

Guns and Feelings:
Emotionality and the Arming of Probation and Parole Officers

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Abstract

This report is about the serendipitous nature of qualitative research. It is also about emotional reactions to workplace change. Specifically, I discovered that the legislation enabling probation and parole officers to carry a weapon necessitated emotion work directed at reconciling a change in occupational role as well as self. For me and the officers I came to know as friends and colleagues, carrying a weapon served as a symbolic flash point for the deep-seated motives that define and give substance to the *raison d'être* for parole and probation and by association what it means to be committed to change – both personal and social. The way the officers worked out their emotions, the sense they made out of the policy, revealed their emotional ties with what they do for a living. Similarly, I had to come to terms with what I do for a living. Like officers, I continue to seek balance. My personal commitment to change through the practicing of a “liberating pedagogy” has to be reconciled with student needs and institutional change.

And they decreed in SENATE BILL NO. 367 89TH, GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1997, of the great state of Missouri that:

- 217.710. 1. Probation and parole officers, supervisors and members of the board of probation and parole, who satisfy the requirements of subsection 2 of this section shall have the authority to carry firearms to carry out the provisions of sections 217.650 to 217.810 as authorized by policies and operating regulations of the department.
2. The department shall determine the content of the required firearms safety training and provide firearms certification and re-certification training for probation and parole officers, supervisors and members of the board of probation and parole. A minimum of sixteen hours of firearms safety training shall be required. In no event shall firearms certification or re-certification training for probation and parole officers and supervisors exceed the training required for officers of the state highway patrol.
3. The department shall determine the type of firearm to be carried by the officers, supervisors and members of the board of probation and parole.
4. Any officer, supervisor or member of the board of probation and parole that chooses to carry a firearm in the performance of such officer's, supervisor's or member's duties shall purchase the firearm and holster.
5. The department shall furnish such ammunition as is necessary for the performance of the officer's, supervisor's and member's duties.

Why Arm Officers?

The passage of such legislation in Missouri as well as nationwide is precipitated by several factors ranging from the personal to the organizational to the societal. At the personal level many officers believe that they are working with a more “dangerous” clientele. Often the element of danger is related to regional issues. For example, officers in southwest Missouri are dealing with methamphetamine users. This type of drug user can be quite violent and unpredictable. In urban areas, such as St. Louis and Kansas City, officers have caseloads that cover a variety of offenders. These caseloads include the non-violent drug user as well as the violent drug distributor; but they also include dead beat dads and sex offenders. At the organizational level, probation and parole officers are moving towards a new professionalism modeled after state highway patrol associations. A part of this professionalism is the taking on of “peace officer” status and a move from “social work” status (Abadinsky 1999). Probation and parole officer associations have endorsed such a change in status with the intent of: 1) having more access to state resources often of which go towards law enforcement; 2) gaining more respect within the state system; and, 3) increased pay by a change in classification (Missouri Probation and Parole Officers Association Newsletter 1997). At the societal level, public opinion, which drives public policy, is currently entrenched in a crime control model. In this context the arming of officers seems only logical.

Context: Balancing Client Needs with Community Protection

Historically, probation and parole officers have been aligned with helping clients reintegrate into the community (Keve 1979). Over time, helping the ex-offender while protecting the community has become an increasingly problematic feature of probation and parole work. Specifically, an emphasis on control has replaced an emphasis on rehabilitation throughout the

criminal justice system (Beckett and Sasson 2000; Irwin and Austin 1994). Nowhere is this more strikingly revealed than in the field of community corrections (Geerken and Hayes 1993; Richards and Jones 1997). An emphasis on control has led to an increase in intermediate sanctions ranging from electronic monitoring to shock incarceration to intensive supervision.

Most of what we know about arming officers comes from survey research and policy analysis (Abadinsky 1999, Brown 1990, Keve 1979, Sigler and McGraw 1985). This work helps to outline the scope and magnitude of changes that arming officers can bring to the dual role expectation of protecting the community and helping the ex-offender. However, what is missing from this outline is a narrative account of being caught up in a life-changing situation driven by historical and political contingencies. Faced with a hostile political climate and an increasingly diverse client population, officers struggle to maintain a balanced sense of self. This self is linked to a role that is distinguished by the statement “We are not cops and we are not social workers, we are PROBATION AND PAROLE OFFICERS” (MPPOA 1997). Such a change in self also involves the emergence of emotions. Ultimately, it is a narrative description of these emotions, often trivialized or ignored in social science that I want to share with the reader. I also want to give the reader an idea of how emotions as a research focus emerged during the research process. The narratives that follow are written in the first person. I use pseudonyms throughout and take care to preserve the anonymity of my informants.

Getting Started

As a tenure track professor at a state university, my role expectations include teaching, research, and “community service” activities. To fulfill my community service obligations, I am a member of the Citizens Advisory Board and have worked closely with probation and parole officers as academic supervisor for student interns. In my capacity as a Board Member I have an

ongoing legitimate role in the setting. I would classify my involvement, both professional and volunteer, in the setting as peripheral. However, my interactions with officers "were significant and frequent" enough to yield recognition by members that I was an insider (Adler and Adler 1987, p. 36). Consequently, this placed me in a position to conduct research on the newly passed legislation allowing the arming of officers.

Upon hearing of this change in policy at a board meeting, I immediately assumed that such a change would greatly confound their complex and delicate balancing act between control agent and helping agent (Brown 1990). I thought it reasonable to assume that arming officers might have a significant effect on the relationships they have with clients and on the way officers think about themselves and their work. I based these assumptions on my experience as a case manager at a halfway house for ex-offenders. In this setting I had to confront the same problematic balancing act (Lehnerer 1992, 1996).

In a private memo sent to Alice Bennett, a highly respected unit supervisor at District 66, I asked if I could meet with her to discuss a research project. I approached Alice first because she and I had developed a good working relationship over the years I had been a board member. In addition, we had a friendly relationship and shared in social activities that were not work related. Because of our friendship I was rather forthcoming about my emotional reaction to the recently implemented policy regarding the arming of officers. Specifically, I was convinced that officers would have to deal with a changed perception of self if they chose to carry a gun; the most significant issue being the possibility of using deadly force.

After my meeting with Alice I was given permission to attend the monthly staff meeting of the probation and parole officers of District 66 to "plead my case." At this meeting I explained my interest in the project and distributed a letter to officers describing my intent and

how to contact me. In this letter I chose to be forthright about my belief that I was "personally interested in the *inevitable change* [emphasis added] in role brought on by carrying a weapon." Knowing full well that some officers would interpret this statement as "she is biased" my presentation of self at the meeting emphasized objectivity. I clearly stated that I was looking for factors such as educational background, years of service, and client population that might correlate with the decision to arm one's self. After this meeting several officers agreed to be interviewed.

Respondents: Some Background

There are fifty-one officers in District 66; seven of whom are classified as Correctional Service Trainee (CST). Of the forty-four remaining officers four are unit supervisors leaving forty rank and file with the classification of probation and parole officer. I interviewed all four unit supervisors (two women and two men) and the District Administrator who is responsible for the smooth running of the entire southwest region of the state. I interviewed one CST (a woman) and ten rank and file officers (five women and five men). All interviews were at the officers' convenience in regard to time and place. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours and were tape-recorded except for the District Administrator's.

Officers at District 66 handle "regular probationers" as opposed to intensive supervision probationers. In short, the clients for these district officers are considered to be in need of moderate but not intensive monitoring. The decision to put a client on regular probation versus intensive supervision is often arbitrary and would demand an entirely different paper on the decision-making process (see Spencer 1993). Specifically, instant offense, past records, and viable support systems often have little to do with who is on regular probation versus who is on intensive supervision. Suffice it to say these officers deal with a variety of clients whose

offenses range from DWIs to stealing to drug use and distribution to sex offenders. Many clients are first time probationers; others are parolees on their second or third attempt to "reintegrate into the community."

Officers work with clients in the city, as well as the "out counties." The "out counties" surround the city and cover most of the southwest region of the state. These counties are sparsely populated with limited resources in terms of job opportunities, educational opportunities, and support services. Consequently, officers who work in the "out counties" have to be very resourceful to "facilitate change" in their clients. In addition, home visits in the "out counties" have the potential for being quite risky. Risk has been escalated with a proliferation of "meth labs" in the area.

Respondents: Opponents, Pragmatists, Supporters

As I set up interviews with officers, I quickly learned that all officers supported the right to arm regardless of how they personally felt. In other words, they were in favor of the enabling legislation. No one wanted to be on the record as opposed to choice. The respondents fell into three camps on the issue of arming: the opposed, the pragmatists, and the proselytizers. The first group I would characterize as adamantly opposed to the change. My presence gave them an opportunity to vent to someone with a sympathetic ear. In contrast, there were those respondents whom I categorize as pragmatists. These respondents were still having internal dialog in regard to their position on this legislation. Specifically, they had not yet decided if they would arm themselves. Consequently, they were opting to go through the weapons training, looking at gun catalogs, and doing some target shooting. I was an outside observer with whom they could share their ambivalent thoughts. The third group of respondents, the supporters, were vocally

supportive of the legislation, already had guns, and were in the process of purchasing another gun which fit legislative guidelines.

It is worth noting that five officers by means of direct personal statement said they would not interview with me because they felt that "I was being too subjective." Unlike non-respondents these officers had an ongoing relationship with me. They worked with me on Board projects; or, they supervised interns. Because of these working relationships these officers felt obligated to account for their refusal to participate in this project. In the process of accounting for their refusal to participate, this group of non-respondents often engaged me in informal conversations that were proselytizing in effect. A typical conversation taken from field notes will illustrate my point.

Traveled to the maximum security prison for men with Katie Meyer, Grace Barnes, and Theresa Osburn. The purpose of the trip was to meet with the inmates who conduct the "walls program" for youth. This program is a ninety's version of scared straight. As a member of the Citizens Advisory Board that provides funding for this program I had voiced my concerns about its content [in terms of effectiveness]. I was invited to go on this trip so that I would better understand those involved and their goals. In regard to weapons we talked a little about it on the way back. All three supported carrying weapons and have decided to carry for situational reasons. For example, Katie is quite committed to carrying weapons. Her family background as well as her educational training is in law enforcement. She truly believes that her clients are dangerous and that she needs a gun for personal protection. In addition, she is an active member of the State Officers' Association who pushed for this legislation. As I remember, Grace and

Theresa both focused on the issue of protecting themselves and their families from harm. It is noteworthy that Katie has drawn on her friendship relations with other female officers in particular to encourage them to go to the shooting range with her. In effect, this has become a sort of bonding experience for these women.

The overriding purpose to this conversation was to convince me that officers were only choosing to arm themselves for “personal safety” and that the presence of a gun would not alter their emphasis on client rehabilitation.

Analysis: An Early Statement

In my first attempt to get a “big picture” of the “gun project,” I identified three rational features of an officer’s biography which seemed to be influencing their decision about whether or not to carry a weapon: 1) educational background, 2) perceived risk associated with home visits; and 3) occupational status. First, the influencing contingency of educational background became very salient. Those officers who were trained in vocationally oriented programs such as criminal justice, law enforcement, or the military as opposed to those officers who were trained in the social sciences such as sociology or psychology tended to see the arming of probation officers as a logical response to the increasingly violent clientele they had to manage. Ironically, when these officers described their caseloads their clients tended to be typically described as “non-violent.” Second, the situational factor of home visits became another recurrent influencing contingency. Officers described home visits as potentially dangerous but again as with the violent client their home visits were not particularly occasions of threat. If a home visit was perceived as threatening officers had a series of “protective practices” such as “going in teams,” “honking the horn when they arrived,” “using the two knock rule,” or “just not going in.” As one

officer said, "If they don't answer there is probably a good reason." The third analytical category emerging was the occupational status of the officer coupled with years of experience.

Supervisors in the district are unanimously opposed to officers carrying weapons. As one supervisor said, "This is going to change my world." This early analysis was certainly on target when looking at "rational" factors. As I listened to more and more officers these factors remained salient. Typically this research project would have stopped at this point. But the serendipity of qualitative research brought in another dimension of interest – the emotional.

Analysis Delayed: Life Gets In the Way

Lofland and Lofland write "the fieldwork approach to social research fosters a pronounced willingness, even commitment, on the part of the investigator to orient to her or his own extra-social-scientific concerns; that is, to the concerns that you bring to the situation of doing social analysis" (1995, p. 11). This statement is couched in the context of starting "where you are," but I suggest it can be equally applicable to a project begun. Three extra-social-scientific concerns of life altered the research process: 1) time constraints; 2) health deterioration; and 3) emotional introspection.

Time. At my university women's issues are not high profile. Consequently, those of us who try to keep these issues alive by means of such annual events as Women's History Month (March) are few in number and our energies are stretched to the limits. Along with the demands of this "service activity," I had a teaching load that was time consuming. I had three separate course preparations; two of which were new. In addition, I had paid homage to the third part of the 'holy trinity' of academic life by completing a publication project (Lehnerer 1998).

As April approached I was secure in the belief that I had achieved the expected balance between service, teaching, and research. All I had to do was get through April and early May

and then I would have the summer to devote to the "weapons research project." There was a glitch. I had to go to the Sociological Practice Association (SPA) Meetings in June. At these meetings, I was to present a paper on "intervention in the classroom," participate in a panel on the certification of undergraduate sociology programs, and attend the Board meetings of the SPA as recording secretary. In addition, the week prior to these meetings my husband and I planned to make our annual pilgrimage to New York to attend the Belmont, the culmination of the Triple Crown and a "cannot miss" for serious horse race fans.

Health. While in New York, I fell and dislocated my elbow. The mundane activities of everyday life such as personal hygiene, dressing, and eating became problematic. Most importantly, my ability to write and work at the computer was impaired. Whenever I attempted to do either of these tasks, I experienced physical discomfort and psychological frustration. Carolyn Ellis teaches that sociologists have been reluctant to acknowledge the physiological component of lived experience. At best, the physical may be recognized as possibly "leaking" into consciousness (Ellis 1991, p. 25). Pain, she reasons, may trigger thoughts of good health and the loss of it. Being in pain evokes a dwelling on loss and that sense of loss can become an organizing device of personal time. I began to dwell on what I imagined I could not do in the future. Thoughts of future loss brought on memories of lost opportunities in the past. Because I had this writing project in front of me most thoughts were linked to my academic career and my upcoming application for tenure and promotion. One more publication, especially a "serious one" in my field, would place me in a more competitive position.

Emotion. I engaged in internal dialogue to move beyond my depression, but my arguments were unconvincing. I made flippant statements to others that my health problems were not "life threatening just life inhibiting." I tried to convince myself and others that this was

no big deal. I understood the rules of emotional work (see Hochschild 1983). I knew that individuals with social and material resources (upper middle class, white, higher education, intact family) are not allowed to sit on a "pity pot" for very long. But depression had definitely set in. I slept a lot, rented movies, and watched television rather than read or write.

Hearing and Feeling Emotions

Seven months had passed. I began to listen to the officers' tape-recorded interviews. As I listened to these interviews, I could hear their ambivalent emotions. Emotions linked to their stated concerns about a change in their roles, a change in client perceptions, and the altering of the work environment. As Denzin suggests, "lived feelings communicate an emotional definition of the situation that others can enter into" (Denzin 1985, p. 230). The frustration, physical and psychological discomfort, fear, and sadness I was experiencing allowed me to enter into the feeling world of these officers. These shared emotions and feelings became the second focus of the "weapons project."

Frustration. Carrie worked with a special caseload of individuals who had been identified as gang members involved in such gang related activities as drug use and distribution, transport of drugs, and violence. In describing how I felt about this interview after it was conducted I wrote in my methodological notes that "I was pleasantly surprised that Carrie was opposed to this legislation." I went on to write "her frankness was refreshing." Carrie made it clear that not being armed was her strength. As an unarmed officer focusing on helping clients, she did not pose a physical threat. She believed her situation would surely be compromised once clients knew officers had the option to arm themselves. She was frustrated with the fact that some officers felt this need.

Cherise was a young officer who had been with the agency eight months. Although she was undecided about arming herself, she did support the right of officers to do so. Like Carrie she had a caseload of clients who would be classified as dangerous, specifically "meth" users. And, in contrast, it was this dangerous clientele that triggered her belief that officers should be armed. She reasoned that arming herself would reduce her vulnerability rather than increase it. Her position was bolstered by supportive relations with local police officers who also thought she should be armed. Their only concern about arming was with the type of gun being state mandated. Specifically, the state agency was requiring officers to purchase, at their own expense, a six shot revolver. In addition, the barrel of this gun could not be shorter than two and a half inches nor longer than four inches. Lastly, this gun had to be concealed at all times. As Cherise said, "Imagine me trying to conceal a weapon like that; not to mention the fact that it could easily go off by accident." According to police officers what Cherise really needed was "a small semi-automatic 9mm magazine fed pistol which is easy to use and very effective." Believing the legislative gun criteria was a way for administration to dissuade officers from choosing to arm themselves; Cherise directed her frustration at administration not colleagues.

Emotional discomfort. Emotional discomfort was talked about in terms of feelings related to the lived body (Denzin 1985). This lived experience covered: 1) changes to the physical environment; and, 2) changes in presentation of self. At this point in the project it had not been decided if officers would carry weapons in the office although it was generally assumed that they would. Many of my respondents expressed a concern that their environment (office) would be less secure if some officers were armed. Evidence of this concern was the fact that most respondents talked about the "inevitable accident." Officers made jokes about the thin walls and how their only hope was if a gun did go off accidentally or on purpose (at a client) that

the bullet would hit a wall stud. When interviewing Dave Lynch, a supporter of arming, he commented that he thought Angie “was an unlikely candidate for carrying a gun.” He based this comment on the fact that Angie’s office was decorated in “angel motif.” We both laughed at the placing of guns and angels in the same office space, especially the office space next to his. I reassured him that I had information from her mentor and trainer that she was becoming very adept at using her weapon. "Oh, good!" he said. Another source of physical irritation was the addition of "Fort Knox," a huge vault designed to hold 40,000 rounds of ammunition and gun storage cabinets. Both of these intrusive items took up precious space in an office that was rapidly becoming cramped.

Since guns had to be concealed, presentation of self would be impacted. Officers were used to being dressed informally. Women wore casual dresses or a skirt and blouse. Men wore polo shirts and cotton slacks. A concealed weapon would require that all officers would have to wear some sort of a jacket. Officers joked about how everyone would be forced to look more professional; every day would be “court day.” In a less jocular tone they talked about the expense of the gun, holster, and the clothing required to conceal them both.

Fear. As was the case in all my interviews I asked officers if they thought arming themselves would alter their relationships with clients. In the interview with Cherise I tried to focus on my assumption that the arming of officers would have an effect. But, she would not buy into my argument. In fact, she drew upon her background in family counseling to counter my claim. She insisted that her style of working with clients was not control oriented but "a much more personal relationship approach; that's not going to change." She went on to say, "I think it will affect me a lot more than it will affect them." In this statement Cherise was alluding

to the fact that if she did choose to carry a weapon she would have to come to terms with the use of deadly force. In a later interview with another officer this fear was clearly articulated.

A recent transfer to District 66, Wanda had four years service with the state. She was "adamant that she wasn't going to carry."

There's going to be a lot of stuff coming with this other than the fact that you are carrying a firearm. I think they are going to cover [at the upcoming training session] the issues that if you do have to take this firearm out and you do have to shoot it at somebody or shoot somebody what impact is that going to have on you as an officer and on your life. I just can't imagine [shooting at someone], that has to [pause] I almost ponder [pause] you couldn't even hear that sickening, deadening thud when it hits someone. I don't know if your adrenaline would be so hyped up and the noise would be so much that you wouldn't [hear the shot]. I just can't imagine. I've never even come close to being afraid in a home [visit] to the point that I would remotely need a firearm.

In addition to this fear and dread of the use of deadly force, Wanda like many other officers I interviewed was fearful that the "gung ho" types in the office were not taking the use of deadly force seriously.

I really think everybody's senses are going to be heightened and I really think there is going to be an incident within the first year. Somebody's going to use that weapon and they are going to have to question whether they used it appropriately or not. I hope that's not true but I almost hope it happens relatively quick and that it's a minor incident so that officers statewide who are carrying and who are not can have a little reality check. I think there are a lot of us who think we are above

that, that we don't need reality checks. We don't need to smack you across the face and say, 'Hey, think about what you are doing here' .

Sadness. I felt sadness as officers sensed an impending change in their self-identities. The carrying of a weapon was not a part of the job description when they chose this career. In fact, the job description that all officers receive prior to their probationary period as a Correctional Service Trainee emphasizes non-threatening activities such as "checking social histories," "conducting investigations," "formulating placement plans," and "counseling with clients concerning their personal problems." Everyone I interviewed stated at some point in their interview that they believed in the commitment to treat "their clients" with respect, concern, and honesty. For example, Burt, a unit supervisor, who had twenty-eight years of service put it in the following way:

We have to hope that anybody we hire can see the mix of roles that are on this job and be able to perform all of those roles. Now the control agent, the person who enforces special conditions and is an officer of the court reports violations and checks client compliance with things the client is supposed to do and all those other things associated with authority may be handled very well with somebody whose got that one philosophical stance, being someone police oriented. That's not even half the job. The other part of the job or parts of the job deal with assistance, with motivation and encouragement to deal with developing needs assessment, treatment referral, developing coalitions of support with the client's family and working on human terms with significant others to form support systems that reinforce positive behavior and positive gains and don't reinforce

negative gains. . .If you only can wear one of those hats and not the other some would say you are in the wrong line of work.

Giving situational context to Burt's statement was Lyle, an officer who had been with the district for three years.

We do have a unique relationship with these people. A guy yesterday hit his girlfriend, beat up another guy, kicked in a door. Basically broke the law by kicking in a door. He admitted that he hit her and worked this guy over pretty good. He just lost it; he thought she was screwing around on him. He's telling me this yesterday. Basically I could tell the guy is visibly distraught. . . He's opening up and expressing these things to me. . . things they wouldn't tell a police officer because they know it's going to be used against them. It's unbelievable the amount of information, if you just ask, that they'll tell you; if you can get them to believe that you have rapport. . . it may become more difficult for us because now we have a gun.

Listening to older officers I felt a sense of sadness as they compared themselves to the "new breed" of officer. Their perception was that the wave of the future in community corrections at the rank and file level was moving away from treatment and towards law enforcement. Officers commented on the changing makeup of the type of individuals who are coming into the profession. For example, Wanda talks about how she will be a "has been" in the near future:

Cause we [sociology majors versus criminal justice majors] deal with our clients different. If someone comes in and they are not doing [varying conditions of probation/parole] I don't yell and scream, 'You didn't do it.' It's like, 'Where are

you going with this? Why are you doing this? This is stupid. This isn't in your best interests.' We take this different little tack with them. You start hiring all these criminal justice majors, again, we're really going to be dated. It's almost like they can point to you and say you were hired within these dates when sociology majors were coming in. They're going to have a little red tag that says I was hired between the years 92 and 95. [I'm laughing] It'll be interesting.

Wanda expressed a loss of identity in terms of her fit with the "new breed" of officer. She went on to say, "Am I going to be considered a 'wussie' by my clients if I am not armed and other officers are?" In addition, she expressed a concern about the change in other officers and how that would affect her attempts to stay committed to a treatment orientation. "A gun changes who you are; it might lead you to think that just because you are armed you are . . . hot stuff." Her unstated question becomes: Will I be able to continue to do business as usual? As Wanda says, "You hate to admit that it has got to that point [being armed]. You feel, where did we lose humanity and just become animals? I've got the bigger gun or I'm the better shot. You just think where are we [society in general] and where will this take us [officers specifically]?"

In sum, officers, whether opposed to arming or not, expressed frustration with their peers who wanted to be armed, fear of their social settings becoming dangerous, concern for their psychic well being, and sadness related to the belief that carrying a weapon did signal a change in role and ultimately self identity. As I listened to these officers I began to engage in self-introspection (Ellis 1991). Like the officers I was experiencing frustration, fear, and sadness which were ultimately tied to the process of a "redefinition of self" ((Ellis 1991, p. 25).

Introspection: Feelings Linked to Role Change

Carolyn Ellis in her discussion of sociological introspection tells us that introspection is a "social process as well as a psychological one. It is active thinking about one's thoughts and feelings; it emerges from social interaction; it occurs in response to bodily sensations, mental processes, and external stimuli as well as affecting these same processes" (1991, p. 28-29). The experience of talking to the officers at District 66 gave me the option to involve myself in: 1) self introspection; and, 2) interactive introspection. Self introspection involved self dialogue about my feelings and thoughts and how they became "fused" into the research process. Similarly, interactive introspection involves reflection on feelings and thoughts and their influence on the research process. The key difference between self and interactive introspection is that it is involved in the expressing of ideas with another. For example, in an interview with a woman who had been an officer for sixteen years, her comment on being a "dinosaur" triggered a comparative response in me.

Kimberley: Makes me uncomfortable just handling a gun. See I'm kind of a dinosaur. I'm the last of the flower children. I'm a dying breed. [But] somebody's got to do it.

Melodye: I don't think you're a dying breed. I do think there's a philosophical break. I'm experiencing it myself, in a much different way, at school. I'm really committed as a sociologist to a very different philosophy than a lot of my students who are criminal justice and want to be cops. The more I listen to what you all are telling me my experiences are being replicated in your experiences.

As I listened to these interviews I realized that the respondents and I were engaged in emotion work. This work was directed at grasping a new reality; a reality that involves “the sense of self we expect to persist in a relatively continuous way” (Hochschild 1983, p. 221). The officers I interviewed had developed a personal understanding of role in regard to their identity as a probation officer. This role has a script characterized as functional in nature (Fein 1990). Cognitively, officers understood their fit in the social world of community corrections. They were expected to balance being an agent of control with that of being an agent of change. This delicate balance was being symbolically altered by the introduction of lethal force. As Jennifer Hunt has so aptly put it in her study of police officers, "guns symbolize both masculinity and real police work" (1984, p. 289). The use of guns by the police officer is intended to fight crime and maintain public order. A gun-toting, crime fighting cop "is aggressive, suspicious, and cynical" (p. 289). How does a probation officer committed to changing people through negotiations, trust building, and facilitation reconcile her or his understanding of role with such an altered image? The answer is with resignation.

Resignation: Action Linked to Emotion

Franks’ interpretation of Mead states that “conscious emotional experience [is] an emergent from action and function[s] to maintain action (1985, p. 164). He goes on to say that “the interactionist framework views emotion as a matter of preparation for dynamic conduct” (p. 164). Officers and I did engage in interactive emotionality and our action state was one of resignation. The policy had passed, it was being implemented, and officers had to adjust or leave. Many are choosing to have weapons training and to qualify so that they can survive professionally. The similarity of decision making was not lost on me.

Through interactive introspection I like the officers interviewed had to come to terms with role change. As a sociologist trained in a justice studies program (focus on power, inequality, active intervention) I had to resign myself to the fact that I was teaching students in a criminal justice program. My self identity as “problem poser” was being questioned by students who wanted to simply have knowledge deposited (Freire 1984). As one student put it so well when evaluating the corrections course I taught:

I don't think that group take-home tests really make an individual learn. Because there is no “real-traditional” test, people don't read the book, except for a resource when working on the take home test. Prison tours and field trips are always fun!

The banking deposit style of teaching fits well in a criminal justice program. It appeals to students who want structure, who view justice in terms of personal accountability. It is for administrators that want clearly quantifiable results as reflected in objective test scores and student evaluation means. For example, positive evaluations are a direct consequence of structured classes because it keeps the student in a comfort zone - demanding little on their parts in terms of time commitment and intellectual engagement. Most students can cram before a test and can memorize enough data to pass with minimal effort. A teaching style that expects continual engagement with the material, the teacher, and other students is not appealing to a student who perceives of education as a means to a job rather than as a process of learning to think about the social world and to act on those thoughts (Lehnerer 1997).

In the abstract, the experience of the officers interviewed was similar. The pull to go along with policy change, to become control oriented, to move away from intervention is powerful. Control is a one-way action. Clients “screw up” and pay the consequences. Intervention is interactive. Clients “screw up” and both parties have to reflect on what each

could have done differently. In the contemporary context of community corrections (risk avoidance/emphasis on control), the prior action will be privileged over the latter.

Postscript

I originally collected the data for this writing project in 1997-1998 and I did submit a manuscript based on this data and was told to “revise and resubmit.” In addition, the tenure and promotion process was traumatic and humiliating; I received tenure but not promotion. It took me another two years to receive my associate degree. The “weapons project” was put on the back burner. I directed most of my energy into teaching and promoting social justice issues on campus. I did keep in contact with the many people I knew and interviewed at District 66. Some moved to other locations in the system or to other states. Some quit being probation/parole officers; some retired.

In a follow up phone interview (Meyer August 2006) with the district administrative supervisor I was told that there has been a tremendous turnover in personnel with a majority of current officers having less than three years experience. These officers are handling ever increasing workloads (70-90 a month) with more and more individuals having multiple re-entry problems – drug use, poor mental health, few employable skills, and minimal to nonexistent family support. This aspect of my early findings has not changed and in fact has worsened. Similarly, the factors contributing to the decision to arm one’s self have held up well. As the occupation becomes more peopled by criminal justice graduates the inclination to carry a weapon is strong. Concern for safety is also an ongoing reason especially with the increase of “meth labs” in the area.

Through anecdotal information I was able to verify three incidents involving the use of a weapon by an officer. In one incident an officer shot a deer that was hit by a car to “put it out of

its misery.” In another incident an officer shot a “vicious dog.” The last incident was indeed the accidental discharge of a weapon in an office. The officer was alone and the weapon simply went off. There was no injury except to the officer’s pride. The office environment has been made more comfortable in two ways: 1) “Fort Knox” has been removed giving way to office space; and, 2) officers voluntarily store guns and ammunition in storage cabinets when at work. Nevertheless, guns are a major part of the environment.

Currently, the area in which District 66 is located has the most officers who carry guns. As pointed out to me in my phone interview many of the new officers grew up with weapons; carrying a weapon “creates a comfort zone” for them. The most important change is that over the years extensive training has been implemented. Officers are being trained the same as law enforcement officers by use of the Firearms Training System (FATS). This is a virtual training program that simulates a variety of shooting scenarios. It is used by the military, law enforcement, and security organizations internationally. An interesting consequence of this training is that many officers realize from this experience that they should not carry. In addition, a district administrative supervisor has the right to pull an officer’s firearm card. All of these factors have led to a “reduction in fear between those who oppose and those who support the carrying of a weapon.” Emotions seem to have stabilized. But an ironic twist in policy is brewing – there has been serious discussion that officers should be allowed to use semi-automatics instead of the six-shot revolver they now use. I can only assume that emotions will once again be aroused by such a change in policy.

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