National Institute of Justice

R e s e a r c h   i n   B r i e f

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Issues and Findings

Discussed in this Brief: Research exploring police officers' understanding of agency rules concerning police misconduct and the extent of their support for these rules. The survey also considered officers' opinions about appropriate punishment for misconduct, their familiarity with the expected disciplinary threat, their perceptions of disciplinary fairness, and their willingness to report misconduct. The results of this survey have important implications for researchers and policymakers, as well as for police practitioners.

Key issues: Until recently, most studies of police corruption were based on a traditional administrative approach—one that views the problem of corruption primarily as a reflection of the moral defects of individual police officers. This research, however, is based on the organizational theory of police corruption, which emphasizes the importance of organizational and occupational culture.

Researchers asked officers in 30 U.S. police agencies for their *opinions* about various hypothetical cases of police misconduct, thereby avoiding the resistance that direct inquiries about corrupt behavior would likely provoke. The survey measured how seriously officers regarded police corruption, how willing they were to report it, and how willing they were to support punishment. By analyzing officers' responses to the survey questions, researchers were able to rank the police agencies according to their environments of integrity. The capacity to measure integrity in this way is especially significant for police administrators, who, this research suggests, may be able to influence and cultivate

The Measurement of Police Integrity

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As the history of virtually every police agency attests, policing is an occupation that is rife with opportunities for misconduct. Policing is a highly discretionary, coercive activity that routinely takes place in private settings, out of the sight of supervisors, and in the presence of witnesses who are often regarded as unreliable. Corruption—the abuse of police authority *for gain*—is one type of misconduct that has been particularly problematic. The difficulties of controlling corruption can be traced to several factors: the reluctance of police officers to report corrupt activities by their fellow officers (also known as "The Code," "The Code of Silence," or "The Blue Curtain"), the reluctance of police administrators to acknowledge the existence of corruption in their agencies, the benefits of the typical corrupt transaction to the parties involved, and the lack of immediate victims willing to report corruption.

Until recently, police administrators viewed corruption primarily as a reflection of the moral defects of individual police officers. They fought corruption by carefully screening applicants for police positions and aggressively pursuing morally defective officers in an attempt to remove them from their positions before their corrupt behavior had spread through the agency. This administrative/ individual approach, sometimes called the "bad apple" theory of police corruption, has been subject to severe criticism in recent years.

This Research in Brief summarizes a study that measured police integrity in 30 police agencies across the United States. The study was based on an organizational/occupational approach to police corruption. Researchers asked officers for their opinions about 11 hypothetical cases of police misconduct and measured how seriously officers regarded police corruption, how willing they were to support its punishment, and how willing they were to report it. The survey found substantial differences in the environments of integrity among the agencies studied. The more serious the officers considered a behavior to be, the more likely they were to believe that more severe discipline was appropriate, and the more willing they were to report a colleague for engaging in that behavior.

Contemporary approaches to corruption

Pioneered by Herman Goldstein,[1] contemporary theories of police corruption are based on four *organizational* and *occupational* dimensions. Each is described below.

Issues and Findings

continued…

environments of integrity within their agencies.

Key findings: Based on officers' responses to questions relating to 11 hypothetical case scenarios involving police officers engaged in a range of corrupt behavior, the following conclusions emerged:

● In assessing the 11 cases of police misconduct, officers considered some types to be significantly less serious than others.

● The more serious the officers perceived a behavior to be, the more likely they were to think that more severe discipline was appropriate, and the more willing they were to report a colleague who had engaged in such behavior.

● Police officers' evaluations of the appropriate and expected discipline for various types of misconduct were very similar; the majority of police officers regarded the expected discipline as fair.

● A majority of police officers said that they *would not* report a fellow officer who had engaged in what they regarded as less serious misconduct (for example, operating an off-duty security business; accepting free gifts, meals, and discounts; or having a minor accident while driving under the influence of alcohol.

● At the same time, most police officers indicated that they *would* report a colleague who stole from a found wallet or a burglary scene, accepted a bribe or kickback, or used excessive force on a car thief after a foot pursuit.

● The survey found substantial differences in the environment of integrity among the 30 agencies in the sample.

Target audience: Criminal justice researchers and policymakers, legislators, police administrators, police officers, and educators.

Organizational rules. The first dimension concerns how the organizational rules that govern corruption are established, communicated, and understood. In the United States, where police agencies are highly decentralized, police organizations differ markedly in the types of activities they officially prohibit as corrupt behavior. This is particularly true of marginally corrupt or *mala prohibita* behavior, such as off-duty employment and acceptance of favors, small gifts, free meals, and discounts. Further complicating the problem, the official policy of many agencies formally prohibits such activities while their unofficial policy, supported firmly but silently by supervisors and administrators, is to permit and ignore such behavior so long as it is limited in scope and conducted discreetly.

Prevention and control mechanisms. The second dimension of corruption emphasized in contemporary approaches is the wide range of mechanisms that police agencies employ to prevent and control corruption. Examples include education in ethics, proactive and reactive investigation of corruption, integrity testing, and corruption deterrence through the discipline of offenders. The extent to which agencies use such organizational anticorruption techniques varies greatly.

The Code. The third dimension of corruption, inherent in the occupational culture of policing, is The Code or The Blue Curtain that informally prohibits or discourages police officers from reporting the misconduct of their colleagues. The parameters of The Code—precisely what behavior it covers and to whom its benefits are extended—vary among police agencies. For example, The Code may apply to only low-level corruption in some agencies and to the most serious corruption in others. Furthermore, whom and what The Code covers can vary substantially not

only *among* police agencies but also *within* police agencies. Particularly in large police agencies, the occupational culture of integrity may differ substantially among precincts, service areas, task forces, and work groups.

Public expectations. The fourth dimension of police corruption that contemporary police theory emphasizes is the influence of the social, economic, and political environments in which police institutions, systems, and agencies operate. For example, some jurisdictions in the United States have long, virtually uninterrupted traditions of police corruption. Other jurisdictions have equally long traditions of minimal corruption, while still others have experienced repeated cycles of scandal and reform. Such histories indicate that public expectations about police integrity exert vastly different pressures on police agencies in different jurisdictions. These experiences also suggest that public pressures to confront and combat corruption may be successfully resisted.

Methodological challenges to the study of police corruption

Although many theories can be applied to the study of police corruption, the contemporary organizational/occupational culture theory has an important advantage over the traditional administrative/individual bad-apple theory: The organizational/occupational approach is much more amenable to systematic, quantitative research.

Corruption is extremely difficult to study in a direct, quantitative, and empirical manner. Because most incidents of corruption are never reported or recorded, official data on corruption are best regarded as measures of a police agency's anticorruption activity, not the actual level of corruption. Even with assurances of confidentiality, police officers are un-

likely to be willing to report their own or another officer's corrupt activities.

Unlike the administrative/individual approach, an organizational/occupational culture approach to the study of police integrity involves questions of *fact* and *opinion* that can be explored directly, without arousing the resistance that direct inquiries about corrupt *behavior* are likely to provoke. Using this approach, it is possible to ask nonthreatening questions about officers' *knowledge* of agency rules and their *opinions* about the seriousness of particular violations, the punishment that such violations would warrant or actually receive, and their estimates of how willing officers would be to report such misconduct.

Moreover, sharply different goals and visions of police integrity characterize these two approaches to understanding corruption. The administrative/individual theory of corruption envisions the police agency of integrity as one from which all morally defective individual officers have been removed and in which vigilance is maintained to prevent their entry or emergence. By contrast, the organizational/occupational culture theory envisions the police agency of integrity as one whose culture is highly intolerant of corruption.

Methodologically, the consequences of these two visions are critical. For example, although it may be possible to use an administrative/individual approach to measure the level of corrupt behavior, the number of morally defective police officers, and an agency's vigilance in discovering misconduct, the obstacles to doing so are enormous. Using an organizational/occupational culture approach, by contrast, modern social science can easily measure how

seriously officers regard misconduct, how amenable they are to supporting punishment, and how willing they are to tolerate misconduct in silence.

In an effort to measure the occupational culture of police integrity, a systematic, standardized, and quantitative survey questionnaire was designed and pretested. The survey sought information in key areas that constitute the foundation of an occupational/organizational culture theory of police integrity. At the same time, the survey responses could be used to satisfy certain basic informational needs of practical police administration. The survey attempted to answer the following questions:

- Do officers in this agency know the rules governing police misconduct?

- How strongly do they support those rules?

- Do officers know what disciplinary threat they face if they violate those rules?

- Do they think the discipline is fair?

- How willing are they to report misconduct?

For a more detailed description of the survey methodology and samples, see Survey Design and Methodology. The actions taken to enhance the legitimacy of the survey results are discussed in Validity of Survey Responses.

Survey results

The results of the survey, reported in exhibit 1, show that the more serious a particular behavior was considered by police officers, the more severely they thought it should and would be punished, and the more willing they were to report it. The extraordinarily high rank-order correlation among the

responses to the survey questions suggests that all six integrity-related questions measured the same phenomenon—the degree of police intolerance for corrupt behavior.

Offense seriousness. The 11 case scenarios fall into 3 categories of perceived seriousness. Four cases were not considered very serious by police respondents: Case 1, off-duty operation of a security system business; Case 2, receipt of free meals; Case 4, receipt of holiday gifts; and Case 8, coverup of a police accident that involved driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI). The majority of police respondents, in fact, reported that the operation of an off-duty security system business (Case 1) was not a violation of agency policy. Respondents considered four other cases of misconduct to be at an intermediate level of seriousness: Case 10, the use of excessive force on a car thief following a foot pursuit; Case 7, a supervisor who offers a subordinate time off during holidays in exchange for tuning up his personal car; Case 9, acceptance of free drinks in exchange for ignoring a late bar closing; and Case 6, receipt of a kickback. Respondents regarded the remaining three cases—those that involved stealing from a found wallet (Case 11), accepting a money bribe (Case 3), and stealing a watch at a crime scene (Case 5)—as very serious offenses.

Discipline. In general, police officers thought that the four cases they regarded as not very serious warranted little or no discipline. Officers thought that the four cases involving an intermediate level of seriousness merited a written reprimand or a period of suspension, and that the three very serious cases merited dismissal.

Survey Design and Methodology

Case scenarios. The survey questionnaire presented officers with 11 hypothetical case scenarios. Displayed in exhibit A, the scenarios cover a range of activities, from those that merely give an appearance of conflict of interest (Case 1) to incidents of bribery (Case 3) and theft (Cases 5 and 11). One scenario (Case 10) described the use of excessive force on a car thief.

Respondents were asked to evaluate each scenario by answering seven questions (see exhibit B). Six of these questions were designed to assess the normative inclination of police to resist temptations to abuse the rights and privileges of their occupation. To measure this dimension of police integrity, the six questions were paired as follows:

- Two questions pertained to the *seriousness* of each case—one addressed the respondent's own view and the other concerned the respondent's perception of the views of other officers.

- Two related to *severity of discipline*—one addressed the discipline the respondent felt the behavior *should* receive and the other addressed the discipline the officer felt it *would* receive.

- Two concerned *willingness to report* the misconduct—one addressed the respondent's own willingness to report it, and the other concerned the respondent's perception of other officers' willingness to report it.

The remaining question asked respondents whether the behavior described in the scenario was a violation of the agency's official policy.

The incidents described in the scenarios were not only plausible and common forms of police misconduct, but ones that were uncomplicated by details that might introduce ambiguity into either the interpretation of the behavior or the motive of the officer depicted in the scenario. Some scenarios were based on published studies that had employed a case scenario approach.[a] Others drew on the experience of the authors. Respondents were asked to assume that the officer depicted in each scenario had been a police officer for 5 years and had a satisfactory work record with no history of disciplinary problems.

Survey sample. The sample consisted of 3,235 officers from 30 U.S. police agencies. Although these agencies were drawn from across the Nation and the sample was quite large, it was nonetheless a convenience sample, not a representative sample. The characteristics of the officers in this sample are summarized in exhibit C. The majority of the police officers surveyed were employed in patrol or traffic units (63.1 percent). The overwhelming majority of respondents were line officers; only one of five police officers was a supervisor. The mean length of service for the entire sample was 10.3 years.

Exhibit A. **Case scenarios**

Case 1.	A police officer runs his own private business in which he sells and installs security devices, such as alarms, special locks, etc. He does this work during his off-duty hours.
Case 2.	A police officer routinely accepts free meals, cigarettes, and other items of small value from merchants on his beat. He does not solicit these gifts and is careful not to abuse the generosity of those who give gifts to him.
Case 3.	A police officer stops a motorist for speeding. The officer agrees to accept a personal gift of half of the amount of the fine in exchange for not issuing a citation.
Case 4.	A police officer is widely liked in the community, and on holidays local merchants and restaurant and bar owners show their appreciation for his attention by giving him gifts of food and liquor.
Case 5.	A police officer discovers a burglary of a jewelry shop. The display cases are smashed, and it is obvious that many items have been taken. While searching the shop, he takes a watch, worth about 2 days' pay for that officer. He reports that the watch had been stolen during the burglary.
Case 6.	A police officer has a private arrangement with a local auto body shop to refer the owners of cars damaged in accidents to the shop. In exchange for each referral, he receives payment of 5 percent of the repair bill from the shop owner.
Case 7.	A police officer, who happens to be a very good auto mechanic, is scheduled to work during coming holidays. A supervisor offers to give him these days off, if he agrees to tune up his supervisor's personal car. Evaluate the *supervisor's* behavior.
Case 8.	At 2:00 a.m., a police officer, who is on duty, is driving his patrol car on a deserted road. He sees a vehicle that has been driven off the road and is stuck in a ditch. He approaches the vehicle and observes that the driver is not hurt but is obviously intoxicated. He also finds that the driver is a police officer. Instead of reporting this accident and offense, he transports the driver to his home.
Case 9.	A police officer finds a bar on his beat that is still serving drinks a half-hour past its legal closing time. Instead of reporting this violation, the police officer agrees to accept a couple of free drinks from the owner.
Case 10.	Two police officers on foot patrol surprise a man who is attempting to break into an automobile. The man flees. They chase him for about two blocks before apprehending him by tackling him and wrestling him to the ground. After he is under control, both officers punch him a couple of times in the stomach as punishment for fleeing and resisting.
Case 11.	A police officer finds a wallet in a parking lot. It contains an amount of money equivalent to a full day's pay for that officer. He reports the wallet as lost property but keeps the money for himself.

The sample has some biases, including overrepresentation of particular types of police agencies and particular regions of the country. Because it includes no State police agencies, only one sheriff's agency, and only one county police agency, the sample overrepresents municipal police agencies. The sample also overrepresents police agencies from the Northeast. Although the sample does include agencies from the South, Southeast, and Southwest, it does not include agencies from the West, Northwest, or Midwest.

The sample likely has another bias because not all agencies that were asked to participate in the study accepted the invitation. The reason for an agency's refusal to participate could include a fear of revealing something untoward. Agencies declined to participate despite assurances that their participation in the survey would be kept confidential; that all individual respondents would remain anonymous; and that respondents would be asked about only their opinions, not any actual misconduct.

Nevertheless, the sample includes some seriously troubled police agencies. Key contacts in a number of such agencies, including senior officers and high-ranking union officials, exercised sufficient influence to arrange the participation of these agencies in the survey.

a. A number of studies of police corruption have employed a research strategy that asked police officers to evaluate hypothetical corruption scenarios. These include Fishman, Janet E., *Measuring Police Corruption*, New York: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1978; Martin, Christine, *Illinois Municipal Officers' Perceptions of Police Ethics*, Chicago: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1994; Huon, Gail F., Beryl L. Hesketh, Mark G. Frank, Kevin M. McConkey, and G.M. McGrath, *Perceptions of Ethical Dilemmas*, Payneham, Australia: National Police Research Unit, 1995; and Miller, Larry S., and Michael C. Braswell, "Police Perceptions of Ethical Decision-Making: The Ideal vs. The Real," *American Journal of Police* 27 (1992): 27–45.

Exhibit B. **Case scenario assessment options**

1. How serious do YOU consider this behavior to be?
   Not at all serious   Very serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

2. How serious do MOST POLICE OFFICERS IN YOUR AGENCY consider this behavior to be?
   Not at all serious   Very serious
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. Would this behavior be regarded as a violation of official policy in your agency?
   Definitely not   Definitely yes
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4. If an officer in your agency engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do YOU think SHOULD follow?
   1. NONE
   2. VERBAL REPRIMAND
   3. WRITTEN REPRIMAND
   4. PERIOD OF SUSPENSION WITHOUT PAY
   5. DEMOTION IN RANK
   6. DISMISSAL

5. If an officer in your agency engaged in this behavior and was discovered doing so, what if any discipline do YOU think WOULD follow?
   1. NONE
   2. VERBAL REPRIMAND
   3. WRITTEN REPRIMAND
   4. PERIOD OF SUSPENSION WITHOUT PAY
   5. DEMOTION IN RANK
   6. DISMISSAL

6. Do you think YOU would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behavior?
   Definitely not   Definitely yes
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. Do you think MOST POLICE OFFICERS IN YOUR AGENCY would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behavior?
   Definitely not   Definitely yes
   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Exhibit C. **Characteristics of the police agency sample**

Agency Size (number of sworn officers)	Percentage of National Sample	Sample Size	Supervisory Percentage	Percentage Patrol/ Traffic	Mean Length of Service (in years)
Very Large (500+)	59.9	1,937	14.8	64.2	9.18
Large (201–500)	19.7	638	23.2	60.3	12.05
Medium (76–200)	9.0	292	29.9	59.0	12.29
Small (25–75)	8.5	275	30.8	66.1	11.70
Very Small (<25)	2.9	93	35.9	64.8	11.29
Total/Average	100.0	3,235	19.8	63.1	10.30

Validity of Survey Responses

The validity of the survey's results hinges on the honesty of police officers when responding to the survey questions. Several steps were taken to enhance the legitimacy of the survey results. First, officers were asked only about their attitudes, not about their actual behavior or the actual behavior of other police officers. They also were assured that their responses would remain confidential, although police respondents are naturally suspicious of such promises.

To further allay officers' fears that their identities might be discovered, they were asked only minimal background questions: their rank, length of service, and assignment and whether they held a supervisory position. They were not asked standard questions about age, race, gender, or ethnicity in an effort to assuage fears that disclosing such information, in combination with their rank, assignment, and length of service, would make it possible to identify them.

In addition, at the end of the survey, each police respondent was asked two questions about the validity of the responses. The first was "Do you think *most police officers* would give their honest opinion in filling out this questionnaire?" The second was "Did you?" In answer to the first question, 84.4 percent of police respondents reported that they thought most officers would answer the questions honestly, and 97.8 percent reported that they themselves had done so. The responses of the 2.2 percent of police officers who reported that they had not answered the questions honestly were discarded when the survey results were analyzed.

The survey questions also were designed to minimize any temptation for officers to manipulate responses to create a favorable impression on the public or on their supervisors. Some officers, for example, might have been inclined to report that certain types of misconduct were more serious than they actually thought them to be. At the same time, however, these officers would be unlikely to report that misconduct should be punished more severely than they thought appropriate because of the possibility that they might one day be subject to such discipline, if administrators believed that they were recommending it.

Furthermore, if any substantial manipulation of answers had occurred, it would have been evident in differences in correlation coefficients among the questions about seriousness, discipline, and willingness to report. In fact, the rank order correlation between all six questions is extraordinarily high. Indeed, one could predict with great accuracy the ranking of a scenario on any one of the six questions by knowing the ranking for any other.

To measure how officers perceived the fairness of discipline, the scores on the "discipline *would* receive" scale were subtracted from the scores on the "discipline *should* receive" scale. A difference of zero was interpreted to mean that the respondent thought the discipline was fair. If the difference was greater than zero (positive), the respondent thought that the discipline was too lenient. Conversely, if the difference was less than zero (negative), the respondent thought that the discipline was too harsh.[2] In 7 of the 11 cases, the overwhelming majority of police officers in the sample thought that the discipline that would be imposed was in the "fair" range. But in the remaining four cases, including three that officers considered not serious—Case 2 (accepting free meals and discounts on the beat), Case 4 (accepting holiday gifts), Case 8 (coverup of police DUI), and Case 10 (excessive force on car thief)—more than 20 percent of police officers believed that the discipline administered by their agencies would be too harsh.

Parameters of The Code. An examination of the parameters of The Code of Silence, as revealed in the responses of police officers in the sample, indicated that the majority would not report a police colleague who had engaged in behavior described in the four scenarios considered the least serious. At the same time, a majority indicated that they would report[3] a fellow police officer who had engaged in behavior they deemed to be at an intermediate or high level of seriousness.

Agency contrasts in the culture of integrity

Measurements of the inclination of U.S. police to resist temptations to abuse the rights and privileges of their occupation are likely to prove useful for academic, historical, and cross-cultural studies of police.[4] For police administrators, however, measurements of the culture of integrity of individual police agencies are more relevant than national averages, which often mask significant differences among agencies.

Exhibit 1. **Police officers' perceptions of offense seriousness, appropriate and expected discipline, and willingness to report, ranked by officers' perceptions of case seriousness***

Case Scenario	Seriousness				Discipline						Willingness to Report			
	Own View		Other Officers		Should Receive			Would Receive			Own View		Other Officers	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Mode	Score	Rank	Mode	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Case 1. Off-Duty Security System Business	1.46	1	1.48	1	1.34	1	None	1.51	1	None	1.37	1	1.46	1
Case 2. Free Meals, Discounts on Beat	2.60	2	2.31	2	2.13	2	Verbal reprimand	2.37	2	Verbal reprimand	1.94	2	1.82	2
Case 4. Holiday Gifts From Merchants	2.84	3	2.64	3	2.53	3	Verbal reprimand	2.82	3	Written reprimand	2.36	4	2.28	3.5
Case 8. Coverup of Police DUI Accident	3.03	4	2.86	4	2.81	4	Suspend without pay	3.21	4	Suspend without pay	2.34	3	2.28	3.5
Case 10. Excessive Force on Car Thief	4.05	5	3.70	5	3.76	6	Suspend without pay	4.00	6	Suspend without pay	3.39	5	3.07	5
Case 7. Supervisor: Holiday for Tuneup	4.18	6	3.96	6	3.59	5	Written reprimand	3.43	5	Written reprimand	3.45	6	3.29	6
Case 6. Auto Repair Shop 5% Kickback	4.50	7	4.26	7	4.40	8	Suspend without pay	4.46	8	Suspend without pay	3.95	8	3.71	8
Case 9. Drinks to Ignore Late Bar Closing	4.54	8	4.28	8	4.02	7	Suspend without pay	4.08	7	Suspend without pay	3.73	7	3.47	7
Case 11. Theft From Found Wallet	4.85	9	4.69	9	5.09	10	Dismissal	5.03	10	Dismissal	4.23	10	3.96	10
Case 3. Bribe From Speeding Motorist	4.92	10	4.81	10	4.92	9	Dismissal	4.86	9	Dismissal	4.19	9	3.92	9
Case 5. Crime Scene Theft of Watch	4.95	11	4.88	11	5.66	11	Dismissal	5.57	11	Dismissal	4.54	11	4.34	11

* Scores are based on officers' responses to the integrity-related survey questions.

To uncover these differences and allow comparisons to be made, a system was devised for ranking the responses of officers in each agency. To determine an agency's overall ranking on how its officers perceived the seriousness of a particular offense, the mean score of all responses by officers in that agency to each of the 11 case scenarios was compared to the mean scores of the remaining 29 agencies. The agency was then awarded 3 points if its mean score placed it among the top 10 agencies on any question, 2 points if it scored in the middle 10, and 1 point if it scored among the lowest 10. These scores were then totaled for all 11 case scenarios. Using this scaling system, an agency's score on its officers' perceptions of the seriousness of the offenses could range from 11 (if it ranked in the lowest third

of agencies on all 11 cases) to 33 (if it ranked among the highest third of agencies on all 11 cases).[5]

These summary scores formed the basis for placing agencies in rank order from 1 to 30 (with 1 being the highest integrity rating), making it possible to say that an agency ranked "*n* out of 30" in its officers' perceptions of offense seriousness. This procedure was used to calculate a summary score and an integrity ranking for each agency's responses to each of the six questions about offense seriousness, discipline that should and would be received, and willingness to report the offense. Exhibit 2 summarizes those rankings.

The environment of integrity in two agencies. To illustrate how envi-

ronments of integrity differ across U.S. police agencies, it is useful to contrast the responses of officers from two of the agencies in the sample. Agency 2, which ranked 8th in integrity of the 30 agencies surveyed, and Agency 23, which ranked in a 5-way tie for 24th place, are both large municipal police agencies. Agency 2 has a national reputation for integrity, is extremely receptive to research, and is often promoted as a model of innovation. Agency 23 has a long history of scandal, and its reputation as an agency with corruption problems persists despite numerous reform efforts. Although a local newspaper once dubbed Agency 23 "the most corrupt police department in the country," six other agencies in the sample appear to have integrity environments that are as poor or worse.

In both agencies, the correlation of the scores' rank ordering among the categories was very high, as it was for all 30 agencies surveyed. For every agency, the mean rank order of officers' responses to the six integrity-related questions was nearly identical. Furthermore, the rank ordering of the scenarios differed little among the agencies.

Although differences in the rank ordering of the scenarios were minimal, both within and between the two agencies, discrepancies in the agencies' absolute scores reflected significant differences (see exhibits 3 and 4). Estimates of offense seriousness were consistently higher for Agency 2 than for Agency 23. The differences were especially large (between 0.5 and 1.0 on a 5-point scale) for three scenarios: Case 6 (auto repair shop kickback), Case 9 (drinks to ignore late bar closing), and Case 10 (excessive force on car thief). Police officers from Agency 2 evaluated each of these cases as substantially more serious than did officers from Agency 23.

The mean scores for discipline indicate that, in almost every case, police officers in Agency 2 not only expected more severe discipline than did officers in Agency 23, but they also thought that more severe discipline was appropriate. The differences in perceptions of discipline were especially great for the most serious types of corruption, such as the scenarios described in Case 3 (bribe from speeding motorist), Case 5 (crime scene theft of watch), and Case 11 (theft from found wallet), as well as for Case 10 (use of excessive force). While officers in Agency 2 thought that dismissal would result from the four most serious cases, officers in Agency 23 expected that dismissal would follow only one scenario, Case 5 (theft from a crime scene).

Exhibit 2. **Composite scores on seriousness of offense, discipline, and willingness to report, rank-ordered by agency**

Agency Number	Own Opinion of Seriousness	Other Officers' Opinions of Seriousness	Discipline *Should* Receive	Discipline *Would* Receive	Own Willingness to Report	Other Officers' Willingness to Report	Summary Score/ Integrity Ranking
1	3	3	3	3	3	3	18/1
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	18/1
4	3	3	3	3	3	3	18/1
6	3	3	3	3	3	3	18/1
10	3	3	3	3	3	3	18/1
17	3	3	3	3	3	3	18/1
30	3	3	3	3	3	3	18/1
2	3	2	3	3	3	3	17/8
18	2	2	3	3	3	3	16/9
7	3	2	2	2	3	3	15/10
11	3	3	2	2	2	2	14/11
12	3	3	3	1	2	2	14/11
5	2	2	2	3	2	2	13/13
19	3	2	2	2	2	2	13/13
20	3	2	2	2	2	2	13/13
29	2	3	2	1	2	2	12/16
26	3	2	2	2	1	1	11/17
27	2	2	2	1	2	2	11/17
24	2	2	1	1	2	2	10/19
21	1	1	2	3	1	1	9/20
22	1	1	2	2	1	2	9/20
9	2	1	2	1	1	1	8/22
16	1	1	1	1	2	2	8/22
13	1	2	1	1	1	1	7/24
14	1	1	1	2	1	1	7/24
15	1	1	1	1	2	1	7/24
23	1	1	1	2	1	1	7/24
25	1	1	1	2	1	1	7/24
8	1	1	1	1	1	1	6/29
28	1	1	1	1	1	1	6/29

The most systematic and dramatic difference between Agencies 2 and 23, however, is evident in their attitudes toward The Code of Silence. In both agencies, few officers said that they or their police colleagues would report any of the least serious types of corrupt behavior (Cases 1, 2, 4, and 8). Officers from Agency 2 reported that they and their colleagues would report the behavior described in the seven other cases. In Agency 23, however, there was *no* case that the majority of officers indicated they would report. In sum, while The Code is under control in Agency 2, it remains a powerful influence in Agency 23, providing an environment in which corrupt behavior can flourish.

Exhibit 3. **Agency 2 vs. Agency 23: Officers' own perceptions of seriousness of misconduct, discipline warranted, and willingness to report offense**

Case Scenario	Agency 2 (A2) vs. Agency 23 (A23) Perception of Seriousness				Agency 2 (A2) vs. Agency 23 (A23) Discipline *Should* Receive				Agency 2 (A2) vs. Agency 23 (A23) Willingness To Report			
	A2	A23	Difference	*t* test	A2	A23	Difference	*t* test	A2	A23	Difference	*t* test
Case 1. Off-Duty Security System Business	1.57	1.36	0.21	-2.82 $p<.05$	1.47	1.24	0.23	-3.60 $p<.001$	1.57	1.22	0.35	-4.78 $p<.001$
Case 2. Free Meals, Discounts on Beat	3.04	2.85	0.19	-1.80 $p<.01$	2.50	2.31	0.19	-2.48 $p<.01$	2.42	1.75	0.67	-6.67 $p<.001$
Case 3. Bribe From Speeding Motorist	4.94	4.78	0.16	-3.72 $p<.001$	5.02	4.44	0.58	-6.28 $p<.001$	4.67	3.02	1.65	-16.09 $p<.001$
Case 4. Holiday Gifts From Merchants	3.07	2.79	0.28	-2.47 $p<.01$	2.73	2.59	0.14	-1.35 NS*	2.74	2.05	0.69	-6.24 $p<.001$
Case 5. Crime Scene Theft of Watch	4.97	4.79	0.18	-4.21 $p<.001$	5.85	4.90	0.95	-12.64 $p<.001$	4.92	3.36	1.56	-15.97 $p<.001$
Case 6. Auto Repair Shop 5% Kickback	4.58	4.02	0.56	-6.74 $p<.001$	4.41	3.74	0.67	-6.47 $p<.001$	4.38	2.71	1.67	-15.63 $p<.001$
Case 7. Supervisor: Holiday for Tuneup	4.16	4.05	0.11	-1.24 NS*	3.58	3.51	0.07	-0.72 NS*	3.68	2.66	1.02	-8.68 $p<.001$
Case 8. Coverup of Police DUI Accident	3.16	2.68	0.48	-4.32 $p<.001$	2.85	2.57	0.28	-2.69 $p<.05$	2.67	2.03	0.64	-5.66 $p<.001$
Case 9. Drinks to Ignore Late Bar Closing	4.68	3.77	0.91	-9.96 $p<.001$	4.10	3.17	0.93	-10.45 $p<.001$	4.21	2.48	1.73	-16.02 $p<.001$
Case 10. Excessive Force on Car Thief	4.45	3.49	0.96	-10.12 $p<.001$	3.97	3.15	0.82	-8.30 $p<.001$	4.02	2.53	1.49	-13.42 $p<.001$
Case 11. Theft From Found Wallet	4.94	4.55	0.39	-6.85 $p<.001$	5.42	4.13	1.29	-14.17 $p<.001$	4.74	2.95	1.79	-17.41 $p<.001$

* Not significant.

Conclusions and implications

Redefining the problem of police corruption (i.e., the abuse of police authority for gain) as a problem of police integrity—the normative inclination among police to resist temptations to abuse their authority—enables the direct measurement of the major propositions of an organizational/occupational theory of police integrity. The research reported in this Research in Brief demonstrates that police attitudes toward the seriousness of misconduct, the discipline that should and would result, and the willingness of officers to tolerate misconduct in silence can be measured. Moreover, the measurements reported in this national sample are relatively easy to collect. At the same time, they demonstrate substantial

differences in the environments of integrity in U.S. police agencies.

The ability to measure environments of integrity in police agencies holds great potential for academic studies of police and for practical police administration. For researchers, quantitative cross-cultural, historical, and national comparisons that were previously unthinkable have now become feasible.

Equally important, such measurements have direct implications for practical police administration because each of the propositions of an organizational/occupational theory of integrity implies a specific administrative response. If officers do not know whether certain conduct violates agency policy or what disciplinary threats the agency

makes, administrators have a clear responsibility to communicate this information to officers. If officers do not regard certain misconduct as sufficiently serious, if they regard discipline as too severe or too lenient, or if they are willing to tolerate the misconduct of their police peers in silence, administrators have an obvious obligation to find out why. A police administrator can take specific actions to deal with each of these problems.

The survey instrument used in this study was designed to assess only one aspect of police integrity. In all case scenarios but one—the use of excessive force—the misconduct described was motivated by personal gain. In discussing environments of integrity,

Exhibit 4. **Agency 2 vs. Agency 23: Officers' perceptions of how** most police *would assess offense seriousness, discipline that offense* would *receive, and whether* most police *would be willing to report offense*

Case Scenario	Agency 2 (A2) vs. Agency 23 (A23) How *Most Police* Regard Seriousness				Agency 2 (A2) vs. Agency 23 (A23) Discipline *Would* Receive				Agency 2 (A2) vs. Agency 23 (A23) Whether *Most Police* Would Be Willing To Report			
	A2	A23	Difference	t test	A2	A23	Difference	t test	A2	A23	Difference	t test
Case 1. Off-Duty Security System Business	1.52	1.31	0.21	-1.61 NS*	1.70	1.33	0.37	-5.08 p<.001	1.52	1.31	0.21	-3.12 p<.05
Case 2. Free Meals, Discounts on Beat	2.53	2.57	-0.04	0.41 NS*	2.77	2.51	0.26	-3.27 p<.05	2.07	1.74	0.33	-3.83 p<.001
Case 3. Bribe From Speeding Motorist	4.82	4.60	0.22	-4.25 p<.001	4.90	4.45	0.45	-5.06 p<.001	4.23	2.90	1.33	-13.89 p<.001
Case 4. Holiday Gifts From Merchants	2.73	2.61	0.12	-1.10 NS*	3.07	2.88	0.19	-1.94 p<.01	2.49	2.03	0.46	-4.65 p<.001
Case 5. Crime Scene Theft of Watch	4.93	4.62	0.31	-6.16 p<.001	5.73	4.93	0.80	-10.33 p<.001	4.63	3.25	1.38	-14.99 p<.001
Case 6. Auto Repair Shop 5% Kickback	4.31	3.75	0.56	-6.28 p<.001	4.45	3.91	0.54	-5.35 p<.001	3.92	2.64	1.28	-12.51 p<.001
Case 7. Supervisor: Holiday for Tuneup	3.85	3.85	0	0.04 NS*	3.24	3.52	-0.28	2.78 p<.05	3.34	2.60	0.74	-6.80 p<.001
Case 8. Coverup of Police DUI Accident	2.80	2.54	0.26	-2.61 p<.05	3.33	2.83	0.50	-4.92 p<.001	2.40	1.95	0.45	-4.55 p<.001
Case 9. Drinks to Ignore Late Bar Closing	4.32	3.44	0.88	-9.13 p<.001	4.11	3.29	0.82	-8.92 p<.001	3.79	2.35	1.44	-13.89 p<.001
Case 10. Excessive Force on Car Thief	4.01	3.22	0.79	-8.00 p<.001	4.11	3.46	0.65	-6.86 p<.001	3.44	2.38	1.06	-9.98 p<.001
Case 11. Theft From Found Wallet	4.83	4.24	0.59	-8.53 p<.001	5.24	4.25	0.99	-10.79 p<.001	4.38	2.74	1.64	-16.20 p<.001

* Not significant.

therefore, this survey makes no observation about abuses of discretion in arrests, order maintenance, discourtesy to citizens, or other police misconduct not usually motivated by temptations of gain. A second generation of this survey will explore those problems.[6]

A final note

This survey does not measure the extent of corruption in any police agency or institution. Rather, it measures the culture of police integrity—the normative inclination of police officers to resist the temptations to abuse the rights and privileges of their office. The survey does not identify either corrupt or honest police officers; nor does it pro-

vide any evidence of abusive or dishonest practices—past, present, or future. The survey findings do describe, in a fairly precise way, the characteristics of a police agency's culture that encourage its employees to resist or tolerate certain types of misconduct.

Notes

1. Goldstein, Herman, *Police Corruption: Perspective on Its Nature and Control*, Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 1975; and Goldstein, H., *Policing a Free Society*, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1977. See also Sherman, Lawrence W., *Scandal and Reform*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978; Marx, Gary, *Surveillance*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991; Punch, Maurice, *Conduct Unbecoming: The Social Construction of Police Deviance and Control*, London: Tavistock, 1986;

and Manning, Peter K., and Lawrence Redlinger, "The Invitational Edges of Police Corruption," in *Thinking About Police*, edited by Carl Klockars and Stephen Mastrofski, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993: 398–412.

2. Note that the notions of "greater than zero (positive)" and "less than zero (negative)" are merely shorthand for discipline perceived as too lenient and too harsh, respectively. In other words, because the data are ordinal, positive or negative differences will not be used in any algebraic context. Rather, these differences will be used solely as indicators to classify respondents into three groups—those who perceive discipline to be fair, too lenient, or too harsh.

3. The frequency distribution of responses to the question about officers' own willingness to report a particular offense was analyzed. The five-point scale of offered answers ranged from 1="definitely not" to 5="definitely yes." A cumulative frequency above 50 percent for 1 and

2 was interpreted to indicate that police officers would *not* report the offense. A cumulative frequency above 50 percent for 4 and 5, on the other hand, was interpreted to indicate that the police officers *would* report the offense.

4. See, for example, Haberfeld, Maria, Carl Klockars, Sanja Kutnjak Ivkovich, and Milan Pagon, "Disciplinary Consequences of Police Corruption in Croatia, Poland, Slovenia, and the United States," *Police Practice and Research, An International Journal* 1 (1) (2000): 41–72.

5. An alternative summary ranking system could, of course, be based on the full range of 30-point rankings for each of the 11 scenarios. This type of system would create a scale that could range from 330 (for an agency that scored the lowest of the 30 agencies on all 6 questions for all 11 scenarios) to 1,980 (for an agency that scored the highest of all 30 agencies on all 6 questions for all 11 scenarios). Such a scoring system would, however, magnify small and primarily meaningless differences in mean scores, creating a false sense of precision. The ranking system developed for and employed in

this research intentionally seeks to blunt any false sense of precision by allowing agencies to score, in a sense, only "high," "middle," or "low" on any given question.

6. A summary of the status of progress with this next generation of measures of police integrity can be found on the videotape of the Research in Progress seminar "Measuring Police Integrity," presented by Carl Klockars at the National Institute of Justice in January 1999. Copies are available through the National Criminal Justice Reference Service at 800–851–3420. Please refer to NCJ 174459.

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