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Honor and “The Code of Silence”

The criminal justice system is an important part of the United States government that helps keep order and protects its citizens. When people think of this system the first thing that comes to mind are police officers. Police officers are considered the gatekeepers of and the representors of the system. When getting involved with the law, one is most likely to encounter police officers than any other individuals. Police are held to a higher standard and have the duty of protecting civilians and enforcing laws, though there are officers who don't follow the rules that come with that kind of position. There are several cases where police have done awful things that go against their duty as a sworn officer—but why? The main reason is an honor system that has been created and put in place by the officers themselves.

The 2010 book, *The Honor Code*, written by Kwame Anthony Appiah, explains honor and the effect it has on people. He says there is a difference between honor and morality and that immoral acts such as dueling, slavery, and foot binding were protected and ended by honor. Appiah mentions the trend, stating “in each transitions, something that was naturally called ‘honor’ played a central role” (xii), showing how honor was the main cause of a major changes in society. Police officers have a brotherhood system with their other fellow sworn officers. This honor system is built during the process of becoming a sworn officer, and it is the main cause for corruption in the criminal justice system. The corrupt police honor code starts at the police

academy, it becomes the code of silence mentality at the department level, and it is reinforced by police union.

The police academy is where the process starts creating the brotherhood mentality most police officers feel and are a part of. Recruits of the police academy are taught early on to be separated from society, to go through resocialization to transition them from mainstream culture to the world of police officers (Norman & Nolan 167). This resocialization transition is meant to change officers' reactions to certain situations to fit more in line with the government's intentions for law and order. The transition changes the recruit's reactions to certain situations through the intense training police academies have them go through.

The training that police officers go through focuses more on self-defense and firearms compared to de-escalation tactics. A study done in 2015 that focused on the number of hours that police academies dedicate to these subjects gathered that the time allotted for firearms on average was 58 hours and defensive tactics was 49, making up over half of the training (Walker & Katz 152). Training in communication skills was ten hours, de-escalation eight hours, and crisis intervention eight hours as well (Walker & Katz 152). These numbers demonstrate that the police academy trains officers for an "us versus them mentality" with the citizens they are supposed to protect. The mentality created during their training also emerges from the close bonds that they form with their fellow recruits, and it starts the process of creating the "blue curtain" or code of silence mentality amongst officers across the United States. Appiah says that peer honor is "governs relations among equals" (14). In Police Academies, the way that the training hours are dedicated to towards bonding that way helps create the environment that makes a mentality where peer honor thrives.

The blue curtain, also known as the code of silence, is the system upheld by police officers, similar to a pack mentality. Even if an officer commits a crime, his fellow officers will not inform others of the incident. One study demonstrated that on average only one out of six U.S. police officers didn't abide by the code of silence (Ivkovic, Haberfield, & Peacock 173). This is pack mentality. Police officers refuse to report the misconduct of fellow officers due to this code and if they are caught breaking the code it can lead to them suffering in their careers, being labeled rats (Walker & Katz 173). A national survey done in the 1990s that showed that 52.4 percent of police officers stated that it was normal for to not report police misconduct (Walker & Katz 173). In most cases, when being tried, officers will either not say anything or lie to protect their fellow officers.

Surveys done in the early 2000s show that the code of silence continues to be strong amongst the police officers in the present-day terms, even when there have been policies put in place to prevent this. For example, a national survey done between 1999 and 2000 with police officers and academy recruits asked about the code of silence. The outcome of the survey was that "79 percent of them said that the code of silence exists throughout the country; 52 percent said that the code of silence does not bother them..."; these numbers demonstrate that this code is still current and that police officers agree with them or don't mind (Walker & Katz 173). Even more current, Chicago's mayor Rahm Emanuel stated in 2015 that there is a code of silence in Chicago's Police Department (Walker & Katz 174).

The Honor Code describes how honor is a big influence on how people behave; even if something is morally wrong, their honor comes first. This includes the feelings with officers following the code of silence, using it to their advantage to commit misconduct. Peer honor is only understood and accepted by the people who accept the code, that are a part of it, Appiah

says that to be considered honorable by following the code, people must “understand the honor code and to be attached to it,” which is why outsiders such as citizens don’t understand how officers follow this code (16). Even when negative media exposes these issues, their opinions don’t to the police because they are not a part of the police “honor world” (20). Only the people who are inside the group’s view matters.

A big influence on police officers’ jobs is the police unions they are protected by. A Police union is “an organization legally authorized to represent police officers in collective bargaining with the employer” (Walker & Katz 116). Police unions have positive contributions such as helping with getting good benefits and pay for police officers due to the nature of danger that comes with the job. But, there are negatives to these unions too, including having a negative impact on the relation between the police and their community. The reasoning behind this is that police unions represent and defend police officers in all cases involving their job, including being accused of misconduct.

Police unions protect officers being accused of misconduct and have a powerful influence over these cases, usually leading to the courts dropping the cases against officers. There are many cases that show this, but one of the more recent well-known one involves Eric Garner in New York City. In this case, citizens informed the police that someone was selling loose cigarettes in front of a store, police responded to the call and arrived at the scene where Eric Garner was standing outside (Snyder & al 4). Garner was well-known for having a prior history with these types of crimes and officers questioned him (Snyder & al 4). When attempting to arrest Garner, he refused to comply; four police officers were present at the time and one of them jumped on Garner’s back (Snyder & al 4). The officer put Garner in a choke hold while the others attempted to put handcuffs on him. Garner said multiple times that he couldn’t breathe

before not responding (Snyder & al 4). Garner died during the arrest due to a cardiac arrest caused by the officer on his back and the choke hold which stressed him out. None of the officers received any sort of reprimand and, all charges against them were dropped and never went to trial because of the union's intervention. This case shows how officers don't receive any sort of punishment due to being protected by police unions.

The criminal justice system has been improving by adding newer policies, adding new programs such as field training, and police departments are incorporating community-policing-related principles to police academies (Walker & Katz 336). These changes are bringing a more positive influence with police officers to create a bond with the citizens and helps prevent crime happening in their areas. Improvements are also leading improvement involving trying to break the code of silence by trying to hold police officer accountable for misconduct through performing investigations and prosecution (Walker & Katz 479). Recently, more and more criminal justice theorists are coming out with ideas on focusing on improvement with police officers by creating positive relationships through the community.

The police academy and police union don't only have negative impacts, there are positive impacts as well. Police academies provide training for police officers that prepares them for the potential dangers that could be presented while on patrol. Being a police officer can be a dangerous and is a very unpredictable job, the potential danger that officers can face is the reasoning behind the majority of training dedicated to self-defense and firearms. Police academies are currently making changes to help officers to improve other tactics such as de-escalation and to improve communication skills. The same goes for police unions; their job isn't only to protect officers from getting charged with misconduct. Police unions represent officers in other aspects including for raises and improvement of health benefits such as insurance. Finally,

the honor code that leads to the code of silence makes police stronger out in the field, which encourages teamwork and self-sacrifice.

The code of silence, unlike the police academy and police union, leads to more negative outcomes than positive outcomes. It creates a bond between officers, and the feeling that they to have each other's backs in dangerous neighborhoods. Being a police officer is a dangerous job and the area the officer works in determines the level of danger. That's why officers in bigger cities such as New York City or Chicago are facing more issues with this code of silence (Walker & Katz 173). This code creates a sense of comfort for officers to protect themselves and their fellow officers while in the field. However, this also for misconduct to be brushed under the rug and the failure to report officer's illegal actions.

Police officers can feel no shame for their misconducts. The case involving the death of Delrawn Small in 2016, where he was fatality shot by an off-duty police officer in a traffic dispute (Southall). Officer Issac's was in a tan vehicle was cutting off Small, at a red light Small exited the vehicle to talk to Issac. Issac opened his window and shoot Small several times, killing him (Southall). During the trial Officer Issac had his head up with confidence the entire time, and the murder charges were dropped against him. The mannerism of Officer Issac does demonstrate a correlation with Appiah's work, how honor has people feel when they feel entitled. That they "Look the world right in the eye", in this case Issac felt untouchable and felt that he did no wrong against his honor code (xvii).

Police officers on the other hand can feel shame for their misconducts as well. In 2018 Botham Jean was fatally shot in his apartment by an off-duty police officer, Amy Guyger (Martinez & Mervosh). Amy Guyger was going to her apartment late at night after a twelve-hour shift at the police station and mistaken her apartment for the victims. When he answered the door

she believed he was an intruder and shot him, she attempted CPR, but he died on the scene (Martinez & Mervosh). During the trial Guyger held her head low and was emotional throughout it, showing remorse and apologizing to the victim's family. Appiah mentions this in his work, stating that "Humiliation, on the other hand, curves the spin, lowers the eyes", which is shown in how Guyger behaved throughout the entire process of the trial (xviii). Issac and Guyger both demonstrate two sides that can be shown by police officers when performing misconduct. That depending on how close they hold their honor they can either hang their head in shame or hold their "head up high" (xvii).

The changes that are being implemented are due to society's in recent years. The public's honor code that police brutality is unacceptable is putting pressure on the police code of silence. In *The Honor Code*, Appiah explains how as generations come and go, immortal practices that were once considered acceptable are abandoned. Future generations look back on these acts in disappointment and disgust, which can be said about changes in policing that have happened in the past and are currently happening. Appiah says, "What are they thinking?' we ask about our ancestors, but we know that, a century hence, our descendants will ask the same thing about us" (xvi). The criminal justice system is implementing changes to police departments and police academies slowly over time to adapt to society's constantly changing honor code.

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