

# Chapter 19

## A History of Police Psychology

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter briefly identifies important societal events and governmental responses that set the stage for the emergence of the specialty of police psychology, provides the names and departments of early practitioners (1963-1990) of police psychology, and explains how the current definition of police psychology was developed, with its four domains and 55 proficiencies. The maturation of the specialty is outlined from its recognition as an American Psychological Association (APA) proficiency, to the creation of an American Board of Police & Public Safety Psychology (ABPPSP) specialty board, and most recently to its recognition as an APA specialty.*

### INTRODUCTION

There are few public interests more compelling than public safety. The ability of a police force to conduct its activities safely, effectively, efficiently, and in conformance with statutory and constitutional requirements depends in large part on the functional health of police professionals and the agencies in which they work. Police officers are the only occupational position in a civilian, democratic society with the statutory authority to use lethal force and to conduct criminal investigations. These responsibilities expose police officers to chronic and often traumatic stressors while, at the same time, requiring a high level of competence and resilience. Assisting in identifying police officer applicants capable of carrying out these duties, as well as identifying those who are wholly unsuitable, is one role performed by psychologists specializing in Police and Public Safety Psychology (Council of Organizations in Police Psychology [COPP] Petition, 2011).

The assessment of police officer candidates was not the only activity in which psychology and law enforcement interacted during the formative years. The specialty of Police and Public Safety Psychology commenced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but accelerated following the civil unrest in the United States in the 1960s and further advanced once the specialty was precisely defined in 2007 (Aumiller & Corey, 2007). This chapter captures the key moments of this evolution, noting along the way the significant entry of psychologists who provided a variety of services to law enforcement between 1963 and 1990,

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from whose work today's police psychology was distilled. Many of these pioneering psychologists continue to practice today but they are recognized here more for the course they set for today's specialty practice than for their many contributions along the way. The chapter concludes with the definition of the functional domains, competencies, and proficiencies of police psychology.

## **IN THE BEGINNING**

While police officer selection was psychology's first contribution to modern law enforcement, helping to maintain effective functioning of police professionals through clinical intervention, training, research, and organizational consulting emerged as other aspects of police and public safety psychology. These milieu-adapted practices of the specialty of police psychology have recent origins. In the early twentieth century, only a small number of mental health professionals were involved within the broader criminal justice system. These professionals engaged in activities such as criminal profiling, eyewitness memory and identification, hypnosis, and early attempts at selection to measure the aptitudes necessary to become a police officer, to name a few.

Involvement in police selection (i.e., assessment) was a turning point for the expansion of police psychology into not one but four domains: assessment, intervention, operational support, and organizational consultation. Scrivner and Kurke (1995), as well as Reese (1995), describe "three traditions of police psychology." The "first tradition" of police psychology was created by the applied research spurred by the 1968 Law Enforcement Assistance Administration and its predecessor, the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, particularly two of its affiliate agencies, the National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The roots of the first tradition originated from Lewis Terman's use in 1916 of the Stanford revision of the Binet-Simon Scale that became known as the Stanford-Binet IQ Test for measuring intelligence with children (Terman, 1917). Terman began using an abbreviated form of the Stanford-Binet to test San Jose (CA) Police Department officers in order to assess their intelligence as a step toward establishing job-related criteria for police selection. Terman published his results in 1917 and concluded that intelligence testing could be potentially valuable as a selection tool (Weiss & Inwald, 2010). Terman's work was soon followed by L. Louis Thurstone (Thurstone, 1922), who used the Army Alpha Intelligence Test to assess officers in the Detroit (MI) Police Department and found that patrolmen scored higher (mean IQ = 71.44) than their lieutenants (mean IQ = 57.80). Other departments followed suit including the Los Angeles (CA) Police Department in 1954 when they administered an MMPI, group Rorschach, projective drawing, and a clinical interview to police officer applicants (Weiss & Inwald, 2010). In 1975, Joe Fabricatore was hired by the Personnel Department of the City of Los Angeles as the first full time psychologist dedicated solely to designing and implementing an objective and legally defensible preemployment psychological evaluation program for law enforcement (personal communication, May 24, 2015).

Societal and cultural shifts in the 1960s provided increased demand for psychological assessment in police selection. During the late 1950s and into the early 1960s, the crime rate in the United States increased dramatically (Pinker, 2011). Coupled with the civil rights movement and protests against the war in Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson formed the Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice in 1965. He charged the members of the commission to determine the causes of crime and to recommend what society could do to reduce it. *The Presidential Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice* (President's Commission, 1967) report urged law enforcement agen-

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