'We Deal with Human Beings':

The Emotional Labour Aspects of Criminal Investigation

The term 'emotional labour' was coined by the sociologist Arlie Hoschild (1983) to describe the means by which workers regulate emotions in order to perform occupational tasks according to workplace norms. Although previous studies have considered the emotional labour aspects of police work more generally (Martin 1999; Tracy 2005), few researchers have considered the degree to which emotion management is an integral part of the work of criminal investigators (see Stenross & Kleinman 1989).

Within the present paper, we employ Hoschild's concept to explore the extent to which various forms of investigative work rely on practitioners' abilities to deal with complex emotions, both their own feelings and those of the individuals they encounter. The material presented is based on an analysis of data drawn from thirteen in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with Canadian criminal investigators in the fields of forensic identification, property crimes, major crimes, sex crimes and homicide investigation. In interviews these investigators spoke candidly of the delicate balance they must often strike between managing their own emotions in order to, on one hand, conform to police culture and perform their work efficiently and effectively, and, on the other, present an empathetic face to victims, victim families and, in some cases, to suspects. In doing so, they revealed both the toll emotionally difficult cases can take upon their own mental and emotional well-being, and on the boundary-setting and other strategies they employ in order to manage the emotional aspects of their work.

Emotional labour in policing

The concept of emotional labour was developed by Arlie Hochschild (1983) while studying the work of flight attendants and bill collectors, who were expected to keep a constant check on their personal emotions in order to meet customer expectations, and to adhere to officially defined norms of emotional expression (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). According to Hochschild (1983), emotional labour comprises "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p7). Highlighting the transactional nature of emotional labour, Hochschild also contends, "Emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value (p 7)". In itself, the definition has resonance for understanding how employee behavior could be explained in terms of the invisible norms governing it. However, the deeper significance of Hochschild's construct lies in its explanatory power: it provides a means of better understanding the ways in which service organizations direct not only the physical actions of their employees, but also employee emotions, aspects of which are, in fact, considered an integral component of their job.

As a matter of greater concern, it has been pointed out that since emotional labour requires an effort on part of the employee to reach organizational goals, it leads to commoditization of feelings, as emotions are exchanged as an aspect of labour power (Hochschild, 1979). Hence, in view of the above, it would appear that through her research, Hochschild (1983) has provided a useful reference point for indexing not only how people shape and manage their feelings, but also how social structure and institutions try to constrain these efforts (Wharton, 2009). This is even more important when considered against the centrality of emotional labour in contemporary job

descriptions. In this context, it has been pointed out, that while the requirement for emotional labour may not be explicitly defined in a job description, it is now implicitly considered a part of many occupations (Hsieh & Guy, 2009; Mastracci et al., 2006). It would appear that depending upon the nature of the job, organizations tend to prescribe certain rules for display of emotions for management of employees' feelings at work (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). These representations include the courteous postal worker, the calm 911 dispatcher, as well as the seemingly tough corrections officer (Guy et al., 2008).

Much has been written on the unique features of both the police organization and its occupational landscape. Research has also focused on how aspects of those unique features can contribute to occupational stress and burnout (Burke, 1994; Dorfmann & Zapf, 2004). Fortunately, some studies have also looked at emotional labour within policing, more generally, as well as how various aspects of that type of work affect individual officers. Indeed, one of the clearest illustrations of emotional labour in the case of policing relates to interactions involving unpleasant incidents like verbal abuse by a member of the public. Here the officer cannot react the way he or she would normally do in such a situation, due to the overt or covert control of the police command over the officer's response (Chapman, 2009). Such organizational control mechanisms are referred to as display rules (Grandey, 2000). In the case of overt display rules, these are established through organizational policies (Schaible, 2006), whereas covert rules are conveyed through the behavior and actions of organizational members (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003). The unequal power relationships arising from such interactions, become a source of emotional strain for the officer (Grandey, 1999)

Although emotional labour is not necessarily considered harmful and has even been deemed emotionally healthy by some scholars (Shuler & Sypher, 2000), it can lead to negative psychosocial effects, mainly due to loss of control over a private act, such as the regulation of one's emotions (Hochschild, 1983). The complex nature of policing gives rise to other contradictions that culminate in a high degree of emotional labour. For instance, officers are expected to suppress their felt emotions in order to influence suspects (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987) and deliver professional service (Tsai & Huang, 2002). The emotive dissonance arising from the conflict between felt and real emotions may have detrimental consequences for officers, including burnout (Wharton, 1993), self-alienation (Mumby & Putnam, 1992), cynicism (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), exacerbation of the negative experience (Butler & Gross, 2004), impaired personal relationships (Chapman, 2009) and deterioration of physical health (Barak, 2006). Under such circumstances, it is easy to understand how police work may entail a great deal of emotional labour.

As we noted previously, despite the fact policing is typically viewed as one of the most stressful of occupations (Copes, 2004), very little research has examined the role of emotional labour as an aspect of the criminal investigation side of policing, or on its potential impact on officers within this unique occupational environment. In this paper, we offer an exploratory analysis aimed at beginning to unpack some of these issues.

Method of inquiry

This paper is informed by data drawn from a larger study on Canadian police investigators and the extent to which their work tasks and occupational environment mirror those portrayed within television and other mass media products. In the original

study, the sample included 31 police officers from investigational units in seven different organizations within two provinces (British Columbia and Ontario). They were asked a series of interview questions based on four major lines of inquiry drawn from the study's research questions. These were:

1. In what ways, if any, do mass media portrayals of police investigators and investigations match the reality of police work?

2. How do public perception of investigational work – that is, as glamorous and exciting – align with investigators' experiences?

3. How do investigators view the public treatment of their work?

To answer these questions, approval to conduct interviews with police investigative personnel was received from municipal, regional and provincial police agencies in two Canadian provinces: British Columbia and Ontario. Seven police agencies representing two major Canadian cities and several medium-sized communities agreed to participate. Once approval was secured, one of the authors conducted interviews with police investigators from the following units: homicide, major crimes, sexual assault, property crimes, and forensic identification. Interviews typically ranged from one to two hours, with an average interview length of one and a half hours. Each interview was digitally recorded and manually transcribed.

In analysing our interview data we observed that 13 of the 31 interviews contained detailed discussions wherein participants reflected on the emotional aspects of their work. Often this topic was introduced in the context of discussing significant differences between how police work is portrayed in media depictions as compared to the realities of the job. These 13 interviewees spoke at length on how emotionally taxing

their work can be and the factors that help to exacerbate or mitigate stressful aspects of their emotional labour. As the interviews were intended to be relatively free-flowing, when a participant chose to speak on a topic of this nature, we listened, engaged and asked follow-up questions. The thoughts, beliefs and experiences captured in our data are reflected here.

A word on coding and analysis: as the study from which this paper is drawn was exploratory in nature, we opted to code and interpret the data utilizing Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory method. Interviews were transcribed and then coded using open coding. To do so, we followed Glaser's (1978) concept-indicator model, looking first for key concepts and then for words and phrases that functioned as indicators of that concept. For example, to code for 'emotions', we looked for words and phrases such as 'feelings', 'cry, 'crying,' 'anger', 'upset' and/or 'getting affected'. In coding emotional labour effects, we relied on key indicators, such as words or concepts like 'stress,' 'stressed', 'impact', 'depression,' 'burn out' and 'falling apart.' Once this initial coding was complete, we returned to the transcripts and recoded them using a focused approach aimed at drawing connections between concepts and sub-concepts. To ensure inter-coder reliability, transcripts were re-read and independently re-coded by a research assistant.

Managing your own emotions

A study of police detectives by Steinross and Kleinmann (1989) reveals that norms guiding the control of emotional display can lead to distancing or depersonalization, which is a source of strength for officers in stressful situations, acting as a buffer against conflicting work expectations (see also Innes, 2002). In the present study, despite the

effort to distance themselves emotionally from crime victims, the detectives felt affected, especially by situations that were more relatable. For example, a Major Crime Investigator stated, 'In the force we deal with human being so as soon as you --- there, everybody goes through the same things, and you think, what would happen if this would be my mom or my aunt or whatever so we can all relate'. Another Major Crimes Investigator believed that it was not possible to remain unaffected by human suffering, 'Everybody gets affected. It's easy to say but when a guy comes home at night after going to a dead baby death scene I'm sure when he goes on his pillow he's not so tough. Everybody has feelings'. A Sex Crimes Investigator complained how people sometimes consider investigators to be devoid of all emotions, and thus incapable of relating to their situation: 'they look at me like I'm a robot. I have to remind them that at the end of the day I go home. I have days off. I am a person too."

Officers, especially those who are parents themselves, generally consider witnessing the deaths or suffering of young children to be particularly traumatic experiences. As one Sex Crime Investigator reported 'if you're talking about a baby or a child- particularly if you've had children of your own – there no question, it can be a very difficult thing emotionally to deal with, as opposed to going to other scenes that do not involve kids'. Another Sex Crime Investigator shared the emotions she experienced during an interview with a young child whose mother had been murdered by his father 'Just watching her sit there on her grandmother's lap, just completely oblivious to how her whole world had been decimated. And then related it to my own children and equating it to them growing up without me'. Even homicide investigators, frequently portrayed in media as stoic and emotionally detached, find it difficult dealing with the

death of a child. One officer stated: 'I remember going to a sudden death and it being a 4-month old baby and thinking in the back of my head, 'Oh my gosh, I have kids the same age.' The same officer described the challenge of distancing oneself from the trauma and carrying out their official duties:

> Thinking to myself, 'I can do it. I can go there. It's just the job.' Getting there and seeing how devastated the family is. The mother screaming, still holding their child that has died. And thinking to myself, 'I have a job to do. But as a human being, I couldn't imagine being in that predicament and having this person saying, 'Look, I really need to talk to you. I know that you're in mourning right now, but really we need to get down to business.

The officer also felt that maintaining a balance between emotions and professionalism is quite difficult at times and eventually leads to a breakdown. Female officers, in particular, can experience role conflict or a "double bind" between their personal and professional identities (Pierce, 1995, p115). On the one hand it is socially more acceptable for women to express emotions like sadness and empathy relative to their male peers; however, on the other hand, institutional norms can place expectations on all investigators that require them to appear unaffected by upsetting events (Daus & Brown, 2012). As one officer explained: 'You're supposed to be the police. You're strong. You do not cry. You do not get upset.'

Empathetic face

Aside from the fact that empathy is a normal human response that officers quite clearly feel of their own volition, and that can be used to show support for a victim and/or their family. It is also the case, however, that police investigators working with victims, families, witnesses and, indeed, suspects, are also frequently placed in positions in which occupational necessities require the display of empathy to further an investigation or

other related purposes. In his study of police investigative work, Richard Ericson (1991) identified three things that detectives work at when dealing with victim-complainants:

1. providing a 'gloss' - trying to impress that as representatives of the force that they were concerned about the matter and were doing the best job they could;

2. gathering information – information used to aid the investigation and/or to assess what other investigative activities would be appropriate, and;

3. Securing co-operation – attempting to secure victim-complainant cooperation in the detectives' decision about case disposition.

In our interview data, we observed instances of both: spaces in which investigators spoke about the need to show empathy in order to support victims emotionally, as well those circumstances in which expressions of empathy are or can be employed strategically to meet case-related goals.

Although building relationships based on empathy and trust with victims and their families can be important ingredients for a successful case, some officers saw the construction of such of empathetic relationships as beyond the boundaries of 'normal' police work. To illustrate, a Sex Crimes Investigator said of her work: "your files don't just go away when you file the report. You have to come back and build a certain relationship after and during the court process ever though it's not police work per se.' Because interaction with members of the public usually takes place under unpleasant circumstances for investigators and victims alike, it helps if one is prepared to deal with a range of emotional responses from the victim. This aspect of the job can be especially

challenging for homicide investigators, and it is their ability to empathize, that can impact relations with grieving victims and/or victim families. One homicide investigator shared the following story:

> I had a father for one of the files here, his son had been murdered and I was giving him stuff back and ... you can't help but feel ... they're telling you about the things they miss about their son and you're like 'Oh my gosh, I could never imagine that.' You're understanding them and they're like 'this person they're really listening to me.' Instead of, 'yeah, anyways, thanks for telling us.' And so the fellow gave me a hug and I was like 'uh ... oh ... okay.' It's one of those things. It's a thank-you.

As we can see the example above, and from several of related examples similarly drawn from our data, investigators believe that it is important for police officers to show empathy as a sign of support for victims' families, that doing so acknowledges the importance of their loss. Such expressions can also provide comfort to affected individuals, assuring them that their loss is not merely a part of someone's job, but felt at a personal level by responding officers. A Sex Crimes Investigator admitted that while she didn't always feel appreciated in her job, she found the emotional bonding aspect of her work with victim families personally satisfying: 'it's very gratifying when you are able to support the families".

We also found instances in which investigators spoke of how empathy could be used strategically to meet one of the organizational imperatives observed by Ericson (1991). For example, in relation to the idea of the need to provide 'a gloss', a Property Crime Investigator explained how showing concern to a traumatized victim of property crime can have an impact on the public perceptions of police: 'You know if you come in there and give comfort, explain things a little more …… She would probably say 'you know what? He did his job, he was professional, and I don't need to complain.' The same

investigator felt that victim complaints were more the result of a lack of empathy by the officer for their loss, than simply because 'he refused to dust here for fingerprints.' A Homicide Investigator summed up how the police were doing a better job now, by dealing with the affected families with greater empathy, which made a difference not only to the investigation but also to the image of the police,

> We, as the police, are the only people who really deal with those people. Really deal with them when they find out. Really hold their hand throughout. We're doing a much better job of that than what we used to. With our victims' service people and on major cases like that, we always have a police officer that would liaison with the family, and usually somebody with a high ranking, someone with authority on the investigation.

Maintaining open communication with victims' families may also prove to be a source of important leads (Ericson 1991). This point was illustrated by an investigator who related the following:

> Every once in a while, it doesn't happen very often, but they might come up with something where you go, 'Oh, okay, that's a good point. Maybe we should look at that.' Or lots of times they come up with stuff about say the victim I'm dealing with right now. The daughter, the daughter knows more about her father who got killed than I do. So she comes up with things that I'd never know if she didn't tell me.

Emotional stressors and their toll

A stressful work environment takes its toll on employee personal lives. In particular, situations involving trauma, along with excessive workload, and dealings with physically or verbally aggressive individuals have been observed to lead to burnout among police officers (Burke, 1994; Dorfmann & Zapf, 2004). According to a Sex Crime Investigator interviewed in this study, 'You can walk around this floor and find people on their second marriage, and I think drinking still exists out there but I find that a lot more times it's the

relationships that fall apart.' Many officers turn to alcohol in order to cope with work related stress, leading to an increase in domestic abuse, divorce, and an increasing rate of police suicide (Donovan, 1994). Another Major Crime Investigator felt that some homicide investigators are committed to their line of work at the cost of their health and family life, as they try to cope with stress by relying on alcohol, which further puts a strain on their relationships.

Although repeated exposure to death, desensitizes homicide investigators to death, cases involving the death of a child makes it more difficult for the investigators to balance their emotional responses with the requirements of the job (Henry, 2004). This response is due to the perceived innocence of the victim (Ursano & McCarroll, 1990) and a sense of personal failure to protect a life that the officers themselves are able to identify with as a family member (Van Patten & Burke, 2001). Such continuous encounters where officers are unable to employ their usual coping mechanisms of emotional distancing can lead to severe stress and emotional trauma (Henry, 1995). A Homicide Investigator provided such an example:

> We worked on a year and a half long project on the murder of a 21-year-old pregnant female, who has a three-year-old daughter. Now motherless, and it was just a brutal, brutal killing, and I know I speak on behalf of the entire team that worked that file… the longer we worked at the more personalized it became.

A Sex Crimes Investigator, herself a mother, stated, 'I can deal with the sex assault stuff any day of the week, but stuff with children, with physical abuse, because you are actually seeing the effects, you know.'

Discussion

Management of emotions in service organizations has received considerable

attention in the past few decades (Holman, Martinez-Inigo, Totterdell, 2008; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). The present study drew on in-depth interviews with criminal investigators to explore aspects of the emotional labour work they perform in executing their duties. Although clearly preliminary in nature, this study does contribute to our understanding of the work of criminal investigators, an occupational field that has generally received little scholarly attention (author cite).

Our analysis highlights several themes worthy of future exploration. For example, while officers recognized that their occupational role generally requires them to inhibit their emotions, many, if not most, saw external value in maintaining an empathetic face to those with whom they came into professional contact – primarily victims, victim families, and to some extent witnesses and suspects. As Ericson (1991) describes, the display of empathy in this context allows them to meet organizational needs, from securing victim cooperation to convincing family members the police are providing appropriate levels of service – that is, 'doing everything possible' for their case (see also Van Gelederen, 2011; Daus & Brown 2012).

For the most part, though, police officers are expected to manage their emotions and to maintain a 'professional demeanour' to those outside of policing, which is often seen as stoicism or emotional detachment (Steinross & Kleinmann, 1989). As we know, the suppression of feelings, particularly in stressful or traumatizing situations, can produce negative effects on the individual (van Gelderen et al., 2011). Not surprisingly, several of the officers interviewed spoke at length about the personal toll that emotionally and psychologically difficult cases can take. Aside from conventional police coping strategies – dark humor (Pogrebin & Poole, 1991), peer support (Dignam et al 1986),

adherence to professional norms (Henry, 2004), and cynicism coupled with authority (Schaible & Gecas, 2010) – we observed that the ability to express empathy, without fear of peer judgement or organizational sanctions, provides a healthy outlet for some of the emotions officers experience.

Overall, the foregoing discussion of our preliminary research on the topic of emotional labor in criminal investigation highlights the importance of managing its negative impact on officers and of understanding how to effectively address its wide-ranging implications in the workplace. It is our hope that future research will unpack this topic more thoroughly, leading to greater discussion of how best to assist criminal investigators in understanding the positive and negative aspects of emotional labour, and mitigating negative effects through evidence-based organizational programs and policies.

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