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## HIGHER EDUCATION AND POLICEMEN: ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FRESHMAN AND SENIOR POLICE COLLEGE STUDENTS

IRVING B. GULLER\*

### INTRODUCTION

There is a general assumption that education in its broadest perspective will have some effect in enhancing the capabilities of police to handle their progressively more complex role.<sup>1</sup> Among the tangible consequences of this faith has been the establishment of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a four year senior institution of higher learning offering a broad curriculum to members of the law enforcement community. This institution, founded in 1964 at the City University of New York, has been functioning for a sufficient period of time to utilize it as a model in assessing some of the consequences of higher education upon policemen who have been its students. The present study sought to examine one facet of the impact of college education: differences along certain attitudinal dimensions between freshmen and senior police college students.

Smith, Locke and Walker<sup>2</sup> have pointed out that flexibility and impartiality are among the desired characteristics of today's policeman. In a 1967 study, these same authors found college oriented police to be less authoritarian in orientation than non-college oriented police.<sup>3</sup>

It is a culturally shared assumption that through exposure to new and diverse ideas and a broadening of perspectives, a person's view of himself and attitudes toward others will undergo changes in some beneficial manner.

Two relatively uncontroversial expectations about the consequences of education are that the involved individual will increase in self esteem and will become more adaptively flexible in his approach to his environment. One purpose of the present study was to examine whether policemen

who were college seniors differed from police of comparable age and status who were freshmen in levels of authoritarianism as measured by the Dogmatism (D) Scale. Dogmatism, "closed-mindedness," implies the tendency to form opinions on the basis of limited information and to accept or reject information largely on the basis of its source and independent of its validity.<sup>4</sup> The person high in dogmatism (D) is regarded as prone toward opinionation, rigidity, resistance to new ideas and traditionalism. Conversely the low (D) or "open-minded" person tends to be willing to weigh new ideas, is considered to be more flexible and is less prone toward prejudice and prejudice.<sup>5</sup>

As a logically related issue, this study also sought to determine whether differential exposure to higher education is associated with differences in self esteem and "hard line" or punitive attitudes toward social deviance. It has been noted that policemen may tend to develop tough and punitive attitudes for reasons of self defense and social acceptability within police society.<sup>6</sup> If education is correlated with improved self esteem and reduced rigidity, and has some impact by softening hard attitudes toward people, it would presumably be meeting some of the goals its proponents have enunciated.

The hypotheses of this study thus were as follows:

1. That on a self concept inventory, there would be less evidence of negative self regard as a consequence of college education for policemen: *i.e.*, that seniors would think better of themselves than freshmen.
2. That policemen who are college seniors (SP) would show lower levels of authoritarianism, as measured by the Dogmatism (D) Scale, than freshmen, who were also policemen (FP), of similar age and socio-

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<sup>1</sup> See generally PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE, *THE CHALLENGE OF CRIME IN A FREE SOCIETY* (1967).

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Locke & Walker, *Authoritarianism in Police College Students and Non-Police College Students*, 59 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 440 (1968).

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Locke & Walker, *Authoritarianism in College and Non-College Oriented Police*, 58 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 128 (1967).

<sup>4</sup> See M. ROKEACH, *THE OPEN AND CLOSED MIND* 3-27 (1960).

<sup>5</sup> See Rokeach, *Political and Religious Dogmatism: An Alternative to the Authoritarian Personality*, 70 PSYCHOLOGICAL MONOGRAPHS 1 (1956).

<sup>6</sup> A. NIEDERHOFFER, *BEHIND THE SHIELD: POLICE IN URBAN SOCIETY* 102-51 (1969).

economic background with similar amounts of police work experience.

3. That seniors (SP) would show lower levels of punitive or "hard line" attitudes toward socially deviant people, and less of a tendency to value toughness as a virtue than would freshmen (FP).

## METHOD

### Subjects

The subjects were 63 male undergraduate students (Ss) at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice who were also policemen of varying rank in the New York City Police Department. Those Ss finally employed in the study were the 63 respondents of 70 Ss solicited. These 70 were drawn, in turn, from an original pool of over 150 freshmen and seniors. In order to keep the population homogeneous with respect to background, Ss were matched roughly for years of police experience<sup>7</sup> and men from departments other than the New York City Police Department were eliminated. Further attrition resulted from an attempt to match (FP) students with (SP) Ss for age. The final S group included 32 seniors (SP) and 31 freshmen (FP). Because all Ss were part time students and full time policemen, the seniors in general had begun their college education several years prior to the freshmen.

### Instruments

The instruments consisted of Rokeach's D Scale<sup>8</sup> and two equivalent forms (T and S) of specially prepared 50 item questionnaires each of which was a dual instrument. The initial 40 item sections of Forms T and S were adopted from an instrument previously used to obtain self assessment reports from college students by Guller.<sup>9</sup> The 10 item "hard line scale" in Table 3 was a continuation of Guller's format, and consisted of items relating to one's attitudes toward social deviance, the desirability of physical combat, and punitive attitudes toward offenders.

The questionnaires entitled "Self Description—Form S (or T)" required response to each item in a six category choice scale ranging from completely

<sup>7</sup> Mean police experience was found to be 7 years, 3 months.

<sup>8</sup> M. ROKEACH, *supra* note 4, at 71–80.

<sup>9</sup> Guller, *Increased Stability of Self Concept in Students Served by a College Counseling Center*, 47 PERSONNEL AND GUIDANCE J. 546 (1969).

true (CT), designated 1, to completely false (CF), designated 6. Items having positive and negative social valence were so arranged as to preclude arbitrary place responses.

### Procedure

The procedure consisted first of sending a letter to each of the 70 selected potential subjects asking their willingness to participate in a confidential research project which was officially sanctioned by John Jay College. Respondents who indicated willingness to proceed were sent a copy of the D Scale and either a T or S Form of the questionnaire in the mail along with instructions and a stamped return envelope. In the cases of those who did not initially respond, follow-up was conducted, yielding a total of 63 usable sets of data from the originally matched and selected group. Most responses were returned by mail. A few were dropped off completed at the investigator's college office. There was no discernable difference on any demographic measure between respondents and non-respondents.

## RESULTS

FP and SP Ss were found to be well matched for age, experience in law enforcement and socioeconomic background as far as could be determined. Mean age of the FP group was 373.9 months (31.2 years) while the SP mean age was 404.7 months (33.7 years). The obtained difference of 2.5 years was found to be non-significant.<sup>10</sup> Data on job experience was omitted by a few subjects in each group, and averaged 7.3 years for all Ss. FP mean experience was 6.8 years compared with 8.9 years for the SP group. The obtained difference was slightly less than the difference in mean age for the subject groups, and is considered non-significant. There did not appear to be any relevant differences in socioeconomic background between the FP and SP groups. Most Ss in both groups came from blue collar and civil service family backgrounds. Each group contained a handful of officers above the rank of patrolman.

In compiling scores for the various measures used including positive self esteem, negative self esteem and hard line attitudes, the answer "Completely True" received a numerical score of 1 while "Completely False" received a score of 6. Total scores for each variable were the arithmetic totals of these

<sup>10</sup> S.D. of FP = 82.85 months; S.D. of SP = 55.39 months;  $t = .14$ ;  $p > .50$ .

TABLE 1  
ITEMS IN THE POSITIVE SELF ESTEEM SCALE

S	T
5. I am quick witted.	5. I am intellectually sharp.
9. I can understand other people.	9. I am a good judge of character.
15. I am a steady and reliable worker.	15. I am a stable and dependable worker.
18. I am a strong personality.	18. I am a forceful person.
23. I am as masculine as any man my age.	23. I have no doubts about my manhood.
29. I have a sense of personal dignity.	29. I have pride in myself.
35. I plan ahead.	35. I think before I act.
37. I am a mature person.	37. I am a responsible person.
39. I have my share of friends.	39. I have my full share of friends.
48. I feel qualified to lead others.	48. I have leadership qualities.

TABLE 2  
ITEMS IN THE NEGATIVE SELF ESTEEM SCALE

S	T
2. I can't show my emotions.	2. I am unable to express my feelings.
4. I tend to act as if I were superior.	4. I tend to be arrogant.
6. Deep down I am lacking in courage.	6. I am basically a coward.
10. I have a feeling of hopelessness.	10. I feel life is useless.
14. I am an inadequate person.	14. I am an inferior person.
20. I tend to let others down.	20. I tend to disappoint people who rely on me.
24. Too many things bother me.	24. I tend to have too many worries.
32. My opinions are easily influenced by others.	32. My ideas are easily changed by other people.
34. My feelings are easily hurt.	34. I am too sensitive to criticism.
40. I lack confidence.	40. I am unsure of myself.

conversion values for the number of items under consideration. Thus, the Positive Self Esteem (PSE) score consisted, for any given individual, of the sum total of scores on the 20 items shown in Table 1. Table 2 and Table 3 show items used in the Negative Self Esteem (NSE) and Hard Line (HL) scales respectively. The lower the PSE score, the more positive the self evaluation. For the NSE, the lower the score, the more negative the self evaluation. In the case of the HL scores, the lower the score, the "harder the line" or "tougher" the self description.

For the Dogmatism (D) Scale results, higher scores reflect greater degrees of dogmatism or closed-mindedness while, conversely, a low score signifies more "open-mindedness." Normative data utilizing the same D Scale form were available from an earlier study.<sup>11</sup> These were used in comparing our Ss with the 150 civilian college seniors and juniors from which the normative D scores were obtained. Results of this comparison are shown in Table 5.

<sup>11</sup> Bailes & Guller, *Dogmatism and Attitudes toward the Vietnam War*, 33 *SOCIOMETRY* 140 (1970).

FP and SP Ss were compared by use of *t* tests for their PSE, NSE and HL attitudes. Results of these analyses are shown in Table 4.

The first hypothesis of this study was that SP Ss would show less tendency toward negative self esteem or self derogatory responses than would FP students. The mean difference of 2.94 in NSE score was in the predicted direction<sup>12</sup> but failed to achieve statistical significance by the .05 level of confidence criterion. Although not included in the hypotheses, an evaluation of positive self regard was made. Results were non-significant. The FP group showed a very slightly higher self esteem score<sup>13</sup> than the SP Ss yielding a probability of .50. As Wylie<sup>14</sup> has pointed out, positive self esteem reports have been demonstrated to have little meaning since one cannot generally discriminate between groups, including normals, neurotics and schizophrenics using this measure.

On the D Scale, SP students showed significantly

<sup>12</sup> See Table 4.

<sup>13</sup> The mean difference found was .82.

<sup>14</sup> R. WYLIE, *THE SELF CONCEPT: A CRITICAL SURVEY OF SELF CONCEPT LITERATURE* 111 (1961).

TABLE 3  
ITEMS IN THE HARD LINE SCALE

S	T
12. I have little faith in other people.	12. I do not trust other people.
18. I am a strong person.	18. I am a forceful person.
41. Lawbreakers deserve stiff punishment.	41. Those who break the law should be punished severely.
42. I think physical combat strengthens a man's character.	42. I believe that a good fight once in a while is good for a man.
43. I believe trying to understand all points of view on an issue can be dangerous.	43. I think trying to see all sides of an issue can get you in trouble.
44. I don't particularly like people who are individualistic and unconventional.	44. I don't especially admire free, spontaneous people.
46. I don't think poor people need to be specially helped.	46. I don't believe poor people deserve our help.
47. I don't want to depend on anyone to make it in this world.	47. I am self reliant and want no help from others.
49. I believe in never letting the other guy get the upper hand.	49. Life is a matter of "push or be shoved."
50. I believe most intellectuals are impractical.	50. Generally speaking, I think intellectuals are out of touch with reality.

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF FRESHMEN POLICE STUDENTS (FP) WITH SENIOR POLICE STUDENTS (SP) FOR POSITIVE SELF ESTEEM (PSE), NEGATIVE SELF ESTEEM (NSE), HARD LINE ATTITUDES (HL) AND DOGMATISM (D) SCORES

Groups compared by *t* test of the null hypothesis for small groups.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i>	p
PSE	SP	32	22.66 <sup>a</sup>	5.13	.59	> .50
	FP	31	21.84	5.62		
NSE	SP	32	47.06 <sup>b</sup>	6.19	1.80	< .10 > .05
	FP	31	44.10	6.79		
HL	SP	32	38.87 <sup>c</sup>	3.49	2.41	< .05 *
	FP	31	36.32	4.84		
D	SP	32	147.66 <sup>d</sup>	41.40	2.56	< .05 *
	FP	31	169.42	24.08		

\* Significant beyond the .05 level of confidence.

<sup>a</sup> The lower the PSE score, the more positive the self evaluation.

<sup>b</sup> The lower the NSE score, the more negative the self evaluation.

<sup>c</sup> The lower the HL score, the more "hard line" are the attitudes.

<sup>d</sup> The lower the D score, the lower the degree of dogmatism or the greater the degree of "open-mindedness."

less dogmatism than FP students, thus supporting the second hypothesis of this study. The mean difference of 21.84 points was somewhat mitigated by the greater variance in the responses of the SP group.

Our final hypothesis was that the SP students would yield lower "hard line" scores than FP Ss.

Table 4 shows that SP and FP students did differ significantly on this variable in the direction predicted, thus supporting the third hypothesis of this study.

Table 5 shows that in comparison to a group of 150 male civilian undergraduate students (CUG), the police students of this study were as a group less

TABLE 5  
COMPARISON OF D SCORES DERIVED FROM CIVILIAN UNDERGRADUATES (CUG) AND FP AND SP Ss, UTILIZING SAME INSTRUMENT

Group	Mean D				
	N	Score	S.D.	t	p
FP.....	31	169.42	24.08	2.56	< .05 *
SP.....	32	147.66	41.40		
CUG.....	150	163.99	26.02	1.14	< .10 > .05
FP & SP combined.....	63	158.36	35.73		
FP.....	31	169.42	24.08	1.17	> .10
CUG.....	150	163.99	26.02		
SP.....	32	147.66	41.40	5.32	< .05 *
CUG.....	150	163.99	26.02		

\* Significant beyond the .05 level of confidence.

dogmatic, though the difference was not significant.<sup>15</sup> The FP students taken alone were slightly more dogmatic than the civilians<sup>16</sup> but this difference was not significant. The D scores of the SP Ss, on the other hand, were significantly lower than those of the CUG group, though the variance of the former group's responses was greater.

#### DISCUSSION

One of the paradoxes of the position police find themselves in is that they are accused of being too rigid and repressive by one segment of the society while others regard them as too flexible and permissive. Historically, the police have been regarded as the bastion of defense for the social and cultural values of the times. They uphold traditional standards, reflect conventional values and come, in general, from lower middle class homes where typical cultural expectancies have been taught. For upward striving groups who demand that the culture alter rapidly, police are often the prime visible obstacles to change. As such, police are the targets for the displaced hostilities of these groups.

The lone police officer frequently feels that he is confronted by mutually contradictory demands: be firm but reasonable; tolerate the personally intolerable; relate to values which are often the obverse of his own. At this vortex of social and political upheaval, where the wisdom of a Solomon, the education of a sociologist, the nerves of a test pilot and the patience of a saint are called for, we have, after all, an average man.

Education of police has been widely, and, for the

most part, simplistically proposed as the panacea for these problems. The question is, however, what kind of education. What should the police study if they are to become sufficiently wise to deal with their dilemma?

The results of the present study would suggest that it does not make very much difference. What we have found is that there seems to be a relationship between amount of exposure to college education—regardless of major since our Ss had widely divergent majors—and a variety of presumably positive cognitive changes. The statistically most significant of these was in the area of dogmatism. The present study shows that the police students sampled were not significantly more dogmatic—on the basis of the same instrument—than a randomly selected group of largely upper middle class, predominantly white, suburban dwelling and liberally oriented students who were much younger and were not exposed to the conservative traditions of police organizations. This finding is in accord with the conclusions reached by Smith, Locke and Walker.<sup>17</sup> Our results further suggest that those police students who have been exposed to college are less dogmatic than those whose college experience has just begun. Lower levels of dogmatism are related to greater flexibility and openness to alternative points of view.<sup>18</sup> It needs to be reemphasized that dogmatism has historically been regarded as a relatively stable if not inherent cognitive style of the individual and highly resistant to change.

There is no reason to assume any fundamental difference between our subject groups with regard

<sup>15</sup> The mean difference found was 5.63.

<sup>16</sup> Here the mean difference was found to be 5.33.

<sup>17</sup> See Smith, Locke & Walker, *supra* note 2.

<sup>18</sup> M. ROKEACH, *supra* note 4, at 57-60.

to this variable at the outset, *i.e.*, before exposure to college. Furthermore, our SP Ss were, on the average, older and more firmly rooted in their jobs (though not significantly in either case) than the FP group. One might, therefore, anticipate greater rigidity on their part. The opposite was the case. Barring the operation of potent unknown variables, greater exposure to education on a college level is what seems to make the difference. Anecdotal reports are inappropriate data in scientific inquiry, but many specific cases which come to mind at John Jay are in dramatic accord with the statistical findings of this study. Individuals who at the outset most rigidly resisted new ideas were later the champions of the reasoned alternative.

Although our other findings are not statistically potent, we also have evidence from this study that more exposure to college results in less negative self esteem and at the same time diminishes hard line or punitive attitudes toward others. Both of these changes are considered consistent with the goals of promoting better accord between the public and police, and of making better people out of the police. The fact that the positive self esteem measure did not distinguish between our FP and SP Ss

is not surprising in view of the research<sup>19</sup> which indicates that positive self referent statements are not indicative of good adjustment. On the other hand, a reduction in negative self descriptive remarks is widely accepted as a clinical sign of improved self esteem. It is conventional wisdom that those who like themselves find it easier to deal harmoniously with others.

The exact process through which education accomplishes such changes as were found remains an area for further research. The SP Ss are, however, distinguishable from their freshmen fellow officers in that they are more open-minded, less inclined toward punitive social attitudes and seem to think somewhat better of themselves as people. The assumption, however, that more open-minded, less punitive policemen who think better of themselves will be better officers remains only an article of faith in the absence of generally agreed upon criteria for good police work. Further research is needed to determine in what ways, if any, the findings of this study might be translated into action in the field and what the social consequences might be.

<sup>19</sup> R. WYLIE, *supra* note 14.