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Identity Work and Control in Occupational Communities

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ABSTRACT:

This chapter is about three highly intertwined concepts. The first concerns occupational communities and the work cultures they nourish. The second concerns the work identities that are valued (and devalued) in such communities and how members of those communities manage to sustain and sometimes enhance these identities in their everyday activities. The third concerns the implications of the first two on organizational control practices and takes up the question of how managers, at least nominally in charge of the work undertaken by members of occupational communities, attempt – with more or less success – to align the identity work of occupational community members with the aims of the organization or organizational segment. Empirically, urban police officers in the U.S. – mainly street cops -- who carry out their tasks within large, complex, hierarchically and functionally segmented organizations of a quasi-militaristic sort are of particular interest and serve as ethnographic examples for the occupational identity work that takes place within organizational settings.
Prologue

This chapter is about identity construction and display in the workplace. It is concerned directly with a few of the many ways work selves and work lives are animated and made meaningful and what this might mean to managers in organizations where strong, valued, collective work identities are at play. I take as axiomatic that work is a natural locale for the study of identity since we spend so much of our adult life at it. But the significance of work is by no means only quantitative. As Hughes (1951) noted long ago, our work is as good a clue as any as to our sense of self, our course of being, our way of life. “What do you do for a living?” is an all too familiar probe to which we must have a ready answer or risk censor.

There are a number of ways work can bestow meaning on the self. Some are set by historical and institutional processes that are rather distant and removed from specific individuals going about their trade. Others emerge from the kinds of things people do in the ordinary context of going about their work. The former draws on a relatively stable, categorical ordering of occupational status and provide something of a shell or vessel within which people labor (Hauser and Warren, 1997). Such processes govern the prestige of a given occupation in a socially recognized universe of occupations (e.g., being a police officer rather than a postal worker) or the prestige of the specific social context in which the occupation is taken up, especially the type and status of the organization or organizational segment in which the work is pursued (e.g., the Los Angeles Police Department rather than the Azusa Police Department or as a member of the SWAT team in the Patrol Division rather than as a member of the Officer Friendly squad in the Community Relations Division). Work also provides meaning by its contrast to other human activities relative to some worldview, religion or ideology (e.g., work rather than play, leisure, contemplation or self-development). Matters such as these reflect the status ordering of occupations, the place of work within broad social contexts and suggest -- at least to outsiders -- the physical, social and moral nature of a given line of work versus others. Societal notions of "dirty work" develop in this context and are somewhat above and beyond the control of individual role occupants to alter. Awareness
of the prestige of an occupation (or lack thereof) is however another matter entirely and may well effect the ease or difficulty individuals have identifying themselves with their work.

Work also bestows meaning on individuals through their daily activities -- the bundle of tasks that comprise the occupation. The intricacies and skills involved in the work process itself is one example (e.g., the thrill of an expertly handled car chase, the pride that comes from a superbly orchestrated drug bust). The results of the work are another -- both the products (e.g., a captured villain, a child rescued from danger) and the byproducts (e.g., a raise, a reprimand, a promotion). By and large, the meaning of work in these more or less internal domains relies on cultural conventions or codes specific to the occupation and arise (and change) in the day-to-day conduct of the trade. Outsiders rarely have much appreciation for the insider's perspective on the occupation's processes or products and are therefore in no position to judge individual performance with the same appetite, knowledge, evaluative criteria and consequence that practitioners bring to the task.

Of central interest to me in this paper are the ways individuals define, sharpen and solidify their work identities in organizational settings. These matters concern the performance or playing out of an occupational role in an always-specific temporal, spatial and interactional context. In particular, I want to sketch out how the words and deeds of police officers in large urban departments allow them to affirm and sustain a particular and valued work identity. Work identity rests of course on both an immediate situated identity and broader social identity. I treat the work identity more or less claimed by individuals as akin to claims of personal character in an organization and use it, as do subordinates, peers and superiors who honor such identity claims, to stand for a postulated "real person" who transcends situation and role. In broad strokes, it reflects a person's sense of distinctiveness, agency, dignity, special skills, ethics and morality (or lack thereof). At work, it emerges within a context of occupationally similar colleagues who share (roughly at least) the same occupational role.

This exercise is an initial try at linking something of a theory of work identity to matters concerning organizational control by using the everyday world of police officers
as a heuristic (and altogether opportunistic) grounding devise. My writing of this world is fashioned more as an analytic ethnography than a substantive one because I am more interested in putting forth and illustrating a few concepts than representing a way of life (although the two are not unrelated). The theory sketched out here stands as a compliment rather than a corrective to a good deal of previous work on occupational culture and control. This earlier work emphasizes the shaping of social identity through the processes by which individuals learn their trade, come to value it and thus become members of specific work organizations and/or occupational communities. Social identity concerns the self-consciousness that comes from membership in an occupational category and, when fully elaborated, provides members with a more or less shared sense of the collective culture -- its mandate, license, heroes, history, legacy, special ethos, rules of thumb, unique problems, in-groups and out-groups and so forth. While much empirical work has been focused on work identity generally, this work is often not always grounded in specific organizational settings where particular work identities are displayed and played out. What I argue here is that occupational or work identities have considerable organizational relevance. When work identities are highly valued, strong, salient and held in common by numerous colleagues in close proximity, management control becomes in varying ways problematic.

Resistance is of course one response of members of an occupational community to managerial efforts to direct their work but it is not the only response. Indeed I will argue that control of members in at least one occupational community – police officers in big city departments – depends largely on the degree to which managers intentionally or unintentionally respect and reinforce everyday identity claims made by members of the occupational community who fall under their area of responsibility. That this occurs rather matter-of-factly, routinely and continually is a point that should not be missed.

Control is treated in organization studies in a number of ways. Some analysts rely on taxonomies emphasizing coercive, instrumental and normative tactics (Etzioni, 1985; Scott, 1997), others look to input, throughput and output controls (Cardinali, 2006), still others look to more subtle, less direct control strategies such as concertive controls (Barker, 1998) or control through “leniency arrangements” or “indulgency patterns”
or control by self-regulation, professional oversight and/or peer pressures (Friedson, 2005). My treatment here leans toward the latter, more subtle control processes but points also to the widely acknowledged view that control is multifaceted, not singular, dynamic in the sense that control strategies come and go, vary over time in their effectiveness (or lack thereof), and ultimately derive whatever lasting power they may have from the consent of those who are said to be controlled. vii When it comes to those who harbor highly valued work identities, matters of managerial control become complicated and complicit in ways that link both the would-be controllers and controlled in identity games that carry more or less identifiable rules of play.

What some of these rules are how they operate on the ground in the day-to-day work life of urban police officers are put forward in this chapter. The police are a peculiar occupational group because the nature of their work makes a large degree of self-control unavoidable. Yet the occupation lacks the institutional status and social prestige that leads managers (and outsiders) in other organizations to trust so-called professionals to control themselves (Banton, 1964; Rubenstein, 1973; Black, 1980; Manning, 1994). Critically, the police are so widely dispersed (particularly in the heart of the organization, the patrol division) that their work cannot be observed. Much of what the police do and are supposed to do occurs outside the managerial gaze. The result is then a façade of organizational control (pseudo-control) that measures things that can be measured and ignores things that cannot. To wit, the police have parking ticket quotas and arrest statistics but make no attempt to count how many crimes have been prevented. The question raised here is what directs police action given that they operate within what most organizational theorists would call, at best, a mock bureaucracy? My answer rests on the work identities shaped and adopted by street-savvy officers. But before diving empirically into the police world, a quick review of what we know of occupational communities is provided.

**Occupational Communities**

One of the more persistent themes in sociology generally has been the presumed dichotomy between communal or collegial and rational or administrative forms of work organization. While theories of organizations typically adopt the latter perspective, a
conception of work organized in terms of occupational communities approximates the former. Broadly, an organizational community can be seen as a group of people who consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work; whose social and personal identity is drawn from such work; and who, to varying degrees, recognize and share with one another job specific (but, to varying degrees, contentious) values, norms and perspectives that apply to but extend beyond work related matters (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984; 1985).

Occupational communities build and sustain relatively unique work cultures consisting of, among other things, task rituals, standards for proper and improper behavior, work codes surrounding relatively routine practices and, for the members at least, compelling accounts attesting to the logic and values of their rituals, practices, standards and codes. Moreover, a continuing – and problematic -- quest for occupational self-control that allows work identities to emerge from displays (and claims) of personal agency serves as something of a special motive for most members of any given occupational community. viii

In many ways, the notion of an occupational community stands as an alternative to an organizational frame of reference for understanding why it is people behave as they do in the workplace. Yet it is a perspective of considerable worth when seeking to explain or, more prosaically, figure out why seemingly well developed rational principles of organizational design including authority relationships, incentive systems, decision rights, performance assessments and so forth work so poorly in certain settings. Several analytic aims are served by this approach.

First, a focus on occupations preserves some of the existential, everyday reality of the firsthand experiences of people at work. Social worlds coalesce around the objects produced, the services rendered, the interactions that occur in the workplace (and elsewhere), and the identities sought and assumed, honored and dishonored by those within the community. To focus on occupation as the semantic tag that ties together the bundle of tasks that constitute a given line of work brings such social worlds and their many meanings to light.
Second, by examining these social worlds, we broaden our understanding of social control in organizations. It is axiomatic that a fundamental problem of organization – or, more properly, the management of organizations – is the control of the labor process. Occupational matters are undeniably central to this problem since all positions have histories marking their rise (and fall) in terms of the amount of self-control occupational members have over their labors. The ongoing struggle of stable and shifting, formal and informal, large and small groups to develop and occupy some niche in the occupational structure of society is played out everyday in organizations where administrative principles of control (i.e., codification, measurement, standardization, discipline, etc.) compete with traditional or communal principles of control (e.g., peer pressures, work symbols and ideologies, valued practices, etc.).

Third, a focus on work and occupation casts a slightly different light on problems of diversity and conflict in the workplace than that cast by organizational theories. From an administrative standpoint, “deviance” among organizational members is defined in terms of exceptions to managerial wishes and expectations. The sources of such deviance are often ignored or muted since administrative solutions are sought in terms of correcting the “system” so that expectations can be met. That deviance is willful is a point often made in organizational studies but seldom elaborated on beyond bland references to the ubiquitous “informal” groups contained within an organization. Even when deviance is treated seriously and in some depth by organizational theorists concerned with the individual and group orientations or organizational members, it is often treated as merely the result of non-work factors such as sub-cultural norms imported into the workplace from outside (Katz, 1965); too rigorous, tight, punitive or otherwise unenlightened management practices (Pfeffer, 1995); narrow, standardized, efficiency focused technologies (Blauner, 1964; Thomas, 1995); one-shot, special favors granted by bosses to favored employees (e.g., Rousseau, 2004); situational opportunities seized on by employees to improve earnings, advance careers or reduce risk (Dalton, 1959; Mars, 1980); and so on. While these sources of informal adjustments or member deviance are no doubt present in all organizations, willful violation of managerial dictates may also correspond to a pervasive logic embedded within the historically developed
practices of occupational members doing what they feel they must. What is deviant organizational may be occupationally correct (and vice-versa).

Finally, a focus on common tasks, peer relations, shared symbols or any and all of the elements that comprise an occupation brings forth a concern for how a given line of work can be said to influence one’s social conduct and identity in the workplace. Goffman (1961:87-8) makes this point nicely when he suggests” “A self (then) virtually awaits the individual entering a position; he needs only to conform to the pressures on him and he will find a ‘me’ ready-made for him …” Although a position is organizationally created and sanctioned, the work that comprises such a position often has a history and a set of everyday contingencies of its own. Even rigidly defined and monitored positions are almost always more than most organization designers, authorities and, alas, researchers make them out to be (e.g., Roy, 1960). Some of these positions may offer an occupant far more than a job. Indeed, some may offer a rewarding and valued ‘me.’ The identity bestowing or limiting characteristics of positions are, in short, frequently matters that are job specific and worked out and honored or dishonored by colleagues within a given (and bounded) occupational community. Such communities could involve high status executives (Morrill, 1995), West Point cadets (Lipsky, 2003) or gang members (Venkatesh, 2008). Here I look at the police.

**Identity Work**

There is I think a general neglect within social science to examine the ways human beings develop and sustain a sense of uniqueness from one another as a social phenomena. The term identity is used in a bewildering variety of ways and has, of late, become something of a cultural cliché. The scholarly literature spans sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, literary theory and cultural studies. Within this burgeoning literature are many theories of identity but it is nonetheless abundantly clear that human beings conceive of themselves in a vast number of ways and these conceptions are all shaped by the specific cultural context in which they emerge.
Given this as a starting point, a good deal of the discourse on identity is built on broad ideas about the kind of social relations and institutional forms that surround us. Theories of modernity, for instance, take as a given the progressive prying loose or disembodying of persons from the traditional ties of place, tribe, clan and family. Modern society is highly rationalized and operates largely through the production (and reproduction) of individuals who can easily be slotted into what seems to be an ever increasing set of categories such as nation, race, ethnicity, region, sex, religion, class, interest group, lifestyle, occupation, job, generation, voting block and so on (and on). Identity is thus tied to assumed group membership and people become aware of themselves mostly as members of a particular category or mix of categories. Within a category, individuals are subject to similar socialization processes such that personal differences are often considered maladaptive (at best) or deviant (at worst).ix

Identity in current social theory rests largely on the social context within which people operate. Goffman (1959) suggests that individuals have as many selves as there are social contexts within which these selves are lodged. And these situated selves may or may not congeal. Postmodern theorists push the multiplicity and segmentation of individuals -- as initiated by modernity -- to the limit by denying any cohesion of the self from one social context to the next. A situated identity is all that is possible. Any transcendent identity -- existing across social time and space -- is illusory for, in Gergen's (1991) view, the self is so fully saturated in fragmented, fleeting, inconsistent, disconnected social relations that whatever identity the person holds at the moment is depthless and flat. Nothing is left of an individual's sense of the self except an incessant play of images without continuity or consistency.

Or is it? We might best think of the saturated self as a hypothesis and then ask whether or not people try to identify themselves and others in a reasonably coherent fashion across social situations and times. Do they, for example, make connections between their past and present? Do they succeed? Are they concerned with continuity? Are people worried that an identification made of them (or by them) in one social context may not carry over into another? Are identity claims respected and accepted or disputed and denied by others? Are these questions even answerable in any persuasive way? I
think they are but, before considering them concretely in the police world, an analytic framework must first be sketched out.

**Acts of Identity**

The key idea underpinning my approach to the formulation of identity in the modern (or postmodern) world is that people are constantly interpreting themselves and others and that the very act of interpretation is synonymous with meaning making. Personal identity is thus the meaning of the self to the self or to others. Meaning is of course a contextual matter and so therefore is identity. Selves are contextualized when connected to other persons, to beliefs, to ideas, to situations, to feelings, to objects in the world, to particular times, to specific places and so forth. Any connection -- attributed, claimed, denied or ignored -- is an act of identification and is a building block of identity formulation. If these acts are repeated time after time and are sustained by others, bits and pieces of personal identity are formed and perhaps stabilized. In this fashion, identity results.

Making a connection is a rhetorical activity -- an attempt to persuade, a claim, an attribution. It can occur in many ways. For example, a patrol officer who identifies himself as an "honest cop" invokes a connection between himself and a desirable ethical value. Such a claim may or may not be honored by others (or even the self) but it is nonetheless a part of any identity formation process. Countless claims (and counterclaims) are no doubt made in the course of a workday, a week, a year or a career. Some stick, some do not. Some are deeply held and felt, some are not. Identity formation is thus mostly a rhetorical process of deploying identifications by acts that connect the self to the world.

Connections are of many types but two stand out as generic forms -- synchronic and diachronic. Synchronic connections are those that identify the self with a condition, a state, a value, a person, a place, a feeling and so on. They are atemporal and rest on specific tropes -- metaphors, synecdoches, metonymies -- that link the self to something else. Diachronic connections link the self across time and take narrative or storied form. Selves in a story become characters with a past, a present and, presumably, a future.
Narratives are obvious (and formidable) instruments of identity and the police make much use of them. Stories are often the only entertainment available in patrol cars, they are the essence of long and late nightshifts spent waiting for something to happen (Van Maanen, 1974; Manning, 1977; 1989; Young, 1991).

Identifications emerge not only through talk but also through performance. As folklore suggests, actions often speak louder than words. An officer who walks into the squad room before roll call and stands chatting away with one group of officers rather than with another group makes an identifying statement. The way an officer issues a traffic citation or interviews a crime victim identifies as well by the indifference, enthusiasm or sympathy shown (and presumably felt). A high-five slap of hands, a fist-bump with a colleague, or a sound pat on the back may make a more powerful statement than simply the verbal comment "good work." Identification through performance works not only by the message conveyed but also by the manner of its execution. But, as communication, identification of both the verbal and non-verbal sort must rely on established cultural codes or else they would be unintelligible. Some of these are broad, drawn from meanings that float in the society at large, some are narrow, drawn from meanings that are tied to a given occupational community.

What I am sketching out is a rhetorical, semiotic and communication framework for the study of identity. I assume that identity is always up for grabs and it is not a matter that can be settled once and for all. This does not mean that I think we are in some sort of perennial identity crisis or suffer from a kind of existential dread that comes from not knowing who we are. On these matters I follow both Schutz (1958) and Berger and Luckman (1966) who argue that our social worlds are already deeply suffused with assumptions about identity, about self, about others and that those with whom we regularly interact share these background understandings such that identity is an explicit concern only in certain times and places. Most interpretation is implicit and only becomes explicit as an active, conscious matter when people are encountered who are not yet known, when novel situations are experienced or when our assumptions about identity (our own as well as others) are, for whatever reason, challenged. A patrol officer who thinks of herself as a model of professional conduct may think again after receiving...
a sudden and public dressing down from a respected (by her) fellow officer who identifies her as a "negligent, weak, flighty and carrying a bad attitude problem."

Active interpretation of the self and others is a common phenomenon only when persons are showered with unexpected, sometimes traumatic experiences that violate their sense of routine, normality or propriety. This is of course why transition points are so important to the establishment of identity and why socialization theories stress the novel, the irregular, the unexpected since such situations place new claims on the self. Yet socialization theories are typically concerned with what agents do to the subjects of socialization. The self that emerges most clearly from socialization studies in the workplace is one that is deemed occupationally or organizationally relevant and proper. This is the work identity that must be more or less taken up and accepted by recruits if they are to be regarded by colleagues as members in good standing within the trade. Students of socialization as an organizational form of control look to acts of identification aimed toward others that are intended to produce a group of like-minded persons. Students of identity as a form of self-control must look to acts of identification coming from both the self and others (toward both the self and others) that are intended to document one’s standing as a distinctive member within a group.

Of importance to any concern for identity is of course the strength of an identification. The remarks "I work for the police department" and "I am a cop" are both identifications. But, each remark can be heard and held as quite different in quality and intensity. Addressing the strength and importance of a given identification can be handled in many ways. Some, for example, are theory driven as when an analyst of a Freudian bent privileges certain phases in life, certain key relationships and certain interactional patterns as the keys to identity. But actors on stage in the everyday world make identity judgments too and seem quite able to do so without recourse to psychoanalytic thought or any other analytic aid beyond those provided by the communities in which they live. Participants in ordinary conversation generally have a good sense of those self and other identifications that are strong and weak, those that are important or not. Insults, jokes, irony, compliments, persuasion, satire would be impossible without such abilities. At issue here is word choice, topical choice, gesture, timing, awareness of audience, style,
figures and modes of speech, posture, invocations of context, a twinkle of the eye or a
tongue put firmly in cheek. Through such means identifications are seen, spoken, heard,
felt, written and read as to their salience to the self and to others.

In everyday life therefore identities are continually being communicated both
explicitly and implicitly by actions (and inactions) as well as by verbal exchanges of all
sorts -- from brief interjections to much longer conversations and narratives. But how do
a vast number of identifications add up to something like a personal identity? Here I
follow both the ethnomethodological and symbolic interactionist principles in which the
conventionality and stability of interpretation are constituted through asserting and
documenting agreement in a given human community. Identity is thus dependent on the
work that takes place in a particular interpretive community (Fish, 1980). It is grounded
by sustained forms of social interaction and stabilized in collaboration with others who
can initiate and respond, confirm and disconfirm acts of identification.

Identify formation is a give and take process occurring between the self and
others. If, for example, Officer Smith gets identified by one of his mates in the patrol
division as a "real battler, a rough and ready guy, always willing to mix it up" and Officer
Smith finds this identification attractive or flattering, he may use it in his narratives with
patrol buddies who more or less support the identification by repeating it to others and
back to Officer Smith. At some point later he may be confronted by a doped-up meathead
on the street who takes a swing at him. If he answers by punching out and flattening his
adversary, he identifies himself again as a battler. As the incident is talked about among
members of his squad, Officer Smith once again hears the identification of himself as a
rough and ready guy and finds himself reconfirmed. Later he might be encouraged by
others to volunteer for tasks that require toughness and provide him with more chances to
prove his nature and get reconfirmed by both himself and others. Here such opportunities
serve as identity enhancers and thus direct and influence action. If he hasn't heard the
identification in awhile, he may have to seek out certain situations to discover whether or
not he is still the sturdy battler.

In such a fashion, identities are built (and dismantled). They are personal but
thoroughly social and provisional in origin as well as maintenance. Strictly speaking,
personal identity refers to those understandings of the self (by the self) that are internal but stable, transcending time and place. Yet they must rest on situated identities that are public, socially enacted, negotiated and bounded by space, time and circumstance. Officer Smith's talk and action occurs within defined situations and his responses to those situations are read by others in shared ways. Situated and personal identities are related in the sense that we presumably wish to enter and exit situations with our personal identity in tact. Much of the time, if we are fortunate, this is not a problem but inevitably tensions between situated and personal identities arise. The challenge on such occasions for the individual is to not only bring forth a convincing self (a situated identity) but to believe in that self (a personal identity) as well.

Identity work, as laid out here, deals with the interplay of social, personal and situational identities. From the interplay comes the differentiation of individuals within a particular occupational community. How police officers -- in particular, patrol officers -- distinguish themselves one from the other and how such identity work promotes a certain order or control regime within the organization is the question I want now to explore. I look in three domains for answers to the question. These domains are hardly exhaustive of the uncountable spaces, times, performances, tropes and narratives by which identities are established but the three areas are -- as I will argue -- of considerable importance and concern to the police. The first concerns what is done and focuses on the work ethics of police officers. The second deals with the way or how the police handle their work activities and takes up the social poetics of police work. The third domain is a moral one and considers how officers judge the trustworthiness of their colleagues (and, by implication, themselves as well). There is of course much overlap among the three. Where the person stands in one domain has implication for where they stand in the others.

**Work Ethics of the Police**

Patrol work is a social and spatial activity. Officers are assigned to precincts, work units and given territorial responsibility. There are good beats and bad, similar colleagues and not so similar, comfortable places to be and uncomfortable places, safe zones and unsafe ones. Officers, by reading and occupying space, place themselves and
others. Those who seek out active assignments over quiet ones or prefer night shifts to days identify themselves. Those who work solo or in tight, long-lasting partnerships or as members of certain cohesive squads in the department are identified -- and identify themselves -- by the company they keep. Precinct preferences identify as well.

Overriding a good deal of these social and spatial particulars is the metaphoric use of a station house (inside)/street (outside) distinction made by the police (Manning, 1977, Ianni and Ianni, 1983; Young, 1991; Glaeser, 2000; Moscos, 2007). This is a distinction that gives rise to identifications across hierarchies, across functions, across officers. A patrol car team, for example, when leaving the station, radios a message to a police dispatcher saying that they are heading out, hitting the bricks, going to the street. Outside is where action can be found, the place where self-respecting police officers are supposed to be and where officers can exert agency and prove themselves. Inside, by contrast, is the place of boring paper work, the place of supervision, restraint and lack of agency. Outside is a place of relative freedom and autonomy. Inside is the place where those who do not know what is happening outside are located, a place of theory rather than practice, a place where "brown nosers" hang out.

Such a distinction is not entirely unambiguous however for inside the station is also where coffee, company and comfort can be found, a place for relaxation and a place where there is occasionally no work to do -- certainly, for many, no "real work" to do. Sometimes it can be a place where identifying acts of resistance can be set as is, for instance, the case when patrol officers stay in when their sergeant wants them out attending to police tasks on the streets. While advancing in age and hierarchy or shifting from patrol to certain other police functions typically means spending more time inside than out, all officers develop reputations early in their careers for their interest in and worth as street cops.

This interest and worth is not taken lightly for it is regarded in many ways as a measure of the officer's personal commitment to police work. Most every level of the police hierarchy uses some version of the inside versus outside dichotomy when comparing themselves to the next higher level. Sergeants spend more time out than lieutenants who spend more time out than captains and so on up to the Assistant Chiefs.
and Chief of Police who spend more time out than the civic leaders to whom they must answer. Or so each claims.

For many if not most officers, personal character forms more on the outside where discretion and personal choice reside than on the inside where routines and rituals mark the working day. "Real police work" is done on the outside. Paperwork, meetings, training sessions, strategic planning sessions, administrative work, record keeping, lock-up work (all regarded by some -- especially young, lower level officers -- as "shit work") are done on the inside thus the more time one spends (or has spent) outside, on the proverbial street, the more one can credibly claim to be a real police officer. What it is one does outside is of course a critical matter and with such considerations the ethics of police work emerge more sharply and contentiously. Contested identities emerge from almost any discussion of work ethics in American police agencies. At issue is the proper attitude toward the work and the attitude displayed, inferred, claimed or implied by an officer is thought to reveal the person, not the uniform.

Sergeants and other supervising personnel in police agencies know all this of course although the further they are from the street, the less they will know of the characters they seek to influence. A part of such knowledge resides with their own experience for all American police officers begin their careers with a lengthy stint in the patrol division. But, closer to the ground, where everyday assignments are parceled out and duties allocated, considerable knowledge of those over whom one has formal authority is present. If not, troubles are sure to arise. Yet, generally, sergeants know well who likes to work with whom, who prefers district A to district B, who enjoys the late turn rather than the early one, who will walk a beat without complaining and who will not, and so on (and on). By trying to match up such identity preferences, sharp supervisors can exercise considerable control over what gets done under their respective watches. What occurs is, in effect, is the sorting out and distribution of identity rewards: Officer Brown is charged with an identity-sustaining (or enhancing) task by Sergeant Jones who in so doing is reasonably confident that such a task will be handled well, Identity rewards – what Anteby (2008) calls “identity incentives” -- are thus potential and potent form of managerial control.xiii However, as a tool of the supervisor’s trade, they
must be handed out sparingly, selectively and judiciously if they are to retain their power. Moreover, since there are different work identities at play in the police world, allowing and encouraging the expression of certain desired identities (and not others) is often a tricky matter.

Some officers, for example, believe others are lazy, inert, without initiative. What they find wanting in their counterparts is a commitment to their work as police officers. Younger patrolmen, in particular, say they are surprised at what they call the "job mentality" of some of their colleagues -- notably the older ones -- who they say lack an independent spirit and take little interest in performing their duties in an aggressive, timely and professional fashion. Police administrators often invoke this line when they identify "uniform carriers" who cannot be counted on to do much more than they are explicitly told (if that). They are annoyed by the way they approach police tasks. In the words of a police sergeant:

"Being a cop is not harmless. A good street cop has to have drive and be willing to go out of their way to get some work done. If you see some kid blow a red light or smoking a joint you've got to go after him, chase him down. Or if someone pisses you off a couple of times, you gotta get 'em. Make it personal and try to achieve something. If you're taking a burglary report, go around the neighborhood and talk to people and find out if they saw or heard anything funny. Its really a matter of taking pride in the job and getting results."

(from Van Maanen, 1981: 227)

This is a work ethic that stresses a goal and task orientation. A good officer from this perspective is marked by a drive to maintain order, catch crooks, act autonomously and go beyond commands, mere punctuality, or official job description. Initiative and success are linked and results come to those officers who seek them out. They know, as Manning (1974) notes, enforcing the law sometimes means breaking it. Real police officers do not simply "snuggle down in a warm and cozy patrol car, enjoy the scenery
and go only where dispatch tells them to go." Those who identify others as uniform
carriers or simple-minded order followers do not necessarily blame them for their lack of
initiative. Often they regard them as products of an older, out-of-date, militaristic
organization (and historical period) that emphasized (inappropriately) strict notions of
command, control and obedience. But they do see the work ethics of this earlier period as
flawed and those that are seen to hold on to them identify themselves quite clearly as
certain kinds of people.xiv

Other officers -- notably older ones -- have a rather different spin on work ethics.
Rather than celebrating narratives that suggest organizational change, they bemoan them
and worry about the efficiency minded efforts of their superiors and the softening or
weakening of the right kind of attitude among their younger patrol colleagues. They are
often convinced that the spirit and pride of being a police officer has taken a fall and
many officers now lack the discipline it takes to be a police officer.xv A good officer
doesn't go off looking for something wild and crazy to do or worry about exceeding a
quota while on patrol but goes by the book and attends to their assigned and traditional
duties -- maintaining law and order on their patch. Efficiency and effectiveness of the
police is contrasted to notions of readiness, duty and staying out of trouble. Discipline is
a critical matter in this regard and must be displayed. Discipline can be inferred by the
way the hair is cut, a uniform is worn, a gun holstered, a tie knotted, an order executed.
Where there is respect for higher ranking officers (a somewhat rare commodity) it comes
from the greater knowledge of police action and action plans these superiors are thought
to possess -- a matter often determined by the amount of time these superiors spend or
have spent on the street and the reputations they have gained as a result.

Many police practices serve as reminders to patrol officers of the need for
discipline. Shotguns are checked in and out, locked in position in the squad car. Reports
must be properly filled out and filed. Radio communications are continually monitored
and messages sent and received in special code. Patrol cars must be equipped and
positioned in certain ways. Security and safety are not only precautionary police concerns
but they are the products of police action. Secrecy is necessary since the enemies of the
police -- and there are many -- wish to know what the police are up to and secrecy is best
maintained through order, a strict division of labor, hierarchy. Discipline means sacrifice of course and its basis lies in the vow, the oath of office all officers are sworn to uphold. This sets the police off from other, less noble, pursuits and gives their work a special luster, value and importance. Those who stress discipline, sacrifice and living up to an oath are also those officers most likely to find colleagues in their midst who lack the true "police spirit," who are regarded as slackers, inauthentic sorts, who only play at being a police officer and treat their work as if it were a mere job rather than a calling.

Acts of identification that signal such a stance are many. A seeming obsession for making rank might be one, the drawing of strict lines of separation between work and leisure another. Still another might come from showing less than a keen interest in the street tales of veteran officers, who, in turn, read such indifference as a lack of respect for the uniform. Some duty conscious officers complain that too many of their cohorts back out of their police responsibilities and point to the fact that many officers ride to and from work in plain clothes, have no sense of obligation to intervene in police relevant situations they witness off-duty and talk about their occupation as if they simply fell into it accidentally. Some complain that others are so dependent on technology that they no longer know any "real" police skills (Meehan, 1998). Occasionally they mention those officers who they think are ashamed of what they do and thus when they are at work they are "faking it," merely playing a role rather than being a police officer. For some officers, policing is a 24-hour a day matter, a seven day a week responsibility, a way of being -- in uniform or out. It is not a job but a way of life, a way of being premised on considerable sacrifice. Needless to say, a quite strong sense of self and feeling of importance results.

From such concerns come self and other distinctions of just who embraces and just who distances themselves from the police role and what that role rightly means -- the uniformed role in particular. Senior officers in many departments have a choice of wearing a uniform at work and those that choose to do so or not are thought to reveal their identities in telling ways. Within any rank, some officers seem to work only to not work, taking as much time off from the job as they can by coming to work late and leaving early, running personal errands on the job, not monitoring the on-going work on a shift than thus not helping others out with their work, taking frequent sick leaves and
never putting in an extra day (or hour) unless coerced to do so by superior officers, or "milking" their calls and staying "out of service" for long chunks of time while on duty. An officer who challenges such practices may well win the respect of others and then can ask more of his colleagues who identify more closely with the “real cop” role.

The issue here is not to analyze whether these claims and derogations are justified or not. What matters is that the police identify one another and themselves as committed to the work in a particular fashion and the attitude they assume is closely monitored and felt. The highest praise an officer can give another is that he or she is just like me and approaches the job from the right frame of mind -- whether that job is treated as a career, a calling, an opportunity, a burden, a job, a dead end, a duty or an imposition. How officers carry out and talk about their work establishes their work ethics and these are seen as identity markers with consequences as to who will do what and how well they will do it.

Another example concerns those officers who display an intent interest in their pay and work to maximize the amount of overtime they earn through court appearances, extra duty or second jobs. They talk about providing for their families or having a taste for the finer things in life or even their aim of putting away as many bad guys as possible through the making of numerous arrests. All police officers regard money as important of course but some -- regardless of the vocabulary of motives they put forth to explain it -- are seen to go beyond the pale, whose work ethics are shaped (or stripped) by squeezing out as much money from the job as possible and being certain that every minute of work time is properly remunerated. Those who criticize their colleagues for their crass materialism are, of course, positioning themselves as righteous, dedicated sorts driven only by the internal benefits of the work and the larger goals they serve (goals only partly and imperfectly met by putting in hours or making arrests).

Much of this identity work is conditional on the opportunities that flow from work itself, opportunities that are of course controlled by others in the agency. To wit, an officer assigned to a drug enforcement unit or a gang squad is far more likely to make abundant arrests that an officer assigned routine patrol duties. Within patrol, some officers enjoy writing tickets (well beyond whatever quota might be imposed on them by
the department) or making numerous vehicle checks, stops and searches as ways of seeking "hits" (e.g., stolen cars, outstanding warrants, "on view" liquor or drug violations, etc.). While there is of course variation attributable to mood, weather, health, time and the like, most officers display work interests that they can defend -- and that others learn to more or less count on whether they like it or not.

The main -- and official -- function of patrol consists of answering dispatched calls, backing up other officers on their calls and clearing up the paper that results from assigned calls. Such calls may entail helping clear the scene of a traffic accident, dealing with a helpless person who needs assistance ("helpless" often being little more than the official tag for a drunken or drugged person), sorting out a family squabble, taking a report from someone whose car has been stolen, responding to a suicide threat and so on. Much of the time between calls for many patrol units is spent driving around going to and from places that have impinged themselves on officers in some way as trouble spots -- places where real police action might be found. The nature of these trouble spots point to the kinds of police work given officers find attractive and, as such, identify.

Patrolling also involves its share of arbitrary activities -- especially when boredom looms large and the usual trouble spots are unyielding. If the day -- more commonly the night -- is passing without much to do, patrolling may well be about "fucking off" as a way to avoid boredom and the lethargy it fosters rather than to find work. Fucking off may be about getting away from the squad sergeant with whom an officer lives in conflict. It may be about taking a lengthy time out in a local coffee stop or enjoying a city view far from a busy highway. Fucking off is a way of asserting agency and hence identity and all officers develop characteristic ways of doing so in the face of tedium and organizational controls they regard as largely irrelevant to the job. How officers choose to duck some of their duties -- when, where, how, how long, why and so forth -- sheds light on their work ethics and is of more than a little concern to others in the department.

It is important to also note that certain tasks and assignments in the patrol division deprive officers of agency. Without agency, identity suffers and it should be no surprise that fucking off in such situations makes escaping work an identity marker of some
interest. When there is little or no police work to be done, outwitting one's sergeant, playing practical jokes, securing some alcohol, taking a snooze are understandable responses although not all will be equally amused or impressed when hearing of or witnessing such acts and thus display their own identity by taking offense. As a general rule, the less agency allowed on a particular police assignment, the less potential there is to make a difference in the performance of the task through a display of personally valued skills. In such cases the more likely it is that officers will reassert their agency in non-work related activities. Escapades and legendary escapade stories emerge in this domain suggesting a rather unbreakable link between identity and agency as well as the salience and importance of personal identity to officers caught up in such situations. Sergeants and other higher-ups in the department are usually well aware that fucking off is an act of identity (although they would surely not use the phrase “an act of identity”). Overlooking such practices is common but, again, as with proactive identity rewards, selective. Overlooking certain officially taboo practices carries value and can sometimes be exchanged for hard work on other matters that might otherwise be resented and resisted by particular officers. “You owe me one” is an expression heard frequently in police agencies and is itself a control device that grows directly out of the identity work of the police among the police.

In sum, work ethics are very much an issue for police officers. Every officer it seems can be located as to their commitment to the police role and, while considerable variation is to be found in the way commitment is read, measured and assessed, there are clear and forceful views of what it means to be properly in the police role. Generational differences are apparent as are differences among ranks and differences by assignments but all would agree that work ethics are attached to the person and a good deal of variety exists across officers. But it is this variety that often allows astute superior officers to get their bidding done through the selective identity games they play.

Work ethics however have more to do with the level, focus or intensity of work involvement than the quality of such work (or escapade). Police officers are also concerned with the face, skill and style displayed by themselves and others at work. The chief way performance is made visible to the police is through stories -- the narration and
re-narration of work sequences to colleagues and superiors. From such stories come what I describe next as the social poetics of police work, which, like the work ethics claimed, attributed, displayed and judged by police officers, provide another domain in which personal identity is fashioned.

**The Social Poetics of Patrol**

Poetics in literature concerns the ways writers as narrators achieve particular effects in their texts and on their readers. It emphasizes the close examination of the making of texts by looking at how specific authors blend invention and convention, innovation and tradition in their work. In like fashion, social poetics deals with the processes of creativity in the social world and thus displays a keen interest in how individuals appropriate certain cultural forms (established ways of saying or doing things) for use in specific and ever changing social situations. A social poetics analyzes how performances -- as production and communication -- take shape such that they are read (by the self and others) as creative, typically individual, adaptations or solutions to both the novel (exceptional) and common (familiar) problems faced by members of some specified community. Agency is at the center of social poetics and it is found in those differences in doing things that make a difference. Police officers who perform a police action in a particular way identify themselves by the choices they make, by their artful (or artless) style of execution and by the greater or lesser degrees of mastery conveyed to knowledgeable others by their actions. Competence is at issue and, to the police, wide discrepancies exist.

That work is often understood by the police as a performance of a certain sort is clear when stories of the work are told. "Let me tell you about last Friday night..." leads into a story or series of stories about episodes and characters, about duties performed and avoided, about what happened to whom, where, when and why. The primary audience for these tales is other police officers. In fact, the chief way work performances of patrol officers are made visible to others is through the retelling of work experiences -- both informally (mostly word of mouth) and formally (mostly in writing). The police on the ground usually work alone or in pairs and most of their colleagues and especially their superiors do not often see what they do. But a good deal of police work does get narrated
and attended to in various ways. In important ways, the tales that are told within the agency serve to shape and direct the actions of the members.

Stories of patrol work consist mainly of relatively closed action sequences in which troubles arise (beginnings), actions are taken (middles) and outcomes achieved or thwarted (endings). The plot is standard, one of crisis, intervention and result (Manning, 1988). Some action sequences are of course preferred to others, notably those taking place on the outside and involving real police work. Instances in which the police are unsure of what to do or are unable to do anything at all muddy if not destroy the middle and end of the standard tale and hence are less likely to be told because they are not seen as "real police work." Calls to attend to disputes among neighbors (rarely requiring any action to be taken) or to investigate burglar alarms (overwhelmingly false) are examples in this regard. Such tasks are handled with dispatch and relative disinterest for they do not lead to good stories.

A reportable and identifying story must be "police relevant" in that there is some form of danger posed to people or public safety of the sort that the police could remove or eliminate through their actions (Bittner, 1970; 1991). Situations that do not promise some possibility for police action (and thus narratability) are not sought out or liked. Incidents most worthy of creating a story are those that provide a challenge to a police officer's abilities and might involve a sequence of events that lead to a particularly sought after ending such as the rare capture of a red-handed thief. The best stories are those that portray officers exercising their imagination, their special skills and abilities in response to an opportunity sought or good fortune seized.

The social poetics of patrol work inevitably involve the police notion of commonsense -- a kind of presence of mind that leads an officer to a shrewd analysis of a problematic situation and can be acted on in certain ways to achieve or at least try to achieve a desirable goal. The choice of what to do in a given situation reflects the amount of commonsense possessed by an officer. The best stories elaborate complexity and provide multiple-choice opportunities. All officers seeks to display their commonsense and, based on the feedback and confirmation they receive from others, come to understand and (usually) sustain a positive sense of self.
Commonsense is not thought to be evenly distributed across officers or always realized by an officer at the time (although there is usually plenty of it on hand after an incident has, in police parlance, gone down). At the center of police tales and poetics are choices about what to do in a vexing situation, about what measures to take given always particular if not peculiar circumstances. This is one reason why police procedurals are disregarded and why the thick rulebooks they carry remain in the trunks of their prowl cars. An officer's reaction to a car identified as stolen depends for example not on some standard operating procedure but on a variety of contextual matters such as where it is at the time it is spotted, whether it is in motion or stopped, does it appear abandoned or in use, is the engine still warm, could the thieves still be about, and so on. Each of these contextual features opens up different lines of possible action that call for police judgment and action.

Commonsense as displayed in the stories officers tell and are told about them is then built up over time and becomes associated with the identity of a particular officer. Those officers with lots of commonsense have therefore lots of memorable and creditable stories circulating in the agency about their exemplary use of it. There is of course a structure to commonsense based partly on just where officers are assigned and the opportunities they have to take part in events that can demonstrate their commonsense (or lack thereof). Since commonsense assumes agency or choice, it is most readily displayed outside on the street rather than inside in the station. Patrol officers can build identity then by telling stories about their own work while administrators can build identity only by telling stories about the work of others or by placing themselves in the past. Since identity must be continually attended too, administrators are at some disadvantage when it comes to displaying commonsense -- beyond what is revealed by their choice of the stories of others to tell -- because they have no longer have a continuous flow of outside experiences to draw on for use in their narratives.

The poetics of various patrol activities allow individual officers to develop something of their own characteristic style of work that reflects not only their work ethics but the quality of their work as well. Performance identifies the performer and through such a linkage a piece of work is signed. As stories are told, officers develop their own
signatures. How they issue moving vehicle violations, deal with the public in a crowd control situation, intervene in street corner quarrels or interrogate criminal suspects are identifying acts. In a family dispute, an officer can take, for example, the jovial "let me be your buddy" approach of a friendly helper or assume the worldly "you can tell me anything, it won't shock me" posture of a nonchalant professional. They may favor impersonality and cutting things short by adopting a "don't tell me too much 'cause I'm not your friend" line or take a technical turn by pushing those they deal with to tell them "what's the problem around here, anything for us?" Some may be slightly embarrassed by the whole matter and simply rush to finish the job and get back to their patrol car. Depending on whom they are talking to and what effects they are trying to achieve, officers place themselves in a particular position, select a tone, display or conceal implements of their trade, assume a bodily pose, choose a vocabulary and so forth. Taken as a whole, these performances are recognized as involving particular skills. They are not the kind of skills assessed by annual performance reviews but they are the skills that count to valued colleagues and are talked about and judged by others in the department. Reputations as being good or bad on the family beef call emerge and an officer becomes known to their colleagues (and themselves as well) as someone who is "affable and calms people down" or "short-tempered and irritates everyone" or "tough and easily takes control."

Known skills such as an ability to talk to people, write crisp and well formulated reports, locate trouble of a certain kind or handle the wheel expertly and coolly in a high speed chase are some of the ways police identify one another and themselves through the poetics of their work. Certain skills often become the basis for the control of work through its distribution as when a patrol sergeant or dispatcher gives a certain call to Peter and not Paul. Signatures are often reinforced indirectly as is the case when a officer notes that they had taken the a call the day before yesterday that Mary would have loved or that their work would have been much easier if only Joe had been along. In principle, there are as many different poetics in police work as there are culturally recognized skills. And these skills are much discussed such that good and bad performers (and performances) become known. Storytelling itself is a performance whose identifying
Poetics include topic and word choice, wit, elliptic or hyperbolic style, displayed emotion and means of convincing emplotment (e.g., tragedy, satire, irony, romance, comedy).

It is important to point out that for the police the doing of the work is often more the source of identity than is the result of the work. This performance or process orientation for the police is perhaps more pronounced than in other lines of work since policework -- in particular, patrol work -- rarely has a product to serve as an object of pride. Much police work is undertaken to restore disorder and achieve something akin to an imperceptible state of calm or peace (clearing an accident, quieting a neighborhood). Some patrol officers claim that their job is simply "to keep the assholes from taking over the city" (Van Maanen, 1978). Even when arrests are made in criminal cases, the arresting officers, if they are from the patrol or uniformed division, see little of the final product and rarely learn if their reports and activities are helpful in making the case. They are left with a sequence of action and only a tentative or provisional end imposed by the division of labor and the administrative logic that attends to their work.

Yet, the sequence of action it seems is more than enough to allow a rich poetics of patrol work to develop. The police have no doubt that their work allows for many different kinds of mastery and each kind has its own poetics that can be achieved, recognized and, critically, talked about as such. Mastery of performance in police circles is acquired, as all would attest, only through many years of experience and practice. Stories multiply, converge, thicken, spread such that some officers are able, within the genre of work to which their mastery applies, build what Bourdieu (1981) calls "cultural capital." Identity adheres in and across these work genres since what a person does well is considered a good measure of just who they are under the skin.

Police Morality: A Matter of Trust

Identity is fundamentally a dynamic matter. It is not achieved once and for all but is always provisional and therefore represents, as suggested before, something of a quest -- a quest for personal dignity, for recognition, for grace, for the respect of others (conditional, of course, on the display of respect), for a sense of place and stability. Effective supervisors recognize this of course and, to their credit, grant honor and respect
to those whose actions correspond to their own ideas of what skillful police work entails. Respect and honor signal confirmation of identity. This is of course something of a quiet, modest gift yet one the giver may well expect -- vaguely -- to be paid back in some fashion in the future (e.g., the willingness to help out on a distasteful task, the foregoing of a lunch break when a squad is shorthanded, the taking on of extra paperwork, working a shift with a hapless rookie, etc.).

Personal identity is what we think of as the deep, unshakable, authentic, honest, sincere "true self," the inner core of, so to speak, our being. Among the police, the most discussed and worrisome moral value is trustworthiness. All police officers point out just how important it is "to be able to rely on one another," "to count on your back ups," "to trust your partner blindly." One of the striking features of trust to the police is the heavy negative moral weight put on the behavior of coworkers taken to be inauthentic, phony, deceitful, fake, false, insincere and thus dishonest. The performed or presented self should line up with the true self -- the situated with the real. From this perspective, the most damaging lies are those that directly involve the self (Manning, 1985). The officer who says he cares deeply for his patrol colleagues yet is rarely seen to slide by on those potentially troublesome calls his colleagues handle will have his trustworthiness questioned. This is dirty work at the individual level.

Performances, tropes and narratives provide the materials that allow police officers to assess the moral character of themselves and their colleagues. To have an identity is to be a "real person" and that means putting a "true self" out for inspection. The true self must be both claimed and displayed, it must not be hidden or withheld among colleagues. To be trustworthy is therefore to be known by others (and presumably one's self) as a readable, straightforward, candid (in the right situations, for the right reasons) and predictable sort of person. Trustworthy officers "show themselves," "speak their mind" and "can be counted on." They are "open and honest," "reliable," "straight shooters," "know what they are doing" and "say what they think not what you want to hear." To be trustworthy is to have a "true self" that is known. Identity is premised on such reasoning because a person without an easily identifiable and relatively stable
identity has nothing solid -- no character or principles -- to be true or false to beyond the consistency of their inconsistency.

The patrolman who claims, "I have my values, my hard stops, and everybody around here knows what they are and where I stand" is saying he is trustworthy. He is assuring himself and others that he can be counted on as to what he will and will not do. It may well be that because the police are so preoccupied with criminals who achieve their goals through misrepresentation, guile and cunning, they value trustworthiness moreso than other occupational groups. Violations of trust are, after all, precisely the kinds of behavior they are paid to prevent. What repeated violations of trust reveal is a lack of personal identity without which there can be no promises met, no reliability or predictability, no person behind the mask.

Distrust between police officers frequently results, as they point out, from not knowing one another's stories -- their narratives and performances. Common is the expression of shock or disgust with the behavior of a fellow officer through the use of the pointedly tart question, "What's his story?" It may be simply this colleague has yet to amass any stories or that the puzzled officer has not yet heard them. Whatever the source, however, not knowing one another's stories means they can not know the other's identity and thus can hardly gauge the other's trustworthiness. Over time, by telling and showing one another more and more bits and pieces of their work lives, their family lives, their likes and dislikes, their pasts and presents, their skills and lack of skills, their aims and frustrations, officers begin to identify one another and judge one another's trustworthiness. Those who are not out and about on the street, are not seen in the station house, are not apparent at squad parties or local gathering spots are not trusted. Supervisors are obviously disadvantaged in this regard.

Two general matters are of most interest in these sorts of identity games. First, since trustworthiness is taken to be a mark of one's character, it should be relatively constant across social situations. Second, it should be relatively consistent across time. This is one reason why officers like to get to know their colleagues in a variety of situations and times -- inside the station and out, in different action settings, with partners and peers, with ranking officers, with various publics, at home and at social occasions, at
play and at work, drunk and sober, in tense situations and relaxed ones, at different points in one's career and in different work roles. The "true self" is thought to reveal itself by a certain consistency of behavior across all these settings and times.

This is not to say that the police expect each other to behave in exactly the same way across time and space. It is not precise in any arithmetic way with one side of an equation expected to equal the other side. But it is to say that the police regard as untrustworthy those who, for example, give widely discrepant accounts of events in different social situations or those who appear obsequious and ingratiating with some officers and unbending and aloof with others. The aggressive, street savvy patrol officer who, when promoted to sergeant, turns suddenly into a rule-minded zealot obsessed with procedural regularities will be shunned by stupefied former colleagues as an unpredictable sort devoid of character. The valued sameness in different places and times is then a matter of degree. Few patrol officers expect their workmates to speak to a drunk citizen or a district court judge in the same way they speak to friends or to behave the same way at home as they do at work or to show the same enthusiasm for the job as a twenty-year veteran as they did as a rookie. Too close a match between situations and times would reflect a sort of unaccountable stiffness or rigidity and be regarded as potentially false as social chameleons whose colors always match their surroundings and thus have no true color at all. A person who has a pat line for all situations or seems to be constantly selling themselves as a good and honorable sort may well be taken by others as "stiff," "hiding something," "unable to act spontaneously" or being "too slick" and will be seen therefore as untrustworthy, unable to be candid. Those who say yes to everything, who never show resistance (or vise versa) or those who are seemingly always upbeat and cheerful, never bitchy or morose (or vise versa) wherever they happen to be are thought to be depthless sorts of people who have no opinion of their own, no soul to reveal, no character or, if they do have character, they are, for some reason, most unwilling to expose it.

At the heart of the matter is a deep concern over the potential betrayal of and disloyalty to one's colleagues. Those who show sudden shifts of allegiance or appear virtually inflexible create suspicion as to whether they even have the capacity to act in a
moral fashion. Without such a capacity, trust is impossible. As a moral value, trust implies a predictable and more or less unflinching commitment to opinions, ethics, ideas, persons, places and so on. These are matters that that cannot be altered overnight and a certain stability is expected. If changes occur, they must be carefully accounted for and orchestrated over time and typically be only of modest degree. Those who are seen to give up their principles (or, worse, their colleagues) too quickly, too easily or too abruptly are regarded as morally bankrupt, empty of character, unworthy of respect and beyond trust.

Within this moral discourse exists a shadowy character in the police world, the despised, untrustworthy officer who is a traitor to one's own kind: a dissembler, a dirt bag, a rat, a depraved and dangerous anti-hero of the occupation. The despised have however a peek-a-boo, now-you-see-them-now-you-don't presence. Everyone seems to know of untrustworthy colleagues but few get identified as such -- at least completely so. They are apparently everywhere and nowhere at once and are perhaps best thought of as allegorical members of the trade. Their function it seems is to mark the moral boundaries of the police world across which members must not pass. Yet, despite the difficulties the police face when pointing to specific untrustworthy colleagues, their interest in establishing and maintaining their own credentials and those of others as trustworthy remains lively.

As I have mentioned, coming to know others depends in large measure on learning their stories. There must then be places and times where these stories can be exchanged so that officers who do not often work together can get to know one another as human beings rather than simply as members of the same organization. Such socializing is often sponsored directly by the organization and serves in part as a control tactic because it is assumed that if colleagues have a more intimate knowledge of one another, their relationships and work performance will improve. Some of my previous work has taken up this theme for the police do think of social events, of squad parties, of pub crawls, of holiday feasts, of departmental picnics, of promotion celebrations, of retirement fetes, of breakfast gatherings, of wakes and funerals, of reunions and get togethers of all sorts, planned and spontaneous, as oracles of identity -- occasions that are
believed to reveal "true selves" (Van Maanen, 1985, 1991). On these occasions, participants can "let their hair down," "say what's really on their mind," "toss convention to the wind" or, most generally, "be themselves."

What happens of course is usually less than what is hoped. The veterans with long service in the department who, for example, find their younger efficiency-minded or technology-obsessed colleagues mystifying will learn few of their stories because the identity they display in the stories they tell will be promptly challenged or attacked by the veterans as inappropriate to the police role (and the reverse). The dance of intimacy, as Goffman (1959) tells us, depends on the exchange and honoring of revelation by counter-revelation. When narratives are challenged, identity is on trial and a defense usually mounted. Exchange is blocked. If there is a lack of respect for the mind that is spoken, the atmosphere clouds and often all that can be uncovered is a dislike among officers.

While it is true that one can trust another officer without liking them, both judgments rest on a good deal more than an occasional social gathering. Parties may help for they sometimes mix up ordinary social relations and provide another time and place in which the stability of character can be displayed and tested. Yet, more often than not, like-minded officers seek one another out at parties and small clusters form. Most partygoers know that to speak one's mind across clusters, to be open and honest with less familiar colleagues is to risk misunderstanding. Recognizing this, officers across organizational segments such as the patrol and detective divisions or across hierarchical ranks must identify each other without much direct input from one another and feel sure that even if they were to talk, their counterparts would not open up or tell them the truth. Thus telling one's own stories as well as learning the stories of others is not a smooth, casual or easy to orchestrate matter.

Patterns of trust in police agencies are therefore rather restrictive and premised usually on a long interactional history. They extend often to only those officers who are linked by early partnership, long-term squad membership or divisional posting, shared police academy experiences, close and extended residential proximity and so on. Because trustworthiness is tied directly to personal identity, an assessment of continuity and consistency is crucial to the matter and such assessment takes time, usually a long time.
Social poetics and work ethics play a role here too for those who are seen to emphasize the wrong kinds of interests and skills or hold on to the wrong kind work values and interests can not be trusted by those who possess the right ones. This is of course a matter of perspective. For example, those officers who some feel compromise their work obligations by not backing-up fellow officers or by avoiding certain kinds of calls are "faking" their identity as responsible and hard working police officers and can not be trusted just as those who by taking advantage of their disability insurance or the sick leave policy in the department for monetary gain are seen by many to display a most inappropriate commitment to the police mission and are not "real cops" despite the claims they make. The officer who is the master of escapade cannot suddenly turn into a pillar of work-a-day respectability without losing the trust of those who knew him earlier. At stake is moral character and it is always on the line.

Some Concluding Remarks …

Students of work life have repeatedly suggested that those drawn to worthy occupations that have long histories are expected to acquire a strong sense of belonging to a traditional establishment that sets them off from others (Hughes, 1958, Abbott, 1991; Barley and Kunda, 2001). Police work is certainly no exception to this rule and those engaged in the police life do form an occupational community that emphasizes loyalty to colleagues, independence of thought and action, strong work identities, and emotional distance from high ranking members of their trade, ordinary citizens and, of course, most villains. Police culture forms at the bottom of the organization where most of the members labor and thus valorizes working the street while mocking police management and command. Police work as patrol is responding to calls, looking for action (or distraction) and producing quick, decisive and altogether pragmatic solutions for the messy problems that are met in the street in such a way that those solutions stick and do not come back to haunt an officer or the department. Paperwork is a necessary evil, despised but handled with the understanding that a mistake -- even a trivial one -- could be costly.
At an organizational level of analysis, it is hardly surprising that police organizations are marked by a good deal of self and occupational control. To take the patrol function specifically: coordination demands across and even within units are slight to modest; the relationship between ends (keeping the peace) and means (patrol activities) are not well understood despite at least a half-century of seriously trying; the problems of order faced on the street remain rather unpredictable both spatially and temporally; much of the work is carried out unobserved by others in the agency and even less so by the public at large; and the environment or field in which the police operate is highly politicized and volatile. High status professionals carve out considerable autonomy in such domains and so do relatively low-status police officers. Cops may not control significant organizational resources beyond their craft-like knowledge of the job and of their territories and clientele but they nonetheless operate for the most part on their own with considerable discretion as to what they will do. This is more or less consistent with what theorists of a contingency, resource dependency, neo-institutional and even population ecology bent might say. But, critically, what it is people do with their autonomy at work is not well developed in the organizational literatures. In the foregoing analytic and ethnographic notes, I have tried to open up the organizational control discourse to some of the day-to-day control tactics and stratagems that operate largely on a cultural plane but are seeming so common and deeply embedded within some organizations that they are almost taken-for-granted and hence rather invisible.

Again at the organizational level, this taken-for-granted character of using identity as a control mechanism is not a particularly astonishing matter. It has been picked up of late by a number of organizational scholars (e.g., Ibarra, 2003; Wrzeniewski and Dutton, 2001; Kogut and Zander, 1996; White, 1992). Organizational economists Akerlof and Kranton (2005:11) say, for example, “the ability of organizations to place workers into jobs with which they identify and the creation of those identities are central to what makes organizations work.” I agree but few researchers – including Akerlof and Kranton beyond their engaging review of several classic work ethnographies– have spelled out in any detail what those identities might be specifically or how particular actions might follow from such identities.
Bringing the notions of occupational communities, cultures and identities into the scholarly discourse surrounding organizational control allows for a greater understanding of how self-control operates. I have argued here that such an understanding turns on a nuanced awareness of the always variegated work identities present in an organization. When such identities are valued and desired by both managers and the managed, individual acts of identity follow that may well be consistent with organizational aims and managerial preferences. Control is virtually automatic. Rarely, however, are such perfect matches to be found for jobs and roles in organizations consist of multiple tasks, some of which are identity sustaining (even enhancing) and some of which are not. Control then rests on the tricky ways these bundles of work are lumped and split into tasks that are affirming or disconfirming of identity and then allocated selectively across those who make up a given work group.

Control is always a mix and match matter. Direct face-to-face orders come along with the use of particular constraining technologies that are held in high or low regard and are backed up by official rules and procedures that have more or less authoritative status. Pay policies, production quotas, bonuses, promotional opportunities, disciplinary measures, supervisory oversight and monitoring and highly rationalized appeals to meet or exceed targets are found in all organizations. In police organizations, the influence of all of these approaches – save perhaps appeals “to serve and protect” – are rather minimal. Pay bands are narrow, negotiated and set beyond the workplace, no bonuses or special rewards are delivered beyond symbolic ones, promotions are few and far between with only one in ten or so patrol officers expected to make it to the sergeant’s rank before retiring, disciplinary measures are used quite sparingly and take considerable time to unfold. What are left are peer pressures and self-control. Official rewards of course combine with the unofficial, but, as I have argued here, police organizations by maintaining and often embracing the self-image of its workforce builds managerial control by engaging officers in a tacit agreement: Identity engaging and sustaining work for the meeting of managerial goals.

Identity pursuits on the part of most patrol officers by and large meet management’s desire for compliance. Sergeants can usually and routinely rely on the
arousal of positive identity feelings to induce appropriate action and effort on the part of their charges. Allowing officers to “do what I want to do and express who I am” keeps the organization afloat and, by and large, allows it to meet its rather loosely and internally defined public service goals. Outsiders may not see the police doing much but, rest assured, the police would not agree.

This suggests that perhaps too much classic organization control research is focused on constraint and the power to impose restrictions. This approach assumes that an organizational member’s aspirations for autonomy, freedom, dignity and respect compete with the achievement of organizational goals. Yet a member’s voluntary engagement in particular activities can be achieved in many ways. And the way managers and supervisors create opportunities for the support and enactment of valued identities is one of those ways. We know organizations help shape these identities but the fact that they also become highly desirable with action consequences that follow such desirability has not been closely examined. Here I have suggested that police organizations help shape the identity of police officers, allow opportunities for its expression, routinely but selectively grant indulgences to identity-sustaining actions that fall beyond official lines of approval, and count on those who come to the organization to deeply engage with the police identity.

The broad culture is learned rather swiftly at the outset of an officer's career and serves to help neutralize the noticeable taint or stigma associated with doing the so-called dirty work of a society, work that appears no one else wants to do (Bittner, 1970, Van Maanen, 1982, Moscos, 2007). The stigma is, in part, institutional, reflecting the working class character of the police organizations and, in part, social, reflecting the degraded status possessed by most of the "clients" of regular police attention and action. The trade also carries a physical stain because of violence and proximity to violence sometimes involved in the work as well as a moral stain because of the corrupt, criminal or scandalous revelations that surface from time to time in numerous police agencies.

There is of course nothing like a shared stigma to draw people together and many have remarked on the tight, cohesive, culture of solidarity that mark police agencies (Skolnick, 1966; Walsh, 1990; Reiss, 1992). Socialization into such a culture provides
recruits with a self-consciousness of the collective as defined by members rather than the society. Ennobling aspects of the work are prominently drawn on by agents of socialization as a way of helping recruits cope with whatever stigma -- however slight -- they might feel. Recruits learn of the sacred public trust they are given and the importance of the police role to society. They hear of police heroism in the face of danger. Potential stigma is thus actively managed.

By and large, American police departments seem to be reasonably successful in this regard -- particularly the large, urban ones. Turnover within the occupation is low, a long line of aspirants to the trade forms whenever departmental openings are offered, and a self-image of "helping people" is almost universally quoted by the police as a motive for joining and staying with the force (Greene and Mastrofski, eds., 1988; Reiss, 1992; Sanders, Hughes and Langworthy, 1993). Those for whom a stigma looms large, who, for example, regard the police as despicable henchmen for the ruling class or brutal enforcers of the status quo or deceitful con artists out to line their own pockets at the expense of the local citizenry or lowly, unskilled, useless civil servants forced to interact with the scum of the earth would no doubt never join the police or leave after joining if such feelings persist or emerge. If they did not, the tension between their personal, situational and social identities would be extreme for their "true selves," if revealed by word or deed to colleagues, would then be a source of considerable discomfort and pain as a target for the degradation of others.

Socialization as a control devise helps to bring social, situational and personal identities in line and by so doing helps create an occupational community of notable strength. Occupational members -- as set off from the rest of society -- are given means by which they can satisfactorily present and manage their roles in society. The organization is of course critical in this regard. The police have resources, powerful supporters in high places, vows, honorable goals, past and present heroes, insignias, sophisticated technologies, codes of conduct, mission statements and mottoes (e.g., "Making Detroit Safer," “New York’s Finest”) as sources of collective pride. Yet police recruits also learn swiftly that those who do not wear the badge and with whom they must interact often treat them as rather faceless, anonymous, street level bureaucrats (Lipsky,
All officers soon recognize that as representatives of the state *par excellence*, their presence is not always welcome. Even if a good citizen’s heart is pure and conscience clean, a police car parked in front of one's house is not a benevolent sign in this society (nor is it likely to be overlooked by the neighbors). The police know this and talk a good deal about their ability to "secure the peace" by merely showing up. They know that a seemingly idle patrol car or officer is still doing something -- communicating a social identity -- through mere presence. As they learn their work, they come to appreciate and talk about symbolic character of the police role and their own shared position in the scheme of things.

Yet the police also know that such matters say little about them as individuals *qua* individuals -- as unique persons with special interests, skills, values and character. The categorical police role is then something of screen behind which a good deal of individual variation is concealed. Outsiders rarely sense such variation beyond the socially marked distinctions of rank, age, gender, ethnicity, function and so on. What I have somewhat breathlessly argued in this paper is that while the police agree that work ethics, poetics and trust are central matters, of concern to all occupational members, these are also precisely the matters officers use to distinguish themselves from one another and thus become individuals within the workplace. Those officers who, for example, seek court time and seemingly relish making heaps of arrests are seen by others (and themselves) as quite different than those who do not seek such work. Those who blissfully pass on work to others or finesse it or avoid it altogether put their work ethics on display. All is complicated of course by the multidimensional aspects of the work. The station house sergeant who is labeled by patrol officers the "Olympic Torch (who never goes out)" may lose status to some by his inside inclinations but gain some back again by his much appreciated ability to "brighten" the paperwork of subordinates and thus help "cover their asses" by his suggestions of just what to put in and leave out of formal reports (Van Maanen, 1983).

It may well be that the unity of the police occupational culture has been much overstated. Police values and attitudes are far from uniform. Some of this is structural. In most good sized departments, officers can be posted to: the mounted (horse) patrol; the
traffic, juvenile, internal investigations or records division; the bomb, gang or tactical 
operations squad; the drug enforcement, crime prevention or equipment repair unit; the 
community relations, crime statistics or police training function; the personnel or police 
communications department; the detective bureau with its numerous specialties such as 
homicide, computer crimes and bank fraud. Each will have its own poetics and perhaps 
special measures of morality and ethics on which officers will vary. Each will be seen to 
some as embracing or eschewing "dirty work" as locally defined. This division of labor is 
gendered as well with women more frequently assigned to administrative and service 
units than men (Martin, 1993; Worden, 1997). The patrol division -- my interest 
throughout most of this paper -- is itself quite varied in the kinds of assignments it offers 
while serving also as the gateway to postings elsewhere in the organization. Officers seen 
by some of their patrol colleagues as "unwilling to share the load" or "backing away from 
the action" or perhaps simply as "shy and quiet" will be encouraged by word and deed to 
move on to a more appropriate posting (or out of the agency altogether) if they cannot 
find an acceptable niche (both to themselves and to others) within the division. And, 
again, this is what allows identity controls to be effective in the hands of knowledgeable 
managers. Were the same identity rewards offered to all or were all identities the same, 
postings, leniencies, respectful attitudes would lose the considerable influence they now 
possess.

Many niches in police agencies exist and officers typically find them or make 
them. Identity is thus linked to the work and ordinarily -- with time, effort and the 
confirmation of others -- stabilized. What the occupational culture provides are those 
dimensions on which personal differences matter. Yet, across the board, trust is crucial in 
the police world and character judgments inevitably turn on this moral matter. Trust will 
almost certainly not be taken for granted by officers unacquainted with one another or 
even vouchsafed among all those who are acquainted. The basis of trust is a certain 
consistency of behavior across time, space and situation. Only those whose "true self" is 
shown and known can be trusted.

On this last point, some readers may find it rather archaic to be reading of a "true 
self." As I mentioned at the outset, the self, we have been told, is today’s shattered,
fragmented, contradictory, entirely situational (e.g., Jameson, 1991). Postmodern theorists argue that individuals today are completely absorbed or -- to use the Adler’s (1991:219) evocative term -- "engulfed" by the social contexts that surround them. Since these contexts are radically different from one another because of the ever growing and varied roles we are asked to play in everyday life, any authentic sense of self must recede from view as impossible to maintain. To be sustained, a "true self" must be anchored in social relations. But if our social relations are multiple, disconnected, pull us in many directions, invite us to play a number of non-overlapping roles, they become more or less incoherent. Some celebrate such conditions as providing the structural means of freeing the person from the social (Baudrillard, 1990). Others express grave concern as does Giddens (1991) when he suggests that our lives have become ever more unpredictable, ever more disembedded from the familiar and stable, and thus whatever trust we have in our knowledge of the self or others is continually eroding.

While no doubt useful as a warning against both essentialism and the easy presumption of a transcendent human nature, I am, in the end, skeptical of this postmodern portrait of the individual as isolated, situationally conformist, segmented and altogether fungible. The police view such a person as morally flawed -- without enduring character -- and struggle, successfully for the most part, to maintain a sense of themselves and their colleagues as having coherent identities that do not drastically shift over time or across social situations. Contradictions raise questions and officers are held to account for them as best they can. But trust among colleagues would be impossible were not a continuity of identity -- a "real self" -- assumed. Perhaps, in other lines of work, postmoderns multiply and prosper. Certainly trust is unlikely to have quite the same central value and distinguishing mark of acceptable character in other occupations as it does to the police. But I think it unlikely to be irrelevant to the conduct of any work that takes places in an occupational community so typically marked if not defined by the by intense interaction and identity work that goes on among members. Thus, to again invoke the words of Everett Hughes (1970:149): “if a problem turns up in one occupation it is nearly certain to turn up in others.”
Notes

This paper is written for an edited book of readings edited by Sim B. Sitkin, Laura B. Cardinal and Katinka Bijlsman-Frankema titled Control in Organizations: New Directions in Theory and Research to be published by Cambridge University Press. What follows is a draft presented at a conference attended by the contributors to the volume on August 8-9, 2008 in Laguna Beach, California. As are most conference papers (of mine at least), this is a hasty, wordy and provisional draft and I have no one yet to thank for help with its production. This will change with readers and time.

By this remark I mean merely that social identity, as attached to the performance of dirty work in society, is modified, if at all, more by collective associations and actions than by individual acts of interpretation and negotiation. Professionalization is one such collective process by which members of a given line of work attempt to increase their status, respect and rewards within a society and unload unwanted tasks -- dirty work -- to other occupational groups (Saraffi-Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1981; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985a). But dirty work designations run deep, pertain to the moral status of certain kinds of work and are not likely to disappear entirely even if the respectability of those who perform it is uplifted (Hughes, 1970; Emerson and Pollner, 1976; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1998). That people carve out meaning and dignity while attending to low status work or in socially distasteful occupations is not at issue. They do. But efforts to bootstrap the collective endeavor to higher realms of social standing and reward typically fall flat. See, for example, the ethnographic work on sewer men (Reid, 1993), doormen (Bearman, 2005), crack dealers (Bourgeois, 2003) and temp workers as “warm bodies” (Barley and Kunda, 2006). Even the homeless carve out a degree of meaning and dignity despite their socially distained position (Snow and Anderson, 1987).

The notion of a situated identity emerges most cogently from Goffman's (1959; 1961; 1967) analysis of the interaction order. It refers to that aspect of identity that is public, socially enacted, more or less momentary since it is bounded strictly in space and time. It is negotiable only within a defined situation that regulates the actions and responses of both the self and others. Social identity refers to the self-consciousness that results from membership in a particular social category such as an occupation or role and is further discussed a bit later in this paper. For considerably more elaborate treatments of situated and social identity, see, Turner, 1968; Alexander and Lauderdale, 1977; Stryker and Burke, 2000; and especially Holland et al, 2001.

The ethnographic materials dealing with the police, unless otherwise noted, come from my own studies of police organizations – focused particularly on patrol divisions. A good deal about the settings and methods followed in these studies has been published and I will not repeat these accounts here other than to say that they rest on 15 months of participant-observation in a large, urban, American police agency (in the early 1970s), 9 months of fieldwork in the Metropolitan Police Department in London during the academic year

Such work is considerable and, in sociology, dates back to both Durkheim (1951) and Weber’s (1958) interests in the role of work in society. The idea of occupational community is hardly new. Gertzl (1961:38), for example, used the phrase to reflect the “pervasiveness of occupational identification and the convergence of the informal friendship patterns and colleague relationships.” Salaman (1974) elaborated on the same themes when characterizing the work worlds of architects and railroaders. More recent synthetic treatments are found in Hodson and Sullivan (2002) and Barley and Kunda (2001).

There are of course notable exceptions. Consider, for example, Pratt (2000), Kunda (1992), Fine (1996), Covaleski et al. (1998) and Creed et al. (2002). These are studies grounded in particular work worlds in which observed talk and action is linked to particular not general work identities and a reader comes away with a sense of the specificity of a given work world.

The notion of “consent” is a contentious one in organizational and occupational studies. Neo-Marxist scholars raise the possibility of “false consciousness” whenever consent is flagged as legitimating a given control regime in capitalistic contexts (e.g., Willis, 1977; Burawoy, 1979; Jermier, 2003). They have their points to make and, by and large, they are thoughtful and worthy ones. My view on these matters is agnostic and pragmatic because sorting out what is “false” and what is “real” depends a good deal on one’s epistemological stance and the too easy displacement of lived experience for theory. I have no doubt that consent is in many place and many times manufactured and manipulated by those whose persuasive resources are munificent and powerful but I know too that there are always weapons of the weak that must not be underestimated. When put into play, false consciousness often dissolves. There are thus many ways to read consent.

Several good reviews (and examples) of the “quest for self-control” are found in Fantasia (1998), Hodson (2001), and Simpson (1985). A few useful empirical studies of late include Pratt, Rockman and Kaufman (2006), Alvesson and Willmott (2002) and Bearman (2005). The “quest for dignity” is a somewhat broader matter but it too is developing a solid research literature. See, for example, Hodson and Roscigno (2004) and Sennett (1998). This latter quest – and its many failures – has of course been at the core of virtually all of Erving Goffman’s writings but made particular poignant in Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (1963).

This is of course a gross simplification of some quite subtle and serious social study. Theories of modernity track back to Durkheim, Marx and Weber and there are important differences among them that
are ignored here. All emphasize however the progressive loosening of social bonds among people as
nationalization, industrialization, urbanization, mechanization, professionalization and so forth take hold.
As modernity advances, work becomes fragmented, rationalized, separated from the home, the family, the
neighborhood. Social roles narrow and multiply, conformity within roles is demanded but it is conformity
within increasingly delimited spheres. The literature here is massive. Giddens (1991) provides an elegant
sociological treatment of both modernity and post-modernity and their respective discontents.

*I am hardly staking out any new ground in this section and have written on these matters before (see, in
particular, Van Maanen, 1978, 1979, 1987). I should note however that when it comes to the study of
identity I rely heavily on Cooley, 1968[1902], Mead, 1962[1934] and Goffman (1959) as well as a long
line of symbolic interactionist writers of whom I am the most fond of Rock, 1969; Lyman and Scott, 1969;
1995. Good collections of work in this tradition include McCall and Simmons, eds., (1978) and Kortarba
and Fontana, eds. (1984). Of most use to me in this paper is however a remarkable study of the merging of
the East and West Berlin police agencies occurring after the fall of the wall by Glaeser (2002). Much of my
thinking about the personal identity of American police officers as set forth here is influenced by this work.

*xi Scholarly treatments on the consciousness of the self includes Strauss, 1977; Geckas, 1982; Demo, 1992;
to the surface is, in Zussman's (1996) phrase, "autobiographical occasions." These are encounters and
episodes in which we are under some pressure to produce a story of our life such as a job interview, an
anniversary, a homecoming, a professional convention, a first date, a retirement banquet or a therapy
session. On these occasions, we are ordinarily required to reflect on our lives and provide a satisfactory
account for them (to both the self and others). Vinitzky-Seroussi (1998) provides a marvelous treatment of
high school reunions as powerful autobiographic occasions wherein the past is usually (but not always)
reconstructed to fit the present. As suggested in this work, one reason we talk so much about the past (and
memory) is that there is so little of it left. Ibarra (2004) is also quite good on the self-consciousness that
obtains when career transitions are undertaken by those in high status positions (MBA graduates of the
Harvard Business School who were ten to fifteen years into their respective high flying careers when they
decided to undertake dramatic career shifts).

*xi As used by the police, "real work" is most often taken to mean their law enforcement duties more so than
their peace keeping ones (although officers do not always agree on what precisely these duties mean and
just how they are to be separated in practice). To be sure, crook catching is always "real work" while tasks
undertaken inside the station house rarely qualify as real work to patrol officers. But, beyond this point,
work ethics are involved. To some officers, real work means attending to "reportable" business of almost
any type (but not the reporting process itself which is mere "paperwork"); to others, only certain kinds of
reportable business qualifies as real work. All officers use the phrase however as a gloss for those tasks they find most fulfilling as police work and therefore most closely connected to their social identity as police officers. For more on the notion of "real work" to the police, see, Van Maanen (1974), Manning (1977), Bittner (1981), Brown (1988), Young (1991) and, most recently, Moscos (2007).

xiii I must note that I am much taken with Michel Anteby’s superb and just published Moral Grey Zones (2008). This ethnographically-informed monograph provides a close look at a dying occupational community formed among craftsmen working for a French manufacturing firm in the aeronautics industry. In marvelous detail, Anteby shows how these craftsmen approached their work and managed to carve out a good deal of autonomy (and dignity) within the organization. “Identity incentives” refer specifically to the willingness – indeed sometimes eagerness – of managers to allow for the making of “homers” (finely crafted artifacts of a highly symbolic sort having nothing whatsoever to do with the assigned work of the craftsmen). These artifacts are crafted on company time with company materials. What is shown clearly is the power of such practices and just how they served to not only regulate the interaction order in the plant among craftsmen and managers but to insure that official work was itself carried out well. One would have to return to Gouldner’s (1958) wonderful study of the indulgence patterns he discovered in Gypsum plants he roamed in the 1950’s to find as detailed and nuanced treatment of the various kinds of leniency practices that are no doubt found in all organizations, then and now.

xiv Fabien (1987) develops the useful idea of "allochronism" to refer to a strategy people sometimes use to discount and override the experiences of others. He uses it to suggest how ethnographers treat informants (and their cultures) in their texts and on the ground. Glaeser (2002) borrows it to show how West Berlin police treated the stories told by the East Berlin police when the two organizations were brought together in the early 1990s. It is the labeling of others as backward, as displaced in time ("where their clocks tick differently") that places them in a position where they are disallowed as unable to fully take part in the present. Younger police officers of my acquaintance who often type their older colleagues as "hopelessly out of it," as "living in a different time," or as "unable to get with it" are using the same discounting -- if not dehumanizing -- strategy. The response of those so labeled is inevitably one of anger and defensiveness. Dialogue is thus foreclosed by allochronism.

xv Discipline follows organizational contours as well as personal ones. Some departments stress honor, sacrifice, discipline through, for example, the giving of medals, boot camp-like training, decorative or dress regalia, the use of considerable ceremonial protocol and strict codes of conduct governing relations between the ranks. All police organizations display quasi-military characteristics but some more so than others (e.g., Wilson, 1968; Jerimer and Berkes, 1979; Skolnick and Bayley, 1988; Manning 1996). Within most police agencies, however, the ties that bind officers to their work are perhaps becoming more contractual and instrumental rather than normative and expressive. To some, the ceremonially minimalist
organizational form of the so-called “professionalized” police department is a sad commentary on the occupation (see, Young, 1991).

My favorite escapade story is one Manning (1997) tells of the Alamo Run, a police caper made possible by the use of personal cellular phones in squad cars. The story tells of how patrol officers in Dallas challenged one another at work to drive to San Antonio, snap a Polaroid photograph of themselves and their patrol car in front of the Alamo National Monument and return to Dallas before their shift was finished. Until the escapade was discovered and stopped by departmental officials, calls that were assigned to the unit speeding to and from San Antonio were taken by other units in the patrol squad who kept in touch with their gleeful, on-the-road compatriots by phone.

This variation infrequently makes it into published reports on the police life. On this matter I too must cop a plea for I am guilty of underplaying the variety of work ethics among the police in favor of a rather general one I once tagged the "lay low and keep out of trouble" ethic (Van Maanen, 1973; 1974). I cannot claim ignorance either since I was quite aware at the time of a few officers who regarded the "lay low" ethic a faulty and demoralizing one. Indeed, they were the very ones that made the rule apparent for me. Moreover, in the late-1970s, I counted over fifty different official assignments available to officers of the lower ranks in the agency I studied and knew quite well that there were personal differences and varying work styles across the officers who filled these slots (Van Maanen, 1983). This paper is something of a corrective in this regard. Manning (1996) has good things to say about the many flaws associated with research on police agencies and a number of equally good things to say about what to do to fix them.

Social poetics is a relatively new topic within the social sciences. It has been developed most notably by Herzfeld (1985, 1987, 1996) in anthropology, Brown (1982, 1987, 1989) in sociology, and Gergen and Gergen (1988) in social psychology. In many ways, it gives constructivism added vigor by directing attention to creativity and innovation. Analytically, it is not too far away from the practice theory of Bourdieu (1987) and Lave (1993). Both approaches assume agency and push for finding the sources of originality and mastery in the informing traditions, interaction patterns, implicit knowledge, social relations and transmitted wisdom represented in any "community of practice."

A good deal of police work -- particularly "real work" -- is narrativized in written reports and read and signed off by ranking officers. Peers also read these reports as well if they are particularly interested in the story. All can retell the narratives appearing in reports, filling in the missing details and restoring the sequence of events as necessary, by drawing on a rich store of background knowledge -- both general to the trade and perhaps specific to the story. Some of the stories -- verbal and written -- become classic tales of the field and spread throughout the department (and sometimes beyond as the Alamo Run tale illustrates).
On the characteristics of those stories that travel well in police organizations, see, Muir, 1977; Manning, 1984; and Young, 1991.

xx By moral, I mean that identity -- to the self and to others -- is not neutral. It is used here in the Durkheimian sense to refer not to some universal standard but to what a given group defines as good. Judgments of the self and others as good or bad are involved and, while they are culturally shaped, they are most assuredly not relative (nor necessarily generous). Taylor (1989, 1992) is the authority in this realm. On the controlling metaphors of morality in American politics, Lakeoff (1995) has intriguing ideas (and data).

xxi I am not suggesting that personal change is entirely unacceptable but such change must be accounted for carefully, in culturally accepted ways. On the nature of acceptable (and unacceptable) accounts in general, see Scott and Lyman (1968). Change can be disclaimed as well (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975). How personal change is shaped by narrative is a topic on which much ink is being used these days. See, for example, Fine, 1996; Vinitzky-Seroussi, 1998; Cole, 1996; Bruner, 1990; Schudson, 1989 and Sarbin, ed., 1986. On studying narratives, see, Reissman (1993) and Czarniawska, 1997.

xxii There is, as Manning (1997) points out, some irony in adopting the perspective of patrol officers as the defining ethos of the occupational culture for this perspective also keeps the lower-order participants in their place at the bottom of the organization. The police culture celebrates patrol work and thus resources and personnel are directed into a line of work with a limited career structure and a most traditional -- some might say conservative and reactionary -- outlook toward the work. Some 60-70 percent of sworn officers serve in the patrol divisions of most American police agencies with perhaps 15-20 percent in middle management positions and 1-5 percent in the top command posts. This distribution has been rather steady over the years. Except for the Chief of Police (for whom an outside search might be organized), police careers are flat, local, internal and tightly constrained.

xxiii Three reasons can be put forward for this state of the art. First, a good deal of current research on police work adopts rather uncritically the classic fieldwork studies of twenty to twenty-five or more years ago that focused primarily on white, urban, male patrol officers (e.g., Skolnick, 1966; Cain, 1973; Reiss, 1972; Rubenstein, 1973; Muir, 1977). Second, structural changes in police organizations are often passed over and thus tensions arising from the introduction of new technologies, increased recruitment of women and minorities, and the penetration of other occupational groups into police worlds (notably lawyers, computer technicians, social researchers, organizational consultants, and "civilian" record clerks, communication operators and social service workers) are underplayed. Third, the external environment within which the police operate has historically been understudied (with, of course, exceptions such as Wilson, 1968; Bayley, 1985 and Reiner, 1992). Union politics, city elections and governance, budgetary practices, local
economic ups and downs all influence the police in various ways and thus unsettle the occupational culture. On these matters (and more), see, Greene and Mastrofski, eds, 1988; Scheingold, 1991; Reiss, 1992; and, of course, Manning, 1996 from whom this list of research woes is lifted.