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James F. Hooke

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PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL POLICE SERGEANT CANDIDATES*

JAMES F. HOOKE AND HERBERT H. KRAUSS

James F. Hooke, Ph.D. was Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Georgia and consultant on prisoner placement, Manpower Development and Training Center, Buford, Georgia. Dr. Hooke received his Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska, was formerly on the faculty of the Kansas University Medical Center, and is now at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Herbert H. Krauss, Ph.D. is Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Georgia. He received his Ph.D. from Northwestern University and has served on the faculties of the Kansas University Medical Center and the Ohio State University College of Medicine. This paper is based on data which he collected as consultant to the Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department.

These are confusing and difficult times for law enforcement agencies. On the one hand, there are increasingly strident pleas for "law and order," and on the other hand, the competency and in some instances the basic humanity of the police is questioned (e.g. Misner, 1969). In the face of such irrational subjectivity, the need to obtain information about the effectiveness of local police forces has become imperative.

Basic to the appraisal of a police force is an assessment of its selection and promotional procedures. In spite of the growing realization that personality assessment techniques have an important role to play in selection and promotion of personnel for many types of work, Naroll and Levitt (1963) report that few of the police forces of the major cities use personality tests as part of their assessment procedures. Yet the presence of such terms as "police mentality" in everyday speech provides evidence that personality factors may be quite important in the selection of police personnel.

The data presented here was collected as part of what was intended to be an extended study of the usefulness of objective personality inventories in the selection and promotion of police officers.¹ Studied first were those who had passed both written and oral examinations for sergeant and, therefore, were eligible for promotion to that rank. This group was selected because, as sergeants, they will

play a crucial leadership and disciplinary role on the force (e.g. Wilson, 1950).

METHOD

Subjects. Thirty seven officers of the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department were studied. All of these men had passed the written aptitude and oral examination for sergeant and were, thus, eligible for promotion to that rank within the biennium. These men were from 26 to 46 years old (mean age was 33.3 years) and had 4 to 20 years experience on the force (mean service 8.7 years). Participation in this investigation was voluntary and "for the good of the department." All participants knew that the department had no access whatsoever to the test data, and, thus, it would have no bearing on their promotion.

Procedure. The following tests were administered to the successful candidates:

(1) Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Hathaway & McKinley, 1951), a widely used personality test designed to assess the presence of severe psychopathology.

(2) Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values (Allport, *et al.*, 1960), intended to measure basic value orientation.

(3) Gough Adjective Check List (Gough, 1952), a list of adjectives considered useful in determining self concept. In addition, on the assumption that the man who occupies a position would be a good judge of how another might perform in that position, all of the sergeants on the force were asked to anonymously rate the successful candidates. They were to assign each candidate a score from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent) on each of two scales: (1)

* Based upon a paper presented at the 1968 South-eastern Psychological Association Meetings in New Orleans. The authors wish to express their thanks to Chief Kelly, the personnel officers, and the men of the Kansas City, Missouri police force for their cooperation.

¹ Unfortunately, both authors left Kansas City and obviated, at least temporarily, collection of further data.

TABLE 1
MMPI SUBSCALE SCORES (*k* corrected)

MMPI Scale	Successful Candidates	Matched Patrolmen
L	2.67	3.24
F	2.97	3.51
K	17.19	14.76*
1	11.92	13.24
2	17.08	18.00
3	19.89	19.43
4	22.65	22.38
5	22.40	22.65
6	8.59	7.38*
7	23.65	23.84
8	23.68	22.59
9	19.73	20.22
0	20.43	25.03*

* Groups differ significantly ($p < .05$).

"How good a policeman is this man?" (2) "How good a sergeant do you think he will be?"

An effort was made to obtain comparable data for unsuccessful sergeant candidates. These men were uniformly unwilling to cooperate. However, since most of the force had taken the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), it was possible to draw from this MMPI data pool a group of men who matched the primary subjects in age and length of service.

RESULTS

The mean MMPI profiles of both the group of successful candidates and the comparison patrolmen peaked on scales 4 and 9. However, none of the MMPI scale scores were greater than one standard deviation above the mean of the general population. Overall, so far as the MMPI is adequate to reflect psychopathology, both groups of police officers are a normal lot, exhibiting high energy and little neurotic inhibition.

Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the mean profiles of the two groups occurred on only three scales. The successful candidates were higher on scales K and 6 and lower on scale 0 than the patrolmen with whom they were matched. These differences suggest that as a group the successful sergeant candidates tend to depend more upon themselves, appear more self confident, are more sensitive in interpersonal relationships, and are more outgoing and genial than the patrolmen.

On the Study of Value Scales, the scores of the

successful candidates did not differ significantly from those of normal males.

The Adjective Check List items endorsed by the majority of the successful candidates were both conventional and socially desirable. All but one saw himself as capable, cooperative, dependable, and practical. All but two also checked honest and responsible. Interestingly enough, despite the high pejorative nature of some of the items (*e.g.* greedy, cruel) there was no item which did not receive at least one endorsement.

The correlation was .87 (*rho*) between the sergeants' opinion of "How good a policeman is this man?" and "How good a sergeant do you think he will be?" This indicates that those who were seen as good policemen were also regarded as potentially good sergeants.

The candidates were divided into two groups; one was made up of the 13 highest rated and the other 13 lowest rated. The MMPI and Study of Value Scores for the two groups were compared. No significant differences between the two groups emerged. However, it is of interest to note the differences between the two groups in frequency of abnormal MMPI scales. Of the 13 high-rated subjects, one had one scale above T-score 70, while among the low-rated candidates, three had one scale above T-score 70, and another had more than two scales in the abnormal range.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are suggested by the data:

(1) The test material indicates that the successful candidates and their matched controls are psychologically normal.

(2) The group of successful candidates, however, seems better suited for leadership and disciplinary roles than their matched controls.

(3) Within the group of successful candidates for sergeant, men who were rated by established sergeants as good police officers were also rated as potentially good sergeants. Conversely, those who were rated as relatively poorer officers were also seen as poorer sergeant material.

(4) The psychological tests did not differentiate between the candidates rated as good sergeant material and the group rated as relatively poorer candidates. Many explanations for this seem reasonable. For example, the two groups might be so similar that the psychological tests are insufficiently sensitive to differentiate between them.

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