How Far From the Tree Does the Apple Fall? Field Training Officers, Their Trainees, and Allegations of Misconduct

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Abstract
Grounded in both organizational- and individual-level theories, this study examined the relationship between police field training officers (FTOs) and their trainees’ subsequent allegations of misconduct. Trainees in the sample were each exposed to multiple FTOs, which presented a unique methodological problem. As such, multilevel models that permitted the nesting of individual trainees within multiple higher order groups of FTOs were estimated. Results revealed that approximately one quarter of the variation in trainees’ allegations of postsupervision misconduct was attributed to FTOs, suggesting the apple (trainee) indeed falls close to the tree (FTO). Implications for FTO selection and training are discussed.

Keywords
field training, police misconduct, police training

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Effective training and socialization are critical for molding police recruits into self-sufficient officers. Field training has perhaps the most potential to influence officer behavior because of its proximity to the “real” job. It is also important because of the informal learning it is designed to instill (Anderson, 1977). As Sun (2002) pointed out, field training programs (FTP) “. . . have become the principal formal mechanism for transmitting the police culture and craft to new officers” (p. 69). Likewise, as the U.S. Department of Justice (2003) has observed that “[t]he field training officer [FTO] is all important to the success of a department’s training program as the FTO is the first person in authority who will orient a new officer to the job environment” (p. 24).

FTOs are called on to implant in new officers a sense of values and competencies above and beyond those taught in the academy (Bennett, 1984; Engelson, 1999). Recruits presumably bring to the job an understanding of “book knowledge,” but they cannot be taught in an academy how to fairly and impartially apply all they learned in real-world situations. In other words, new officers can be taught when to legally arrest and use force, but the academy cannot instill in each trainee the intangible community value-based decision-making skills that are necessary to manage unpredictable incidents in varying situations. FTO programs therefore “. . . help compensate for selection errors and inadequate academy training” (Haberfeld, 2013, p. 89).

FTOs are also expected to impart in each recruit a new set of values and priorities that is acceptable in the individual’s new work setting. These values may differ significantly from those held by previous trainers, the general public, or even the recruit himself or herself. The FTO’s job is thus to take newly sworn officers and train them to the point at which they are able not only to perform daily (mundane) patrol duties but also to decide for themselves the “right” things to do within their new professional settings.

Although FTOs perform an important function, very little research has examined the FTO/trainee relationship. A number of studies have commented on and described the various approaches to FTO training (e.g., Haider, 1990; McCampbell, 1987). Others have compared different aspects of FTOs with their trainees (e.g., Sun, 2000, 2002), and still others have documented ethno-graphically the police socialization process, particularly the FTO role in it (e.g., Fielding, 1988; Van Maanen, 1973, 1974). This latter line of research has revealed that officers’ occupational outlooks and working styles are affected more by their FTOs than formal “book” training. To date, however, no research has explored the possible effects of FTOs on their trainees’ behavior after field training has concluded.

In one of the few peer-reviewed FTO-related studies published to date, Sun (2000) observed that
future research might attempt to observe FTOs’ behaviors in both training and non-training settings and to probe the impact of FTOs’ attitudes and behaviors on new officers’ performance after field training, and capture the state of the art and to identify changes in FTO selection, training and compensation. (pp. iii-iv)

Until now, policing scholars have not answered this call for research. The all-important question of how much influence FTOs have on their trainees’ subsequent actions has been ignored. The present study thus seeks to fill this gap. Police trainees were nested under their respective FTOs such that it was possible to explore whether and to what extent individual police misconduct could be attributed to FTOs. The focus was on misconduct because such data are both kept and readily accessible in most large police departments.

**A Brief History of the FTO Movement**

As far back as 1967, it was nationally recognized that police recruit training and evaluation were insufficient. The President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) found that only a small percentage of departments combined classroom work with formal field training that would acquaint recruits with everyday street problems. It was noted that “[a]ll training programs should provide instruction on subjects that prepare recruits to exercise discretion properly, and to understand the community, the role of police, and what the criminal justice system can and cannot do” (p. 112). The Commission also recommended “an absolute minimum of 400 hours of classroom work spread out over a four- to six-month period so that it can be combined with carefully selected and supervised field training” (President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967, p. 112).

In 1969, the San Jose Police Department hired a “likable, enthusiastic, but naïve, young recruit” who was judged by his peers and supervisors as “unacceptable police officer material,” yet allowed to continue as a police officer, “although there were numerous areas in which he was judged to be ‘in need of improvement’ (judgment, safety consciousness, and work quality)” (Moore & Womack, 1975). Less than 1 year after being hired, the officer killed a motorist and severely injured himself, prompting development of the most widely recognized FTP in the United States today. The resulting protocol, the so-called “San Jose Model,” became the first formalized police FTP (Haberfeld, 2013, p. 82).

Some years later, in 1983, a Dade County (Florida) grand jury investigated what officials perceived as an alarming uptick in police shootings within a
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relatively short period. An elaborate report was issued, which, among other
calls for reform, cited a need for improvements to police field training (Dade
County Fall Term 1982 Grand Jury, 1983). The report expressed alarm over
what it referred to as an “incestuous cycle of young officers training other
young officers” and suggested police departments should offer incentives for
senior officers to act as FTOs: “Throughout our Term it became increasingly
and repeatedly apparent to us that the strength and effectiveness of any police
department is inextricably dependent upon the strength and effectiveness of
its Field Training Officer program” (p. 7).

Fast-forwarding to 1989, the Supreme Court decided in City of Canton v.
Harris (Alpert, 1989) that local governments could be held civilly liable for
“failure to train” their officers. In light of that decision, the burden now rests
with police departments and local units of government to train recruits or risk
possibly significant financial loss. Although the standard to establish liability
was set rather high, at the “deliberate indifference” level, the Court’s decision
furthered the need for formalized field training to replace an ad hoc system of
having untrained veterans “train” new recruits (e.g., Alpert, 1989). Departments scrambled to update training and FTPs and reforms were imple-
mented almost en masse. National surveys soon revealed that all major police
departments and most midsized ones implemented formal FTO programs
(e.g., Webb, 1993). Formalized FTPs are now a fixture in police departments
around the United States.

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical perspectives can be brought to bear on the problem at
hand, but two seem most appropriate. We begin with a focus on organiza-
tional explanations for the FTO–trainee connection because, as Smith (1984)
observed, “contrasting departmental orientations” are important forces
throughout police training and officers’ later careers. We also look toward the
individual level and explore how social learning theory, which has been
invoked in police deviance research, is relevant in the present context.

Organizational Influence

In Varieties of Police Behavior, Wilson (1968) identified three distinct types
of law enforcement agencies: watchman, service, and legalistic. Watchman
style agencies were considered nonprofessional and focused primarily on
order maintenance; discretionary decisions were the norm, with an eye
toward peacekeeping. Service and legalistic agencies, then, were considered
professional but varied in their level of bureaucratization. Highly
bureaucratic professional agencies were considered legalistic, while agencies with less-developed organizational structures were considered service departments. Law enforcement was subordinate to service in service departments, whereas uniform enforcement was typical of legalistic agencies.

Smith (1984) took Wilson’s classification further and distinguished between four types of agencies. Nonprofessional agencies with shallow bureaucracies were deemed “fraternal,” while nonprofessional bureaucratic agencies were called “militaristic.” In other words, Smith broke the watchman style into two categories. Service and legalistic agencies were identical to Wilson’s (1968) classifications.

The common thread running throughout these works was a realization that police decision making is contingent on organizational contexts. Such contexts could extend beyond police departments to include ecological units, such as cities, but Wilson (1967, 1968) and Smith (1984) focused more on organizations themselves, as “...the behavior of individual police officers reflects...shared values and beliefs about law enforcement and the police role (p. 20).

Particularly relevant to the topic of the present study, organizational effects on officer behavior are often manifested through supervisors’ influence on their subordinates. For example, Smith (1984) found that the presence of a supervisor on the scene increased the probability of an arrest decision, net of other factors. More importantly, this effect varied across the type of agency in question. It was more pronounced in militaristic and legalistic police agencies than it was in fraternal agencies. In addition, the presence of a supervisor had no bearing on arrest decisions in service-oriented agencies.

Although Wilson and Smith did not examine the FTO–trainee relationship, it is not difficult to conceive of how important organizational factors are in such a context. We could expect a strong connection between FTOs and their trainees in militaristic and legalistic agencies. Their “by the book” approach demands a high level of supervision, monitoring, and involvement on the part of those conducting the training. The opposite would likely be true in fraternal and service agencies. Indeed, as Smith (1984) observed, “...patrol supervisors in fraternal and service style agencies are, at times, reluctant to become involved.” Extending this into the FTO realm would imply a tenuous, if not altogether absent, connection between FTOs and the eventual patrol habits of their trainees.

Social Learning

Social learning (Akers, 1985) refers to the direct and indirect involvement and exposure one has to different norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors in
different social contexts, and how such behaviors are reinforced via rewards and punishments. FTOs involve themselves in the officer’s work life (and sometimes, life in general) in every context the FTO can manufacture. Trainees are thus presumed to learn behaviors applicable to “real life” on the streets, beyond what is taught in the academy. The FTOs use quizzes and scenarios to teach the officers and grade them on the FTOs’ perception of correctness. The trainees are held accountable for what the FTO believes is right and wrong. Simply put, the main basis for the FTO program’s existence is for the trainee to learn how to be a self-sufficient officer.

Within the context of FTOs, the FTOs have the latitude to train as they see fit. The FTOs can teach officers “the letter of the law” or how to do things “by the book,” how to circumvent departmental rules by explaining to them which are “important and unimportant,” or something in between this strict adherence and outright deviance. Regardless, the FTOs teach policies and procedures that are (re)forming the officers’ “definitions,” one of social learning theory’s primary mechanisms.

It is unlikely there is significant variation in the teachings of FTOs regarding acceptable deviance, but it is realistic to assume FTOs can and do teach their trainees what is considered right and wrong according to department policy. It is even more likely that FTOs distinguish between outright corruption (unlawfulness) and “bending the rules” to favor the recruit, the department, or the society. Examples of this would be “pencil-whipping” a report or “thumping the bad guy” to teach him or her a lesson, whereas “the ends” of arrest justify “the means” of possible deviant behavior (Caldero & Crank, 2011; Crank, Flaherty, & Giacomazzi, 2007). Similarly, Ford (2003) observed that “[a] number of authors have concluded that by the end of the rookie year, many subcultural attitudes and values have been fixed” (p. 86). His study focused on “war stories,” which he defined as a “recounting of idealized events, entertaining humor, or police-related social commentary” (p. 86). He argued that war stories “subtly contradict the instructional message, [and that] FTO or rookie officers may become cynical and defensive” when they are subjected to these day after day—as is most often the case (Ford, 2003). New officers were exposed to veteran’s narratives about how “street justice” was meted out, “the insanity of police policy and procedures,” and other deviant behaviors that FTOs are generally thought to shun.

FTOs are expected to act as “role models” not only for the recruits but also for their peers as well (e.g., Dallas Police Department [DPD], 2008a). As described above, the FTOs play many roles, but one of the most important is to be the quintessential perfect officer from which the new officer can learn through example. Caldero and Crank (2011) argued that the FTOs’ influence is so important that new officers are going to role model the FTOs’ actions.
“down to the last doughnut” (p. 73). They warn police managers that if an FTO is not a proper role model, it is a “screw up.” The FTO is a powerful figure in the learning process of behavior among newly minted police officers and it is likely that this process has consequences not only for the trainee but for future generations of police officers.

To date, Chappell and Piquero (2004) are the only researchers to have formally applied Akers’ social learning theory (SLT) to police deviance. In their view, “the social psychological behaviorist approach of Akers’ social learning theory provides a unique theoretical lens through which to view police misconduct” (p. 91). Through the use of questionnaires, they examined officers’ attitudes and the perceptions of peer attitudes and the likelihood of punishment vis-à-vis actual citizen complaints. The scenarios were used to measure social learning concepts specific to police officers. Their findings offered some support to the idea that Akers’ “theoretical framework” may be useful when empirically examining police misconduct (p. 103). Even more important and relevant in the present context, they suggested that training needs to be conducted to overcome the (prevailing) subculture of acceptable misconduct.

In a separate study, Chappell (2007) argued that field training is an important part of police socialization, but the focus was on the extent to which FTOs imparted community policing principles to their trainees. Through the use of analyzing formal evaluations and reports generated by the FTOs, she concluded the FTOs fell short in this regard. In a subsequent study, she and a colleague explored this phenomenon at the academy, finding that community policing was downplayed, despite its rhetorical importance, in favor of paramilitary structure and culture (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Although SLT was not formally tested in either of these studies, it is nevertheless clear that it is a natural fit. The teacher–student, mentor–mentee relationship, coupled with the peer exchange between the FTO and their trainees, all but requires that social learning theory be considered in this context. The present study simply extends this line of research.

**Research Setting**

The setting for the current study was Dallas, Texas. The DPD is the principal law enforcement agency serving the city and is staffed by approximately 3,500 sworn officers and 500 civilian employees. It is further structured around seven patrol divisions, each with its own substations. The population of the city of Dallas is approximately 1.2 million people, according to the 2010 Census.

The DPD’s current FTO program (formally called the Field Training Program, or FTP) is based on the San Jose model. Every officer who goes through the program passes through at least 24 weeks of training, which is
above and beyond in-house academy training that takes place over a preceding 35½ weeks. During the 24-week FTP program, new officers are trained in four separate “phases” by three different FTOs (see below). According to DPD (2008a), after completing the program, the officer should be able to “function in a safe, skillful, and professional manner” (p. 2).

The Dallas FTP is guided by General Order 416.00 and the DPD’s (2008a, 2008b) Field Training Program Manual. FTOs must hold the rank of at least senior corporal and be assigned to uniform patrol. To be selected, FTOs must undergo a review of their disciplinary history, be recommended by their sergeant, be selected by an interview board, and “possess qualities of maturity, fairness and dependability” (DPD, 2008a, p. 9). Moreover, according to policy, FTOs should be above the standards in all areas because they are responsible for teaching the Department’s policies and procedures to the recruits. With these responsibilities in mind, one can see why the selection process is vital and must cover numerous aspects of the officer’s past and present career, as well as his attitudes and expectations for the future. (DPD, 2008a, p. 5)

**DPD’s Field Training Procedure**

If a so-called Apprentice Police Officer (APO) passes successfully through the training academy, he or she is assigned to one of the seven patrol divisions for further training within the FTP. The FTP is designed to “provide the structure, information, and guidelines necessary to adequately prepare newly graduated recruit officers to meet the challenges and demands of field assignments as members of a patrol bureau” (DPD, 2008a, p. iv). In other words, the FTP is practical field instruction used as a conduit between academics in the academy and producing “a police officer at the end of this twenty-four week period that can function in a safe, skillful and professional manner as a single-unit” (DPD, 2008a). Between the academy and the FTP, this usually accounts for 1.5 to 2 years of officers’ occupational training.

FTP training within the DPD begins only days after graduation from the academy. The officers are required to report to their respective patrol divisions (based on manpower but otherwise randomly assigned by the Office of the First Assistant Chief) for a 2-day orientation briefing on the Monday following graduation. During this 2-day orientation, the officers are introduced to their chain of command, the “philosophies of their commanders,” their role and responsibilities, steps to take to resolve conflict and receive assistance, and maintenance of their “Recruit Training Workbook.” The officers are told the basics of the FTP, what is expected, and how their work/training rotation will proceed.
The FTP is divided into four training rotations. The officers will usually stay within the same geographical boundaries of their divisions but will have at least three separate FTOs. In each of the first three phases, a different officer serves as FTO. Trainees then rotate back to their initial Phase 1 FTO at Phase 4, which is an evaluation-only phase. Each of the first three phases lasts 7 weeks.

Phase 1 is the “teaching phase.” During this phase, the FTO does most of the daily work and is responsible for teaching, demonstrating, exposing, and training the officer. The FTO primarily does everything related to fieldwork and does not begin assigning “grades” to the officer until the sixth week. In other words, the first 5 weeks are considered an “instructional period.” It is assumed the officer is “working at a level of under 15 percent of the workload until week six” (DPD, 2008a, p. 2).

Phase 2, the teaching/development phase, also lasts 7 weeks. Here, the first 2 weeks are not graded; they are known as “the instructional period.” It is during Phase 2 that the DPD believes the officer should begin to develop. The officer is given more responsibilities by the FTO. Starting with Week 10, the trainee is made responsible for various activities, including a problem-based learning exercise. If all the goals for Phase 2 are met and the end of phase evaluation is satisfactory, the officer will pass to Phase 3.

Phase 3 is the development/confidence-building phase. By the beginning of Phase 3, the officer should be performing about 55% of the daily workload (DPD, 2008a). During this phase, the FTO does much less of the patrol work and the APO needs to demonstrate he or she can fully complete daily tasks and may necessitate only minor corrections. By the end of Phase 3, the officer should be able to demonstrate he or she can operate in an uncontrolled environment, doing daily police work with no intervention or remediation from the FTO. This is because the final phase, Phase 4, is meant to be an observer/evaluation phase and not a “teaching” phase.

Phase 4 is the last step before the officer is released on his or her own and given an independent work assignment. In Phase 4, the Phase 1 FTO simply “shadows” the officer (sometimes in civilian clothes if authorized) and evaluates him or her. The FTO will allow the officer considerable latitude and should only “interfere” if a situation becomes dangerous, the officer breaks policy, or the officer fails to act or overreacts. The FTO completes a Daily Observation Report (DOR) and assuming there are no issues or problems, recommends the officer be passed through from the FTP. According to DPD policy, “[o]nly when it has been demonstrated that the standards can be met will a recruit graduate from field training. Should the recruit be unable to meet the standards, termination may result” (DPD, 2008a, p. 2).
Table 1. Rotation of FTOs and Their Trainees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>FTOs</th>
<th>Trainees in Phase 1</th>
<th>Trainees in Phase 2</th>
<th>Trainees in Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Noye</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kuhlman</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimmerman</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Fagen</td>
<td>Hamelin</td>
<td>Spears</td>
<td>Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sanders</td>
<td>Spears</td>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>Hamelin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>Hamelin</td>
<td>Spears</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. FTO = field training officer.

Table 1 depicts how six hypothetical FTOs and their six officer trainees would typically rotate through the FTP program. In this particular example, there are two different groups (Group 1 and Group 2) of trainees being trained at the same time, each with three FTOs and three trainees.

Method

Data and Analysis Procedure

The analysis was based on data from all sworn officers hired by the DPD from June 2004 through June 2009 (n = 218), each of whom were observed for the first 24 months of unsupervised post-FTO training police work and were exposed to only three FTOs, in accordance with DPD policy. These officers were in turn nested across multiple FTOs (n = 91) who, at a minimum, had experience training at least five APOs. As indicated above, all officers were trained by three different FTOs at equal intervals prior to being eligible for unsupervised police work.

The goal of the analysis was, again, solely to ascertain how much variation in posttraining officer complaints was attributable to FTOs (see Johnson, 2011). Subsequent research will examine officer- and FTO-level correlates of police misconduct. Because officers were nested within multiple FTOs, a model was estimated that explicitly accounts for multiple group membership, in a multilevel modeling framework (see Leckie, 2013). This was a multiple membership model of officer complaints.

In regular multilevel modeling applications, units/cases at Level 1 are nested in only one group at any given number of subsequent levels in a hierarchy. For example, elementary school students (Level 1) may be nested within a particular classroom (Level 2) and/or in a particular school (Level 2
or Level 3, depending on the model). In our case, the traditional multilevel modeling approach was extended to allow for the nesting of lower level units within multiple higher order groups.

Again drawing on the school example, if schoolchildren were exposed to multiple teachers throughout the course of the academic year, then the traditional multilevel approach would force the analyst to assume exposure to just one teacher, which is inaccurate in such a situation. If individuals are exposed to multiple Level 2 groups, then a Level 2 weighting procedure is necessary (e.g., if a student spent 60% of the day with one teacher and 40% with another, this must be accounted for in estimation).

In our analysis, each APO was exposed to three different FTOs for the duration of the training period. Conveniently, each FTO was responsible for that officer for exactly 7 weeks. Trainees were thus nested within three specific FTOs, each of whom accounted for one third of the officer’s training.

Models were restricted to FTOs who trained at least five officers. It is important to note that although a greater number of Level 1 units within Level 2 groups would have been preferred, a minimum of five officers per FTO is not fatal to the analysis for the following reasons: (a) Five observations per group/individual is suitable in growth curve models, which are mathematically equivalent to cross-sectional multilevel models, and (b) we modeled only the Level 1 intercept, conditional on Level 2 variation. Concerning the latter, because we did not attempt to estimate a model with any covariates, a high ratio of trainees to FTOs was not as critical to the analysis.

Measures

The outcome variable was the number of officer complaints on record occurring during the first 24 months of unsupervised police work. This measure ranged between 0 and 5 ($M = 0.45; SD = 0.94$). To alleviate skew, the measure was log transformed. The frequency of complaints is tabulated in Table 2. As shown, 74.6% of officers had no complaints during the observation period (24 months).

Results

The first step of the analysis was to estimate an intercept-only model (i.e., no model predictors) and calculate estimated variation components at both the officer and FTO levels. This model “simply decomposes the total variance in [officer complaints] into separate [FTO] and [officer] variance components” (Leckie, 2013, p. 16) and was constrained as a two-level regression model expressed as the following:
complaints$_{ij} = \beta_0 + \text{FTO}1_{ij} u_{1j} + \text{FTO}2_{ij} u_{2j} + \text{FTO}3_{ij} u_{3j} + \ldots \\
+ \text{FTO}91_{ij} u_{91j} + e_{ij},$

where complaints$_{ij}$ is the observed number of officer complaints for officer $i$ in a single artificial “super cluster” $j$; $\beta_0$ is the overall mean of officer complaints; FTO1$_{ij}$, FTO2$_{ij}$, FTO3$_{ij}$, . . . , FTO91$_{ij}$ represent the proportion of time that officer $i$ was trained by each of the 91 FTOs; $u_{1j}$, $u_{2j}$, . . . , $u_{91j}$ are represented by 91 Level 2 random coefficients that measure the 91 FTO effects; and $e_{ij}$ is the residual error term at the officer level (see also Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2008).

For every APO, an FTO trained that trainee for one third of his or her training period. This resulted in a 91 × 91 variance–covariance matrix, with each of the 91 variances constrained to be 0, resulting in a sole random effect parameter at the FTO level (Level 2), which is the between-FTO variance. This model was estimated in Stata 12 using the xtmixed command.

The regression model results are presented in Table 3. As shown, it does appear that a statistically and substantively significant level of variation in officer complaints lies at the FTO level. This is apparent, first, by the estimated variance component more than doubling its standard error and, second, via the likelihood ratio test between the multilevel and regular ordinary least squares model comparison ($p < .001$). We also calculated variance partition coefficients (VPC), which provide an estimate of the variation in officer complaints at each level of the data hierarchy (FTO and Officer). This procedure gave us an opportunity to explore how important FTOs may be in determining officer complaints. Because the proportion of time spent with each FTO was equal across all officers, we were able to estimate the following equation, which represents the VPC for officers with FTO profiles given by $w^{(2)}_{1j}, \ldots, w^{(2)}_{91j}$ defined by the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaints</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>74.61</td>
<td>74.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>88.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>94.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>98.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>99.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 256 100
Table 3. Multiple Membership Multilevel Model Results: Officer Complaints.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed part</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Random part

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variance (FTO1-FTO147)</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance (residual)</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n (L1) = 218. n (L2) = 91. Log likelihood = −89.67. Likelihood Ratio Test versus Linear Regression (10.38; p < .001). FTO = field training officers.

\[
VPC_{u(2)} = \frac{\sigma_u^2 \sum_{h \in FTO(i)} (w_{h,i}^{(2)})^2}{\sigma_u^2 \sum_{h \in FTO(i)} (w_{h,i}^{(2)})^2 + \sigma_e^2},
\]

where cases involving multiple FTOs, that is, all of them in the present case, simply extended the formula to take the sum of the FTO training proportions there does appear to be statistically and substantively significant (i.e., 0.333 of the training each). This results in the following:

\[
VPC_{u(2)} = \frac{\sigma_u^2 \left(0.333^2 + 0.333^2 + 0.333^2\right)}{\sigma_u^2 \left(0.333^2 + 0.333^2 + 0.333^2\right) + \sigma_e^2},
\]

and suggests that 26.4% of the variation in new officer complaints is explained by the FTOs responsible for training that officer. The remaining proportion of variation in complaints is attributable to the individual police officer and his or her opportunity for complaints. In the end, there does appear to be statistically or substantively significant variation in officer complaints that is explainable by the FTOs, at least within the data analyzed. This is a novel and important finding.

Discussion and Conclusion

It has been widely argued that field training is critical to new officer development (e.g., Beaver, 2006; Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement
Agencies, 2006; Connor, 2000; Dade County Fall Term 1982 Grand Jury, 1983; Engelson, 1999; Haider, 1990; Kaminsky, 2002; Pitts, Glensor, & Peak, 2007; President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967; Sun, 2000, 2002, 2003a; Warners, 2010). FTOs presumably teach new officers the practical application of what they have learned in the academy. More importantly, the field training process acclimates trainees to the department’s values—and to the community’s values (e.g., Bahn, 1984; Bennett, 1984; Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010; Engelson, 1999; Ford, 2003).

A number of FTO studies have been published over the years (e.g., Doerner & Patterson, 1992; Doerner, Speir, & Wright, 1989; Fagan, 1985; Haberfeld, 2013; Sun, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b), but most have either focused on attitudes and behavior or were largely descriptive accounts of the ideal training protocol. Our study built on prior FTO/trainee behavior studies and is distinguished by our efforts to identify the FTOs within the department, nest trainees within their respective FTOs, and determine whether those FTOs have an effect on their trainees’ later behavior. In other words, ours was the first step taken beyond the many anecdotal accounts claiming to draw strong associations between FTOs and their trainees’ behaviors (e.g., Beaver, 2006; Connor, 2000; Engelson, 1999; Haider, 1990; Kaminsky, 2002; McCampbell, 1987; Pitts et al., 2007; Unsinger & More, 1990).

We found that FTOs seem to have a statistically significant effect on their trainees’ allegations of misconduct. There are different ways to interpret this finding. On one hand, to the extent FTOs have a significant effect on their trainees’ allegations of misconduct, the training an FTO imparts is at least partially responsible for the incidence of officer-level complaints. “Bad apple” and/or poorly trained FTOs may thus have a harmful influence on their trainees. On the other hand, the lingering effect on individual officer behavior of FTO training is an important finding that can be used to improve training going forward. Had we been unable to reject the null hypothesis, then one wonders whether reforms to FTO training procedures could have positively affected the trainees and their eventual work habits.

**Limitations**

It is important to note that our analysis was limited in certain respects. First, we studied only complaints, irrespective of the disposition or the source. We did not distinguish between founded and unfounded complaints. Likewise, we did not identify the initial source of the complaint (internal vs. external). Finally, there are metrics other than complaints that could have yielded different findings. For example, commendations could have yielded different results, but such data were not available.
The analyses were also limited to one police department (Dallas) that uses a somewhat unconventional FTO selection protocol. The primary and relief FTOs are selected through a process outlined in department’s FTO manual (DPD, 2008a) and in the department’s general orders (DPD, 2008b). In practice, however, many shifts do not possess the amount of FTOs needed to train all new officers (this was ascertained via interviews by the lead author with various officials involved in DPD’s FTP program). The department’s supervisors have the authority to “draft” an officer (usually a senior corporal) regardless of his or her prior training and/or formal selection as an FTO. In practical terms, this means that some trainees are put at the mercy of a senior officer who may not have been prepared for the job. Data accounting for the extent of this problem were not available, so we can only speculate that the results may have been affected as a result of it.

Third, the DPD’s multiphase approach to FTO training may also be problematic, practically and methodologically. Because trainees were exposed to multiple FTOs, it is conceivable that the relative brevity of training at each phase may have stopped short of instilling good or bad habits in many new police officers. This also limited the number of officers we could nest within each FTO (many FTOs in the data did not train a large number of recruits). As mentioned earlier, we did restrict our analyses to FTOs who trained at least five officers. This was done to provide at least a measure of variation across FTOs, but it bears mentioning this limitation could have affected the outcomes observed.

**Implications**

It is widely assumed that FTOs are transformative and influential in the lives of their trainees. The data analyzed and models estimated seem to support this assertion. Before we can put too much stock in the findings, however, more FTO research is needed, preferably with other agencies and/or different field training protocols. Assuming our findings are meritorious, police departments would do well to closely examine the structure and selection mechanisms at work in their FTPs.

Wilson’s (1967, 1968) and Smith’s (1984) research, although very important to policing scholarship, make the assumption that organizational factors are static and more or less not amenable to change. Subsequent research has argued, however, that there is much police organizations can do to improve. This is not to suggest that any one organizational type is necessarily preferable over the next, only that if one proves less than ideal in certain circumstances, change is possible.

More attention should also be paid to which officers are training and how well they themselves are trained. We accept the argument that FTOs occupy
a critical position between the academy and the “real” job of policing; the data bear this out. As it stands, there is little uniformity in FTO selection procedures. Haberfeld (2013) has offered a supportive assessment of the assessment center approach to FTO selection. Trained assessors observe applicants’ performance in numerous settings and then draw conclusions as to who should be selected.

What influence the FTO position can or should have deserved more empirical attention, as well. As Sun (2000) observed, “although the emergence of formal field training programs has drawn much attention to many aspects of FTO programs, there has been sporadic research on the trainer” (p. 24). Much is unknown about the trainer, and our findings underscore the importance of this shortcoming in the literature.

Finally, although policies that ensure FTOs are instilling the correct values in the new officers are paramount, we know virtually nothing about how adequately they are put into practice. Agencies should thus maintain a greater degree of FTO supervision, not just trainee supervision. Such an effort would go a long way toward improving FTO programming and better informing the research base.

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