

# Measuring Attitudes Toward Police Misconduct

## OBJECTIVES

- Further describe the National Institute of Justice study of 1977
- Characterize unethical behavior of police officers through the use of case scenarios
- Identify variables in the National Institute of Justice study that depict ethical awareness, standards, and action in police officers
- Further explore the concepts of ethical awareness, standards, and action in law enforcement
- Suggest some hypotheses for ethical awareness, standards, and action in law enforcement as they are impacted by individual, organizational, and social factors

This chapter explores a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study conducted in 1997. The NIJ study did not use random sampling in its data collection, but collected data from agencies based on prior relationships and convenience. The authors do not indicate how many agencies were invited to participate; however, included in the NIJ study are agencies from 11 different states that are not identified in order to honor promises of anonymity made during administration of the instrument (Klockars et al., 2000). This lack of random sampling creates both an internal validity selection bias issue and an external validity issue. Thus, statistical significance cannot be established from data analysis, and results may not be generalized to police officers in the United States.

This data set is unique, however. The survey instrument for the NIJ study was completed by 3,237 officers from 30 police agencies in the United States (Klockars et al., 2000). The study received a 55.5% overall response rate. The size of the data set, the number of variables, and the subject matter are extremely valuable. The sampling unit for this study is the individual level and the agency level. The NIJ study also collected data at both the individual and agency levels. As the sample is a convenience sample and not random, this sample is treated as a population.

In police agencies where officers rank misconduct as very serious, the officers are more willing to report peers for misconduct. There was very little difference between the officer's individual attitude toward the misconduct and what they believed their peer's attitudes would be toward the misconduct (Klockars et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the Klockars study did not analyze the strength of the relationships, only a comparison of means.<sup>1</sup>

## THE INSTRUMENT

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The instrument used by the NIJ captured police officer attitudes toward police misconduct. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study has been administered to over 10,000 officers worldwide, thus bolstering content validity (Klockars et al., 2004).

Asking officers directly whether they have engaged in unethical behavior yields mixed results, as most people are reluctant to admit to unethical behavior. Officer attitudes toward misconduct, on the other hand, yield more reliable results. Two additional questions asking officers whether they have been truthful and whether they believe their peers have been truthful increased reliability of the instrument. The independent variables available in this study are the agency size, job assignment, supervisory status, rank, length of service, knowledge of existing policy, and perception regarding peer attitudes and behavior. The dependent variables are an officer's ethical awareness, ethical standards, and ethical action. A copy of the scenarios found in the instrument can be found in Chapter 3.

The authors selected police agencies and collected data from individual respondents. The NIJ report examines corruption by asking hypothetical

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Carl Klockars passed away on July 24, 2003, precluding additional analysis and publication on this topic.

questions regarding misconduct. Officers are more likely to respond to questions that do not ask officers directly whether they have been a party to corrupt behavior. The NIJ study asks officers for their perceptions regarding agency rules, corresponding punishment, and willingness to report a peer's unethical behavior (Klockars et al., 2000).

This research study will analyze the NIJ data using advanced statistical tools. To date, the NIJ data have been used to prepare descriptive studies that present the mean scores for questionnaire responses. One study exploring traditional sociological theories of crime and deviant behavior has used advanced statistical tools in analyzing the NIJ data (Hickman et al., 2001). This study expands the analysis to examine the NIJ data in the context of public administration literature as it relates to street level bureaucrats and policing.

The survey instrument used in the NIJ study included 11 case scenarios describing police misconduct. The case scenarios involve behaviors that range from not very serious to intermediately serious to very serious in nature. Some of the activities included in the case scenarios are conflict of interest, bribery, theft, and excessive force (Klockars et al., 2000). The first scenario, depicting a conflict of interest regarding off-duty employment, will not be used in this research, because it is not necessarily depicting misconduct. Many departments have policies regarding off-duty employment; however, most do not have a policy that such employment is a conflict of interest (Brunet, 2005).

Content validity is supported by the methods used to create the scenarios. The scenarios were created to be culturally neutral by avoiding the mention of specific holidays and currency amounts. Respondents were asked to assume that the police officers depicted in each scenario had 5 years of service and no previous disciplinary problems. Some of the case scenarios relied on previously published studies using the case scenario approach (Klockars et al., 2000). Chapter 3 includes the case scenarios and the corresponding International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) National Law Enforcement Standards of Conduct violation.

Several general standards of conduct apply to the scenarios, including a provision that prohibits officers from violating the law. Officers are also not allowed to engage in conduct that would discredit the officer and/or the agency. It could be argued that one provision in particular applies to case 8 that prohibits officers from interfering with or thwarting an internal or criminal investigation.

Each case scenario is followed by seven questions capturing the police officer's opinion regarding the misconduct scenario. Two questions asked officers to rate the seriousness of the case scenario from their own perspective and from that of their peers. Two additional questions addressed what disciplinary action the officer felt should be taken and what disciplinary action the officer felt would be taken in the case scenario. The officer's willingness to report the misconduct was another question, as well as a question regarding whether the officer felt their peers would report the misconduct. A final question addressed whether the officer believed the misconduct was a violation of their agency's official policy (Klockars et al., 2000). Chapter 3 includes the questions, possible responses, and corresponding coding.

The question asking respondents to consider how serious the behavior is will measure the officer's ethical awareness. The question regarding what discipline should follow from an officer engaging in the behavior will measure the officer's ethical standards. The question addressing the respondent's willingness to report the behavior will measure the officer's action. Although these questions alone do not adequately measure awareness, standards, and action completely, they do provide partial measures. Relying on partial measures reduces construct validity; however, the NIJ researchers did not collect multiple measures, nor did they use multiple methods in gathering their data.

The questions regarding what the respondent believes would be the responses of their peers to seriousness, punishment, and reporting allows a discrepancy measure. Whether there is a policy in a given agency is not as important as the respondent's knowledge of the existence of such policies and the certainty of that knowledge given the respondent's length of service and rank.

Finally, the survey asked officers general questions regarding their background and context, including rank, assignment of duties, and size of agency. Chapter 3 includes the general background questions, possible responses, and corresponding abbreviations.

## **STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

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This research study seeks to identify the relationship between a police officer's attitude toward misconduct and whether that officer is willing to report peer misconduct. The appropriate statistical analysis tools include

cross-tabs, gamma, and regression. Although gamma establishes the relationship between variables, multiple regression assesses the relative strength of this relationship. Multiple regression can also be used to determine the predictive nature of the independent variables with respect to the dependent variable in this study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

### *Variables*

The hypotheses explored in this study address the fundamental question of whether there is a relationship between officer characteristics, attitudes regarding misconduct, and an officer reporting the unethical behavior of peers. The variables that are available for analysis within this data include officer attitudes regarding misconduct, officer attitudes regarding agency misconduct policies, officer attitudes regarding reporting peer misconduct, rank, supervisory position, length of service within an agency, length of service within law enforcement, job assignment, and agency size. Background questions about officers are limited in order to protect confidentiality; therefore, questions indicating gender and race were left off of the NIJ survey instrument (Klockars et al., 2004).

Figure 5–1 explores the characteristics of respondents within the NIJ study. These characteristics are defined by the NIJ study. Over 70% of respondents work in very large agencies (over 500 sworn officers), whereas approximately 7% of respondents work in large agencies (between 201 and 500 sworn officers). Approximately 11% of respondents work in medium-size agencies (76 to 200 sworn officers); 6.8% work in small agencies (25 to 75 sworn officers), and the remaining less than 3% work in very small agencies (less than 25 sworn officers). The typical respondent has been an officer for approximately 10 years. Officers who work in patrol or traffic comprise 66.7% of respondents. One in five respondents is a supervisor. There was only one sheriff agency respondent and only one county police respondent in this study, and thus, these agencies were added to the corresponding agency size.

Several of the hypotheses explore whether an officer who is not promoted will view misconduct more or less favorably than an officer who is promoted. An officer may achieve various levels of rank during their career. Not all agencies use each of the ranks explored in this study. Each agency can use rank in a different hierarchical order, and some ranks can be combined (i.e., lieutenant colonel). Rank within police agencies is similar to military organizations.

The ranks included in this study include officers, deputies, and corporals who are not supervisors. Detectives include detectives and investigators only. First-line managers include sergeants and corporals who are supervisors. Midlevel managers include captains and lieutenants. Senior managers include colonels, chiefs, and majors. These same labels are used throughout this study for analysis of ethical awareness, standards, and action.

This study also hypothesizes that length of service will have a curvilinear relationship to an officer's ethical awareness, standards, and action controlling for rank and supervisory status. It is important to examine an officer's experience or length of service with rank in mind as officers achieve higher rank and supervisory status as they gain more experience. This study, therefore, controls for supervisory status by examining length of service for nonsupervisors only.

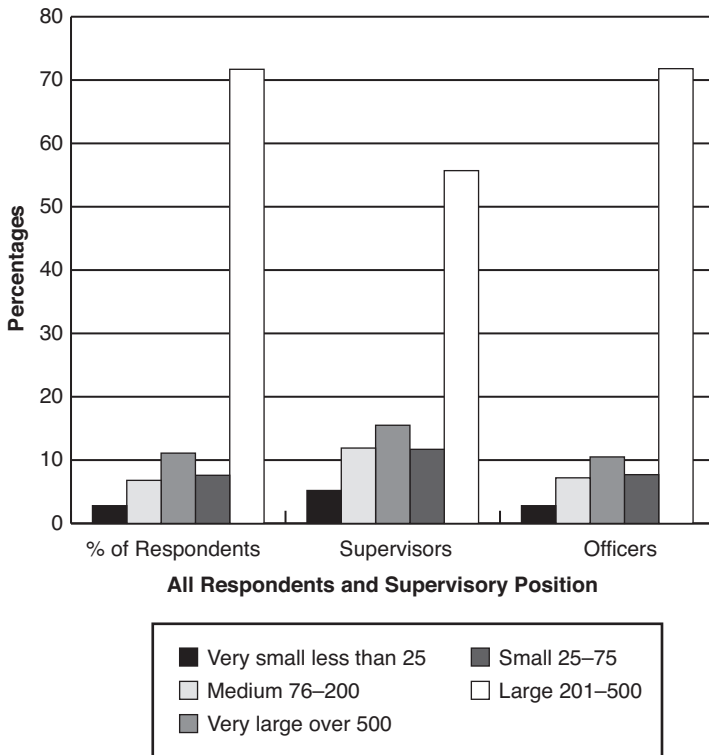


FIGURE 5-1 Percentages of Respondents and Supervisors by Agency Size

Not surprisingly, managers have been in service longer than officers. The majority of midlevel and senior managers have been in service for more than 20 years. Over 90% of midlevel managers have been in service for over sixteen years. Almost 79% of senior managers have been in service for over 16 years. First-line managers consist of almost equal one-third portions of officers who have been in service for 11 to 15 years, 16 to 20 years, and over 20 years. Approximately one third of all officers and one third of all detectives have been in service for 6 to 10 years. These results indicate that officers are likely to obtain promotion during years 6 through 15 of their careers. Figure 5–2 shows the characteristics of respondents by rank and length of service.

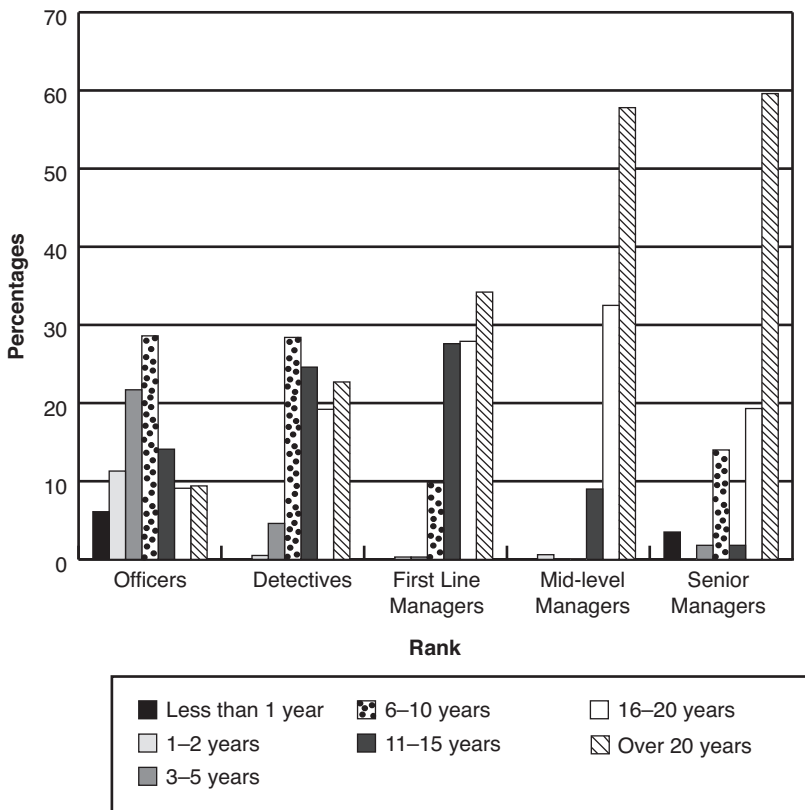


FIGURE 5–2 Percentages of Respondents According to Length of Service and Rank

The characteristics of rank and job assignment are somewhat redundant. The job assignment variable offers five possible categories, which include patrol, detective/investigative, special operations, communications, administrative, and other. There were only eight communications officers within the sample and these officers were merged with patrol.

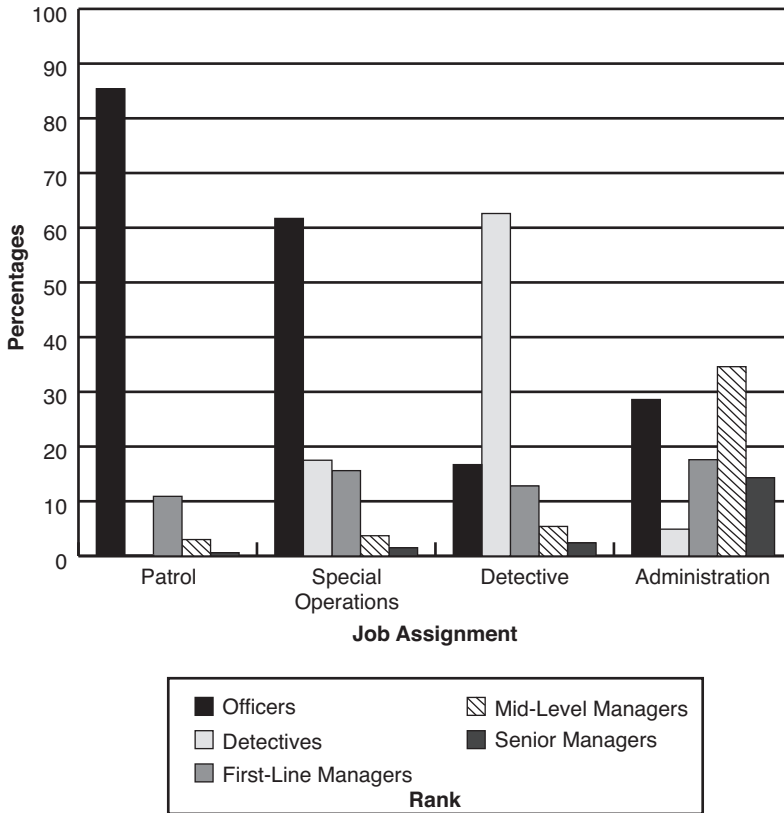
Approximately 85% of patrol officers categorized their rank as officer, whereas 79.3% of detective/investigative officers characterized their rank as officer or detective/investigator. Although detective rank is a promotion, it does not necessarily involve a supervisory responsibility. As the results show later here, about 20% of detectives are managers, mostly first-line managers. Administrative officers tend by 66.5% to categorize their rank as management. As a result of this overlap, job assignment is not explored as a variable in the chapters that follow, although it is important to recognize that the assignments of patrol and investigation are embedded in the measure of rank for officers and detectives, respectively. Figure 5–3 explores the characteristics of respondents by rank and job assignment.

The independent variables that will be used for analysis in this study include the agency size, supervisory status (in cross-tabs only), rank (in regression analysis), length of service controlling for supervisory status, knowledge of existing policy, and perception regarding peer attitudes and behavior. Respondents were asked questions regarding the agency size, supervisory status, rank, and length of service as described earlier in this chapter. Respondents were also asked whether each scenario violated policy within their agency on a five point Likert-type scale with 1 equaling definitely not a violation and 5 equaling definitely a violation. For each scenario, respondents were asked how peers would respond to the same scenario with respect to awareness, standards, and action.

There are three dependent variables. Two of these become independent variables during the analysis. These dependent variables are ethical awareness, ethical standards, and ethical action. Ethical awareness is the officer's attitude regarding the seriousness of the misconduct in each scenario. Ethical standards include the officer's attitude toward punishment that should follow the police misconduct. Ethical action is the officer's willingness to report misconduct. Both ethical awareness and ethical standards become independent variables during the analysis.

To provide an overview of hypotheses that will be presented later, there are certain assumptions about the relationship among variables that will be tested. For ethical awareness, the variation in responses may be





**FIGURE 5-3** Percentages of Respondents According to Rank and Job Assignment

explained by the independent variables such as size of agency, length of service, rank, supervisory position, the perception of peer attitudes, and the perception of official policy regarding discipline.

For ethical standards, the variation in responses may be explained by ethical awareness, although “slippage” is expected. The attitude that a behavior is serious can be undercut by preferring “weak” discipline. Thus, attitude about discipline is considered to be a better indicator of the real judgment about the behavior than the attitude about seriousness.

For ethical action, the variation in responses can be explained by ethical awareness and ethical standards, as well as discrepancies in attitude between the individual officer and the attitudes of their peers, as well as official policy. With regard to reporting, attitudes of peers and official policy are considered

to have a reinforcing or deterrent effect. An officer is more likely to break the code of silence if expected by his or her peers to do so and if it will be sustained by appropriate official disciplinary action. On the other hand, an officer is less likely to risk alienating peers who disapprove of his or her behavior and also less likely to deviate from informal norms if it appears that the agency will not provide discipline the officer feels is appropriate.

The survey instrument used in the NIJ study included 11 case scenarios describing police misconduct. Each scenario is followed by a series of questions, including one question asking the officer, "Do you think you would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behavior?" This question is a direct measure of whether an officer is willing to report a peer for misconduct. This question asks officers directly what they would do under the circumstances, unlike the other questions in this instrument. These questions are designed to "probe the implications of the normative inclination to resist temptations to abuse the rights and privileges of one's office" (Klockars et al., 2004).

The officer's attitude toward misconduct is measured with this question: "How serious do you consider this behavior to be?" This question is asked following each scenario. This question is a direct measure of the officer's attitude regarding misconduct. Because there is a broad range of misconduct in the case scenarios, the respondents are more likely to answer honestly. Their responses would seem unreliable if they simply answered accepting a free meal is as serious as accepting a money bribe (Klockars et al., 2004). We will not presume, however, that the officer's attitudes about seriousness match standards for police conduct that can be derived from external sources. This is one of the issues to explore in the research.

The officer's attitude regarding the discipline that should follow misconduct is also measured within the instrument. This is an operational measure of ethical standards. Regardless of the attitude about the seriousness of the behavior, the preferred action indicates how the seriousness would be translated into discipline. The options given for response are limited to actual forms of punishment, which is problematic. The forms of punishment offered do not include formal sanctions such as transfer, fines, counseling, and delay in promotion or informal measures such as peer intervention or ostracism (Klockars et al., 2004).

Peer norms can be measured with this question: "How serious do most police officers in your agency consider this behavior to be?" Norms are those attitudes shared by a group. This question is also asked of each peer

and those responses could be used as the measure; however, what is important is the respondent's belief and not the actual response of peers. Similarly, peer behavior is measured with this question: "Do you think most police officers in your agency would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behavior?"

### *Categorizing Unethical Behavior*

Measuring the impact that the nature of misconduct has on officer attitudes and behavior can be accomplished by categorizing the case scenarios. As noted previously here, the designers of the survey instrument intentionally presented cases that presented a broad range of misconduct, although the authors provided no guide indicating their ordering of the cases with respect to seriousness of misconduct. Two methods may be used: perception of respondents and external standards.

According to respondents, the case scenarios range from not very serious to intermediately serious to very serious in nature. Specifically, respondents ranked the least serious of the scenarios as conflict of interest, accepting free meals, accepting holiday gifts, and professional courtesy. According to respondents, the intermediately serious scenarios included excessive force, supervisor misconduct, alcohol bribes, and kickbacks. The scenarios that were considered very serious to respondents include stealing a wallet, stealing a watch, and accepting a money bribe.

One method for classifying the seriousness of officer misconduct by objective standards would involve assessing uniform codes of punishment for such misconduct. The limitation of this approach is that the punishment for misconduct varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and can differ within a state from county to county and among various agencies. There is a movement to make punishment more standardized by individual states in the same way federal sentencing guidelines are used, but there would still be differences between states in how they punish various forms of misconduct (Walker, 2004).

There is another way of classifying the data that reflects a principle-based approach to ethics. This approach uses external standards to judge the seriousness of actions rather than relying on the perceptions of officers, such as the respondents within the NIJ study. According to this approach, one can make independent judgments about officers' ethical sensitivity based on the extent to which their attitudes are consistent with ethical principles (Svara, 1997).

There are numerous definitions from scholars and commissioned government reports for three types of unethical behavior: misconduct, brutality, and corruption. The consensus among these materials is that misconduct includes behavior that violates police policy and usually involves some type of personal gain for the officer engaging in the misconduct. Acts of misconduct include favoritism, graft, prejudice, perjury, and brutality. Although considered misconduct, brutality or misuse of force is considered nearly as serious as corruption and is treated separately in the literature. Corruption is considered to be even more serious misbehavior. It can include behavior for personal gain and most often includes some type of illegal behavior. Acts of corruption include burglary, theft, bribery, kickbacks, payoffs, and other fixes (Hale, 1989).

Kolthoff et al. (2007) identified a typology of integrity violations for public officials. Their research is based on research conducted in the Netherlands. The typology is useful within the context of this study. The typology includes definitions of various types of corruption, as well as definitions of concepts such as bribing, theft, conflict of interest, improper use of authority, and private time misconduct.

Bribery falls under corruption and is defined to include the misuse of power for private gain and asking, offering, accepting bribes (Kolthoff et al., 2007). Bribery within the United States is similarly defined as the “offering, giving, receiving, or soliciting of something of value for the purpose of influencing the action of an official in the discharge of his or her public or legal duties” (Garner, 1999, p. 191). Kolthoff et al. (2007) define fraud and theft as an organizational private gain. Fraud and theft are treated separately under the law. The U.S. Black’s Law Dictionary (1991) defines fraud as a deception with intent to cause injury to another, usually by convincing the victim to consensually part with something of value. Theft does not have the element of deception, but the two can be combined under the law.

The improper use of authority according to Kolthoff et al. (2007) only considers abuse that occurs as a result of noble intent. Improper use of authority with bad intentions is called nepotism, cronyism, and patronage. This typology, however, does not consider abuse of authority with bad intentions that does not fall within the three narrowly defined categories provided. Kolthoff et al. (2007) does recognize conflict of interest as the acceptance of something of value that might interfere with the public interest.

This study creates a typology that is specific to the scenarios listed within the NIJ study relying on the typologies identified by Kolthoff et al. (2007) and Hale (1989). Analysis of the NIJ data will be done according to four categories of seriousness: conflict of interest, exploiting authority, abuse of authority, and malfeasance. These classifications of misconduct and corruption are supported by the literature, and neither contradicts the discipline that would be received within the departments surveyed in the NIJ study (Hale, 1989).

In addition to categorizing the scenarios within this study based on current literature and existing legal definitions of crime and punishment, principal component factor analysis and bivariate correlation were used to confirm at least moderate correlation among the scenarios. Categorization according to the literature and correlation enhance construct validity, including convergent and discriminant validity. Principal component factor analysis confirms strong correlations among scenarios within each of the four categories, but not overly high correlations.

Categorizing the scenarios requires consideration of harm to third parties, benefits to the officer individually or collectively, and whether the misconduct is illegal behavior. The scenarios that involve minor instances of misconduct that do not involve harm to third parties or illegal behavior are categorized as conflict of interest. These scenarios include officers accepting gifts or food from local merchants. Scenarios where the officer uses their power as a police officer to take advantage of others for economic gain are characterized as exploiting authority. These two scenarios include the receipt of kickbacks and a violation of office policy.

The third group of misbehavior—abuse of authority—involves behavior not providing any direct economic benefit to the officer, but a psychic benefit instead. Abuse of authority is the wrongful exercise of lawful authority. The scenarios depict a violation of departmental policy, a human rights violation, and a violation of criminal law. Two of the three scenarios encourage what is considered professional courtesy where officers protect or shield one another from harm. Although not professional courtesy, the third scenario depicts conspiratorial behavior. Conspiracy is treated more seriously in criminal law, as it is potentially more dangerous than crimes committed by individuals (Samaha, 2005). One scenario depicts physical harm to a suspect, which is considered more serious in criminal law than economic harm (Samaha, 2005).

The final group of misbehavior includes criminal behavior that is considered malfeasance. A common law term, malfeasance includes illegal behavior that is attributed to public officials (Hale, 1989). Each of the three scenarios depicted within malfeasance involve illegal officer behavior including bribery and theft. Table 5–1 shows how the scenarios are categorized.

One scenario has been omitted from this analysis—the scenario that involves off-duty work, which potentially creates a conflict of interest. Not all departments in the United States have an off-duty conflict of interest policy for officers to follow. For most departments, having outside work is not a violation of policy at all; even work that is closely related to the job of a police officer (Brunet, 2005). Those that do have policies enforce different rules with respect to whether and how an officer will pursue outside employment. The survey responses clearly indicated that there is no relationship between this scenario and any of the others offered in this study.

The scenarios are represented in the law enforcement code of ethics. Conflict-of-interest scenarios and unnecessary force are explicitly forbidden by the code mandating that officers should never accept gratuities and should never employ unnecessary force. The code also generally directs officers to “develop self restraint,” which contradicts both exploiting authority and abuse of authority scenarios. The code also requires that officers “enforce the law courteously and appropriately without fear or favor,” which would prohibit behavior depicted with both exploiting authority and abuse of authority. Malfeasance is generally not allowed in that the code states officers should be “honest in thought and deed.”

The scenarios are also covered by the IACP National Law Enforcement Standards of Conduct. The standards generally prohibit officers from violating the law, accepting gratuities without filing a report, or using their position for gain or advantage. The standards provide specific language prohibiting drinking alcohol on duty and, in particular, from drinking in public whether on or off duty. There is also a specific provision prohibiting misuse of force. The law prohibits misuse of force in the sense that misuse of force is technically an assault.

The scenarios that fall within each of the four categories are highly correlated according to bivariate correlations. The categories are listed in order of seriousness according to the factors used to create the categories. For example, exploiting authority should be considered more serious than conflict of interest because there is greater harm to third parties. In order to condense the variables into these categories, means were used for the

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**Table 5–1 Case Scenarios by Nature of the Misconduct**

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**Conflict of Interest**

A police officer routinely accepts free meals, cigarettes, and other items of small value from merchants on his beat. He does not solicit these gifts and is careful not to abuse the generosity of those who give gifts to him.

A police officer is widely liked in the community, and on holidays local merchants and restaurant and bar owners show their appreciation for his attention by giving him gifts of food and liquor.

**Exploiting Authority**

A police officer has a private arrangement with a local auto body shop to refer the owners of the cars damaged in the accidents to the shop. In exchange for each referral, he receives a payment of 5% of the repair bill from the shop owner.

A police officer, who happens to be a very good auto mechanic, is scheduled to work during coming holidays. A supervisor offers to give him these days off, if he agrees to tune-up his supervisor's personal car. Evaluate the SUPERVISOR'S behavior.

**Abuse of Authority**

A police officer finds a bar on his beat that is still serving drinks a half hour past its legal closing time. Instead of reporting this violation, the police officer agrees to accept a couple of free drinks from the owner.

At 2 A.M. a police officer, who is on duty, is driving his patrol car on a deserted road. He sees a vehicle that has been driven off the road and is stuck in a ditch. He approaches the vehicle and observes that the driver is not hurt but is obviously intoxicated. He also finds that the driver is a police officer. Instead of reporting this accident and offense he transports the driver to his home.

Two police officers on foot patrol surprise a man who is attempting to break into an automobile. The man flees. They chase him for about two blocks before apprehending him by tackling him and wrestling him to the ground. After he is under control both officers punch him a couple of times in the stomach as punishment for fleeing and resisting.

**Malfeasance**

A police officer stops a motorist for speeding. The officer agrees to accept a personal gift of half of the amount of the fine in exchange for not issuing a citation.

A police officer discovers a burglary of a jewelry shop. The display cases are smashed and it is obvious that many items have been taken. While searching the shop, he takes a watch, worth about two days pay for that officer. He reports that the watch had been stolen during the burglary.

A police officer finds a wallet in a parking lot. It contains the amount of money equivalent to a full-day's pay for that officer. He reports the wallet as lost property, but keeps the money for himself.

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scenarios falling into each category. For example, conflict of interest is the mean of the two scenarios depicting an officer accepting gratuities and accepting gifts on holidays. The following section explores the nature of this relationship and the hypotheses to be tested in this study.

### *Hypotheses—Ethical Awareness, Ethical Standards, and Ethical Action*

The hypotheses analyze what factors impact officer attitudes toward misconduct and standards, as well as whether an officer will report peer misconduct. This study analyzes organizational and situational variables that impact officer attitudes and behavior. Organizational variables are measured by the size of an agency, an officer's job assignment and rank, and whether an officer is a supervisor. Situational factors are measured by the nature of the misconduct. Attitudes of peers, expected behavior of other officers, and departmental policy are measures of organizational culture. An officer's ethical awareness is measured according to their attitudes toward misconduct. Ethical standards are measured according to what an officer believes should be the punishment for misconduct. Ethical action is measured by whether an officer is willing to report peer misconduct.

- H1: The more serious the misconduct, the higher an officer's ethical awareness.
- H2: Officers who are supervisors will have higher ethical awareness.
- H3: An officer's length of service controlling for rank and supervisory status will have a curvilinear relationship to an officer's ethical awareness.
- H4: The size of the police agency will have no relationship to an officer's ethical awareness.
- H5: An officer's awareness of existing policies regarding misconduct will positively impact that officer's ethical awareness.
- H6: An officer's perceptions regarding peer ethical awareness will positively impact that officer's ethical awareness.
- H7: The more serious the misconduct, the higher that officer's ethical standards.
- H8: Officers who are supervisor will have higher ethical standards.
- H9: An officer's length of service controlling for rank and supervisory status will have a curvilinear relationship to an officer's ethical standards.



- H10: The size of the police agency will have no relationship to an officer's ethical standards.
- H11: An officer's awareness of existing policies regarding misconduct will positively impact that officer's ethical standards.
- H12: An officer's perceptions regarding peer ethical awareness and standards will positively impact that officer's ethical standards.
- H13: The higher an officer's ethical awareness, the higher that officer's ethical standards.
- H14: The more serious the misconduct, the greater the likelihood of an officer's ethical action.
- H15: Officers who are supervisors are more likely to take ethical action.
- H16: An officer's length of service controlling for rank and supervisory status will have a curvilinear relationship to the officer's ethical action.
- H17: The size of the police agency will have no relationship to an officer's ethical action.
- H18: An officer's awareness of existing policies regarding misconduct will positively impact that officer's willingness to take ethical action.
- H19: An officer's ethical and perceptions regarding peer ethical awareness, standards, and action will positively impact that officer's willingness to take ethical action.
- H20: The higher the officer's ethical awareness and standards, the greater the likelihood of an officer's ethical action.

The first six hypotheses examine the variation in awareness levels of officers. These hypotheses involve situational, individual, and organizational variables. Situational measures include seriousness of the misconduct for each misconduct scenario. The measures for individual factors include supervisory position, rank, and length of service in general. The organizational factors included in this study are agency size and policy.

H5, H11, and H18 explore an officer's awareness of existing policies regarding misconduct. This variable may be an indicator of how much an officer has been exposed to ethics training during his career. This variable also may indicate to some degree how committed supervisors are to communicating agency policy to subordinates. The results explored in this study regarding whether officers are aware of agency policies will suggest

whether further training is necessary within an agency or system wide. Given that not much ethics training exists for officers, the expectation is that officers will be uncertain about whether policies exist regarding less serious misconduct depicted in the scenarios. Educators and police supervisors agree that ethics training is important for law enforcement, suggesting that this variable will have a substantial impact on an officer's ethical awareness, standards, and action.

H6, H12, and H19 explore an officer's awareness of perceptions regarding peer ethical awareness. This variable measures the importance an officer places on peer opinions, particularly when considering its impact on whether an officer will report misconduct. This variable essentially gives insight into the weight indirect peer pressure may have on an officer's ethical awareness, standards, and action. The solidarity depicted within law enforcement among peers suggests that this variable will have a big impact on an officer's awareness, standards, and action.

H2, H8, and H15 explore supervisory status, whereas H4, H10, and H17 explore the size of the agency. Individual and organizational variables have had mixed results with respect to impact on officer attitudes and behavior (Riksheim & Chermak, 1993). These hypotheses follow the police culture literature, which suggests that socialization and police culture shape attitudes (Paoline, 2001). If these hypotheses are correct, then supervisors and higher ranking officers believe that officer misconduct is more serious than nonsupervisors and lower ranking officers. Supervisors and higher ranking officers will also believe that more discipline is necessary and will be more likely to report misconduct than non-supervisors and lower ranking officers.

Hypotheses that explore length of service—H3, H9, and H16—are supported by Catlin and Maupin's (2004) findings that socialization on the job impacts an officer's ethical orientations. Analyzing the data to determine whether support exists for this hypothesis requires a comparison of means between officers at varying years of service. Actual years of service are not available in the NIJ data, only the categories indicated earlier in this chapter. In view of the expected impact of rank and supervisory status, length of service will be analyzed with a control for supervisory status.

There is very little research exploring the issue of agency size—H4, H10, and H17—and its impact on officer attitudes. Recent research suggests that local political culture has no impact on the organizational structure of law

enforcement agencies (Hassell & Zhao, 2003). Most studies that do consider the organizational structure of a law enforcement agency do so within the context of the size of the city serviced by the officers and not the size of the agency itself (Riksheim & Chermak, 1993). Research that does exist related to size of agency is conflicting, suggesting that there is no relationship between size of agency and an officer's attitudes.

As for the impact of policy on officer attitudes—H5, H11, and H18—some studies have found a relationship between agency policy and officer behavior (Robinson & Chandek, 2000). Their study relies on hierarchical structure to influence the officer's attitude toward misconduct. One can argue, however, that community policing is changing the long-established relationship between size and hierarchy. Larger organizations are more likely to have eliminated formal hierarchical bureaucratic structures in community-based approaches (Kenney & McNamara, 1999).

In addition, larger agencies will have more resources for training and that can narrow the amount of discrepancy in attitudes between officers and their peers. This study hypothesizes that community policing and more extensive resources in larger agencies will have a positive effect on an officer's ethical awareness, standards, and action. On the other hand, bureaucratization and the stress-producing conditions of large cities where one finds larger agencies have a negative effect. Given the contradictory expectations regarding size, the hypothesis predicts no relationship.

From two perspectives, the nature of the misconduct itself—H1, H7, and H14—has an impact on an officer's attitude toward that misconduct, the discipline that should follow, and whether an officer is willing to report that misconduct. First, virtue-based approaches to ethics would suggest that the more an action violates norms of integrity, the more likely it is to be considered wrong, as should the disparity between principle and action (DeLattre, 2002). Second, some studies have shown a relationship between situational variables and officer behavior (Engel & Worden, 2003). This suggests that the nature of the misconduct itself has an impact on an officer's attitude toward that misconduct, the discipline that should follow, and whether an officer is willing to report that misconduct. The more serious the nature of the misconduct consistent with objective standards, the more serious the officer is likely to view that misconduct, the more discipline the officer will believe should follow, and the more likely the officer will report that misconduct.

Supervisors—H2, H8, and H15—will have been in police work long enough for the socialization process to shape their attitudes toward misconduct such that it will be in line with the attitudes of their peers. Furthermore, they have been selected to be supervisors because they meet agency standards and expectations and have incentives to uphold ethical norms. Similarly, as officers progress through their careers, they hold more prestigious job assignments and attain higher status through rank. Persons selected for promotion meet agency standards and expectations (Scarborough et al., 1999; Whetstone, 2001). Each of these variables—supervisory position, rank, length of service—contribute to the officer's attitude toward misconduct. The analysis will examine the separate and combined effects.

New officers—H3, H9, and H16—should have higher values than officers who have been in service for 3 to 10 years for two primary reasons. In part, this view is inferred from the finding that officers who are disciplined for misconduct are generally in their seventh year of service, as Trautman (1997) has shown. In addition, officers become more cynical during this phase of their careers (Hickman et al., 2004). As officers progress through their careers, their commitment to ethical values rise as they either receive promotion or come to terms with their careers (Barker, 1999). The exception to the standard expectation regarding length of service is officers who have been passed over for promotion or selection as supervisors. Negative socialization and/or the cumulative effects of longer service in stressful conditions together with possible resentment for not being promoted can lead to a decline in ethical values. Toward the end of a long period of service, however, self-selection may leave highly experienced officers with higher values than their colleagues who have intermediate periods of service.

All of these situational, individual, and organizational variables combined contribute to an officer's ethical awareness, ethical standards, and ethical action. An officer's socialization shapes the officer's attitude regarding how serious misconduct is in any given situation, whether discipline is warranted, and whether the officer will report the peer misconduct. Ethical awareness and standards ultimately affect an officer's ethical action.

Hypotheses 14 through 20 address the issue of what impacts an officer's decision to report misconduct. Klockars (2002) pointed out that police departments that have successfully broken the police code of silence have consistently upheld fair ethical standards for all officers. Ethical awareness and standards each contribute ultimately to whether an

officer is willing to report peer misconduct. One possible explanation for mixed results in the literature when tying socialization, situational, individual, and organizational factors to behavior could be that these factors may only play an indirect role in shaping behavior. Attitudes may more directly impact behavior, whereas these socialization, situational, individual and organizational factors may more directly impact attitudes.

### *NIJ Data*

The NIJ study provides data at the individual level of analysis, making it accessible to multiple forms of data analysis. One advantage of using this data set is that it is very large and missing values did not impact the overall number of respondents. A second advantage is that it contains responses creating approximately 88 variables, including a broad range of misconduct and background information. The majority of variables, 77 questions in the survey, explore the respondent's attitudes toward 11 different specific scenarios depicting officer behavior. The remaining 11 variables inquire into the respondent's background.

The statistical analysis tools that are appropriate to this study include gamma and regression. Each offers a different perspective for interpreting the data. Gamma is a measure of association that measures the strength of relationships between variables (Garson, 2006). Gamma ranges from +1 to -1 and measures the independent variables ability to predict the dependent variable's rank (Garson, 2006). Regression can establish the predictive power independent variables have with respect to a dependent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Combined, these tools offer a deeper understanding of the NIJ data than has been provided in earlier published reports.

The hypotheses explored in this study ask two basic questions. First, what is the strength of the relationship between the variables including organizational, situational, attitudinal, and behavioral variables? This question is best explored through gamma results. The second question revolves around the combined relative impact these variables have on the dependent variables. This question is best analyzed with the help of regression analysis.

Regression assumes linearity, interval level data, normal error terms, homoscedasticity, minimal measurement error, normal distributions, nonrecursivity, absence of multicollinearity, and additivity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Gamma assumes ordinal-level data and is used in place of Yule's Q when using dichotomous variables. Gamma also does not assume a random sample, as is the case with this study (Garson, 2006).

### *Screening the Data*

The first step in screening the data that was unique to this data set involved honesty of the respondents in completing the survey data. One question added to the end of the survey instrument asked officers who did respond to the survey whether they were truthful in responding to the survey questions. According to the authors, approximately 2.2% of the officers responded “no” to this question, with approximately 1.8% not responding. These 4% of respondents were deleted from the analysis in this paper. The NIJ study chose only to delete the “no” responses to this question.

The next step involved meeting assumptions for regression. The assumptions discussed later here include interval level data, linearity, homoscedasticity, normal distributions, normal error terms, multicollinearity, and no overfitting of data. Most of the data are discrete in the form of a five-point Likert-type scale, which may be treated as if continuous (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). It is necessary to check the data for normality by running skew and kurtosis tests and requesting outliers. The test results show no significant skewness or kurtosis problems.

Scatterplots are used to determine whether observed variables have linear relationships, as this is not possible with unobserved variables. Although not perfect, linearity was not problematic with these variables. Residual plots and the analyses of outliers are tools used to determine violation of this assumption. Lack of homoscedasticity would be indicated on the residual plots by a funnel-shaped pattern. The homoscedasticity assumption was met with the NIJ data.

Regression assumes absence of multicollinearity or singularity among variables. Squared multiple correlations were analyzed from the data. The variable length of service in general was virtually identical to length of service for the agency, making the two variables redundant. As this study does not analyze data at the agency level, the variable length of service for the agency was dropped in order to avoid multicollinearity issues.

Analysis of a histogram for standardized residuals is the proper tool for determining whether this assumption has been met. If the histogram shows a normal curve, then the residual error terms can be assumed normally distributed.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 reveal the results of the analysis discussed in this chapter.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss each of the case scenarios from the NIJ study. How serious is the behavior depicted in each scenario? What punishment do you think should follow? Would you be willing to report this type of behavior?
2. There are no standardized punishments (analogy: federal sentencing guidelines) for unethical/illegal behavior committed by police officers. Each jurisdiction varies, even within a state. Do you think there should be standardized punishments? What are the benefits to this approach? What are the drawbacks to such an approach?
3. Analyze each hypothesis presented within this chapter one at a time. Do you find support for each hypothesis in the research presented in this book? Do you find conflicting evidence?
4. Which hypotheses do you believe will be supported, and which do you think may not be supported by analyzing the data in the NIJ survey?
5. What impact does this data/survey have on policing, if any? What impact should it have?

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