

“Laying Hands” and Learning to Touch and Grab in the Police Academy

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Abstract and Keywords

Research on the formation of police officers generally focuses on the beliefs, accounts, and categories that recruits must master. Becoming a police officer, however, is not simply a matter of acquiring new attitudes and beliefs. This article attends to an unexplored side of police culture—the sensorial and tactile education that recruits undergo at the police academy. Rubenstein wrote in 1973 that a police officer’s first tool is his or her body. This article examines the formation of the police body by examining how police recruits learn to use their hands as instruments of control. In police vernacular, this means learning to “lay hands” (a term borrowed from Pentecostal traditions) or going “hands on.” This chapter focuses on two means of using the hands: searching and defensive tactics. It describes how instructors teach recruits to use their hands for touching, manipulating, and grabbing the clothing and flesh of others to sense weapons and contraband. It also examines how recruits are taught to grab, manipulate, twist, and strike others in order to gain control of “unruly” bodies. It concludes by discussing the implications of “touching like a cop” for understanding membership in the police force.

Keywords: touch, habitus, Bourdieu, police, body

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5/25/08: I am driving my patrol car southbound on a narrow, two-lane highway in a small town, in the county I patrol. The town has only 2,000 inhabitants and no services except a grocery store, a bar, and a gas station. At about 3 a.m., I see a man riding his bike down the highway. Hanging from the bike is a white grocery bag containing a red gas canister

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and a rubber piece of tubing. I immediately recall that there has been a rash of gas theft from residents' cars over the past few nights. I also notice that the bike rider has no lights on the bike, a vehicle code violation.

I drive by him, and then turn around and stop him, activating my ambers and my spotlight. He gets off his bike and starts walking over to me. I get out of the car, still on my radio with Dispatch calling out the stop. I tell the guy, “Hey, go stand by my car . . .” As an afterthought, I say, “I don't want you to get whacked by a car, safer in front of my car.” Something didn't feel right and I want distance between myself and the bike rider.

The guy doesn't look like our typical local. He is white, has red hair, a beard, about 5'10,” 190 lb. He looks kind of like a hipster, wearing a blue Dickies jacket and nice black construction jeans. His speech is refined. This is not the kind of guy I have encountered, night after night, in this poor, rural, geographically isolated town. Yet he has a gas canister and siphon hose in his plastic grocery bag. He also keeps reaching into his blue jacket. I say to him, “Hey, you mind keeping your hands out of your pocket?” He says, “Sure. Whatever you like.” I start talking to him:

BL: “What's the gas can for?”

Guy: “My car broke down and I was trying to get to a gas station for gas. All I got is \$5.”

BL: “Ok. So what kind of car do you have?”

Guy: “Toyota Camry.”

BL: “What year?”

[He pauses to think.]

Guy: “1989.”

BL: “So where was the bike?”

Guy: “I had it strapped into the trunk.”

[Reaches into pockets again, like he is checking to see if something is still there. This gets my attention since I had already clearly told him not to.]

BL: Hey. I told you not to put your hands in your pockets. You mind if I search you for weapons?

Guy: Ok.

BL: You have any weapons on you?

Guy: No.

BL: Ok, turn around, put your hands on your head, and interlock your fingers.

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I grab onto the man’s hands, firmly gripping several of his fingers, effectively locking his hands together. I start patting him down. I briskly feel around his waist band. Nothing. I run my hand up and down his shirt, and all I feel is flesh. I move to the jacket. I pat, feeling for anything hard and then I make a grabbing motion with my hands, making sure I don’t miss anything. I get to the outer pockets. I pat and feel something hard in the right. From the pat alone I can’t tell what it is. I know it isn’t good. I grab the man’s hands more firmly, pull him back, widen my legs and bend my knees slightly to get a better center of balance. I then sweep his right leg out to leave him off balance. I make a grabbing motion that bunches the cloth together and reveals something hard, heavy, and metallic, about the size of my hand. My heart rate climbs, and I know that it is a weapon. I plan on pulling it out but first I ask, “What’s in your pocket?” in order to gauge any changes in the man’s reaction. He says, “Uh, brass knuckles.” I pull the brass knuckles out and set them on the hood of my car. Still holding his hands with my left hand, I take out a pair of cuffs and snap them on his wrists. I tell him to sit on the push bars of my patrol car. I ask him, “You planning on using those things on me?” He says, “No, no, they aren’t mine. I just found them outside on the side of the street by that bar ...”

This moment from the field captures the corporeal and sensuous nature of police work. As the encounter unfolds, the suspect and I come into closer and more proximal tactile contact with one another, but this intimate contact is not unstructured or random. It hinges on a unity of sensory potentials unique to policing. The body of a police officer is “always already there” in the face-to-face interactions of police work (Katz 2001; Merleau-Ponty 1962) but with a set of perceptual and actional habits and skills that orient police officers toward others in an occupationally specific way (Bourdieu 1984). Within these interactions, police bodies begin to function even before an officer can interpret, at a symbolic level, the situation at hand.

Introduction: Embodying “Search and Seizure”

In this chapter I take an embodied approach (Bourdieu 1990; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 2010) to what the law calls “search and seizure” by police. *Search and seizure* is a set of legal prescriptions, statutes, and policies enforced by police departments and courts and practiced by police officers in everyday life, in which officers restrain civilians’ freedom of movement and search their bodies and clothing for weapons. To speak of an embodied approach is to say that I focus on the body as a locus of action rather than to treat it as something passive only to be read as a source of symbolic expression. Above all, search and seizure, what police officers colloquially refer to as “laying hands,” is a set of socially patterned bodily acts and perceptual competencies, learned in face-to-face and body-to-body interaction with police academy instructors, peers, and senior officers; it constitutes a core competence of police work (Rubenstein 1973). These embodied acts are also accountable (Heritage 1984; Weider 1974) in that recruits and officers are held accountable for their performances of search and seizure by courts (Fyfe 1981; Waegel

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1984), by citizens and suspects (Rojek, Alpert, and Smith 2012), and by other police officers (Barker 1999; Henry 2004; Hunt 1985; Manning 1997; Rubenstein 1973). I argue that accounting for the occupation-specific *perceptual* and *motoric* competence of policing requires looking at how police bodies are disciplined and trained as well as how specific ways of moving and exploring the social environment, via the vehicle of the body, are correlative of how people, things, space, and relationships are disclosed in the experience of *search and seizure*.

I use ethnography to describe and explain how an officer’s perceptual and motor behaviors are socially patterned into search and seizure—which includes learning techniques of movement and concomitant sensitization and fine discrimination of tactile perception—and how neophyte police recruits learn to competently account for their embodied perceptual activity. I analyze both the settings of body-to-body interaction in which recruits learn how to “lay hands” and the social milieu in which police recruits learn to competently account for their use of the hands and to see how they are potentially accountable to others. In other words, I ethnographically describe the explicit world of talk, accounts, the thousand islands of reprimands, praises, and injunctions to which soon-to-be officers learn what is expected of them as well as the tacit dimension, typically ignored by the policing literature, of how recruits learn to “feel” and “manipulate” in ways that lay bare the objects of searches (e.g., baggies of “dope” or weapons).

The difficulty of being a new police officer is that being a competent police officer requires being able to see and “feel” the world in terms of qualities like how grabbable another person is. And to *see* things as grabbable or touchable, a new officer must *know how* to grab and touch. This means acquiring a tacit knowledge of how and when to enact search and seizure; a *habitus* or matrix of appropriate perceptual or forceful bodily techniques (Mauss 1979) which, I will argue, an officer must possess in order to experience a world full of things that are searchable and seizable in a properly “police-like” way.

Becoming competent as a new police officer requires an attunement to the social logic of bodily co-presence between officer and suspect, especially the way the police officer learns how to use his or her body to control and sense the bodies of other people. In other words, to be a cop, and “grasp” the occupational world of policing, is to *touch like a cop*. I will argue that being able to touch like a cop means incorporating a set of bodily techniques (Mauss 1979), or socially acquired, technical, and socially efficacious movements into the habitual body, what Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*.

This chapter makes the following arguments: (1) The bodily movements and forms of policing are not just correlated to individual traits of police but are similar patterns of movements, by which the bodies of recruits become increasingly homogenized through collective conditioning experiences in the academy. In this sense, police do not have a “shared” culture of searching; rather, individuals acquire a network of competencies to enact searches and seizures based on their unique and individuated experiences of training in a well-structured training milieu with plentiful and timely feedback (Bourdieu 2000; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Thompson 2010). These structures are, on the one hand, symbolic—

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as when a recruit is held to account for a breakdown in bodily conduct—and, on the other hand, they are corporeal, learned in and through the recruits’ structured participation with other performers of “laying hands.” (2) *Search and seizure* is a multimodal and embodied competency, involving training the tactile sensibilities alongside sensitizing one’s visual acuity and olfactory sensitivity. (3) How people and situations “show up” for police officers is a consequence of the kinds of actional gestalts they acquire (skills for exploring clothes with hands and for grabbing, pushing, manipulating, punching, etc.). In other words, action and perception are linked such that police have deeply visceral responses to how they categorize people, in part because they categorize people in terms of the kinds of actions those persons, in given situations, afford.

Search and seizure is high stakes. Not only is it a matter of regular “Fourth Amendment” litigation, as we have seen in the federal court rejections of New York City’s “Stop and Frisk” policies (*Floyd v. City of New York* 2013), it is also the point where officer and community members come into physical contact with one another, and the moment when all involved are most vulnerable, and potential violent conflict is most likely to occur. Given the personal, political, and social stakes in what happens when police “lay hands,” it is worth considering how search and seizure is actually implemented so we can move on to discussions of whether those practices are enacted under fair and unbiased conditions.

Methodology

This chapter draws on my observations from police academies in two large Northern California counties between February 2006 and August 2007: some from my own six months of experience as a recruit in the South Bay Police Academy¹ (SBPA, the academy I graduated from), plus an additional three months of observation at the North Bay Police Academy. SBPA was operated by a regional consortium to deliver basic police academy training at a number of community colleges. The SBPA campus was separate from the community college that administered the training and was located at a military base. The NBPA was administered directly by a large county sheriff’s office on a property owned by the sheriff’s office. Both academies were paramilitary in organization, emphasizing physical fitness but varying in the degree of stress and discipline enacted by the respective cadre toward the recruits. Between SBPA and NBPA, I observed two classes, with thirty-eight and fifty recruits in the respective academy classes, six training cadre (four in the former and two in the latter), and a large number of visiting instructors. Much to my surprise, I found little difference between the practices, talk, and organization of daily life at either academy. As a result, I will not focus on the differences between the academies, since they had little bearing on “search and seizure.” The administration, training cadre, and recruits all knew I was a graduate student and that I was writing about policing. I began work as a police officer and then as a deputy sheriff, and continued taking notes from April 2007 through June 2010 and, like at the academy, my colleagues all knew that I was a sociologist and that I was writing about my observations about life on patrol.

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I supplement experiential data and observations with interviews and an analysis of police academy learning materials. In total, I spent approximately 1,500 hours in the field making observations on police academies. During my fieldwork, I documented my observations of recruits, instructors, and recruit training officers (RTOs or “cadre,” the drill instructors of the police academy), as well as my own physical and emotional experiences. I have gathered over 500 pages of field notes, nearly a thousand photographs, hours of video, and many audiotaped interviews. Together, these compiled data have helped me to question fundamental assumptions about studying police culture and police violence.

What follows is, to use Wacquant’s (2003) terminology, a “carnal ethnography”—a study not only *of* the body but *from* the body. I use my own embodied encounters in the police academy as one tool, among others, to reveal the moral, mental, and physical dimensions of becoming a cop. Gender, race, class, athleticism, and more all influence recruits’ bodily experiences of training; for the purposes of this chapter, however, I focus on the generic transformations that *all* recruits must undergo to become probationary police officers who produce practices recognizable as “search and seizure.”

Overview of Search and Seizure

Generally, police officers are taught that there is a seizure whenever a police officer stops an individual and restrains that person’s freedom to walk away, and a Terry “search” occurs when an officer makes a careful exploration of the outer surfaces of a person’s clothing to attempt to find weapons. These searches and seizures are routine parts of a police officer’s day.

Police practices of search and seizure are governed by constitutional law (including both the Fourth Amendment and subsequent case law) and further limited by state law and departmental policies. The Fourth Amendment aims to protect citizens from “unreasonable searches and seizures,” but it does not say *how* to do searches, why, or when. Local policies restrict when searches or seizures may occur. The Fourth Amendment and other case law (e.g., *Terry v. Ohio*, 392 US 1 [1968]²; *US v. Neff*, 300 F.3d 1217 [10th Cir. 2002]³; *Arizona v. Johnson*, 000 US 07-1122 [2009]) make accountable when, why, and how police officers put their hands on people to search them for weapons and contraband. In justifying a particular search or seizure, an officer must be able to point to specific and articulable facts (that which can be seen, smelled, heard, and touched), which, taken together with rational inferences from those facts, reasonably warrant that intrusion. Police officers are taught that intrusions upon the body of another must be based on more than hunches, and so officers learn how to articulate perceptual objects in ways accountable to the courts.

Of course, an officer’s decision to search is not always the product of rational or legal processes. There has been reinvigoration of concern, especially since the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement that police officer judgements to search are influenced by a variety of psychosocial factors that lead to discriminatory outcomes for different social groups (Baumgartner et

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al. 2017). Two prominent psychosocial factors are frequently given to explain why racialized social groups experience disparate rates of searches: organizational policies and officer bias. On the one hand, many police departments have strong imperatives for officers to be proactive and initiate investigative stops (“stop and frisk” is an example). Such policies might aim to show the agency is “tough on crime” or to raise productivity numbers, arrests statistics, and so on to demonstrate to various constituencies the agency’s performance and value (Epp et al. 2014; Lande and Mangels 2017). On the other hand, some observers of racially disparate rates of police contact suggest that officers’ judgments of suspiciousness, risk, or threat, which often trigger a search, are biased: consciously, in the form of racial profiling, or unconsciously, via negative and widespread stereotypes based on race or ethnicity (James et al. 2016).

There are a variety of factors, such as organizational imperatives to conduct investigative stops, that influence a police officer’s decision to stop someone, and those factors might, as Epp et al. (2014) suggest, result in poor people and people of color being stopped at disproportionately high rates. Another line of research suggests that officers might hold stereotypes of criminal behavior that link skin color to judgments of aggression, threat, or violence, and this might cause officers to overestimate threat and conduct unnecessary searches and seizures (James et al. 2016). However, not all stops progress to searches. Searches mark an important stage in the back-and-forth sequence of exchanges between police and individuals during encounters and are separable from the initiating judgments and actions that open the encounter. In other words, racial disparities in outcomes of searches won’t likely be well understood by looking at the decision to search alone. As this chapter will demonstrate, officers who decide to “lay hands” on someone they have stopped learn to use specific bodily clues—suspicious gestures, unusual bulges in clothing, smells, and so on—that are far more accurate predictors of threat or concealment than skin color. In this way, professional training in “laying hands” aims to retrain officers’ perceptual abilities, replacing naïve (and sometimes biased) assumptions about who represents a threat with better data about where—and with whom—threat actually resides.

Indeed, studies of implicit bias demonstrate some interesting and often counterintuitive results that reinforce the findings of this ethnographic study. In particular, implicit bias experiments of police officers versus college students (i.e., novices) decisions to shoot black or white armed/unarmed subjects in simulations (Correll et al. 2014; James et al. 2016) show that even though target skin color impacts officer response times, officers seem immune to errors, are faster to make decisions, and are more accurate. Correll and his colleagues suggest that even though novices (college students) and police officers show a prepotency to shoot (e.g., shorter reaction times for armed black targets), officers immediately overcome the tendency through cognitive control, which minimizes bias. This cognitive control develops as especially patrol officers have to “assess every person in every situation” (Correll et al. 2014), and this seems to diminish the power of skin color as a relevant cue. More recently, James et al. (2018) explicitly tested how skin color, at-

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tire, and demeanor interact as threat signals and found only hostile and confrontational behavior caused officers’ escalation of force.

In my study, I offer a description of the perceptual and motoric socialization that appears geared to produce the aforementioned results. Police officers must learn to recognize patterns in what they see, hear, feel, and smell that accurately signal hidden contraband (whether weapon, drugs, etc.). As Sacks (1972) put it, police are “occupational specialists on inferring the probability of criminality from the appearances of persons present in public places” (1967, 282). Officers learn to use the movements of their hands not only to control the movements of individuals but to create a safe space in which hand manipulations of clothing can produce, that is, detect, hidden perceptual objects. This bodily instruction takes place within a symbolic and moral environment that links accuracy to obligations to their own and other’s safety. In specific regards to searches, officers must recognize not only reliable visual, olfactory, and tactile patterns to discern whether or not a search should be conducted (e.g., feeling a bulge in the appendix area of the waistband) but detect anomalies (e.g., a bulky warm jacket on an otherwise hot day) and know how these cues vary by constantly changing context (e.g., time of day, weather, season, location).⁴ I also want to note that during the time I conducted this study, skin color, ethnicity, and gender were explicitly discussed as unlawful bases for conducting searches as well as being unreliable for determining threat.

Search and Seizure as Perceptual Competency

“Search and seizure” has its carnal embodiment in body-to-body contact, in hands on flesh and clothing (e.g., Rubenstein 1973). *Seizing* is a particular way of grasping a body, and it is a socially instituted somatic knowledge—a knowledge embedded in the way officers grab fingers, the way they hold bodies and body parts with their hands, the placement of those hands on pressure points, the ability to feel a tensing opponent, and engagement in a strike or a kick of a foot to unbalance someone. *Searching* is also a bodily affair: a sensual tactile *exploration* of another’s body, where that body is encountered as an indeterminate and textured field of exploration, full of warm and sometimes sweaty flesh, tense limbs, parts to be manipulated, moved, revealed, and dodged. Taken together, “search and seizure” is a series of actions, reactions, and embodied responses that officers can adapt and align to ever-changing circumstances and conditions (no body and no situation encountered by an officer is ever exactly the same).

For example, a handgun concealed in the waistband is easy to miss for a new police recruit. New recruits typically “pat” the waistband area to feel for hidden objects. But this form of holding the hand and the patting motion do not do a good job of revealing perceptible features of a hidden gun. For example, this patting motion with a flat hand is not very sensitive to hardness because of the broad surface area of the hand. Nor is it sensitive to the edges of a hidden handgun because the flat hand isn’t pliant enough to get caught on a handgun’s hard edges. A pat is, however, less invasive than what recruits will eventually learn, which looks more like hand scrunching. Moreover, how an officer

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searches will vary depending on the clothing and body shape of the person searched. But a novice police officer is not sensitive yet to these variations and cannot yet use his or her hands to feel like an experienced officer. It is only with the directed experience of searching for simulated weapons across a large variety of simulated encounters (typically with other recruits of different bodily morphologies, wearing different types of clothes, etc.) that novice officers acquire the background tactile knowledge by which they can search accurately.

These various efforts by cadre to teach hand formations and movements—to lay hands—constitute the “body work” (Wacquant 1995) of search and seizure, whereby heterogeneous bodies are made relatively standardized. Such learning requires police to acquire a bodily *know-how* as well as a social aesthetic unique to policing, wherein police officers develop unique ways of moving through the world via the vehicle of their bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Police officers spend a good deal of their time in situations of bodily co-presence with others. In specific situations, with specific alignments of bodies and skills, some people will come to be experienced as strikable or searchable to an officer. In these moments, bodies that police officers encounter on the street are perceived almost immediately as meaningful for searching activities that will reveal possibly hidden meanings under jackets, the running of thumbs in waistlines to check for weapons, or in feeling pulses to detect the influence of controlled substances. The police officer’s world is not only a visual world but a tactile world: bodies, surfaces, and things *seen* by an officer are colored by how they may be felt (e.g., in a tense moment with a suspect, the suspect’s wrist suddenly stands out visually to me as grabbable, and urgently so).

In other words, the detection of “deviance” in police work is shot through with a sensual, tactile, and (often) olfactory element that is crucial to the mastery of policing as a profession. While police work has been called “dirty work” (Van Maanen 1973) because officers have to deal with the stigmatized sectors of society, this status also derives from the up-close, sweaty (and sometimes smelly), body-to-body contact that frequently characterizes the job. Sustained ethnographic observation reveals that a police officer’s world contains sights, sounds, touches, and smells that are already rich in meaning and potential for action to the police officer in ways quite different from other groups.

Teaching new police recruits to attune their bodily habits of movement and their perceptual sensitivities to a rich world of sensory experience is one of the greatest difficulties of becoming a police officer. But this kind of sensory attunement, that is, learning to touch and perceive competently in ways that conflict with widely held norms of social etiquette, is not unique to policing. Sensory and bodily socialization arise, sometimes quite intentionally, in a variety of social settings. One such setting is the religious sphere, for example the tradition of charismatic healing (Csordas 1997; from where I and police take the terms “laying hands”). An occupational analogy to learning to touch as a police officer can readily be found in medical settings where doctors and nurses must also learn to touch and palpitate the bodies of others in professionally competent ways (Draper 2014;

Goodwin 2010; Underman 2011, 2015). In the examples that follow, I show how police recruits learned to manage their own bodies and the bodies of others through both ideological/moral and physical retraining.

Symbolic Economies of the Police Body: Learning the Value of “Laying Hands” and “Going Hands On”

Relating to the Hands of Others

Before police recruits even begin their defensive tactics or search-and-control training, they go through a phase of learning why searching and seizing matters as well as learning to recognize when such techniques should be applied. In the first days of the police academy, police recruits begin learning about their hands in terms of the hands of others. Police often have a fascination with hands—where they are, what is in them, and what they are doing (Rubenstein 1973).

Ways of approaching hands are imparted through ongoing pedagogical labor, starting at the academy and involving both peers and instructors. Recruits are taught that hands reveal intentions that often are at variance with what a suspect is saying or otherwise doing—they “leak” (Ekman 2009). Since most recruits won’t have had some prior exposure to hidden dangers, they first encounter them through stories and injunctions. In the first week of the academy, one recruit received an email from an officer, which she then recirculated, with the following advice:

Develop a “Hand Fetish.”

MAKE YOURSELF watch the hands before you even look at the face. They can only hurt you with their hands. If you don’t see two empty PALMS, then assume they have something in it [sic]. I can’t overemphasize this—if I have someone run from a car stop, I STILL look at his or her hands before the overall appearance for the description. If I get out at a domestic, when the people come out of the house, I’ve seen every hand there before I’ve seen their face[s]. Many experienced officers can tell you that they’ve approached a violator’s vehicle, made the “Hi, I need to see your license please” spiel, and (maybe unconsciously) watched their hands so closely, they then drop the gaze to the hands and it’s someone they know. I have done this countless times. Develop a “hand fetish”! If you have trouble getting in this habit, watch “Surviving Edged Weapons” once, and think about that butcher knife penetrating and deflating your lung, and as you hit the barn floor, you’ve lost 50% of your strength.

Such graphic testimonials were routine, and they were found in everything from the texts we studied to the videos and pictures that instructors or cadre showed during classes. They were typically deployed to sensitize a recruit’s perception of the Other’s body.

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“Hands are weapons,” we were told. “It’s the hands that kill you, not their eyes.” The full meaning of this email is only apparent in the context of its use in honing the visual perception of recruits and eventually linking that perception to the activities of the hand. Another instructor describes, to the SBPA class, that learning to attend to hands (as opposed to the face) may upset recruits’ routine modes of domestic or spousal interactions.

Women usually are better at making eye contact and listening. But we teach you to watch hands and behavior, to see if a person is going to start fighting with you. So husbands always start complaining that when they come home with problems, that their police wives no longer look like they care! Trust me ladies, you are going to leave here being more like men than you want. But it is necessary for the job. You have to be suspicious, watch hands, and stand your ground to be a good cop.

In the early weeks of the police academy, statements like these provide recruits’ first exposures to the trade-specific competence of a police officer, defined in terms of a perceptual vigilance. Here, perceived gender differences are expected to be homogenized and transformed into a specifically “police” manner of relating bodily to others. Such statements also mark how that perceptual adeptness, though appropriate to policing, is distinctly out of line with civilian expectations (especially for women). That is, such lessons also are lessons of social distinction and difference, marking and ritualizing new recruits as members of a distinctive social order.

Police recruits relate to others, not by guessing the intentions of others (i.e., hypothesizing about the mental state of the Other) but by perceptually attending to what is immediately available for exploration. A defensive tactics instructor demonstrated and articulated how hands “leak” intentions. “If I am speaking to you compliantly, telling you I am going with the program, lots of ‘yes sirs,’ but you see my hands balling up, knuckles white, or I bring my hands up toward my head, where my arms are now loaded for a strike, you might want to start getting worried and maybe think about getting me in restraints. Probably what I am doing is trying to soothe you with words, to get your guard down, so I can strike you with your guard down.”

Throughout the training process, instructors and RTOs reinforced this lesson, emphasizing the need to watch the hands of others in the context of what is being said and done, and in the context of what was said and done in prior moments. Thus, just as recruits must acquire the proper bodily techniques for using their hands, they also have to acquire a refined perceptual schemata capable of constituting certain behaviors as suspicious and threatening, and this is often revealed by movements of the hands.

Moral Injunctions to Lay Hands

When defensive tactics instructors teach recruits *how* to search, they also have to retool recruits’ sensibilities about proximity and closeness to others (Hall 1966; Kendon 1990).

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One way this is done is by suggesting the practical, moral, and social consequences of not using the hands well.

Instructor F. from M. Police Department and Instructor S. from the S. County Sheriff’s Office teach us how to do full searches. F. tells us to be aggressive in our searching: “*You can’t be afraid to touch people. Don’t just glide your hands over them.*” F. demonstrates on S.; he pats and grabs at S.’s clothes, bunching it up and manipulating it until he is satisfied that there are no objects. He does this all over his body, including the groin area. F. says, “If you have done your search properly, you should know if your suspect is hanging to the left or right.” [There is masked laughter from the class.] He continues: “That is how thorough you need to be. If you’re not, you will have some pissed-off deputies at the jail when they find that you didn’t find all the weapons. But if you are out working West county, and you have no backup or cover and you have no jail nearby, you are going to have the suspect in your car for half an hour or more. For your own safety you need to make sure that he is clear.”

What F. and S. try to convey is the need to overcome most recruits’ visceral discomfort with touching a stranger’s body. Knowing “if your suspect is hanging to the left or right” is a sign of competence that recruits eventually begin to adjust to with practice. The instructors imply that continuing lack of competence, especially if it derives from personal distaste, will have social consequences for officers’ professional relationships with correctional staff and sheriffs’ deputies at jails. It will also have consequences “for your own safety.”

This type of morality is situational and grounded in tacit expectations about what interactants (correctional staff and police officers) expect from one another in handing off prisoners. For example, Instructor S. begins a segment by articulating a moral order specific to policing: “It’s important that, while we are practicing today, you do everything right. When you are doing searches, you are going to be going places that you find uncomfortable. To do this job, you are going to have to get over that. If you give me a guy that you say you have searched but you didn’t feel around his crotch because you don’t want to and I get shot because you missed a gun, guess who is responsible? *You are!*”

The moral violations articulated here outline the types of “trust” that officers presume about each other’s competency in searching and seizing. Trust is taken for granted because most of the work of prisoner transportation and the “handing off” of prisoners could not take place if members of law enforcement did not already expect the work of searching to have been completed. In this regard, the ability to competently search a prisoner or suspect is a moral problem to the extent that such searches are taken as necessary and presumed as part of ongoing interactions between officers and other staff.

The broader problem of cultivating a willingness to enter into physical engagement with others—especially violent conflict—is addressed in similar moral terms. The most regular form this takes is the “war story.” In these, instructors describe rookie officers, fresh from

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the academy, who are fired or resign after their first violent encounters. For example, one police officer, during defensive tactics training, told the academy class:

I had a new trainee. Did great in defensive tactics at the academy, was a black belt in judo. But when I got into a fight while he was in the third phase of his field training program, he just stood there, frozen, while I wrestled with this suspect. The other officers on scene jumped in immediately, but not my trainee. It’s one thing to fight in a safe place like the *dojo* [martial arts training gym], but it doesn’t mean you are ready to jump into a street fight. The trainee resigned after I explained that his conduct was completely unacceptable for a police officer. If he hadn’t, he would have been failed out of field training by me!

Stories like this make clear what is expected of recruits and suggest standards of action in dangerous situations. They perform the triple job of forecasting what recruits can expect during field training, informing them of the consequences associated with unwillingness to fight, and prescribing a proper protocol of action across varying contexts in ways that departmental policies, legislation, and constitutional law cannot. Ultimately, the moral lessons conveyed are not simply attitudes, values, or expectations, but a particular tempo of action: recruits are to act unhesitatingly when a danger presents itself, not wait until the situation has escalated.

Overcoming Taboo

It is one thing for cadre to demand that recruits touch others as a moral obligation. However, if recruits are to “lay hands” and meet the moral demands of their occupation, it is ultimately they who must overcome their visceral distaste for getting close to people and violating spatial norms for interaction. In so doing, recruits must confront gendered, sexualized, and above all bodily taboos surrounding interpersonal touching in everyday life.

Learning to “take the person physically in hand” (Rubenstein 1973, 290) takes time. During training, the experience of learning to “lay hands” is saturated with embarrassment, stuttering, blushing, and mumbled apologies to those being searched. For example, a male recruit having his waist area searched by a female recruit shouted, “Hey now! We don’t know each other *that way!*” Another cadet reacted similarly as I checked his legs and groin area for “contraband” during training. As I patted him down with the back of my hand, he shouted, “Wow, Lande, what you trying to go? *Lande just molested me!*” Recruits must overcome “civilized” (Elias 1939) sensibilities that place strict limits on how, with whom, and when it is appropriate to touch others. Those limits are internalized, according to Elias, as feelings of shame and embarrassment. In the police academy, the touching of bodies often is articulated as a violation of sexual mores, such as in jocular accusations of being “molested.” These feelings, expressions, and jokes centered on the shame or embarrassment of touch are also something nurses and doctors learn to overcome, often through similar use of simulated or role-play examinations, for example, using gynecological teaching assistants to facilitate instruction of pelvic exams (Underman 2015). In other words, in addition to the investment in bodily work to hone professional

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tactile competency, police officers and medical professionals alike must invest in emotional work that bounds these socially unusual forms of touch.

Part of what makes touching so viscerally uncomfortable is that recruits have already learned habits for how to touch men and women. How it *feels* to touch someone—of one’s own sex or a different sex—conditions how recruits initially search other. The search-and-seizure training process is almost always awkward when male recruits have to search women. Routine strategies for managing proximity between men and women create special problems to overcome, requiring gender-specific bodily techniques for searching. Instructors frequently express concern that male officers will be too afraid to search women out of fear of lawsuits for sexual harassment or misconduct. So even though at times cadre warn recruits of the legal liability of lawsuits, “feeling rules” (normative injunctions about how a person *ought* to feel, Hochschild 1983) are invoked when recruits are still expected to bracket their worry about litigation when other “officer safety” concerns take prominence. Instructor S. explained:

When you practice with women, don’t do it half assed. I am not saying you grab their breasts or touch their groin, but bring your hand in between their cleavage, that’s where weapons are likely to be. You should be able to tell what kind of bra they are wearing. There are also techniques for checking women’s breasts without violating them. Have them pinch their shirt and bra so that any objects fall free. To check their crotch area, slide your hand around the belt area, check for guns. You don’t have to pat them down the same way as a male. In fact, your department may have policies that prohibit you [from doing so]. But the fact is, you aren’t always going to have a woman officer around and you have to guard yourself, and that means conducting a thorough search. When you do a search, I don’t just want you brushing your hand over the person’s clothes. You need to pat and then grab. You pat to feel for hardness or sharp objects and then, if safe, you grab the clothes and manipulate the clothing to feel for missed objects like small knives, screwdrivers, etc.

The “feeling rules” recruits learn from their instructors dictate that visceral discomfort with intimate searches does not excuse an inadequate search. Recruits also learn, through small degradation ceremonies, that if they try do a search “half assed” that they may be chastised and corrected.

To help recruits manage their discomfort, instructors provide them with ways of using their hands that are considered less offensive. A.L., a white female police recruit in her mid-twenties (now with a small city police department) describes how she learned to move past the embarrassment associated with taboos on searching another’s body:

It is real awkward at first. You just don’t go around touching people every day and you aren’t used to touching people’s crotches! I remember when we first started practicing searches that I just wanted it to be over with, and I would speed through the search and miss stuff, because it made me feel so uncomfortable. What made it get better was being given some *order* in which to do the searches.

Then, I was so much less focused on the fact that I am touching someone and more focused on “am I searching them in the right sequence.” Like during the academy, we learned this “S” style of searching where you swept down the front of a person in an “S” shape. [We also learned] to break the body down into quadrants to search. What mattered was having some way of doing the search, and that made it much easier for me.

To overcome the awkwardness and displeasure of searching taboo areas of the body, A.L., like many recruits, focused on the search technique rather than on the person being searched. These practices were then repeated until they became routinized and thorough searches simply seemed necessary.

Above all, whether examining how recruits learn to look at hands, how they learn to feel hands, to perceive threats, or even the physical and affective dimensions that color touching and searching, becoming a police officer requires a sentimental education of sorts. That is, to be a police officer is to participate in a range of situations (discourses, cadre demonstrations, and role-playing exercises) that, over six months, *r-tools* how recruits see and feel and, in turn, affects the content of their perception and emotions about their social world.

Inculcating Practices: “Laying Hands” and “Going Hands On” as Bodily Techniques

Exhortations to engage suspects fully and without reluctance take place in the midst of continuous bodily training: physical drills, exercise, scenarios, and so on. In this context, engagement entails demonstrations (by instructors), imitation (by recruits), and continuous visual, tactile, and verbal feedback (provided by instructors and recruits alike). At the police academy, interactive scenarios with role players were used to manage an increased acceptance of and familiarity with violent conflict and close bodily contact, translating the moral obligation to act into physical readiness for such action.

Cadre use demonstrations and scenarios to create a visceral sense of what recruits ought to expect once they leave the academy and start working the streets. As such, scenarios can be nerve wracking, filled with adrenaline, and, frequently, real pain. The form, frequency, and content of scenarios take recruits’ deliberate practice of search and seizure and put it in a social process that is the attenuated form of the “reality” of the streets, at least as cadre see it. As Hoffman puts it in his study of how boxers prepare for bouts, “To fully grasp the sociology of events or performances, one needs to look at how people prepare for them. Simulations are a means by which groups index and simplify what aspects of the future they should worry about. “The greater the risk and consequence attached to an event or performance, the more likely one is to find an elaborate range of simulations used to prepare for it” (Hoffman 2006, 189). In a similar way, learning the procedures or rules of searching is of little value unless recruits can also index a practice or grasp the urgency of searching “well.” Scenarios are used to sensitize recruits to hidden dangers by

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showing them how their existing perceptual procedures for detecting bulges, bumps, hardness, pointiness, and so on may reveal hidden dangers. A wide range of props are involved, including plastic imitation firearms of different sizes, plastic imitation knives of different shapes and size, and even plastic baggies with imitation contraband meant to simulate the textures of marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamine. These training forms offer recruits the opportunity to link newly acquired schemes of action and perception in contexts that capture salient features of “real-life” practice.

First, Instructor T. demonstrates the proper feeling technique, using Instructor S. as his suspect. When I was standing and waiting, I saw S. hiding all kinds of knives and small guns on his body. T. is now trying to find them. He demonstrates his feeling technique by exaggerating his movements. He goes to the pockets, palm down, thumb at the top edge of the pocket. He then grabs upwards on the pocket, bunching it up and using the whole palm to feel. He then says, “The wrong way to do it is like this.” He then puts his hand sideways and makes a scrunching movement where he only feels with his fingers and touches a much smaller surface area. “But this is the way that most people grab.”

To teach us the importance of conducting a thorough search, F. divides us into “officers” and “suspects.” Officers are taken outside while S. and F. stay with the suspects. S. pulls out a bag of “goodies,” as he calls it, filled with prohibited weapons, including knives concealed as pens, combs, and belts. We hide all of these objects on our bodies. There are small knives that fit in our shoes, socks, and underwear, dangling knives that are tied to the inside of the pants and hang down by the crotch area where officers are less likely to be thorough. Adrian is also given a knife sheath to wear on his arm, under a long-sleeved shirt. The officers are then called in and told to conduct their search.

S. explains some rules. He says, “Just so you understand that this is deadly serious business, there will be consequences for mistakes and for being sloppy. I am going to PT you [i.e., order you to do physical training] every time you make a mistake. So if you miss one object, I will have you do grass drills to punish you. If you miss more, I am going to PT you till you really do hurt.”

Daniel does my search. He is fairly thorough, but I am wearing the knife belt. He checks around my belt but does not take it off to discover a knife built into the belt buckle. When Instructor B. comes and evaluates us, he remarks to Daniel, “You have to remember that anything can be used as a weapon or contain a weapon. You missed this belt right here. *You could be dead right now! Check everything.*”

S. has everyone who missed an object go outside and PT for about five minutes. Sweaty and tired, we come back in and do the scenario over and over again until the entire class is more or less aggressively searching and almost no items are missed. (10/8/06)

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At the end of academy training, recruits are presented with scenarios, populated by unknown role players, where they have to perform what they have learned in situations that approximate the patterns, processes, and dangers of “reality.” During one of the final scenarios, recruits are dispatched to a “suspicious” person loitering behind a closed business at night. When recruits come upon the person and find him playing with the rear door, those that do not keep track of hands, do not safely control the person with their hands (seizure), and then perform a competent search find themselves either being failed in the scenario by the evaluators or being painfully shot by a Simunitions (a colored and clay-like projectile propelled by gun powder from a real gun) from a hidden firearm. More important, failure to locate the weapon during the evaluation scenarios is sufficient to fail the scenario evaluations and, hence, to fail out of the police academy. As such, assertiveness and diligence in conducting searches, when able, during final scenario testing, are a must for entry into the police profession.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the police academy, recruits are exposed to a new world of touch where they learn the value of being able to grab and palpitate well. Being able to coordinate action and perception through the hands is what it takes to be a worthy member of the police world. But it is not enough to know that police value the skilled use of the hands as a form of control and a moral obligation (i.e., officer safety). We must also understand how such valued use of the body is enacted and constituted. This chapter has described the social reorganization and education of police recruits’ bodies as they master techniques of *searching and seizing*. When recruits enter the police academy, they are expected to learn how to touch, grab, and strike (*search and seize*), manipulating and exploring their world through the vehicle of their bodies. Search and seizure is thus enacted, not as a set of juridical principles or rules to be followed, but as dispositions to act, feel, and perceive accurately objects otherwise hidden from their civilian counterparts. As a result of their education, police do not come to know “others” (suspects and citizens) simply by cognitive classification. Instead, recruits learn how to physically *connect* and *engage* others in the context of ongoing and shifting situations.

As this chapter illustrates, understanding search and seizure requires us to go beyond external accounts of how “search and seizure” is structured in law or departmental policy to an internal analysis of the mundane details of drilling, scenarios, war stories, admonishments, and praise that inculcate skilled ways of deploying the hands. In doing so, we can account for how recruits come to feel the world differently as they try to meet the moral and professional demands to act in an appropriate, “police-like” fashion.

I came to understand how these police bodies were created through a unique method: carnal ethnography. This method involves the active use of the body of the ethnographer not only as an instrument of observation but as an organism open to modification through participation in the process under study, and it allows us to reveal the frequently tacit relational processes through which bodies and selves are constructed.

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A focus on the lived experience of tension and vulnerability that must be managed during searches has meant researchers and policymakers have missed a key understanding of how these intimate encounters can explode into violence. Questions about how people come to be seen as searchable and how searches are successfully or unsuccessfully conducted are missed if we only focus on discourse and deliberative thought (Summers-Effler et al. 2015). To change the outcomes of searches, especially to make them safer for all involved, we must grasp how and why officers search, how officers close the distance with another person, and how they maintain a felt degree of control so as to mitigate perceived risk. Consider what it must take for officers to choose to get close to someone they believe has a weapon and search that person.

Throughout this chapter I have emphasized that search and seizure is a skill that can be performed with varying degrees of expertise. It is a perceptual skill and indeed an execution of emotional self-control. If we wish to reduce the number of unnecessary searches and seizures, this study suggests that policymakers and, indeed, police departments themselves take the notion of expertise more seriously. The search-and-seizure training I observed focused extensively on improving recruits' ability to detect hidden objects. Much of the training officers receive in the academy and later in their careers during in-service training, only haphazardly, through thousands of fragmented drills, scenarios, and “war stories” aims at improving accuracy. In fact, I would describe the police academy's focus on accuracy during searches as near obsessive at times when it comes to officer safety.

Yet training could benefit from a much more highly rationalized system of training in searches, one that builds on an understanding of what leads to expert performance and validates methods for speeding up acquisition of expertise in conducting searches. There is evidence that experimental research and interviews can be used to identify reliable cues to detect the carrying of concealed weapons (Meehan and Strange 2015). Identifying objectively reliable and observable visual and tactile cues is a prerequisite for developing training to improve the perceptual skills involved in search and seizure. Such information can be integrated into training simulators (computer/video based), short search drills, and training scenarios (role plays). In any case, such training could improve the chance officers will attend to relevant signals rather than to unreliable or unlawful cues, such as skin color or gender. Further, being sensitive to false or unreliable signals saves individuals from unnecessary and potentially intrusive searches. In other words, training aimed at facilitating the perceptual expertise should decrease the likelihood that some groups will face unnecessary and intrusive bodily encounters with police while others are spared. I have argued elsewhere that training interventions focused on improving expertise, not just mitigating bias or error, is critical to improving police performance (Klein et al. 2015), and it is no different when discussing performance during a search.

I have shown, elsewhere, that even simple, low-fidelity scenario training focused on cue detection as part of situational judgement tasks can improve judgment and decision making in law enforcement situations (Halverson et al. 2015; Klein et al. 2015). Specifically, such training can improve pattern recognition of *relevant* cues for specific tasks and im-

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prove the sense-making process whereby individuals understand how cues are related to one another in meaningful ways. It is possible that similar training focused on linking relevant cues to good legal and investigative reasons could improve the quality of officer judgements about whether or not a situation calls for a search.⁵

Another implication of this research is the emphasis on searches as an entanglement of corporeal beings. Searches are felt as intimate, awkward, and tense, and they regularly induce feelings of vulnerability among everyone involved. During my research, I documented countless instances of the emotion work officers do to manage their feelings of awkwardness and vulnerability during searches. What I did not appreciate until several years into my career was the absence of emotion work geared to managing the emotions of those being searched. What I have since learned is that this is dangerous and has clear consequences for officer safety and civilian safety. I learned this the hard way by finding myself in fights caused by insufficient understanding of how experiences of vulnerability and shame, especially in public, by those being searched can trigger violence. Worse, much of the time this is preventable.

This insight offers a significant practical implication for police training. When doctors touch their patients, they do so in a manner that is intrusive but accompanied by a high degree of trust. Officers also touch people in a way that is intrusive but without the accompanying trust. As a consequence, even as officers become minimally competent in conducting searches, they often are not taught the basic social tact necessary to make searches more predictable, consensual, and less violating for those being searched. This too is a skill (Bayley and Garofalo 1989) and must change. One way to do that is to better appreciate social dynamics of searches that entwine the emotions and bodies of police and civilians; otherwise we will continue to struggle ineffectively against the twin crises of police–civilian violence and widespread mistrust of the police.

Police training could and should teach officers some basic social competencies to integrate into their search practices. The author, along with other law enforcement practitioners and researchers such as Jonathan Wender, have implemented just such a training, “T3: Tact, Tactics and Trust,” with the support of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (<https://www.bja.gov/programs/valor.html>). This training goes well beyond the emphasis on accuracy, safety, and control traditionally emphasized by police training and adds a focus on the social management of police–civilian encounters. For example, officers are taught to frame and explain searches to those being searched. Individuals being searched are often caught off guard by a search or may have prior trauma causing touch by untrusted others to be deeply triggering. Individuals may not know why they are being searched or if the officer has the right to conduct a search. When an officer provides a cognitive framework for what is occurring and an explanation of why, the individuals searched aren’t just left in the position of having the search “done to them.” Officers are also taught to provide clear verbal instructions and even to ask subjects if they have questions regarding the search about to occur. Sometimes a civilian just having their concerns heard is enough to dissipate the conflictual tension that might turn to violence. Officers also learn about the

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importance of “face work,” the work of impression management to minimize risk of shame, humiliation, and loss of face that can occur during police searches.

As simple as this sounds, this concern for the emotions, understanding, and well-being of others is often left out of search-and-seizure training. Such basic courtesies and interactions can make searches less alarming and violating, reduce social friction, ameliorate feelings of shame or humiliation, and otherwise humanize a contact that is likely unwanted and intrusive. Most important, it makes searches safer for everyone involved. These training implications, gleaned from close examination of the bodily education officers receive in training, do not resolve issues of discriminatory outcomes. However, they do suggest ways of mitigating some of the social harms that will occur when searches, inevitably, must occur.

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Notes:

(¹) All academies, departments, and names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

(²) An officer can briefly detain a person, based upon reasonable suspicion of criminal activity, long enough to dispel the suspicion or to allow it to rise to the level of probable cause for an arrest. The officer is also permitted to do a limited “frisk” search of the person without a warrant. Before the officer can frisk search the subject, he or she must (1) have articulable facts that the person could be armed with a weapon; (2) limit the search to pat searching the outer garments of the suspect to feel for objects that might be weapons; (3) only reach inside the clothing after feeling such objects.

(³) This case law established that police officers can detain, in hand restraints or at gunpoint, persons whom there is a reasonable belief pose a danger to the officer’s safety (James et al. 2016).

(⁴) It should be noted that criminologists, sociologists, and economists have also looked at “hit rates” (i.e., accuracy) to determine whether or not there is bias in police decisions to stop and search (for an excellent review, see Harcourt 2004). These studies look at aggregated accuracy, that is, across a population of officers, for the rate of successful searches where something (e.g., drugs) is located. These studies do not speak to expertise or the issue of whether or not some officers have higher “hit rates” than others, how hit rates change over the career of an officer, why there is variation between officers, or even if accuracy can be improved.

(⁵) Another similar study reduced racial bias in applications of force in training environments by using high-fidelity simulators where suspect race and presence of a weapon were presented as statistically unrelated in scenarios (Plant et al. 2005).

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Polis Solutions