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COMPARING THE MORAL VALUES OF SLOVENIAN AND AMERICAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE STUDENTS, POLICE OFFICERS, AND JAIL OFFICERS

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Braithwaite and Scott describe the study of values as multi-disciplinary involving, "the intersection of interests of philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Values are presumed to encapsulate the aspirations of individuals and societies. They pertain to what is desirable, to deeply engrained standards that determine future directions and that justify past actions. Values have been postulated as key constructs in the socialization process, and have found their way into cultural, religious, political, educational, occupational, and family research" (1991:661). Psychological and biological aspects of an individual (one's characteristics and needs) link research to attitudes, personality, and self-esteem (1991). These individual factors carryover into the realm of the workplace, impacting one's working personality and professional behaviors. Thus, such moral values are central to the socialization of criminal justice professionals and to the practice of criminal justice. Moral values are not the exclusive domain of a particular geographic culture or region; they permeate all cultures and countries prompting cross-cultural studies.

This research paper presents a comparative study of moral values and morally debatable behaviors conducted with students from the School of Criminal Justice at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan and the College of Police and Security Studies in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Also studied are police officers and jail officers in West Michigan and their counterparts in Slovenia.

Findings indicate that West Michigan students, police officers and jail personnel are more rigid in their views of morally correct behavior than their Slovenian counterparts. In part, we believe this to be an artifact of the strong Christian Reformed underpinnings predominating religious thought in West Michigan. We speculate that such rigidity may also contribute to the general conservative mindset currently prevailing in the United States, a mindset that prefers arrest and incarceration as opposed to treatment and rehabilitation. This speculation is supported to some extent by the (more) rehabilitative model of criminal justice practiced in Slovenia.

We also recognize that human behavior occurs along a continuum. Therefore, Slovenians might view their American counterparts as overly rigid with little tolerance for the myriad circumstances that comprise the gray areas between their black-and-white judgments of right and wrong. On the other hand, Americans might view Slovenians as overly lenient with an acceptance of gray circumstances that suggests not only a faith in the value of rehabilitation's potential but also the potential for unethical behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The need to ensure ethical conduct by criminal justice practitioners has been recognized as long as there have been police officers and prison workers. This need is not restricted to one country alone. One need only catch occasional bits of the evening news to learn that all nations wrestle with corruption in criminal justice.

Sir Robert Peel recognized problems of honesty and integrity among those selected to preserve order and investigate crimes in early 19th century England. He sought to deal with future problems when he issued a set of instructions that stated in part, "when in any division offenses are frequently committed there must be a reason to suspect that the police are not in that Division properly conducted" (National Crime Prevention Institute, 1986: 12).

Corruption of one sort or another has concerned officials on both sides of the Atlantic for some time. Law enforcement in the United States evolved along different lines than the British model and so have attempts to deal with corruption. In the United States, Steffan's series of articles in the early part of the 1900s document the role of police in preserving the position and privilege of corrupt politicians and the capitalist elite in the United States (1957). Still, police reform limped along, fueled by media attention and public indignation. It was not until the Boston Police Strike of 1919 that police reform in the United States finally commenced in earnest.

Police corruption is often easier to identify than corruption in corrections. As Souryal points out, "If police are viewed as the initial and the most visible component of criminal justice, institutional corrections [prisons] are its least visible and most disquieting component" (1992: 309). Early on, the Boston Prison Discipline Society noted that "suitable punishments" could only be inflicted by men of good character. Since the early nineteenth century, periodic media accounts of corruption and brutality have led to reform efforts in prisons and jails, often times with short-lived results. Unfortunately, we know a good deal more about police corruption than we do about corruption in the field of corrections (McCarthy, 1991).

Corruption in corrections often takes the form of corruption of authority. There are many examples – among them is the stabbing death of a jailer by a female prisoner who was sexually assaulted (Balkan, Burger, & Schmidt, 1980). Other examples include instances of inmate victimization that occur with the knowledge, if not consent, of staff. Hawkins and Alpert assert that correctional staff members become involved in the subrosa economy of the institution due to such things as low salaries, and alienation pushes staff to become involved in drug trafficking and other corrupt activities (1989). In Georgia fourteen employees of the Georgia Women's Prison at Hardiwick were indicted on charges including rape and sodomy. Allegedly, prison employees traded favors for sex as well as forcing abortions (Applebome, 1992).

In an attempt to shed light on corruption in corrections, McCarthy reviewed the files of the internal affairs unit of a department of corrections and found that corruption could be divided into five broad categories: theft, trafficking in contraband, embezzlement, misuse of authority, and a residual or miscellaneous category (1991). In addition, we add a sixth: brutality. These six areas appear to be appropriate categories for discussing misbehavior of both police and corrections officials.

In reviewing the literature on police and prison employee corruption and brutality, it appears that the police are far ahead of corrections in their attempts to deal with the issue. This may be because police are the most highly visible part of the criminal justice system and transgressions are apt to be revealed rather quickly, as in the highly publicized case of Rodney King, a motorist beaten severely by Los Angeles police officers or that of Amadou Diallo, a Guinean immigrant, shot 41 times after four New York officers mistook his wallet for a weapon. Pollock supports this view, stating "No other criminal justice professional comes under so much constant and public scrutiny. However, this scrutiny is understandable when one realizes that police are power personified. They often have the choice to arrest or not to arrest, to mediate or to charge, and in decisions to use deadly force, they even hold the power of life and death" (1998:135-6).

Corrections is another story. Sheltered behind walls and traditionally protected by isolation, corrections has largely been left alone as long as there were no major disturbances to call the public's attention to the activities of the corrections officials. Jeffrey Schwartz asserts that many corrections problems stem from a "fortress mentality" in which paranoia of the media is rampant and officials believe that if one "holds onto negative information tightly enough, one will be able to hide in plain sight" (1989: 216, 221-22).

The "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" mentality of the public is also driven by corrections' non-visibility and reinforces the attitudes of a public that seems to feel inmates deserve their lot – few people take notice of what goes on in prisons as long as they are quiet. Corruption is another matter. The taxpayer insists that those we hire to work in prisons or to supervise probationers and parolees set an example of honesty and integrity. For both police and corrections officers, public expectations of conduct are often unrealistically high and when the occasional officer steps over the line, there is much head shaking and hand wringing. While public displeasure is a strong motivator in terms of weeding out "bad apples," the public's views tend to be distorted resulting in the belief that such breaches of conduct are widespread.

ETHICS AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE TODAY

Considering the stresses associated with working in law enforcement and corrections, it is remarkable that most men and women go about their job faithfully, never becoming involved in corruption of any sort or in beating a suspect or inmate unnecessarily. However, most police officers or corrections workers will confide to close associates that they have been tempted on occasion to cross over the thin line that separates ethical from unethical conduct. In anticipation of such temptations, and often because of them, criminal justice managers have attempted to devise programs designed to address the issue before the employees assume their duties.

Sadly, these efforts are wide of the mark. While they effectively communicate the expectations of the executives and elected officials, they do not provide a tool for the officer or employee to use when attempting to resolve difficult ethical issues. Second, contemporary efforts fail to account for the influence of peer culture. Sherman points out that there are two ways to learn police ethics. The first is the most common and involves

learning "on the job, to make moral decisions in haste, under the time pressures of police work" (1982: 10). The second way is to learn ethics "away from the heat of battle, from the opinions of co-workers, and pressures of supervisors;" Sherman is referring to academy training and college classroom settings where police recruits "can take time to weigh all sides of an issue" and to dissect the moral and ethical conundrums inherent in situations police officers are likely to encounter on the job (1982: 10). If we do a poor job of teaching and exhibiting moral standards and ethical values in this second fashion, much is lost when newly hired recruits come into contact with field training officers – likely to be veteran officers with many "war stories" and police subculture lessons to impart.

New employees in corrections also undergo the same moral instruction process as police officers – this includes a brief lecture on integrity or "ethics" at the academy with the "real" instruction to follow during the new recruits' probationary period.

A recent article in *Police Chief* is illustrative of efforts to deal with the subject. It states that the challenge to executives and police officers "is to sustain the highest level of integrity when there is daily opportunity for integrity to break down" (1991: 27). Further, the article exhorts the reader to "instill the highest standards of integrity on the part of the individual officer while simultaneously establishing an environment that makes it difficult for officers to sustain corrupt activities" (41).

Equating ethics and integrity, the authors assert that maintaining departmental integrity involves three processes:

- a. A thorough background investigation of all applicants to ensure the screening out of unwanted values.
- b. A reinforcement of integrity by ensuring that officers have greater understanding of its importance in policing – via college education, appropriate field training, and exemplary behavior of supervisors and administrators.
- c. A reduction in the opportunity for human failure by creating an anti-corruption environment.

These are lofty aims indeed. We assert that they are also better left to personnel departments and to supervisors. One is compelled to ask, how do these aims translate to the individual on patrol, or for that matter the officer working a cell house or standing watch in a tower? We conclude, not very well. Practitioners have fooled themselves by substituting declarations of intent for substance. We have harangued our recruits and employees and failed to provide the analytic tools necessary for the task. In the meantime, it has been business as usual on the streets or in the cell house with older officers handling the moral instruction and indoctrinating new employees into a culture that stresses solidarity and silence.

Davis asks, "Do Cops Really Need a Code of Ethics?" (1991: 14). He answers his own question with a resounding **Yes**. The problem, he points out, is that current codes of ethics are poorly written, conflicting in their language and of such lofty aspirations that few police officers are able to live up to the standards the code holds up as the ideal. As a consequence, little thought is given to them once the recruit leaves the academy. Sadly, corrections does not come up to this standard. As Davis points out, "codes that

seem to come from above generally do not touch the world below" (16). It is important that criminal justice employees be able to view each situation and temptation in light of a framework that will provide real guidance.

Moral standards and ethical values in the field of criminal justice are not the sole property or concern of the American system of justice. There exist no geographic boundaries for these topics. While cultural frameworks and perspectives differ, the underlying problems remain identical. The morality and ethical behaviors of criminal justice employees directly impact their interactions and the quality of humane treatment afforded offenders and victims. It is desirable, then, to perform comparative studies in hopes of acquiring a more detailed understanding of the roles played by moral standards and ethical values and the remedies to implement when breaches are experienced. This research is one such example.

METHODOLOGY

Given the global nature of this study and the differences in culture between Michigan and Slovenia, we judged it best to use pre-tested, standardized measurements. Statements within the administered surveys are from standardized scales designed to measure values, human rights, and moral behavior. We used Harding and Phillips' morally debatable behaviors scale. This instrument "assesses the justifiability of behaviors reflecting contemporary moral issues that adults confront in their lives and have an opinion about" (1986:741). Twenty-two morally debatable behaviors make up this inventory. Each statement item is rated on a 10-point scale ranging from one – meaning the behavior is never justified, to ten – meaning the behavior is always justified. The inventory measures three aspects of moral behavior (1) personal-sexual morality, focusing on matters of life and death as well as sexual relations, (2) self-interest morality, and (3) legal-illegal morality, which is defined by behaviors that are formally proscribed by law.

Sampling and Gathering Data

We administered the survey inventory to a sample of criminal justice individuals (students, police officers, and jail officers) living in West Michigan and their counterparts in Slovenia. Surveys were administered during the months of January through March, 2000. We have tested the data using the KMO test of sampling adequacy and found that both samples reach a high level of sampling adequacy – Michigan, 0.93 and Slovenia, 0.88.

The Michigan sample consists of 129 students of criminal justice from Grand Valley State University who were enrolled in criminal justice coursework during Winter Semester, 2000. Surveys were administered at Wyoming Police Department and Kent County Sheriff's Department resulting in 100 surveys from police officers. With the assistance of the Michigan Department of Corrections, surveys were administered at a variety of county jails in the West Michigan region and garnered responses from 108 jail officers. The total size of the West Michigan sample is 337 (n=337). In this sample, approximately 27% (n=92) of respondents are female and 73% (n=244) are male¹.

Demographically, 43% (n=145) of the sample consists of married individuals, 55% (n=186) are single, and 7% (n=24) divorced.

The average age of respondents in the West Michigan sample is 32 years. Reflecting the larger proportion of college students, 46% (n=155) of respondents are 25 years or younger with over two-thirds of the sample under the age of 35. Breakdowns indicate 22% (n=73) in the 26-35 age range, 16% (n=55) in the 36-45 age range, and 16% (n=54) aged 45 years and older.

Examining years of service for police and jail officers we find that 58% of the sample has ten or less years of service under their belts. This reflects the current demographic shift of veteran officers or "the old guard" who are retiring and being replaced by new recruits. Specific breakdowns are as follows: 30% of officers have less than five years of service, 28% have five to ten years of service, 14% have 11-15 years of service, 8% have 16-20 years of service, and 21% have over twenty years.

The Slovene sample consists of 82 students from the College and Police and Security Studies, 115 police officers and 58 prison officers – from Ljubljana and the surrounding area – comprising a total sample size of 255 (n=255). In the Slovene sample, approximately 23% (n=58) are female and 74% (n=189) are male. Demographically, 37% (n=77) are married or living in cohabitation, 58% (n=147) are single, and 2% (n=6) are divorced.

The average age of respondents in the Slovene sample, 27 years, is somewhat younger than the average age indicated in the Michigan sample. While a smaller proportion of the Slovene sample is comprised of students, the overall age distribution is younger than the West Michigan sample. Over half (53%, n=136) of the sample is under the age of 25 and a dramatic 80% of all respondents are aged 35 or younger (compare this to two-thirds of the West Michigan sample). Also in contrast to the West Michigan's 16%, only 2% (n=5) of Slovene respondents were over the age of 45.

Examining years of service for Slovene police and prison officers we find a sample well-matched with the West Michigan sample at the low and mid-ranges of service but with greater disparity at the high range. Correspondingly, the Michigan sample had 58% with ten or fewer years of service; the Slovene sample indicates 56% (n=97). Specific breakdowns are as follows: 33% of officers have less than five years of service, 23% have five to ten years of service, 13% have 11-15 years of service, 15% have 16-20 years of service, and 16% have over twenty years. Thus, the overall Slovene sample is younger than the Michigan sample, yet it is comprised of a larger proportion of officers with 16 or more years of service.

Statistical Analyses

In addition to descriptive statistics and mean comparisons, we used discriminant analysis in an attempt to understand the findings. Discriminant analysis is useful for situations where the aim is to build a predictive model of group membership based on observed characteristics of each case. The procedure generates a discriminant function (or, for more than two groups, a set of discriminant functions) based on linear combinations of the predictor variables which provide the best discrimination between the groups. The functions are generated from a sample of cases for which group membership is known; the functions can then be applied to new cases with

measurements for the predictor variables but unknown group membership (see Kachigan, 1986, Pedhazur, 1982, and Van de Geer, 1971).

FINDINGS

This survey reveals significant differences in the two samples in terms of respondents' attitudes toward moral behaviors. On a ten point scale, with a score of one representing never justified behavior and a score of ten representing always justified behavior, the Michigan sample averaged 2.8. On the same scale the Slovenian sample averaged 3.9. Thus, we conclude that the Slovenian sample is more liberal, or more lenient in their attitude toward the behaviors queried. On many of the issues queried there is not a great deal of difference between the two groups. However, the differences seem to lie along a line marked by sex and abortion (personal-sexual aspect of morally debatable behaviors). Below we have highlighted a number of significant findings:

- On having an affair, the mean score for the Michigan sample is 1.9 and for the Slovene sample, 4.7.
- On underage sex, the mean score for the Michigan sample is 2.5 and for the Slovene sample, 3.4.
- On homosexual behavior, the mean score for the Michigan sample is 3.5 and for the Slovene sample, 4.1.
- On prostitution, the mean score for the Michigan sample is 2.7 and for the Slovene sample, 4.8.
- Abortion revealed the widest schism with a mean score of 3.1 for the Michigan sample and 7.4 for the Slovene sample.
- Cheating on taxes reveals a Michigan mean score of 1.8 and a Slovenian mean of 3.1.
- On buying something known to be stolen property, the Michigan mean score is 1.5 and the Slovene 2.1.
- Keeping money you have found is the variable that indicates the most lenient attitudes among the Michigan sample at 4.7, while the Slovene sample is somewhat less lenient with a mean of 4.4.
- On killing in self-defense, the mean for the Michigan sample is 9.2 and for the Slovene sample, 8.6.

Discriminant Analysis

Students: Michigan – Slovenia

The results of discriminant analysis for students in the two samples show a high level of group classification (86%). The students of criminal justice at Grand Valley State University are less lenient about the following behaviors than are the students of the College of Police and Security Studies in Ljubljana: divorce, abortion, suicide, claiming state benefits one is not entitled to and euthanasia. With the exception of claiming state benefits one is not rightfully entitled to, the morally debatable behaviors fall into the aspect of personal-sexual morality.

Police officers: Michigan – Slovenia

The results of discriminant analysis related to the two samples of police officers show a very high level of group classification (97.2%). The Slovene and Michigan police officers attribute different moral questionability to the following behaviors: abortion, divorce, married men or women having an affair, claiming state benefits that one is not entitled to, avoiding a fare on public transport, cheating on taxes, lying in one's own interest, and euthanasia. The results imply that the Michigan police officers are less lenient toward these morally debatable behaviors. These behaviors are indicative of all three aspects of morally debatable actions: personal-sexual morality, self-interest morality, and legal-illegal morality.

Jail/Prison officers: Michigan-Slovenia

The results of discriminant analysis for the two samples of prison officers also show a very high level of group classification (95%). Slovene and Michigan jail/prison officers judge the morally questionable behaviors differently. Behaviors which seem to indicate greater significance are the following: divorce, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, homosexuality, married men or women having an affair, claiming state benefits that you are not entitled to, and cheating on taxes if you have the chance. Like the police samples, these behaviors reflect all three aspects of morally debatable behaviors. The Slovene prison officers tolerate these behaviors more than the jail officers from Michigan.

All Groups: Michigan – Slovenia

Compiling the responses of all respondents in the two samples indicates differences for variables comprising the moral aspects of personal-sexual morality and self-interest morality. Again, the results of discriminant analysis show a high level of group classification (85%). The results imply that the major differences exist in judgments of the following behaviors: abortion, divorce, men or women having an affair, claiming state benefits one is not entitled to and prostitution. The Slovene respondents are more lenient toward such behaviors than their West Michigan counterparts.

DISCUSSION

That there was consistency among the three groups in the West Michigan sample in terms of being less lenient than the groups in the Slovene sample comes as no surprise. Grand Valley State University students show a strong tendency to remain in the region, with most shunning work away from their families and cultural roots. It follows that the less lenient attitudes of students also carry forward and are found within the police and jail officer groups since it is, in great measure, Grand Valley students who are eventually hired by these local agencies. In addition, the greater rigidity and conservatism found within the responses of the West Michigan sample are most likely explained by its underlying political, business, and religious cultures – cultures that are strongly and historically intertwined.

West Michigan is very conservative, preponderantly white, prosperous, and with government and business having strong ties to the Church. Conservatism in West Michigan can be traced to the first settlers in the region. In February, 1847 a party of Dutch immigrants arrived near what is now Holland, Michigan. They were joined in March by another band and thus began the "colonization" of West Michigan by Dutch immigrants. In 1867 the City of Holland was incorporated and by the turn of the century, Holland and the surrounding area was a bustling area characterized by industry and an interurban railroad connecting it to Grand Rapids and Saugatuck. In the meantime, Grand Rapids was growing rapidly, energized by timber and its related industries.

Even though other settlers arrived in the area, including many African American immigrants from the South starting with the Underground Railroad, the area continued to maintain its Dutch character. Just as the Baptist church has a strong influence on Southern politics and that influence can be traced to the trials faced by immigrants as they traveled south on the Wagon Road from Philadelphia, West Michigan is no different with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The CRC traces its roots to the secessionist movement in the Netherlands in 1834. This dissent within the Dutch Reformed Church had at its core the desire on the part of the secessionists for Christianity to be "full and deep" requiring believers to maintain an ongoing intimacy with God through rigorous introspection and daily spiritual exercises (Bratt, 1984). That strain remains alive and well today working its influence in politics and business. Perhaps the Amway Corporation most exemplifies the West Michigan marriage of gospel and business in a form of militant capitalism, ethnocentrism, and the success ethic felt to be blessed by God. Over time this unique blend of religion, business, and work ethic has been good for West Michigan. The area has never experienced the economic ups and downs felt by much of the nation and success and prosperity is felt to be the rightful due of citizens of West Michigan.

Slovenian attitudes vary consistently from those found in West Michigan gravitating toward greater leniency and tolerance. Unlike the West Michigan respondents who view morally debatable variables in strict black-and-white terms, the Slovenian sample views these same variables with a greater tolerance for the "gray" aspects of human behavior. Explaining this more liberal attitude is difficult, but may be rooted in the history of the past 1,000 years in which the Slovenian people were subjected to one conqueror or another. Only in the past decade have they enjoyed autonomy and personal freedom unknown for at least the past 45 years. Thus, the feeling may be that absolutes are difficult to come by and an attitude has arisen to live and let live as long as the behavior does not threaten group cohesion. This may be especially so in a country that, albeit small, has long been known for its strong sense of national identity and that has fiercely maintained a sense of independence in spite of a history of political oppression (Benderly and Kraft, 1996).

In addition, we recognize that behavior occurs along a continuum from very bad to very good and that distinctions of good or bad, moral or immoral, are distinctions made by individuals based upon religious, historical, and cultural reasons. Therefore, Slovenians might view their American counterparts as overly rigid with little tolerance for the myriad circumstances that comprise the gray areas between their black-and-white judgments of right and wrong – views that reflect a mindset of arrest and incarceration.

On the other hand, Americans might view Slovenians as overly lenient with an acceptance of gray circumstances that suggests not only a faith in the value of rehabilitation's potential but also the potential for unethical behavior.

NOTES

¹Throughout, percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding and numbers may not be equal to total sample sizes due to missing answers.

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