CrimRxiv

Review 2 of "Improving Mandatory Firearms Training For Law Enforcement: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Illinois Law Enforcement Training"

David Sausdal

Published on: Mar 19, 2021

DOI: 10.21428/cb6ab371.0bf6079a

License: [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Vote: Publish pending minor changes

[For votes to count, referees must reasonably explain why they voted as they did. Thus, please explain your vote. If you voted to publish pending minor changes, specify each change, why it is needed, and, possibly, how it should/could be done.]

The paper is a nice read with a clear argument and solid recommendations. My only suggestion is that the author thinks a little bit more about the following:

The paper is about *US* law enforcement, but is largely presented as a paper about policing *per se*. It, for example, starts out by saying that “Police use of force, particularly deadly force, has been on the forefront of scholarly and practitioner discussions for the past decade.” While this is evidently true in a US context, it is not so in every other country. I would therefore recommend that the author simply highlights how it is (mostly) paper about US policing. In fact, the ‘Americanness’ of the issues presented became abundantly clear to me as I read the paper while thinking about my own ethnographic experiences. Having attended firearm training courses with the Danish police, I rarely encounter the same militaristic discourse. Both at and outside the shooting range, language such as “eliminating threats” the focus on “coming home” is not that common. They do tell each other to stay safe and there is definitely a masculine and action-oriented esprit de corps, but an overemphasized “warrior mentality” would largely be seen as a bit over the top if not downright ridiculous. Also, when practicing their firearm skills, Danish police officers of course focus on becoming better shooters, yet there is also much focus on safety measures (though mostly police safety more than public safety). Another interesting point is that a lot of the police officers I have spent time with often find mandatory firearm training rather tedious and even sometimes a waste of time. Anyhow, I mention all this simply to point to how your perspective and your empirical material don’t only speak of policing and firearm training but, indeed, of policing and firearm training in a somewhat militarized US policing context (cf. Kraska’s or McCulloch’s work)

Your auto-ethnographic approach works. In your description of the ups and downs of this method, it is however a bit hard to see how it differentiates from regular ethnography/participant observation. I understand that your own experiences from and position in law enforcement provides you with particular personal insights, but this personal/participatory perspective is also at the heart of conventional (anthropological) ethnography (cf. Spradley’s *Participant Observation*). With this in mind, a few words on

why it is not simply an ethnographic study would be clarifying. Also, a few more words on the problems of studying your own home/yourself (see for example Jackson (1987) *Anthropology at home* or Greenhouse, C. J. (1985). "Anthropology at home: whose home?" would, I believe, help further explicate the pros and cons of your method(ology).

While I understand and support your recommendations, I also think one should bear in mind that the police (in the US and elsewhere) have a long yet largely unsuccessful history when it comes to different forms of, for example, sensitivity and community training. As Loftus (2009) has described it, police forces and their 'police culture' (ibid) have been remarkably resilient. Many efforts have been made to reform and diversify the police around the world, but they nevertheless seem to keep adhering to the somewhat soldierly and masculine outlook you describe. So, while I understand your recommendations and critiques, you may want to briefly mention/discuss how similar "softer" approaches to police training haven't always been that successful.