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## A darker shade of blue: From public servant to professional deviant; Law enforcement's special operations culture

Louis Scott Silverii  
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A Darker Shade of Blue:  
From Public Servant to Professional Deviant;  
Law Enforcement's Special Operations Culture

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
In  
Urban Studies

by

Louis Scott Silverii

B.G.S. Nicholls State University, 1992  
M.P.A. University of New Orleans, 2006

December 2011

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[ii]

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, friends and “brothers and sisters in blue.” I thank my dear parents, Jean and Joe Silverii, whose personal commitments to higher education showed the value of learning to me as a child. I pray that my sons will see the sacrifices made as noble and learn the value of persistence through adversity.

After more than twenty years of law enforcement, I continue to be blessed by the men and women with whom I serve. To those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice and those who continue the good fight, I am eternally thankful for your service to our country and community. I am indebted to my friend and mentor, Craig Webre, Sheriff of Lafourche Parish, Louisiana for providing the inspiration and opportunities to accomplish nothing short of giving my all.

To my friends who were often greeted with, “I can’t, I’m reading,” thank you for your patience while I pursued my dream. Finally, I dedicate this work to my friend, who more than anyone I have ever known, treasures the value of education. Dave Paul Thibodaux has been a constant encouragement by always asking about my progress, making sure I was home reading, and reminding me why I ever began this journey. I hope that everyone has a DP in his life.

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## **Abstract**

The culture of law enforcement is an all or nothing proposition with no gray area where membership into this society is concerned. You are either “on the job” or you are not. Even references among officers to “the job” indicate there is only one job. Likened to a secret handshake, that initial phrase if answered correctly opens the door to instant fraternal acceptance, get out of violation passes, and the many other assumed privileges of brotherhood. Manning (1980) describes the powerful mystification of policing as the “sacred canopy”. He further asserts that “the police role conveys a sense of sacredness or awesome power that lies at the root of political order, and authority, the claims a state makes upon its people for deference to rules, laws and norms” (Manning, 1980, p. 21).

These elements make policing unique to all other American occupations. The sacredness of the profession creates social autonomy protected by the officers’ code of silence. Operating in this vacuum apart from public accountability fosters an environment for behavior outside of laws the institution is charged with enforcing. My research shows the process of occupational socialization ushers officers into a state of becoming blue, or the enculturation of expectant behavior and actions. I confirm that assignments into the Special Operations Group (SOG) facilitate a subculture separate and apart from the institutional ideals (Librett, 2006) and encourage a darkening of the shade of blue identifying officers with a labeling of deviance. While previous research identifies the code of silence as a by-product of the policing culture, my research identifies it as fundamental for maintaining the covenant of the dark blue fraternity.



## **Key Words**

Occupational socialization

Liminality

Police Culture

Subculture

Deviance

Hegemonic masculinity

Groupthink

## **Specific Findings**

- The SOG subculture is a reflection of the manifestation of specialized skill set selection, the collective personal characteristics transformed during periods of liminal opportunities uniquely experienced in the SOG mission, and the institutionally autonomous operational environment of violence, silence and risk.
- Individuals may devolve into a deviant subcultural fraternity when associated with a purposeful segregation from the mainstream population of moral civilian anchors.
- Six liminal benchmarks track the occupational trajectory from civilian to fully socialized SOG.
- Detrimental hegemonic entitlement embodies occupational subcultures characterized by hegemonic masculinity and the dynamics of groupthink.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The law enforcement profession is a unique dynamic having a stratified hierarchy segmenting officers by assignment and rank structure. Barker (2005) details the disillusionment of law enforcement officers as they experience a fracturing from the institutional ideals associated with traditional policing. The more enmeshed in special operations, the more autonomous the subculture devolves and disenfranchised officers become. Though the effects of the SOG vary by degrees of tension and separation from institutional ideals, this urban affairs project explores Turner's (1967) liminality relating to the trajectory of socialization. This shows the effects on individuals transitioning from civilian life to policing and the officers moving from traditional policing roles into the deviant subculture of the SOG.

Turner (1967) describes the phenomenon of liminality as a period of transition where normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are relaxed - a situation which can lead to new perspectives. He refers to the phase as a "betwix and between" period. This state of transition may present itself as a continuing evolution beginning with the civilian-to-officer assimilation and continues as the officer moves beyond the thin blue line from traditional policing assignments and into the covert environment of the SOG. The "thin blue line" is a term commonly used to symbolize the position law enforcement serves in society as they stand between honest citizens and criminals.

Operating in this social margin places SOG Operators on the legal, ethical and societal fringe where deviant behavior encapsulates the hedonistic ethos. I associate the term deviance with the personal behaviors differing from the traditional norms of society and policing.

Examples of SOG deviant behavior include alcohol consumption, violence, sex, discriminatory practices and risk-taking and societal fringe lifestyles encroaching upon criminal activities.

Punch (2009) uses the metaphor of the slippery slope to convey the social-psychological process transitioning the initial sampling of abnormal deeds into the seriously disturbing actions leading officers to a depth of deviance finding themselves bumping up to criminality. Punch (2009) further describes those officers exercising deviance as either grass-eaters or meat-eaters. While officers classified as grass-eaters may engage in acts of deviance such as using alcohol on duty, sex, and execution of unjustifiable violence, others ideologically committed to the criminalistic fringe lifestyle are categorized as meat-eaters engaging in bribe taking, accepting favors for preferential treatment, extortion or even murder. Sykes and Matza (1957) explain the rationalization of this deviant behavior by the violating officers in their “vocabularies of motive”.

Characteristics of Janis’ (1972) groupthink embody the elements associated with Sykes and Matza (1957), Punch (2009) and Turner (1967). The combination of these elements and the deviant ideology links the SOG behavior to other civilian groups (page 113) through sociological similarities. The dominate white male influence creates environments of hegemonic masculinity where control over others is exercised, while justifying their antisocial behavior as necessary for completing the objectives of their occupational or organizational missions.

This applied social science project studies the SOG identified as the Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) and Narcotics Operators. I use the term “Operator” to identify a law enforcement officer as a member of the SOG. It is a term of distinction and used among SOG members to establish occupational separation from non-SOG officers.

Both SWAT and Narcotics units promote intra-member dependence for performance of their duties and to a greater extent their very survival. The term SOG can include other law enforcement assignments like K-9 teams, water patrol units, explosive ordnance disposal, divers, mounted divisions, motorcycle patrols, mountain search and rescue teams and air patrol units. I specifically focus on the SWAT and Narcotics Operators to ensure a methodological congruity, and an opportunity to apply my professional experiences to the SOG's SWAT and Narcotic assignments. These two units differ from the others because their mission frequently requires operational autonomy, covert training and assignments, supervisory authority outside the typical organizational hierarchy. They also include assignments requiring the depersonalization through identity concealment (SWAT – heavy armor and Nomex balaclava, Narcotics – undercover identities), the use of extended surveillance periods followed by brief enforcement actions with high propensities for violence (SWAT hostage rescue or Narcotics undercover purchase of illegal drugs or weapons from dangerous felons) and are unsupported by traditional policing resources.

The SOG promotes autonomy from regular law enforcement operations and segregation from fellow officers assigned to more traditional roles. Occupational isolations may be detrimental to their personal lives and to the effectiveness of the individual officer's career. Girodo (2002) reveals how extended assignment into SOG's exposure to antisocial behavior, violence and extreme hazards may prevent the successful reassignment to traditional roles of policing and ultimately the ability to protect the public. In a profession dependent on standardization and uniformity to provide effective public safety services, intra-fraternal segregations jeopardize the organization's primary objective. An examination of policing's occupational socialization process explores the catalyst for creating institutional subcultures fragmented from traditional agency ideals of duty, honor and service.

Series of liminal transitions during the assimilation process shapes their ideological shift from public servant to professional deviant. The conceptual adjustment among society's moral entrepreneurs is responsible for changes in the officer's perceptual standing and professional allegiance. I address occupational socialization through an ethnographic examination identifying counter-institutional behaviors deemed professionally unacceptable but unofficially tolerated by supervisory staff. The contributions to academic research begin with the introduction to a previously uncharted society entrenched within the institution of law enforcement. There remains a gap in research between institutional structures and SOG subculture. My research adds to the knowledge and provides the details of public servants' fringe existence leading to the break from organizational values. This study adds to the understanding of the officer's occupational trajectory beginning with new hire cadet status and evolving through the phases of liminal transformation leading to SOG institutional fragmentation. This understanding explains the shift in social and moral perspective, leading once "by-the-book" officers to assume that antisocial behavior is acceptable and expected as a titling to the brotherhood of blue.

The research also provides useful information for social scientists examining the effects on employees experiencing the ideological transitions and deviant practices associated with exposure to specialized, autonomous assignments and its ultimate effect on organizational congruity. This ethnography, the study and systematic recording of human culture, demystifies law enforcement's SOG, who are participants and products of organizational division through the process of becoming blue. An operational definition of becoming blue is the process of civilians becoming informally indoctrinated into the fraternity of law enforcement's restricted access society separating idealistic public servants from SOG Operators enmeshed in a destructive cycle of subcultural self-allegiance.

The intra-fraternal segregations may jeopardize the organization's primary objectives of public service. To document this phenomenon, literature is categorized into three main topics for summarizing the results of research: 1) Occupational Socialization, 2) Police Culture, and 3) Organizational Detection of Problematic Behavior. Although an abundance of literature exists on the topics of organizational structures, deviant behavior and the profession of law enforcement, little research exists describing the subculture of law enforcement's SOG. Deficiencies in past literature (Ivkovic, 2003; Klochars, 2000) often cite entrée into this culture as the main problem. They struggle with the limited access granted to individuals outside of law enforcement and depend on non-participant observation of the organizational structure, institutional policy and agency information made public.

Access into the SOG is restricted due to several reasons including the covert nature of the assignment, the disengaged positioning from the public, secreted policing traditions and an impenetrable code of silence. Past research such as Klochars (2000) and Ivkovic (2003) relies on assumptions, media portrayals, parallel literature and officer interviews offering limited insight. The absence of observational opportunities and SOG Operator interviews creates a void of knowledge for understanding the cultural trajectory of law enforcement's clandestine nature and the environment dominated by informal social conformity outside the customary and professional norms of acceptable behavior.

The main deficiency in researching law enforcement's subcultures is identified in Ivkovic's (2003) work specific to police corruption relating to occupational socialization. Although methods were rigorous, Ivovic (2003) still was unable to penetrate the thin blue line as the institutional code of silence prevails with officer participants.

The code of silence is an unwritten rule among police officers to not report another officer's errors, misconducts or crimes. If questioned about an incident of misconduct involving another officer, it is standard practice to claim ignorance. Walker and Katz (2008) discuss the code of silence as an expectant mandate among officers to remain quiet about reporting or confronting other officers engaged in illicit, immoral or illegal activities.

A study by the United States Department of Justice reveals a culture of maintaining the code of silence among agencies. This study, conducted by Klochars (2000) shows the historical limitation of valid data compilation from among the ranks of officers remaining a challenge for researchers. Officers do not trust anyone outside their circle, and researchers asking questions about corruption will result in either limited participation, or unreliable results. Because of this adversarial relationship, institutional mechanisms created to identify the presence of officer behavior non-conducive to the mission of public service fall short in producing a comprehensive matrix for early reporting, intervention and remediation of actions. The countercultural actions observed by Girodo (1991) seek characteristics required for selecting successful undercover agents. They are based on the contradicting characteristics of recruiting ethical candidates, then training them to deceive the public as a benchmark of their professional success. These issues were addressed by Girodo (1991) to identify personal behaviors non-conducive to ethical behavior.

My research addresses these issues to show the path leading public servants to a fringe existence and point of departure from organizational values. This examination also provides understanding of the individual officer's transformation from public servant to social deviant as he transitions from the traditional roles of policing and into the SOG.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Examining the effects of occupational socialization on the individual, work groups and entire institutions helps with understanding of the elements involved with the occupational socialization of highly trained skill set positions requiring organizational autonomy. Literature relating to the subtleties of workplaces and the effects of peer groups reveal a unique phenomenon within the law enforcement milieu. The autonomous assignment into the SOG creates the potential for growing an environment fertile for illicit and fringe behavior. This fracturing of organizational ideologies, similar to those described by Barker (2005) promotes a disenfranchisement from the institution's traditional truisms of duty, honor and service. Although officers remaining in more traditional (non-SOG) assignments experience fraternal bonding, the SOG operators devolve into an allegiance of brotherhood more binding than the oath to the agency, demanding loyalty and adherence to a different code of silence than regular law enforcement.

## **Purpose, Rationale and Research Questions**

This public service sector is responsible for providing civil order, rule of law and domestic protection. The community of law enforcement is often slow to recognize their vulnerabilities and the detrimental effects on officers who take the oath to protect and serve, but now also owe allegiance to SOG over that of the institution. The experiencing of negative effects associated with occupational socialization into the SOG is common. It is seen as breaking the code of silence for Operators to seek professional assistance in dealing with effects on their personal and professional lives.



The difficulties of honoring the tradition of silence is compounded by the extra-ordinary experiences (criminalistic violence, exposure to the drug trade, dangerous criminals and a gun carrying culture) (Insert 1; 2) of the stressors placed on SOG Operators.



Insert 1  
Photograph from: Scott Silverii



Insert 2  
Photograph from Scott Silverii

I identify as best for exploring the effects of occupational socialization on the SOG the research questions:

1. Does assignment into the SOG cause perceptual changes specific to organizational allegiance that are detrimental to providing quality service to the public?
2. Does a liminal state of ideological transition occur during the SOG socialization process that prevents the transfer back into more traditional roles of policing?
3. What are the effects of occupational socialization on the personal lives of law enforcement officers assigned to SOG?
4. What are the effects of occupational socialization on the professional careers of law enforcement officers assigned to SOG?

## **Significance**

The significance of this study is the applicability to various audiences ranging from academic researchers to institutional policy and decision makers. Although the SOG is a unique environment, the principles of institutionalized organizations, workforce behavior, groupthink, and the detection of actions non-conducive to professionalism and productivity apply.

The exploration and analysis of the officer's liminal trajectory from traditional public servant to countercultural SOG Operator affects public service institutions, socio-cultural structures, and law enforcement assignments.

The research methodology allows for the future replication of the study, as the implications will benefit policing's association with cultural anthropology, the sociology of organizations and institutions, and the psychology of antisocial / deviant workplace behaviors. Additionally, this benefits public administration and human resource managers responsible for identifying professional behaviors conducive to effective and efficient workplace productivity. The strength of this project lies in my close relationship to the highly restricted subculture of SOG, allowing for thick, rich descriptions of dialogue and observations into a society seldom seen and minimally understood.

## **Limitations**

The weakness of the project is the limited amount of academic literature specifically targeting the SOG. This requires the incorporation of parallel literature for providing a conceptual basis for description and understanding. Another challenge to collecting data in Louisiana and the southern United States involves the events unfolding around the New Orleans metropolitan area concerning law enforcement actions immediately following Hurricane Katrina.

Notable events at the time of this initial research are referred to as the Danziger Bridge shooting and the Henry Glover murder, involving officers of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD).

During the time of interviewing and observing SOG, six NOPD officers were under indictment by the United States Department of Justice for the deadly police shooting that occurred on the Danziger Bridge. On Sunday, September 4, 2005, two African-Americans were killed in the gunfire and four other civilians were wounded. It is alleged that the civilians were unarmed and that the officers coordinated in fabricating a cover-up story for their crime. Each officer admitted his role in the cover-up and agreed to cooperate with the prosecution. Prior to my final research, these five NOPD officers pled guilty in the federal trial of this case. Five additional officers were convicted at trial on August 5, 2011, on a variety of charges to include civil rights and firearm offenses for unjustifiably shooting the six civilians on the bridge, and all five defendants were convicted of obstructing justice in the wake of the shooting. One last former officer is scheduled for federal trial in January 2012 (Department of Justice, 2011).

The Henry Glover murder involved NOPD officers indicted in the death of Henry Glover. He was shot to death in the days following Hurricane Katrina, and his body was burned by officers in an effort to conceal their crime. Three officers were convicted and two were acquitted in a federal trial. Those convicted involved federal charges to include civil rights violations, obstruction of justice and lying to the FBI (Department of Justice, 2010). Following the convictions, the United States Attorney's prosecutor Thomas Perez states:

Instead of upholding their oath to protect and serve the people of New Orleans in the days after Hurricane Katrina, these officers violated the law and the public trust" "And while some officers broke through the thin blue line and told the truth under oath, others were rightly convicted for obstructing justice. Today's verdict brought a measure of justice to the Glover family and to the entire city (Department of Justice, 2010).

These investigations are causing this community of law enforcement to become more segregated from the civilian population because the code of silence was broken and officers were held accountable for illegal actions. Their convictions did affect my ability to capture recordings of SOG Operators.

The final limitation affects the perception of the SOG as having no variations of ideology or behavioral differences. While directing the research I was aware of possibilities for identifying anomalies in the data. I do not claim that the SOG presented itself as one hundred percent homogenous, but the variations in the data collected were minimal. Operators claiming that they did not share the fringe lifestyle refused participation in the interviews and may cause an impression of total cultural homogeneity.

I asked these Operators to share their experiences inside the SOG, but they chose to not participate, or upon initiation of the semi-structured interviews withdrew their commitments to continue. Four Operators discontinued the interview and asked that I not mention them. Honoring the requests, there is no mention of their information in this study except that their views were very different from the majority of others. While acknowledging limitations of the research establishes credibility for the design, the examination of literature relevant to occupational socialization, policing's unique culture and the institutional challenges of identifying dark blue behaviors establishes a foundation for past and current research related to these main themes.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

To study the SOG's effects on the officer, agency and the public, literature relevant to the topic is examined. Providing a comprehensive representation of current literature allows the categorization of the information into three major themes: occupational socialization, police culture, and organizational detection of problematic behavior. These categories were chosen to represent the powerful influence of occupational socialization on the officer and the process of introducing them to the fragmented sectors within the homogenous environment.

The second category details the unique culture of police work. While socialization shares similarities with other para-militaristic hierarchical professions, the authorization to use force on the citizenry makes it an occupation and culture unique to any other American profession. Because of the strength of the assimilation process and the uniqueness of the profession, the final category is included to show the challenges for holding officers accountable and deterring them from engaging in countercultural behavior.

#### **Occupational Socialization**

Literature specific to law enforcement's occupational socialization is limited because of the strong and impenetrable culture of policing. My study incorporated parallel literature to supplement information about organizations similar to law enforcement's hierarchical structures and professional specializations, such as the military and health care profession. The following researchers present studies specific to the process of "fitting in" to illustrate that as officers become more acculturated, they move further away from the central tenants of the organization. The socialization process includes definitive stages teaching officers the principles and practices of policing but simultaneously promotes a degeneration of moral and ethical behaviors.

### ***Bureaucratic Fraternal Order***

Feldman's (1976) research of the health care profession identified four distinct stages of socialization are applicable to institutionalized peer clustering and group-think and provides a comparative analysis of law enforcement socialization practices. The study of nurses, nurse's aides, radiology technologists, tradesmen and accounting clerks demonstrates the individual progressing through the stages of socialization may experience at least one of four possible outcomes: 1) general satisfaction, 2) mutual influence, 3) internal work motivation or 4) job involvement. Feldman's (1976) study does not mention the potential variable of job dissatisfaction. This omission fell outside the scope of investigation, but it is an obvious component in assessing the results of occupational socialization.

In addition to his four socialization outcomes, Feldman (1976) describes four specific thresholds in the socialization process. I relate each stage to the law enforcement milieu for understanding the conceptual parallel to the health care profession as it relates to occupational socialization. The first stage in the socialization's trajectory is "Anticipatory Socialization" and includes learning about the job prior to actually joining the agency. In law enforcement, this stage often involves the recruit developing unrealistic expectations created by media portrayals of police work. "Accommodation" is the second stage when the reality of the occupation meets the individual's expectation as he attempts to become a participating member of that culture. This stage in law enforcement is usually accomplished during the police academy, yet the image presented to the recruit is still far removed from the reality awaiting graduation and assignment on the streets.

The third stage in Feldman's (1976) occupational socialization model is "Role Management", which allows an employee the opportunity to begin resolving problems within his own work groups. The role management phase as related to law enforcement is an opportunity for the cadet to resolve conflicts between other people and groups placing demands on him. In law enforcement this is common as the para-militaristic nature of the profession immediately differentiates individuals into rank, departments, divisions, shifts, beat areas and partner assignments. This institutional compartmentalization creates an environment for cliques and social tension. The clash between work-life and home-life begins demanding time away from families and personal activities. The nature of the work assignment serves as a motivating factor and is associated with the individual's need to reach self-actualization. The expression "police widow" is widely used by law enforcement to describe the family abandoned during weekends, holidays and special occasions because of the demands of the assignment.

This conflict created for the officer as described by Feldman's role management phase was examined by Johnson (1991) and Neidig, Russell and Seng (1992). They show at least forty percent of full-time police officer's families experience domestic violence, in contrast to ten percent of non-law enforcement families. Also, Quinnet (1998) found that the divorce rate among police officers is sixty percent higher than the national average, alcoholism is twice the national rate and police officers commit suicide three times more often than the civilian national average.

The final stage in Feldman's (1976) socialization process is "Outcomes" and may result in one of the four possible outcomes listed earlier. Once the individual reaches this level of actualization Feldman (1976) claims he is considered fully socialized within his occupation and may now proceed towards becoming an independently productive and interactive member of the occupational culture. Feldman's (1976) level of actualization relates to the police officer's graduation from the academy and successfully passing through the field training program. Once initially socialized, the officer begins working assignments independent of direct supervision.

In summary, although conducted within the occupation of health care, Feldman's (1976) study provides a way to understand the changing aspects of individuals entering into a new environment and the requirements extending beyond the performance of new job tasks and skill sets. Feldman's (1976) project also indicated that socialization programs do not always achieve the intended purpose, but they do often offer a positive effect on the general satisfaction of the workers translating into decreased turnover and absenteeism. While Feldman's (1976) study is helpful for understanding that occupations provide a trajectory of socialization, it does not capture the specifics of law enforcement, especially SOG units. However, Ashford and Saks (1996) detail this in their research describing the negative effects of organizational isolationism.

#### *Attitudes, Motivators and Satisfiers*

Hazer and Alvares (1981), McKittrick (1984), Van Maanen (1975), Ashford and Saks (1996) all focus on the attitudes, motivators and satisfiers associated with occupational socialization. This is described as the process by which an individual learns the required behaviors and supportive attitudes necessary to participate as a member of an organization (Van Maanen, 1975).



All studies identify intrinsic values as primary factors for entering into law enforcement or military, but the decisions to remain with the organization vary between McKittrick's (1984) motivators discussed below to the other researchers' search for self-actualization.

The difficulty in obtaining an individual's self-assumed maximum potential may be what influences some to quit and others to resist the rigid structures of the organization. This is the point of tension between self-actualization and bureaucratic restriction. This state of tension is a catalyst for the perceptual and personal changes occurring through the SOG socialization process. Those changes often solidify the officer's commitment to the homogenous state perpetuating the isolationist and anti-diversified fraternity. The United States Marine Corps (USMC) directs a socialization process based on the factors of motivators. These motivational forces are usually intrinsic and categorized as either satisfiers or motivators (McKittrick, 1984). He identifies the satisfiers as the elements of the profession that result in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction over job tasks. McKittrick (1984) states the USMC recognizes that only relying on personal satisfaction may fail to mold a productive soldier. Many of the mission objectives of the USMC are not normally pleasant; therefore the Marine is not socialized to be motivated by personal satisfiers.

The second factor is motivators and includes the components of the occupation that influence the individual to become professionally productive. During the socialization process, the Marine is taught that becoming a Marine is a main motivator and that further motivation comes from accomplishing the mission as opposed to attaining self-recognition. McKittrick (1984) explains that the USMC promotes the ideals of motivation through intrinsic means and is team and mission focused over self-actualization and satisfaction.

While military socialization practices are similar to those of law enforcement's, their focus of placing the organization before the individual is opposite of the policing's culture need for obtaining self-actualization as identified by Van Maanen (1975).

The outcome of self-actualization is closely aligned to the police officer's perception of the value or importance of the work conducted. Hazer and Alvares (1981) produce a study addressing law enforcement officers' perception of work values and outcomes and is similar to Feldman's (1976) "Outcomes" stage. Hazer and Alvares (1981) sought to understand the relationship between satisfaction and why officers feel the desire to quit a career. Because law enforcement experiences high attrition rates, Hazer and Alvares (1981) examine why individuals enter the profession, endure the difficult assimilation processes, seek the social clustering, yet become so alienated leading to early separation.

Hazer and Alvares' (1981) police study uses the Survey of Work Values (SWV) instrument to evaluate the principal secularized aspects of the Protestant work ethic. Their survey addresses 'Intrinsic' values (pride in work, activity preference, and job involvement), 'Extrinsic' values (attitude toward earnings and social status), and an 'Upward Striving' values (desire to progress within the organization). While the study confirms the powerful effect of occupational assimilation as it contributes to self-actualization, it also indicates that officers cared more about intrinsic values (duty, honor and service) than extrinsic values (monetary compensation, or public opinion). Hazer and Alvares (1981) also found that officers value close friendships and peer clustering opportunities.

Van Maanen's (1975) study shows the tactic of isolating new officers from developing close friendships is exercised by supervising officers to ensure institutional assimilation. Those new officers who fail to assimilate to the culture, despite their job performance, are exposed to isolationism with the purpose of leading to termination of employment. Van Maanen (1975) conducted a longitudinal study of law enforcement officers to identify factors affecting commitment to the organization. He focused on the term "organizational socialization" to describe learning organizational ecology. Van Maanen (1975) chronicles the socialization process by examining academy cadets' occupational attitudes as they progress through socialization benchmarks: 1) entry, 2) introduction, 3) encounter and 4) metamorphosis. Although most careers claim socialization transitions extending the duration of a career, he says this initial period in an officer's profession is the most influential in determining future organizationally relevant attitudes and behaviors.

Van Maanen's (1975) first benchmark, entry, is the successful completion of the application and hiring process, where wanting to be an officer transitions into actually becoming one and the stark realities of policing begins. The second benchmark, introduction, is an indoctrination into the organization. The anticipation of being hired is over, and other cadets in the same situation surround the new officer. Immediately they are subject to strict discipline and behavioral commands from an academy staff of instructors. Failure to comply with orders results in physical punishment, demerits, and possible termination. The cadet quickly learns to depend only on classmates to avoid harsh treatment since all are punished for the mistakes of the few. This reliance upon other officers engrains the "no rat" rule that protects fellow cadets from punishment and discipline at the hands of authority figures and agency superiors.

His third socialization benchmark; “encounter” starts after academy graduation as the rookie officer enters the Field Training Officer (FTO) training period. This apprenticeship introduces the rookie to the complex reality of policing where the expected attitudes and behaviors are learned. Beyond the purpose of showing the rookie the ropes, this is the opportunity for veteran officers to insure operational and attitudinal congruity from one academy class of officers to the next. Van Maanen’s (1975) final benchmark for successful socialization is “metamorphosis” and is closely associated with Turner’s (1967) liminality. In this period, the rookie adopts the perspective and attitude of veteran officers. Usually within six months of experience in patrol work they gain what is labeled the “final perspective” in the socialization process that mirrors the occupation’s culture. This powerful adherence to cultural homogeneity led Van Maanen (1975) to state:

Consequently, the police culture can be viewed as molding the attitudes, with numbing regularity, of virtually all who enter (Van Maanen, 1975, p. 207).

In addition to identifying the socialization benchmarks, attitudes were measured for determining the officers’ perception toward features of their organizational ecology. The first attitudinal measurement addressed “motivation” and is based on Vroom’s “Expectancy Theory” (1964), useful in understanding individual behavior in organizational settings. The theory is that the potential for an individual to behave in a particular manner is based upon “the degree to which the person expects certain outcomes to result from the particular behavior (expectancy) times the attractiveness to him of the expected result (value)” (1964, p.224).

The second attitudinal measurement addresses the “commitment” to an organization, and it is defined as the willingness to put forth extra effort to help the organization succeed, loyalty and concern about the fate of the organization and willingness to recommend the organization as a place of work. The final attitudinal measurement addressed was “needs satisfaction” and included job characteristics such as security, opportunity to develop close friendships, feelings of worthwhile accomplishment, and authority. In addition to measuring these occupational attitudes, he studied the officer’s performance rating once he began working patrol duty on “the streets”. He found demographic characteristics did not prove a strong relationship with job performance and occupational attitude.

Van Maanen (1975) does show that most individual demographics creating a significant relationship with job performance appeared early in the career but were neutralized within several months of gaining experience on the streets. As an example, recruits with military backgrounds initially reported high levels of motivation, organizational commitment and needs satisfaction. Within the first few months of actual police experience those levels dropped sharply to parallel the measures of the recruits who reported no military experience. He attributes the decline to decreasing expectations about what the job actually involved after graduating from the academy and adopting the veteran officers’ apathetic attitude that hard work is not linked to a system of reward or recognition.

Based on the sergeants' evaluation of the rookie officers during their initial exposure to actual police work on the streets, Van Maanen (1975) discovered that officers rating the lowest in attitude and motivational scores during the academy actually rated higher in their performance on the streets. This inverted rating may be attributed to those officers having a more realistic expectation of the job than the recruits who were overly idealistic. Van Maanen (1975) further documented that recruits' level of satisfied needs increased upon academy graduation, as did their need to increase satisfaction. This is attributed to their desire to begin conducting police work. When recruits were individually questioned relative to needs satisfaction, the self-actualization and social cluster elements were rated highest in the survey. These attitudes show the beginning of the organizational and individual exclusionary behavioral patterns leading to the "us versus them" mentality, as occupational social groups and individual needs will soon outweigh the recruits' desire to selflessly serve the public. The project included a quoted tip from a veteran officer passed down to academy graduates for generations. It was advice I personally received over twenty years ago upon police academy graduation as well. To quote the officer:

There's only two things you gotta know around here. First, forget everything you've learned in the academy because the street's where you'll learn to be a cop; and second, being first around here don't mean shit (Van Maanen, 1975, p. 225).

Van Maanen's (1975) project gave specific distinctions about the indoctrination to police work beginning with the anticipation of becoming an officer, the training to perform as an officer and the realization of what it takes to be an officer. The combination of these stages produce the fully socialized officer who learns to acclimate to the occupational environment by embracing mediocrity for the sake of avoiding isolation from peers.

Ashforth and Saks (1996) replicated Van Maanen's (1975) model using recent business school graduates. The goal is to address additional components of the original study, most notably the element of needs satisfaction and why individuals feel the need to quit a career, which was not included in Van Maanen's (1975) study. Understanding the significance of quitting a career is important due to the organizational disenfranchisement of officers and their high attrition rate. The focus on self-satisfaction versus mission based motivators as described by McKittrick (1984) may contribute to this career separation occurrence, while Ashforth and Saks' (1996) research supports law enforcement's research showing the need for peer acceptance and social clustering.

Ashforth and Saks (1996) explain why an individual develops intentions to quit included four elements identified as socialization tactics; person change, stress symptoms, organizational identification, and self-appraised performance. Ashforth and Saks (1996) establish a high correlation between positive socialization tactics and the reduction of uncertainty and anxiety about remaining within the occupation. This produces an affective and cognitive attachment to the job and the organization, as it relates to higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and identification, and the reduced intentions to quit. Workers who are not incorporated into a positive social clustering method associate institutionalized isolationism with stress symptoms, job dissatisfaction and intentions to quit. Ashforth and Saks (1996) showed that the practice of isolationism is used by senior members of an organization to weed out new employees who fail to adhere to the cultural norms of the institution. Officers willing to operate within a cultural expectancy outside of their ethical sphere to avoid institutional isolation from cohorts may compromise their moral character and become vulnerable to professional deviance.

The powerful confluence of socialization and peer acceptance provides the institution of policing with a key strategy for maintaining the homogenous status of the organization and a tool limiting the diversity within the profession. The thin blue line serves as a barrier to integrating the “others” into policing, and the following section demonstrates the efforts made to breach the barriers and bring diversity into the fraternity.

### *Diversity Within the Ranks*

Literature specific to occupational socialization has thus far focused on the homogenetic state of law enforcement and the organizational requirements demanding rigid conformity. The SOG’s fracturing from institutional ideologies and engaging in antisocial behaviors creates a restricted access subculture placing further limitations on individual diversity. Simon and Pettigrew (1990), Britz (1997) and Myers, Forest and Miller (1997) and the Armed Forces and Society (2000) examined the roles and exclusion of women, minorities, gays and lesbians from joining public service institutions like policing and the military. The character of conventional institutional diversity is established by Simon and Pettigrew’s (1990) phenomenon of group homogeneity and is characterized by the out-group hypothesis that resembles characteristics of the SOG.

Using a quasi-experimental design, Simon and Pettigrew (1990) divided subjects into well-defined groups and others into ill-defined groups. Information and activities are devised for each group and resultant data was acquired to formulate the theory. The in-group experienced more diversity due to the motivation for conveying individual characteristics and self-expression. The out-group binds together against the in-group and is similar to the isolationist practices of the SOG subculture. This “taking of sides” is indicative of policing’s subculture.



The policing out-group (SOG) is exclusive and requires demanding subculturally informal processes that discourage and often prohibit participation of women, minorities, gays and lesbians.

The two “groups” are dependant variables used to describe an individual’s connection to a larger association with people. The research identified three elements believed to provide a reciprocating effect on both groups. The first explains that the in-group experiences less homogeneity due to a motivation for conveying individual characteristics and self-expression. Next, the out-group segregates itself as a justification against in-group diversification. Finally, the variety of different people interacting with the in-group is greater than with the out-group; and therefore, it creates a more diversified environment than that of the SOG. Simon and Pettigrew’s (1990) description of the “out-group homogeneity hypothesis” is consistent with the conflicting relationships between the law enforcement traditional assignments and the SOG.

Britz (1997) and Myers, Forest and Miller (1997) attempt to uncover the anti-diversity ethos dominant in the process of becoming blue by using structured interviews and surveying officers. Their work examined the influence of women, minorities and homosexuals in the workplace, and the potential for breaking through the thin blue line. The role of diversity injected into the policing milieu by judicial mandate or social demand provides minimal to no success.

Britz (1997) examined the infusion of minorities and females into the ranks of professional police officers. This effect prompted by affirmative action in many cases, promised to break the normative barriers. The degree to which socialization occurred did not present a significant effect on disrupting occupational solidarity. Upon completion of her research, Britz (1997) summarized the results of most police culture investigations by stating:

Traditional research in this area has suggested that the socialization process is so intense and the subculture so strong that individual characteristics are quickly overwhelmed (Britz, 1997, p.01).

The homogenetic state of the white male heterosexual is so dominant that researchers Myers, Forest and Miller (1997) examine the process of diversifying the law enforcement milieu. Similar to Britz's (1997) observation, policing remains dominated by a white, masculine, heterosexual ethos. The nature of the occupation requires officers to address dangerous calls for service and depending upon fellow officers in what is regarded as "hegemonic masculinity". Myers, Forest and Miller (1997) use hegemonic masculinity as first defined in 1997 by Stanford University's Robert Connell as a "Western, capitalist interpretation of masculinity associated with authority, aggressiveness, technical competence, and heterosexist desire for and domination over women as well as subordinated masculinities, including gay masculinities (Connell, 1997). The term masculinity more commonly includes the various types and degrees of masculinity as evidenced by different cultures and sexualities. This modernization of the term did not enmesh itself within the policing milieu explains Myers, Forest and Miller (1997).

Despite the loosening of organizational restrictions created by court orders and law suits, the limited access fraternity of policing continues to resist the cultural invasion of "others" by clinging to the traditional racist and sexist spheres of influence perpetuated by the white heterosexual male officers. Myers, Forest and Miller (1997) further reveal the conservative nature shared by the majority of law enforcement officers as that similar to the military that includes a strong anti-homosexual attitude. This fraternal value system resists the implementation of hiring practices that openly recruit gays and lesbians. This resistance relates to behaviors perceived as feminine being despised and not conducive to policing.

Finally, Myers, Forest and Miller (1997) identified a major source of resistance towards diversification is because homosexual lifestyles were considered until recently as a deviant behavior. An ideologically opposed balance exists between perceived personal deviance and the task of law enforcement as moral entrepreneurs to maintain order over deviance. *Armed Forces and Society* (2000) documented group homogeneity and minority exclusion literature specific to subcultural or out-groups existing within a larger and structurally established organization, the United States Military. Concerned with the obvious lack of representation of minority groups within the Special Operations Forces (SOF), Congress authorized an examination of the issues related to why minorities do not join the SOF. They also sought solutions for increasing numbers to more accurately reflect the military's minority population. *Armed Forces and Society* (2000) used personal observations, surveys and structured interviews to examine the degree to which minority populations in the military are underrepresented in the elite units of the SOF.

*Armed Forces and Society* (2000) establishes that similar to law enforcement, organizational structure has a strong effect on diversity. A major source of this effect is the perceptual barriers to include attitudes or beliefs causing minorities to feel not welcomed or fit for SOF service. The SOF recognizes an institutional foundation capable of overwhelming individual characteristics through the socialization process. The military SOF are similar to the law enforcement SOG in that both are small populations compared to the entire professional bodies and consist primarily of white males who endure the difficulties of entry level testing and specialized training.

The research identifies challenges to minority participation to include structural and perceptual barriers. Again, similar to law enforcement, these structural barriers include physical agility, application test scores and academic requirements. Perceptual barriers list attitudes, manufactured cultures, and traditions causing minorities to believe they are not fit for SOF service. Another key element to the limited number of minorities in organizational special service is the current lack of role models. Armed Forces and Society (2000) conducted interviews with minority candidates who indicate that the lack of role models limited their interest in applying for duty. They advise the application and training processes were extremely difficult, but the absence of others with whom to identify made the prospect of successfully completing the process impossible.

Armed Forces and Society (2000) addresses the last major issue preventing minority participation in the SOF is the perceived racism within the specialized military units. The United States Navy SEALs, recognized as a white organization are not spoken of negatively as anti-minority or racist. The other end of the spectrum includes the United States Army Green Berets who are commonly associated with having racist attitudes and is a major deterrent to minority application. This perception whether actual or not may be an organizational tool used to exclude minority populations from even considering joining the forces. The perception of racism discouraging minorities from applying with SOG is equally significant as actual segregationist practices, and the roots of this perception run deep with a historical connection to modern law enforcement.

Although Boston established the first American police force in 1838, it was the slave patrols most resembling today's policing model. Senna and Siegal (2010) explain that "slave patrols" were a distinctive form of law enforcement. Charged with recapturing runaway slaves and guarding against slave revolt, the Charleston, South Carolina slave patrol in 1837 had one hundred officers and was far larger than any northern police departments. The social culture of the SOG is a white dominated environment and the restrictive effect of racial homogeneity in peer selection perpetuates this perception and reality.

Feldman (1976), Van Maanen (1975), and Ashford and Saks (1996) demonstrated the effect of social clustering on larger organizations where high level skill sets, demanding tasks and a hierarchical command structure provide an environment for segregation into subcultures. By virtue of the group's desire to include only those of like sex, race and sexual orientation, the SOG propagates racism and sexism by exercising power over others wishing to join. The institutional politics of racial and sexual exclusion not only affect public perception of the SOG, but law enforcement as a whole. While race and gender were the focus for Simon and Pettigrew (1990), Britz (1997), Armed Forces and Society (2000), and Senna and Siegal (2010), sexual orientation was the focus for Myers, Forest and Miller's (1997) study. All recognized the powerful influence of the white, male heterosexual ethos. The above researchers identified an institutional foundation capable of overwhelming individual characteristics through the socialization processes. The practice of becoming blue is prevalent in law enforcement, and beyond the point of enculturation, an experiential change in perception occurs that is entrenched in the white-male centric fraternity.

In an attempt to understand the resistance to diversification, the literature below examines the police culture created by assimilation and attempts to demystify the code of silence and the thin blue line. The formal and informal occupational socialization processes continue developing throughout the history of law enforcement to accommodate the policing culture. The formal processes requiring application, testing, training and evaluation as described by Feldman (1976), Van Maanen (1975), McKittrick (1984), and *Armed Forces and Society* (2000) corroborate the difficulties of entering the profession. The informal processes center on peer acceptance and social clustering to support the difficulties of acceptance into the police culture. The strategies for professional entrance and social acceptance continue to evolve, but the culture of policing is very resistant to change.

### **Police Culture**

The culture of law enforcement is influenced by numerous factors including a stratified system of formal hierarchical structures, spontaneous on demand assignments, and ideological subgroup alliances. Crank (1998) defines the policing culture as a confluence of themes of occupational activity, shared values, shared experiences, shared behaviors and shared efforts. He separates the cultural characteristics into the themes of group cohesion; image of strength and authority, and territorial control. As part of this influence on culture, the officer experiences abstract concepts such as the thin blue line, affecting concrete behaviors. This section examines nonfigurative concepts such as codes and lines influencing the socialization of policing.

#### ***Silent Codes and Blue Lines***

The ideal of a line that is thin and blue creates conceptual challenges (Insert 3). To the idealistic applicant and cadet officer, law enforcement separates the honest citizens from the victimizers of the public.

To the fully socialized officer, the line separates them from the civilian population. To the SOG, it is a barrier from civilian populations, criminals and officers (non-SOG) assigned to the traditional policing duties, and the vanguard protecting their fraternity of deviant behavior. To the civilian population it means nothing. Still, the fraternity of policing regardless of their concept of purpose lives and dies to hold that line. The code of silence is an abstract ideal that officers are socialized to comprehend and is what protects the fraternity while they conceptually fight to maintain the thin blue line.



(Insert 3)

Walker and Katz's (2008) description of the code of silence prevents officers from reporting or testifying against fellow officers. This discourages an environment of accountability and permeates the culture of policing. They claim that officers are reluctant to report misconduct by fellow officers. Officers reporting misconduct are often punished by their peers for doing so. An example of the strength of this code of silence was Walker and Katz's (2008) case study of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). They examine ninety LAPD officers who successfully sued the department over disciplinary actions received because of breaking the code of silence by reporting misconduct by other officers. This further enmeshes the institutional ethos of silent conformance.

Similar to the LAPD's illustration of the code of silence, the following describes the isolationist ideologies inherent within the policing environment's blue line culture. Ivkovic (2003), Klochars (2000), Westwood (2002), and Quinn (2004) document their difficulties securing credible original data from law enforcement sources.

Specific to the topic of police corruption in relation to occupational socialization, researcher Ivkovic (2003) attempted an in-depth examination of corruption connected to occupational socialization. The value of her meta-analysis of police corruption studies demonstrates that the socialization process ensures a culture of isolationism as a staple of policing and remains entrenched to ensure autonomy between officer and citizen. To supplement her analysis of prior police studies, she attempted her own research project. Despite the care given and numerous attempts made to present her original surveys and interview questions to officers, she failed to penetrate the code of silence. In her final analysis, she describes her failure to break the code of silence and admitted to relying only upon past studies, estimates and incomplete information. She states:

No police agency is completely free of corruption and police officers, the "blue nights" entrusted and empowered to enforce the law can become some of the most aggressive criminals themselves (2003, p.593).

Although taking this perspective by generalizing law enforcement into a category as corrupt, her issue particular to this research project is to demonstrate the power of the socialization process. Britz (2003) found that the process of indoctrinating police officers is a powerful tactic for organizational and individual self-preservation. Because she was unable to gain access, she became a victim to the culture of isolationism.

Klochlar (2000) attempted a similar study for the United States Department of Justice that revealed the culture of maintaining the code of silence is disparate among agencies. He developed an instrument to measure integrity among police officers by conducting structured interviews using hypothetical scenarios focusing on integrity. Law enforcement studies historically focused on the 1970's "Bad Apple Theory" of Herman Goldstein (Walker, 2005) blaming corrupt practices on the moral defect of the individual officer.



This methodology immediately causes the individual officer under examination to withdraw to ensure self-preservation. To avoid similar difficulties experienced by Ivkovic (2003), he queries officers about integrity to identify how seriously they view corruption, how willing are they to report it, and how willing they are to support the disciplinary actions taken because of the corrupt behavior.

Klockars' (2000) study to measure the culture of police integrity includes the definition of integrity as the normative inclination of police officers to resist the temptations to abuse the rights and privileges of their office. The reliance upon normative was not clarified as to whether the scale is based on the general population or the law enforcement's perceptual predisposition. The idea that officers will autonomously investigate their fellow officers draws external criticism. Results from Klockars' (2000) measure of integrity survey shows that the more serious officers considered a particular violation, the more likely they were to report it. The challenge came with trying to define seriousness of violation. Actions such as covering up the receiving of gratuities, police alcohol related accidents (on and off duty), excessive use of force and supervisors providing preferential treatment for officers who provide private favors are not viewed as serious violations of behavior and would not be reported.

Equally significant as the measurement of integrity is the realization that environments of integrity differ greatly across police agencies. Klockars (2000) discusses the disparate levels of integrity throughout United States law enforcement agencies but did not provide a tool for measuring the degree of integrity. Although a different method was used, Klockars' (2000) research suffered the similar challenges of agency access as Ivkovic (2003). While they both designed research to avoid the code of silence, Westwood (2002) focused his attention directly on it.

Westwood (2002) studied the inculcation for honoring this code of silence that significantly impacts the police profession in a negative manner. Ultimately, he admits the inability to quantitatively report a level of confidence because the participants refuse to cross the thin blue line. Through Westwood's (2002) participant observation and institutional policy review, he documented the code's presence in most law enforcement agencies to varying degrees. He reports that the code of silence is not written in police training manuals but is culturally expectant and honored within the institution of policing. Westwood (2002) reports the code of silence is passed down through the generations from veterans to rookie officers ensuring the continuation of the policing culture. Westwood (2002) defines police culture to include the "us versus them" philosophy, along with the powerful feelings of loyalty and solidarity with fellow officers. Westwood (2002) explains this sense of loyalty is displaced by the peer expectation of not reporting or lying about criminal behavior committed by fellow officers.

Consistent with Westwood's (2002) study of the code of silence, Quinn (2004), a former Minnesota police officer for more than twenty years experienced its destructive forces. Quinn's (2004) autobiographical account of the organizational infusion of the code and the negative impacts on the police culture was summarized in this statement:

As terrible as it is, there is no escaping the Code. It is as inevitable as your childhood disease and just as necessary. Each stinging battle with the Code will either be an inoculation of the spirit and an opportunity to grow stronger or a crippling injury to your integrity. Regardless of the outcome there will be vivid images you can't erase from your memory. There will always be the mental and physical scars to remind you of your battles (Quinn, 2004, p. 27).

This misguided loyalty to another employee, who openly commits a criminal or procedural offense, relies upon an expectation of silence. This not only perpetuates the corrupt activities, but destroys that silent witness's integrity. This code of silence protects the conceptual integrity of the thin blue line and supports an autonomous dark blue environment lacking of accountability and leading to a culture of deviance and violence.

### ***Deviance and Violence***

Certainly there is no hunting like the hunting of man, and those who have hunted armed men long enough and liked it, never really care for anything else thereafter (Hemingway,1936).

Perceptual changes leading to deviance and violence occur for law enforcement officers during a trajectory of liminal thresholds. The experiential depth of cultural commitment spent behind the thin blue line promotes the crossing of perceptual thresholds along a path of antisocial conduct. The more years invested in the profession of policing, the more exposed to violence, and the more engaged in deviant behaviors the officer becomes, the greater his opportunity for liminal transitions leading to a disenfranchisement of the organization's core ideology. The following studies describe how officers begin a journey of idealistic public servant that may devolve into professional deviants.

Studies by Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005), Manning (1980), Ulmer (1994), and Librett (2006) describe trajectory of evolutionary periods in the careers of law enforcement officers. Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005) show a causal relationship between attending a police training academy and increased alcohol consumption. Their longitudinal study uses a survey and structured interviews to examine police recruits for tracking increases in consumption patterns throughout their first twelve months in law enforcement. The survey verifies that as police training and experience increases so does the risk of harm from consuming alcohol.

Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005) claim this increase is caused by the indoctrination of recruits into a culture of alcohol consumption driven by peer socialization, desire for acceptance and social clustering networks.

Other studies corroborate the relationship between alcohol consumption and policing. Similar to results found in the United States, an alcohol consumption survey (Canberra, 1996) of Australian police officers shows that forty-eight percent of policeman and forty percent of policewomen drank alcohol excessively, while the general population is at ten percent of men and seven percent of women who drink to an excessive amount. Canberra 's (1996) project went beyond the twelve month period used by Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005) by using additional data to expose that excessive alcohol consumption does not just begin and end at the academy. A survey of police sergeants reported over forty percent drank on workdays and binge drinking among the law enforcement profession occurs more frequently than the general population. Sex and age were not influencing factors as both male and female officers reported a rate of thirty-one percent participating in binge drinking.

Canberra (1996) studied police as they compared to other occupations including transportation, health care, metal fabrication, hospitality and emergency services. Consistently, police officers reported higher consumption of alcohol rates than other professions. This research focuses on the culture's need to consume alcohol as an element of socialization. Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005) shows drinking subcultures are characterized by an environment stressing teamwork and peer pressure, and alcohol use is integrated into the job with a permissive attitude towards consumption. The nature of work leads to drinking off duty with peers to relax and debrief.

The occupational identity is also associated with leisure time and activities involving alcohol consumption. Barker's (2005) twenty-year ethnographic examination of the Los Angeles Police Department mirrors the five characterizations of drinking subcultures.

Although the permissive use of alcohol is not the only reason officers focus on the clustering aspects of socialization, the practice of consumption plays a role in solidifying peer relationships. Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005), Canberra (1996), and Barker (2005) show the profession of law enforcement does impact the individual officer's level of risk for alcohol problems. The process of induction and enculturation suggests a strong correlation to influencing the officer's alcohol consumption and further validates the unique environment within which police officers operate, both professionally and personally. Further, they propose the act of consuming alcohol may serve as a gateway for more serious antisocial behaviors.

While the seeds of antisocial behavior are sown in the academy, the career attraction towards violence is detailed by Manning (1980). He describes policing's role in state sponsored violence as a means to legitimize an officer's credibility among peers. He also claims that the assimilation into a violence culture is accepted because of the organizational promotion as the state's arm for administering force. Manning (1980) suggests that this intentional open ended interpretation for what is an appropriate level of force is meaningful and necessary for the state to maintain a posture of social control through physical deterrence. He reports that in 1980 police killed people thirty times more often than they were killed and asserts that this violence "supports the social interests with which they are aligned" (1980, p.136).

He shows the direct relationship between judicial and legislative controls working to affect policies shaping and channeling the use of police violence. If Manning's (1980) assertion is correct that policing is synonymous with violence as the foundational tone, then the execution of that violence by the individual officer is central for occupational acceptance. Manning (1980) asserts that the violent nature of individual officers is a result of the state's dependence on the police to deter social disobedience through violence and the necessity for secrecy, loyalty and the internal orientation of the officer to be established through the exercise of applying violence.

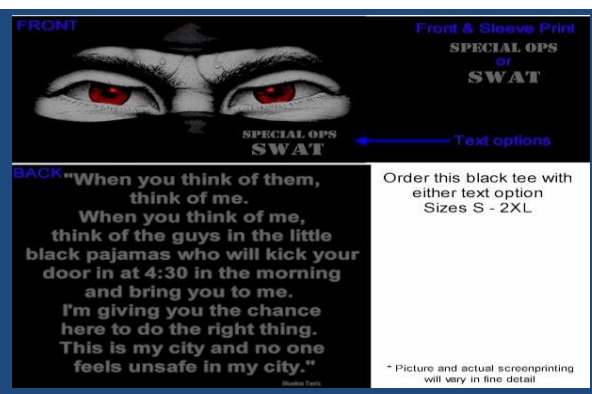
Because the sense of self of the officer is affirmed by exercises in violence, officers are motivated to define administrative rules as being arbitrary, capriciously applied, and the means by which higher administrators protect their own vested interests "cover their asses" (Manning, 1980, p. 27).

Whether it is through the indoctrination by death exposure, violent criminality, or code of silence fraternal cultures, the turning point in an officer's career described as a disenfranchisement from an agency's ideals may be connected to the application of force. The gaining of organizational autonomy by using violence reinforces the acts of deviance in the SOG, and rewards the Operator with perceived freedom from authority.

Manning's (1980) theory of legitimized police violence and peer acceptance is similar to Janis' (1972) effects of groupthink on the deterioration of moral judgment and dehumanizing others to gain favorable opinion of those most like them. The components of groupthink are similar to the SOG subculture and are included to show the unique nature of "belonging". An example of the outcomes produced by a homogenous group binding together under the pretense organizational unity is policing's romanticism of its cultural similarities to the gang culture. Law enforcement promotes itself as the largest street gang in America and refers to itself as the Bad Boys (Insert 4 and 5).



Insert 4  
Blue Line T-Shirts and Products



Insert 5  
Blue Line T-Shirts and Products

To understand how once idealistic individuals fall victim to the professional deviance promoted by groupthink, Ulmer's (1994) work on labeling links associations with deviant careers leading individuals to become identified with that subculture. The identification with the label of deviance creates a deep commitment to the actions and association of that group. Ulmer (1994) argues that deviant careers and labeling processes can heavily influence career trajectories and claims disciplinary penalties imposed to deter deviance, can actually foster it. In addition, placement in an environment where deviance is the influencing force may lead to the development of deviance as a self-concept. This phenomena is similar to the officers assigned to SOG; although they serve in an elite unit of law enforcement, they are seen by non-SOG as "others". Because the SOG conducts legitimate policing functions using covert operations unknown to their fellow officers, they are perceived as "gray" cops existing too close to the unethical edge. Ulmer (1994) shows the effects of associating with a stigma of deviance may lead to an irretrievable investment into the label, thus strengthening the level of personal commitment to the career path, i.e. a darker shade of blue.

A final source of structural commitment or the external influence is the difficulty of terminating the line of action. The original target of Ulmer's (1994) study was the ethnography of a former outlaw motorcycle club (OMC) member who gave examples of the difficulty of getting out of the club. The subject in Ulmer's (1994) study explained that quitting an OMC often involves violent beatings, stabbings, shootings and the physical torture of removal by cutting off all club related tattoos. Similar to Ulmer's (1994) account of the OMC's difficulty exiting the club, my professional observations also show difficulty in terminating assignments into SOG except by poor performance reviews, disciplinary actions, or resignation. This makes leaving the SOG with honor a rare option and exposes the officer to a continuing deviant identity, making the liminal change of ideology possible. These examples demonstrate the effects of associating with a stigma of deviance leading to an irretrievable investment into the label, thus strengthening the level of structural commitment to the career path.

This review illustrates liminality and groupthink by finding oneself in a suspended state of being, or a transitioning phase of being neither here nor there relative to the personal identity versus the collective persuasion of an identity unaligned with organizational ideals. The research of Ulmer (1994), Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005), Manning (1980) and Janis (1972) demonstrates the power of ideological transitioning within the law enforcement community and provides the conceptual basis for understanding the detrimental personal effects of becoming blue.



### ***Personal Effects: Social and Individual Fracturing***

Cadets attending academy training unwittingly experience a liminal state during the occupational socialization process. The liminality is made possible by the vulnerable status of officers as the enculturation process overwhelms conventional norms with tradition, identification with deviance and a fraternity based upon secrecy. This section of the literature review examines the effects experienced by SOG causing an institutional disenfranchisement and communal rebellion against traditional societal values. These professionals pride themselves in running towards danger while others flee, but it is the emotional and psychological toll suffered while they run. The SOG Operator prepares for the physical demands of the assignment by regular and strenuous training, but it is the undetected effects described by Girodo (1997; 2002) causing the most personal and social harm.

The United States law enforcement profession employs over 800,000 municipal, county, state and federal law enforcement officers. From these ranks emerge the SOG without clear or consistent qualifications for selection and whose professional standards vary between jurisdictions. Girodo (1997) examines the most desirable characteristics required to choose a successful undercover agent. Since World War II, the United States government has worked to identify characteristics of an effective undercover agent for national and law enforcement interests. The duality of expectation begins when an officer is recruited based on performance measures to include good judgment and integrity and then asked to falsify his identity to misrepresent himself to others for the sake of detecting crime, and then is unable to return home to regular family life.

Girodo's (1997) study of two hundred and seventy-one undercover agents demonstrates that chronic exposure to undercover work causes psychological symptoms and that those agents with cognitive traits such as extroversion and emotionality are prone to excessive drug and alcohol use. He observes that undercover work becomes associated with an erosion of psychological, behavioral, and moral standards jeopardizing both health and police operations. Through the course of his observations and structured interviews, he identifies the conflict of living a double life. This causes SOG Agents who were under examination in Girodo's (1997) study to experience elevated symptoms resembling those of psychiatric outpatients.

In addition to his work describing the psychological harm associated with undercover operations, Girodo (2002) studied agents disassociation from self-identity and unprompted reappearances of altered identities developed for conducting undercover operations. He shows the occupational maladjustment, psychiatric disturbances and personality changes associated with undercover work. Those at highest risk for suffering this effect are the elite units within law enforcement such as SOG, who serve outside the traditional boundaries of policing. The acts of establishing deviant networks give rise to stress disturbances, corruption and perceptions of "self as unreal", along with paranoia and other troubles. Girodo (1997) also explores an element related to SOG length of time spent in assignment as linked to higher rates of corruption, disciplinary infractions and social detachment. This time-in-assignment effect is related to the occupational socialization trajectory model influencing an officer's commitment to deviance as stages of liminality occur throughout the experiential course of a career.

Girodo (1997) and Fitzgerald (2002) illustrate that living on the fringe develops an antisocial effect on the officers that may lead to deviant, subcultural allegiance to principles separate and apart from organizational priorities. While Girodo (1997) focused on United States federal government undercover trainees, Fitzgerald (2002) applies her research to a municipal police department's undercover agents in the field of operation. By embedding herself into the police culture as a participant observer, she studies the SOG's close affiliation with the criminal lifestyle and the exposure to the drug culture to determine if they were impacted in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Fitzgerald (2002) demonstrates through survey and interviews that while a patrol officer's performance is measured by anonymous activities such as writing tickets to motorists and making arrests, the undercover agent's performance is based on the ability to misrepresent himself for the purpose of establishing criminal networks leading to intelligence and arrests. Her results were similar to an earlier embedded study by Farkus (1983) of the Honolulu Police Department showing that agents experience stressors from undercover work manifesting itself as anxiety, loneliness, isolation, relationship problems and paranoia.

SOG are socialized to internalize the stressful situations they face, and verbalizing these issues is a sign of weakness. The warrior ideal is promoted within the SOG subculture. A popular writer and speaker among this SOG warrior community is Lt Col Dave Grossman (retired), who promotes his work about the effects on officers who kill another person. His article describing policing's role in society inspires a phrase used by SOG to communicate one simple message; always be armed and always be prepared.

The phrase “don’t be sheep” was shared in several interviews in different states, and I used it personally to end correspondence to other SOG during my career. The phrase to most people would seem pointless, but to those understanding their position in society’s margins, it is a powerful reminder of their place in this world. It originates from a book on the psychological cost of killing and is an analogy of where law enforcement stands within a society. To law enforcement, peaceful and productive citizens are the sheep who never purposefully intend to harm another. Wolves, on the other hand are the violent chronic offenders preying on society. Sheepdogs are society’s warriors standing in the gap when the wolves viciously attack the sheep. Sheepdogs remain in the margins until needed, but the mainstream flock of sheep never fully accepts them. The closing statement from his article is what encourages SOG to embrace their position in society for the sake of their sworn oaths.

And so the warrior must strive to confront denial in all aspects of his life, and prepare himself for the day when evil comes. If you are a warrior who is legally authorized to carry a weapon and you step outside without that weapon, then you become a sheep, pretending that the bad man will not come today. No one can be "on" 24/7, for a lifetime. Everyone needs down time. But if you are authorized to carry a weapon, and you walk outside without it, just take a deep breath, and say this to yourself... "Baa." (Grossman, 2009).

The darker blue an officer is within the police culture, the more entrenched he becomes in the warrior mindset. Survival at all costs dominates his focus. This often comes at the expense of adhering to organizational policies and respecting the rights of the public. When the culture violates the expectations of the agency or public, it is important that the organization maintain a mechanism for accountability. The following describes law enforcement’s attempts to regulate themselves to ensure institutional integrity.

## **Organizational Detection of Problematic Behavior**

A concern for law enforcement and the public is the effectiveness of self-regulation for police. Walker (2001; 2005) and Hughes and Andre (2007) examined methods for detecting problematic behavioral patterns through assessment tools commonly referred to as the Early Warning System (EWS). Walker (2001) conducted an extensive examination by surveying law enforcement agencies reporting to support an EWS. He studied eight hundred and thirty-two sheriff's offices and police departments to identify those with EWS and conducted case studies of three agencies including the New Orleans Police Department. Walker (2001) found that problem officers referred into the EWS for counter institutional behavioral were often promoted at higher rates than officers having never been identified as requiring intervention. He thinks that ten percent of the officers cause ninety percent of the problems. Herman Goldstein who claimed that these officers are well known within their agency and community, but little is done to address them or alter their conduct, first highlighted this phenomenon of the "problem officer" in 1970.

Walker (2001) states that in 1981 the United States Commission on Civil Rights recommended all law enforcement agencies develop an EWS. Although not legislatively mandated, by 1999 only twenty-seven percent of agencies serving populations of fifty thousand or more complied. There are many variations of the EWS operating throughout the country. The basic premise of the EWS is a data based police management tool designed to identify officers whose behavior is problematic and to provide a form of intervention to correct that performance. Officers identified for EWS are usually those receiving repeated citizen complaints or engaging in inappropriate behavior. The EWS consists of three basic phases: selection, intervention, and post intervention monitoring.

The selection process is the point of entry that Walker (2001) finds pivotal as officers are first identified for the EWS. There are no uniform standards, but among the agencies participating in the study include one or more of the following; citizen complaints, firearm discharge, use of force reports, civil litigation, resisting arrest incidents, high speed pursuits and vehicular damages. Intervention occurs when the agency contacts the identified officer in regards to his problematic behavior. The majority of responding agencies (sixty-seven percent) reply that the intervention process includes a discussion with the officer's immediate supervisor. Only forty-five percent of responding agencies indicate that a training course is included during the intervention. The third phase, post intervention monitoring, includes a mixed bag of techniques used by the agencies employing an EWS. Nearly all (ninety percent) reported following up on the initial meeting with the identified officer. An immediate supervisor usually conducts this monitoring, but is informal and goes undocumented. In addition to the surveys by Walker (2001), three case studies in Miami-Dade County, New Orleans, and Minneapolis are conducted. An analysis of the data collected exhibits that male officers are overrepresented and do not differ in terms of race or ethnicity.

Walker (2001) did uncover a dramatic effect of the EWS intervention in reducing citizen complaints and other problematic behavior among those identified officers. In Minneapolis for example, the number of citizen complaints against officers participating in the agency's EWS program dropped by sixty-seven percent within one year of the intervention. New Orleans Police Department shows a sixty-two percent decrease in citizen complaints within one year of the intervention, while the police department in Miami-Dade saw reductions in their use-of-force reports from ninety-six percent down to fifty percent in the same period.

Walker (2001) notes that programs (EWS) cannot foster a climate of answerability where a cultural commitment does not already exist. The most salient observation was that the EWS was not an alarm clock, a mechanical device programmed to sound an automatic alert. It is a complex, high maintenance administrative operation requiring close and constant human attention. While Walker (2001) focused on the three phases of the EWS, Hughes and Andre (2007) focused specifically on the selection phase. Since this is the point of entry for a system that is contrary to the tradition of law enforcement, it is important that prior to an agency investigating an officer's personal life and actions, they first identify the most applicable and appropriate variables associated with causing problematic behavior.

Hughes and Andre (2007) identified characteristics associated with problematic behavior, thus signaling the need for intervention. They divide the characteristics into two categories: officer characteristics and job characteristics. Hughes and Andre (2007) use the term "antisocial egocentricity" as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. This characteristic is associated with frequent complaints against an officer from the public and hierarchical insubordination. Additional personal characteristics associated with problematic behavior are excessive use of force, failing to exhibit self-discipline, and poor performance in training programs and testing. Hughes and Andre (2007) explain the professional characteristics for officers having not created close relationships with positive role models in policing and that they exhibit risk for developing bad behavior. These personal and professional characteristics are more effective for identifying problematic behaviors when used with a database for capturing information about the individual officer and the development of patterns leading to problematic behavior.

Hughes and Andre (2007) also take the agency's organizational culture and situational factors such as assignment in high crime areas into consideration. Their research claims that evaluating job environment, occupational socialization, and stressors are better indicators than personality characteristics for identifying the potential for problematic behavior. Hughes and Andre's (2007) findings are similar to Ivkovic's (2003) that the fraternal socialization process is powerful. Both claim occupational socialization as such a strong influence that once honest officers have little success in defending themselves from the inappropriate behaviors associated with deviance.

In a later study, Walker (2005) identifies another police warning system similar to the EWS as the Early Intervention System (EIS). This system, based on the same principles as the EWS focuses on preventing problematic behavior linked to personal issues. The EIS attempts to be more proactive through predictive profiling as opposed to waiting for complaints against an officer. Walker's (2005) survey represents that the EIS focuses on quality initial interventions with the officer by a better-trained first line supervisor and by expanding the resources available to assisting the officer. Walker (2005) identified a phenomenon labeled the "rotten apple theory" where honest, moral officers who exhibit personality characteristics once thought of as desirable for recruitment and selection can engage in inappropriate behavior if their agency socializes the officer into such behavior. The success of the EIS links the attention paid to the officer's personal needs and not just the unacceptable professional behavior. This attention promotes an increase in agency accountability, integrity, and overall organizational health.



The EIS focuses on the trained supervisor's observations of an officer's personality characteristics, as included in the following examples: an outgoing officer is suddenly quiet and withdrawn; the usual joking among officers suddenly takes on an edge with a note of hostility just below the surface; the quality of an officer's paperwork declines; an officer begins avoiding responsibilities in small ways; an officer is going through a difficult divorce; or, one of the officer's children is having serious problems. Walker (2005) claims that these may appear to be intangible alarm triggers not traditionally of concern among an alpha male driven profession, but these indicators are necessary to preemptively identify and potentially prevent an officer from doing irrevocable harm to himself or his career.

The organizational detection of problematic behavior through an EWS, employee assistance program, or any other variety of strategies used to seek out the "bad apples" in policing perpetuates a state of tension between Manning's (1980) state sponsored violence theory and the institutional ideals of behavioral accountability. Further, there remains a void in literature for addressing the issue of anti-organizational actions by SOG Operators.

### ***Deficiencies in Current Literature***

The three main categories of: occupational socialization, police culture and organizational detection of problematic behavior demonstrate the complexity of policing. I use parallel literature where appropriate to show connections and comparisons to the policing milieu, the career trajectories and the deviant subcultures leading officers from academy cadet to SOG. With the exception of Librett's (2006) unlimited access into the professional environment, the cited researchers expressed difficulties and limitations securing access into the culture.

The absence of detailed observational opportunities and SOG Operator interviews creates a lack of knowledge for law enforcement's covert nature. Other deficiencies in literature fail to provide insight for fully examining fringe behavior of the SOG and the pack mentality of groups insulated from outside opinions. These groups have parameters for expected performance and behaviors leading to a collaborative environment where faulty decisions are made because of group pressures.

The documented psychological tolls affecting Operators during SOG assignments as described by Girodo (1991) are limited in scope for presenting a comprehensive text describing the body of SOG indicators for administrators, supervisors, or the individual officer. Fitzgerald (2002) provides a more recent account but focuses on the comparative analysis of SOG and non-SOG. Her results also show issues with validity as the information provided to her conflicts with her direct observations of officers. The final major category examines the detection of problematic behavior within the profession of policing. The studies describe the disparities with identifying a standard for referring officers into an early warning system. Although Walker (2001) mentioned the promotion of aggressive officers fitting the EWS criteria, there is nothing addressing the SOG's dark blue socialization and labeling of deviance affecting the EWS referral system.

These examples of the deficiencies provide an opportunity to address the specific vacancy of research existing due to a historical limitation for entrée into the policing culture. My research fills the theoretical void by focusing the ethnography only on SOG Operators. I have observed and spoken with them in personal and private settings. The material I collected from Operators provides detailed information about their subculture, ideological transitions, individual and collective identities, interpersonal relationships, and their unfiltered reflective perspectives on their trajectories into the SOG.

Combined, this information provides a thorough cultural portrait of the individuals belonging to the pack-mentality of SOG. Each of the three main categories benefit from my research to include information explaining how an officer becomes socialized to embrace the fringe subculture of SOG, the importance of protecting the autonomy of his blue line fraternity by practicing silence, and the risk taking activities and disdain for organizational authority and its inability to detect and correct their countercultural behavior.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Research Design and Methodology**

The constructivist philosophical worldview best serves as the paradigm guiding this project. Creswell (2009) relates constructivism as seeking understanding of the world in which they live and work. The focus relies on the participants' views of the situation. He also explains that the process of qualitative research is largely inductive with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field. I am using this worldview to interpret and understand the dynamics of law enforcement's socialization process.

#### **Role of Researcher**

I have the experience of serving in the SOG during the course of more than a twenty-year career in law enforcement. My SOG experience includes sixteen years in SWAT and twelve concurrent years in a multijurisdictional narcotics task force. After leaving the position for promotion to a division commander and now a city chief of police, my position provides me the ability to both understand the subculture while being separated from it. I address the issue of entrée with my experiences, and the trust established within the SOG community allows me an opportunity to gain access into the autonomous activities covertly conducted by the SOG.

## **Ethnography**

This ethnography, the description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system (Creswell, 2007), is a work produced from researching the specified unit of analysis - the SOG. He further defines ethnography as “a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs and language of a culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 2007, p. 68).

I examine the SOG behavior, language, and interactions to demystify the secretive services of policing. Studying this cultural group in natural settings allowed me to collect observations and interviews over the course of two years and maintain a flexible research process for documenting spontaneous lived realities occurring in the field. The ethnography’s narrative form represents the complexity of social interactions within and beyond a formalized organizational structure. This strategy also depends heavily on the observation of human interaction and the patterns emerging from those observations to establish meaning of the SOG Operators’ lives and experiences. This ethnography also allows for the description of the symbolism and institutional traditions enmeshed in the subculture influencing the potential state of liminal transition for the officers.

## **Methods**

Creswell (2009) describes that an important component for conducting qualitative research. These methods involve forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. My qualitative research design includes the use of open-ended questions, interview, observation, and audio-visual data. From the collection of information, I identify codes and themes for description, analysis and interpretation of the materials. I use participant observations, semi-structured interviews and the autoethnography to translate the approach into practice.

## **Data**

I collected the data secured by semi-structured interviews and participant observations in a manner to protect the Operators from potential identification and to create a cultural portrait based on emerging patterns. My personal recollections have also been sanitized for guarding against the detection of identities.

### ***Semi-structured Interviews***

The semi-structured interviews include informed consent and the asking of permission to audio record and / or videotape the interview. The subjects were not willing to participate if their identity was potentially exposed, and I honored their requests. The sources of the semi-structured interviews occur in different states with a mixture of SWAT and Narcotics Operators. Twelve current and two retired Operators are included in this section. I interview SWAT Operators in Louisiana, Texas, Florida, and Virginia, while Narcotics Operators came from Arizona, Virginia, and Louisiana (retired) and Alabama (retired).

I take limited recordings and detailed field notes to document their experiences. Upon completion of the subject interviews, I personally transcribe the recorded data to ensure accuracy of the information. I did not incorporate this data verbatim into the body of this project to protect against unintentional identity exposure. The four accounts of salient personal experiences required to illustrate specific examples involve the use of code names I assigned to ensure anonymity. The SOG Operators asked to participate in the semi-structured interviews were chosen based on the population selection criteria and their depth of experiences involving line of duty activity and undercover and/or SWAT operational experience. I conduct interviews of retired SOG Operators as semi-structured interviews and include no participant observations.

I initially identify the subjects through a convenience sampling by approaching subjects who I share a personal acquaintance. Snowball sampling is used to identify additional subjects to interview.

#### *Criteria for Semi-structured Interview Participants*

The criteria for identifying the semi-structured interview population is based on my personal experiences in the policing milieu. There are seven criteria listed below with explanations of each criterion preceding them. Since they are unique to my research, I provide justification for their inclusion.

Criterion 1. Law enforcement academy graduate.

Justification: Criteria number one is significant because graduating from the law enforcement academy becomes the gateway into the policing universe.

Criterion 2. One full year of service in a traditional policing role, such as detention center, patrol, or detective prior to SOG assignment.

Justification: It is used for demonstrating the socialization trajectory that the SOG Operators are grounded in the experiences of traditional policing roles prior to their assignment into SOG. The pre SOG, during SOG and post SOG analysis also requires the base of experience in the traditional policing roles to serve as a comparison of occupational experiences.

Criterion 3. Officer was selected for SOG assignment as result of an agency application announcement and a screening process to include panel interview, weapons qualifications and a physical fitness assessment.

Justification: The third criterion is included to ensure a standard of professionalism and accomplishment is achieved prior to the SOG selection process.

Criterion 4. SOG Operator has served as a full time Narcotics Agent for a minimum of two years, or

Criterion 5. SOG Operator has served either full time or collateral duty with SWAT for two years.

Justification: Standards four and five require two years served in SOG to ensure the Operator has had ample experience in the culture prior to evaluating their experiences. Normatively, it takes at least one year of experience through mentoring and supervised field training before an officer is independently productive in the assignment. Most SWAT Operators serve a collateral or part-time duty assignment, and the time-in-assignment requirement compensates for the lack of full time status.

Criterion 6. Relative to retired officers, the period of separation is not relevant, but the same time-in-assignment requirements for active duty service remains consistent. Retired will refer to those SOG Operators who either officially retired from active service, who resigned voluntarily, whose service was terminated by the agency without their consent or whose service did the agency and SOG Operators mutually end.

Justification: The sixth criterion details Operators no longer employed by law enforcement, but still possess the experiences of SOG assignment.

Criterion 7. SOG Operators shall not be excluded from this study based on sex or race.

Justification: The final criterion is included to ensure that although SOG is predominantly a white male population, the minority or sex of a willing participant will not exclude them from this examination.

### *Participant Observations*

I conduct twenty participant observations to provide the opportunities for documenting thick, rich details of the SOG environment. Participant observations also occur in different states with a mixture of SWAT and Narcotics Operators. I observed one hundred eighty-six Operators during a period from January 2009 to August 2011. I observe SWAT Operators at Louisiana training sessions, in California at a National Sheriff's Office conference, in Colorado at an International Association of Chiefs of Police conference, in Florida after conference hours at a bowling alley, in Mississippi during a pre-raid briefing, and in Virginia at a training session. I observe Narcotics Operators in Pennsylvania at a Lifesaver's conference, in Missouri at a Governor's Highway Safety Association conference, in Louisiana at an officer's funeral, in Virginia at a national MADD conference, in Nebraska during a post workshop supper, in Louisiana during an undercover purchase of illegal narcotics briefing, and in North Carolina following an undercover surveillance operation.

I examine SOG Operators under observation for identifying patterns of speech, interaction, and relationships. Participant observation as described by Lauder (2003) is a fluid strategy for gaining access into segments of society that would not allow entrée except through the application of deception on behalf of the researcher. Although not useful for quantitative studies, this style of recording human activities provides a mechanism for researchers to enmesh themselves in the everyday lived experiences of their subjects.

Lauder states the following:

The goal of participant observation is to move beyond the classification of an analytical tourist and experience the novel social reality (Lauder, 2003, p. 187).



I am aware through personal experience and research that officers will not usually volunteer information for fear of breaching their code of silence. This strategy allows me to move freely between observational opportunities and document detailed field notes for detecting patterns of behavior and conversations.

### *Autoethnography*

Creswell (2002) defines the autoethnography as “a narrative study of an individual’s personal experience found in single or multiple episodes” (Creswell, 2002, p. 524). He categorizes it as a type of narrative research with growing purpose and popularity. Most shared events for this study involve criminal cases with individuals arrested and undercover operations targeting drug violators. I change the names of jurisdictions, agencies, agents and anyone involved other than me to protect the confidentiality of those SOG Operators still engaged in active covert operations.

I enmesh lived experiences throughout the findings and discussion of the data in the descriptive, analysis and interpretative sections of this project. To illustrate examples of SOG subcultural and professional experiences, I recount my first day on the job as an officer, first SWAT training, first day assigned to the narcotics unit, first undercover purchasing operation of illegal narcotics, first SWAT activation, last SWAT activation. In addition, I incorporate my last undercover purchasing operation of illegal narcotics, narcotics and violent crime training conference, Bandito OMC confrontation at swimming pool, reflection of SWAT career, and career as an undercover narcotics agent.

## **Sampling**

The population of Operators consists of professional officers employed or retired by federal, state, county/parish, and municipal law enforcement agencies. I did not select the population of SOG Operators, but it is a result of subjects attending trainings, debriefings, conferences, or social events unorganized by me.

## **Data Analysis**

Consistent with Creswell's (2003) strategy for presenting ethnographic analysis of qualitative data, information is indexed and coded creating themes for extracting specific details and accounts of rich lived experiences of those officers under direct observation. I identify patterns and themes from the experiences shared by the subjects to assist in achieving a comprehensive understanding of the data. I decipher the categorical and chronological organization of data for detecting themes in the coded information to ensure an accurate understanding of the major categories while implementing the processes discussed by Creswell (2003).

The first step involves organizing the data. This includes personally transcribing all recorded statements to ensure accuracy and familiarity, then typing out all field notes. Next, I sort data into various categories or types to include semi-structured interview data and observational data. Data secured from retired SOG officers is categorized separately from current SOG members. The third step is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the material by reading through the data in its typed form. The overarching review provides the comprehensive meaning of the tone and main themes and ideas associated with the depth of the shared information.

The fourth step involves the detailed analysis and coding of major sections of the data prior to categorizing the information into specific themes based on meaning and significance. The final process of analyzing the data requires a systematic procedure for digesting and evaluating textual data for discovering the models of behavior shown to demonstrate consistent patterns.

### **Coding**

The process of coding identifies major categories within the data to begin extrapolating those sections of research falling into the areas of common patterns. Creswell (2009) describes coding as a process of organizing collected materials into “big chunks” of text before bringing meaning to the information. He continues to explain that the gathered data is segmented into sentences or paragraphs, and then labels are applied to those categories with a term best describing the actual language.

A mixture of inductive and deductive coding combines the best of each strategy. The inductive coding process allows me to determine categories as the data develop and unexpected results emerge from the interviews and observations. It also serves as a safeguard against my bias as a former SOG and current researcher from overlooking valuable categories. The deductive method establishes codes that were predetermined based on the project’s theoretical perspective and actual experiences in the SOG.

### **Themes**

Upon completion of filling the coding categories with contextual data, I established themes to represent these broad descriptive statements. According to Creswell (2009), the technique of building themes begins after the detailed information is assigned to coding categories. These patterns develop into theories or generalizations suggesting an end for qualitative studies.

Creswell (2007) adds that themes may reflect the evolution of frequency of terms used to illustrate or describe a topic. This reemerging and frequency of use also assists in establishing reliability for the data and research project.

### **Validation Strategies**

I identify several processes recommended by Creswell (2003) promoting the authenticity of data secured during the semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The first technique is to triangulate the various data sources to determine congruity of the major themes and patterns of behavior. I accomplish this by regularly reviewing the sources of information to identify commonalities of theoretical perspective. After collecting information from the semi-structured interviews and observations, I compare what I experience with the literature to ensure consistency. The second technique incorporates rich, thick descriptions allowing the reader to experience this isolationist culture from an insider's perspective.

I use the third strategy by acknowledging my personal biases as addressed in the section titled "Role of Researcher." I examine the sample universe by documenting data regardless if it supports or refutes the central themes of this project. This allows me to experience the different views that did not agree with the majority of information collected but important to collect for documenting all perspectives and experiences. The final process is spending prolonged time in the field. I spent more than two decades in the field of law enforcement, and while not in the researcher's capacity, the depth of observation provides a foundation for evaluating the information given to me during the data collection process.

## **Reliability**

Qualitative research presents limited options for examining the stability or consistency of responses. A strategy recommended by Creswell (2003) for examining the stability and consistency of responses is the process of coding interviews to identify the major themes and inconsistencies of data provided by the various subject participants. I initiated the coding of transcripts and detailed notes of interviews not recorded. I assembled a team of stakeholders working in the criminal justice profession and who had graduate degrees. These stakeholders of the research project subsequently reviewed and coded the same information to determine consistency of interpretation, major theme identification, and discrepancies.

## **Description, Analysis and Interpretation**

Once the process of coding and then placing the coded data into one of the three major themes was complete, I utilize Wolcott's (1994) strategy for analyzing the data. The three-phase process allows for a continual reviewing of the data to ensure I study the volume of secured information multiple times to capture an accurate and richly descriptive presentation of the restricted access SOG subculture.

The first step in the manner of presenting the collection of data is the description. This phase asks the question, "What is going on?" I present data in thick, rich detail as told to me and based on my observations and interviews, it is memorialized in written form. Wolcott (1994) warns that there is no "pure" description, and the attempts to relate every spoken word by the interview subjects still lack the scientific rigor of quantitative analysis. This requires a concerted effort on my part to insure the identification of potential biases and diligently work to filter their accounts from my own perceptions.

The descriptive phase is an effort to provide a breadth of detail without losing the purpose of the research. Wolcott (1994) advises that readers always want reassurance that there is a point to the lengthy descriptions, and researchers must weigh what they think is essential with what is actually relevant to the account. He encourages the researcher to base his descriptions on “sufficiency” of data specific to what should be eliminated or included. My accounts are reviewed by cohorts (stakeholder team identified in Reliability section) unfamiliar with the research to ensure information included is focused on the objective of this project.

Wolcott (1994) suggests that during the descriptive phase of data presentation, the accounts are best served as implicit analysis or interpretation before leading to more explicit analysis and interpretation. I chose to use two strategies he recommends to guide the preparation of the descriptive materials. The first technique described by Wolcott (1994) is the “Plot and Characters,” and it is used when individuals or sociological roles are central to the description. The researcher introduces the characters, and the story is put into motion while the researcher’s role varies from narrator to participant. The second of Wolcott’s (1994) techniques is the “Groups in Interaction.” This is helpful when presenting various groups operating within the same space. Creating distinct groups assists in distinguishing the social clusters under examination.

Wolcott’s (1994) next phase of presenting the data is the analysis of the detailed descriptions. He writes that analysis addresses the question, “How things work?” by identifying essential features of interrelationships among them. He more formally defines analysis as the “...systematic procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships consonant with the descriptors noted above” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 24).

By submitting my data to rigorous analysis, I offer a method for achieving credibility of information by presenting the more orderly and less speculative side of data transformation. Wolcott (1994), similar to the descriptive strategies, developed those for addressing the analytical presentation of the materials. His first technique that I employ is “Flesh out Whatever Analytic Framework Guided the Data Collection.” It is similar to the narrative technique and is best for content analysis and analysis of social settings. The next analytical technique I use is the “Contextualize in a Broader Analytical Framework.” This draws connections with external authorities by using recognized bodies of theory in a specialized field, recognized classics, or tradition of known literature. I chose to connect my analysis to the traditional literature in the fields of sociology and anthropology.

The final phase for transforming data is the technique of interpreting the data for presentation. Wolcott (1994) states this phase addresses the processual questions of meaning and content. It asks, “What is to be made of it all?” He advises that interpretation designates the point where the researcher “...transcends factual data and cautiously analyses and begins to probe into what is to be made of them” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 36). He suggests that researchers should err on the side of too much description and too little interpretation to ensure the focal point remains on the topic of research and not the researcher’s opinion.

To interpret the analyzed data collected during the observation and interview processes I use two of Wolcott’s techniques referred to as the “Turn to Theory.” I use this method for linking the limited scope of research with larger issues. My association with Victor Turner’s theory of liminality is conducive with this strategy for interpretation.

The final technique referenced from Wolcott's (1994) strategies is the "Connect With Personal Experience." Inspired by Clifford Geertz's "I-witnessing" this involves the personalization of interpretation as I address in my autoethnography.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Findings and Discussion**

The theoretical perspective relating to the liminal transitions leading to a subcultural SOG fraternity is supported by the description, analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data secured with participant observations, semi-structured interviews and my sharing of lived experiences while serving in the SOG. The discussion centers on the interpretive issues relating to liminality and the trajectory of socialization phases that may lead to professional deviance. I divide the descriptive data into three major themes; the trajectory of socialization, hating the others, and the final shades of blue. This categorical division assists in transforming the bulk of raw qualitative data into refined contents available for describing, analyzing and interpreting.

### **Transforming Qualitative Data; Description, Analysis and Interpretation**

#### **Description**

The descriptive phase emerges from coding the data and the emergent themes. This section is a cultural portrait of the SOG incorporating the emic perspectives of the group, as well as my (etic) views of the collective culture. Three themes emerge from the coding of data. The first is the "trajectory of socialization" and contains the narrative accounts of data representing the code homogeneity which is further divided into the subcategories of race, sex, chronological age, physical appearance.



The subcategory of physical appearance is further separated into categories representing coded data specific to style of clothing, hairstyles, tattoos and language. The next codes involve alcohol involvement, physical contact, and occupational socialization / becoming blue.

The second theme emerging from the coded data is titled “hating of others” and incorporates the coded categories of attraction to violence, degradation of women, and the anti-diversity / anti-homosexuality. The final theme entitled the “final shades of blue” consists of the codes; deviant and antisocial behavior, apathy for traditional policing, and ideological transformation.

### **Trajectory of Socialization**

During the process of coding the data, the major theme, trajectory of socialization, emerges. Learning the environment within which an officer works is a dynamic experience. The law enforcement profession uses militaristic rank structures attained through promotional opportunities. The achievement structure of the organization creates a linear trajectory throughout the course of an officer’s career. The socialization aspect is the learning of traditions, customs, and the expectant behaviors conducive to operating within the policing environment. Together, the trajectory of socialization follows the path an officer takes during the period of employment with a policing organization.

The journey toward occupational socialization travels along an experiential continuum beginning with cadet phase at the police academy and progressing through liminal transitions during an officer’s career. This theme is supported by the patterns of codes associated with homogeneity, alcohol involvement, physical contact, and occupational socialization / becoming blue. The theme of trajectory of socialization is closely associated with the stages of liminal transitions that officers experience throughout the course of their careers as they move from shades of light to dark blue.

### *Homogeneity*

I use the term homogeneity to describe the similarities of individual members in the policing culture and is similar to Van Maanen's (1975) statement about the "numbing regularity" of becoming socialized. Despite the individual's personality, professional background, or prior life experiences, the ultimate goal of the journey is to achieve socialization - becoming blue. Across the country, accounts of the numbing regularity are recorded through the observations and interviews of SOG as patterns emerge with the specific categories of race, sex, physical appearance, and language (cop talk). Literature reviewed and my personal observations identify the effects of peer clustering and a pack mentality by individuals once taking their position behind the thin blue line.

Obst, Davey, and Sheehan (2005) detail the powerful effects of stratified peer clustering and the desire to conform to the cultural norm for the purpose of institutional survival by "not making waves." A narcotics agent from Arizona who discusses struggles with maintaining his integrity states, "I know I have a choice, but you cannot afford to swim upstream too often. Better to go with the flow." To emphasize the cultural effect of homogeneity, I detail the demographics of the subject participants. The demographics come from two hundred law enforcement participants. Within that population, one hundred ninety-three were males and seven females. Of those one hundred and ninety-three males, one hundred and seventy-nine were white, eleven black, and three Hispanic. Five of the seven females were white, and the remaining two black.

### *Race*

The element of race is consistent with literature (Simon and Pettigrew, 1990; Britz, 1997; Armed Forces and Society, 2000; and Senna and Siegal, 2010) documenting the lack of minorities in policing, especially the SOG. An observation recorded in Philadelphia shows that of the ten officers, nine were white and one was black. I note that the one black male did not distinguish himself as different, and I add a researcher's note that all appeared "blue." The descriptor "blue" refers to their characteristics being so strong in appearance, physical mannerisms and speech, that race by color is not a factor. In the homogenous environment of policing, although the white race is present more than any other race, the personal characteristics of physical appearance in body build, hair style, clothing, tattoos, language used, close physical contact with other SOG, and the mannerisms are used by all officers to transcend the color of skin.

In regards to the white race being the majority, my sample population lists ninety-two percent are white officers; five and five-tenths percent are black, and one and five tenths percent are Hispanic. The 2010 United States Census claims the percentage of population claiming to be white was seventy-two and four tenth percent, while twelve and six tenths claim to be black or African-American. Persons claiming Hispanic or Latino decent report sixteen and three tenths percent. Obviously, those entering the SOG community do not mirror society's racial composition. During an observation of a Louisiana SWAT training there are thirteen white Operators and one black Operator. Although the interaction between these men became raucous at times, racist comments are not noted. The only observations where comments about black people occurred came from the sole black operator.

He states, “Crack dealers always wanting to shoot Uncle Tom first. With all these fucking crackers around, why they gotta take it out on a brother?” Minority women were an even rarer occurrence. Of the two hundred officers observed, there were only two black females. One is in a North Carolina narcotics unit and the other is in a Nebraska narcotics unit. Neither claims having much experience in the SOG and though both make comments about suspicions that their selections are based on race, the North Carolina black Operator expresses it was to “color it up”. The three Hispanic males are observed during SWAT trainings, presentations and a briefing (Colorado, Virginia and Florida), but none of the three interact with their cohorts. I observed they each look very young, act timidly within their respective groups, and refuse to participate in an interview.

#### *Sex*

Similar to the dominance of the white SOG in law enforcement’s milieu is the sex of SOG Operators. Male SOG represent ninety-seven percent of the Operator’s population. The 2010 United States Census reports a male population of forty-nine and twenty-seven hundreds percent. None of the seven SOG females are SWAT Operators, but work in narcotics units. The SOG is a male dominated culture despite attempts by federal mandates to integrate policing. Barker (2005) describes some of the strategies employed through affirmative action and consent decrees, but the results default to the hegemonic masculinity as described by Myers, Forest, and Miller (1997). Two SWAT trainings observed in different jurisdictions in Louisiana consisted of only men. Male officers dominate the funeral I attend for an officer from my department killed in a motorcycle crash.

In another observation, a Louisiana narcotics unit pre-undercover purchase briefing had seven men gathered to provide security for the single female narcotics agent assigned to purchase narcotics from a drug dealer. These examples express the minority standing for females in the SOG and are consistent with Britz's (1997) examination of females hired as police officers. The SOG's subcultural solidarity has no significant effect on breaking the gender barriers.

### *Age*

Literature (Van Maanen, 1975) and observations show the law enforcement hiring process taking long periods from vacancy to announcement, testing and appointment. Because of the length of hiring, attending college and serving military duty before beginning a policing career, the average starting age is approximately twenty-five. Many states also allow for retirement after twenty and twenty-five years of service, and make the mid-forty year old age range common for attrition by retirement.

In a culture of youth, seniority is measured by years of service and not chronological age. In observation of SWAT training, I am acquainted with some of the Operators, so the interaction with them turns to extended bouts of teasing directed at my age. The main topic of harassment involves reasons why I am no longer active in SWAT. Most comments center on being too old for the strenuous tasks associated with SWAT. Although I know the kidding is in jest, it is also obvious that the majority of the males are in their mid-thirties at the oldest.

While in Kansas City observing a group of male officers after a conference presentation, I watch as the six men who range in age from twenty-five to fifty-five years, sit in a lounge discussing police work. The oldest in the group identified as Carl diplomatically confronts the SOG Operator in the group, Bob, over disparaging comments made about traditional policing operations.

When the group decides to leave the lounge for supper, a verbal exchange occurs between Bob and Carl. We exit the lounge; the elder officer in the gray slacks (Carl, about 55 years old) decides to return to his room. After Carl exits the elevator, Bob says to the other Operators, “Well, fuck that old mother fucker then.” I thought this was inappropriate and commented that maybe he was tired. Then Bob replies, “Yes. Old ass and tired.” This interaction is common and part of the larger patterns observed during the interviews and observations.

### *Physical Appearance*

Race, sex, and age cannot be altered by an individual. The culture of SOG attracts and sustains the white male operator in the prime years of his career. Observations also show that Operators are consistent in their uniform of dress, grooming, and language.

### *Style of Clothing and Accessories*

In the majority of SOG encounters there are specific items and articles of clothing worn by the participants that serve as “markers” that could be used to identify an SOG operator. One of the most distinguishing “markers” includes the tactical folding knife accessory held in the front pant pocket by the sturdy metal clip. Officers, especially SOG carry these knives at all times whether on or off duty. In September 2011 while attending a special church service honoring law enforcement officers called a Blue Mass, I stood in a pew behind a Louisiana State Trooper to notice the same style knife clipped to the interior rear of his leather motorcycle boot.

A more contemporary “marker” is the popularity of a certain police clothing manufacturer; 5.11© Tactical Clothing. The wearing of the 5.11© police clothing line of products ranging from khaki cargo pants, watches, polo shirts with radio microphone tabs and ink pen holders to the supply of eyewear, socks, shoes, undershirts, tactical boots and even underwear are common among individual officers and agencies.

Although the brand is popular among all officers, the on duty wearing of these items is associated with the tactical SOG assignments. During all five SWAT training observations, Operators dressed in similar tactical dress uniforms (TDU) identified with law enforcement special operations type clothing.

In Pennsylvania, California, Virginia, Florida, and Missouri the males in the observation groups are dressed with similar clothing in slacks or the khaki colored tactical style 5.11© police cargo pants (popular for deep pockets on each thigh, reinforced knees and additional pockets for securing gear, ammo or miscellaneous equipment). Each wore a polo style short sleeve shirt, and most have police logos stitched onto their polo style shirts with their agencies badge or emblem embroidered on the chest. Within all of these disparate gatherings of SOG, no one stood out among the others.

The briefings held by narcotics agents should have provided an opportunity to observe SOG in a variety of clothing types. The pattern of similarity remains consistent as all are seen in casual attire with similar style blue jeans and tee shirts with different logos on the front. They also all have tactical vests with ballistic capabilities and police patches for identification placed on the outer shell. This reinforces their unified association despite the slight differences in denim jean colors and shirts. Some did distinguish themselves by wearing baseball caps in the typical style of the bill turned backwards.

In another example, the funeral I attended for the police officer killed in March 2011 provides a visual illustration of the split between SOG and non-SOG. I was aware that the deceased officer belonged to a law enforcement motorcycle club (LEMC), and that group, the “Brothers In Blue” asked to participate in the funeral procession.

I note about 50 motorcycles at the funeral services, and standing around the motorcycles were police officers dressed in motorcycle attire. These officers are clad in tattered jeans, t-shirts, headbands, bandanas, and leather vests with menacing patches and symbols representing the LEMC “Brothers In Blue” (Insert 6).



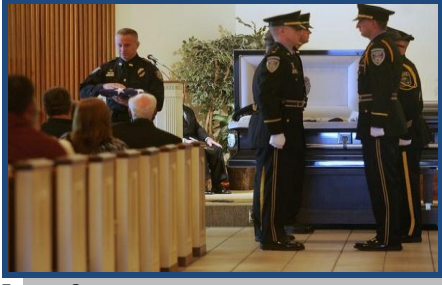
Insert 6  
Photograph by Emily Schwarze  
Staff / houmatoday.com (4-29-11)



Insert 7  
Photograph by Emily Schwarze  
Staff / houmatoday.com (4-29-11)

The officers are flying their colors to show respect for the loss of the officer, and it is similar to what every officer was doing who arrived in dress blues (Insert 7). Before the services begin, I watch how the various groups of officers segregate themselves by uniform and LEMC attire. As the memorial service begins, I stand at the rear of the chapel to observe and to provide support to my officers. There is great symbolism in police burials, such as the twenty-one gun salute and presenting an American flag to the officer’s family (Insert 8). Turner (1967) uses religious activities such as pilgrimages to demonstrate liminality. He explains how segregated classes seem to coalesce into a unified body for the purpose of worship. I observe that not even the emotions attached to attending an officer’s funeral blurred the lines between officers in dress blue uniforms and LEMC.





Insert 8

Photograph by Emily Schwarze  
Staff / houmatoday.com (4-29-11)

Finally, during an interview of a SWAT Operator from Texas I asked if he thought there was a level of comfort from everyone looking and dressing similar. He responds, “I’m not crazy about cloning, but you gotta keep it tight.” Whether it was SOG in training, operational, educational, or social environments, all SOG dress similar in style and the functionality in garments further reinforces the pattern of “markers.”

*Hair Style and Tattoos:*

*Hair Style:*

Institutional policy may direct the issue of hairstyle more than personal preference, but it is a reoccurring observation made of this para-militaristic profession. Most police agency grooming policies mandate that the male officer’s hair shall not touch the collar of his shirt, clean shaven face with no beard, and all mustaches must be trimmed neat and not extend below the mouth. While these guidelines leave some room for individuality, the majority of SOG encountered chose to sport a style of haircut referred to as a high and tight or crew cut. This involves the hair at the base and above ears; shaven or closely shaven to the scalp and the hair left incrementally longer as it progresses to the crown of the skull. The hair on top of the head is either spiked up, or combed to one side or the other, and all have a similarly short and manageable hairstyle.

The narcotics agents, who usually have latitude with grooming regulations, still chose to wear the same basic hairstyles. A minority of narcotics agents sport goatees and an earring in the left ear lobe. In the last twenty years, I saw a variety of changes in the grooming styles worn by SOG. When I began, the SOG wore long hair and thick beards to mimic the late seventies and mid-eighties look. During the late nineteen nineties through the early two thousands, I saw the hairstyles change to a shorter style to remain consistent with societal trends. During my last undercover operation in 2002, I sported a shaved baldhead and a giant goatee that covered most of my jaw line (Insert 9). Prior to shaving my head, I grew hair below my shoulders and sported a combination of beards, goatees, and other menacing facial hair combinations.



Insert 9  
Photograph from Scott Silverii

### *Tattoos*

The most traditional of all markers separating one culture from another is some form of permanent identification on the body itself, the tattoo. As stated by one Florida SWAT Operator:

It's funny I never had a tattoo until joining this shit. First thing you got to do. Give you the template and address to the shop. Hurts like hell but got to get it or they kick the crap out of you. My wife, ex-wife, hated the thing and after a while I didn't give a crap.

While hairstyles are only as pertinent as the last barbershop visit, the presence of tattoos is a permanent commitment in the SOG. This Operator's recounting of his first ink session reminds me of the arguments I engaged in with my wife over getting my first tattoo. Seen as a rite of passage, I wanted the experience of going into a tattoo shop to earn my wings in the SOG society. Immediately following my divorce, I got my first tattoo. I wanted a permanent commitment to the culture that had consumed me; the SOG. Having now lost count of my many tattoos, the final one was in honor of leaving SWAT and those brothers killed in the line of SOG duty.

In Kansas City, Missouri, sitting in a 54<sup>th</sup> Street restaurant and bar, I observe four SOG lift their pants legs, shirt sleeves, and drop their collars to display various tattoos representing SOG brotherhood, dedication to their children, country and themselves. While attending two SWAT trainings in separate jurisdictions I observe Operators with visible tattoos. In most interview and observational opportunities, I am told about and shown tattoos on the SOG Operators.

Tattooing was the subject of a federal hearing in Los Angeles relative to the gang-like culture and the demarcation of deputies belonging to white male dominated "social clubs" within the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office (LASO). An excerpt describing the purpose of the federal hearing reads:

He is still proud of his tattoo. The somber image of Death's hooded skull and scythe tattooed onto the inside of the deputy's left ankle in 1989 initiated him into a select fraternity called the Grim Reapers. Then a street cop at the Lennox station, this deputy has risen to a key position in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department - along with other members of his "club." The groups - with macho monikers like the Pirates, Vikings, Rattlesnakes and Cavemen - have long been a subculture in the country's largest Sheriff's Department and, in some cases, an inside track to acceptance in the ranks. Senior officers say they began with the creation of the Little Devils at the East Los Angeles station in 1971.

Membership swelled in the 1980s at overwhelmingly white sheriff's stations that were islands in black and Latino immigrant communities (Los Angeles Times, 1999, p.1).

Membership tattooing continues in practices since this California report. From the observations, there is a pattern of tattoo designs common within the SOG milieu. These patterns consist of either an American flag or a patriotic combination of American colors and symbols inked into their skin to show the eternal love for country and bond to the SOG. The most common image is an eagle with its wings spread. In the right talon, the eagle is holding a submachine gun; in the left talon is a lightning bolt. In between the submachine gun and the lightning bolt is a dagger (insert 10; 11). A tactical SWAT saying is, "Speed, Surprise and Violence of Action." The assembly of these items held by an American Bald Eagle would seem to symbolize those principles. This image is not the "official or sanctioned" image of SWAT, yet it appears on Operators as tattoos in almost all of the states.



Insert 10  
Image from droidforums.net



Insert 11  
Image from www.AR15.com (anonymous)

### *Language*

The language of the SOG is a unique dialect of official police radio codes (10 codes), local slangs, training terminology, and legal jargon all woven together by threads of profanity. I ask a Virginia SWAT Operator about relating to his SOG peers the same as when he was in a non-SOG assignment.

The SWAT Operator answers: “10-50. Fuck no!!! You gotta watch your cock around the suits. They always looked to crack it off in your sweet ass.” In his reply, he encapsulates official police radio communications, masculine jargon, anti-institutional disdain for supervisors, and references to homosexual prison rape. Of course he smiles as he comfortably delivered this statement.

During an observation in Kansas City, the cop talk was evident. While waiting for supper we sat in a lounge getting to know each other. I notice that prior to anyone introducing himself as having SOG experience, the conversation was civil with not a curse word used. Once the four SOG huddle together, they began throwing expletives. During a Louisiana SWAT training some Operators use profanity like a comfortable second language. Although the training sessions are demanding and purposefully stressful, the harassing language is never directed to another person in a provoking manner. Narcotics Agents in North Carolina engage in conversations that are often personal including talk of sex with other Operators’ family members. No one appears outwardly angered by the verbal abuse.

In contrast to the earlier observations of Operators using cursive and harassing language, I observe a group of Narcotics Agents where I hear none. The danger inherent to operations involving the undercover purchase of illegal narcotics creates an environment of determined focus. The briefing in Louisiana includes no verbal hazing or ridicule of each other. Another observation of this group is during the operational briefing when very specific individual assignments are distributed, no one is called by name or nickname. This is consistent with group unification and the hegemonic masculinity’s surrender of identity for social clustering.

The emerging pattern of cop talk lies at the base of SOG communications and seems to escalate under stressful situations or while recounting those situations. Other than the single observation of the Louisiana narcotics briefing mentioned above, it is a blend of street level law jargon and prison yard gangster chatter. Whether it occurs in the form of sex, age, race, dress or behavior and language, the SOG establishes organizational power through homogeneity. The power of homogeneity is apparent. It is at times a security blanket to the Operator for reassurance and acceptance into an institutional subculture often contrary to the public ideals of the organization. Other times it creates moral and ethical conflict between who the public servant wants to be and the professional deviant he became.

#### *Alcohol involvement*

The use of alcohol becomes part of the everyday life of SOG Operators. I witness and experience the confluence of alcohol in the profession and the SOG. Quinnet (1998) documents alcoholism is twice the national rate for police officers. Forty-eight percent of policeman and forty percent of policewomen drink excessively, compared to civilians at ten percent of men and seven percent of women drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. From the observations, other patterns emerge.

A SOG in Kansas City asks a group to explain how police officers could enforce the impaired driving laws when cops are the worst violators. All SOG in the group admit to coming on duty either drunk or hung over. One of the SOG, who has experience as a narcotic agent, tells the others how he used to drive his unmarked police vehicle home from the bars. He would activate his blue lights so other officers would not stop him since he was so intoxicated. He said it became a game and he would serve as the DD (designated driver) for nights out drinking.

In the account of my final undercover purchase of narcotics, I use alcohol as a tactic during the actual role-playing that leads to the purchases of illegal drugs. In this undercover assignment, I drank beer throughout the night while in the bar. Although not intoxicated, I act as if I were. This role-playing of intoxication helps ease the drug distributors' tensions about selling illegal drugs to a total stranger. Once I complete the purchase of the drugs from three women in the dark parking lot, I use the ruse of being intoxicated as an excuse to avoid engaging in sex with them. During this same night of working undercover, my SOG team of Agents and I engaged in an eventful operation:

After more beers, shots of whiskey, offers for wild sexual experiences and arm wrestling matches it was time for the bar to close. I led my crew into a neighboring state to begin a monster celebration. When you are working undercover, you are always on duty and looking for the next dope buying opportunity. Duty could wait. That night, like many others, we drank extremely too much tequila, danced too poorly with ugly women, and threatened to kick too many redneck asses. I woke after just a few hours of sleep and reported back to the off sight narcotics office to ready for the next day's mission of working undercover. I felt like a knife had plunged deep into my head, chest, back and stomach as my years of conducting operations and age had left me not so quick to recover after a night of "working" undercover, but it was the job I swore to do.

A pattern of alcohol use is consistent. These excerpts from interviews and observations demonstrate the presence of alcohol in the SOG. A SWAT Operator from Mississippi describes his team's nights out as, "Just acting like assholes who shit don't stink. Kings of the fucking world. Drinking and fucking around like some freaking spring break movie."

Meanwhile a retired SOG from Louisiana says, "Long hair, beard to my dick and all the beer and pussy in the world. No hassles with your brothers. Those fuckers would buy us beer before, during and after work. We would stop at the bars on night patrols and get tanked. These probes would shit themselves because they knew they would get busted. The vets told them. Do it or walk out. Too much ego I guess.

They drank up. Then we would leave their asses in the dark and pop rounds over their heads. How in the hell did we not get killed. End of the day, it made you tough. We were all brothers then.”

In Arizona, a SOG associates alcohol consumption with off duty social activities and as a factor in cheating on his wife. He states, “I’ve come home blasted drunk from work, nights with the boys, softball games, you name it. I’ve also got caught with my pants down a few times if you know what I mean? I’m not that kind of person, but the shit this job puts you through almost makes you feel like you have no control of your life.” This SOG also made peer socialization comments earlier about “not swimming upstream”, and they are similar to the results by Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005) who convey this indoctrination into a culture of alcohol consumption is driven by peer socialization, desire for acceptance and social clustering development.

Their research is also consistent with the observations relative to social clustering, peer acceptance and groupthink. The cultural synergy leads SOG Operators to blend for acceptance even if it requires uncharacteristic antisocial behavior such as chronic alcohol consumption. This is yet another emerging code supporting the trajectory of socialization theme, as SOG enmeshes the drinking of alcohol with personal and professional activities.

#### *Physical Contact*

The process of becoming blue involves the molding of individuals into a unified mechanism capable of working in unison. During the process, the trajectory of socialization creates an environment of cohesion between these individuals. Street survival instructors teach police officers from the beginning of the academy that anyone coming within three feet of their personal space is an assault on their position.



Physical contact and close proximity are not common with the culture of traditional law enforcement, but observations of SOG demonstrate something different.

Oddly, it was the refusal to engage in close contact that demonstrates to me that I am no longer accepted into the subculture by some SOG and that I have crossed the line to becoming a “suit”. While attending the funeral for an officer who worked for my agency, I spotted a longtime SOG dressed in full LEMC attire to include the tattered clothes, bandana, and a leather motorcycle vest full of patches with emblems, logos, and language. We went back over 20 years although in different agencies. Clothed in my Class A dress uniform, I approach him and shake his hand. I lean in to hug him as SOG often does; he instead steps back and addresses me as Chief. The other SOG around him looked at me without acknowledging my presence. We were in two very different worlds and the physical contact usually shared between SOG brothers was no longer mine to participate in.

Literature does not detail physical contact between SOG, but in my experiences and observations, they are more likely to engage in physical contact than officers that are more traditional. This may be attributed to the need for small group reliance, as opposed to traditional assignments often requiring operational autonomy. Because of the operational need to maintain noise discipline during silent covert maneuvers, Operators communicate using hand signals and touching their partner. The combination of tactical communications, operating in close quarter tactics and the bond of this fraternal subculture creates an environment for close physical contact. Literature discusses the need for social clustering (Van Maanan, 1975) and peer acceptance (Manning, 1980) among males, and this is demonstrated through physical contact.

Close contact among SOG Operators was vivid in my recollection, so I made a point of greeting these participants with hugging and hard patting as they approach. This level of greeting is symbolic of the deep bond between individuals experiencing a fragmentation from traditional institutional values. During a SWAT observation in Virginia, touching is a normal level of physical contact between these men. From the handshakes and hugs to greet one another to the punching and grabbing throughout the training session, it was obvious that physical contact in the form of playful striking and wrestling is the dominant interaction among the group.

Another example of close contact occurs in a social setting while in Philadelphia teaching law enforcement officers. A small group of officers came to talk with me between sessions. Although all are cordial, no one makes personal introductions or shakes hands. One officer references his SOG experience during the talk and another officer responds that he too was SOG. Once identified, the two SOG physically relocate within the circle of officers to stand together and make a close personal introduction quietly as to not disturb the larger group.

The act of social clustering among homogenous groups occurs while observing a group of officers in Colorado. There were ten male officers standing in a group discussing training sessions, places to eat and other mundane topics. During the conversation, three of the men identify themselves as SOG. The initial gathering of these men involves no handshaking or physical contact. The three men readjust their positions within the circle and formally introduce each other with handshakes. The independent actions of the other seven seem typical of officers used to working routine, autonomous police assignments. Compared to the other seven non-SOG, who do not as much as pat each other on the back; these three SOG regularly make physical contact with each other in a friendly manner to include patting on the shoulder and back and grabbing the forearm or triceps.

Close personal contact occurs in eighteen of the twenty observations. SOG Operators relocate to each other when in mixed company with either civilians or non-SOG. The relocating does not disrupt the group or the conversations, but appears to be an attempt to establish comfort rather than dominance over the environment. SOG gravitating towards each other in public settings exemplifies a benchmark for the trajectory of socialization. Although officers begin the police training academy void of loyalties or associations with others, the desire to develop close relationships and cluster among peers soon over takes their individuality. Through the transformative process of becoming blue, SOG Operators develop the relational bonds of brotherhood, and the desire to cluster with those most similar. This groupthink or pack mentality is an evolutionary step in the trajectory of socialization's process of becoming blue.

#### *Occupational Socialization / Becoming Blue*

The duality of conflict in becoming blue exists between loyalties to the subcultural fraternity or the institutional ideals of duty, honor, and service. The process of disengaging from the law enforcement institution intensifies the process of socialization. My research demonstrates the gang like clustering characteristics of the SOG. During an interview with a Florida SWAT Operator, he detailed the expectations of acceptance into the SOG. I ask a follow up question: "Like a club?" and he immediately snaps back: "More like a gang. You got rules and if you don't follow they kick your ass out. You run your face and you get blackballed. You learn the rules fast. It's great if you fit in, it sucks if you don't." His accounts reflect my own experience and illustrate the difference between assignment into SOG and acceptance by SOG.

Feldman (1976) and Ashford and Saks (1996) explain the negative impact of organizational isolationism for creating dissatisfaction and termination of employment. I ask a retired Louisiana SOG about the toughest part in working with non-SOG. His reply is a typical effect of the isolationist tactic; “I feel like I’m on a deserted island but I see everyone. No one sees me and probably don’t give a rats ass who I am.” SOG who becomes a darker shade blue, continue through liminal phases as they progress along the trajectory of socialization. An undercover narcotics agent in Arizona shares his struggles over maintaining the integrity he desires versus getting pulled into a lifestyle he wants to avoid:

I’m not like some of these cats who just do it for the rush, or the pain. They live to chase women and tell war stories after each night of partying. Hell, I find myself at the center of these stories, and I’m like, this ain’t the me I want to be.

He exemplifies the strain of subcultural socialization when he states:

Just the peer pressure ... is crazy. Worse than any college frat I saw. I used to think if it’s that bad then the guys should just quit. Then I realized that you can’t. In a way you’re trapped. It’s a dishonor to quit.

The three SOG all use powerful expressions (ex: like a gang, on a deserted island, ain’t the me I want to be) that illustrate the internal difficulties of SOG socialization.

SOG learn that exclusive membership to this subculture comes at a price. The unity of SOG creates an atmosphere of resilience and dependence upon each other. Operators cannot call upon the staff of the regular police to assist in most covert operations. During my period of SWAT command, I exemplified this isolationist ideology by creating a unit motto: “If not us, who?” This stresses the realization of the commitment of the Operators, and that once SWAT activates; it was our responsibility to resolve the crisis. We printed metal dog tags with this motto and wore them under our uniforms.

A Colorado SOG Operator captures the isolationist ideals of organizational disenfranchisement:

“Once they (SOG) trust you, everything is possible and you are always in. You never rat.

Never! It doesn't matter what you see or do. No one talks. This is the way things should be.”

Throughout the trajectory of socialization, SOG Operators become entrenched in the ideals of the subculture. A series of liminal transitions further remove them from the traditional organizational values of duty, honor, and service. The findings demonstrate the intensity of belonging and the allegiance to the SOG. Samplings from data include an observation of California officers, Dave, and his partner Earl. These officers attempt to convince me they were fulltime SOG. I know they were lying based on the inconsistencies of their stories. These two officers are practicing the blue code of silence; one lies and the other swears to it. Although not Operators, these two officers are socialized to believe that SOG status provided them credibility. The occupational process of becoming blue is so strong that this Operator's response to quitting the unit prompts a preference for death over leaving. A Louisiana SWAT Operator was asked why he just did not quit SWAT.

He replies:

Serious? Dude you don't fucking quit. I wanted that shit my whole stupid life. On the ground motherfucker, SWAT in the house. That's better than crack. All the hell I went through to get in, and to get out because of that bitch? She can go. You work at McDonalds and you make fries every day. I'd eat a bullet.

A Nebraska SOG Operator sums up the fraternity over family ideal by saying, “It's like another family but without the bullshit.”

Another example of the strength of connection to the isolationist ideals develops at a Louisiana SOG funeral where the officers are flying their colors (LEMC patches) to show respect for the loss of the officer.

A Mississippi SOG Operator says, “You know how it is. You wait your ass off to get hired and then they stick you in the jail to rot with those fuckers for about a year. If you’re lucky you break into the academy. I waited about a year and a half till it broke. I said hell yea I wanna go.” Finally, a Virginia SOG Operator comments on the value of becoming socialized and isolated as “blue” by saying: “We are like a family who watches each others back. Most of those fuckers (non-SOG) don’t run when you call for help.”

The trajectory of socialization is a complex process and includes many stages of liminal transitions occurring before full acculturation. During this process, the Operators develop an identity influenced by the fringe lifestyle of their peers. Part of this identity includes the expectation of entitlements associated with the assignment. Characteristics present themselves as organizational autonomy, disassociation with traditional uniformed police. Other characteristics include the mystique of SOG operations fanaticized by media portrayals, close association with living on the edge and risk taking, and the self-identification as existing outside the law. This attitudinal persona creates a loyalty to the SOG and a divide from others who threaten the existence, while hating the others to protect the fraternity comes easily.

### **Hating Others**

The hegemonic masculinity of the SOG creates a protective nature for the preservation of ideals associated with the fringe lifestyle. Outsiders, others, and alternatives are identified as threats to the congruity of the small group units given the latitude to carry out their missions without direct hierarchical supervision. Within that fringe comes the disdain for conformity, respecting of others and a propensity for physical force during the execution of their duties. The examination shows the antisocial lifestyles associated with the actualization of a socialized SOG that does not avoid the intensity of hating others for maintaining their status.

### *Attraction to Violence*

This section details the promotion of the use of force as necessary for conducting certain missions, and as a mechanism to gain social acceptance. The Operators express no regrets for injuries inflicted and justify their actions of strategically applied violence. I share the following story from my autoethnographic record to demonstrate a potentially deadly situation I was in while conducting an undercover drug deal with a possible OMC member. While operating in an undercover capacity in a biker type rundown bar, I found myself alone in a small one-stall bathroom with a giant of a man holding a steel blade buck knife and a plastic bag of methamphetamine.

It was an odd situation to find myself. My partner had walked outside of the barroom and unknowingly locked the door behind him at closing time. I was walking slowly behind him and heard the bartender call out to me. This man stood about six feet six inches, with shoulder length hair and a full unkempt beard and mustache. He was a possible target of our undercover mission and identified as a member of an OMC. Because of his intimidating build and disposition, I made little eye contact with him other than ordering alcohol from him at the bar. I did not want him to mistake me as being confrontational, but only to think I was there to party and buy drugs. He asked me to follow him and we walked into that small bathroom. There, he pulled a giant buck knife from a leather sheath on his side.

I forced myself to remain calm as my heart began to pound, and my mind began to rehearse close quarter combat strikes and kicks I looked forward to executing in the confined area. Although faced with a potentially violent encounter with a knife wielding biker selling dope, I was preparing and admittedly looking forward to the battle. He shoved that knife in my face with the point of it filled with methamphetamine powder and tried forcing me to consume it.

It was more of a test than a nice gesture to share his drug supply. We exchanged words and the encounter became heated. Although no physical attack was launched, I began to incite him in an effort to manipulate his emotions to establish dominance. It worked, and he poured the drug into a plastic bag and handed it to me. I unlocked the exterior door to exit and was relieved because I had just busted him. My account is typical of the attraction to violence that permeates the SOG.

Manning (1980) claims the execution of violence earns an officer respect from his peers, and is an expectation of cultural assimilation. SOG do not consciously associate their violent actions with serving the state as the social compliance controller. Their acts of force upon the public are expected by peers to ensure each Operator is willing to exercise that option, and capable of remaining silent about it. During an observation of Virginia SWAT Operators, they joke about violence experienced or inflicted upon civilians, and about violence that was not justified but inflicted for the sake of making a point. The conversation during this observation sounds contrived at times, but the effort to impress each other led to one Operator trying to outdo the other with their accounts of occupational violence.

The observations and interviews provide numerous accounts of the aggregate desire of the SOF subculture to engage in physical violence. A SOG from Nebraska admits within a group of his peers that: "...what matters is getting the job done and kicking the crap out of shitbags."

A Narcotics Agent from Arizona shared that: "I think that's the thing most people do not understand. You have to defend yourself. Gotta take it to them. All they respect is force. That's their life. They got a saying about "taking your courage." Not me motherfucker. I'll take your life before you take shit from me." An interview with a Louisiana SOG involved asking the question, what else do you enjoy about the job?



His answer reflects the indoctrination to violence: “Really? Cracking skulls. I whipped the shit out of some motherfuckers. Can’t count the asses.” I do not know if Manning’s (1980) state sponsored violence was meant for the levels of “cracking skulls” though. This attraction to violence also earns Operators’ respect within the ranks as a Louisiana SWAT commander earns his position because of experiencing violent situations. He shares that he was only twenty-six years of age, but he had survived the “shit” so the chief made him the commander. This incident is similar to Walker’s (2001) claim that counter-institutional behavior results in higher rates of promotion than other officers.

A Mississippi Operator states that there is a professional price paid for exacting levels of violence. He said, “The worse we behave the more respect we earn from the street. I think that’s why the rest of the agency looks down on us. We don’t and not going to take any crap.”

This Louisiana SOG also talks about the countercultural disposition towards the agency’s internal integrity mechanism commonly known as internal affairs (I.A.). He states, “Oh, I.A. Fuck them. Kick one ass and they think they own you. One douche said to me, ‘you have established a pattern of violent and destructive behavior’. Like that’s a fucking insult?” These examples validate the dilemma of the SOG and their role in traditional policing.

The one Operator displays the organizational reward for violent behavior; the second example shows how the violence causes separation from the rest of the agency, and the final example illustrates the adversarial relationship between SOG and institutional accountability.

A Louisiana SOG was asked: Do you like being in the middle of the chaos and having others look to you? He says, “Sure. I work my ass off to get here and stay here. I’m good at what I do and if everybody knows it, oh well. I don’t mind the heat and I can take care of business.

Most people are sheep looking for a shepherd. I'm the shepherd motherfucker." The Operators promote the culture of violence because it is expected from the SOG. Operators see themselves as society's shepherd, and they understand the necessity for applying violence to keep the flock intact and the attackers at bay.

Another SOG Operator from Louisiana responds to my question to support the acceptance of violence. I ask, Has being in SWAT changed your professional life? He replies, "Yea my attitude changed, I don't take shit from nobody. My brothers got my back. I want to kick ass. Not just drive around all day trying for free tea." The "free tea" statement is attributed to uniform patrol officers who usually receive free drinks at restaurants as an enticement for visiting the store or restaurant. Another example from an Operator in California also talks about how he changed:

Probably. Who doesn't? You want to do a good job and be nice to the people but after a while of them disrespecting you, you learn to say fuck it. I used to try talking to people to help with their stupid problems. Now I just say shut up or you going to jail. Maybe I'm meaner or more of an asshole. My wife also said I was an asshole. Maybe she was right.

In eighty-five percent of the observations, Operators use physical force on each other by applying striking, kicking, or control hold techniques against each other. This application of violence is executed using strategic techniques taught to officers in the academy, in-service trainings and martial arts classes. Seldom does the Operator swing wildly to inflict the force, but instead, methodically applies control techniques to gain immediate compliance from the receiver of the force. The constant physical contact with each other is an informal rehearsal of those techniques. An Arizona Operator said this interoffice behavior causes the group to become desensitized and more prone to violence towards the public.

He states that, “The office then flows into the streets. This is one violent ass group. But either we take it to them or they will bring it to us. This is proactive violence prevention. It gets out of hand sometimes, but that’s the suppression aspect of it. Lay it on their ass.” Even beyond the office environment encouraging violence, this Operator explains that: “Can’t control the future but you can sure the fuck train to kick the shit out of it.”

In my non-SOG career, I was not a violent person, nor did I seek to engage in violent confrontations. After joining the SOG, I understood the necessity of violence when applied in a controlled manner. To the uninitiated, SWAT Operators armored in dark colors and the seemingly fast and violent tactics are dangerous; but they are purposefully orchestrated. These displays of strategic violence often prevent the criminal from doing something to cause injury to himself during the course of executing a high-risk arrest. This distinction between violence and violence applied in a controlled manner is not made in Manning’s (1980) discussion of state sponsored violence as a mechanism for acceptance. The tactics of violence executed as a means of controlled chaos is what I learned to apply most often and effectively, and is consistent throughout these interviews and observations.

#### *Degradation of women*

The hegemonic masculinity dominating SOG subculture includes the male dominance over his environment to include women. Women are seen as weaker than men and therefore in need of protection. Similar to the Myers, Forest and Miller’s (1997) examination involving the fraternal value system of despising any behavior perceived as feminine, the SOG relegates women into a second-class status where not fit for duty, is not good enough. Although they may feel the need to protect women, it does not equate to respecting them, and this leads to their degradation.

During my research, I chronicle a relationship between officers and OMC (Appendix 1). The role of women in both subcultures is relegated to a second-class standing. Women are objectified, and regularly used for sex among the members of each group. Connell (1997) first coined the term hegemonic masculinity to describe the heterosexist desire for domination over women as well as subordinated masculinities. A retired SOG's interview illustrates the view of women as resources for Operators to use at will. He shared with a sense of pride when I asked what else he enjoyed about SOG, to say:

Really? Fucking. Fucking everything that walked, moved, breathed. Those whores would sneak out of dorm rooms, bedrooms, hell, even their old man's houses to fuck us. It was a party out of this world. Look. Not all skanks either. They had some fine mommas too. We would pass them around like pets. Shit we would all fuck 'em at the same time. I still see some of them today. I'm like don't act like you don't know me bitch. Bet if her husband knew the whore she was, she'd drop that fucking attitude. I'd never say a word. Them was some good fucking days.

There are groups of women that follow the SOG similar to musicians' groupies that Operators call by various unflattering nicknames. SOG working in mid-western cities report the same policing ideals about women. There was a near disdain for women in their conversations. They referred to them as "groupies" and called them badge bunnies, house mouse, holster sniffers, and siren sluts. In my experience as well, I hear these names attributed to females who regularly have sex with police officers.

The hegemonic masculinity characteristic may prevail in the SOG, but the acts of degrading women come as an introduction to the fraternity of SOG. The Arizona SOG who struggles with his sense of morality admits:

I'm not proud of it, but I've done some evil shit. I never knew we had groupies, like rock stars. Freaking women throw themselves at you. Like they stalk you to have sex with you. My first experience was with a house mouse. I'd only been in a few months and before leaving for a deal, the guys got real goofy.

Next thing I knew there was this girl going from office to office. Guys were piling up in the offices and coming out laughing. I was told she was there to take the stress off doing the drug deal. She was screwing or blowing every guy in the office. Hell, she wasn't even bad looking. What was I to do? I had to let her go down on me. They would have ridden my ass all night if I backed out. It became easier after that to run around. I justified it as part of the job.

Obviously, the presence of willing women promotes the temptation of engaging in illicit sexual behavior, and it does not encourage the SOG to show respect to these women. Similar to the women that are property of the OMC, I witness a similar scene of women accompanying LEMC members. They are subject to a secondary role consistent with the fringe subculture's classification of women. They are not allowed to wear the same leather membership vests, but only wore "supporters" tee shirts and vests.

The negative on-the-job attitude towards women also relates to their personal relationships. Quinnet's (1998) study shows police officers suffer a divorce rate sixty percent higher than the national average and relates to the attitudinal experience towards women at work. I observe this devaluing attitude towards women by the Operators who are quick to dismiss female partners (wife or girlfriend) if they conflict with assignments. A Louisiana SOG discussed his divorce and the reasons he did not try harder to make the marriage work. I asked him, "Why didn't you tell her that?" He replies, "By then I didn't care no more. Figured fuck it. She hates me so I'll go somewhere. Wanted me to quit the team and come home. For what? To hear more that shit? I'm fine without her." I followed up by asking if SWAT meant that much to him, to which he responds:

Why not? Women come around all the time. Who cares? I got hooked up after she left. Always some sniffer coming around. This shit makes me money. All she did was take it. She is better off. Go find some fag and tell him what to do. That's all she likes anyway. As to his divorce, he said: Only for my kids. Her, I don't care if she dis-a-fucking-pears.

Divorce and marital infidelity are common patterns and continues with an observation of four SOG in Kansas City. From my field notes, three of the four SOG were previously married but now divorced. The fourth SOG is still married, but the others assure him it would not be long until he was divorced. I pay special attention to him as the conversation moved to sex with other women. He reports having sex with women other than his wife and he did not seem too concerned about it. He even attempts to justify cheating by claiming that everyone engages in affairs, and that his wife did not understand the stress of his job. The prevailing attitude towards illicit sex, and their personal relationships is best illustrated by the Colorado Operator who stated, “My girlfriend says she don’t even know me anymore. Who cares? Fuck her.” While women are not represented in SOG for a number of reasons, the degradation of women in both language and behavior remains pervasive. This type of stereotyping and projection is similar in the ways in which they think and act toward a wide range of individuals they cast as the ‘other.’

*Anti-diversity / Anti-homosexuality*

As an ideal type, law enforcement officers are designated the moral entrepreneurs of society. Simon and Pettigrew’s (1990) out-group homogeneity identifies the SOG as the out-group that discourages and often prohibits participation of women, minorities, gays, and lesbians in policing. Myers, Forest, and Miller (1997) explain that the homosexual lifestyle does not fit into the SOG because it is seen as abnormal. The ideological imbalance between perceived deviant homosexuality and maintaining / enforcing society’s laws supports the SOG ethos of anti-diversification.

I attempt to distinguish the data coded as physical contact between Operators from data coded with the hazing of Operators using homosexual gestures. It can become confusing to an uninitiated outsider to observe the behavior of SOG that includes homosexuality as a hazing method that results in touch or acting out gay sex. This is used to shock the person receiving the hazing, but also establishes a hierarchy with the senior Operators hazing the junior members. My field notes show the Operators of equal tenure were without inhibition in their physical contact ranging from tradition handshakes to simulating explicit sexual techniques on each other. These acts of physical contact would appear to contrast literature documenting the disdain of law enforcement officers towards homosexuality but the contact among these Operators is conducted to shock the other person.

Operators use terms associated with homosexuality while referring to each other. They also make suggestions of sexual acts towards each other. Similarly, these same observations are made at a Mississippi SWAT training session. Many Operators make lewd and sexual gestures towards each other. A Virginia SWAT training observation provides the same results. The language used is the same for all despite race and age. The verbal hazing includes suggestions and offers for performing homosexual acts on the Operator or accuses an Operator of homosexual acts, or inability to perform heterosexual acts. This language goes beyond the “frat house” jabs associated with boys being boys. It establishes the subcultural fringe behavior and socially hierarchical positioning. The same Louisiana SWAT Operator I asked about the gay sex talk and acts reflects the defense of their actions and language. The question seems to catch him off guard, and he delivers a reply with defensiveness.

He responds, “Like suck my dick or I’m gonna fuck you? I don’t freakin know. I guess to get under their skin. We say we gonna fuck your mom, don’t mean we will. Just a way to test your heart. Too soft go home. We ain’t gay, but it pisses people off to hear it I guess. We don’t mean anything by it.”

Despite the lewd language and actions, Operators are quick to distance themselves from anything seen as personally resembling homosexuality. A Louisiana SWAT Operator states: “I played sports growing up. I like the individual sports now like running and triathlon. I was in the military. I guess that is like a team. No clubs or carnival crews though. That is gay.”

Although I never mention being “gay,” the socialization process of SOG is so homophobic that any inclination of less than masculine activities are labeled as gay.

Relative to racism, I did not experience many instances within the ranks of the SOG. While being a white dominant subculture, overt speech and behavior about race are not present. Only one participant observation included a group of thirteen white males and one black male. During that opportunity, I only heard the black male refer to black people. Although he used terms like “cracker” and “uncle tom,” he was not delivering or intending to be derogatory or racist. A group in Philadelphia included nine white officers and one black officer. Other than the color of his skin, nothing distinguished him from the others. An interview of a Texas SOG presented a comment that I initially thought bordered on racist. Afterwards, he never elaborated nor used any other terminology resembling a race related comment. While he was describing the adrenaline of conducting a forceful SWAT entry into a fortified residential structure he said, “Gotta be nice to this fucker and that one. This ain’t like that. BAM, on the ground motherfuckers. Nothing like them spooks on the ground. Like what the fuck was that shit going off?”



As I reported earlier, the other exposure to race or anti-diversity was the North Carolina Operator, a black female who stated that her assignment selection was to “color it up.” This is not said in an angry tone, but almost jokingly. While this is a small recognition of the deeper relations of race, it is an essential note.

The idea of hating others may appear as a strong indictment of the SOG Operators, but it is an accurate descriptor. The Operator fails to accept the diversity among others and refuses to coexist with them. Even remarks about non-SOG police officers are cruel and tainted with a tone of violence towards them. The imitation of homosexual speech and action are not admiration, but as an offense to the SOG Operator receiving the abusive hazing. The following section details the final enculturation experiences of liminal transition and demonstrates that these attitudes of hate develop throughout the career experience.

### **Final Shades of Blue**

#### *Deviant and Antisocial Behavior*

Hate, violence, degradation of women and the discrimination of others because of difference do not equate with the ideals of duty, honor, and service. Yet these are but some of the antisocial characteristics and actions of the SOG subculture. The alcohol-fueled violence and risk taking behaviors of the deviant Operator lifestyle support the subculture. Who are these Operators and how do they arrive at this occupational status? Operators move through liminal phases of transition starting from the day they enter into the police academy as an idealistically naïve public servant and continue until becoming shaded as professional deviants. Becoming blue serves as a sliding scale for officers, and the darker the shade depends upon the number of thresholds crossed. SOG operates in the darkest shades of blue because of the subcultural fragmentation from institutional ideals.

I ask a retired Alabama Operator if his sense of serving the public had changed after becoming an Operator, and he replies, “Yea. I used to give a shit. I realized they all got the same problem. They are constant complainers who don’t raise their kids, don’t pay their bills and want us to take care of their stupid asses.” His cynicism is typical of the responses I receive from Operators on this question. The Florida SWAT Operator similarly expresses, “I guess the more hell I see the less I care. After a while, you either laugh or cry. I ain’t crying for shit.” In every interview conducted, the subjects admit to experiencing an altered sense of duty since joining the SOG. They all express a disdain for the mundane duties of policing, such as addressing quality of life or traffic safety issues. The SOG with disgust uses the term “social worker,” that their job was not social work. This liminal break from the policing ideals is what begins to sow the seed of deviant behavior.

I observe a group of five Louisiana SWAT Operators, of who three also serve as Narcotics Agents. To illustrate the antisocial attitude developed by the SOG, I include a portion of dialogue prompted by my question, Do you relate to your work peers the same in SOG as compared to previous traditional assignments? Identities are assigned code numbers, and the question mark following the symbol for number represents a comment made, but I did not know which Operator said it.

#1 - Fuck no!!! You gotta watch your ass around the suits. They always looked to crack it off in your sweet ass.

#5 - You ain’t shitten. It’s cool back here. We know whose boss hog, but he’s one of us.

#? - He came up like we did and if we ain’t there for him, he’s fucked

#5 - Patrol is okay but it’s a one man game. In the care of yourself all 12 hours. Fuck that anymore. Even detectives can be squirrels sometimes. They got bosses too.

#3 - They not as bad though. You don’t just start off deep. If you carry that crybaby shit in here your ass is back in the car.

#1 - Cry alone motherfucker. Fucking sheep.

This dialogue demonstrates a distinct separation from traditional policing assignments. These SOG realize their protection comes from a supervisor probably engaging in the same deviant practices and as they said, if they were not there for him, “he’s fucked.” Even within the subcultural brotherhood, there is an element of extortion. This discussion illustrates institutional fracturing from the patrol and detective sections. This attack upon the hierarchy is an example of the organizationally internal “us versus them” paradigm.

Since the issue of institutional isolation is established, I follow up with the question: “Describe being isolated from traditional policing assignments and how does it affect you personally and professionally?” Their collective replies were:

#1 - You serious? It’s fucking great. No bullshit. Nobody looking to bust your ass in IA

#4 – It’s cool and all but sometimes I miss hanging out with the older guys. We did more shit like fishing and bowling. Them guys were okay.

#? - Yea, you just don’t want to work with them though. I rather be away from that crap. No office hours, no report time, no fucking bosses after every little thing you fuck up.

#? - Then don’t fuck up

#1 - That’s right dummy. Do your shit and keeps the flies off your ass. Stupid bitch

#4 – It sucks sometimes because you don’t know what’s going on inside the place and feel like a derelict outsider. I’d rather be on the outs than getting crap from everybody.

#5 – That’s the price you pay for freedom. It used to bother me but like anything else you get used to it.

#? - I think we mostly hang out with each other because we know each other and spend more time here than at home.

#? – It’s like my family.

ALL – Laughing.

It is also a recurring theme that many Operators express a sense of loss that comes with alienating themselves from the mainstream organization. Former friendships and activities no longer become available.

The disconnection is that Operators express a loss of interpersonal relationships, but hate the assignments creating those initial bonds. These particular operators work for the same organization, but do not take the initiative to reengage former work friends. They spoke of the non-SOG officers as if only a memory. This further illustrates the depth of which SOG places itself while serving within the periphery of law enforcement.

The SOG account of antisocial behavior seldom mentions regret or repentance, but the retiree from Alabama admits when asked about that said: “Sometimes I wish I didn’t do some of the things we did ... Mostly, I’m proud of who I am and what I did in my life, but we can all do better right?” The Mississippi Operator expresses the most regret about his moral conflict, but quickly justifies every action. He says, “Yes, I have regretted some ass kickings but better them than me.” Other than these Operators, nearly all others express no remorse for their actions, words, and deeds. An Arizona SOG discusses work behavior in relation to the rest of his life:

I’ve got a great family and wife, but I’ve done some stupid crap. Thank God she understands what this job involves.” and “I ask myself that all the time. Where did my friends go? I’m so isolated to these guys, my wife and my boys. Not that it’s bad, but man, where has everyone gone.

In contrast, SOG are overly protective about their children and there were no negative comments about another SOG’s children. I ask an Operator in Missouri if he behaves like this at home. He states, “My personal life is nothing to do with my job. You have to be a certain way to survive and get along. I keep shit separate. My kids don’t really know what I do. Best way to protect them. Everybody lives two lives.”

The Arizona Operator held out hope that his eventual transfer out of SOG and into the detective bureau would change his deviant behavior for the sake of his family. He said, "I'm not that kind of guy. I guess after these last few years, I have become that guy. Makes me feel like crap for my boys. I'll turn it around in CID." The SOG Operators showed little remorse for their actions, attitudes, or expressions. The few who say they regret some aspect of what they did were quick to distance themselves from the liability of the outcomes in those actions. This disregard extends to the way SOG Operators view and refer to the other police.

*Apathy for traditional policing*

Because SOG Operators separate themselves on many dimensions, their attitudes towards other police were often negative. SOG across the country express a genuine disregard for policing operations focusing on crime prevention and traffic safety. Their "us versus them" attitudes are consistent with Simon and Pettigrew's (1990) "out-group homogeneity hypothesis." I ask a Louisiana SWAT Operator if he relates to his peers differently than the non-SOG group. He says, "Nobody fucks nobody. We know where to stick our dicks. Bitches in Patrol are always crying about their squad car being dirty or writing tickets, and something stupid." Although most SOG began their career assigned to duty as corrections officers or uniform patrol officers, they recall the collective experiences with disdain. They do however; continue to relish the good memories with fellow non-SOG officers. Similar to the Louisiana SWAT Operator's statement, a Pennsylvania Operator was similar in his apathetic perspective. Although he was attending a national conference focusing on traffic safety countermeasures to include detection and arrests of impaired drivers, he stated within a group of non-SOG officers, "Fuck DWI arrests."

Another officer inside the group identified with the SOG Operator agrees silently by nodding his head and moving next to the critic to engage him in conversation centered on discontent with traditional policing operations such as making arrests for driving while intoxicated (DWI). The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that in 2008 there were 37,261 traffic related fatal crashes in the United States (Longthorne, 2010). The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) reports that 14,180 individuals were murdered during the same period (FBI, 2009). Although nearly forty percent more people are killed in traffic crashes than homicides in the United States, SOG Operators view traffic enforcement as not central in their mission.

A continuing theme of apathy towards traditional law enforcement missions was experienced in California. I was preparing a room for a presentation I was delivering specific to traffic safety and enforcement inside the Anaheim Convention Center when I encounter two sheriff's deputies. I welcome them and ask if they are there for my presentation. One of the deputies, Earl states, "Sorry. We really don't give a shit about this. SWAT is the next class in this room." Remaining in the room during my presentation became a distraction as he and his fellow deputy, Dave openly spoke to each other. In the Midwest, the behavior of SOG Operators is similar. I joined six officers in the Skies Lounge atop the Hyatt Regency Crown Center. This is a lounge 42 stories high with a magnificent view of Kansas City. I enter into an ongoing discussion about the use of affidavits and search warrants to draw blood from a driver arrested for DWI, and refuse to submit to a chemical breath test by blowing into an intoxilyzer machine. As the seven of us discuss traffic enforcement strategies, Bob, a white male, twenty-seven years old states to the group, "Who gives a fuck. I use that shit to find drugs."

His initial declaration of apathy for traditional police work is followed by a barrage of comments detailing his disdain for arresting drunk drivers because it took too long to process. He then asks the group: “How we can arrest drunk drivers when everyone drinks and drives, especially us?” His question was more rhetorical and he continued to criticize traditional policing duties.

Carl, wearing grey slacks, dress shirt, and appears to be the oldest in the small group responds to Bob in a low toned voice and asks, “Then why in the hell would you attend this conference?” Bob replied with an even louder voice that he thought there would be courses on highway drug interdiction. Carl replies calmly that he should have checked the agenda before coming. This drew laughter from the others including myself. Bob’s behavior, although not obnoxious, did not win favor from the group of seasoned officers. This verbal exchange demonstrates an apathy extending beyond the normal work environment. The disrespect toward this older officer appears to show a genuine dislike for not only the traditional policing operations, but for individuals representing those functions. The disrespect for the traditional policing spills over to the individuals who perform these tasks when close personal friendships are not fostered between the SOG and non-SOG during prior assignments. The SOG disdain for non-SOG evolves into the ideological transformation of the SOG Operators.

#### *Ideological transformation*

After fully actualizing the trajectory of socialization and the Operator assimilates into the subculture of the SOG, the individual perspective fades into a pack mentality. Prior individual creativity and initiative is replaced by following the rules, both formal and informal, and an ironclad code of silence. The ideological shifts manifest into various forms. While some may serve to improve an Operator’s ability to cope with the stresses of the assignment, others become a detriment to their personal and professional lives.

I identify the following categories to demonstrate the differences in ideological transitions.

Although change is imminent, the attitudinal adjustment takes different forms. These transitional forms include; Fuck the World (F.T.W.), SOG Over All, Attitude Adjustments, and Occupational Reflections. Salient comments from Operators provide a description to demonstrate the manifestation of their ideological transformations.

#### 1) F.T.W.

“Kings of the fucking world”, “I used to give a shit about what they said”, “I never fit in so I just said fuck it”, “It was me against the rest of the ass kissers”, “Fuck no. They don’t have my respect”, “you learn to say fuck it”, “it’s all of my bitches against your lying ass”, “Fuck that anymore”, “I’d rather be on the outs than getting crap from everybody”, “Cry alone motherfucker”, and “Fucking sheep”.

The term F.T.W. originated with the OMC, but is adopted for use by the SOG, and further shows the relations between the OMC and SOG’s outlier attitudes. The three letters are sewn onto OMC members’ vests and tattooed into their skin for demonstrating their commitment to that ethos. The SOG liminal transition from social idealist to adversarial worldview is expressed in speech and by tattooing the three letters acronym.

#### 2) SOG Over All

“Either SWAT or not”, “My brothers got my back”, “We are like a family who watches each other’s back”, “It’s like another family but without the bullshit”, “Don’t like it go home. No bitches and no babies”, “don’t be sheep dude”, and “I’m the shepherd mother fucker”.



This ideological transformation ensures that Operators adhere to the expectant rules and behaviors that informally persist within the SOG to maintain internal and isolationist integrity. This category is similar to the metal dogs tags displaying our motto, “If Not Us, Who?” for my SWAT unit.

### 3) Attitude Adjustments

“It makes you wild”, “We’re all cops but there is a difference in the way to act and do your job”, “Yea my attitude changed, I don’t take shit from nobody”, “After a while you either laugh or cry. I ain’t crying for nothing”, “I used to try talking to people to help with their stupid problems. Now I just say shut up or you going to jail”, “Maybe I’m meaner or more of an asshole. My wife also said I was an asshole. Maybe she was right”, “when I’m in beast mode”, “I think I don’t worry so much about the small shit”, and “Everybody lives two lives”.

This category of observing the adjustments in the Operators’ attitudes is necessary for understanding that the person entering the SOG does not arrive with this perspective. It is the result of an evolution of ideological transformations along the socialization continuum.

### 4) Occupational Reflections

“It’s great if you fit in, it sucks if you don’t”, “Sometimes I wish I didn’t do some of the things we did...”, “Shit hits the fan and most of them bitches are calling us”, “I always fought with the other commanders”, “Everyday sucked having to deal with the political bullshit”, “They don’t do the job I do”, “I guess my family doesn’t understand what it takes to do this job”, “They rather me be a detective so I can come home at night and wear a suit”, “want us to take care of their stupid asses?”, “Gotta be nice to this fucker and that one. This ain’t like that,” and “BAM, on the ground motherfuckers.”

This category highlights Operators who have the capacity to reflect upon their current occupational position, and articulate a justification for their actions and decisions. Additionally, their expressions about family or professional conflict demonstrate an awareness of the ideological transformations and their reluctance to digress. The trajectories of socialization illustrate the analogy of becoming blue, and the actualization of that process is demonstrated by describing the final shades of blue. Transitional benchmarks during the SOG Operator's career cause the individual to experience ideological shifts in moral and professional perspectives. The series of liminal experiences present an opportunity for the Operator to color himself with the darkest, most deviant color of fraternal blue. The depth of commitment to these attitudinal shifts is examined in the analysis of the descriptive data.

### **Analysis**

Relying on Wolcott's (1994) matrix for conducting an analytical evaluation of the data as described in the previous section, I connect my analysis to a broader conceptual framework based on the anthropological theory of liminality. The research questions connect to an "external authority's specialized field" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 34) of theory. Turner's (1967) concept of liminality leads the composition of the questions determining if, through a trajectory of socialization, SOG Operators experience liminal, ideological, or perceptual transitions.

The four research questions are: 1) Does assignment into the SOG cause perceptual changes specific to organizational allegiance that are detrimental to providing quality service to the public? 2) Does a liminal state of ideological transition occur during the SOG socialization process preventing the transfer back into more traditional roles of policing? 3) What are the effects of occupational socialization on the personal lives of law enforcement officers assigned to SOG?

4) What are the effects of occupational socialization on the professional careers of law enforcement officers assigned to SOG?

Using the questions to assist the exploration of relationships between occupational socialization and liminal transitions, I establish criteria for the collection of data utilizing semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and autoethnographic illustrations. After dissecting the descriptive data into codes, then themes, it becomes clear there are direct relationships between the trajectory of socialization and liminality. I use the sliding scale of “becoming blue shades” as an analogy for visualizing the degrees upon which officers find themselves along the socialization experiences. While the police academy cadet finds himself at the lightest shade of blue, the subculturally socialized SOG Operator is located in the darkest shade of blue. This examination focuses on those Operators evolving into the darkest shades of blue.

Basing my analysis on the descriptive data, I am able to determine there are identifiable liminal benchmarks. Feldman (1976), Van Maanen (1975), Ashford and Saks (1990), Hazer and Alvares (1981), and McKittrick (1984) identify distinct stages and outcomes in their descriptive works on becoming socialized to the expectant informal behaviors within different occupational cultures. These researchers show notwithstanding the differences in their respective stages and outcomes; becoming socialized is inevitable and the degree of fitting in affects the individual’s ability to remain inside the organization.

The first liminal benchmark is the transition from civilian to police academy cadet, followed by the police academy graduation, and the third liminal benchmark occurs after the completion of an extensive period of field training and the officer is now an independently operating law enforcement officer.

These first three liminal benchmarks are unique to the remaining ones because they do not allow for the regression to previous stages. Obst, Davey and Sheehan (2005) show the influence of academy training as the civilian is introduced to a culture where individual characteristics are forfeited for the sake of homogeneous cohesion. They show the cadet willing to engage in risky behavior for the chance to establish personal relationships and peer clustering. Canberra's (1996) study of risk taking behavior examines the post-academy phase, and that the behavior learned in the academy engrains itself into a continuation of evolving countercultural ethos. My third liminal benchmark relates to Feldman's (1976) actualization stage and Van Maanen's (1975) encounter stage where the reality of the culture begins to identify the identity of the officer.

Beginning from a civilian perspective of no experience in the policing profession, the officer can only enter, learn, and train once. These first three liminal trajectory transitions slides the officer along the scale towards becoming a solid blue shade. The officer, socialized to remain silent, begins to formulate the thin blue line's concept of "us versus them." This oppositional relation is discussed by Van Maanen (1975), Simon and Pettigrew (1990) and Westwood (2002) as a cultural outcome of individuals solidifying ideologies in a form of Janis' (1972) groupthink.

The next liminal benchmark is the voluntary petition by the individual officer in the form of a transfer request or application for consideration into SOG. The decision to apply for SOG assignment is similar to the uninitiated external rational used to breach the initial liminal benchmark of entering into an unknown occupational ecology. The perception of SOG entitlement encouraging application for the assignment begins to differentiate non-SOG officers into groups of those with a propensity for the fringe risk taking lifestyle, versus those honoring the core values of the institution.

Those officers desiring an SOG assignment may experience one of two possible results. If accepted, the officer will cross through the fifth liminal benchmark to begin a resocialization process based on informal practices and culturally specific expectations congruent with the standards of the institutional fringe. If not accepted, the officer, who makes the organizationally public profession of interest into SOG must deal with rejection. This rejection places the officer along a fringe area within the traditional policing culture, and creates a professional fissure leading to the disillusionment and segregation from the non-SOG ideas. Because the desire to develop close personal friendships and peer clusters is so strong, rejection contributes to occupational isolationism and a continuation of darkening the shades for the non-SOG. Ashforth and Saks (1996) discuss the detrimental effects of occupational isolationism as a technique for causing job dissatisfaction by preventing the opportunity to establish close relationships. Hazer and Alvares (1981) show a satisfaction with the work performed sustains a positive correlation to occupational commitment. Those officers not accepted by the SOG, but remain in their non-SOG role may lose respect for the importance of their current mission. Van Maanen (1976), Girodo (2002), and Ulmer (1994) provide examples for the negative effects of not socializing with the desired peer group.

The officer accepted into the SOG crosses the fifth liminal benchmark as they experience the separation from the traditional institution, and are reintegrated into a new, animated environment with organizationally disparate ideologies. The officer, now categorized as Operator realizes a socialization distinction of title in addition to subcultural status. The completion of their initial indoctrination period provides sufficient time for fraternal acclimation and acceptance among their peers. Groupthink as Janis (1972) defines it represents this fifth benchmark.

The re-socialization of the Operator into the SOG may occur quickly as the individual desires the collaboration with cohorts. This need for social clustering engrains the Operator into the singular mindset demanding the abandonment of individual ideas and independent action. This is possibly the point of no returning to the non-SOG assignment, or the stage of liminality where the regression of assignment becomes increasingly difficult if not impossible, and the darkening of deep blue shades begins.

In the sixth liminal benchmark, my findings, similar to Girodo's (1997) show that the more years or greater the experiential intensity an Operator gains, the deeper a commitment to subcultural deviance becomes. Feldman's (1976) "outcomes" stage relates to this point of full enculturation. Van Maanen's (1975) institutional socialization stage of "metamorphosis" relates to Turner's (1967) liminality and includes the individual adjusting into the environmental ecology of the assignment, providing a conceptual foundation for this benchmark.

Analysis shows that the darkest shades of subcultural blue occur when the Operator transitions beyond the sixth liminal benchmark. This final transition of occupational evolution includes the emulation of fringe lifestyle characteristics and hedonistic behaviors associated with a disdain for traditional ideals and societal norms. The desire to shock the conscience of society through word, deed or action becomes a personal standard of operation. The necessity to segregate from the core values of the organization begins to blur the blue lines and demand a continuing allegiance to professional deviant behavior. This final liminal benchmark finds the Operator no longer struggling with moral confliction between the officer he used to be, and the SOG he now is. Although creating inter-personal conflict outside the job, this standard of behavior is no longer the exception, but the rule.

To relate the research to the questions, I observe a majority of SOG assignments to cause perceptual changes to organizational allegiance. My analysis, similar to Barker (2005) and Fitzgerald (2002) shows perceptual changes to be detrimental to the personal lives of Operators as evidenced by divorces, alcohol abuse, and the detachment from traditional social networking anchors. It is difficult to determine whether the quality of professional services is affected because of the subcultural characteristics. These challenges arise due to the nature of the SOG mission. The assignment requires Narcotics Operators to frequently associate with felons and drug dealers for the purpose of gaining criminal intelligence and arranging undercover operations. These associations involve the nurturing of relationships with confidential informants to establish a basis of trust between them. The difficulty is with determining whether the professional effectiveness is measured by the levels of associational depth with their criminal networks for disrupting criminal activity, or by the standards applied to the non-SOG for assessing the Operators conformance to traditional social expectations.

I found, as did Janis' (1972) examination of cohesive groups, that Operators may devolve into a deviant subcultural fraternity when associated with a purposeful segregation from the mainstream policing population, the homogenous environment of a high skill set unit assigned to a unique mission, and an autonomous culture of limited institutional accountability. Also reported by Ulmer (1994), the slide into deviance may be attributed to the daily exposure to the criminal elements they investigate, and the need to imitate the criminalistic, fringe lifestyle for the purposes of covert surveillance and undercover purchasing investigations. This exposure is similar to Ulmer's (1994) labeling of deviance through an investiture of the exposure to antisocial actions.

Analysis shows a liminal state of ideological transition occurring during the SOG socialization process. I was not able to determine if this ideological transition prevents a transfer back into more traditional roles of policing, but the overwhelming consensus was that none of them would consider a return to strictly non-SOG assignments. As one Operator from Louisiana put it, “I’d eat a bullet.” The descriptive findings express the negative effects of occupational socialization on the personal lives of law enforcement officers assigned to SOG. Queen (2005) and Librett (2006) describe the harmful results for families and friends as the Operator’s commitment to the assignment requires them to choose the fraternity over the civilian networks. Feldman’s (1975) “role management stage represents these costly effects as detailed by Johnson (1991) and Neidig, Russell and Seng (1992) report of law enforcement as aggressor or victim of domestic violence, alcoholism, divorce and Quinnet’s (1998) account of an officer suicide rate over three times the national average.

The characteristics associated with SOG fringe and deviant behavior suggests that their personal lives are limited to associations within that restricted sphere of companions. Most admitted to isolation from mainstream society, diminished relations with family and friends, and the desire to remain in the company of their SOG “brothers.” My analysis based on the Operators’ admissions to the chronic use of alcohol, infidelity, and attraction to violence and risk taking show behavior non-conducive to traditional civilian interpersonal relationships to include wife, children, family, and social associations beyond those of law enforcement. The detachment from civilian moral anchors is consistent with the works of Johnson (1991) and Neidig, Russell and Seng (1992), Quinnet (1998), Queen (2005) and Librett (2006).



Finally, I find the effects of occupational socialization on the professional careers of law enforcement officers assigned to SOG may not threaten or impede promotional opportunities. The main limitation to career advancement is the small number of Operators belonging to the specialized units. There can only be so much rank and supervisory authority among so few select individuals. The Operators assigned collateral duty and serve fulltime in non-SOG capacities demonstrate rank promotion at quicker rates as self-reported by association to their assignment to SOG SWAT. This same effect is documented by Walker's (2001) study to confirm aggressive officers traditionally referred to as EWS are actually promoted at faster rates than other officers are. I find the personal perception of the Operators relative to the negative attitudes of others directed to their SOG assignment was high, but there was no assessment method in my research design for determining the reality of biases or SOG discriminatory practices.

Although the SOG is unique in its policing practices, the essentials of Janis' (1972) groupthink make them similar to other sub sects within policing's milieu and non-law enforcement professions characterized by the domination of hegemonic masculinity. Manning's (1980) observation of the required execution of violence upon the public distinguishes policing from the others, but the operational ideological meshing of ideas, emotions and actions binds the white middle to lower class male to both realities. I found similarities between the SOG and other subcultures consisting of a restricted access membership, standards of similar dress, grooming and personal characteristics, common speech and behavioral patterns, and an identity formed by the collective momentum of the pack exercising groupthink.

The important linkage between the SOG and similar groups wielding fallible power and substantial influence over others such as Catholic priests, OMC, athletic sports coaches, stockbrokers, government leaders, or policy decision makers is the vulnerability in their respective groups to adopt faulty ideologies leading to detrimental actions. Janis (1972) identifies characteristics of groupthink creating an environment contrary to legitimate rational decisions leading to moral, ethical, and legal challenges for the collective cultural body. Because of the sacred canopy (Manning, 1980) of policing, society is assimilated to revere officers as dutiful servants. Demonstrating the parallels of perception and lifestyle characteristics between the deviant policing subculture and similar occupational features shines light into the dark blue environment of the SOG.

The analysis of descriptive data provides a depth of observation and prepares for the following strategy recommended by Wolcott (1994). The final strategy in decoding (Interpretation) and applying what is observed through observations and interviews includes my interpretation of the original information I collected.

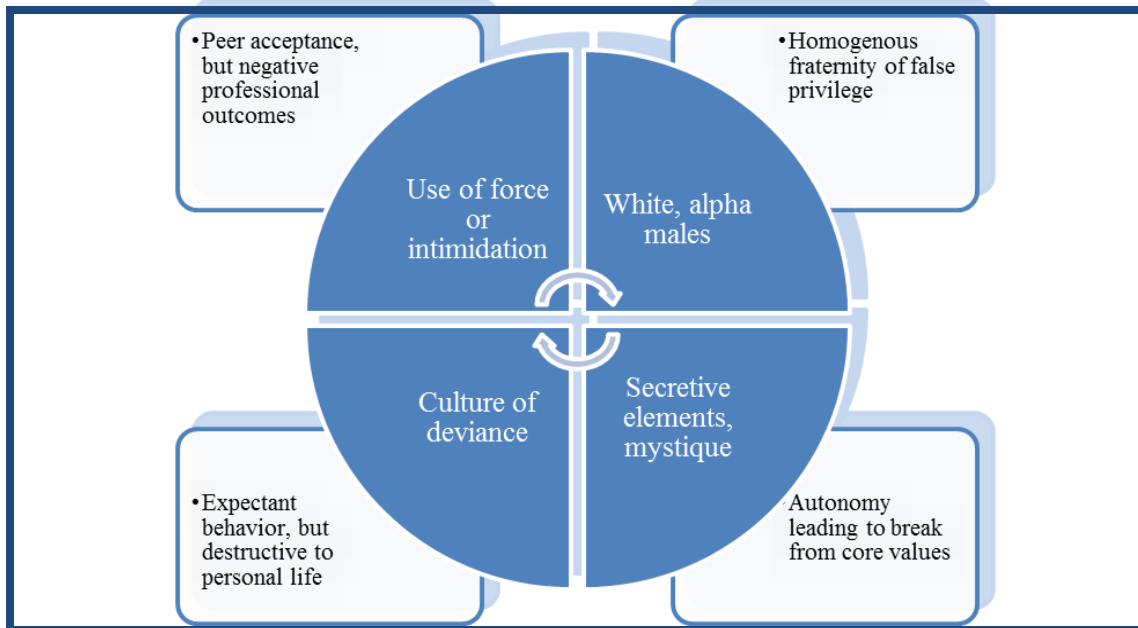
### **Interpretation**

Consistent with Wolcott's (1994) strategy for interpreting the analyzed information, I employ a technique of "I-witnessing" inspired by Clifford Geertz (1988) for connecting data with the wealth of personal experiences amassed during my SOG career. The initial epiphany for this topic of research occurred as I was describing my professional status and commented to a cohort group that I had "been on the outside" (from SWAT) for about two years. Prisoners have spoken that comment about their release from incarceration for decades, and it occurred to me that my informal speech is infused with criminalistic style jargon.

Although receiving a master of public administration degree, qualifying as a doctoral candidate, and professionally serve as a city chief of police, I still have an attachment to the fraternity of SOG. I was unaware that the subcultural environment experienced over those years connects through academic research. Literature searches and original data collections allow me to vicariously relive the SOG experience, and provide the clarity through an objective distance for placing the data and my reality into perspective. I came to understand the dynamic of occupational socialization in the SOG's professional deviance by a term I refer to as detrimental homogenetic entitlement. It reflects a deviant culture dominated by alpha males operating behind a veil of secrecy who inject force or intimidation as a resource for securing the desired outcomes of the cohesive group.

There is a negative outcome associated with operating within this culture of assumed entitlement as the select individuals become vulnerable to personal and professional damages. The subculture of the SOG fosters this homogenous membership of white alpha male Operators, who by the covert nature of their assignment are allowed extending degrees of latitude. This curiosity created by the secreting mystique of the SOG lends itself to an environment non-conducive to traditional core values of duty, honor, and service. The detrimental aspect of this term is directed to the Operator, who may suffer great personal and professional expense by participation in the hedonistic subculture. I have illustrated this (Insert 12) to link the connection between the SOG to other subcultures guided by the same principles of groupthink cohesion and hegemonic masculinity. I provide examples of similar subcultures earlier in the work (page 113) which when applied to this diagram, demonstrates the applicability of the general principles of detrimental homogenetic entitlement to more than only the SOG.

The significance is that within the most mainstream occupational or organizational cultures, the potential for subcultural deviance exists when the basics of detrimental homogenetic entitlement are allowed to foster.



Insert 12  
Detrimental Homogenetic Entitlement Diagram

The question begs to be asked; “Why does SOG participate in deviant activities?” Because it can. Manning’s (1980) assessment of police violence as a societal necessity is accurate, but the SOG Operator does not have the luxury of his theoretical perspective. Society submits to this violence as long as it is not too severely dispensed; not exposed through media; or, not used against someone closely associated to them. The SOG, whose mission is to pursue the most violent criminals, are afforded operationally creative liberty to deliver their tactics centering on force meeting force. SOG Operators, just as I did, quickly realized the usefulness of violence as a resource.

Wolcott's (1994) second technique for interpreting information is to link the scope of my research with larger issues through a theoretical perspective. My interpretation of the descriptive information and appreciation for the application of the series of liminal trajectories is that the SOG does experience ideological adaptations. Whether actual, perceptual, or imitative, the Operators do experience levels of transformation. Turner's (1964) concept of liminality leaves the possibility open for the individual to experience changes in perception, practice, or ideology. Because of external forces such as peer clustering influence, and internal predispositions or expectations, the shades to which an Operator is colored dark blue are dependent upon various factors. The expectation is that the experienced law enforcement officer possesses the ability to prevent or limit the powerful seduction of the subculture that engages in professional deviance. It is their level of vulnerability that determines the depth and deviance of the liminal transition.

It is my interpretation that the effects of groupthink, pack mentality and attractiveness to the perceived freedom of the others' worldview, entices officers with certain personal characteristics to become SOG Operators. Occupational socialization is a powerful influence, and when metered out in unassuming stages of trajectories, it becomes difficult for detecting or preventing the detrimental effects. In my opinion, it does not appear that the subculture of deviance is a result of personal or moral defect. There is an occupational dynamic associated with segregating specialized skill sets of Operators in an environment dominated by hegemonic masculinity.

Officers selected into the SOG are not made aware of the mental, physical and social effects of the subcultural socialization. Peer clustering is a behavioral pattern practiced through a lifetime of social interactions. The patterning of behaviors change to reflect the synergy of individuals interjected into the social arena.

I find that the subcultural SOG is a reflection of the manifestation of specialized skill set selection, the collective personal characteristics transformed during periods of liminal opportunities uniquely experienced in the SOG mission, and the institutionally autonomous operational environment of violence, silence, and risk. This overarching observation is detailed in the next section and includes practical suggestions to avoid the formation or substantiation of the subculture.

### **Conclusion**

This urban affairs project focuses on law enforcement's SOG for examining personal and professional effects of socialization. The secretive subculture within an already isolationist institution presents a vibrant topic for study. The description, analysis, interpretation of data, and the following recommendations are based on the literature review, data, and analysis. Using my fraternal membership was the most effective method for breaching the thin blue line. In so doing, a complex portrait of Operators emerged.

The SOG Operators were often dedicated to a fault, by committing themselves to the ideals of the SOG in the esprit de corps instead of the institutional core values. This type of research has obvious limitations, as it involves a covert participant observation. I took notes of the semi-structured interviews, but Operators in the southern United States continued mentioning the investigations of the NOPD officers and other prosecuted cases against police officers as reasons for not allowing tape recording. I also planned to present a pictorial ethnography of SOG appearances to include tattoos. Not one single Operator would allow me to photograph their tattoos, even those on unexposed body parts.

I address two issues relative to the SOG's subcultural disengagement from the core institutional ideas and mission. The first is the personal and the second is the professional effects on Operators. To lessen the personal impact of the subcultural effects, the individual officer willing to enter the SOG should be encouraged to have the full support of his social network system. His immediate and extended families, friends; both civilian and police peers, church and community service groups will anchor the individual in the civilian world. Law enforcement agencies should educate Operators about the detrimental effects of terminating these civilian social anchors, and encourage network building within the community.

If the officer accepts assignment into the SOG, law enforcement agencies need to encourage boundaries and limitations for SOG personnel. The SOG business office should be regarded as a professional work environment. The Operator will spend more time in that office socializing with his cohorts both on and off duty than with their respective families. This practice shows dedication to the team, but in actuality begins the process of selecting fraternity over family. The degree of personal relationships with other Operators should be limited for maintaining a healthy separation of work versus play expectations by the peer group. The main factor for minimizing the detrimental effects to the officer's personal life is maintaining objective distance from the subculture of the SOG.

There is a point of diminishing professional work efficiency for the SOG in relationship to time-in-assignment. There is a peak window of opportunity between the energetic naïve rookie and the "been there done that" veteran. The Operator should be limited to an established number of service years in the SOG, as long as the service is productive and free of disciplinary actions. I spent twelve years in a multijurisdictional narcotics task force, with three of those years operating as an agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force.

I experienced a point of enduring too much and needed to transfer out of the SOG for maintaining a productive work habit. In hindsight, I stayed in too long, suffering much personal loss for the sake of honoring the code and the SOG ideal. The subjects of my study also appear to slide deeper into a commitment of social deviance as their career longevity increases and the experiential intensity rises. While transferring Operators out of SOG might sacrifice a level of expertise, the ability to sustain an ethically high level of legitimate performance may be enhanced. The assignment over time becomes damaging y allowing the Operator, while initiating dangerous investigative cases, to cause irreparable personal harm. An alternative to the officer rotational practice based on time-in-assignment is the rotation of command staff every two years to ensure a fresh perspective. The commander should come from outside the ranks of the SOG. In the course of my Louisiana SWAT observations, I uncover a professional extortion used against a supervisor (former peer) with whom the Operators just served. A third alternative is to institute a strict hierarchical command structure with mid to upper level authorization afforded to a non-SOG supervisor. Placing administrative oversight outside the realm of SOG allows the Operators to train and conduct missions, but provides a constant reminder that they serve under the authority of the institution to support the core values of duty, honor and service.

These personal and professional recommendations also provide opportunities for future studies of the SOG phenomenon. Included are a few areas for potential research that I saw during my study. The first recommendation for future study addresses the above topic of diminishing returns over years assigned to SOG. An examination of the number of years it takes assigned to the SOG before Operators begin experiencing the diminished returns on their assignment will benefit the law enforcement profession.



The next suggestion for further research kept emerging during each observational opportunity. The question is, “How can police officers in Alaska act the exact same way as police officers in south Florida?” There is no standard training manual or unified national police academy. To explore the possibilities, I searched for an explanation of similarities among distant cultures to determine if there is applicable theory relating remote ancient cultural commonalities to the policing cultures. Tylor (1865) credits similarities in human mental processing and diffusion, or the evidence of contact among distant cultural regions as two explanations why cultures share traits yet distanced by continents. The exploration of disparate cultural similarities based on Tylor’s (1865) theories would provide another opportunity for future study.

A third suggestion is determining if policing’s chief executives are aware of the deviant subcultures operating within the ranks of their agencies. There is an unofficial tolerance for the SOG since it is necessary for investigating the seriously chronic and violent offenders. If deviance is allowed within an organization because commanders do not have the SOG background for understanding the complexity of the subculture, it is the failure of the institution’s executive level command. Conversely, commanders having SOG experience, yet allowing operational latitude because of a relational history also demonstrate executive level failure. This future study would provide the opportunity for an examining a top down ideology relative to acceptance of organizational segregation.

My final suggestion for future research is to expand the sociological scope of the occupational and organizational groups I established in relation to the subcultures of countercultural deviance based on the characteristics of Janis’ (1972) groupthink, Sykes and Matza’s (1957) neutralization theory, Punch’s (2009) slippery slope to deviance, and Turner’s (1967) liminality.

I chose the SOG for the purpose of methodological suitability, but my description elucidates the subculture's mystique and its ability for relating to other groups having characteristics of detrimental hegemonic entitlement.

The existence of SOG in the public safety sector affords a necessary service to both the institution of law enforcement and the community. The SOG targets the most dangerous criminals, yet their very existence cause concern for administrators and the public. The image of professional deviance is not always substantiated, but the actions of those setting the subcultural standard are recreated for popular public consumption in the media, movie and television fiction in programs such as "The Shield," and "Training Day."

I trust the SOG subculture and the salient influencing effects of the liminal states of transition become better understood. The demystification of the SOG, the influences promoting the substantiation of the subculture, and the detrimental effects to the individual committing their professional talents at great personal risk, demand a serious examination by the policing community. The officer, the agency, and the community deserve better. Don't be sheep!

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## **Appendix 1**

### *Cultural Similarities of the LEMC and OMC*

While conducting research for this project I saw the emergence of a relationship between two subcultures embodying the trajectories of socialization and groupthink. I include this appendix for demonstrating the similarities between two unrelated groups of individuals sharing characteristics developed through liminality in an environment of hegemonic masculinity. To demonstrate the phenomenon, I incorporate peer clustering supporting an isolationist environment where irrational actions and antisocial behaviors foster.

The similarities between the law enforcement motorcycle club (LEMC), and fringe organizations such as the OMC show a relational assimilation or acting out with deviant behaviors. The characteristics of both groups closely associate with Janis' (1972) risk taking, collective rationalization, an inherent morality, threatening to the others, refraining from expressing alternative opinions, misguided belief that decisions are unanimous with the group, and filtering of information from the hierarchy contradicting group cohesion. The LEMC are law enforcement officers (many SOG) joining together to create restricted access social clubs beyond the isolationist fraternity of policing. They consist of members sharing a passion for motorcycles, social events, alcohol, and portraying themselves as similar to the OMC.

The common behaviors between two ideologically opposed groups are described by Librett (2006) for confirming the connection between the LEMC and the OMC:

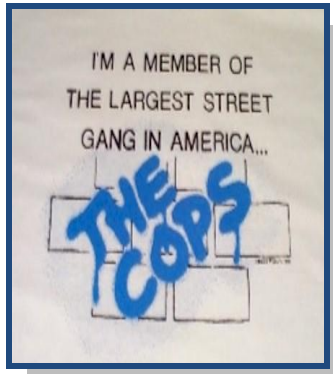
I compare outlaw bikers and police officers who band together in their off-duty hours in stylistically analogous motorcycle clubs – evocative of the same cultural themes and recreational activities as are ascribed to the 'outlaws'. The worldviews of both groups place a high premium on 'living large' and they also share a hedonistic perception on the meaning of leisure itself (2006, p.258).

I also illustrate the depth of the shared personal characteristics between both groups through the lived experiences of former Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) federal agent William Queen (2005) and chronicle the conflict of allegiances between his ATF coworkers and the OMC “brothers” he infiltrated during a twenty-eight month undercover operation. He states of his experience:

Hard core gangsters would be going to jail today, but for years I’d been calling these gangsters my brothers. I was both proud of my work as an undercover agent and sad about the ramifications...for some of the men I’d grown close to (Queen, 2005, p. 251).

The literature (Librett, 2006; Janis, 1972) and the real life experiences of SOG Operators like Queen (2005) provide an opportunity to document groupthink as an element of becoming fully socialized once an Operator has successfully crossed the series of liminal benchmarks.

Manning’s (1980) theory of legitimized police violence and peer acceptance is similar to Librett’s (2006) perspective of policing’s culture of cohesion emulating the gang culture outlook. Although groupthink applies to many social situations influenced by hegemonic masculinity, the examples of occupations and groups with similar subcultures listed earlier in the work differ from the SOG and OMC comparison due to several factors. The influence of violence, purposefully outward appearances of danger and intimidation, and the regular association with known criminal felons separate these two subcultures from stockbrokers and priests for example. The violence temperament is embodied in the deviance of the OMC, who display an intimidating outward appearance and a crudely hedonistic public behavior distinguishing themselves from traditional societal ideals for perpetuating the fringe lifestyle. Law enforcement imitates this posturing by promoting itself as the largest gang in the world and wears apparel promoting this (Insert 13; 14).



Insert 13  
Blue Line T-Shirts and Products



Insert 14  
Photograph by Emily Schwarze  
Staff / houmatoday.com (4-29-11)

The suggestion that LEMC/SOG are similar to OMC in behaviors, traditions, beliefs, and socioeconomic demographics should seem impossible, but research and observation show differently. The two cultures are similar. Librett (2006), a retired police officer from New York after twenty years, now a professor of criminal justice documents this connection. The depth of his research and professional experience laid the foundation for my comparative analysis between the similar subcultures. Librett's (2006) work focused on the cohesive nature of each group.

The OMC originated following World War II with the return of military veterans to the United States who became disillusioned with the new society awaiting them. Similarly, the SOG began developing criteria for undercover agents after World War II because of the changes in crime and national security threats. In 1967, the first official SOG unit (SWAT) was developed at the LAPD with returning military war veterans. Both groups are highly and purposefully visible to project an aura of dominance and superiority, not unlike the military offensives they once participated in to shock the senses and overwhelm their enemy through intimidation. Librett (2006) describes the similarities of both cultures as indistinguishable. He states in his findings:

They are characterized by hierarchical command structures, initiation rites and socialization processes, oaths of loyalty, codes of silence, a uniform mode of dress, and outwardly symbolic accoutrements of rank and achievement (2006, p. 257).

Librett (2006) shows the cohesive LEMC is similar to the OMC as both promote a deviant milieu of countercultural ideologies. His work displays the similarities on multiple levels to include surface and general appearance, anti-institutional posturing, racial and sexual attitudinal practices, and socioeconomic similarities. The career commitments made by LEMC lead to an affinity for the “edge” lifestyle similar to that of the hedonistic lifestyle of the OMC. The riskier the activity, the more enmeshed within the subculture. Librett (2006) reports that the thirst for pushing the “edge” and risking it all for a chance to feel the power of survival and conquest may be what connects and labels the two countercultural institutions as deviant.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) retired Special Agent William Queen (2005) lived the experiences observed by Librett (2006) and detailed by Ulmer (1994). He was also at times a victim of Janis’ (1972) groupthink while he enmeshed himself deep within the alpha-male driven fraternity. The melding of attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs led to an association with the deviant label, and Queen (2005) began to distance himself from the bureaucracy of the ATF and associate with the love of his OMC “brothers.” He wrote about his feelings:

Over the years, testifying against my former Mongrel brothers became a kind of personal purgatory (Queen, 2005, p. 256).

He served twenty-eight months of deep undercover operations while riding motorcycles with a violent OMC, the Mongrels of Southern California. Despite his high ethical character, he struggled with his sense of duty and acceptance by his “peers.”

The influence of socialization and groupthink are closely related and linked by the element of hegemonic masculinity. Queen (2005) further illustrated the conflict between his duties and his associational loyalty by this statement:

God, I wished I could be a regular cop like Zack. It was all black and white to him... I'd not only witnessed it and lived it – I had felt it... We could take them down...prosecute them for...rape and homicide. The thing we could never attack was the love these guys felt for their brothers; in many cases it was a love stronger than for their blood relations (Queen, 2005, pp. 258-259).

I provide practical illustrations of the effects of liminality, occupational socialization and groupthink in my comparative analysis. The two subcultures are different in purpose and mission statement for demonstrating the strength of these three elements. The comparative analysis provides the following description and visual representation of those similarities.

During the course of this research project, I discovered similarities between the SOG and the OMC. The purposefully hedonistic portrayals of fringe type behaviors led me to examine the two subcultural worldviews. There is evidence available demonstrating the fringe organizations are more closely aligned than mere imitation. Based on Librett's (2006) documentation, Queen's (2005) lived account, and my professional experiences with both subcultures, a comparative analysis illustrates the linkages between two antisocial fraternities. A chart comparing characteristics between the two groups allows me to develop a visual representation of the depth of commonalities. The chart titled, *The OMC v. LEMC Characteristic Comparison Chart* provides an initial observation and an introduction to future examination. It lists the unique characteristics of the OMC and LEMC in singular columns, and then the similarities shared by both are combined in the final column. The similarities exceed the differences and prove the nature of associational imitation going deeper than an imitative surface appearance.

<b>OMC</b>	<b>LEMC</b>	<b>Both</b>
Life of Crime	Oath to Uphold Law	Band together off “duty”, Freedom from doldrums, need adventure.
1% Patch	1* Patch	Power to influence social control, Enjoys living on the “Edge”
Legitimizing business	Emulate the “Others”	Biker “worldview” includes dominant male & submissive/serving female. Badge Bunnies & Biker Mamas
Infiltration of minorities	Loss of homogeneity through affirmative action hiring	Mental-physical toughness, dominant, alpha male Patches, pins, ribbons, colors, emblems, mottos
		Militaristic organizational structures, Alcohol, violence and tattoos culture
		Minimal naturalistic research conducted. Both demand privacy & resist external forces. Total unity, group cohesion, brotherhood, mystical aura of power and violence.
		Probationary periods, rewarding of Colors; rocker patch- Agency Shield
		Socialization process involves total immersion into culture. Sacrifices of personal privacy to organizational control.  F.T.W. (Fuck The World) mentality

*The OMC v. LEMC Characteristic Comparison Chart*

Directed by the results of the *OMC v. LEMC Characteristic Comparison Chart*, I conducted additional research to compare the academic and experiential understandings of these two groups to their own perceptual ideologies that influence the creation of organizational images. The FBI (2009) identifies four OMC as the “Big Four” based on membership, criminal influence and detrimental social influence.

The Big Four are identified as the Hells Angels, the Banditos, the Pagans, and the Outlaws. The FBI's 2009 National Gang Threat Assessment describes the OMC's activities:

...posing a threat to public safety in local communities in which these gangs operate because of their wide ranging criminal activity, propensity to use violence, and ability to counter law enforcement efforts. OMGs are highly structured criminal organizations whose members engage in criminal activities such as violent crime, weapons trafficking, and drug trafficking. OMGs maintain a strong centralized leadership that implements rules regulating membership, conduct, and criminal activity. As of June 2008 state and local law enforcement agencies estimate that 280 and 520 OMGs are operating within the United States (FBI, 2009, p. 8).

The LEMC, mostly SOG, band together during off duty hours and limit participation based on occupational assignment clusters and the love of motorcycles. Although not criminalistic by creation, LEMC emulate the OMC so that deciphering who is who becomes difficult. I selected four LEMC to compare to the OMC by conducting an internet query by typing "law enforcement motorcycle clubs" into a search engine. The results list over forty clubs listed on the World Wide Web. Before opening any of the LEMC websites for content, I printed the screen page containing links to the LEMC's webpages and selected four clubs. Once the four LEMC were chosen, I examined all eight websites (four OMC and four LEMC) for content and context. I created a comparison chart based on my observations and began to code the images on each motorcycle site. These codes are used to populate the chart of all eight clubs demonstrating similarities.



The OMC websites selected were from clubs known by the FBI as the “Big Four”:

- Pagan’s Motorcycle Club <http://www.jailedpagans.com/>
- Bandidos Motorcycle Club <http://www.bandidosmc.com/>
- Hells Angels Motorcycle Club <http://www.hells-angels.com/>
- Outlaws Motorcycle Club <http://www.outlawsmc.com/>.

The four LEMC websites selected include:

- Iron Pigs Motorcycle Club - <http://www.ironpigs.com/Homemain.htm>,
- Untouchables MC - <http://www.untouchablesmcnj.com/>,
- Iron Brotherhood MC - <http://www.ironbrotherhoodmc.com/>, and
- Wheelmen MC - <http://wheelmenlemc.com/>.

The *Motorcycle Club Website Survey* documents results from each site surveyed and lists the similarities between the subcultures. While examining the websites, I saw both subcultures relish secrecy and anonymity, yet post their respective websites on the internet for public consumption. This may serve as another “in your face” tactic from a technological perspective, as all sites contained threatening logos, photographs, and symbolism. Skulls, club colors, and demonic images dominated the artistry. The majority of sites offered sign in sections and contact options for recruitment or fundraising. Pictures posted of events, riders, parties and various activities were near impossible to distinguish between the OMC and LEMC, and the “edge” lifestyle is obviously portrayed by both.

Despite the countercultural deviance practiced through participation in these clubs, the vast majority had the wherewithal to protect their site's images through registered trademarks and copyrighting licenses. Clubs use these restrictions to market merchandise to further support their activities. The most noticeable element of each site was how interchangeable all were with each other. Whether by design or coincidence, the *Motorcycle Club Website Survey* illustrates the differences between these contrasting social organizations are negligible and purposefully portray deviant lifestyles outside the acceptable realm of the public. Both subcultures intentionally categorize themselves as the "others" and appear to enjoy operating within society's margins.

The examination confirms my professional experiences and the work of Librett (2006) particular to LEMC distancing themselves from the policing norms to devolve into a deviant subculture of disengagement from the institutional organization of law enforcement. The desire to live on the "edge" and within the margins of society is a powerful draw to officers escaping the daily regimented operating procedures that direct policing activities. This comparative analysis of the OMC and LEMC provides a unique look at the separation officers may find themselves from the core institutional ideals. In an occupation where perception becomes reality, the imitative attraction to the OMC through dress, behavior, and ideology threatens the core institution of law enforcement. The example illustrates the possibility of any combination of unlike groups finding a majority of similarities when engaged in a subculture defined by the detrimental hegemonic entitlement.

MC Website	Pagans	Hells Angels	Outlaws	Bandidos	Untouchables	Wheelmen	Iron Pigs	Iron Brotherhood
Club Patch	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
"MC" Symbol	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1% Symbol	1		1	1				
1* Symbol					1	1		1
99% Symbol							1	
Demonic Symbols	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Harley-Davidson Images	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Portray Fringe Lifestyle	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Trademark Warnings		1	1	1	1	1		1
Motto/Creed	1	1	1	1		1	1	1
Highly Stylized Site	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Heavy Metal Music	1		1	1		1		1
History Page		1	1		1	1	1	1
Our Colors Page		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Memorial Page		1	1	1	1			
Merchandise Page	1	1		1	1			
Other Chapters Page		1	1	1	1		1	1
Links Page	1	1		1		1	1	1
Guestbook Page		1	1	1		1		1
Members Only Page						1		
Photographs Page	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Events Page		1	1	1	1	1		1
Women Not Equal	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Motorcycle Club Website Survey

## Appendix 2

### *Institutional Review Board*

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

University of New Orleans

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#### Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Pamela J Jenkins

Co-Investigator: Scott Silverii

Date: November 17, 2011

Protocol Title: "Traditional Ethnography of SOG Officers"

IRB#: 02Nov11

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that the information obtained is not recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair

UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

## **Vita**

Louis Scott Silverii received his Bachelor of General Studies in 1992 from Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. In 2004, he enrolled into the University of New Orleans' (UNO) Master of Public Administration program and graduated with honors in 2006.

Silverii continued graduate studies with the Doctor of Urban Studies program at UNO in the fall of 2007. He successfully completed all program requirements, and led by his dissertation committee (Dr. Pam Jenkins, Dr. Martha Ward, Dr. David Gladstone and NOPD Superintendent, Ronal Serpas, PhD) will graduate from the UNO on December 17, 2011.