

Chapter 3

Social Climate Change and the Modern Police Department: Millennials, Marijuana, and Mass Media

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ABSTRACT

The advent of social media, blogs, smartphones, and the 24-hour all access news channels make information available to us constantly on the television, the internet, and even while mobile. This chapter highlights contemporary social and generational trends including the arrival of the Millennial generation into the workforce, legalization of marijuana, the mainstream acceptance of body art as a form of self-expression, and the influence of mass media on the lives of police officers, particularly in officer-involved shootings. These emerging factors challenge law enforcement managers to consider complex issues in the workplace while maintaining the core values, camaraderie, and professional standards inherent in policing. The public safety psychologist's role is also evolving with new technology, social developments, and organizational challenges. This chapter aims to encourage dialogue between mental health professionals, law enforcement managers, and policy-makers.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 10 years, Americans have experienced significant changes in how we communicate. The advent of social media, blogs, smartphones, and the 24-hour all access news channels make information available to us constantly on the television, the internet, and even while mobile. The Millennials born into this age of technology differ significantly from the preceding generations, and these differences impact

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the available applicant pool for law enforcement agencies (Wilson, Dalton, Scheer, & Grammich, 2010). As the Millennials move into the workforce, and societal trends and practices change, the acceptance of tattoos and body art and the legalization of marijuana alter the landscape of hiring, policy, and operations of police agencies across the country. This chapter highlights contemporary social and generational trends including the arrival of the Millennials into the workforce, legalization of marijuana, the mainstream acceptance of body art as a form of self-expression, and the influence of mass media on the lives of police officers, particularly in officer-involved shootings. These emerging concerns challenge law enforcement managers to consider complex issues in the workplace while maintaining the core values, camaraderie, and professional standards inherent in policing. The public safety psychologist's role is also evolving with new technology, social developments, and organizational challenges. The content of this chapter ideally brings contemporary issues in policing to the forefront, which will hopefully encourage dialogue among mental health professionals, law enforcement managers, and policy-makers as they wrestle with the benefits and risks that often accompany change. Our goal is to enhance the personal and professional lives of the men and women who choose daily to work in the field of law enforcement.

THE NEXT GENERATION

As we progress into the new millennium, it is clear that society is changing rapidly. The invention of social networking and the development of technology for smartphones have drastically changed the volume of information available and the way in which we communicate. The technology boom provides the user with immediate access to worldwide data, 24-hour access to news sources, and encourages the sharing of personal videos, photos, thoughts, and ideas instantaneously with vast numbers of people worldwide.

Facebook, a social networking site launched in a college dormitory room by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, changed the way we share information and made it possible for people from all over the world to have instant access to others' personal information, perspectives, photographs, and video (Carlson, 2010). In October 2012, a short 8 years after its creation, Facebook had passed the monthly active users mark of one billion members who visit the site at least once a month. The company has an estimated 600 million mobile users and 140 billion friend connections since its inception. In each of the first 3 months of 2014, over one billion users logged into their Facebook account on a mobile device, doubling the amount from only 2 years prior, suggesting massive increases in the mobility, ease, and speed of information sharing (McDuling, 2014). The recent dramatic advances in technology and the use of social media accounts creates new challenges for public safety psychologists and law enforcement commanders, especially those tasked with maintaining legally defensible hiring practices and those providing oversight and intervention after a deadly force encounters.

The number of viewers using mobile devices to access video content increases daily. These devices capture digital images, video, and audio files that can easily be transferred to the internet and viewed immediately by up to millions of viewers worldwide. In fact, almost 30% of smartphone consumers access the local news primarily with their mobile devices, and almost the same number use these devices to view news videos (Smith, 2015).

The Millennials are the generational members born into this age of technological advances. The constant ease and influx of information sharing and the entry of Millennials into the workforce is creating cultural change, necessitating a shift in law enforcement recruitment, technology, and procedures. These technological advances shape the new generation of officers and change law enforcement opera-

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