Police officers are human beings, and, as with all human beings, there are good ones and bad ones, honest ones and corrupt ones. But the power and authority that the police have over the rest of us makes police misconduct unique and uniquely dangerous—particularly in a society with a great deal of inequality. Sometimes they misbehave for what they believe are good reasons, and other times they misbehave for selfish reasons. Often it’s somewhere in between the two. Sometimes they are responding to pressure from other officers, other times they are acting on their own initiative, and sometimes they are simply caught up in much bigger social forces that are beyond everyone’s control. But because they have so much power over us and because most Americans place a great deal of trust in the police, the misconduct of officers can be a very big problem—if a society is rotten, it is often the police that are the core of the problem.

In this chapter, we will discuss police deviance. We will look at all forms of police misbehavior or police misconduct that are committed by officers in their professional capacity. If a police officer steps out of line in her private life (for example, if she cheats on her taxes), this is certainly a form of deviance, but it is not police deviance—the abuse of the unique powers of an officer is what we will discuss here. Police deviance includes corruption, that is, the abuse of police authority for personal gain—usually for money but sometimes for favors, including sexual favors. But police deviance can also involve things like excessive force, police brutality, and racial profiling—misconduct that is committed because officers believe that it is necessary for them to do their jobs, rather than being committed out of self-interest. While corruption and excessive force are very different forms of deviance in many respects, in each case, the police officers violate their own codes of professional behavior, and so they become a danger to the people that they have sworn to protect.

We will first look at the overall problem of police deviance, that is, we will examine why police deviance presents unique problems for society. Then we will turn to the various forms of misconduct: First we will look at the problems that result from what I will call overenthusiastic policing. By this I mean crime-fighting efforts by police officers that cross the line of legitimate police conduct. Then we will turn to outright corruption, examining its forms and causes. Then, we will look at the causes of these behaviors and examine some of the ways that have been used to control police deviance.

Through all this discussion, a few things should be kept in mind. First, while American policing has its problems, it is a remarkably effective institution and a remarkably ethical one, particularly when compared with the police in many other countries. While there are plenty...
of problems with American policing, the most surprising thing is that it is not very corrupt, at least when compared to other police forces around the world. In some countries, policing is considered a for-profit job—it is expected that officers are to be bribed, and police corruption and government corruption more generally are considered a fact of ordinary life. Also, in many other countries, particularly in dictatorships, the loyalty of the police is first and foremost to the state, not to the people, and officers can show remarkably little regard for the well-being of the public. Modern American policing is more effective and ethical now than at any other time in our history. When placed on a scale and weighed against other police forces, the modern American police force is among the best in the world and among the best of all time. This does not mean its problems are acceptable—it simply means that they should be seen in their appropriate context.

POLICE DEVIANCE IN CONTEXT

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

7.1 Explain why the topic of police deviance is important to the study of American policing.

The reality is that society needs some type of agency to maintain order, and this requires that officers have the authority to use force over those who will not obey the law. Once they have control over us, it is very tempting for police officers to abuse this power, because it’s extremely difficult for anybody to stop them. There are no real political or social counterweights to the police with the authority to use force, so if officers “go rogue,” there is little that can be done to stop them—except trying to get other police officers to step in. While armed citizens might be able to stop an unjust police force, this is extremely unlikely, as officers are highly trained and heavily armed. Even if such a group did stop the police from hurting the public, this new group would simply replace the police and the same problem would return. All societies need force to keep the public in check, but this is extremely difficult to do without inviting those who wield force to abuse it.

Many officers look at their job in “us versus them” terms—seeing nonofficers as outsiders who cannot understand the pressures and demands of police work. After dealing with countless people who are dishonest or disrespectful toward them, officers often become cynical about the public and distrust nonofficers. Officers must often interact with the public in situations where nobody is happy to see them and where people are belligerent and rude to them, causing officers to develop strong bonds with each other and show hostility to nonofficers. This has led to the creation of what some officers call a blue wall of silence—a strongly held belief among officers that policing problems are not to be shared with outsiders (that is, non–police officers), and any officer who openly discusses police problems is not to be trusted. This wall makes it extremely difficult for outsiders, that is, politicians and those who study the police, to get a good grasp on the nature and scope of police deviance, much less find ways to effectively reform police departments.

Many people are reluctant to second-guess the behavior of officers and are inclined to take their side when they are under attack. Most of us want to believe in the police and think that
they are usually doing the right thing—even when officers are clearly involved in wrongdoing. This is particularly the case when those complaining about police behavior are “others,” that is, people who do not look or act like us. If those complaining about the police appear different and the police officers look like us, we’re naturally inclined to be biased in favor of the police. Psychologists describe this difference in how we evaluate others as \textit{ingroup} versus \textit{outgroup} attitudes (Hewstone et al., 2002). We are far more likely to be sympathetic to people who look like us (our ingroup) and skeptical about people who look or act different (the outgroup), which, in turn, shapes how we look at many policing problems. A white person is more likely to trust the police, particularly when those complaining about the police are not white and the officers in question are white (Morin & Stepler, 2016). Even in the face of numerous high-profile police shootings, overall support for police officers has not changed from historical averages of about 57\% (Norman, 2017). For white people, the percentage is 61\%; for Black people, it is 30\%. When largely white groups chant “Blue Lives Matter” in response to the #Blacklivesmatter movement, they are reflecting these attitudes.

All of this means that police deviance is different from other kinds of deviance, such as acts of deviance committed by people who sell illegal drugs or by corrupt politicians. When police officers break the rules, it takes place under very specific circumstances. The police have a form of power that ordinary people do not, and they have the respect and goodwill of much of the public—doubly so when those who complain are people of color. Many of these issues have come to the public’s attention over the past few years with many high-profile cases of police violence. In Ferguson (Missouri), Minneapolis (Minnesota), Louisville (Kentucky), and Baltimore (Maryland), unarmed Black men and women have been killed by (usually white) police officers, and some of these incidents have been caught on video camera by bystanders. This has led to protests and even riots from angry citizens. On the other hand, many other citizens have shown unwavering support for officers, closely examining the evidence for any hint that that officer’s actions may have been the right ones and scouring the history of the victims for any sign of unsavory conduct. There have been reports of work stoppages by police departments who have refused to accept criticism from the public and from politicians (Celona et al., 2014). Many voters supported Donald Trump in 2016 and 2020 because of his vocal support of police officers, which they compared favorably to President Obama’s mild criticisms of police violence. Like so many other conflicts in American society, the debate over police violence is both racialized and political—those who support the police tend to be white and conservative; those who are protesting police violence tend to be Black and/or liberal.

In short, American society is presently having a very difficult argument about the role of the police in our society and how to change policing for the better. This argument reflects deeper social divides and has been brought on largely by responses to high-profile cases of overaggressive policing and excessive violence on the part of officers. As we saw when we looked at the history of policing in Chapter 5, the police have always played an important role in racial and economic conflicts in the United States, so it should be unsurprising that on the subject of police deviance, those on the bottom of the social ladder have it worst. When the police step out of line, it is usually those already on the bottom who feel it most.
OVERENTHUSIASTIC POLICING

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

7.2 Describe the major forms of excessive force and racial profiling.

A lot of police deviance does not stem from selfish motives. Rather, sometimes police officers break the rules because they believe that doing so is necessary to protect the public and to do their job more effectively. In these situations, officers believe that their professional duty requires that they break the laws that they are supposed to uphold and that at times they must consider the greater good rather than the rights of the defendant. There is a great deal of pressure on the police to stop crime and protect the public, and there is a certain amount of public support for using aggressive tactics against people who commit crimes. Television often lauds officers who are not afraid to get their hands dirty if it helps save innocent lives. Shows like 24 show heroic officials resorting to torture to save lives, and the detective who will break the rules to catch “bad guys” is a staple of TV dramas. The police scholar Carl Klockars describes this as the Dirty Harry problem (named after the famous movie detective “Dirty” Harry Callahan, who, in a string of movies in the 1970s and 1980s, broke laws to catch those who commit crimes). As Klockars asks, “When and to what extent does the morally good warrant or justify [the use of] ethically, politically, or legally dangerous means to its achievement?” (Klockars, 1980, p. 35). Overenthusiastic policing is simply policing that goes beyond the bounds of appropriate law enforcement to achieve the goals of law enforcement.

The two examples of overenthusiastic policing we will discuss here are excessive force and racial profiling.

REALITY CHECK
POLICING AS A DANGEROUS PROFESSION

One of the most common myths about policing is that it is a dangerous job. It is not—at least when compared to many other jobs that are commonly performed in America. In fact, it doesn’t make it into the top 10 most dangerous professions according to most rankings. Agricultural jobs (farming), construction work (roofing), and transportation work (driving) have higher fatality rates than policing. Probably the most dangerous field to work in is the lumber industry, where accidents claimed 135.9 per 100,000 workers in 2016. This compares to 14.6 per 100,000 workers for the police (Stebbins et al., 2018).

Further, while getting shot is one of the most common ways that officers can die, it is just as likely that an officer will die in a transportation-related accident, such as a car accident, as be killed by a suspect. Between 2007 and 2016, 549 officers were either stabbed or shot in the line of duty, according to the National Law Enforcement Memorial Fund. Nearly an identical amount were killed by transportation accidents (“Causes of law enforcement deaths,” 2018).
Excessive Force

One common form of overenthusiastic policing is the use of excessive force. Either officers use force when there is no need to do so, or in other cases, they use more force than is necessary—they go too high or too fast on the use of force continuum discussed in the last chapter. Most often, the excessive force used is nonlethal, such as physical pushing and punching, the use of batons, and so on. While nonlethal force may be better than guns, supposedly nonlethal force can cause death, and even nonlethal force when used unnecessarily is a violation of an individual’s civil rights. Violence can profoundly damage a person, not only causing physical harm but also leading to long-lasting psychological and emotional damage.

One aspect of excessive force is the phenomenon of net widening. Officers sometimes use nonlethal weapons (pepper spray, tear gas, etc.) when there may not be cause to do so, simply because it’s a relatively easy way to subdue a suspect. This fact that technologies like pepper spray have made it easier for the police to avoid using their fists or their firearms to handle difficult encounters has not led to a decrease in the use of force but rather has led to an overall increase in it—only the force being used is often nonlethal. Officers sometimes conclude that it is easier and safer to subdue a suspect who is not cooperative and potentially hostile than to risk escalating the situation to the point where it could get out of hand (Amnesty International, 2004). Handling a person who is uncooperative is difficult and frustrating, and it could potentially lead to a dangerous confrontation. It’s sometimes better and safer (for the officer) to simply subdue the suspect with a Taser or pepper spray and sort out the situation afterward. The relative safety of nonlethal weapons makes them a tempting tool for officers to use in situations where it may not be necessary.

Of course, the most serious form of excessive force is the unnecessary use of lethal force. Officers do sometimes kill suspects when it is unnecessary. Sometimes, this is simply a result of bad judgment on the part of the officer—either a rookie officer is scared and escalates the violence unnecessarily, or an officer uses too much force without knowingly doing so. Officers must make split-second decisions based on the evaluation of a threat under high pressure. Other times, officers use force against an individual and do not intend to kill their victim. The line between lethal and nonlethal force can be fuzzy when officers use controversial tactics like a chokehold, which essentially involves using a forearm across a suspect’s windpipe to prevent the flow of oxygen and thereby subdues the suspect. Many police departments ban the use of such neck restraints, but people are regularly killed when in such holds. In Staten Island, New York, on July 17, 2014, Officer Daniel Pantaleo killed Eric Garner, 43, by holding him in a chokehold. The killing was captured on video by a bystander. Police officers who had been
patrolling the area stopped Garner and accused him of illegally selling cigarettes. Garner angrily rejected the officers’ charges against him, declaring, “I didn’t do shit.” Officers moved in on Garner, who stated, “Don’t touch me please.” Officer Pantaleo placed his forearm across the victim’s throat and pulled Garner down to the ground, holding him until the other officers handcuffed him. As he was being choked, Garner repeatedly stated, “I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe!” While Officer Pantaleo claimed that he never used a chokehold against Garner, the New York City Medical Examiner’s Office declared that Garner died from “compression of neck (chokehold), compression of chest and prone positioning during physical restraint by police.”

In the adrenaline-soaked context of physical conflicts with the public, it is not surprising that unnecessary lethal violence occurs, even when the officers are highly trained. This, of course, does not mean that it is acceptable. On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black teenager, was shot and killed by Officer Darren Wilson in the city of Ferguson, Missouri, just outside of St. Louis. Wilson, a 28-year-old city police officer who had been working in law enforcement for five years, was responding to a call that a suspect wearing a red Cardinals hat and a white shirt had stolen cigarettes from a nearby liquor store. The altercation was short, and the details are disputed. According to reports, Brown, who was unarmed at the time, reached into Officer Wilson’s police SUV, and the two struggled over Wilson’s gun. Wilson fired two shots, slightly wounding Brown, who reportedly then ran from Wilson. At this point, Wilson claims that Brown turned and charged him, at which point Wilson fired 10 shots at Brown, killing him. Some witnesses claim Brown didn’t move toward Wilson; others that he had his hands up. The coroner’s report largely backs up Wilson’s claims about Brown’s behavior. After a grand jury refused to indict Wilson for shooting Brown, several days of riots began in Ferguson, which in turn led to what many people charged was an excessive police response. The Department of Justice later issued a scathing report on the widespread civil rights violations of the Ferguson Police Department that ultimately led to the riots, though it largely absolved Wilson in the killing.

George Floyd was a 46-year-old Black man in Minneapolis. When he attempted to use a counterfeit $20 bill to buy cigarettes at the Cup Foods market in south Minneapolis in May 2020, the cashier called the police. After some initial resistance by Floyd, he was handcuffed and placed inside a squad car. Eventually, he was taken out of the car and he fell to the ground. One of the officers on the scene, Derek Chauvin, placed his knee on Floyd’s neck while he was handcuffed and face down on the ground. Chauvin held his knee there for nearly nine minutes while Floyd pleaded for the officers to not kill him. He pleaded, “My stomach hurts. My neck hurts. Everything hurts. I need some water or something, please,” and called for his mother. During the last two minutes, Floyd was unresponsive. The coroner’s report showed that Floyd’s heart stopped during the altercation, during which he was handcuffed and unarmed.

These, of course, are only a few of the recent police killings that have been in the public eye over the past few years. There are plenty others: Other police homicides in South Carolina, Ohio, and Texas have brought to light the large number of unjustified killings of civilians—and in particular African Americans—by police officers. Other racial and ethnic minority groups, such as Latinos and Native Americans, have had similar experiences, but the fact that so many of these victims have been Black men and they all have been unarmed at the time that they were
killed has not gone unnoticed by the public. In particular, the Black public sees these killings as part of a history that traces back to the antebellum slave patrols—authorities using violence to maintain white supremacy. The protests and riots that have taken place in response to these killings, as well as their violent crackdown by the police, have also brought to light the excessively militarized police forces that are operating in much of America that were discussed in Chapter 5.

Racial Profiling

Another example of overenthusiastic policing is the targeting of individuals for stops, searches, or even arrests based on their race, religion, or ethnicity. Often profiling takes place when young Black men are targeted by the police, but racial profiling can occur in many other circumstances. Many Arab and Muslim people (and those who “look Muslim” with darker skin and beards) report being excessively stopped and searched, especially when flying (Baker, 2002; Bennett, 2006). Police officers often possess the same prejudices as the rest of society and are as inclined to assume that young Black men (as well as Muslim people) are up to no good as most of the rest of America is. The only difference is that most of us have little power to act on these prejudices in the way that police officers do.

It might seem to make sense to target groups that are considered likely to engage in criminal activity. If most people who conduct terrorist attacks at airports are Muslims, it seems logical to subject such people to extra scrutiny, particularly in sensitive places like airports or federal buildings. It would be a waste of resources to treat an 80-year-old grandmother as a potential drug trafficker while ignoring a group of young men hanging out on a corner dressed and acting like they are in a street gang. The police evaluate suspects based on a wide array of criteria—age, dress, behavior—to determine if they are involved in unlawful activity. Why shouldn’t race or ethnicity be one of these criteria? While many critics dismiss profiling, there may be reasons for it that make sense.

All profiling is problematic, especially racial profiling. Stopping an individual simply because she is Black or Muslim is a violation of the Fourth Amendment’s guarantee of protection from unreasonable searches and seizures, as well as a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee that everybody will be granted “the equal protection of the laws” (Feder, 2012). Further, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy to select certain groups for heightened scrutiny. If officers target African American men as suspected drug traffickers, they are probably going to find more Black drug dealers. This, in turn, further justifies targeting Black men as potential dealers (Banks, 2003). As a result, the sense that a group is being unfairly targeted by the police is sure to affect the relations between the police and the group, alienating young Black men and Muslim people, when their trust in police is essential to fighting both crime and terrorism. Being repeatedly stopped by police officers for little or no reason is going to make an individual less likely to trust officers and go to them when there is a real problem (Tyler, 2005).

Finally, targeting individuals based on their race or their religion just seems un-American: A country that declares that all are “created equal” and guarantees that people have a right to “equal treatment” before the law should not discriminate between different groups based solely
on issues of race or religion. As we saw in Chapter 5, American policing has had a very troubled history in its relations with the Black community, and regardless of whether it could be justified, racial profiling feels like a continuation of segregation, Jim Crow, and other racist policies that were propped up by police forces. Racial profiling, whether it could be justified for practical reasons, probably does a good deal more harm that it does good.

Some have suggested that there are other, better criteria for profiling individuals that are more sophisticated and less morally questionable than racial profiling (Fredrickson & Siljander, 2002). One suggestion is not to treat people differently based on their race but rather to keep an eye out for behaviors that indicate that a person is involved in suspicious activity. Terrorists and drug traffickers know that officers are looking for a type of person and therefore often seek to use people who don’t look like the type to carry out their criminal activities. Many Muslim people look white, and many drug traffickers seek out people who seem clean and respectable (and white) to help move their merchandise. But there are often behaviors that are better guides to a person’s likelihood for being involved in criminal behavior than the bare fact that she is Black or Arab. For example, a terrorist might book a ticket in a certain way (such as booking a one-way ticket or following a suspicious pattern of travel), or a drug dealer may be standing in a suspicious place or dress in a way that indicates a likelihood of engaging in criminal activity. So, rather than focusing on the color of individuals’ skin, their facial hair, or their race, focusing on what they do and how they act may ultimately produce better results than racial profiling.

Racial profiling can take place in a lot of different ways, not all of which are illegal. The most extreme version of racial profiling is sometimes referred to as pulling a person over for DWB (driving while Black) or stopping a person at the airport for FWM (flying while Muslim). In each case, the officers pick an individual and stop, search, or arrest her exclusively because of her race or religion. While this undoubtedly happens and is clearly illegal, this is not the only form of racial profiling that is carried out by the police, and though it is outrageous, it is certainly not the most common.

More common than overt cases of profiling like DWB are pretextual stops of drivers from targeted groups. A pretextual stop involves pulling an individual over for a minor infraction as an excuse to find out other information about the individual or scan for incriminating evidence. The police use the initial stop as an excuse to look inside the individual’s car, check the driver for any outstanding arrest warrants or signs of intoxication, or find probable cause to search the car. A driver who an officer suspects of being a drug trafficker makes a turn without using the turn signal. Ordinarily, an officer would ignore such a small infraction, but instead she pulls the driver over, expecting that doing so will probably lead to an arrest. This belief is often based on the race of the driver or other similar circumstances. Sometimes officers will give the driver a minor citation during this stop with the expectation that the driver won’t pay the ticket, which could give the next officer an excuse to arrest and search the driver. There are so many laws governing driving that a shrewd officer could easily find an excuse to pull over anybody at virtually any time—and if necessary, the officer can invent an error that the driver would be helpless to defend herself against. Since it is the job of the police to enforce all laws, it should come as no surprise that most of this is legal.
While there are some cases where officers openly express a bias against certain groups and use their powers to persecute minorities, often this is not the case. There are far more complicated facts that shape how officers interact with Black suspects, many of which are far subtler than any overt racial biases held by individual officers. A surprising number of officers who have been involved in incidents of excessive force have not been white. For example, the New Orleans Police Department is among the most diverse in the country but nonetheless has problems with bias (Craven, 2015). Different forms of bias work together to show that people of color and Black men have a very different relationship with the police than other groups in the United States. White Americans are significantly more likely to trust the police than Black Americans and are significantly more likely to give officers the benefit of the doubt in cases like that of Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, or Walter Scott (Ekins, 2016).

Overt racism and unconscious bias are different from what is sometimes called systemic racism or institutional racism in criminal justice. Systemic racism refers to a wide array of disadvantages that affect the lives of Black Americans (along with other people of color) and shapes their relations to the police—none of which has anything to do with the mentalities of officers. Poorer cities tend to be Blacker cities. Native Americans have been forced onto reservations where life is incredibly difficult, and undocumented immigrants are hunted by federal police regardless of whether or not they have broken any laws. As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, poverty leads to a higher crime rate, which in turns leads to more policing and a deterioration of relations between the police and the public. People of color are treated differently by the police because the poverty that they face has made it nearly impossible for many of them to live within the law. According to those who perceive institutional racism in American policing, the attitudes of officers toward Black Americans is irrelevant—what matters is that there are a wide range of social forces at work to ensure that Black Americans will constantly be under the thumb of the police. From a critical perspective, the only way to fix racism in policing is to address the institutional problems of law, education, economics, health care, and work such that Black people are equal to white people.

As we’ve seen throughout our discussion of policing, the toxic relationship between the police and Black Americans has a history stretching back to the early 19th century, if not earlier. More recently, many Black Americans are hostile toward the police simply because they have experiences of being unfairly stopped, harassed, and mistreated by the police. Few white people have had these experiences and have instead been taught to respect the police and to believe that officers are on their side. This has led many to be either confused or dismissive of Black complaints about policing. When rappers performed songs like “F**k tha Police” and “Cop Killer” in the 1980s and 1990s, they were denounced by many police organizations, conservative political groups, and both the president and the vice president of the United States, who called for a boycott of the company that released these songs. Almost nobody in mainstream white culture bothered to take it seriously, and nobody inquired about what kind of experiences of the police the rappers had had, much less why such attitudes would resonate in the Black community. With recent revelations, largely using camera phones and dashboard video cameras, the rest of America has been given a glimpse (and in fact only a small glimpse) into what Black Americans have known about the police since slavery. Maybe for once their anger won’t be dismissed.
WHERE DO I FIT IN?
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

While there are plenty of cases of overt racial profiling, one of the subtlest types of racial bias in policing is one that the officer isn’t even aware of. These biases, sometimes called unconscious biases or implicit biases, do not depend on the officer holding racist views or racist suspicions about Black people or other people of color. Rather, implicit bias studies show that sudden reactions, such as when an officer is faced with an attacker, can reveal secret prejudices that the officer holds. In timed tests with subjects who were expected to react as quickly as possible, giving them no time to reflect on their attitudes, psychologists have shown that officers are quicker to assume that Black people are armed and dangerous than are white people (Correll et al., 2007).

Unconscious or implicit biases take over in these situations, and officers unknowingly decide that a Black person is threatening and not a white person. Equally important, these biases are not unique to police officers. We all have some unconscious biases that shape how we interact with others, especially other people who are from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. In a country like America, where there is a great deal of racial segregation and cultural stereotypes in the media, it only makes sense that many of us hold racial prejudices that we’re unaware of, regardless of how “un-racist” we might like to think we are. White Americans may assume that Latino people are immigrants when they may have lived in the United States since before it even existed, or white Americans might assume that Native Americans have alcohol problems or engage in other types of antisocial behavior. Police are, of course, as much as anybody else likely to hold these stereotypes. While it’s not clear what the significance of this is for understanding the nature of racial profiling, powerful data shows how complicated and deeply rooted racial prejudice is in policing and across America more broadly.

While it is not a “trigger-based” study, you can take an online test of your own unconscious racial biases at http://www.understandingprejudice.org/ and see how you compare to others.

How did you do on this test? Does it make you think differently about your own assumptions about race? Do you think that there might be ways to address such unconscious biases?

CORRUPTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

7.3 List the major forms of police corruption.

Police corruption is in many ways far less complicated than overenthusiastic policing. There is nobody who is willing to publicly defend officers caught taking bribes or participating in other types of overtly criminal activity. The explanations are less complicated, and the politics of police corruption are much more straightforward than with overenthusiastic policing. This doesn’t
mean that there aren’t problems with understanding and defining police corruption—some grey areas as it were—but corruption generates a lot less handwringing: It’s wrong and we all know it.

Among these grey areas in police corruption are the small-scale benefits that officers get in the line of duty. In the 1970s, the Chicago Police Department listed 10 different types of corruption that officers engage in. At the bottom level was *mooching*, defined as “receiving gratuities (such as free meals) sometimes in exchange for favoritism.” Many restaurants and stores offer discounts to officers in part as a measure of support for their efforts and in part to curry favor with officers. After all, a place that is known as a police hangout is unlikely to be robbed. Often these gifts may come with invisible strings attached. Those businesses who give them out often expect special treatment from officers: Perhaps the officers will look the other way when the owner is pulled over, or perhaps they will come a little more quickly if the store is robbed. Police Benevolent Societies give cards to police officers, their family members, and supporters, and showing them to officers during traffic stops can sometimes result in lenient treatment for a minor infraction (“Get out of jail free,” 2018). Even if the gift does not come with such strings attached, it looks fishy to the public, and many officers are told to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, and so they are not allowed to accept free gifts from businesses.

Beyond mooching, there are much larger and more serious forms of corruption. In some cases, officers work in collusion with existing criminal elements, either working alongside criminals or accepting bribes to look the other way when they encounter their criminal activities. This is what is known as *quid pro quo* (“this for that”) corruption—money or services are given explicitly in exchange for preferential treatment by the police. In 1999, for example, two NYPD officers were indicted for accepting cash payments and sexual favors from the staff of a Manhattan brothel in exchange for warning the owners of the establishment of upcoming police raids (Barstow, 1999). The police have cooperated with drug traffickers, prostitutes, and other people engaged in illegal activity for as long as there has been policing, as officers have sought to supplement their meager income by taking advantage of the much higher incomes found in much of the underworld. Other times, officers have been criminal entrepreneurs, seeking to make money on their own volition by either engaging in their own criminal activity (e.g., selling drugs that have been confiscated) or forcibly extracting money from known criminals—also known as a *shakedown*.

**Frank Serpico and the Knapp Commission**

The most famous example of overt police corruption in American history was probably the widespread misconduct in the NYPD in the 1970s that was exposed by Detective Frank Serpico. In part, this case is famous because it kicked off the most influential study on police corruption (at least since the Wickersham Commission), but it is also famous because Detective Serpico’s story became the basis for a hit 1973 movie starring Al Pacino entitled *Serpico*. Detective Serpico was an officer in the NYPD in the 1960s who refused to take the bribes that were taken by his fellow officers and had been shared throughout the precinct. He began to make complaints to officers higher up in the chain of command and to the local press. Because of his whistleblowing activities, several NYPD officials set Serpico up to be killed, sending him into an apartment
against an armed suspect but neglecting to provide him with appropriate backup. Serpico was shot but ultimately survived to talk about his experiences.

The New York City Mayor convened the Knapp Commission (named after its chair, Whitman Knapp) after this case broke. The commission explored the corruption in the NYPD uncovered by Officer Serpico but also provided some general guides for thinking about and countering police corruption more generally. In its report, the commission described two major categories of corrupt officer: grass eaters and meat eaters. Grass eaters are officers who accept bribes when they are offered to them on the job (say, when they arrest an individual), but they do not actively seek out money or other compensation. Meat eaters, on the other hand, are officers who engage in police activity primarily for their own profit. For example, a meat-eating officer might shake down a prostitute or a bookie, a person who runs an illegal gambling operation. If the officer in need of money seeks out these people and threatens them with arrest if they don’t pay a bribe, then the officer is engaged in meat eating.

The Knapp Commission’s report was highly influential in how departments think about and fight police corruption. After another high-profile corruption case in 1992 where several officers were arrested for selling narcotics (including one officer with 15 different outstanding corruption allegations—none of which were investigated by the NYPD), the City of New York convened a second commission known as the Mollen Commission. This body revised much of the city’s thinking about corruption (Rosoff & Pontell, n.d.) The commission found many officers were involved in drug trafficking, which often entailed killing other traffickers and stealing their drugs. This marked a change from the days of the Knapp Commission; now officers were active participants in the drug trade, along with all the violence that accompanied it. As a result, the commission suggested that a permanent civilian commission, known as the Commission to Combat Police Corruption, be formed to oversee police corruption complaints in the city.

In their reports, the Knapp and the Mollen commissions made several recommendations to help prevent future corruption at the NYPD. The Knapp Commission recommended a permanent prosecutor tasked exclusively with investigating corruption in the criminal justice process (including, but not exclusively, in the police force). Among the Mollen Commission’s many recommendations was the creation of a permanent outside body designed to root out corruption with a subpoena power over police officers and the ability to independently investigate allegations against police officers.

**WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

**MOOCHING AND CORRUPTION**

You are a new officer who has just begun your career in a small-town police department. On your very first day on the job, you decide to walk into a local convenience store to buy yourself a drink. You pick up a soda and wait in line behind three other people. The cashier looks at you in the back of the line and waves you forward. “You want the soda? Police get drinks for free! They’ve been a great help for us in preventing robberies. Thank you for your service!”
THE CAUSES OF POLICE DEVIANCE

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

7.4 Describe the different significant causes of police deviance.

Why do police officers become deviant? Very few people become police officers with the intention of being corrupt or abusive, so what is it that makes them lose their way? There are many different possible explanations for police misconduct, and in any individual case, they can all work together. Different groups like to emphasize certain causes of corruption for their own purposes—if you don’t like the police, you’re going to be inclined toward explanations that make the police seem like a bunch of bad people. If you harbor positive feelings toward the police, you’re likely to gravitate toward explanations that blame a few bad apples but put the rest of the police in a positive light. If you are critically inclined, you’ll look at broader social structures. There is no single explanation of police deviance, but each of several partial explanations has compelling points to make.

Sometimes, it is possible to look at the personalities of individual officers to understand why they misbehave. Some officers have a deep, psychological need to dominate others and use their powers as officers to do so, even to the point of abusing the people they are supposed to be protecting. Psychologists refer to these officers as possessing authoritarian personalities. Authoritarian personalities belong to individuals who need the submission of everybody they encounter, and they feel a need to dominate anybody who fails to respect them and their authority. Authoritarians not only expect others to submit to their will but are also inclined to consider any person who does not fit in with the mainstream, traditional values that the officers support to be a threat. People who do not conform to social norms are often singled out for abuse by authoritarians. Authoritarians are usually very intolerant and very conservative and often need to be in charge of those around them, interpreting the behavior of anybody who does not submit to their will as a threat of some kind.

It is understandable why many people with authoritarian personalities would be attracted to policing—anecdotal evidence suggests officers tend to be socially conservative individuals who believe strongly in law and order. As we suggested at the opening of this section of the book, police officers often protect the status quo, for good or ill, and authoritarian personalities
tend to be hostile to anybody who is different or who challenges social norms. Authoritarian officers not only enforce laws but also are hostile to anybody who is perceived as different or who challenges the status quo, whether it is civil rights activists, homosexuals, or those who too aggressively promote their civil rights. The stereotype of the mustachioed bully-cop who brutalizes anybody who is different comes from these authoritarian officers. Again, not all officers are authoritarians, but some, particularly those who are overly aggressive in how they enforce the law, may have authoritarian personalities that are the root of their deviance.

Another possible explanation for police corruption looks at the stresses of being an officer—arguing that there is something about police work that can lead an officer to misbehave. Even if an individual officer has every desire to be a good cop at the start of her career, the pressures of the job can lead her astray. The power that officers have can be very tempting to abuse, and it is unsurprising that some officers slowly become more comfortable with misconduct over the course of their careers. Small acts can snowball into big ones over years as an officer becomes more comfortable with the powers she has in her job. After enough time on the job, she just may not care any more about what happens to the public that she is supposed to protect.

One example of this phenomenon is police burnout. When officers must repeatedly deal with the stresses of confronting a public that is sometimes distrusting or openly hostile toward them, it is often the case that this can shape their attitudes toward the public. It can make them uncaring and unsympathetic to those they interact with and cynical about the motives of the public. This can easily lead officers either to reject their traditional role as a protector of the public and instead begin to prey on the public, or to become jaded about the everyday abuses of authority that they experience on the job. Burned-out officers are likely to be tempted into corruption or to become abusive as they lose their sympathy toward the public.

On the other hand, looking at the psychology or experiences of individual officers may be too simplistic a way to explain police deviance. Many police departments like to suggest that corruption is only the work of a few officers who somehow made it into police departments where they could thrive in secret. The rest of the officers, they maintain, are good people who conscientiously do their work enforcing the law and protecting the public. Others have suggested that corruption and overenthusiastic policing are the result of broader forces that are inherent in the job. In this view, more officers will become deviant over time because the nature of the job tends to push otherwise good officers in that direction.

The frustrations of the job can sometimes push an officer toward deviance. In fighting drug trafficking, officers are exposed to large amounts of money, more money than they would ever make in their own jobs. They are expected to enforce laws that many see as futile or stupid: No matter how many people are sent to prison, drugs stay on the street and remain popular with many people. This is bound to create a sense that much police work is largely a waste of time. Since illegal drugs and prostitution have not disappeared and probably never will, some officers figure that profiting from these crimes makes no overall difference in the grand scheme of things. It is unsurprising that a great deal of police corruption revolves around drug trafficking and other supposedly victimless crimes, as there is a great deal of money in these trades, and there is little evidence that enforcing the law does anything to prevent crime. According to these
observers, it is not the makeup of the individual officer that leads to corruption or deviance but rather that misconduct is in some sense a natural consequence of police work.

Other researchers look at organizational explanations for police deviance. These researchers focus on aspects of the police department—its culture, its leadership, its organization—for clues as to why officers go bad. These features can include poor management and poor leadership as causes of misconduct. If there is a sense that corruption is normal or not a big deal in a police department, it is likely to spread among officers. As one Washington, D.C., police officer put it, “The major cause in the lack of integrity in American police officers is mediocrity” (Parks, 2000, p. i). On the other hand, tightly knit organizations can also shield officers who break the rules, providing them with effective cover and allowing bad apples to operate without consequences. In this view, “Punishing individual cops will not cure the problem of police violence, if systemic features of the police organization permit, sanction, or even encourage the officers’ violent behavior” (Armacost, 2003, p. 456). To reform the police, it is not enough to change officers’ behavior or to recruit better officers: The entire structure of a police department needs to be reformed.

CRIMINAL (IN)JUSTICE

FLAKING

Lasou Kuyateh was pulled over in Staten Island on February 28, 2018, with several of his friends, all of whom were young Black American men. Officers Kyle Erickson and Elmer Pastran pulled over Kuyateh’s BMW for having excessively tinted windows and for turning without using his signals. After they pulled the car over, Officer Pastran told the men that he smelled marijuana on the men (“I don’t appreciate being lied to. I know there’s marijuana in the car; I can smell it,” he said.) and used this as grounds for searching the car. During the search, Officer Erickson’s body camera mysteriously and inexplicably shut off. It turned back on just as he declared that he found a lit joint on the floor of the back seat of the car. Kuyateh was arrested and charged with possession, among other things, and spent two days in jail.

There were plenty of aspects about the search that were fishy. Beyond the suspicious timing of the camera’s deactivation, other body cameras that recorded the car’s interior prior to the discovery do not show a joint where the officer claims he found it. Equally suspicious, the officer’s camera turns on just before he finds the joint and not later. All of these concerns created legal problems for the case, and the prosecutor abruptly dropped the charge during the officer’s testimony at a pretrial hearing. When Kuyateh’s lawyers tried to raise objections regarding the conduct of the officers, the judge ended the case and declared, “What I’m not going to allow [to] happen is [for] my courtroom to become a political place where these things are brought up” (Goldstein, 2018). There have been several cases similar to this that have arisen in the era of body cams. In April 2017, a Los Angeles police officer accidentally video-recorded himself planting cocaine in the wallet of a hit-and-run suspect. The camera the officer was using saves video from 30 seconds before the audio begins, meaning that the officer in question probably did not realize the camera had already started recording when
he allegedly planted the drugs [CBS News, 2017]. In July of that same year, a Baltimore officer similarly video-recorded himself planting cocaine on a suspect, also not realizing that his camera was already recording before he switched it on [Fortin, 2018].

As with other aspects of police deviance, it is difficult to know how often police officers plant evidence on suspects. Officers and their departments don’t disclose this type of information, for obvious reasons. An internal NYPD investigation found no evidence of misconduct on Officer Erickson’s part, but the other two officers faced disciplinary action, including criminal prosecution for the Baltimore officer. While we don’t know how often it happens, it is common enough that there are slang terms for it. Officers call it flaking when an officer plants evidence on a suspect. Padding, on the other hand, consists in adding additional evidence to suspects to put them in greater legal jeopardy [Punch, 1985]. One New York City detective described these practices as a routine part of policing: “It’s almost like you have no emotion with it … they’re going to be out of jail tomorrow anyway; nothing is going to happen to them anyway” [Lee, 2011].

Do you think that flaking is an ordinary part of policing? Why or why not? If so, how could it be prevented?

HANDLING POLICE DEVIANCE

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

7.5 Examine the different strategies police forces and the public have used to prevent corruption and overenthusiastic policing.

There are many ways that police forces and other groups have tried to address police misconduct over the years. Some seek to change police forces from the inside, using the officers themselves as the primary motor of change, while others seek to force change on police forces from outside as it were. While police deviance is an ongoing problem, there are many difficulties that prevent politicians and prosecutors from getting a handle on police misconduct, even in cases where it is flagrant, and the public is aware of it.

Politicians are often very hesitant to take on police misconduct. There is always a great deal of public support for the police, and politicians are hesitant to challenge them out of a fear that they will be perceived as soft on crime or insufficiently supportive of “our police heroes.” Prosecutors have close working relationships with police departments, so they may not be inclined to investigate police deviance too carefully for fear of alienating their professional allies. Finally, most police departments are part of a union that is there to protect the interests of officers. These unions often strongly resist efforts to investigate and prosecute officers for alleged misbehavior, and they provide free legal assistance to officers facing misconduct charges. Police unions have been among the strongest critics of the #Blacklivesmatter movement and were some of President Trump’s strongest supporters [Hauslohner et al., 2020]. They have also blocked efforts to reform the police if these efforts are not seen as benefiting the officers themselves [Kupfer, 2018]. The
blue wall of silence that keeps officers from reporting their fellow officers further protects them from scrutiny and prosecution. All these forces arrayed together make it very challenging to arrest and prosecute officers who abuse their authority (Kindy & Kelly, 2015).

Not only are prosecutors skittish about prosecuting officers, but juries are often unwilling to convict officers of even the most blatant misconduct. In April 2015, Michael Slager, a white police officer, shot and killed Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man, in the town of North Charleston, South Carolina. Slager had pulled Scott over for a broken tail light, and when Scott fled because he had outstanding warrants, Slager shot him in the back eight times from approximately 15 feet away. The whole incident was caught on a video by a bystander, and Slager was charged with murder. Despite the seemingly damning evidence, a jury of 11 white jurors and 1 Black juror was unable to come to agreement, and a mistrial was declared. Slager ultimately pled guilty to the federal crime of denying Scott his civil rights and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Even in cases where violence is captured on video and prosecutors seek convictions for officers, they are often difficult to obtain.

Despite these difficulties, investigating and sanctioning officers who misbehave can be an effective way to handle police deviance. Almost all police forces have internal affairs (IA) units that are responsible for investigating police officers who misbehave. They make sure that ordinary police officers do not overstep their authority or engage in corruption. All officers have records, and bad reports regarding their conduct can harm their chances of moving up in the police ranks. Because they attempt to break through the blue wall of silence, IA officers sometimes report skepticism and mistrust from other officers. While ordinary officers understand that the police need some sort of oversight, they nonetheless often see the IA division as an unwelcome intrusion on their work.

Other approaches to addressing police deviance include training officers differently so that they are better able to de-escalate confrontations with the public. Some departments have been experimenting with reorganizing the way that officers work, allowing the officers who work the graveyard shift (working late at night) an opportunity to work the same neighborhoods in the daytime so that they do not exclusively interact with the underworld. People who encounter the police late at night tend to be more troublesome than those who they would meet in a daytime shift, who may be more polite, respectful, and appreciative of officers when they arrive. This sort of schedule can give officers a more sympathetic relationship with the public and help prevent officer burnout.

There has been a serious effort to recruit racial and ethnic minority police officers to help improve relationships between the police and people of color. This has proven difficult for several reasons. The history of distrust between the police and Black Americans means that Black officers are sometimes viewed as traitors by other African Americans. Organizations like the National Black Police Association have sought to change perceptions about Black officers and change how the African American community thinks about the police, but they have only had limited success. Ironically, the desire for a more diverse workforce in the business world has made it hard for police departments to compete with private companies for the top Black college graduates. They can make more money in business without the stigma of being perceived as betraying their people. Even though police departments have actively sought out Black
candidates, and even though police work is relatively high-paying work that provides many of the benefits that one looks for in a job (health insurance, a retirement program, and job security), few African Americans are willing to seriously consider becoming police officers. The NYPD has reported a decline in the number of Black candidates attending their police academy of nearly 50% over the past 10 years (Swarns, 2015).

Along with these internal approaches to addressing police deviance are external approaches, where reformers have worked outside of the departments to create change. Many cities have civilian review boards that are tasked with keeping an eye on police behavior and handling complaints from the public. These boards are usually appointed by city officials and often work with IA units to investigate complaints about police misconduct. If an individual believes she has been mistreated by the police, she can bring her case to the board, which can investigate and make recommendations about what should be done. While some police officials consider such boards to be an unnecessary and unwelcome intrusion into police activities, believing that they are too susceptible to the whims of public opinion, they can help maintain the delicate balance that officers must maintain between being considered legitimate by the public and retaining their ability to effectively maintain order (Hudson, 1971).

Other times, the federal government can investigate a police department and report on the department’s failings in protecting the rights of citizens. One such investigation took place in Ferguson, Missouri, prompted by the riots following the death of Michael Brown. The Department of Justice report on Ferguson was damning toward the entire police department and the broader city government that supported it. They found that the police department was targeting poor people of color living in the city for citations and arbitrary arrests primarily as a means for raising funds for the city government. These people had little ability to pay fines issued by the courts, and a failure to pay guaranteed that the fines would then increase until the person would be forced to find some way to pay the fine or go to jail. The city’s Black residents became a “cash machine” for the city, and by the time of the riots, nearly a quarter of the city’s budget came from police fines. The report recommended deep changes in the way the police department and the courts operated in the city, including implementing an “ability to pay” system to make fines more realistic for poor people who committed an offense.

Another common way to get the police to change their behavior is through civil suits. The police are often sued by individuals or groups who are not only seeking compensation for the harms that the police have caused (say, through excessive force) but also trying to get the police to change how they behave. These are usually called civil rights lawsuits and often argue that an individual’s or a group’s constitutional rights have been violated by the officers or by the policies of entire police departments. Some of these suits seek monetary compensation, but often they simply want the police to change the way they operate. A Wall Street Journal study suggested that the 20 biggest state and county governments paid over $2 billion in compensation to victims of police brutality (Frosch & Calvert, 2020).

While suing police departments can be effective, lawsuits face many hurdles in court, because officers have what is known as qualified immunity. That is, they have a protection from many lawsuits to prevent them from being harassed by a hostile public. When plaintiffs do get financial compensation, the money usually comes from the city government’s budget, not
the police budget, which can place a burden on the entire community. Sometimes, successful suits won’t result in a monetary reward for the plaintiff, but nonetheless, there will be a court-structured plan to change how the police operate going forward. These judicial orders are known as consent decrees; they usually do not require the police department to pay compensation but instead force it to change its practices. Several cities, including New Orleans, Oakland, and Los Angeles, have signed consent decrees in the past.

Looking at it from the perspective of a critical criminologist, we can see that none of these reforms will probably be enough to truly address the problems of police deviance and improve police relations with the public. While they may improve things regarding racial profiling or corruption, these reforms overlook the deeper, structural problems that create police deviance. As you may recall, critical criminology argues that the deep economic and racial inequalities in a society are reflected throughout the criminal justice system—including in the police. Police practices only reflect these deeper problems. The police have race problems because society has race problems, and addressing one without addressing the other will ultimately be inadequate.

Of course, changing the dynamics of race in American society so that race does not have such a deep impact on how people are treated and their success or failure in life is a much bigger project. Undoing nearly 500 years of white domination and the subordination of Black people through slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow (not to mention the economic and social inequalities that these institutions have created) is an effort that will take generations. Similarly, the mistreatment of other minorities is a result of much bigger social forces (such as immigration and immigration policy for Latino Americans and undocumented workers) and will probably continue as long as these issues exist in the United States. As long as society remains unequal and unfair, there will be no ultimate solution to the problem of police deviance.

**SOME STATISTICS...**

**QUALIFIED IMMUNITY AND POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY**

Police officers rarely face legal consequences for their misconduct for a host of different reasons. Many prosecutors are reluctant to target officers and many jurors are hesitant to convict them. Further, qualified immunity protects police officers from being sued by civilians unless they have violated a clearly established law or constitutional right. Criminologist Philip Stinson at Bowling Green State University (himself a former law enforcement officer) keeps track of police convictions, and the results are surprising. According to his data, only 32 nonfederal officers have been convicted for killing suspects in the line of duty, and many officers who are charged are ultimately acquitted or the charges are dropped (see Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1).

Recent high profile police killings have left the public with mixed feelings about the legal immunity given to officers (See Figure 7.2). According to one poll, 63% of Americans support making it easier for civilians to sue officers for misconduct and there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people who, when surveyed, agree that the criminal justice system is too lenient on officers who kill or injure [Ekins, 2020].
TABLE 7.1  Number of Convictions for Nonfederal Police Officers for an On-Duty Shooting, 2005–2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charge</th>
<th>Number of Convictions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manslaughter</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary manslaughter</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary manslaughter</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal criminal deprivation of civil rights</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official misconduct</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligent homicide</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reckless homicide</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated assault</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reckless discharge of a firearm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Does not count convictions that were later overturned.

Source: Data from Stinson (2020).
DEFUNDING THE POLICE?

Perhaps the most radical solution to come forward over recent years has gone under the slogan of “defunding the police.” It gained public notice in response to the May 2020 killing of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police officers—and was chanted by #Blacklivesmatter protesters across the country. The slogan was controversial and disavowed by Democratic politicians at the time, but what protesters meant when they chanted “defund the police” was largely undiscussed at the time.

Most people who argue that the police should be defunded do not mean that the police should be eliminated from state and local government. Rather, what they believe is that officers have become the primary way to deal with a great number of social problems—homelessness, mental health, drug abuse—and that this emphasis on enforcing laws that are broken by people who are homeless, people who are mentally ill, or those struggling with drug addiction has generated a lot of problems, particularly for people whose incomes are below the federal poverty
threshold and for people of color. The police, they believe, are much more likely to be aggressive to people who desperately need help. The best way to address this problem, critics argue, is by taking money away from police departments and giving it to other parts of government that can deal with these problems more effectively. As Patrice Cullens, one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement put it, “We’re ready to chip away at the line items inside of a police budget that really are nonsensical. Police should not be in charge of mental health crises. They should not be in charge of dealing with homelessness. They should not be in charge of ‘supporting’ people with drug dependency and addiction. Those are three line items which we can cut out of the police budget and then put that back into health care” (Villa, 2020).

Policing takes up a huge amount of state and local budgets in many cities, particularly when compared to other services that local governments provide to the public. Paying officers, providing their benefits (insurance, retirement), purchasing and maintaining equipment, and a whole host of other expenses can eat up city budgets, pulling resources away from other crucial services. The Action Center on Race & the Economy, an organization that provides information and support for groups seeking to change policing policies, runs a database for city police budgets (https://costofpolice.org/), and it is worth looking through. The reality is that police budgets vary widely: In San Bernardino, California, policing takes up 63% of the city budget, while in Hampton, Virginia, it is only 5%. Those cities with big, expensive police departments are taking money away from basic social functions like infrastructure (roads, sewage, water), as well as from resources that can improve the quality of life for everybody. Policing may be necessary, but it is expensive.

Some cities have developed alternative models for dealing with situations that traditionally have been left up to the police. Eugene, Oregon, has a program known as CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets), where a team of trained mental health professionals respond to nonviolent mental health calls and can provide help (including hospitalization) to those in need. The Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program in Seattle, Washington, works with people who have addiction problems, helping them get treatment, housing, and work and thereby avoiding criminal prosecution. When the police killed Daniel Prude, a mentally ill Black man in Rochester, New York, in March 2019, the city government moved its family crisis intervention team out of the police department and into its youth and recreation services department (Sheriff & Butler, 2020). “Defunding the police” doesn’t mean eliminating policing in America as much as it means moving resources that would be given to the police to other social services that advocates believe would be better at handling some of the difficult social problems of mental health and drug abuse. Whether these approaches prove to be more effective is something that will be researched and debated a great deal in the coming years.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has been an overview of all the ways that police can go bad. These include some forms of misconduct where officers misbehave in ways that fit with their role as enforcers of the law. Others, such as corruption, result from officers turning away from their role as the
guardians of society and turning instead toward outright criminality. They both are problems unique to policing, and both can share similar root causes in the personality of police officers, the nature of police work, or the structures of police institutions. Approaches from both inside and outside of the police system have worked to address these problems through reforms, better screening and hiring practices, and lawsuits.

Police deviance is a complicated and troubling problem. Because officers have so much power over our lives, their misconduct can be very dangerous. All humans have flaws and all humans have prejudices, but when these basic human weaknesses are present in a person who is both armed and possesses authority over us, they can become very dangerous. Few of us have the power to act violently on our prejudices, much less have the power to use lethal force against our fellow citizens under the cover of law. The power and authority that officers possess over us magnifies their all-too-human flaws and can allow them to do great harm.

As was mentioned at the opening of this chapter, students should remember that the American police system is far from the worst police force in the world. Many countries, particularly in the developing world, have police forces that are known primarily for their brutality, incompetence, and corruption. In the United States, police misconduct still shocks the public and still makes the news. When videos surface showcasing police abuses, it creates public outcry, protests, and even riots. In many parts of the world, bribing the police and facing abuse from officers is an everyday occurrence that wouldn’t generate more than an exasperated sigh—and very rarely a protest. In other parts of the world, police abuse and police corruption are the norm; in much of America, it remains an exception. Despite all the problems discussed here, there is much to be grateful for in American policing.

REVIEW/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you believe is the best way to deal with corruption? Is it possible to completely stamp it out, or will officers always be tempted to abuse their powers for personal gain?

2. Overenthusiastic policing in general, and racial profiling in particular, have become major elements of public debate in America. Why do you think that is? Are defenders and critics of police departments biased? If so, how?

3. This chapter examines several different causes of police deviance as well as different ways to address and prevent it. Are these connected? That is, what do you believe are the most significant causes of police deviance, and based on this, what are the best strategies for preventing it?

4. Do you think that any of the programs that make up the “defund the police” movement would be a good idea? Why or why not?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian personalities</td>
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<td>Bad apples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue wall of silence</td>
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<td>Civilian review boards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dirty Harry problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Driving while Black (DWB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excessive force</td>
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<td>Flying while Muslim (FWM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grass eaters</td>
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<td>Knapp Commission</td>
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<td>Meat eaters</td>
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<td>Mooching</td>
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<td>Net widening</td>
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<td>Police corruption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police deviance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pretextual stop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualified immunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quid pro quo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial profiling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shakedown</td>
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</table>
One of the main goals of a criminal trial is to uncover the truth. How does it work to do this? Are there aspects of criminal trials that get in the way of this goal?

Sarah Yeh