threatening high speed chase, or perhaps the tragic loss of an innocent life. These are the stories that make up the city police, the county sheriff's deputy, and the highway patrolman.

Perhaps the most difficult issue an officer will face will be to witness the loss of an innocent life, specifically that of a child. Author Michael Middleton shares this in his book *Cop: A True Story*. In his account, Middleton tells of receiving a family dispute call that involved a cutting at a well known drug dealer's apartment. After arriving on scene and kicking the front door open, Middleton recalls seeing a horrible sight. Among a mess strewn house, a little girl laid in a pool of her own blood as a result of having her neck

slit. Her two year old brother was on the floor, his neck slit as well, still alive and sliding in his own blood trying to hide beneath a bed. Paramedics could not save the young boy. With the help from neighbors the father of the children was found a few houses over and a physical altercation ensued. Middleton recalls being blinded by rage (32) as he had his “arm around [the suspect’s] neck, bringing him to his knees. (33) Middleton goes on to say that only with the help of a psychiatrist was he able to rid himself of the nightmares regarding this instance.

Officers must maintain their composure while performing their duties while on duty. They cannot allow themselves to be overcome with their emotions. While the rest of the world sees fit to fall apart emotionally at tragic news, police officers must fight their emotions in order to continue their work on a professional level. Crime shows no mercy and never takes a day off. An officer that allows him or herself to be overcome with emotion presents a danger to both society and their agency.

Even though police work can often times be stressful and dangerous, officers at times will find themselves in humorous situations as well; a welcome change from the stressful norm. For instance, one officer in Baker’s book tells of a situation in which he was required to remove an infant from an unfit Gypsy mother while inside an emergency room. After taking the baby, the mother chased the officer around the crowded emergency room, and when she found that she could not catch the officer, she stooped to desperate measures. The officer tells that the woman pulled down her blouse, grabbed both breasts and commenced to spray her breast milk at the officer. “I was amazed. It sprays a long ways. She was getting me with both barrels.” (69) The emergency room

erupted in laughter. Once officers came to assist, they subdued the woman and arrested her. For years his fellow officers joked that he was “under the curse of the Gypsy mother’s milk,” (70) and that he should have filed charges: “aggravated assault with a breast.” (70) One does not have to be an officer to appreciate the humor in that story!

In closing, the men and women who serve our communities deserve much more recognition than they receive. Perhaps there needs to be a change in the perspective in which police officers are viewed. Perhaps they need to be seen as local heroes, always willing to run toward danger when everyone else is running from it. While many people may curse an officer for issuing them a citation, that officer is probably glad that it was just that; just a citation and not a brawl on the side of the highway, or a blazing gunfight. A career that involves high stress and relatively low pay is a career most people shy away from. Instead of looking at an officer’s uniform, perhaps people should look at an officer’s face, and appreciate and respect them for who they really are. They are sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers who have chosen to deal with the issues that society has chosen to ignore so that peace and justice will prevail.

WORKS CITED

Baker, Mark. *Cops: Their Lives in Their Own Words*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1985. Print.

Middleton, Michael L. *Cop: A True Story*. Chicago: Contemporary Books, a Division of NTC/Contemporary Publishing Group, 2000. Print.