

Professionalism in Policing: Assessing the Professionalization Movement

Philip E. Carlan and John A. Lewis

This study examines police professionalism by using Hall's professionalism scale. Questionnaires ($N = 1,953$) were mailed to all municipal police departments with 50 or more sworn personnel in one southern state, producing 1,114 responses (57% response rate) from 16 participating departments. Analysis revealed that professionalism attitudes did not differ significantly among agencies. Findings also revealed above-average professionalism attitudes on all dimensions (organizational referent, public service, self-regulation, calling, and autonomy). Based on these findings, the authors conclude that policing is closely aligned with the primary components of professionalism. Findings also reveal, however, that officers are content with low levels of actual autonomy; thus, policing must maintain progressive efforts if it hopes to one day achieve status as a profession.

Key Words: Police professionalism • police professionalization • police professions

From the colonial period's constables and night watchmen to the modern era of community policing, U.S. law enforcement has pursued professional status. Society, though, has myriad standards about how it defines professions (Dantzker, 1986; Griffin, 1998), and this definitional confusion is widely regarded as "one of the obstacles that has caused the status of profession to be elusive from the occupation of policing for so long" (Bumgamer, 2002, p. 321). Essentially, it has been argued that law enforcement strategies to obtain professional status have been based on "misinterpretation, misapplication, misrepresentation, and miscalculation" (Potts, 1982, p. 51). Long ago, Germann (1967) commented that police officers support the professionalizing agenda as a means to acquire occupational rewards (i.e., autonomy, pay, benefits) while continuing to perform "in the same old way" (p. 605). Some years later, Potts (1982) also suggested that the police professionalization movement was a reaction to poor occupational status and represented little more than a "superficial, procedural, mainly public relations ploy" (p. 53). Others, too, have proposed that the movement was really more akin to a marketing slogan (Fournier, 1999) that enabled officers to claim professional distinction without corresponding contributions (Price, 1979; Souryal, 2003).

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In a professional environment, the norm is to place substantial demands on police officers (Larson, 1977). It appears, though, that few of the rewards anticipated among police officers for pursuing professionalism are actually achieved (Rudoni, Baker, & Meyer, 1978). Thus, it should not be surprising that professional outcomes have been mixed among the law enforcement community. Bumgarner (2002, p. 321) states that “professionalism as described . . . by author-practitioners frequently fails to resemble professionalism as described in scholarly works.” Griffin (1998), for example, defines professionalism as possessing integrity, intellect, initiative, industry, and impact. As such, some argue that professional status for law enforcement is unattainable because police administrators continue to pursue a self-created version of professionalism that does not fulfill societal demands (Souryal, 2003; Sullivan, 2004). Despite this pessimism, many police departments and law enforcement agencies continue the quest to gain professional recognition (Reiss, 1971). Because societal recognition as a profession affords many organizational benefits (i.e., pay, status), attempts to obtain professional standing are understandable (Bumgarner, 2002; Sciulli, 2005). Unclear standards about what law enforcement agencies must achieve to acquire professional distinction, however, are not the only reason for the limited gains of the police profession movement.

Profession and Professionalism Differentiated

Many occupations claim the status of “professions,” but these claims are questionable when compared with sociological templates for such status (Bumgarner, 2002; Morgan, 1994). According to Brante (1988), occupational employees assume the mental role of a “professional” based on their ideological commitments. Sociological definitions, however, possess a greater degree of complexity than acquired self-image of workers. At a minimum, professions are expected to possess a knowledge base cultivated from tertiary education, vocational training, and experience (Evetts, 2006). The educational focus communicates that occupations cannot transform into professions without substantial commitment to training and certification (Collins, 1979; Reiss, 1971).

Greenwood (1957) advocates five essential dimensions for professional classification: systematic body of theory, professional authority, community sanction, code of ethics, and professional culture. Important to this paradigm is that professions and occupations both possess all the characteristics but differ in degree along a theoretical continuum. A *systematic body of theory* predicated on intellectual prowess ensures that professionals are competent to perform “unusually complicated operations” (p. 46). Greenwood admonishes, however, that too strong a reliance on the skill proficiencies of professionals misses “the kernel of their uniqueness” (p. 46). *Professional authority* allows professionals to use their expertise to make decisions for the well-being of societal clients. This

authority must be granted by clients, though, and for this reason it is imperative that acquisition of systematic theory (through education) be accumulated to arm the professional with knowledge that “highlights the layman’s comparative ignorance” (p. 47). *Community sanction* delegates control of training centers and admission requirements to professions to filter incompetence and immorality from among the brotherhood. Formal (written) and informal (subtle pressures) *codes of ethics* must be adopted and enforced to promote allegiance and adherence to the cornerstone of public service. Ethical codes are of greatest importance because they deter misconduct through aligning professionals’ loyalties with the larger occupation instead of unfaltering obedience to an organization (Price, 1979; Sullivan, 2004). Lastly, *professional culture* must evolve to promote “*values, norms, and symbols*” (p. 52) demonstrative of a “calling” that basically consumes the essence of life.

Wilensky (1964) attributes the genesis of a profession to a five-stage process. First, occupations must be dedicated fully to serving client needs. Second, they must establish training requirements and schools (and ultimately form alliances with universities to expand the knowledge base). Third, they must form professional associations to screen for quality applicants and convince the public of their competence. Fourth, they must install mechanisms to protect against work intrusion and sustain a code of ethics. The fifth (and final) stage requires implementation and enforcement of rules to protect against the unqualified and unscrupulous, reduce internal competition, and promote the well-being of clients by means of emphasis on the service model. Many other definitional requirements consistent with those that appear in this section also emerge from the academic literature (Dale, 1994; Hawley, 1998).

Turning attention to the construct of professionalism, Hall (1968) posits that professional attitudes can be instilled into occupational members, just as professions house members exhibiting unprofessional attitudes. According to Hall, professionalism entails five (somewhat similar and somewhat different) criteria. First, the professional depends on organizations as a major *referent* for guiding ideas, standards, and judgments. For example, professionals depend on journals and meetings as mechanisms for the maintenance of professional competence (Snizek, 1972). Hall (1968) then suggests that professionalism exudes a firm *belief in public service*, primarily visible in the conviction that its occupational services are indispensable for societal well-being. *Belief in self-regulation* as a requisite is important because it evinces the mentality that only colleagues possess the intellectual tools and expertise to judge the merits of decisions and actions and usually resents intrusion from all others (Hall, 1968; Snizek, 1972). The fourth requirement is a *sense of calling* to the field that is so intense that it commits to a lifetime of devotion without regard for associated benefits. Lastly, the freedom to make

decisions without interference from others (outsiders and even employing organizations) is a hallmark of professionalism. Concerning this *belief in autonomy*, however, Crank explains that it is “not illogical for a person to agree that decisions in general and his own decisions in particular are reviewed by others, and yet still express confidence in his ability to be his own boss, to use his own judgment, and to make his own decisions . . .” (1990, pp. 409–410).

Policing and Professionalism

Occupational members struggling for greater legitimacy often engage in professional rhetoric to “convince themselves and their constituencies that they deserve recognition” (Miller & Fry, 1976a, p. 403). Assuming education truly is the “heart” of professions (Sullivan, 2004) and professions demand more than technical competency (Mayhew & Ford, 1974), police organizations face a monumental challenge as a majority of police managers are against baccalaureate requirements for hiring new officers (Garner, 1999; Hawley, 1998). While a growing portion of police officers are earning college degrees in the absence of organizational mandates, it remains true that many police managers deemphasize the need for higher education based on the assumption it fosters negative behavior (e.g., resistance to authority, discontentment with work environments) (Kuykendall & Roberg, 1990; Price, 1976). Operating primarily within a paramilitary structure (Auten, 1981), police management (and its philosophies) appear to be wholly incompatible with the tenets of professions. Commitment to autonomy and self-regulation offer the greatest promise for nurturing the ethical conditions required of professions (Donahue, 1992; Wilensky, 1964). As such, police administrators’ often are regarded as the primary reason for the limited gains in the police profession movement because of their rigid commitment (though understandable) to strict policies, procedures, and regulations.

Several studies using Hall’s (1968) Professionalism Scale conclude officers (or police-oriented college students) possess higher-than-average professionalism attitudes. Miller and Fry (1976a) found that officers were aligned with self-regulation, sense of calling, professional organizations, and public service but possessed only moderate alignment with autonomy. Crank (1990) confirmed officer commitment to self-regulation but questioned the validity of other professionalism components. In that study, officers scored above average in all but one scale (professional organizations). Crank also reported that officer “professionalism” scores (as collected through Hall’s Professionalism Scale) were substantially higher than measures of “craftsmanship” (e.g., apprenticeship, holistic work ethic, lack of deference to authority, and oral tradition), concluding that policing exhibits attitudes more consistent with professions (although not greatly) than

occupations or vocations. Bumgarner (2002) surveyed attitudes of college students with law enforcement aspirations regarding the roles of police functions and likewise found that they perceived policing as more of a profession than a craft. Moreover, his findings revealed that professionalism and craftsmanship scores were basically unaffected by education and school type (two- or four-year).

Most academic queries regarding police professional status are inconclusive, but some studies do conclude that policing does not align with common professional standards (Dale, 1994; Dantzker, 1986; Lumb, 1994; Regoli, Crank & Culbertson, 1989), and one recent publication states clearly that "police officer" is not regarded by society as a profession (Souryal, 2003). Meanwhile, Potts (1982, p. 57) argued that the nature of policing "insures that only the limited manifestations of police professionalism are attainable" and accused policing organizations of pursuing professional status only as a means to acquire rewards.

Shernock (1992) examined nearly 200 officers from 11 police agencies and expressed doubt regarding the success of the professionalization quest, citing that college-educated cops placed little emphasis on service ideals or exercise of discretion. Dantzker's (1986) national assessment of 46 law enforcement agencies also concedes that policing does not meet the standards for professions as established within scholarly circles. The exploration of Regoli et al. (1989) of 574 Illinois police chiefs revealed that professional chiefs actually exhibited less support for professionalizing aims, citing a lack of enthusiasm toward accreditation and educational mandates. Equally disturbing, Vogel and Adams (1983) found a significant reduction in professional attitudes as experience accumulates. As a whole, academic studies confirm that police behavior is not consistent with the attributes of professionalism (Rudoni et al., 1978). For example, Regoli and Poole (1980) found that self-regulation (peers judging peers) was the only professional dimension present at high levels, and they concluded that officers possessed a narrow understanding of professionalism.

Notwithstanding such criticism, evidence of professional policing does exist (Dantzker, 1986; Price, 1979). One study of police officers from across eight departments demonstrated that a majority of the officers support professional standards (Crank, 1990). Additionally, officers tend to agree that: (1) a high school education is sufficient for patrol duties; (2) promotion is not a product of superior skill; and (3) educated officers are more compassionate. Davis and Lawler's (1985) examination of Oklahoma and Texas police officers confirmed that officers with professional attitudes were less cynical, more effective, less discretionary, and not as stressed when compared with officers not exhibiting professional attitudes. Furthermore, college-educated officers seemed to place more value on ethical conduct (Sherlock, 1992).

Methods

Officers commonly proscribe policing as a profession (Brante, 1988), but most academic queries question whether police officers truly understand (or desire) the responsibilities associated with becoming a bona fide profession (Bumgamer, 2002; Morgan, 1994). This paper attempts to add to the professionalism literature through three empirical examinations: the relationship of professionalism and personal demographics, professional demographics, and education. Specifically, the authors expect the following: 1) professionalism attitudes are independent of personal demographics (age, gender, race, marital status), 2) professionalism attitudes are associated with professional demographics (job position, years of service, hours worked, partner status), and 3) professionalism attitudes increase with educational attainment. The authors used correlations and difference-of-means tests (t-test, ANOVA) to analyze survey results. All findings are accepted at the .05 level of statistical significance.

Instrumentation

Notwithstanding the complexities associated with defining professionalism, Hall's (1968) Professionalism Scale has long been accepted as reliable. Hall supported the instrument's use as a valid measure of actual behavior, suggesting that "respondents practice what they verbalize" (p. 97). Its capacity to embody "symbolic identification with the 'ideal' professional model" seems well established (Miller & Fry, 1976a, p. 409). By using Hall's modified scale (Snizek, 1972), the authors computed an overall professionalism mean from the average of the instrument's dimensions (referent, public service, self-regulation, sense of calling, and autonomy). Each subcomponent consists of five items ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, and all negative statements were recoded (asterisk denotes reverse coding) to attain reliable computations. As such, highest professionalism is associated with a mean of 5 (with 1 being lowest professionalism). Additional statements (Questions 26–34) also were included to measure the actual experiences of officers as related to police professionalism (see Appendix). Respondents also provided professional and personal demographics information (Questions 35–44). The following represents the numerical alignment of the survey items (Questions 1–25) constructing Hall's five dimensions (asterisks signify reverse coded items):

Referent Organizations (1, 4, 11, 15*, 17*)	Sense of Calling (7, 9, 14, 18, 24)
Belief in Public Service (2*, 5, 8*, 12*, 22)	Autonomy (3, 10*, 19*, 21, 25*)
Belief in Self-Regulation (6, 13*, 16*, 20*, 23)	

Data Collection

Twenty-one municipal police departments with 50 or more sworn officers were selected as data collection sites. Based on departmental information extracted from the state law enforcement directory, 1,953 collective questionnaires were mailed to police chiefs with a request to allow its distribution to all personnel during shift changes. A designated staff member disseminated and collected survey instruments and returned them to the researcher. This data-collection strategy produced cooperation from 16 police chiefs. Ranging from 10% to 78%, the overall response rate from participating agencies was 57% ($n = 1,114$). Eighty percent of the responses originated from eight departments (all with a minimum of 51 responses), and department representation ranged from 10 to 379 officers. Furthermore, Table 1 demonstrates that overall professionalism scores were consistent across agencies, meaning that all police agencies could be grouped for analysis in this study.

Table 1. *Professionalism Scores by Participating Police Agencies*

Sworn Officers ($N = 1953$)	Respondents $n = 1114$ (57%)	Mean	SD	SE
522	379	3.43	.32	.02
149	100	3.55	.31	.03
157	96	3.51	.27	.03
99	75	3.42	.33	.04
93	67	3.56	.32	.04
82	64	3.44	.26	.03
75	57	3.60	.31	.04
95	51	3.45	.31	.04
57	39	3.45	.32	.05
153	39	3.50	.29	.05
60	38	3.41	.32	.05
134	33	3.53	.29	.05
51	26	3.49	.28	.06
58	25	3.60	.36	.08
68	15	3.31	.29	.08
100	10	3.44	.16	.05

Note. Mean represents a scale of 1 (Lowest Professionalism) to 5 (Highest Professionalism).
Cumulative professionalism score: $M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.31$

Results

Table 2 indicates that officers in this study were primarily White (81%) and male (92%). Respondents indicated basic youthfulness (57% younger than 37 years of age) but reasonable experience (64% possessed six or more years police service). Most respondents were entry-level officers (70%), most of whom had no assigned partner (83%). The majority of officers worked fewer than 46 hours weekly (56%), and just more than one half (51%) possessed no college degree. The majority of officers also reported being married (69%).

Initial data inspection reveals no significant differences in professionalism attitudes among the variables age, gender, race, and marital status. Thus, hypothesis one—professionalism is independent of personal demographics—is supported. The data also reveal no significant professionalism differences along lines of professional attributes. Thus, hypothesis two—work environment (job position, years of service, hours worked, and partner status) is associated with professionalism—is unsupported. It appears from the data that demographics do not contribute to the formation and maintenance of professionalism. Construction of a zero-order correlation matrix (see Table 3) demonstrates the absence of those associations.

Hypothesis three also is unsupported, as the data suggest that police professionalism is uninfluenced by educational attainment. Only small differences existed among the four educational groups ($F = 0.41, p > .05$). Surprisingly, those without a college education ($M = 3.48, SD = 0.31$) actually had slightly higher professionalism scores than college-educated officers ($M = 3.46, SD = 0.32$). Turning attention to overall professionalism scores, the findings support the maxim that the *whole is the sum of the parts*. With little difference emerging along demographic lines, the cumulative professionalism score ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.31$) was a mirror image of the demographic data Table 2 illustrates. The composition of professionalism orientation, however, is not composed of equal subcomponents. In short, even though professionalism differs little among individual officers, the importance that officers place on the individual components of professionalism differs substantially. Table 4 presents the mean scores for each professionalism component.

Belief in Public Service

Officers demonstrated the greatest professionalism levels in the area of public service ($M = 4.02, SD = 0.58$). On average, 79% supported the indispensability of policing as a service mechanism, with only a fraction opposing its importance (8%). Specifically (Questions 29 & 30), officers were adamant that they would risk their life to protect citizens ($M = 4.27, SD = 0.70$) and that service to the community is the greatest priority ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.83$).

Table 2. *Police Demographics and Professionalism Scores (1–5)*

Characteristics	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>
Gender						
Male	957 (92)	3.48	.31	.04		1.31
Female	82 (8)	3.43	.32	.01		
Race						
White	848 (81)	3.48	.31	.01	2.36	
Black	156 (15)	3.44	.30	.03		
Other	49 (5)	3.41	.38	.05		
Age						
21–28	229 (22)	3.53 ^{c-d}	.32	.02	4.81*	
29–36	368 (35)	3.48	.30	.02		
37–44 ^c	258 (25)	3.44	.30	.02		
45–52 ^d	149 (14)	3.41	.33	.03		
53+	43 (4)	3.54	.31	.05		
Years of Service						
21 +	145 (14)	3.43	.34	.03	1.46	
11–20	307 (29)	3.46	.30	.02		
6–10	214 (21)	3.48	.31	.02		
1–5	325 (31)	3.49	.29	.02		
Less than 1	52(5)	3.53	.35	.05		
Job Position						
Officer	742 (70)	3.48	.30	.01	1.74	
Front-line supervision	154 (15)	3.43	.34	.03		
Administration/Mgt	157 (15)	3.47	.34	.03		
Hours Worked						
51 +	150 (14)	3.51	.32	.03	1.96	
46–50	319 (30)	3.48	.31	.02		
Less than 46	593 (56)	3.46	.31	.01		
Partner status						
No partner	868 (83)	3.47	.31	.01		0.47
Partner	181(17)	3.48	.34	.03		

(Table continues on next page)

Table 2 *cont.*

Characteristics	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>
Education						
GED/High School	528 (51)	3.48	.31	.01	0.41	
Associates	232 (22)	3.47	.32	.02		
Bachelors	236 (23)	3.45	.31	.02		
Masters	48 (5)	3.46	.34	.05		
Marital status						
Never married	169 (16)	3.51	.30	.02	1.46	
Married	733 (69)	3.47	.31	.01		
Other	159 (15)	3.46	.31	.02		

Note. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number; Mean represents a scale of 1 (Lowest Professionalism) to 5 (Highest Professionalism).

* $p < .01$

Belief in Self-Regulation

Officers expressed second highest professionalism in the area of self-regulation ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.59$). Support for self-regulation was 60%, while 24% expressed little faith in the abilities of colleagues to judge competence. Hall's modified instrument, however, measures only perceptions regarding competence evaluations as opposed to actual desire for self-regulation. When measuring these specific attitudes (Questions 26 & 32), support for self-regulation actually goes down. Fifty-three percent expressed that evaluations primarily should be derived from other officers ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.18$), while nearly one third (29%) argued otherwise. Similarly, 49% reported that evaluations should originate within the chain of command ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.59$).

Professional Organizations as a Major Referent

Officer commitment to the value of professional organizations reflected moderate agreement ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.62$). On average, 53% expressed support for these organizational entities, while 22% were unsupportive. One portion of the subset was below average, but that result may be attributable to something other than lack of commitment. A small officer faction (27%) affirmed regular attendance at professional meetings ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.10$). Given the nature of policing, however, opportunities for regular attendance may be limited; therefore, its inclusion in professionalism measurement might conceal real commitment of officers. Reexamination of this measure without that controversial element, though, resulted in only a 6% increase ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.61$). The police did assert (Question 34), however, that opportunities and funds to attend meetings were inadequate ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.00$).

Table 3. *Intercorrelation Matrix for Police Professionalism*

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. Referent	1.00													
2. Pub Srv	.28**	1.00												
3. Self-Reg	-.04	.09**	1.00											
4. Calling	.20**	.30**	.03	1.00										
5. Autono	.05	-.06*	.20**	.03	1.00									
6. Job Pos	.14**	.01	-.14**	-.03	-.10**	1.00								
7. Ys Srv	.08*	.02	-.09**	-.11*	-.07*	.53**	1.00							
8. Hrs Wrk	.05	.02	.01	.06**	.00	.04	.08*	1.00						
9. Partner	.01	.05	.03	-.06**	-.04	.04	.16**	-.06	1.00					
10. Educ	.07*	-.05	-.03	-.08**	.01	.26**	.15**	.02	.06*	1.00				
11. Age	.05	.01	-.09	-.14**	.05	.46	.74**	.00	.13**	.14	1.00			
12. Gender	.02	.04	.00	.03	.02	-.03	.06	.07*	.00	-.06	-.03	1.00		
13. Race	.02	.04	.08*	.07	.00	-.01	.09**	.00	.06	.04	-.01	.14	1.00	
14. Mar Stat	-.02	.00	.04	.02	.03	-.08*	-.23**	-.09**	-.07*	.02	.23**	.07*	.01	1.00

Note. Coding is as follows: Job position (Administration/Mgt = 2, Front-line supervision = 1, Officer = 0); Years of Service (21+ = 4, 11–20 = 3, 6–10 = 2, 1–5 = 1, Less than 1 = 0); Hours Worked 51+ = 2, 46–50 = 1, Less than 46 = 0); Partner (No Partner = 1, Partner = 0); Education (Master's = 2, Bachelor's = 1, Associate's = 0); Age (53+ = 4, 45–52 = 3, 37–44 = 2, 29–36 = 1, 21–28 = 0); Gender (Male = 1, Female = 0); Race (White = 2, Black = 1, Other = 0); Marital status (Never married = 2, Married = 1, Other = 0). Pub Srv, Self-Reg, Autono, Job Pos, Ys Serv, Hrs Wrk, Partner, Educ, and Mar Stat stand for Public Service, Self-Regulation, Autonomy, Job Position, Years of Service, Hours Worked, Partner Status, Education, and Marital Status, respectively.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

Sense of Calling

Officers demonstrated the second lowest professionalism in the area of “sense of calling” ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.61$), as only 34% of the officers believed that police officers in general experience significant gravitational pull to police work. It should be noted, though, that one dimension of professionalism inserted a large amount of negative skew. Specifically, just 21% agreed that most officers would stay in policing if their incomes were reduced ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.21$). Exclusion of this statement from the “calling” subset produced a computation more favorable to officers’ sense of calling ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.60$), an increase of 12%. As a result of this manipulation, officers’ sense of calling becomes equitable with self-regulation. Furthermore, officers confirmed (Question 27) that they

would likely leave policing for a job with higher pay ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.20$). Recoding of this “anti-calling” statement produced an unprofessional bent ($M = 2.37$). Police do, however, believe (Question 31) that they accomplish important things in the course of daily duties ($M = 4.00, SD = 0.73$).

Table 4. *Police Professionalism by Dimension*

Dimensions	Mean	SD	SE
Professional Referent	3.38	.62	.02
Belief in Public Service	4.02	.58	.02
Belief in Self-Regulation	3.53	.59	.02
Sense of Calling to the Field	3.25	.61	.02
Autonomy	3.20	.58	.02

Note. Mean represents a scale of 1 (Lowest Professionalism) to 5 (Highest Professionalism).

Autonomy

Representing the weakest component of police professionalism, 41% reported the ongoing presence of occupational freedom, while 28% acknowledged its noticeable absence. Essentially, officers recognized only a moderate degree of autonomy attached to daily functions ($M = 3.20, SD = 0.58$). It should be noted, though, that Hall’s modified instrument measures officer perception of autonomy, not one’s desire for autonomous operation. It could be argued, then, that the bureaucratic structure of police organizations compress the value that officers place on work freedom. To address that possibility, several areas were explored. Sixty-seven percent of the officers in this study expressed (Question 28) that considerable latitude should be granted to pursue work goals ($M = 3.74, SD = 0.80$). At first glance, this finding suggests that officers do desire autonomous police roles, but an even higher percentage of officers (73%) reported satisfaction (Question 33) with current freedom delegation ($M = 3.74, SD = 0.98$). It appears, then, that police officers seem satisfied with actual autonomy levels that are substantially lower than what they claim should be delegated. From these contradictions, one could argue that even though officers espouse the desire for autonomy, the real essence of autonomy seems to escape them. It appears that police officers do not truly understand the meaning or value of autonomy. In fact, educational attainment did not even produce significant differences pertaining to autonomous desire ($F = 0.98, p > .05$) or satisfaction ($F = 0.58, p > .05$).

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that police officers are aligned with Hall's definition of professionalism. Officers demonstrated a strong commitment to the service ideal and moderate support for peer regulation. Attitudes regarding the value of professional associations and sense of calling also reveal reasonable adherence to the tenets of professionalism once controlling for undue influences. The presence of autonomy emerged with the least support (although it still received above-average support). The findings of related studies confirm the reliability of the present outcomes. Overall professionalism in the current study (3.47) is consistent with the means (3.44, 3.22, 3.55) of associated explorations by Bumgarner (2002), Crank (1990), and Miller and Fry (1976a), respectively. Concerning subset priorities, however, the rankings are somewhat mixed. For example, officers demonstrated a much greater bent toward the value of public service than the value expressed in two related studies (Crank, 1990; Miller & Fry, 1976a). Conversely, though, studies illustrate the greatest support for self-regulation, which is quite consistent with the high prioritization surfacing in this study. Examinations of the remaining subset scores (professional referent, calling, and autonomy) revealed that officers in this study lie between professionalism measures previous studies reported.

Professional status requires long-term commitment to education and training fostered in collegiate environments (Potts, 1982; Wilensky, 1964). On this issue, police commitment remains marginal, and without this educational focus, it will be difficult to professionalize policing. Addressing this point, Miller and Fry (1976b, pp. 189–190) acknowledged that police personnel “are not always ideal students,” and recognized the difficulties associated with professionalizing a person who is “forced by circumstances into the classroom.” As such, some fear that aspiring professions that want reward without real transformation may form partnerships with institutions of higher education that possess, at best, “pliable standards” and use them as a “spurious authenticating mechanism” (Moore, 1970, p. 120). Other scholars have also discussed this “bed-partnering” alliance (Farrell & Koch, 1995). For example, criminal justice educators often are criticized for focusing on the occupational development of students at the expense of traditional educational goals such as developing an understanding of philosophies, ideologies, and principles that may have no direct (or visible) application within police work. The occasional acceptance of law enforcement training as a valid substitution for academic credit promotes even more criticism (Schafer & Castellano, 2005). Farrell and Koch (1995) contend that most academic studies of law enforcement do not possess scientific neutrality because researchers (and departments) fear losing support of police personnel. They further warn that criminal justice scholars often are regarded as “unthinking defenders of the system” (p. 54).

Conclusion

Miller and Fry (1976b) concluded long ago that police officers endorse professional views but not as a product of educational experience; three decades removed, the police now appear more committed to the value of a college education. Not only have the number of college-educated police increased substantially (Carter & Sapp, 1990), their personal perceptions regarding the occupational value of their college degrees also have been documented in recent years (Carlan, 2007). As such, tertiary education has emerged as a greater focal point of the police professionalization process.

Along a similar vein, Sullivan (2004, p. 16) suggests that one of the greatest obstacles facing the occupational transformation of policing into a profession is that police officers often are not “serious about their purposes.” The findings of this study, however, indicate that police officers are quite serious about attaining professional status, in that they ascribe to the traditional notions regarding what constitutes a profession. Thus, law enforcement is proceeding in the right direction to attain professional distinction, but the absence of job autonomy remains problematic because the very nature of police work inhibits officer autonomy. Even though officers in this study believed they should have autonomy and were content with their current levels of autonomy, the actual amount of such reported autonomy was quite low. This finding begs the question, then, whether police officers truly comprehend (or want) the responsibilities associated with becoming a member of a true profession. Until this singular obstacle is resolved, the police industry will remain an “occupation” longing for professional status.

In light of the aforementioned concerns, and recognizing that many officers continue to resist behavioral transformations essential for “real professionals,” it is possible (if not probable) that the realities associated with working in a “real profession” may prove counterproductive for police operations as a whole (Evetts, 2006). Reiss (1971) is adamant that the police are obligated to pursue professional status, and he has no shortage of allies. But if policing continues to expend its energies on professionalizing efforts, it needs to ensure that the outcome is more than the mere formation of a police profession regarded as nothing more than “marginal” (Hall, 1968, p. 92).

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Appendix

Police Professionalism Questionnaire (Abbreviated Version)

Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A	B	C	D	E

1. I systematically read the police journals.
2. Other professions are more vital to society than policing.
3. I make my own decisions with respect to work assignments.
4. I regularly attend professional meetings at the local level (community, state or regional).
5. The police profession, more than any other, is essential for society.
6. Police officers have a good idea about the competence of other officers.
7. Police officers have a real "calling" for their work.
8. The importance of the police profession is sometimes overstressed.
9. The dedication of police officers is most gratifying.
10. I don't have much opportunity to exercise my own judgment.
11. Police organizations should be supported.
12. Some occupations are more important to society than policing.
13. A problem in the police profession is that no one really knows what other officers are doing.
14. It is encouraging to see the high level of idealism maintained by police officers.
15. Police organizations are of little benefit to the average police officer.
16. Police officers have no way of judging each other's competence.
17. Although I would like to, I don't read police journals too often.
18. Most police officers would stay in the profession even if their incomes were reduced.
19. My own decisions are subject to review.
20. There is not much opportunity to judge how other police officers do their jobs.
21. I am my own boss in almost every work-related situation.
22. If ever an occupation is indispensable, it is policing.
23. Police officers know how well other officers perform their work.
24. There are very few police officers who don't believe in their work.
25. Most of my decisions are reviewed by other people.
26. The judgment of people above me in the chain of command should count most heavily in evaluating my performance.
27. If offered a higher paying job outside of policing, I would be inclined to take it.
28. I should be given considerable latitude to pursue work goals I feel are important.
29. I would risk my life to protect the safety of a citizen.
30. Service to the people of the community is my most important priority.
31. I accomplish important things in the course of my job.

- 32. My fellow officers are in the best position to judge my competence.
- 33. I am satisfied with the degree of freedom that I am given in the course of my job.
- 34. I am provided adequate opportunities and funds to attend professional police meetings.

Please provide the following personal and employment information.

- 35. Marital Status
 - A Never married
 - B Married
 - C Divorced
 - D Separated
 - E Widowed
- 36. Hours worked/week (average)
 - A < 40
 - B 40–45
 - C 46–50
 - D 51–60
 - E 61+
- 37. Police Partner
 - A Male partner
 - B Female partner
 - C No partner
- 38. Job Position
 - A Administration
 - B Mid-management
 - C Front-line supervision
 - D Officer
- 39. Have you ever been assigned to special operations?
 - A Yes
 - B No
- 40. Gender
 - A Male
 - B Female
- 41. Race
 - A White
 - B Black
 - C Hispanic
 - D Asian
 - E Other
- 42. Age
 - A 21–28
 - B 29–36
 - C 37–44
 - D 45–52
 - E 53+
- 43. Highest Education
 - A GED
 - B High School
 - C Associates
 - D Bachelors
 - E Masters+
- 44. Years of Police Service
 - A Less than 1
 - B 1–5
 - C 6–10
 - D 11–20
 - E 21+

