‘This Isn’t What I Signed Up For’:

When Police Officer Role Expectations Conflict with the Realities of

General Duty Police Work in Remote Communities

Although police researchers agree rural policing is an under-studied phenomenon within the criminal justice literature (Weisheit, Wells and Falcone 1995; Pelfrey 2007), there is one factor that has been continuously remarked upon: policing within rural environments can, and does, pose different sets of challenges than those experienced by officers working in urban locales (Decker 1979; Crank 1990). To illustrate, in Decker’s (1979) now classic study, police in a rural community were called upon to settle land disputes between neighbours and, on at least one occasion, to check on an ailing cow – service calls not typically experienced by their urban colleagues. Sandy and Devine (1978) suggest the nature of rural environments also creates unique stressors tied largely to working in small towns. Specifically, they identify four major stressors for rural officers: security issues (geographical isolation and fewer members per detachment result in officers facing a greater risk in relation to their personal safety); social factors (living and working in small towns can create a ‘fishbowl’ effect where an officer has little to no privacy or anonymity and is more likely to be called to respond to calls involving friends and family); working conditions (rural policing is often shaped by economic constraints that translate into lower pay and a lack of resources); and inactivity (small populations with low crime rates can generate either routine calls or long period of boredom for officers) (Sandy and Devine, 1978).

Although some insights into potential occupational stressors for rural police officers exist, to date, researchers have tended to focus on the policing styles of rural officers (Crank 1990; Pelfrey 2007), with little consideration for the relationship between what officers *do* and how they *feel* about their work. To address this lacuna in the literature, in the present study we adopt a role theory perspective – drawing on the relevant policing literature and an analysis of semi-structured

interview data with rural police officers alongside participant observation – to reveal how features of rural policing often require officers to adopt specific roles with associated tasks, or ways of performing tasks, that they might otherwise eschew ('role strain'). To do so, we draw on data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with twenty (n=20) currently serving police members, each of whom is presently assigned to one of seven rural police detachments in a Canadian province. We also draw on insights derived through field observation of police work in a rural detachment in this same province.

Role theory and the nature of police roles

Role theory focuses on how individuals adopt patterned modes of social behaviour – roles – to meet real or perceived social expectations (Merton 1957). Although commonly associated with the symbolic interactionist perspective, early developments in role theory can also be attributed to the work of social psychologists, structural functionalists and organizational behaviouralists (see Merton 1948, 1957**;** Mead 1934; Linton 1936), who were variously interested in how consensus develops around specific roles and role expectations, individual and group conformity to roles, role taking behaviours and forms of role conflict and strain (Biddle 1986). Indeed, Ralph Linton (1936), an anthropologist, notably observed that individuals in any society hold multiple statuses (social positions with accompanying rights and obligations) that entail the adoption of ascribed modes of behaviour (what we term 'roles'). More simply put, following Linton, role theorists generally view a role as a set of behaviours associated with a status that is either conferred on an individual through effort ('achieved') or at birth ('ascribed').

In the case of police officers, it is somewhat axiomatic to refer to the fact that, by virtue of the public office they hold, they occupy a unique social status as individuals empowered by the state to use force in the pursuit of lawful objectives (Bittner 1990). As an achieved status, the

extent to which this status is truly unique has been challenged more recently (see Brodeur 2010), although consensus remains among policing scholars as to the primary roles police officers adopt in fulfilling their work duties. However, how their specific roles may cause internal tensions for the individual – that is, generate what role theorists refer to as 'role strain' (Goode 1960) – has received little if any attention in the literature. Nonetheless, over decades of research, the roles of law enforcers, peacekeepers, social workers, and knowledge workers have been consistently identified.

Law enforcers

Many scholars agree that law enforcement is the primary role of police and defines the policing function (Shearing and Leon 1992: 218-9). Drawing on work by Banton (1964), Bittner (1967; 1970) explored the role of 'law enforcement', first in his ethnographic study of the policing of 'skid row', and then later, in his highly influential work, *The Functions of Police in Modern Society*. In essence, the conceptualizing of the police as 'law enforcers' highlights their power to invoke the law by applying sanctions to any person found or thought to be in its violation, albeit through issuing tickets or warnings, effecting an arrest, or even using force to stop actual or potential law breaking behaviours – what Ericson (1981) termed 'reproducing order'. The law enforcer role is not, however, simply about the reproduction of order in a given instant; it also includes activities aimed at processing cases through the criminal justice system, with an emphasis on arrests and arrest-related procedures that advance criminal justice processing (author cite).

However, as recognized by most policing scholars, officers generally spend little time engaging in 'law enforcement' pursuits and when they do, as Wilson (1968) highlights in reference to the patrol officer's function, their activities are largely clerical. Traditionally, the average patrol

officer spends more of his or her time on order maintenance tasks (e.g., administrative work) that do not result in the direct invocation of the law.

Peacekeepers

As 'peacekeepers' (Bittner, 1967) – that is while engaged in 'order maintenance' activities – police use discretion to deal with minor offences (Harcourt, 2001). They also engage in a range of other informal, extra-legal activities to minimize disorder and reduce tensions that could otherwise encourage crimes or disturbances – such as setline interpersonal disputes and/or issuing warnings to active or potential wrongdoers. Decisions as to whether to invoke the law or use discretion reflect individual police styles (Muir 1977), as well as the need by officers to "solve certain pressing practical problems in keeping the peace" that more readily lend themselves to the use of informal solutions than resort to law enforcement(Bittner 1967: 710).

Bittner (1967), returning to the example of skid row policing, argued that order maintenance policing reflects the structural demands police face. The role of the police becomes to contain a space and its inhabitants using discretion and informal proactive policing techniques, including coercion, to maintain order. When extrapolated to the structural demands placed on the police in rural communities, where alternative service providers are not available, knowledge of the jurisdiction and its inhabitants helps formulate effective responses to local situations thus maintaining order and reducing the potential for 'trouble.'

Social workers

Extending Bittner's (1967) observations, researchers sought to extrapolate the nuances of the non-law enforcement aspects of police work. . Recognizing the fact that police routinely provide assistance to those in need outside of official law enforcement or other actions, a view of police as social service providers emerged (author cite).

Studies of *why* police are prepared to respond to calls for service also precipitated the rise of the social work model of policing (Skogan 1990). Given police are readily available to respond to calls for service 24 hours-a-day seven days-a-week, they are too often the recipients of calls concerning non-policing matters from citizens. Their authority and access to resources further misleads some in the general public into soliciting their advice, even assistance, in neither criminal nor policing related matters (Waddington 1993). In this sense, police are treated as social workers.

In the 1990s, the social work model expended its scope with the rise of community (Herbert, 2001) and problem-oriented policing (Goldstein, 2001). These two approaches, theoretically, underscore the social work component of policing through a re-visioning of the police role as proactive 'problem solving' within communities. This re-casting, as Trajanowicz, Kappeler, Gaines and Bucqueroux (1998: 19) argue, is not antithetical to traditional understandings of the police role, as some critics of community policing suggest, given "social work has always been an important element of police work." The social work orientation of the police role becomes normalized in the democratic ethics informing the community policing model, it underpins its central philosophy, that is: police are accountable to the community.

Knowledge workers

Scholars such as Ericson (1981) and Manning (1977) have highlighted the fact that police work occurs within institutional contexts shaped by bureaucratic rules and communication systems. Within this environment, police organizations are routinely gather and transfer knowledge within and across institutions – from generating reports on case workloads to creating statistics on highway accidents . To produce and transfer this knowledge, police officers are tasked with transforming each of their activities, observations and/or events attended into data that can be processed and used for governance and/or risk management purposes (Ericson and Haggerty,

1997). As demand for inter- and intra-institutional knowledge increase, so too do demands on individual officers to produce 'paperwork' (ibid). As Brodeur and Dupont (2006: 12) have noted of what they observe to be an "impressive multiplication of the number of forms that the police have to fill out … with very little zeal," these authors see not the production of reams of useful information, but "a stifling bureaucratization of policing … which is acutely resented [by officers].

Taking into account an array of studies demonstrating the transformation in the quantity, type and uses of police information (see as more recent examples, Malm, Pollard, Brantingham, Tinsely et al. 2005; Brodeur and Dupont 2006; ' Ericson and Haggerty (1997: 41) point out how policing had become "a matter of surveillance, of producing knowledge of populations that is useful for administering them." This includes police relaying information to industries, such as insurance, *and* the law of contracts, as it is more economical and expedient to transfer property crimes (e.g., fraud, vandalism and theft) to insurers who can, and do, invest in proactive enforcement (i.e. supporting private security programs and contracts that require policy holder vigilance) and reactive efforts (e.g., fraud detection programs, deductibles). It is the role of police as knowledge workers to assist other institutions in the management or risk, including the risk of crime through identifying, monitoring, controlling, minimizing, averting and, perhaps most importantly, communicating about real and perceived risks (Ericson and Haggerty 1997).

Current Study

In examining occupational stressors among police officers, researchers have tended to focus on policing in urban centers with a heavy reliance on the impacts of individual demographics, organizational characteristics and/or on work tasks (Johnson 2012). Often less examined is the

specific roles police may be required to adopt to perform tasks within their occupational environment, the extent the adoption of these roles may cause internal tensions for the individual, or 'role strain' (Goode 1960), and how this plays out in rural areas. Police officers, for example, who dislike paperwork, see little value in spending their time on a queue of reports when they could be on patrol looking for drug dealers, may experience a sense of frustration. Such frustration results from a fundamental mismatch between their expectations of what they believe a police officer should be doing ('law enforcement') and the role they are being required to adopt ('knowledge work'). To what extent such mismatches lead to role strain among rural officers, who work within very different environments from their urban colleagues, is the focus of the present paper as well as to reveal how rural police officer operational their occupational role as police officers, albeit as law enforcement, peacekeepers, social workers, or knowledge workers.

Method of inquiry

This paper is drawn from a larger mixed-methodological study conducted by our research team on the policing of youth within one, largely rural, province in Eastern and Atlantic Canada. The analysis presented here is based on the qualitative portion of the study, which entailed in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews with twenty (n=20) police officers from communities across the province. To supplement these interviews, observational data was also collected through field work.

Data collection

To locate potential interview participants, the researchers visited six rural detachments across the province and interviewed members of a seventh detachment in another location. Each interviewee was self-selected; that is, after being briefed on the purpose of the study – to improve

our understanding of youth policing within rural areas – each person chose whether they wished to participate.

On average, interviews were typically between 40 and 70 minutes duration and conducted with the interviewer first adhering to an interview guide. However, the interviews were only semi-structured in nature as this guide was abandoned as the interview progressed and instead the conversational path followed the trajectory set out by the interviewee. Each team member received pre-field training in qualitative interviewing techniques and received further training and supervision in the field on technique and how the interview guide should be used under the guidance of two experienced team members. This guide consisted of questions related to the following topics: a) basic demographic information[1]; b) views on youth crime; c) attitudes toward youth policing; d) strengths and limitations of the policing environment and their effects on youth policing. Questions about police roles and the potential for role strain and/or role conflict were included under the final category. We specifically enumerated each of the four standard policing roles for interviewees – law enforcement, social work, peacekeeping and knowledge work – and then posed variations on two questions: (1) 'which of these roles did they see as best representing how they see their work?' and (2) 'which best represents their desired occupational role?' We also provided space for interviewees to elaborate on their responses and/or construct and discuss other roles they felt they occupied in their occupational work, which are draw upon to inform the analysis.

To supplement interview data, one of the researchers also engaged in ethnographic fieldwork at a rural police detachment for a period of one week. During this time, she was placed

[1] Due to the interviewed officers being based in smaller detachments, we have taken the liberty of masking some potentially identifying features, including gender where appropriate.

at a desk among the patrol officers, with access to the police leaders' offices, and was able to freely observe and record in her notes the work of officers on day shift. She was also able to read back some of the observations recorded in her field notes to the officers in order to solicit feedback on the insights developed and other relevant comments.

Data analysis

To code and analyze the data collected, thematic analysis was employed (Braun and Clarke 2006). Initial coding used an inductive approach where, first, participant responses, as indicated by an interviewer on the interview guide, were coded. This first step resulted in a data set that provided basic information regarding demographic factors (age, rank, length of service) and police experiences. These results were subsequently verified against interview transcripts. To develop a set of thematic codes from the interviews, interview notes were compared to notes taken during readings of the transcripts. It was during this step that the issue of a mismatch – and thus the potential for role conflict – emerged between what police officers said were their actual versus desired police roles. Next, we returned to the transcripts and began to identify relevant sub-themes (see tables 1, 2 and 3), which were subsequently coded. Field notes were also subjected to the same coding scheme.

Table 1: Sub-themes used in coding for the theme of 'how I see my role as a police officer'

Themes	Sources drawn from
Law enforcer	Research literature
Social worker	Research literature
Peacekeeper	Research literature
Knowledge worker	Research literature
Babysitter	Interview data; field observations
Doctor	Interview data

Table 2: Sub-themes used in coding for the theme of 'my desired occupational role'

Themes	Sources drawn from
Law enforcer	Research literature

Social worker	Research literature
Peacekeeper	Research literature
Knowledge worker	Research literature

Table 3: Sub-themes used in coding for the theme of 'role conflict'

Themes	Sources drawn from
Not feeling good about work	Interview data
Not providing service	Interview data
Frustration	Interview data; field observations
Work as difficult	Interview data; field observations

To ensure inter-rater reliability, we note that all coding was independently verified by another team member.

Research context

Given some of the unique features of the jurisdictions the officers in our sample police, and the impact of some of these elements on the style of policing demanded of them, it is incumbent to give a brief description of their occupational environment. This study was conducted in a Canadian province where the majority of the population is concentrated in one of a handful of cities and towns. Of the 405,000 square kilometers this province comprises, most is uninhabited, sparsely inhabited or made up of small, rural communities. It is this vast, largely unpopulated space that the officers in this study are responsible for policing. They work within one of approximately fourty detachments across the province that range in size from ten active members to nearly forty. Many of the patrol areas they cover are so remote, that there are stretches of road in which they have no cellular or other means of communication (i.e., in some areas internet access remains exclusively dial-up). One officer related a story of having to park his cruiser and knock on a citizen's door in order to call the detachment to request back-up. Despite these and other related challenges, these officers are responsible for the enforcement of all federal laws, provincial quasi-laws and, technically, municipal bylaws.

Theme 1: How I see my role as a police officer

When asked how they would conceptualize their work in light of the four roles commonly identified within the policing research literature, several officers cited law enforcement alongside another role and only one officer cited law enforcement alone. Most commonly, the law enforcement role was paired with peacekeeping: "The first two – law enforcement/peacekeeping – because to me it's hand-in-hand. I want to go out there to stop shit from happening, not to go there after it's done." This officer was assigned to one of the busier detachments with a larger and more stratified population base, thus more calls for service, and a greater number of opportunities to invoke the law. Other officers at this same detachment shared this view, including an officer who compared her present work environment to quieter postings:

> Most of my career has been in isolated posts, as a police officer. And in isolated posts you're all those: you're the social worker, you're the counselor, you're the parent sometimes, police officer as well. In a community like this, it's different altogether. Larger population base and it's so busy here.

As this officer's words reveal, although law enforcement is a primary role for officers, the rural nature of their occupational positioning requires more flexibility in their policing role which include performing additional roles outside of strict law enforcement. The problem however arises in light of each officer's willingness or interest in holding such varying roles and the associated strain.

Some individuals cited peacekeeping as their primary occupational role, sometimes pairing it with law enforcement or social work. One officer acknowledged his role as a law enforcer, but felt he resorted more frequently to the peacekeeping role: "I would think higher [a] percentage of peacekeeper than law enforcement … I would rather settle it verbally than have to throw you in jail." Like Bittner (1967), his peacekeeping was directed toward containing a space and its inhabitants—order maintenance—, although the space was not as outwardly shaped by

criminogenic factors as one would see on skid role. Similarly, another officer described himself as "more [of] a peacekeeper and social worker." He explained:

> I tell a lot of my clients or whatever, a lot of issues can be resolved just talking. And I say to new police officers, 'that's the biggest tool hey have, just to talk'. I've had other officers say I talk too much. I say, 'no, I don't think so. … I've talked more … I'll say 'gorillas' into the back of my car than I've had to wrestle in the back of my car.

This excerpt first demonstrates the officer role of peacekeeping in the community and further shows how communication skills are tied to this role, specifically the idea that law enforcement tends to require more aggressive actions in comparison to the verbal skills associated with peacekeeping.

Given the nature of policing in remote, rural communities – which poses its own unique challenges – it is not surprising that officers in smaller, more isolated detachments reference the social work components of their work life. While conducting fieldwork in the detachment office, one of the researchers observed an officer taking a call for service from the local school. An eight year old had locked himself in a bathroom stall and the school was requesting that an officer come and get him out. As he was donning his jacket, the officer joked that he intended to resolve the situation by luring the child out with a chocolate bar. By the time the officer arrived on scene, the child had already left the stall. In discussing the nature of this call with other officers at the detachment, no one was surprised by this use of police services within the community.

Other officers cited the extensive volume of paperwork they deal with in relation to calls for services and processing criminal cases as the reason they saw themselves more as knowledge workers than any other role. Individuals in this group did not, however, typically refer to themselves as 'knowledge workers,' instead they used variants of the term 'data entry.' Our observations of patrol officers in the detachment office as they try to catch up on their backlog of paperwork supports the merit of this characterization. Indeed, over the course of two day shifts,

one of the researchers observed a patrol officer struggling to reduce his queue of unfinished motor vehicle collision reports. When later asked about how he would describe his occupation, he replied "a computer input individual." He then added, "Information input, that's all." An officer at another detachment similarly replied, "Knowledge. Data entry. All the way." Later, "oh, I pump out stats like crazy," a female officer said. She then elaborated on this answer by adding, "I'm a walking statistic. Everything I do is based on stats. How many tickets did you write? How many domestics did you go to? How many this, how many that?" The descriptions of these officers provide of their occupational role highlights both the clerical and administrative component tied to the position of knowledge worker. Police coordinate information to be processed for transfer to other databases and institutions under the umbrella of 'governance' and to show their own occupation's utility – 'walking statistic[s]'.

One of the most common answers interviewees gave was "a bit of everything." Participants felt their role as general duty officers within their communities required them to inhabit several roles during the course of a week or even a shift. "We're everything," one female officer explained. Assigned to a small detachment with a relatively high call volume for its size, she said of herself and her colleagues, "~~we're everything.~~ We're doctors. We're social workers." While another officer at a similarly under-resourced detachment responded to the same question stating:

> I see myself wearing even more hats than that, because I am [pause] a social worker. I'm a babysitter. I'm a marriage counselor. I'm a mental health advocate. I'm a police officer. I am a peacekeeper. But the amount of stuff that we do and deal with, most times I'm a negotiator and a mediator. That's seven things that I counted off that I am.

Echoing this officer, officers routinely described the diversities of roles they were left to occupy when on duty. An officer at another small detachment explained the roles he adopts as a function of the challenges that come from working within a rural policing environment. Comparing his

situation to that of his colleagues in other provinces, he said, “their way of policing … is totally different. We have an organization that’s trying to make a fit for everybody … from the way you do your job to the way you interact with the community. Two totally different [styles of] policing.” He felt that policing in other more populous provinces was more law-enforcement oriented, whereas police officers in his province were required to not only be generalists, but to hold a wider variety of roles simultaneously in response to community expectations borne of the fact the police are often the only on-call service providers within a fairly large geographical territory. Indeed even legal sanctions referral services or hospitals with emergency rooms were sparse in location and even more so in availability.

Theme 2: What I want to be doing

When asked whether the occupational role (or roles) officers play in their communities was their preferred work role, few responded in the affirmative. One such officer had been recently assigned to a busy detachment which, although geographically remote, had a high volume of crime and public disturbance calls. His preferred role of law enforcement aligned with how he primarily saw his work and, as a result, he was satisfied by the fact that he was doing “what I wanted to do: law enforcement and a lot of peacekeeping too.” Another officer from this same detachment also saw his primary work role as law enforcement: “I kind of like to be … I still like the law enforcement side of things, and I still kind of see myself in that light.” In consequence, he self-reported feeling “a great sense of satisfaction and pleasure and enthusiasm at the end of the day when I catch who I deemed to be the bad guy.” In these examples, representing a select few participants, the officer’s desired occupational role corresponds to their actual occupational role. In response they experience “satisfaction” and can take “pleasure” in their day-to-day work activities, which in effect minimizes role strain.

Unfortunately, the majority of officers interviewed stated they would prefer to be fulfilling other occupational roles within policing rather than those they felt they currently held. The two roles most frequently cited as either desirable and/or the reason why the officer first joined the force were: law enforcement and social work. Yet, instead of fulfilling these roles, too often, officers felt trapped in the more clerical positions tied to knowledge work. For example, the officer who described himself as a "data entry clerk," did not hesitate when asked what he'd prefer to be doing: "the first two [law enforcement and peacekeeping]." He further explained, "I'm hardwired to do that"—thus evidencing the desirability of the law enforcement role. A female officer reflected on what first attracted her to the job when reporting her preferred role: "law enforcement, but with a little of the social work stuff." Similarly, prior to the following exchange, an officer disclosed his reasons for joining for the police force, which were rooted in typical law enforcer tasks, such as investigating and arresting suspects:

> Q: Of those four roles – law enforcement, peacekeeping, social work, and knowledge work – which one do you feel best reflects what you actually do?
>
> A: Social work.
>
> Q: And what did you sign up for?
>
> A: Exactly [laughs]

Across these excerpts the primacy most officers give to law enforcement, over social work and all other roles, is evinced as well as how social work, or some mix of social work and law enforcement, were also seen as preferred roles. An officer, who felt most of her time was taken up with paperwork, was very clear in terms of her desired role: "the social work part because I joined the police force to help people. It's not for the pay cheque. It's not the power trip. I could care less." She was joined in her views by a colleague at a different smaller detachment who similarly preferred adopting a social work role in relation to the calls he deals with: "I don't mind the social.

I like talking to people, because sometimes that can keep it out of the courts." Overall, the positioning of law enforcement, social work, or a combination of the two as preferred roles is evinced.

Theme 3: Role conflict

Not surprisingly, officers who felt entrapped in what they perceived to be an undesirable occupational role expressed frustration and discontent, often speaking in disparaging tones about some of the many demands placed upon them by the community or organization. Referring to the volume of paperwork officers must generate for internal and external purposes, for example, one officer described himself as "a paperboy." Another was clearly unhappy about spending a significant portion of his time filing reports when he wanted to be on patrol: "I always say that they trained me to kick down the door and not write a report." As these excerpts demonstrate, of all the roles that officers adopt, the one that generates the most notable degree of frustration is the knowledge worker role that tied to paperwork and the need to generate statistics for internal and external use. The associated frustration was expressed by many officers, across detachments:

> My job is data entry. That is my job. It is not to solve crime. I'll tell you, nobody cares if I solve the crime.
>
> …nobody cares about the work I do. They care about what I type. If I don't type anything … nobody cares that I did all the work.
>
> Because it doesn't count as a statistic, unless you clear something.
>
> The data entry, you know what? You could hire a 15-year-old who knows how to type.

These excerpts come from officers whose desired roles varied, however their inability to take on such roles, albeit doing activities tied to law enforcement or "helping people", created role strain—causing internal tensions (Goode 1960). Many officers felt trapped in seemingly endless and time consuming knowledge work that offered little gratification and was an added source of pressure given its quantity appeared insurmountable—officers could never get ahead. Further, they

consistently shared a sense of being undervalued given the duties they felt they spent much of their time performing could be done by an untrained "15-year-old who knows how to type".

This feeling of being undervalued is perhaps a byproduct of policing in remote, rural areas where officers are often required to deal with calls for service that larger, municipal police services might refer to other community resources for resolution. As an example, one of the researchers observed officers handle several calls from various parties regarding neighbor and interpersonal disputes. In the former case, an ongoing feud between neighbors was observed to have consumed the time of three different police officers, who each had to lecture the disputants over the fact that their problems 'were not police matters'. One of the officers, who had spent nearly an hour explaining the limits of the law to one side, and then to the other, subsequently described himself in clearly frustrated tones as "a glorified hand holder." While, to exemplify the latter, an individual who was involved in a 'break up' with his girlfriend called the detachment to request an officer help him pick up his belongings, despite the fact there was no reason to believe violence would ensue. In both examples, the officers clearly express role strain founded on frustrations, laced with feeling undervalued, even taken advantage of or misunderstood by community members. The role of police appeared to be conflated with that of a general service provider when disagreement ensued rather than of individuals responsible for upholding the law, preventively and reactively.

Not surprisingly, such strain also became apparent when frustrated officers introduced another task they described too often performing, that of 'babysitting', which was sometimes a form of peacekeeping and other times social work. An officer who objected to 'babysitting' members of his community cited the following story as an example of the type of calls he finds difficult to reconcile with his vision of a career in law enforcement:

> I had a guy call me about two and a half months ago, I think, and he said that he had taken over payments of a quad that belonged to his father, his father couldn't

> afford to make the payments, so he was making the payments. The quad was now his. But his father was now telling him when and where he could use the quad, and he wanted to know if it was legal for his father to do that.

As evinced above, officers felt they spent too much time responding to matters that would best be left to 'parenting' or even simple communication and thus failed to utilize their skillset or that fall in line with their perceptions of their occupational responsibilities.

As noted previously, police detachments within this province cover large geographic jurisdictions. In some instances, a detachment with 10 or fewer officers may be tasked with responding to calls for service within an area that is a two to three hour drive from end to end. This means that police officers in such work environments often felt they were doing little more than reactive policing when they wanted to be engaged in more proactive, social work oriented tasks: "I sit by my desk and wait for the phone or the radio to go off," one frustrated individual explained. Again, experiences reinforcing feelings of frustration and being undervalued—intensifying the inner struggles inherent to role strain.

A number of participants were also openly demoralized by the role conflict they were experiencing. When asked which role she would cite to describe the nature of her work, an officer in another small detachment replied:

> A: Law enforcer, I guess.
>
> Q: And ideally what would you like it to be? When you signed up, what did you view your role as?
>
> A: I guess I felt like I was going to help people. I don't feel like I am helping people …
>
> Q: Do you really not feel like you're helping people?
>
> A: No, I don't.
>
> Q: Is that very dissatisfying?

A: It is and frustrating.

As evinced in this officer's words, she chose to use the term 'frustrating' to describe the scope of her occupational responsibilities and roles.

Indeed, the nature of the police organization studied, and its requirement that general duty officers be generalists who are able to work within a range of very different communities, and at times very different occupational tasks, was cited as another - and paramount – factor underlying officers' experiences of role conflict. Although one officer was now happier, ever since she had switched provinces and was no longer being given speeding ticket quotas, she still felt constrained by the calls for service and paperwork demands she faced. She felt such tasks did not permit her to do the type of community policing she preferred: "I find in this organization, we don't let you chose what you're good at." This point was similarly raised by a police officer, who self-reported being better suited for social work activities, but who had been assigned to a busy detachment where his time was largely spent performing law enforcement and peacekeeping tasks. When asked about his expectations on joining the force, he said:

> I had essentially thought I would have more time for community building at that time. I thought we would have more time to be more engaged with the community … I find when you're in a busier detachment, by the time you do what you have to do there, God, there's not much time left over, especially when you have families.

As evinced above, and perhaps not surprisingly, a number of officers expressed feelings of dissatisfaction and demoralization as a result of role conflict—embedded in the disconnect they felt between their occupational desires and interests versus the role(s) they actualize when on duty. One officer said in relation to what she perceived to be some of the more stressful aspects of the social work role she is forced to adopt: "sometimes you wonder why you do it." Most of the officers who expressed similar sentiments were junior in rank and with less than ten years of service, although not exclusively so. One veteran officer spent nearly two hours discussing his

work frustrations with one of the researchers, thanking her afterwards for "the therapy session" – which was not an isolated occurrence. Similarly a junior officer at another detachment said of his interview, during which he also shared his own feelings of demoralization, at its conclusion: "that was like therapy." The fact that talking about their occupational demands and practices left officers feeling somewhat relieved to be able to express their concerns further evinces the degree of role strain, and associated inner tensions, they experience in their occupational position.

Lessons learned: concluding remarks

Men and women choose to enter the field of policing in light of their, among other factors, perceptions of what the occupation entails. In our study of police officers working in rural and remote areas, we reveal, first, how officers operationalize, singly or in combination, their roles as law enforcers, peacekeepers, social workers or knowledge workers, . Then we examined their experiences of role strain as a result of mismatches between their desired versus actual occupational role(s). The majority of officers in our sample voiced the desire to hold either the law enforcement or social worker role, which they saw as being mostly closely associated with their perceptions of what it means to be a 'police officer.' However, , most felt they performed tasks related to less desirable roles, such as knowledge work or peacekeeping. Certainly, the limiting of much of their daily work to 'paperwork' or data entry tasks was a consistent source of role strain, particularly for people who did not want to be sitting at a desk and instead preferred to be active on patrol. Others experienced role strain when they felt undervalued in light of the calls for service they received and thus were required to respond to, particularly if they felt their occupational responsibilities t closely resembled 'parenting', 'babysitting' or the resolution of non-policing matters. This role strain was accompanied by feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, and resulted in inner tensions that hindered the

occupational wellbeing of members of the police force. Not surprisingly, some officers presented as demoralized.

Our analyses offer support for the contention that policing in rural and remote areas differs can differ signification from the occupational demands and responsibilities found in urban centres (Decker 1979; Crank 1990). As such, efforts need be directed to recruiting police officers with generalist approaches to police work and flexible perceptions of what the position entails in order to find individuals who will not only excel at policing in remote or rural jurisdictions, but who will be less likely to experience role strain. In relation to the latter, we note that tensions and frustrations associated with role strain can be detrimental for the wellbeing of the affected persons and further may compromise the overall effectivity of the policing force in comparison to dedicated, satisfied employees. Training initiatives should also take into account the diverse nature of the policing role in rural and remote areas, including the 'fishbowl effect', the smaller population sizes, the vast geographical areas to be covered, the frequent lack of technology and resources, among other factors, in order to ensure officers are prepared for the challenges unique to rural policing they will likely experience. In short, there needs to be specific recruitment and training for officers working in rural areas.

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