



Why cops kill: The psychology of police deadly force encounters



Laurence Miller*

Royal Palm Medical Centre, 1599 NW 9th Avenue, Suite 206, Boca Raton, FL 33486, United States

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ABSTRACT

The use of any kind of physical force is by far the exception in most police–citizen interactions, and *deadly force encounters* are rarer still. Police officers use deadly force when they believe they have no choice in order to protect human life—their own or that of other citizens. Any force, however mild or severe, that goes beyond the level necessary to preserve life, prevent injury, or safely control the scene constitutes *excessive force*. Police officers characteristically restrain their use of force with citizens, sometimes at the cost of their own safety. However, certain types of attitudes, personalities, and job experiences may render some officers more prone to use force in police–citizen encounters, and certain emotional and behavioral features of police–citizen confrontations may eventuate in a *tipping point*, where force is then deployed. Special circumstances may attend *suicide by cop* incidents, where disturbed citizens manipulate officers into killing them. Altered patterns of thought and perception often occur in the minds of officers during a deadly force encounter, and the aftermath of such an incident may include both administrative and psychological consequences. Certain racial and ethnic groups—of both police and citizens—may be disproportionately represented in use of force incidents. However, these are mainly related to the demographics of criminal behavior and officer assignment in various communities, and there is no evidence that police systematically target members of certain ethnic groups for more forceful confrontations, unless the situation itself requires it. Certain features of selection, education, training, discipline, and supervision of police officers can help weed out bad cops, improve police–citizen communication, and further reduce the incidence of use of force, including deadly force, encounters.

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* Tel.: +1 561 392 8881.

E-mail address: docmilphd@aol.com.

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1. Introduction

Every time we dial 911 for a law enforcement crisis, we expect that our emergency will be taken seriously and handled competently, due to the skill and dedication of the majority of police officers who perform their jobs competently and honorably every day. Historically, however, some segments of American society have come to see their relationship with local law enforcement as adversarial, and this has been highlighted recently by intensely publicized news stories that have focused on officer-involved shootings and other in-custody deaths of young African-American males. Some media accounts have characterized police as marauding bullies, thugs in blue, who harass, abuse, and kill innocent citizens with impunity, while, for their part, police officers have come to feel maligned and persecuted for what they see as their thankless efforts to protect an ungrateful and hostile public.

The field of *police psychology* encompasses the many ways that behavioral science can assist law enforcement work, including assessment and screening of police candidates; providing training and assistance to special units (hostage negotiation, undercover policing, criminal investigation); carrying out fitness-for-duty evaluations of underperforming or misbehaving officers; conducting psychotherapy and family interventions of police personnel; and assessment of officers following a critical incident, which may include an officer-involved shooting, other deadly force encounter, in-custody death, suicide-by-cop incident, murder or sex crime investigation, intervention with mentally ill citizens, or disaster response (Barrett et al., 2011; Blau, 1994; Kitaef, 2011; Kurke & Scrivner, 1995; Miller, 1995, 2000, 2005b, 2006b,f,g,h, 2007a,b,c, 2009a, 2010, 2011a, 2015b,d,e, Russell & Beigel, 1990). This article explores the mindset of deadly force encounters, specifically, officer-involved shootings.

2. Necessary force, excessive force, and deadly force

Any account of police use of force begins with the gun—as both weapon and symbol. Among all civilian public safety and emergency service personnel, no other service group is mandated to carry a lethal firearm as part of their daily equipment, nor is charged with the responsibility to use their own discretion and judgment in making split-second decisions to take a life (Blau, 1986; Fyfe, 1986, 1988; Garner, 2005; Geller, 1982; Geller & Scott, 1992; Henry, 2004). Watching any typical TV cop show or movie might convince the viewer that most officers fire off multiple rounds on a regular basis without a second thought. However, in reality the discharging of one's weapon in the line of duty is a rare and profound event that almost always leaves a psychological trace on the officer involved (Bohrer, 2005; Grossman & Christensen, 2007; Miller, 1995, 2006a,c,h, 2008c; Nielsen, 1986; Pasciak, 2015; Rudofossi, 2007; Solomon & Horn, 1986). Line-of-duty deadly force actions are most likely to occur in the following circumstances, in descending order of probability: (1) domestic or other disturbance calls; (2) robbery in progress; (3) burglary in progress; (4) traffic offense; (5) personal dispute and/or accident; and (6) stake-outs and drug busts (Blau, 1994; Garner, 2005; Hatch & Dickson, 2007; Russell & Beigel, 1990).

2.1. Definitions and characteristics of use of force

Deadly force encounters represent a small subset of police use of force incidents, which are themselves only a minor fraction of police interactions with citizens. One point of confusion and anger for many citizens is the common misconception that deadly force automatically

equates to excessive force. Actually, *necessary force* is the amount of force required to control a given situation, so as to preserve the life and maintain the safety of police officers or vulnerable civilians at the scene. *Excessive force* is any use of force beyond that required for safety and control. The severity and intensity of the force used—from verbal commands, to handcuffing, to baton, pepper spray, Taser, or firearm—must be proportional to the dangerousness of the suspect's present actions and should not be based on the suspect's attitude or the presumed moral blameworthiness of the crime in question. That is, whether the suspect is being detained for shoplifting a candy bar or raping a child, the purpose of any police action is to secure the suspect for further processing, not to judge or punish him, which is the province of the courts (Blau, 1994; *Graham v. Connor*, 1989; Mastrofski, Reisig, & McCluskey, 2002; Miller, 2004b, 2006c,h, 2008b, 2012, 2015e; Petrowski, 2002a,b; Scrivner, 1999; *Tennessee v. Garner*, 1985).

Thus, a mild gratuitous finger-flick upside the head of a suspect who is already safely restrained constitutes excessive force; multiple gunshots fired at a suspect who is lethally assaulting an officer or civilian may not be. In law, a police deadly force encounter in which an officer kills a suspect who is presenting a clear threat to the life of that officer or others would be classified as a *justifiable homicide* (Flowers, 2002; Miller, 2012; Palermo & Kocsis, 2005). However, despite training and official guidelines, in most real-life situations encountered by police officers, the line between proper and improper force is hardly clear-cut. The amount of force necessary to secure the situation is almost always in some part a judgment call. And that means occasional *misjudgments* are inevitable (Scrivner, 1999).

In fact, the law does not require police officers to invariably utilize the absolute minimum force necessary in a given situation, because how could one instantaneously judge what “minimum” is in every conceivable circumstance? Rather, the law requires only that the level of force used be *objectively reasonable* to control a deadly threat situation (del Carmen, 1994; Meadows & Trostle, 1988; Petrowski, 2002a). The FBI provides four categories of deadly threat: (1) the suspect possesses a weapon or is attempting to gain access to a weapon; (2) the suspect is armed and running to gain the tactical advantage of cover; (3) a suspect with the capability of inflicting death or serious injury, with or without a weapon, is demonstrating an intention to do so; or (4) the suspect is attempting to escape the vicinity of a violent confrontation in which he or she inflicted or attempted to inflict death or serious injury. Note that officers are expected to react to the imminent and credible *threat* of violence by the suspect; they are not required to wait until the suspect has committed a violent act, because by then it would be too late to prevent death or injury to the victim (Klockars, 1996; Petrowski, 2002b).

An early analysis (Reiss, 1971) found that 78% of documented excessive force instances occurred in police-controlled settings, such as the precinct station, patrol car, or public streets. Almost all victims of force were young, lower-class males from any ethnic group, who were regarded by police as offenders. Among this group, 39% of suspects openly defied police authority, 9% physically resisted arrest, and 32% were persons in generally “deviant” offender roles, such as drug addicts. However, the study also found that, even in the face of clearly antagonistic behavior, many officers chose to restrain their own use of force.

Other surveys have shown that police officers rarely regard themselves or their colleagues as using what they would categorize as “excessive” force (Grant & Grant, 1996); however, over a fifth of officers in at least one study (Carter, 1976) believed that extra force is sometimes necessary to establish an officer's authority, while almost two-thirds felt that officers have the right to use force in retaliation for physical attacks by suspects. Force does not necessarily have to be physical:

about half the officers in this sample felt that “rough talk” was sometimes the only way to get some citizens to obey the officers. Less than one in six officers felt that their use of force reflected primarily ethnic or racial discrimination per se. However, in agreement with other studies, endorsement or tolerance of verbal and physical aggression toward unruly citizens was associated with those officers’ overall dissatisfaction with their own jobs.

Many police officers regard excessive force as a less serious offense than sleeping, drinking, or having sex on duty, taking bribes, accepting free services, or lying under oath. Police officers who strongly identify with their “cop’s cop” role are more likely to admit that they would participate in the street execution of a suspect known to have killed a police officer (Lester & TenBrink, 1985; TenBrink & Lester, 1984). Yet, even when deadly force is justified to apprehend a fleeing felon, many officers report that they would refrain from using such force in these situations due to legal repercussions, possible civil suits, and/or departmental sanctions (Brown, 1983; Cloherty, 2004; Hughes, 2001; Kappeler, 1997; Kappeler, Kappeler, & del Carmen, 1993; Miller, 2004b, 2006d, 2008d, 2009b,c, 2015e, Vaughn, Cooper, & del Carmen, 2001).

2.2. Judgment and restraint in the use of force

In fact, given the volume of contentious and often potentially dangerous interactions with citizens in the work life of an average patrol officer, it is noteworthy how often police officers restrain themselves from utilizing force, even in circumstances where it would be legally justified (Fitzgerald & Bromley, 1998; Kesic, Thomas, & Ogloff, 2012; Klinger, 2005). Force of any kind is used in less than 1.5% of police–citizen contacts. Officer-involved shootings are rarer still. The average annual rate of use of deadly force by U.S. law enforcement is about 360 cases per year. This is compared to over 60 thousand reported cases of citizen assaults on police officers each year, approximately 11 thousand of which involve a lethal weapon. Up to 80% of officers are assaulted in the line of duty, and these officers are assaulted an average of seven times over their careers. FBI data reveal that approximately 85% of officers killed in the line of duty never discharged their service weapons (Hickman, Piquero, & Garner, 2008; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Petrowski, 2002a).

Thus, even within the context of potentially dangerous interactions, use of force by law enforcement is the overwhelming exception. Factors contributing to use of force in a police–citizen encounter include: (1) contact is officer-initiated, rather than from a 911 call for service; (2) subject is young, male, and/or non-white; (3) there are bystanders present, including both citizens and other officers; (4) subject resists a lawful request or command on the part of the officer; (5) subject shows a hostile demeanor or overtly aggressive behavior toward officers; (6) subject possesses a weapon or object that can be used as a weapon; (7) encounter follows an automobile pursuit; (8) subject is intoxicated; (9) subject is mentally ill or cognitively impaired (Engel & Silver, 2001; Friedrich, 1980; Garner & Maxwell, 1999; Garner, Schade, Hepburn, & Buchanan, 1995; Garner, Maxwell, & Heraux, 2002; Geller, 1982; Greenfield, Langan, & Smith, 1999; Holmes, 2000; Johnson, 2011; Kaminski, DiGiovanni, & Downs, 2004; Langan, Greenfield, Smith, Durose, & Levin, 2001; Lawton, 2007; Lee & Vaughn, 2010; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Novak & Engel, 2005; Ostrom, Parks, & Whitaker, 1978; Petrowski, 2002a; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill, Leinfelt, & Kwak, 2008; Weitzer, 1999; Worden, 1996).

The last two factors warrant further comment. Substance intoxication is a risk factor for use-of-force encounters because it impairs judgment and may disinhibit aggressive behavior that might otherwise be constrained in a sober subject. Substance abuse is also a proxy factor for aggression, in that impulsive, thrill-seeking subjects who prefer to stay drunk or high are typically less reflective and have poor overall self-control and ability to tolerate negative emotional states without reacting. In fact, when queried, more than half of forcefully subdued

suspects admit to having been intoxicated at the time and of resisting the police by arguing, disobeying an order, or becoming combative (Langan et al., 2001; Parker, 1998; Parker & Aurbahn, 1998; Parker & Cartmill, 1998). These last findings should be interpreted with caution, however, as suspects may consider it to be in their own best interest to report having been mentally impaired at the time of their arrests.

Subject mental illness has a paradoxical relationship to probability of a use of force incident (Engel & Silver, 2001; Johnson, 2011; Novak & Engel, 2005). On the one hand, the evidence suggests that when police perceive a citizen to lack volitional control over his own behavior, they are generally disposed to treat him more leniently. That is, officers will take the necessary steps to prevent a mentally deranged subject from hurting himself or others, but are more likely to let him go if he calms down, or to transport him to a receiving hospital, rather than jail, if he remains agitated (assuming such a receiving facility is available). Even if the mentally ill subject acts abusively toward the officers, but does no real harm (curses, threatens, pokes a finger, pushes the officer, tries to wriggle out of the officer’s grasp), he is less likely to be arrested for assault on a law enforcement officer or resisting arrest, because the police take into account the subject’s disordered mental state. At the same time, however, precisely because of his heightened agitation, disturbed perception, impaired judgment, and lack of self-control, the mentally ill subject may require far more physically forceful restraint than the average citizen.

The risk of a mentally ill citizen becoming aggressive and requiring police use of force to contain him is increased by the following factors: (1) the subject displays psychotic symptoms, especially persecutory delusions with command hallucinations; (2) the subject has a co-existing substance abuse history and/or is presently intoxicated; (3) the subject has a co-existing personality disorder, particularly in the antisocial, borderline, or paranoid category; (4) the subject has a history of treatment noncompliance and is currently not taking psychotropic medication; (5) the subject has recently experienced or has been experiencing stressful life events, such as family conflicts or homelessness, probably associated with his mental disability; (6) the subject resists officers, becomes combative, or wields a weapon during the encounter. Thus, if police use a greater degree of force against mentally disordered citizens in a community, it is likely because those citizens have presented a greater-than-normal danger to responding officers and others (Arsenault, Moffitt, Caspi, Taylor, & Silva, 2000; Engel & Silver, 2001; Johnson, 2011; Link & Stueve, 1994; Link, Cullen, & Andrews, 1992; Link, Stueve, & Phelan, 1998; McCluskey, Terrill, & Paoline, 2005; McNeil & Binder, 2005; Miller, 2012; Novak & Engel, 2005; Silver & Teasdale, 2005; Silver, Felson, & Vaneseltine, 2008; Swanson, Borum, Swartz, & Monahan, 1996, 1999, 2006, Swanson et al., 2006, Swanson, Borum, Swartz, & Hiday, 1999, Swanson, Estroff, Swartz, & Borum, 1997; Swartz et al., 1998a, 1998b; Taylor et al., 1998).

Police–citizen animosity is far from inevitable. As a rule, communities are not categorically “against the police” when the latter are perceived as acting in the legitimate pursuit of public safety. Indeed, when suspects are clearly acting in a belligerent, dangerous, or out-of-control manner, potential victims, family members, and community observers generally expect officers to take charge of the individual to preserve public safety, and often encourage the police to “do something” to get the situation under control (Langan et al., 2001; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008). Even in these circumstances, police tend to err on the side of less force versus more force, and will usually first try to manually restrain the suspect before resorting to use of weapons. If the suspect is posing a clear danger, but has not yet escalated to imminently life-threatening behavior, officers will usually first deploy less-lethal control technologies, such as baton, pepper spray, or Taser (in one case, police used a ladder and a fire hose to control a psychotic suspect wielding a machete) before resorting to their firearms (Garner et al., 2002; Henriquez, 1999; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008). Thus, far from being trigger-happy gunsels, research shows that officers restrain their use of deadly force in over 90% of circumstances in which such use of

force would be objectively justifiable and, in many cases, even when this puts the officers' own safety in jeopardy (Pinizzotto, Davis, Bohrer, & Infanti, 2012).

3. Which officers are most likely to use excessive or deadly force?

Certainly, then, most officers do not use excessive force, much less deadly force. Yet, in every law enforcement agency, there seem to be a few officers who are involved in a disproportionate number of force episodes, often accompanied by a higher number of citizen complaints. Identifying a standard "profile" of the excessive force-prone officer is problematic, because the components of such profiles for different officers are likely to involve varying proportions of, and interactions among, individual factors, job-related experiences, and the law enforcement culture of that officer's agency. Nonetheless, research has identified a set of characteristics that seems to be associated with some officers' higher likelihood of using any level of force.

3.1. Officer demographics

Reflecting sex differences in aggressive behavior in general, male officers are more likely to utilize deadly force than female officers. With regard to officer ethnicity, some studies find that white officers are more likely to shoot suspects of any race than are Hispanic officers (McElvain & Kposowa, 2008), while other studies (Geller & Karales, 1981) have reported that black officers are most likely to shoot; these inconsistencies may reflect regional differences in ethnic composition of both the particular police forces and their served communities. A strong predictor of future officer-involved shootings is a past history of such shootings, but it is not clear if this represents a dispositional propensity of certain officers to more quickly resort to force (see below), or whether officers who work in more dangerous patrol areas are statistically more likely to be involved in violent confrontations with citizens.

Officers who have completed a college education show a significantly lower likelihood of utilizing force than less-educated officers (Aamodt, 2004; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Paoline & Terrill, 2007). In addition to any particular knowledge gained from college coursework, it may well be that the innate traits of self-discipline, perseverance, intelligence, and verbal skills necessary to complete a higher education curriculum also translate into a more reasoned and nuanced approach to communication and interpersonal problem solving on patrol.

3.2. Officer attitudes

Especially in the era of *community policing*, law enforcement administrators have emphasized the need for earning the trust and cooperation of members of an officer's patrol community through relationship building, subscribing to a preventive service model of law enforcement, and utilizing an interdiction and enforcement-based approach only as a last resort (Peak, 2003). However, cops on the beat know that their jobs frequently put them in the position of dealing with citizens who are in a decidedly uncivil frame of mind, and having to make them do things they do not want to do or stop them from doing things the citizens feel are their right to do, or at least should be allowed to get away with. Yet, these officers, who on a daily basis face the public at their worst, are still expected to behave politely and courteously in every interaction with a citizen, from first contact through arrest (Mastrofski et al., 2002; Reiss, 1971, 1980; Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Officers keenly feel this irony and, in response, often develop their own unique patrol styles and attitudes to deal with what they perceive as the realities of patrolling their beats.

Surveys (Grant & Grant, 1996; Lester & Arcuri, 1994; Mastrofski et al., 2002; Ostrom et al., 1978; Worden, 1996) have shown that police officers are more likely to use excessive force if they believe that: (1) "real" police work consists of in action-oriented crime-fighting,

rather than interpersonal problem-solving (pejoratively referred to as "social work"); (2) too many restrictions prevent officers from doing their jobs in battling crime in their patrol neighborhoods; (3) only fellow patrol officers, not clueless civilians or administrative desk jockeys, are qualified to pass judgment on what constitutes excessive versus necessary force in a tense street confrontation; and (4) citizens on the officers' beats will generally be hostile and disrespectful, and will exploit and abuse officers if not regularly and definitively taught "respect."

3.3. Officer personalities

Although the diversity of family histories and cultural backgrounds among police officers makes it unlikely that we will ever identify a singular "police personality" (Balch, 1972; Bano & Talib, 2012; Miller, 2003, 2007d; Twersky-Glasner, 2005), certain personality types among police officers seem to be associated with higher rates of excessive force, including deadly force (White, 1972; Worden, 1996). For example, "tough cops" hold the cynical view that people are motivated mainly by selfish impulses, they believe that the citizenry is generally hostile toward police, and they over-identify with the so-called Cop Culture. They conceive of the role of police officers as "keeping the lid on" or "drawing the line," that is, controlling serious crime. They also believe that personal experience and common street sense are the best guides to dealing with the realities of daily law enforcement, and that "thumping" or other forms of curbstome justice are sometimes appropriate and effective.

Some officers may suffer from diagnosable personality disorders or other psychopathology that puts them at risk for using excessive force (APA, 2013; McCafferty & McCafferty, 1998; Miller, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2007d, 2012; Millon & Davis, 2000; Scrivner, 1999; Sperry, 1995; Tyre, 2001). These officers are typically found to have pervasive, enduring, and extreme personality traits, largely in the antisocial, narcissistic, borderline, and paranoid categories. These dysfunctional traits, which include egocentricity, impulsivity, immaturity, inflexibility, and lack of empathy, may predispose these officers to abusive behavior, especially when they perceive challenges or threats to their authority by citizens. These officers are unlikely to admit fault or learn from their mistakes, and are therefore unlikely to change their policing styles, so they tend to accumulate a disproportionate number of repeated citizen complaints.

For example, officers with *borderline personality disorder* may exhibit a pattern of erratic and intense relationships, alternating between over-idealization and devaluation of colleagues, departmental brass, and citizens alike. They may show self-damaging impulsiveness in the form of car chases, citizen harassment, and other abuse of authority. They may be characterized by emotional instability, including inappropriately intense anger and/or depressive mood swings and suicidality, as well as persistent identity disturbance in self-image, professional goals and values, and types of interpersonal relationships. They often experience a chronic feeling of emptiness that may lead to the quest for stimulation through provocation or escalation of incidents or other excessive actions.

Narcissistic personality disorder is a pattern of grandiosity, sense of entitlement, arrogance, need for admiration, and lack of empathy for others' feelings or opinions. Officers with this pattern will typically believe that rules are for others cops and they are "above the law" because of their special knowledge and powers of perception, insight, and judgment in matters of justice and everyday right and wrong.

Beyond mere entitlement, officers with *antisocial personality disorder* will show a flagrant disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others, associated with an exploitive and predatory lifestyle, unrestrained by any sense of conscience or empathy, allowing them to regard other people simply as object for their own gratification. They can easily inflict violence to force compliance with their demands, but many of them can also be quite shrewd in a cunning/conning type of way, and the more intelligent among these officers may accumulate considerable street-level

fiefdoms of wealth and power, or rise to positions of great authority within the department before their complex web of deceit begins to unravel (or somebody gets mad enough to kill them).

Histrionic personality disorder is a pattern of excessive emotionality, attention-seeking, quest for excitement, exaggeration in speech and behavior, and a desperate need to be validated and liked by others. These are the “showboats” of the police department who will do anything to garner recognition from colleagues, supervisors, family members, and the media. As long as the spotlight is on them, they can be quite pleasant to work with. However, when their attentional needs fail to be adequately met, histrionic officers may become depressed and angry, and may resort to more aggressive policing, if they believe that this is what is required to impress their peers or bosses.

Officers with *paranoid personality disorder* show a pattern of pervasive distrust and suspiciousness, so that others' actions and motives are almost invariably interpreted as deceptive, persecutory, or malevolent. This pervasively cynical us-against-them mentality can lead to hair-trigger reactivity with a resultant pattern of abuse of force confrontations. In addition, it is often not long before such suspiciousness is turned against their own colleagues and supervisors, especially when the officer's actions are critiqued: “When push came to shove, my department took the side of the criminals, rather than backing up one of their own.”

3.4. Job experiences

The experiences of some officers on the job may put them at special risk for use of force in police–citizen encounters (Blau, 1986; Eitle, D'Alessio, & Stolzenberg, 2014; Henry, 2004; Klinger, 2005, 2006; Miller, 2004b, 2006h, 2015c; Rudofossi, 2007; Scrivner, 1999). These can affect officers at different stages in their careers and will almost certainly interact with the personality variables noted above.

Some officers begin to show problems at early stages of their police careers. These are the “hotdogs” or “cowboys” of the department (Scrivner, 1999), young, inexperienced, immature, highly impressionable, and impulsive rookies, with a taste for action and a low tolerance for boredom. However, their attitudes and behaviors have not yet lurched out of control, and they may actually become quite effective police officers if their gung-ho enthusiasm can be channeled productively. However, without such proper early mentoring and guidance by mature and experienced field training officers and first-line supervisors, the law enforcement zeal of these young firebrands could degenerate into abusive behavior with citizens.

Another profile consists of officers who begin their careers with good intentions and good police work, but develop dysfunctional patrol styles over time. Although not necessarily personality-disordered *per se*, these officers may be overly sensitive to challenge and provocation, and learn to combine a dominant command presence with a heavy-handed “take-no-crap” policing style to quickly gain control in critical situations. This gradually develops into a rigidly authoritarian style for dealing with all citizen encounters, even ones that could be more effectively resolved through tact and communication.

Because much of this behavior is learned and reinforced on the job, there may exist the potential for corrective change through appropriate training and supervision, especially where these officers can be shown how to increase their influence and effectiveness through more nuanced means of persuasion. The longer these rigid patterns continue, however, the more entrenched they become and the more these officers become disproportionately invested in the power and control aspects of policing. This pattern is often seen in the old-timers or “dinosaurs” in the department and, unfortunately, this may include those in upper administrative positions; thus, their attitudes filter down to the rank and file.

Some officers may have been performing acceptably until they are additionally impacted by personal problems—often several overlapping crises at once, such as separation, divorce, parent–child issues, financial

crises, alcohol problems, and/or job-related stresses (Violanti, 2015; Violanti & Marshall, 1983). Many of these individuals may have been struggling with a tenuous sense of self-worth and high levels of anxiety that, up to now, they had been able to mask through immersion in their law enforcement work. But under increased personal or professional stress, they become less able to cope with the fear, animosity, and emotionally charged nature of many police–citizen patrol scenarios, and may reflexively “lash out” in such situations to restore their sense of order and control. Departments should be encouraged to develop behavioral early warning systems to help supervisors detect cops in distress who may be at risk for excessive force or other police misconduct, and to provide appropriate intervention services (Blau, 1994; Miller, 1995, 2000, 2004b, 2006b, 2006h, 2011c, 2015c, 2015d; Scrivner, 1999; Williams, 1991).

Police officers who are military veterans may face special challenges (Friel, White, & Hull, 2008; Kalmbach, & Garner, 2015; Grossman & Christensen, 2007; Miller, 2008a, 2013b, 2015d; Solursh, Meyer, & Nolan, 1991; Wilson, Price, & Burke, 2015). In particular, some military service members experience the violence of wartime as hyperstimulating and exhilarating, and find it difficult to leave this aggressive mindset behind when they return to the civilian world and either begin or resume their careers as law enforcement officers. Individuals affected by this so-called *combat addiction syndrome* may seek out or create situations where they can re-experience the dangerous thrill of previous combat experiences by engaging in a repeated pattern of aggressive behavior. Preoccupation with weapons, fighting, and sometimes illegal sexual or drug offending, are common expressions of this kind of “living on the edge.” The heightened excitement of violence is typically followed by a “down” period in between, and this pattern may follow an oscillating cycle throughout the veteran-officer's career. Many of these individuals realize that their excessive and, at times, frankly antisocial behavior can get them into trouble, but report being nevertheless driven to engage in it (Friel et al., 2008; Grossman & Christensen, 2007; Solursh et al., 1991). In such cases, police managers and mental health clinicians should look for diagnostic overlaps with pre-existing antisocial personality disorder or combat-acquired post-traumatic stress disorder, and these syndromes should be treated accordingly (Miller, 2012, 2015d).

4. The psychology of deadly force encounters

While personal attitudes, personality traits, psychological disorders, and/or adverse job experiences can account for a given officer's predisposition to using excessive force, the flashover into an actual deadly force encounter inevitably involves the abrupt perception of a situation as life-threatening, and thereby immediately calling for a defensively lethal response. Much of the controversy over police officers using deadly force against supposedly unarmed suspects relates to confusion over precisely those issues of what is defined as mortal danger and what constitutes a proportionate response.

4.1. What is an “armed” suspect, and what is “deadly” force?

Suspects who threaten lethal violence may be “armed” in any number of ways. Yet, many people assume that unless the suspect closely matches the police in physical power or weapons technology, he or she cannot possibly be much of a menace, and so deadly force used by police in such circumstances must violate some street-chivalrous notion of a “fair fight.” However, every cop knows just how unpredictably dangerous a police–citizen encounter can be when dealing with a suspect who is angry, intoxicated, delusional, or some combination of the above. A look, a word, a gesture—and in a flash, a compliant citizen can turn into an adrenalized assailant.

An unsecured suspect lying prostrate and spread-eagled on the ground, 10 ft from an officer, head facing away, can be on top of that officer's chest in less than three seconds. Because it seems hard to

believe, officers often practice this in training, and the skeptical reader is encouraged to try it with a friend. In a life-and-death confrontation, any nearby object can become a lethal weapon at any time; a firearm or blade is not required. This author has interviewed officers who have been choked with a bathrobe sash, brained with a flowerpot, had shop tools or industrial chemicals hurled at them, been clawed, bitten, spit on, urinated on, and worse. One officer suffered permanent knee damage after being kicked by a man who was literally unarmed (actually, he had one arm). A fist to the face or a pair of strong hands around the throat can render an officer unconscious. Even full use of one's own body is not required; in another case, a suspect on the ground in full hogtie restraint was able to twist around and bite an officer's ankle.

The other point of confusion attends the very concept of what "deadly force" means. After an officer-involved shooting, citizens and media pundits often express an outraged sense of puzzlement that goes something like this: "All right, I understand that if an officer's life is truly threatened, he has to defend himself, but did it really take all those bullets? Was it really necessary for six cops to fire 40 rounds to bring down the dangerous felon?" Without realizing it, this attitude gives far more credit to the ballistic accuracy of police officers in critical life-and-death circumstances than exists in the real world of officer-involved shooting incidents.

In the movie, *Die Hard III*, Officer John McClane uses a .38 caliber revolver (with only two bullets left) to snip off an electrical wire several hundred feet away—which would be the envy of any trained military sniper equipped with a high-power rifle and a telescopic sight. Similarly, civilians who grew up on cop movies and TV shows commonly wonder why an officer cannot just wing a threatening suspect and thereby nonlethally disable him, just like in those screen portrayals (actually, this goes back even further than cop dramas, to the old cowboy reels where the white-hat hero shoots the black-hat villain's pistol right out of his hand). In reality, even with extensive firearms training in simunition or live-fire scenarios, the average police officer (or soldier, for that matter) misses at least as often than he or she hits their intended target (Grossman & Christensen, 2007; Pinizzotto et al., 2012; White, 2006). And the rule for a deadly force encounters is simple: Do not use deadly force unless there is absolutely no choice. But once that decision has been made, be sure the force is as deadly as possible, as quickly as possible.

Why? Because in a real emergency, to prevent a dangerous assailant from killing or injuring someone else, the primary goal is not to wound the suspect or even to kill him, but to *stop* him. If an officer shoots a charging suspect multiple times, it won't make much difference if the suspect dies of his injuries several seconds after he's had a chance to crush the officer's skull with a brick. Once an assailant has presented a clear and credible threat, the goal is to neutralize that threat immediately, and while four bullets may not swiftly drop an aggressive juggernaut, 40 bullets might. Yet, as described earlier, despite the high priority placed on neutralizing a potential threat to life, it is impressive how often police officers restrain themselves from utilizing deadly force even in circumstances where it would be justified.

4.2. How deadly force encounters evolve

Potential deadly force encounters can begin in a number of ways, but two trajectories are most common. For vehicle patrol officers in suburban or semirural areas, a call usually comes in over the radio concerning a possible crime in progress or a 911 call from a distraught citizen. Several officers in vehicles may respond to the scene to confront a situation that may range from no activity noted to a dire emergency in progress. Urban police get radio calls too, but are just as likely to confront suspicious activity or crimes in progress directly during their vehicle or foot patrols.

In either case, it is rare for a firefight or grappling match with a suspect to begin immediately. Almost always, there is an emotional and behavioral buildup, an interactional dance that precedes the escalation

into a violent confrontation. In published studies and in media accounts of deadly force incidents (2006, 2012; Blau, 1986; Fyfe, 1986; Geller, 1982; Honig & Roland, 1998; Pinizzotto & Davis, 1992; Pinizzotto & Davis, 1996; Pinizzotto, Davis, & Miller, 1997; Remsburg, 2008), as well as in the present author's own work with officer-involved shootings and other use-of-force episodes (Miller, 2006a, 2006c, 2008b, 2008c), a striking pattern emerges: the *tipping point*. That is, at some critical juncture in the verbal exchange, one party says or does something that triggers a behavioral reaction from the other. From the citizen's perspective, it may be the cop imperiously barking an order or smugly nudging the citizen to move along.

Once this street gauntlet has been thrown down, and especially in the presence of peers who may delight in cajoling their friend and further provoking the cops, a citizen who does not want to look like a chump may push the officer away, yell in his face, or dismissively saunter off. For the officer, this citizen is now officially an "asshole" (Van Maanen, 1978), and is guilty of *contempt of cop* (Alpert & Dunham, 2004; Dunham, Alpert, Stroschne, & Bennett, 2005; Lardner & Reppeto, 2000; Toch, 1996; Worden & Caitlin, 2002). While such an interpersonal offense is not codified in any criminal statute or police procedural manual, such blatant disrespect may be just what it takes to set up a hostile confrontation (Crawford, 1973; Mastroski et al., 2002) because such effrontery is seen as defying the very moral and social institutions the officer represents and thereby signals a greater menace to officers. Therefore, the citizen who complains loudly, attempts to fight or flee, disobeys the officer's instructions, argues or disagrees with the officer, and generally makes a nuisance of himself and makes the officer's job more difficult, will be treated more forcefully than a more compliant and respectful citizen.

Police officers are the only nonmilitary professionals who are authorized to use, when necessary, coercive physical force, including lethal force, against citizens as a regular and expectable part of their job, thus representing the ultimate expression of governmental power in civil society (Klockars, 1996; White & Klinger, 2012). A doctor cannot treat you without your permission, no matter how much he or she believes you need vital medical care. But a police officer has the authority to order you to move across the street and, if you fail to comply, to bodily transport you there. What many citizens do not realize is that the law requires civilians to obey a legitimate command from a police officer. Officers come to expect this compliance from the public, and most citizens are reasonably respectful, or at least have learned to avoid trouble by acting complacent when dealing with the police; the reader may recall how he or she behaved the last time they got pulled over for a traffic violation.

Consequently, when a citizen openly defies a police command or is truculently uncooperative with an officer's attempt to engage him, this automatically interjects a heavy dose of suspicion on the part of the responding officers that this citizen has a greater than normal potential to escalate his behavior into violence. The officers think this way because they've seen it. This also explains another roadside scenario that often baffles motorists: Why do they need four police cars to give that guy a speeding ticket? Well, maybe because the first cop on the scene ran the plates and this guy has half a dozen outstanding warrants for violent felonies, so the officers are taking no chances. Officers also know that a suspect confronted with overwhelming force of numbers is more likely to back down from a violent confrontation because it allows him to save face ("Ha, they sent ten cops to take me in; I'm not stupid!").

The irony is that, occasionally, attempts by officers to use less-than-lethal force become the basis for even more strident accusations of police brutality. Take the infamous choke hold—or, where this is prohibited, equivalent physical restraint tactics. The whole point of such manual takedown procedures is to enable officers to subdue a suspect *without* having to club, spray, Taser, or shoot him; in fact, the officer places himself at considerable risk by this kind of in-close, hands-on confrontation. Not surprisingly, officers are naturally more wary of

physically intimidating or strangely behaving suspects because they know that a simple conversation can abruptly flash over into a deadly encounter. Again, cops expect citizens to obey them, and when an already formidable suspect fails to do so, this signals increased danger, calling for heightened vigilance and the potential escalation of force.

Based on analyses from internal investigations, criminal prosecutions, civil litigation, high court decisions, and case law, deadly force encounters that could or should have been avoided or nonlethally contained appear to have the following characteristics (Alpert & Dunham, 2004; Alpert & Fridell, 1992; Alpert, Dunham, & Strohshine, 2006; Aveni, 2003; Belvedere, Worrall, & Tibbetts, 2005; Black, 2001; Campbell, 1999; Crawford, 1973; del Carmen, 1994; Dorriety, 2005; Dunham et al., 2005; Fishel, Gabbidon, & Hummer, 2007; FBI, 2005; Fyfe, 1980, 1986; Geller & Karales, 1981; Griffin & Bernard, 2003; Hicks, 2003; Hails & Borum, 2003; Hill & Logan, 2001; Lee & Vaughn, 2010; Lord, 2000; Manning, 1978; Mastrofski, Snipes, & Supina, 1996, 2002; Meadows & Trostle, 1988; Meyer, 1980; Miller, 2004a, 2004b; Mollen, 1994; Montgomery, 2005; Nowicki, 2002; Parks, 2000; Petrocelli, 2006; Pogrebin & Poole, 1993; Rayburn, 2007; Reiss, 1980; Ross, 2000; Skolnick, 2002; Spector, 2002; Terrill, 2001; Terrill, Alpert, Dunham, & Smith, 2003; Van Maanen, 1978; Vaughn & Coomes, 1995; Westmarland, 2005; White, 2000, 2006; Williams, 2002; Wilson & Rashbaum, 2006; Worden & Caitlin, 2002):

(1) Abuse of authority escalates to deadly confrontation; (2) there is a reckless use of deadly force and/or inadequate continuum of force; (3) there is an attempt to control an agitated or belligerent suspect; (4) suspect is intoxicated and/or mentally ill; (5) police retaliate against a suspect for endangering officers or for showing “contempt of cop;” (6) deadly force is used on a suspect who is already surrendering; (7) officer draws a gun while handcuffing a suspect; (8) adrenaline overload occurs following a high-speed chase; (9) *split-second syndrome*: officers misperceive danger and overreact, e.g., low lighting/bad weather, misidentification of harmless object as weapon, misidentification of innocent citizen for suspect, misidentification of fellow officer or off-duty officer for suspect, officer stumbles, drops flashlight, or prematurely emerges from cover, leading to overreactive use of force by his peers; (10) *contagious fire*: one officer fires, then all officers reflexively fire; however, recent research suggests that this happens rarely and that officers generally make their own decisions whether or not to shoot during a deadly force encounter (White & Klinger, 2012); (11) failure to prevent an otherwise avoidable *suicide by cop* (see below); (12) use of deadly force to prevent a subject's own suicide (i.e., you cannot kill someone just to prevent them from killing themselves); (13) improper off-duty policies; (14) improper vehicle operation; (15) maintaining code of silence in failing to report peers' misconduct; (16) inadequate training and supervision of officers.

4.3. In the breach: the deadly force mindset

But what actually happens in the minds of police officers during a deadly force encounter, such as an officer-involved shooting? Typically, from the moment the 911 call comes in or the officer enters a potentially dangerous scene on patrol, that officer's internal threat radar is engaged. Many use of force encounters escalate gradually, a few erupt explosively, but most officers can clearly recall the instant when they decided to draw their weapon and when they decided to fire.

Under emergency life-and-death circumstances, the brain does extraordinary things to allow its owner to survive. However, officers in a deadly force encounter must do more than survive; their job descriptions do not give them the luxury of fleeing. An officer's responsibility is to control the scene, preserve life, and furthermore, to act lawfully in doing so—all in the moments where he or she could be instantly killed. Most officers who have been involved in a deadly force shooting episode have described one or more alterations in perception, thinking, and behavior that occurred during the event (Addis & Stephens, 2008; Artwohl, 2002; Bohrer, 2005; Fyfe, 1986, 1988; Geller, 1982; Honig &

Roland, 1998; Honig & Sultan, 2004; Klinger, 2006; Miller, 2006c, 2006h). Most of these can be interpreted as natural adaptive defensive reactions of a nervous system that is conserving energy and allocating resources under extreme cognitive and emotional demand.

The most common phenomenon is a distortion in time perception. Paradoxically, this can take two, seemingly opposite, patterns. Many officers recall isolated events of a shooting episode as occurring in slow motion (“the guy's gun hand just seemed to float up toward me”). At the same time, the whole episode may seem to have lasted for a much shorter time period than it did (“they told me it took ten minutes, but it seemed like just a few seconds to me”).

Sensory distortions are common and mostly involve visual hyperfocus, or “tunnel vision,” in which the officer sharply tunes in to one particular aspect of the visual field, typically, the suspect's gun or weapon, while blocking out almost everything in the periphery, including, sometimes, the perpetrator's face or the actions of other officers. Similarly, auditory exclusion, or “tunnel hearing,” may occur when the officer's attention is attuned exclusively to a particular set of sounds, most commonly the suspect's voice, while background sounds are muted or excluded. Sounds in general commonly seem muffled and, in some cases, officers report not hearing their own or other officers' gunshots or hearing them as faint pops. On the other hand, some sounds may seem magnified; in one case, an officer recalled that “I could hear the guy's blood drip” (James D. Sewell, FDLE, ret., personal communication).

Some form of perceptual and/or behavioral dissociation may occur during the critical event. In rare instances, officers have described feeling as though they were standing outside the scene, observing it “like it was happening to someone else.” Probably the most common reaction is just “going on automatic:” this what they have trained for, and that training now kicks in at the critical moment, allowing the officer to carry out whatever actions are necessary, sometimes with a sense of robotic detachment, other times staving off the throes of adrenaline-fueled hyperarousal. Some officers report intrusive distracting thoughts during the scene, often involving loved ones or other personal matters, but these reflections are more likely to occur if the critical situation has been prolonged in some way, as in hostage-barricade scenarios.

A sense of confusion and/or helplessness may transiently occur during the lethal force encounter, but this is probably underreported due to the potential stigma attached to “folding under pressure.” A very small proportion of officers report that they “froze” at some point during the event; however, Artwohl (2002) conceptualizes this supposed immobilization response as actually representing an adaptive *action-reaction gap* in which the officer intuitively hesitates from shooting until the suspect has clearly posed a threat, a controlled response which actually works in favor of a nonlethal outcome.

Disturbances in memory are commonly reported in shooting incidents, and may involve impaired recall for particular events during the shooting scene or for all or part of the officer's own actions; the latter, in turn, may be associated with the “going-on-automatic” response noted earlier. For example, it is common for officers not to remember how many rounds they fired. More rarely, some aspects of the scene may be recalled with unusually clarity—a “flashbulb memory.” Over a third of cases involve not so much a total loss of recall as a distortion of events, to the extent that the officer's account of what happened differs markedly from the report of other observers at the scene.

Research in cognitive psychology (Loftus, 1996; Loftus, Greene, & Doyle, 1989) has shown that memory is typically selective and reconstructive, and that one's subjective confidence and self-reported clarity of recall may be weakly related to the factual accuracy of the remembered event. Internal Affairs supervisors, grand jurors, and other investigators who are unfamiliar with the cognitive psychology of memory under stress may listen to an officer's spotty recollection of what they think ought to be a vividly memorable event, or they may hear an account by the officer which is discrepant with the testimony of other observers (or with the images on their camera phones), and mistakenly

conclude that the officer is deliberately distorting facts or covering up events.

4.4. Aftermath of deadly force encounters

Officers know that their involvement in a deadly force scenario is likely to kick start a cascade of events that can seriously impact their law enforcement careers. All police agencies take deadly force encounters seriously and have policies in place to deal with them (Hatch & Dickson, 2007; IACP, 2009; Miller, 2006c, 2006h, 2015e; Petrowski, 2002a, 2002b). Procedurally, immediately following an officer-involved shooting, designated personnel will respond to the scene. In smaller departments, this may include the police chief or sheriff; in larger jurisdictions, it is usually the precinct captain or district undersheriff. Other responding personnel typically include paramedics, crime scene investigators, a departmental attorney, and in some agencies, a mental health clinician to assess the officer's psychological status. If the officer does not require medical care, a detailed *walk-through* then occurs, where the involved officer(s) take the investigators step-by-step through the event while it is still fresh in their minds; this is usually video-recorded and may take several hours, especially where the scenario is a complex one and there are multiple officers involved. Following the on-scene investigation, the officer is usually taken home and remains on administrative leave while a departmental investigation of the incident is carried out.

In some departments, the officer may be referred for a post-incident psychological evaluation, usually within a few days to a week following the incident, in order to assess for any residual adverse psychological reactions. Normal short-term post-shooting reactions include heightened tension, impaired sleep, and ruminating and/or dreaming about the incident; these usually abate within a few days. If the shooting is administratively cleared and there are no psychological problems noted, the officer will usually be returned to service within a week or two. If the officer seems to be having an especially hard time coping, psychological counseling may be recommended. For an otherwise healthy officer, this is usually short-term and is typically followed by a second evaluation for return to duty. In high-profile or contested shootings, however, the psychological stress is often far higher and officers may be out of service for prolonged periods of time due to a combination of administrative and mental health concerns (Miller, 2006c, 2006h; Rudofossi, 2007; Solomon & Horn, 1986).

With regard to some officers' longer-term psychological response, some authorities (Nielsen, 1986; Williams, 1991) have divided the post-shooting reaction into four basic phases, beginning with an immediate *impact phase*. For officers who have just shot a suspect during a dangerous confrontation, there may be an initial reaction of relief and even exhilaration at having just survived the encounter. But later, feelings of guilt or self-recrimination may surface, especially where the decision to shoot was less than clear-cut or where the suspect's actions essentially forced the hand of the officer into using deadly force, such as in botched robberies, domestic disputes, or suicide-by-cop incidents (see below). Or the officer may simply be confronting the fact that, however justified his response, he has nevertheless taken a human life.

During this second *recoil phase*, the officer may seem detached and preoccupied, spacially going through the motions of his job duties, and operating on behavioral autopilot. At the time when all he wants to do is put the event out of his mind, he will typically be barraged with questions from his peers, due to the obvious strong identification factor among officers, each one wondering, "What would I have done under those circumstances?" He may also be sensitive and prickly to even well-meaning congratulations by his peers ("Way to go, Supercop—you got the guy"), and especially to accusatory-like interrogation and second-guessing from official investigators or the media ("Officer Jackson, did you really believe you were in fear for your life from a confused teenager?").

As the officer begins to come to terms with the shooting episode, a *resolution phase* may be ensue, wherein he or she assimilates the fact that the use-force-action was necessary and justified in the battle for survival that often characterizes law enforcement deadly encounters. Of course, this resolution process may be complicated by ongoing departmental investigations, impending criminal prosecution, or civil litigation. In addition, even under the best of circumstances, resolution may be partial rather than total, and psychological remnants of the experience may continue to haunt the officer periodically, especially during future times of crisis. But overall, he or she is eventually able to return to work with a reasonable sense of confidence.

In the worst case, sufficient resolution may never occur, and the officer enters into a prolonged *posttraumatic phase*, which may impede or derail his or her law enforcement career. One factor in this kind of adverse reaction lies in the emotional disconnect between some officers' expectations of a heroic, armed confrontation (they watched cops shows as kids, too) and the gritty reality of most actual shooting scenarios, which typically involve petty criminals, mentally disordered subjects, domestic violence escalations, or the posturings of young-and-dumb juveniles.

In less severe cases, a period of temporary stress disability allows the officer to seek treatment, to eventually regain his or her emotional and professional bearings, and to ultimately return to the job. Still other officers return to work right away, but continue to perform marginally until their actions are brought to the attention of superiors. In my experience, the vast majority of officers involved in justified deadly force encounters soon return to work without incident. Those with more adverse traumatic reactions can usually get back on the job eventually if provided with the proper psychological intervention and departmental support.

4.5. Suicide by cop

A special category of officer-involved shooting occurs when the deceased compels or manipulates police into being the unwilling instruments in his or her own death. This phenomenon has probably been known for a long time, but was first explicitly articulated by Wolfgang (1959) and the actual term, *suicide by cop* was coined by police officer and psychologist Karl Harris in 1983 (Homant, Kennedy, & Hupp, 2000). Other terms for this phenomenon have been proposed, such as *officer-assisted suicide* (Homant et al., 2000), *law enforcement-assisted suicide* (Lord, 2000), *suicide by victim-precipitated homicide* (Hillbrand, 2001), and *copicide* (Violanti & Drylie, 2008), but *suicide by cop* (SBC) continues to be the descriptor that has the widest usage among law enforcement personnel, police psychologists, and media commentators (Lord & Sloop, 2010; Miller, 2006a).

It is estimated that approximately 10% of the approximately 600 police shootings a year in the United States are intentionally provoked SBC incidents. Most involve uniformed officers who are on duty at the time of the shooting, probably because such officers are easily identifiable by subjects seeking to exploit them as unwilling executioners. The greatest number of SBC incidents occur in the context of a police response to an armed robbery; the next most common situation is a domestic disturbance call. While some SBC incidents arise spontaneously out of the anger and panic of these situations, a good number of them appear to have been planned, as shown by the fact that, in nearly a third of SBC cases, investigators find a suicide note which apologizes to the police for deliberately drawing their fire. Other SBC attempts begin as self-suicide crises, but when law enforcement arrives on the scene, many of these subjects choose to make a virtue of necessity and to delegate the lethal job to the officers. Officers involved in SBC incidents often feel a sense of powerlessness and manipulation, and this is typically reported to be an especially stressful and demoralizing form of shooting trauma. In general, SBC cases garner more departmental, community, media, and legal scrutiny than more common officer-involved shooting cases (Allen, 2004; Cloherty, 2004; Feuer, 1998; Homant et al., 2000;

Kennedy, Homant, & Hupp, 1998; Miller, 2006a; Pinizzotto, Davis, & Miller, 2005; Praet, 2002; Van Zandt, 1993; Wilson, Davis, Bloom, Batten, & Kamara, 1998).

The typical SBC subject is a white male in his mid-20s to mid-30s with a history of drug and alcohol abuse. He has had prior contact with the law, but usually for minor offenses, although this may have given him some familiarity with how police operate and their responses to critical incidents. There is often a history of prior suicide attempts associated with a mental health treatment record; diagnoses have typically included schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and/or substance abuse, although there is at least one report of attempted SBC following a traumatic brain injury (Bresler, Scalora, Elbogen, & Moore, 2003). The crisis episode is commonly precipitated by the rupture of some important relationship in connection with the subject's self-esteem or social support, such as a family or job crisis, which leads to feelings of hopelessness, anger, and despair. Up to two-thirds of SBC subjects take hostages, and up to 40% of subjects are intoxicated with alcohol, but other drug use at the scene is rare. The average duration of the incident itself from initial police arrival to death of the subject is under half an hour, but most situations are over within 10 min (De Leo, Bertolote, & Lester, 2002; Fazel & Danesh, 2002; Feuer, 1998; Gill & Pasquale-Styles, 2009; Hutson et al., 1998; Kennedy et al., 1998; Kesic et al., 2012; Klinger, 2001; Lord, 2000; Lord & Sloop, 2010; Mohandie, Meloy, & Collins, 2009; Mumola, 2007; Perrou & Farrell, 2004; Wilson et al., 1998).

From studies of survivors, motives for SBC actions include: (1) not wanting to appear weak by committing self-suicide (going out in a "blaze of glory"); (2) wanting to "send a message" to family members or others who have hurt or betrayed the subject; (3) fear of incompleteness of self-suicide (one bullet to the head might leave me a vegetable, but dozens of police bullets will surely finish the job); (4) religious proscriptions against self-suicide (if the police kill me, I'm technically not killing myself); (5) financial considerations (life insurance policy or relative's will excludes payment for suicide); (6) delusional motives (dying for the sins of the world); and (7) rare cases of suicidal police officers or ex-officers who understand that drawing a weapon on fellow officers will leave them no choice but to return deadly fire (Hafenback & Nasiripour, 2005; Homant et al., 2000; Lord, 2000; Lord & Sloop, 2010; Mohandie & Meloy, 2000).

In SBC cases, all of the split-second judgment call issues that attend an ordinary officer-involved shooting are greatly magnified. In most SBC scenarios, police understand that the subject is not their typical armed assailant, daring to engage them in a desperate contest of life-and-death resolve, but a disturbed person who may not "deserve" to die, other than by the fact of creating a lethal threat to officers or other civilians. On the one hand, the presumed lesser blameworthiness of a distraught mental patient may make the police more hesitant to take him down; however, at the same time, the very instability of a mentally disturbed subject may render him unpredictably dangerous even when the situation appears calm, fostering a heightened hair-trigger reactivity on the part of responding officers.

Officer reactions to having killed a subject in a SBC incident include anger at having been baited into "doing the guy's dirty work for him," as well as sadness at the perceived senselessness of many SBC scenarios, especially when they have involved young or mentally ill subjects. Where the SBC incident has followed a failed effort at negotiating a peaceful outcome, officers may experience a demoralizing sense of disappointment and self-criticism (Clagett, 2004; Van Zandt, 1993). Because of the increased administrative and media attention in suspected SBC cases (Cloherty, 2004), especially when such force has been used against a so-called "harmless psycho" or a "dumb kid," the involved officers may feel like bugs under a microscope, as suspicions of excessive force are magnified or overblown. Such officers may well need extra support as they negotiate the aftermath of a SBC episode (Miller, 2006a, 2006h, 2009b, 2011c, 2015e).

5. Deadly force encounters and the community

Attributions of racism to police forces is nothing new, and have been commented about since the beginning of organized policing in America (Peak, 2003). Historically, almost every major ethnic group—Italian, Irish, Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern—at one time or another has felt itself to be stigmatized or victimized by their local police forces. For about the past century, accusations of racism have involved alleged abuses of force, including deadly force, against African-American citizens. For their part, most police officers would counter that they are only responding to criminal activity by whoever commits it.

5.1. Less force, less safety?

As we have seen, police sometimes justify their use of force as necessary component of "getting the job done," and may claim that they have a clear if unofficial mandate from the law-abiding citizens in their patrol communities to crack down on criminals any way they see fit. Indeed, as noted earlier, most citizens expect that police will take legitimate action to protect them from the real bad guys. Although this can easily be used as a self-serving rationalization for outright police misconduct, in some circumstances, police may well be tacitly responding to the will of the community by bending the rules (Lersch, 2002).

For example, following the reports during the 1990s of widespread police abuse and corruption in the Los Angeles Police Department's notorious Rampart Division, interviews with area residents found them to be far more concerned about increased criminal gang activity than about possible police abuse of force or other misconduct (Cannon, 2000). In the wake of the official investigation, LAPD officers concerned about being perceived by their supervisors as abusive, and perhaps using the opportunity to express their resentment in a passive-aggressive way, often just cruised up and down the streets in their patrol cars—which became known as "drive and wave"—instead of actively interdicting criminal activity. As a result, gang-related homicides and crime in general rose in that area. Similar phenomena have been seen in other major departments, such as in New York City, following their own well-publicized crackdowns on police misconduct over the years (Knapp, 1972; Mollen, 1994), and more recently, in the NYPD rank and file's response to the perceived lack of support by their mayor surrounding several well-publicized use of force incidents (Celona, Cohen, & Golding, 2014).

The harsh truth is that, given a choice, many residents in crime-blighted communities would rather put up with a certain degree of police harassment than with the far more serious depredations of emboldened gang members, muggers, carjackers, sex offenders, and other hard-core criminals. The challenge, of course, is for local police agencies to effect a balance between aggressive (but not abusive) policing in high-crime areas and adherence to core law enforcement legal principles and ethical values (Lersch, 2002; Miller, 2004b, 2005a, 2006e, 2011b, 2015e; Peak, 2003; Petrowski, 2002a, 2002b; Pinizzotto et al., 2012; Scrivner, 1999).

5.2. Deadly force and race

Another reality is that law enforcement deadly force encounters do often involve white officers and minority, chiefly African-American, citizens; the question is why. Part of this may be due simply to the demographics of many high-crime communities, which typically have a predominantly Anglo police department and a predominantly minority citizenry. In these communities, young black males are more likely to be affected by deadly force encounters because young males of any race or ethnicity are disproportionately involved in illegal activity and aggressive confrontations of any sort. In white neighborhoods, it will be young white males who are differentially involved; in black neighborhoods, it will be young black males; same with Latino communities, Asian communities, and so on. Overall, in the U.S., since 1978, the

proportion of black suspects killed by police has been going down, from 49% in 1978 to 35% in 1998—still higher than the ratio of black to white citizens in the general U.S. population, but a clearly declining trend. During that same period, young black males killed police officers at a rate almost 6 times that of young white males (Brown & Langan, 2001).

Evidence suggests that, even though black officers are in the minority of most police forces, they may be disproportionately more likely than white officers to shoot suspects and are more likely than white officers to be killed by suspects. Again, this may be due to the demographics of deployment, where minority officers may be preferentially assigned to minority neighborhoods (Brown & Langan, 2001; Geller & Karales, 1981; Geller & Scott, 1992). However, when the factor of officer-to-citizen race/ethnicity ratio is controlled for, the evidence suggests that officers of any ethnicity are equally likely to become involved in deadly force encounters with citizens of any ethnicity (McElvain & Kposowa, 2008).

Where such confrontations appear to single out black citizens, this may be explained by the factors of: (1) higher likelihood of violent criminal conduct by community members, especially young males; (2) lower level of overall community cooperation with law enforcement; (3) greater likelihood of residents to be armed with a firearm; (4) high population urban area with low socioeconomic status of the community; and (5) the perception by community members that the police are already biased and invested in the continued repression and subordination of residents, creating a vicious cycle of hostility and recrimination (Fyfe, 1982; Jacobs & O'Brien, 1998; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Robin, 1964).

Consciously or unconsciously, many officers will “profile” young males, including young black males, engaged in certain types of suspicious actions because the cops’ instinct, training, and experience has taught them that these situations carry a high probability for potential illegal activity; however, absent this suspicious *behavior*, there is little evidence that white officers systematically target minority citizens for their race alone (McElvain & Kposowa, 2008). As discussed earlier, when an encounter ensues, police officers usually first try to use verbal and behavioral de-escalation strategies with all citizens before resorting to any kind of force, much less deadly force. The one circumstance where minority citizens may be more likely to be subject to use of force than white citizens is in the presence of large crowds, especially where one or more minority subjects have initiated disrespect toward the police, and officers are fearful of being overwhelmed by force of numbers of a hostile throng (Mastrofski et al., 2002).

Not surprisingly, violent environments often make for violent policing, and jurisdictions in which police officers kill civilians at a higher rate are also those locales where civilians kill police officers and each other at higher rates (Garner et al., 1995; Griffin & Bernard, 2003; Lester, 1984). However, it may not always be clear where this vicious cycle begins, since many police officers may come to feel that the entire community is more hostile to them than is actually the case, especially with less-well educated who may harbor pre-existing prejudices (Crawford, 1973; Lersch, 1998). Most officers in any community rarely encounter the “silent majority” of law-abiding citizens, and on a daily basis deal mainly with criminals and their victims. It is thus easy to their perceptions of an entire community skewed in the direction of cynicism and hostility.

5.3. *Deadly force and law enforcement culture*

However, police culture is still important. Within a given law enforcement agency, a command structure and managerial attitude that tolerates low-level breaches of police ethics and professionalism is more likely to harbor dysfunctional and corrupt officers who engage in all varieties of misconduct, from petty theft to excessive force. It is the “broken windows” theory of deviance (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), but this time applied to the officers themselves: ignoring “smaller”

violations emboldens departmental miscreants to commit more serious offenses.

A given department’s hard-nosed, “law and order” orientation may unintentionally encourage already violence- and corruption-prone officers to abuse their authority under a tacit mandate from the brass. Essential legal and ethical principles, such as observing due process and earning community acceptance, may be conveniently ignored by officers favoring a “get-em-at-any-cost” approach to policing. Within such a department, aggressive crime-fighters are praised and rewarded, and officers who engage in “social work” are denigrated, thereby further encouraging less attention to community relations and more emphasis on busting heads (Toch, 1996; Worden, 1996).

An early study of police shootings among Los Angeles County police departments found that the major determinant of shooting rates was not their communities’ levels of crime and violence, but the personal philosophies and policies, official or implicit, of their chiefs (Uelman, 1973). Similarly, the number of police shootings in Philadelphia was found to be relatively unrelated to the actual threats to police officers’ lives or safety, and had more to do with whether the mayor’s office was occupied by a “law and order” politician (Fyfe, 1988). More recent research has only reinforced the role of departmental policing philosophy on the conduct of rank and file patrol officers. Specifically, a strongly enforcement-oriented department, without the requisite attention to ethical training and practice, can abet the proclivity of already aggressive officers to use discretionary excessive force, and encourage their less aggressive peers to abandon efforts to “reason with these people” and just concentrate on making arrests (Geller & Toch, 1996; Lee & Vaughn, 2010).

Finally, in other law enforcement agencies, management or control may be conspicuous by its absence. Supervisors may tolerate patrol officer abuses because the managers themselves lack the ability to detect, prevent, or constrain them. The working independence and autonomy of police officers means that on a day-to-day basis, supervisors oversee at a distance the performance of officers who often work in low-visibility settings, essentially as free agents. Appropriate management training may be essential to helping the brass in these departments maintain better oversight and control of their personnel (Dias & Vaughn, 2006; Engel, 2000; Fyfe, 1988; Griffith, 2003; Hughes, 2001; Iannone & Iannone, 2001; Jurkanin, Hoover, Dowling, & Ahmad, 2001; Lee & Vaughn, 2010; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Miller, 2005a, 2011b; Peak, 2003; Scrivner, 1994; Sewell, 1992, 2002; White, 2000, 2003).

All things being equal, three factors have been found to be associated with lower rates of police deadly force encounters in a community: (1) higher overall educational level of the rank and file patrol force; (2) higher investment in mental health response and verbal crisis intervention training; and (3) greater efforts at police–community relationship building. Indeed, compared to less-educated police, officers who complete a college degree sustain fewer on-the-job injuries, take fewer sick days, endorse higher ethical standards, are less authoritarian and more communicative in their policing styles, garner fewer citizen complaints, and receive more favorable ratings from both their department and their communities (Carter & Sapp, 1990, 1992; Carter, Sapp, & Stephens, 1988; Finnegan, 1976). As noted earlier, the cause and effect relationship of this finding is not clear, i.e., does higher education equip officers with intellectual and practical tools for law enforcement problem solving, or does having already high cognitive and verbal skills enable one to persevere and complete a college curriculum? This may have implications for whether higher education in policing should be more of a selection factor, a training goal, or some combination.

5.4. *Law enforcement education and training*

In this vein, identifying the sources of law enforcement excessive force and deadly force should lead to productive strategies for its control and management. Solutions to this problem will involve a suite of

strategies, including officer selection, training, coaching, counseling, and discipline (Miller, 2006h, 2015d). Here is a summary of some useful approaches to training for alternatives to force.

The most successful diplomats, combat soldiers, and trial lawyers have developed the ability to control their temper, words, and behavior under stressful and confrontational conditions, and such *conflict management training* enhances officers' communication skills as the primary tools for controlling potentially violent citizens (Fyfe, 1988; Geller & Toch, 1996), including managing those with mentally illness (Hails & Borum, 2003; Johnson, 2011; Miller, 2013a, 2015d). A model that may be productively applied here comes from the field of corporate conflict resolution, and appeals to the idea from the martial arts that true strength comes from inner confidence, peace, and wisdom, that power is a tool that is best used quietly, and that true respect inheres as much in force restrained as in force overtly expressed. Such a model might be practically reinforced by training in communication skills that appeal to this kind of "verbal judo" approach (Cooper, 1999; Crawley, 1995; Potter-Efron, 1998; Slaiuku, 1996).

Police officers may not fully understand the utility of a business model in dealing with many of the characters they encounter on patrol, but most respect the members of their agency's hostage negotiation team; after all, these specialized officers are no "social workers" and, indeed, many of them come from the ranks of SWAT team members. Patrol officers may therefore be more receptive to applying some of these negotiation techniques to police–citizen conflict resolution (Greenstone, 2005; Hammer & Rogan, 1997; Hare, 1997; Kohlrieser, 2006; McMains, 2002; Miller, 2005b, 2013c; Misino & DeFelice, 2004; Slatkin, 1996). The most effective conflict resolution and negotiation training programs teach officers through role playing how to control a potentially violent encounter and how to de-escalate rather than exacerbate tensions between themselves and citizens—that is, how to defuse, deflect, and delay the fatal tipping point that frequently causes an encounter to turn violent and deadly.

6. Summary and conclusions

The use of any kind of force in police–citizen encounters is uncommon, and deadly force encounters are rarer still. Police officers use deadly force when they believe they have no choice in order to preserve human life, their own or that of other citizens. Any force used beyond that necessary to preserve life, prevent injury, or control the scene is excessive force. Police officers characteristically restrain their use of force with citizens, sometimes at the cost of their own safety. However, certain types of attitudes, personalities, and job experiences may make some officers more prone to use force in police–citizen encounters, and certain emotional and behavioral features of police–citizen confrontations may eventuate in a *tipping point*, where force will be deployed. Altered patterns of thought and perception may occur in the minds of officers during a deadly force encounter, and the aftermath of such an incident may include both administrative and psychological consequences. Certain citizen racial and ethnic groups may be disproportionately represented in incidents of police use of force, including deadly force. However, these are mainly related to the demographics of criminal behavior in all communities, and there is no evidence that police systematically single out or target certain citizens for use of force confrontations based on race alone.

There will always be some bad cops, just as there will be negligent doctors, disreputable attorneys, and rogue soldiers. The reason virtually all police departments have Internal Affairs divisions is to minimize the effect of these bad apples on their peers and on their communities. If body cameras, civilian review boards, independent prosecutors, and other measures can be shown to improve objectivity and transparency in a fair way, so much the better, and no reasonable police agency should categorically resist these recommendations without careful study of their pros and cons. More fundamentally, certain features of selection, education, training, discipline, and supervision of police officers

can improve police–citizen communication and further reduce the incidence of use of force, including deadly force encounters.

Most police agencies will listen to citizens if they have legitimate concerns and present them in an organized manner. If citizens are unhappy with the law enforcement policies in their area, we have the right and obligation to use our collective moral, social, and political power to study the problem and work constructively for a change, not let the process be hijacked by self-serving demagogues, thrill-seekers, or criminal opportunists. The important thing for police personnel to realize is that, for every complaining citizen and mediagenic protester, there is a silent majority of citizens, in any community, who appreciate what most officers try to do every day to keep them safe.

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