NEGOTIATING THE DECISION:
WHAT IS A POLICE MATTER

by

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ABSTRACT

Most sociological studies of the police tend to be concerned with aspects of their social control function in society. Few researchers have treated the day to day duties of the police as part of the performance of a work role.

This study reports on the social activities performed by police and civilian personnel in a specific phase of police organization -- the phone room. It is through these routines and practices that this aspect of police work is done.

The study is based on observations made in the phone room of the Vancouver Police Station. Tape recordings were made of a number of calls. As an adjunct to observational data, interviews were held with members of the staff.

Members of the community phone in to the police to report a variety of troubles. Staff, through their routine practices, select and work up from these calls, those which will be treated as "police business." "Police business" is thus viewed as produced by the routine practices of the phone room staff. This study examines some of these routine practices through which police business is accomplished.

A section of this study deals with the kinds of callers staff consider are entitled to make a report because of their relationship to the event they are reporting; callers who stand in a special relationship to the police; and those features of the caller's account that police attend to in assigning the event
described in the call to an administrative category.

The police mandate to take action is discussed, and consideration is given to some of the organization factors that phone room staff take into account in exercising discretionary power to use that mandate.

A final section deals with two typifications of people commonly made by phone room staff -- "missing persons", and "crank callers." Phone room staff make these typifications based on their knowledge of the community and the exigencies of phone room work.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We tend to think of police largely in terms of their social control function in society. This is true not only of the ordinary lay person, but is also reflected in much of the research done by social scientists. Illustrative of this concern are some of the studies in Bordua's book, *The Police: Six Sociological Essays*; notably those by Silver, Reiss and Bordua, and Werthman and Piliavin.\(^1\) Silver gives an historical account of the development of modern police as the result of a need for a body of 'specialists' to exercise coercive control over and on behalf of the community. Reiss and Bordua pursue the same theme in a discussion of legal control in a modern urban setting. Werthman and Piliavin are concerned with studying the balance between effective law enforcement and respect for the citizenry in police encounters with Negroes. Skolnick, even though he accompanied the police, indicates in an essay in Bordua's book and in *Justice Without Trial* an interest in the consequences of the organization and bureaucratization of social control in a democratic society.\(^2\)

Study of the police force as a "rational organization" charged with maintaining social control is based on the concept of organization as

stable associations of persons engaged in concerted activities directed to the attainment of specific
objectives. It is thought to be a decisive characteristic of such organizations that they are deliberately instituted relative to those objectives.\(^3\)

This concept of a rational organization becomes regarded as a normative idealization and carries with it some notion of "what ought to be" with subsequent lack of emphasis on how the work of the organization is accomplished.

There are few studies that have treated the policeman going about his duties, looking at the performance of these duties as a work role in the same way that one might look at the work role of a postman, a mechanic or a laboratory technician and taking into account such aspects of work as time, expectations, orders, conflicts, material resources, personal reactions, pressures and frustrations. Some of the research that is particularly informative in this area includes those studies of the police done by Egon Bittner, Harvey Sacks and Roy Turner.\(^4\) Comparing the two approaches, we find, for instance, that both Bordua and Bittner discuss police activity in preventing a potentially troublesome situation from accelerating. Bordua, however, simply states that the policeman in this situation uses his authority, and failing that, force. The use of such terms tells us little of how this is accomplished. It remains for Bittner to describe what a policeman attends to in evaluating the potential for trouble and what he actually does in attempting to prevent it. Similarly, both Skolnick and Sacks discuss the policeman's interest in identifying possible transgressions, but while Skolnick is concerned with the possible misuse of this in infringing on individuals' civil liberties, Sacks studies it as a skill that police acquire in
monitoring their environment. Further, Turner discusses aspects of the policeman's job -- time pressures, or the visibility of some of his work to the public, for instance -- that the policeman takes into account in shaping the activities of his work day.

It is Bittner's suggestion that it is necessary at this time to do more of this; to study police work as a craft, to uncover those organizational routines, particular procedures, skills and standards that policemen use in carrying out their work. It is his contention that until more of this is done it is perhaps too early to discuss whether the police use of discretion to exercise social control is desirable or not. It is through this kind of study that a more realistic basis can be established for such an appraisal. 5

This study, therefore, seeks to look at how a specific aspect of police work gets done. Focus is on the actual routines and practices which are part of the daily duties of the staff in a specific phase of police organization -- the phone room -- and how it is through these routines and practices that police business is accomplished.

Determining what is police business seems to be straightforward enough. We all have some "common sense" notion of what it is. The process by which these determinations are made, however, are not ordinarily observable to us. What we consider as "fact" -- a crime, a misdemeanor, and so on, is an accomplishment that is an intrinsic part of police practice, and is the product or result of interactions between the police and the public.

General concepts of what is police responsibility, such as
fighting crime, keeping the peace, enforcing law, and even such notions as social control or maintenance of order must be seen as accomplished by the concerted actual interaction of actual individuals in the concrete everyday world. This ordinary daily work of the police is oriented to how such work can be made sense of in such terms as "fighting crime", etc. The actual mundane operations that make up police work are not adequately described or prescribed by such terms.

This study is an ethnographic study of the phone room. The phone room is ordinarily the place where incoming calls are received; where staff who respond to the calls decide whether the call is police business and if so what kind of intervention is necessary. It is only one part of a larger organizational process, but it is a critical point in intervening.

All kinds of problems arise that people in their everyday lives see as properly a matter for the police. These don't necessarily coincide with police categories of what constitutes a police matter. It is a feature of the everyday world that much of what happens in it may not be amenable to such classification. It is the job of the phone room staff to fit the actualities of the real world into administrative categories. Since these actualities do not always correspond to such categories, and since the largest part of public contact with the police is made through the phone room, police themselves describe this setting as that setting where the decision as to what is to become a police matter is most problematic.

I avoided using a framework such as "roles" within which to
discuss what police do, but am concerned as much as possible with the concepts they themselves use, and what principles of co-ordinated action they use in accomplishing the rationality of phone room work.

Because of the nature of my interest in the setting -- the process of negotiating the decision re: what is to become a police matter -- my observations were mainly of their talk. Since observation is of talk, and since the aim is to bring out the rules, etc., that staff themselves use in accomplishing their work, the focus is on conversational material recorded in the setting. I look for the categories staff members use, the procedures followed in selecting them, and the ways in which they sometimes talked to justify, excuse, or explain particular procedures.

I wanted to know what policemen do, what they consider the reality of their circumstances, what they feel they must do in order to do a good job. It is not within the interest of this study to determine whether the performance is desirable or not, but only how it is that phone room staff produce a 'police matter'; how it is that they go about organizing the world and generating appropriate courses of action such that the work of the phone room is accomplished.
Method of Gathering Data

In this section the method of gathering data for this kind of ethnographic study is discussed, as well as some of the difficulties it presented and how it is felt these were satisfactorily overcome.

The study is based on observations made in the phone room and in the adjoining radio room over a six month period. Access was granted by permission of the Staff Sargeant in charge of the Report Centre, who then introduced me to the Corporal in charge of the phone room. Staff were not consulted. Their cooperation was felt to be insured since I was there by permission of their senior officers.

I was able to come and go freely on these premises at any time of the day or night. A head set was provided for me monitor calls, and in addition permission was granted to tape-record calls coming in on one line, a line that was also being recorded by the police, and was done by plugging in my tape recorder to the police machine. Police do not have the equipment to record more than one line at a time, and this therefore is used mainly to provide a sort of "spot check" to determine whether calls are being handled correctly. In addition, I was told that the recorder can be switched to any phone line to keep a record of abusive calls in case of further complaints or trouble from the caller, and to capture necessary information from an excited caller if it is felt that such information would otherwise be lost. Neither of these was done in the time that I was there.
Phone conversations quoted throughout this study were transcribed from tape-recordings made in the manner described. The following conventions are used: a sequence of dots (..) indicates a brief pause, and a slash (/) indicates an interruption. All identifying information -- names, addresses, staff numbers, and phone numbers -- have been changed. Otherwise the transcripts are verbatim.

In addition to observational data and tape recordings, the study was supplemented by informal interviews and discussions with staff and administrators. Field notes were made at the time and were expanded upon at the end of the day.

All the staff knew the nature of my study and knew I was being allowed to record the one line that was already being taped. My notebook was left open and in plain view and occasionally at the beginning the corporal would come and read what I had written down, but he soon no longer bothered. The reception was a friendly one, and some staff members expressed pleasure that I was interested in that particular aspect of police work, since it is not one that gains much public attention.

Only one staff member objected to the Staff Sargeant about my being there. This was a civilian, and her concern was that I might misinterpret angry behaviour on the part of the staff to an abusive caller. Such angry behaviour was often mentioned at the beginning as a feature of phone room activity. Since police work is to be seen as a rational enterprise, and since my purpose was to seek, and the staff in some sense to display to me the rationality of that enterprise, the concern was that the angry
behaviour which she saw as rational in the context in which it was displayed might be misunderstood by me. In discussing this complaint with me the Staff Sergeant expressed the hope that I would realize the pressure that the staff were under and not "criticize" them.

In fact, I saw very little of this kind of behaviour at all. This may have been a result of my presence, though it is my feeling that after the first few visits, my presence made very little difference to the actions of phone room staff. On the first of the few occasions that I witnessed an angry reaction on the part of the staff, the Corporal came and read my notes, and, apparently satisfied with my written remarks did not do so again. Subsequent calls of this nature were completed without comment to me, and the impression I received was that such behaviour was presumed to be understood, since at other times, when it was felt I would not understand the way a call was handled, an explanation was usually offered.

In order to obtain the information necessary for this kind of study, to find out how it is that staff accomplish the work of the phone room, what has to be done and who does it, and to discover the relevant judgemental and administrative concerns that staff bring to bear in arriving at practical decisions, it is necessary as much as possible to take on the role of the staff member and to see the world from his or her standpoint. I attempted to do this, although I was never a fully participating member. My monitoring and observational activities, however, were, in fact, the same procedures by which civilian staff were trained to work in the phone room. New staff members, I was told, were given head
sets, listened in to calls, and observed and questioned other staff members. After doing this for some time, they would then begin to answer calls under supervision. Though I did not do this, at the end of my period of data collecting I could have answered the phone and handled the other tasks of the phone room as well as most of the staff. In addition I had lunch with the staff and did other small chores that ordinarily would have been done by staff such as making coffee or carrying messages. From this experience I think it is possible to discover and to make explicit the practices and procedures by which some aspects of routine police work get done.

The Setting

In this section the physical features of the setting will be described, as well as the way these features affect the work of the phone room staff. Composition of the staff will be discussed, along with those features of the setting and of working in the setting that help to determine how staff see their job in relation to the public and to the rest of the force.

The room is located in a corner off the Report Centre which takes up a large area of the main floor. It is not visible by the public who come to the front desk of the Report Centre, and is further indicated to be inaccessible by a "No Admittance" sign on the door, though the sign was ignored by police station personnel. The room is cramped and cluttered, and the Corporal in charge of the phone room was quick to mention that it was an obsolete set-up as compared with the Edmonton and Calgary stations. The staff sit at a rectangular table, three to a side when there is a full shift.
One end of the table is against the wall of the adjoining radio room and is connected to this room by slots through which dispatch slips requisitioning cars can be passed and warrant slips requesting information on whether there is a warrant for a person being detained by a patrolman can be received. They are also used to speak through. The corporal has his desk at the other end of the table and attends to all sorts of paper work -- all phone room reports, items for an internal bulletin, and other miscellaneous items such as applications for liquor licences. He answers calls if the lines become busy, and will take over a call if one of the staff is experiencing difficulty in responding to it.

The table is littered with equipment and papers. Electronic banks similar to a switch-board face the staff and indicate incoming calls. As well, there are direct incoming lines from electronic burglar alarm systems such as from B. C. District and Chubb, private companies that provide such services to businesses. Alarms register at the central premises of these companies, who then report the location of the alarm directly to the police. There are also direct lines from the fire department, and all fire alarms register almost simultaneously with the police. There are direct outgoing lines to one of the ambulance services and to the RCMP, and as well, there are ordinary phones, which staff use to call out as necessary. Staff wear operator's head sets. A pigeon hole arrangement in the centre of the table contains the forms that will be required for different kinds of calls; a large circular device supports clipboards containing constantly updated lists of impounded cars, stolen cars, stolen bicycles, staff time sheets and monthly
details of duty for the entire force. All these are more or less in reach of the staff and are constantly referred to. Not so handy against a wall behind are other files; a file of old people who are frequently missing from nursing homes and residences; a file of children who frequently run away; the owners of electronically guarded premises; principals of all schools; a "Crank File" of people who frequently phone in with what are considered inappropriate complaints or requests; a book containing the names and descriptions of missing persons; all information which will be useful in some types of complaints, both to the phone room staff and to be passed on via the radio to patrol cars.

In addition, the room contains lockers for various uniformed officers, riot equipment, a hotplate, coffee urn, dishes, and a kitchen sink. There is always a lot of activity; senior uniformed officers come in to change clothes before going out to lunch; the coffee urn, kept full by one of the female phone room staff, supplies coffee for patrolmen, detectives, almost everyone on the force it seems, who wants to drop in. Female office staff from elsewhere in the building come in and make themselves lunch. Police officers working in the phone room sit without jackets and with loosened ties and collars. There are magazines lying around left by the night shift. There is a great deal of informal conversation among visitors and between visitors and the staff of the phone room.

The proximity of the phone room staff to each other, the informality, and the amount of talk function so that all can know quite easily what the rest of the staff is doing, can exchange a great deal of information, and can ask for and give advice.
The rest of the phone room staff is almost instantly aware when someone has a caller that is being difficult, or is receiving a call that is apart from the more routine. Given the way the calls come in, the way records are kept, etc., this informal use of some of the aspects of the physical setting seem important in increasing the efficiency of the system. Since no record is kept of some calls, or the same person may phone in several times about the same incident, it is not uncommon for someone to address the room at large, i.e. "Did anyone take a call on a red Buick '63?" or "Who took the call on the B & E at the Esso station on 41st?" It is often possible by this means to provide a certain amount of continuity and to avoid duplication.

If someone is talking to a troublesome complainant or a drunk, everyone else is quickly aware. This also makes it possible to keep track of "repeaters", -- i.e. one of the staff who had just "got rid of" a drunk was able to tell when the man phoned in again and said with a laugh, "He's got that guy now." This, as well as staff sharing the contents of unusual phone calls with each other, results in a shared accumulation of contact with one individual, i.e. "Who's that woman with the strong English accent that is always phoning in? I've just had her again", and is one of the organizational steps whereby people come to be labelled 'cranks' and are officially entered in the "Crank File". This process will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 4.

The number of calls about the same event occurring in the community provides some indication to the staff as to the extent of the disturbance in much the same way as a three alarm
fire indicates this to the fireman, and again such information is accumulated through the proximity and informal sharing of information already discussed. For example, "That's the third call we've had on those kids behind P.W." or "I've got another call on those guys at the Abbotsford", is information that is useful in determining whether supplementary cars will be sent out to help cover the situation.

Staff

The phone room is staffed by both policemen and civilians and headed by a corporal who is, in turn, responsible to the Staff Sergeant of the Report Centre. Policemen who work in the phone room are often on the injured list and are placed in the phone room until they are able to go back to more strenuous duties. Occasionally, retired or auxiliary police are hired. Policewomen are sometimes assigned duty there and civilian women are hired as "report clerks", though they do exactly the same duties as police. In addition, women who are accepted as applicants to become policewomen are often hired for the phone room to keep them employed by the department until classes start, since women enter training at less frequent intervals than men. This also serves the function, according to the Staff Sergeant, of familiarizing them with the kinds of situations that make up routine police work.

For civilian staff the educational requirement is grade twelve. Personal requirements are "the ability to remain cool-headed and not get emotionally involved." The Staff Sergeant, who is in charge of hiring civilian personnel, stressed that the person must
be able to "keep cool" when being subjected to abuse from a caller -- a matter which is of continuing concern to the staff -- and he stated that in an employment interview he will often try to provoke the person by treating him or her in a hostile fashion to see how he or she is able to handle it. This screening technique again illustrates an orientation to possible responses to what staff consider to be the pressures of the phone room. Though the Procedure Manual states that all calls are to be dealt with "in a civil manner", some angry response on the part of the staff is expected and tolerated in certain circumstances, even at the risk of such response being "misunderstood" as irrational. It is perhaps partly owing to this screening that such responses nevertheless appeared to be kept to a minimum, and were rarely observed.

Women are felt to have a tendency to become more emotionally involved with family disputes and to give advice that goes beyond what is felt to be the scope and jurisdiction of the police. Such behavior is relevant to the organization in that advice given by staff answering the phone is taken by the public to be "official" and often, therefore, to have legal status. More relevant to the department, such advice may be taken to be "expert" by the courts, and one of the "horror stories" that was repeated to me as the undesirable effect of such action concerned a woman report clerk who had been subpoenaed to testify concerning advice she had given a woman regarding her husband, and which put the department in an "embarrassing light". She was fired.

Only one policeman I met had actually applied to be transferred to the phone room from his duties as a patrolman and this
was a sufficiently rare occurrence that he felt it necessary to offer an explanation. His marriage had broken up, he stated, and duty in a one-man patrol car had been too lonely, giving him too much time to brood, so when a vacancy had come up in the phone room, he had requested a transfer so that he could "be with people and have someone to talk to".

Staff Talk About Phone Room Work

Features of the setting that members attend to are displayed in their talk. Since as an observer I am also a member, although a non-participating one, I can in some way attend to the same features, and can participate in and listen to talk about the setting in common with other members. At the same time, being an observer and being known as an observer elicits other kinds of talk that is specifically designed by the speakers to display some features of the setting in a different kind of way. Those features of the setting singled out to be talked of for the benefit of the observer are significant, though not necessarily in the way that the talk is intended. It is interesting to note those features which staff felt were important to mention to an observer as being necessary for a full understanding of how the setting functions.

The relationship between the police and the public is a continuing source of tension for phone room staff. The rookie policemen is taught during his course of training to view the office of the police as having arisen historically from the duty and need of the citizen to protect himself and his family from wrong-doers.
The police are seen to have developed as a special force or body when the community became too complex for the ordinary citizen to ensure this protection in the course of his daily life. The policeman is taught that whatever he does by virtue of his office (as a servant of the Crown rather than as an agent of any government department) is to some extent his own responsibility. He alone is accountable for what he does. Even though he is controlled by the government for administrative purposes, no recourse can be had against that government for his actions. One lecturer at the police academy, a lawyer, stated that it was very doubtful that the police had ever been recognized by the courts as a force apart from the general body of citizens. In the case of alleged individual brutality, for instance, this means that the individual policeman alone is held responsible, and his defence will consist of attempting to demonstrate that he did what any citizen would do in his place.

The lecture notes stated that

> the principle still remains that a policeman, in the view of the law, is only a person paid to perform, as a matter of duty, acts which, if he had so desired, he could for the most part have done voluntarily.5

Zimmerman has stated that the history of the setting forms an element of the "occasioned corpus" of that setting.6 Whether or not this refers in this case to the historical origins of the police force, to recent history of relations between the police and the public, or to the history of shared experiences among at least some of the phone room staff in arriving at their present jobs, or is even an element in the setting being dealt with here, the way the staff of the phone room talk about themselves and their jobs often appears to reflect these concepts. Staff describe what
they do as being "just common sense" and "what anyone else would do." At the same time they are aware that they alone are responsible for the results of their actions, as in the case of the woman who was fired because her advice was considered by others to be on behalf of the department and was subpoenaed by the courts. Civilian staff particularly are aware of her fate. Their concern regarding my reaction to "rough" talk in dealing with callers was dissipated when they felt I "understood the pressures" and had "had an earful" of the kinds of abuse they felt warranted such treatment. "Getting an earful" was felt by the staff to be an important part of my experience in the phone room, though, as has been mentioned, it was actually a comparatively rare occurrence.

On another occasion, a disciplinary hearing of one of the officers was a subject of conversation. The staff were aware of this event since the Staff Sergeant in charge of the hearing came into the phone room to get his Sam Brown belt and revolver from his locker in order to be in full dress uniform. Sympathy was expressed for the officer involved and I was told that a collection had been taken up among the rest of the force to pay his salary during the time he had been suspended before the hearing. Resentment was expressed against the citizen who laid the complaint, an action that was interpreted as interference with a policeman trying to do his duty "to protect the public". One officer said, "I'd like to see some of them try to handle the characters we have to deal with."

Staff of the phone room also, however, see themselves as "experts" and clearly see the public as non-experts. Citizens
have the "right" to phone in and ask for police service and
frequently invoke that right if it becomes apparent that the
staff does not consider the caller's problem or complaint one
that is a police matter. Such insistence will sometimes, in fact,
result in police attention, but is always resented by the staff.
Some staff members characterized the public as a whole by saying
"they're always trying to tell us how to do our job," or "they
think they know more than we do."

Work in the phone room is low-status police work. The
number of civilians employed, the informality; the constant in­
trusion by others to have coffee, make lunch, change clothes, or
just talk, is in marked contrast to other "upstairs" areas of
the building where people work in relative privacy, where access
is limited to those with "official" business, and where socializing
takes place in separate rooms set aside for the purpose. To the
observer these other areas have an aura that suggests that serious
work is being done. The phone room in comparison seems a cheer­
fully muddled catch-all.

It is perhaps a characteristic of organizations that the
reception function generally carries little esteem. Contact with
a large number of people making claims on the organization, most of
which will not become police matters leads staff members both in
the phone room and elsewhere to see the phone room job as dealing
with much that is "unimportant" and screening out what is
"important" to be dealt with by others involved in the "real" work
of the police force. One phone room staff member, a policeman,
remarked to me that his work "isn't police work at all, really,
it's just mostly public relations."
Since the bulk of routine police work originates from this public contact, and since the screening activities of the phone room staff are carried out with a constant awareness of the limited resources of the department in terms of cars and patrolmen and a responsibility for their efficient dispersement in the face of requests from the public that often exceed the capacities of the force, phone room staff often feel their work is not sufficiently valued by their colleagues in the department. One staff member remarked, "we're the nerve centre of the whole police force, but they don't appreciate us." Another officer told me, "nobody stands behind us. If we send out too many cars we're wrong. If we don't send out enough we're wrong. We get it either way."

On one occasion the work of the phone room received considerable attention from other members of the force. A child was missing, and the police had requested public assistance. During the time of the intensive search for the child the phone room was continually visited by "brass" and by patrol officers to check what kind of calls were coming in and to inform phone room staff of the areas being searched. Messages came from "upstairs" indicating the kinds of information that would be of interest and the amount that could be dealt with. Phone room staff screened and sorted information accordingly, and passed it directly to the officers involved.

Phone room staff ordinarily have no way of knowing the results of investigations that they initiate in the course of their work, nor of what is happening elsewhere on the force, since it is not necessary to their functioning. Such information appears
to be important to them, however, for whatever reasons, perhaps for a sense of continuity or participation in 'real' police work, and as officers from other divisions drift in for coffee much of the conversation is devoted to finding out "what happened on such-and-such a case".

Phone room staff see an order to the day or to the week in terms of the kinds of calls that are likely to come in, and have ways of predicting what sorts of offences are likely to occur at certain given times. Monday mornings typically begin with many reports of theft -- people return from weekend activities to find business premises broken into. Saturday nights were called by one staff member "nuisance nights" during which a number of drunks call up, there are a lot of family disputes, fights, public disturbances related to drinking. Foggy nights tended to be "exciting", I was told, because there are "a lot of smash and grabs." On the other hand I was told "not to bother coming in between 4:00 and 6:00 P.M." since there would be "nothing but parking complaints, and it is too dull." On one occasion a school principal phoned in to report a car parked next to the school ground. The policeman answering noted the location, around Oakridge, and remarked "it's dollar forty-nine day -- they'll be parked all over."

Excesses of certain offences beyond the "usual" number cause comment. For instance, one staff member remarked one Monday morning, "They sure stole a lot of cars over the weekend." Another replied, "You're not kidding. The sheet's almost full already."

Staff duty rosters are drawn up with these contingencies in mind. Staff may work double time, for instance, on public
holidays, depending on whether the liquor stores and beer parlours are open, to handle the increased number of calls relating to drunkenness.

There were many comments by the staff that indicated to me that they consider much of their work dull and tedious. Staff frequently expressed amazement that I would continue coming there since "nothing ever happens except for bank hold-ups." Several expressed the hope that I would "get to see one." (I did not, but I did see false alarms, in which the procedure is the same until the alarm is discovered to be false.) Thefts, stolen cars and bicycles, sudden deaths, and disputes of one kind or another occur with sufficient frequency that the staff no longer consider them "interesting." After I had been there awhile, I, too, began to regard such situations as "normal" occurrences.

Since about eighty percent of the calls have nothing to do with breaking the law or do not otherwise warrant police intervention, and are not therefore "real" police work, the staff often expressed amazement that I could find such calls relevant to a study of police procedure. As I came in one morning, an officer, sitting among reports of abandoned cars, stray dogs, and lost, senile old men, said to me dryly, "Crime is rampant. Put that in your paper."

It is in this setting that most of what is to become a police matter is decided. The staff orient to the "normal" course of affairs of their part of police work and seek by their actions to guarantee its continuing reproduction. Such a course of affairs is actively reproduced, not simply continued. What is to become a police matter is always being negotiated; staff are always in the process of organizing their acts into a pattern that can be recognized as phone room work.
Work Routine

What is a police matter is constituted by the practices of the phone room personnel as they engage in their interactions with the public and within the organizational milieu. It is the product of organizationally prescribed and practical decision-making. This section begins a preliminary discussion of those judgmental activities and administrative considerations by which an event comes to be recognized as a police matter. The daily work routine, the duties of the staff, the way in which these are ordered, and the priorities given them begins to show the organizational structure of phone room activities and how those involved in them set in motion courses of action that are of immense practical concern to others.

Staff process about half a million calls a year, about one fifth of which become police matters. All staff perform essentially the same duties with the exception of the number one operator seated next to the radio room who, in addition to answering calls keeps a log of all requisitions for patrol cars and passes the requisitions to the radio room. All wear head sets like telephone operators and have in front of them scratch pads on which they begin to jot down relevant information immediately after the call begins, such as names, locations, licence numbers -- information that will be necessary if a car is to be sent out. As the nature of the call becomes clearer the necessary form will be reached for and filled out. This means that information is often written twice, but is rarely asked for twice.

Very few formal guidelines exist to assist the staff in
screening and processing these calls, in deciding which are to become police matters, and in determining the appropriate kind of police intervention. The Procedure Manual for the police force lists the main duties of phone room personnel and contains a "summary of rules and regulations" that apply to this area of police work. The Foreword to the Manual, however, contains the following statement:

Realizing that a great deal must be left to the discretion of the members of the Force, (the Manual) is issued as a guide only.

The Manual presents a brief list of situations that are considered to be civil matters rather than police matters, but other than that very little is offered to instruct staff as to the kinds of calls on which it is appropriate to act. Phone room staff who are policemen make use of their training and experience in other areas of police work in making decisions regarding calls; civilian staff learn "on the job" from other more experienced staff. When staff have difficulty in deciding on the outcome of a call, the corporal is consulted. It appears, then, that staff have a great deal of discretionary room in which to act. In fact, however, there is considerable uniformity in the way calls are handled. This uniformity is maintained through a shared knowledge, based on what has come to be accepted in practice, of what constitutes proper phone room procedure in any given instance, and through the surveillance of the other staff members to ensure that this procedure is carried out.

In certain calls involving, for instance, stolen cars, missing persons, stolen bicycles, lost articles, and certain kinds
of theft, the form filled out by the staff constitutes the initial and often the only investigation, and the call then has official status as a case and is sent to the appropriate division of the police department for subsequent attention.

In other kinds of calls a patrol car is requisitioned on a dispatch form. Routine dispatch forms are white, emergency are yellow. Staff must judge what constitutes an emergency, and though there are some rules governing this, the decisions are often discretionary, the staff deciding whether a car in an emergency would "do any good", that is, would ameliorate the situation or assist the policeman in successfully dealing with it. Cars are sent on emergency to all fires, sometimes to a crime in progress, in cases where a suspect is being held, or if a person is injured. The radio dispatcher processes yellow forms first, since they have priority over other requisitions.

Other calls may be transferred elsewhere in the police complex -- to the police garage where recovered stolen cars and some abandoned cars may be held, to the traffic court, the coroner's office, the justice of the peace, etc. This is usually done by giving the caller the appropriate number to call.

Other calls that are not seen to be police business may also be referred elsewhere. A referral file is kept of other community resources such as the dog pound, the Vancouver General Hospital, City Social Service, the Crisis Centre and so on, and the numbers are given out.

Other kinds of advice might be offered, such as a suggestion to phone a lawyer. "Common sense" solutions are sometimes offered, such as a suggestion to discuss a situation with the landlord, or
to deal with troublesome children in the neighborhood by getting together with other neighbours. Such advice is highly "unofficial" and is sanctionable if it "backfires", as in the case mentioned previously where the staff member was subpoenaed to give evidence of such advice in court. Perhaps for this reason it was observed to be done more frequently by more experienced members.

Some calls are terminated with an explanation that the situation described is not a police matter. Other calls are simply a request for information. Sometimes the caller disconnects prematurely, most frequently when he or she is abusing the police. Occasionally the staff will disconnect, but this is usually done only if the caller is obviously drunk and not "making sense".

Two types of calls assume special importance to the phone room staff. One is a bank hold-up. Such calls come in on direct lines from electronic alarm systems and require special co-ordinated effort between the phone room and the radio dispatcher, the duty of the phone room staff being to impart relevant information directly and quickly. The second is, as has been mentioned, the caller who phones to criticize or insult the police in an angry or obscene fashion. Though it does not happen often, it is continually mentioned and oriented to as a feature of the work of the phone room, and phone staff are extremely sensitive to it. Such calls are the subject of a lot of joking that seems designed to build morale. If one staff member receives such a call the others are immediately aware and are sympathetic. A cartoon pinned on the wall showed police officers listening with alarm through earphones to a tape recorder: a senior officer in the cartoon is explaining to a
civilian "...and these patrolmen are taking the Foul Name Orientation Course." The cartoon delighted the staff. Most such calls are handled in a very matter-of-fact manner and the caller is simply instructed on how to lodge an official complaint. As has been stated, many people making this kind of call simply say what they want and then hang up. In almost all cases they become the subject of subsequent conversation among the staff.

No record is kept of calls that do not become an official police matter. Police matters are recorded on a form or a dispatch slip; otherwise all other notes are thrown away. If subsequent developments occur on a matter that is not recorded, or a caller phones back to complain that he did not receive service, the Corporal or Staff Sergeant is left with the informal device of asking "did anyone take a call on..." in order to ascertain what occurred.

The phone room staff have one other duty -- to assist with "warrant checks". Patrolmen occasionally stop a "suspicious person" and will request a warrant check from the radio dispatcher, who in turn requests the phone room staff to determine whether there is a warrant outstanding for that person's arrest. The phone room staff must then go out into the main report centre to check the files. They dislike this task and state that it has "gotten out of hand" since in most cases no warrant exists for the person being detained.

Much of the time the pressure of work does not appear to be excessive, and phone room staff often appear bored and restless. Much conversation goes on between staff and between staff and others who come in for coffee and staff frequently get up and walk around or leaf through magazines, particularly on the night shift.
It was emphasized to me that the system was inefficient and out-of-date, and at the time of this study there were plans to reorganize both the phone and radio room.

**Incoming Phone Lines: The Treatment of Emergency Lines and Others**

There are two kinds of phone lines. Emergency lines come directly to the phone room and cannot be transferred to the main switchboard. These lines light up in response to the use of the emergency number listed in the phone book. In addition there are phone lines connected to the main switchboard which light up in response to the number listed in the phone book as "Complaints and Inquiries". These calls may or may not have gone through the main switchboard.

The calls are not in fact treated any differently on the basis of which lines they come in on. Staff answer the calls by saying "Vancouver Police" and may add their staff number -- "Vancouver Police 893." Civilian staff as well as police officers have numbers. Some staff answer lines by saying "Police Emergency" or "Police Inquiries" but most do not. There does not seem to be any attempt to deal with emergency line calls more promptly than others and often they could be observed flashing for a considerable length of time while staff continued filling out forms, etc., from previous calls. One staff member stated, however, that the Corporal would become annoyed if he saw too many emergency lines flashing at one time.

Neither is there any apparent difference in the kinds of calls that come through on different lines. Consecutive calls on
one emergency line, for instance, went as follows: a report of an accident, a possible abandoned car, a request for information, a possible clue to a missing child, a report of a breaking and entering, a shoplifter caught, a landlord complaint against a noisy tenant, a car obstructing a driveway. There was no way of telling in this study what criteria the public used in choosing to dial the emergency number, except possibly that the designation of a number for "Complaints and Inquiries" in the phone book does not sufficiently describe a problem that the ordinary citizen often sees as a police matter, and a citizen wishing a speedy response might be more likely to choose the emergency number.

In ordinary occupational routines the difference between emergency and other lines is, then, largely ignored; in fact, in terms of the calls that come in it hardly exists. However, this feature of the setting can be oriented to and invoked at certain times. In Victoria a teenage boy choked to death in the hour and a half between the time his father called the police and an ambulance arrived. Though this was largely due to a jurisdictional dispute between ambulances, in the subsequent investigation the police defended their participation by stating that they had no reason to believe the call was an emergency since it did not come in on the emergency line. This seems to illustrate Bittner's suggestion that one of the invariant properties of occupational routines may be that there are always ways in which the personnel can invoke the formal scheme in order to keep the organization out of difficulties."
Establishing Oneself as a Qualified Answerer

The first problem for the staff person answering the phone is to establish that he or she is a person qualified to deal with that call. If male staff answers the public tend to assume that he is a policeman, i.e., they address him as "officer", and they are not told any differently. If a woman answers, she is sometimes assumed to be some sort of switchboard operator whose function is to refer calls to someone in authority.

Sometimes callers state their problem directly; however, in line with most people's experience in dealing with large organizations it is more often the caller's assumption that he or she is dealing with a person in a reception or referral function, most especially when a woman answers. The caller will therefore ask for the department he or she thinks is the appropriate one based on his or her member's knowledge of how it is that police forces work, or will state his or her problem in general descriptive terms, perhaps with the request that the call be transferred to the appropriate department.

A further complication is that some of the calls that come in on the "Complaints and Inquiries" number may have already come through the main switchboard, and in these cases the caller sometimes assumes that he or she has reached the department requested. The response of the staff, i.e. "Vancouver Police" then often elicits another question in which the caller tries to establish whether he or she is now talking to a person who has authority to help.

Since the staff do not refer calls to other squads or
details within the department, but do themselves initiate the appropriate police intervention, it is necessary for them to get information quickly, and to establish themselves as qualified answerers without time-consuming explanations as to their status or the nature of phone room procedures.

This may be done by indicating in some general way that the caller has reached the appropriate place or person. For example:

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: I've got a complaint here and I don't know where to report it.
Staff: Maybe I can help you.

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Are you the fellow that's looking after the little girl?
Staff: I can take a report on that.

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Is this the stolen cars?
Staff: Can I help you?

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Yes, is this the stolen car detail?
Staff: Well, we take reports of stolen cars here.

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Could I speak to somebody on the drug squad?
Staff: Maybe I can help you.

It may also be done by beginning to elicit the kinds of information necessary to process the call. For example:

Staff: Police Inquiries 896.
Caller: I was wondering if you could help me. I'd like to speak to somebody in command in the...ah...I don't know what it would be, I guess the division of...ah...assault.
Staff: Oh, what is the situation?

Staff: Vancouver Police
Caller: Ummm I'd just like to report us, uh, something that I saw on Broadway, um...a lady...ah...is this the party I would/
Staff: /Yes, yes, did it just occur, ma'am?

Staff: Police Emergency 876.
Caller: Yes. It's not an emergency. Could I get in touch with regular, please?
Staff: What is it in regards to, sir?
Caller: Well, a stolen car.
Staff: Do you wish to report one stolen?
Caller: No, I've already reported it, but I wanted to...
I just wanted to be leaving my phone number.
Staff: Okay. What is your name and I'll help...ah..I'll look after your report. What is your name, please?

The only time when callers may legitimately be transferred within the department is when they request a particular extension number or ask for an officer by name. Extension numbers are only given out by persons authorized to use that extension, and the caller who has one is considered to have been given permission to use it. On two occasions during my observations extension numbers were given out, both by the same officer, and in both cases the calls ended up back in the phone room where they went through the ordinary procedures.

In the first case, an employee of a home for emotionally disturbed children wished to report a child missing. Since this involves filling out one of the more lengthy forms, giving the caller the extension of the Missing Persons office was seen as simply a way to avoid the task. Even though it ended up back in the phone room with another staff member having to do this procedure, the action seemed to be tolerated by the other members, probably since most of them could be observed at one time or another avoiding similar tasks. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Also, since the staff member doing this was a police officer, he was able to "get away with" his action without censure from civilian staff. Civilian staff have less prestige and earn less money on the force and are considered to be less knowledgeable. They were observed to be more careful about "sticking to rules" than were the policemen.
The second example of breaking this rule went as follows:

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Yes. Can I have the Bunco Squad, please?
Staff: BUNCO Squad?
Caller: Yes, please.
Staff: Call back again and ask for local 1234.

"Bunco" is a term for fraud, American in origin, and is not generally used by Vancouver police. In this case the officer commented to me on his action. He said in a slightly annoyed tone, "If he wants the Bunco Squad I'll give him the Bunco Squad. Bunco Squad! They watch too much TV. They think they know more about our work than we do." Since the caller had to place his call again, and was referred again to the phone room, he was effectively inconvenienced for his use of American slang.

An Overview

This chapter has described the setting of the phone room, the people who work in it, and how they relate to the public and to other members of the force. It has begun a preliminary examination of the organizational structure of phone room work, what has to be done, and who does it.

Chapter 2 examines how it is that what callers say about a person, situation, act or event is translated into an administrative category that can be recognized by other police force members as a police matter upon which they can act. Included in this chapter is a discussion of some of the categories of people who are seen as warranted to make an account to the police, and others who are seen to stand in a special relationship to phone room staff in deciding what is a police matter. Consideration is given
to aspects of the callers' accounts that phone room staff attend to in deciding how to categorize them.

Chapter 3 discusses some of the organizational factors influencing staff's discretionary power to intervene in a situation. Data illustrate the use of the police legal mandate to intervene, and the features of a situation that determine their intervention in matters concerned with "keeping the peace". There is some discussion of situations in which phone room staff choose not to set in motion police intervention even when it appears that they have a mandate to do so.

Chapter 4 concerns "Missing Persons" and "Crank Callers". Staff develop these typifications on the basis of their knowledge and perception of the community. Staff knowledge and perception are displayed in the sequence of questions asked of the caller on the basis of which staff decide what has happened and how to categorize the call. This chapter describes some of the results of such typifications in determining the nature of police intervention.
Footnotes


6This is quoted from a mimeographed paper entitled "The Office of Constable," distributed to new recruits by the Vancouver Police Department Training Academy. It is quoted here as an example of what police themselves learn about police history. For a further


MATCHING CALLERS' ACCOUNTS TO ADMINISTRATIVE CATEGORIES

No one really knows when he or she calls the police how it is going to turn out; this is known only when it has been accomplished. For the phone room staff what happens as the result of a call -- the sending out of a patrol car, the filling out of the appropriate form, the involvement of other agencies, the giving of advice, or simply no further police action at all -- is seen to be arrived at by rationally ordered procedures that are a result of and fit into organizational routines. What may be a crisis for the caller is, from the point of view of the phone room staff, something that must be fitted, or not, into an administrative category that qualifies it as a police matter.

For the phone room staff the procedure by which an event becomes a police matter begins by what is reported. Staff occasionally remarked that many "crimes" are not reported by the public as frequently as they occur. They mentioned particularly crimes which they felt involved "embarrassment" or "shame", such as rape, or theft of money by "pickups" or prostitutes. Staff tended to see this as lack of co-operation by the public in helping them "to do their job".

Events which are not reported of course are not relevant to phone room work; this is mentioned here only because the staff
at different times felt it was worth mentioning, and because the ways of seeing crime, or seeing a police matter, of suspecting it, of announcing or not announcing it furnish the basis for studying a police matter as a sociological phenomenon. The initial step, in terms of phone room work, by which an event becomes procedurally defined as a police matter, is that of informing the police. Calls which do come in, and which make up the work of the phone room, appear to be about every imaginable kind of occurrence. Bittner has suggested that there is probably no human problem that the police have not been contacted about at some time. Staff remarked to me, "we get everything" or "we get all kinds (of people) here."

It can be assumed that what the caller phones in about as an event that merits police attention has been selected from the environment, "worked up", interpreted, and categorized as an occurrence so that it conforms in some way to a model of what the caller sees to be a police matter. The caller adopts an organization of observations, and has attended to the world so as to produce and explain an event or the behavior of other members of the community with respect to his or her notions of the legal system or the functions of the police. The staff, however, have their own set of instructions, their own ways of interpreting an event and therefore of determining whether it conforms with and fits into the administrative categories available to them and within which a policeman can act. They then attend to those features of a call that they can see to be relevant in determining whether that call can properly become a police matter. The staff, as the recognized and socially sanctioned "experts", generally have the privilege of
the final decision, but both caller and staff are often involved in this process of attempting to translate the event into the administrative categories that constitute police work.

**Shared competence in defining a police matter**

Staff recognize differential competence with respect to the caller's ability to interpret an event as a proper police matter. Since they see their work as rationally ordered, they treat callers differently if they see that they can share the responsibility of accomplishing that rationality; they take for granted that certain callers' versions arise out of a shared reality.

Certain organizations stand in this special relationship to the police as sharing rules and instructions to interpret an event as properly a police matter; in fact, they are warranted along with and by the police to "keep order" in the community. They have authority to act in a situation and to request police assistance without having to produce an account to justify either their intervention or their request. A major towing company, for instance, has a contract to remove illegally parked cars, and simply calls in at half hourly intervals to give the police the licence numbers. Calls typically go like this:

**Staff:** Vancouver Police.
**Caller:** It's Betty with the PI's. (Private impoundments)
**Staff:** OK. Go ahead.

Betty is known by the staff as the representative of the towing company, and the licence numbers are then read out and copied down on a list marked "Impounded Cars". This list is then used for reference when owners call in to report their cars missing.
Bailiff companies routinely phone in for police assistance when they are repossessing an item. Again, no account is required of the situation; it is labelled by the caller in a way that is understood by the police as conveying the nature of the situation and the shared expectation of what the police will do. For example:

Staff: Vancouver Police
Caller: R & R Bailiffs. Repossession at 123 Anderson.
Staff: 123 Anderson.
Caller: Right.
Staff: Ok.

In filling out a report for the radio dispatcher "repossession" is sufficient to describe the "Nature of Complaint", and signifies to the dispatcher a situation in which hostilities might arise. His command to the patrol car is typically "Bailiff repossession at 123 Anderson. Stand by."

Bailiffs receive this co-operation from the police even though their activities are not considered police matters. Staff told me they are classed as civil matters, and there is "nothing a policeman can do"; nevertheless, they send police to "stand by in case of trouble", in which case the police will intervene.

Ordinary citizens also call up requesting the police to perform this sort of "peace keeping" function, but their account of the situation must be quite different, as will be described later.

Large stores frequently phone in regarding shoplifting. In these cases as well, it is accepted by the staff that when a call is made sufficient processing has already been done. It is not necessary for the representatives of these organizations to describe
or even label the event that has occurred; police take for granted that the apprehension of a person by one of the representatives of the store means that the "correct" interpretation of the event has been made, the act of shoplifting is an accomplished fact, and the person apprehended is the doer. Calls of this nature typically go as follows:

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Safeway, 4th and Alma. Male shoplifter to go in please.
Staff: OK. Right away.

(call complete)

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Woodward's Security. We have one male adult.
Staff: OK. Thank you.

(call complete)

In terms of subsequent police procedure, no further investigation is necessary; the person is in a sense already arrested. The police send out a car, bring the person in and "book" him or her. The only significant variation in these calls is a statement as to whether the person is male, female, or juvenile, since these different categories may require different arrangements to bring the person in, or, in the case of juveniles, different procedures for laying the charge and a different location where the person is brought. A male, I was told, may be brought in by a one man car; two men are always sent to bring in a female in order that there be a "witness", since it is felt that female suspects might attempt to accuse an unaccompanied officer of making sexual advances.

In these cases it is the personnel of the store who have the final prerogative of deciding that their version of the event is
"that which happened". Not only do the staff in the phone room accept this, but the officers in the patrol cars do as well. The stores decide to prosecute; if they are not willing, the police cannot act; if they are, the police cannot do otherwise. In the history of police relationships with stores, I was told, it was frequently the case that stores would call the police and then would be unwilling to lay charges since they felt it was bad public relations, but would wish the police to lecture or "scare" the offender. Police do not ordinarily see this as their function and eventually refused to go unless charges were to be laid. Now when calls come in this is an accepted and understood condition. Some stores exercise discretion and make judgements as to whether the act of shoplifting was "intended" before calling the police. Staff stated however, that more and more large stores, notably Woodwards and the Army and Navy (perhaps because of their location near the skid road area) routinely prosecute everybody, regardless of explanations offered. The patrolman must then make the arrest, regardless of his assessment of the situation. In one such situation police were called to arrest a woman "caught" taking an unpaid for item out of the store in spite of her protestations that it was an absent-minded mistake and her subsequent offers to pay. Police told her on the way to the station, "I know it doesn't help, but we believe you".

Certain other occupational groups are seen by the police as sharing with them the same ways of accomplishing the rationality of police work. These groups include occupations that might be seen by the police as being of service to the public or to the community in somewhat the same way as the police see themselves as
being in certain circumstances; for instance, firemen, principals of schools, public health nurses, and social workers. Many of the calls that come in from these groups are to enlist the help of the police in their role of maintaining order in the community, or in "helping out" where no other resources exist. Staff tended to look on these groups in certain situations as kinds of colleagues in these endeavours, and accepted their requests for aid as being legitimate. A principal phoning in, for instance, regarding "suspicious" behavior of people around a school ground would find his request received immediate attention, in contrast with a neighbour phoning in about a similar occurrence, even if the staff member taking the call felt it would amount to "nothing".

For example, a car was sent out to a school when the principal called in saying there was a man around the school taking pictures of the children on the playground, even though the policeman said to me after he had disconnected, "there's no law against taking pictures. No harm in that". In contrast, a car was not sent in response to a woman wanting police to investigate a "suspicious car". When asked what was suspicious about the car she stated that it was full of "hippie-types", was cruising around slowly, and was near a school ground. The staff informed her that there was "nothing wrong with that" and "there was nothing a policeman could do."

This co-operation was extended within the context of phone room work, even though in other situations involving the police, the work of a particular occupational group might be felt to be in some way inimical to what police see as their job. Social workers, for instance, are often referred to by staff as "do-gooders"
and "bleeding hearts" and are spoken of derisively as seeing all criminals as "poor, misunderstood youths" who should not be punished, and all policemen as "brutes".

Who can and cannot make a report

Though some people, as above, have a special relationship with the police in that their accounts are taken without question as being shared and proper versions, or who are felt to have special authority to request the services of the police, some callers are not seen as proper people to give an account at all. In general a caller is expected to be in some way closely involved in the event, either as a victim of it or a witness to it. If a caller does not fall into either of these categories, it may be an accountable matter and the caller will be asked to justify his or her participation.

Frequently, for instance, a caller will phone in to seek police intervention on behalf of somebody else who is the victim of an event that has occurred. Some acceptable reasons for this kind of "third party" call were observed as follows:

Staff: Why doesn't she phone in herself?
Caller: She's too upset to talk.

Staff: Why isn't Mr. Chorfsky making this report?
Caller: Well, he doesn't speak too good English.

Staff: Yeah, well they should have phone in themselves, you see...you see...
Caller: Oh, well, I'm her daughter.
Staff: Oh, Oh, I see. That's different.

The expectation that the person involved should and will make the complaint has procedural implications for the police in their subsequent investigations. Police view the successful
completion of certain kinds of police work as contingent upon and requiring the collection of evidence, the apprehension of the offending person or persons, and the working up and presenting of the "case" in court. Since these kinds of activities frequently involve the co-operation of the person involved in the complaint and may even require that person to lay a charge, failure of the person to make the complaint on his or her own behalf is seen as potentially indicating future lack of such co-operation, and police are likely to consider intervention a "waste of time".

It is necessary, then, for phone room staff to determine that the "third party" caller is calling on behalf of someone who is willing but unable to call, for reasons the staff consider legitimate, or is in some other way authorized to make the call, as in the case of the woman calling on behalf of her mother.

In one call that did not meet these criteria, a man phoned to report that his neighbour had been beaten up and had come over to tell him. Part of the conversation went as follows:

Staff: Is he not able to lay this complaint himself?
Caller: Well, he says he doesn't want to do that.
Staff: He doesn't want to do that.
 Caller: No, he says he won't.
 Staff: Well then, there's nothing we can do about it.
 If he wants to lay a complaint we'll look for the guys, otherwise we can't do anything about it.
 Caller: But he needs a doctor... he's bleeding, his... his face is cut.
 Staff: Well, you can call a doctor, or you can take him down to Emergency.
 Caller: But he won't go.
 Staff: Well, what do you expect a policeman to do? If he doesn't want to go that's his business, isn't it?

The caller became more angry, but the staff maintained that unless the victim made a complaint himself there was "nothing a policeman could do".
In a similar case, a man called on behalf of a woman in his apartment building whose estranged husband had beaten her and then had left. After ascertaining that the woman did not require medical attention the staff member explained that the woman herself should lay a complaint. The caller was adamant that the police should do something on the basis of his report.

Staff: The guy's gone hasn't he? There's nothing a policeman could do.
Caller: But he might come back.
Staff: If he comes back, then she can call us.
Caller: Look, has a law been broken or hasn't it?
Staff: Sure a law's been broken, but we don't know a law's been broken until she tells us a law's been broken. If she comes down and lays a complaint we'll arrest him.

After the call was completed, the staff member, a policeman who was sitting at the position being recorded, said to the room at large, "bet that'll sound good on the tape", a reference not to his decision regarding the call but the hostility upon which it ended.

Occasionally callers phone in on behalf of someone who has witnessed or is part of an event occurring at the moment, but who himself does not have access to the police directly. One woman for instance, stated that the paper-boy had come to her door asking her to phone the police since when he had gone to the neighbour's door to make a collection he had heard the woman inside calling for help. In another call, the caller stated,

There's a Christmas tree lot, the old man that was looking after it just came running over here and told me that there's a couple or three guys over there trying to steal his Christmas trees and want to fight with him.

In calls of this kind the right of the caller to phone in is never question; it is assumed that the person involved wants
and requires the intervention of the police. Further, since these kinds of calls concern events that are occurring at the moment it is felt that police intervention could "do some good" regardless of the co-operation of witnesses or victims. Police themselves arriving at such an event become witnesses for the purpose of preparing a "case".

Callers are expected to identify themselves and to provide a phone number and/or an address where they can be reached. In cases where callers feel they have been the victim of some act or event this is seldom a problem; they are usually more than willing. Witnesses to an event, on the other hand, or people calling in with some complaint they feel merits police attention, are often reluctant to provide such information. Such reluctance is somewhat problematic for phone room staff, since this information is helpful and in fact often necessary to the patrolman, particularly if he has difficulty locating the trouble or requires further information. Phone room staff always try to obtain some of these details and may even try to persuade the caller with such statements as "I'm not supplied to file a report without a name and phone number". In fact, if the report is of something that appears to be of a serious nature a car will be sent anyway, whether the caller identifies him- or herself or not. The following illustrates such a call.

Staff:   Vancouver Police.
Caller:  Yep. I think you need a shovel. There's a guy passed out sleeping on a garbage can at the back of the Broadway.
Staff:   Back of Broadway/
Caller:  /Right in the lane.
Staff:   Back of / Broadway
Caller:  / I tried to wake him up but he's practically passed right out cold.
Staff:   Back of Broadway Hotel?
Staff: And New Zenith.
Caller: Yep. Can't miss him.
Staff: Think he's gone, eh?
Caller: He's alive. Sure he's alive but he's just passed out, that's all.
Staff: Passed out.
Caller: Yep.
Staff: And what's your name?
Caller: My name. I'm sorry, I don't feel free. I just thought I'd tell you/that
Staff: /Oh well, no, it's OK. I just thought you were one of the employees there.
Caller: Oh no.
Staff: OK.
Caller: Fine.

(call complete)

The staff member did not press for identification of this caller for two reasons; since the call involved a person who was possibly sick or injured, a car would be sent in any case, and since the caller was not an employee of the hotel he was presumed to be a passer-by who would not remain around or be available for the patrolman to contact, since he was unwilling to give his name. In a similar call where the caller did provide his name, he was assumed to be willing to co-operate with the police and was asked if he would stay with the person until help arrived.

If the report is of a minor offence or incident, however, and the caller refuses to identify him- or herself, the call may not be acted upon at all, since a patrolman going out on such a call may not be able to complete his investigation and therefore will have "wasted his time". Civilian staff usually check with the corporal before such a call is abandoned; for instance, one staff member took a call concerning rowdiness in a neighbourhood, then said to the corporal, "She wouldn't give her name." The corporal replied, "File it in the circular file (wastebasket)."
Although in terms of its subsequent implications for police procedure the prime reason for refusing to implement further action on such a call is that it is minor and that it may waste the patrolman's time, there is also a certain amount of annoyance on the part of staff toward people who will not identify themselves, since they are seen as not wanting fully to co-operate with the police. Some staff questioned the sincerity of a caller who was unwilling to be identified and expressed the opinion that the caller might be "mischievous", i.e. reporting an event that hadn't actually occurred.

Matching calls to categories that constitute a police matter

Having identified oneself as a "proper" person to call in does not necessarily guarantee that the account then given will have the outcome that the caller wishes; that is to say, that the police will then see the matter as one in which they can intervene. The staff must determine whether what the caller says happened can be fitted into the administrative categories within which policemen can work.

Sometimes this does happen; the caller has viewed and evaluated an occurrence and describes it in a way that demonstrates it has been evaluated with what the staff see as a set of shared relevancies that merit it as appropriate for police action. The following two calls are typical; the first representing an account of peoples' actions that the staff felt warranted police intervention; the second, an account of a situation that both caller and staff judged to be potentially illegal and/or dangerous.
Staff: Police Emergency 896.
Caller: Yes, ah, my name is Benson.
Staff: Yessir.
Caller: I live at 1234 East Parkway.
Staff: Yes.
Caller: Across Woodland Avenue from me, I'm on the corner of Woodland and Parkway.
Staff: Uhuh.
Caller: There's a Christmas tree lot, the old man that was looking after it just came running over here and told me that there's a couple or three guys over there trying to steal his Christmas trees and want to fight with him.
Staff: OK. Right now, eh?
Caller: Right now. If you/ would please...
Staff: /on the corner of/
Caller: /the corner of Woodland and Parkway, the Christmas tree lot.
Staff: OK. Right.
Caller: Thank you kindly.

(call complete)

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Hello, could I have a car down here at the Spring Hotel, 234 Granville?
Staff: What's the trouble?
Caller: Well, the chambermaid went in to clean the room and there's a gun in here/ so
Staff: /234 Granville.
Caller: Yeah. 234.
Staff: 234 Granville. Spring Hotel.
Caller: Yeah.
Staff: And what room?
Caller: Number 9.
Staff: Number 9.
Caller: Yeah.
Staff: And what's your name?
Caller: My name is Mr. Smith. I'm the manager.
Staff: And your phone number.
Caller: It's...ah...683-1234.
Staff: Fine, we'll have a car right up.
Caller: OK. Bye-bye.
Staff: 'k you.

(call complete)

Characteristics of these kinds of calls are that the caller's account is not questioned and no further information is sought other than details of name and location, indicating that features of the account as given are sufficient for staff to categorize it as a
police matter. It is implicit in the outcome of these kinds of calls that the type of police intervention (a car dispatched) is understood by both parties to be the expected and suitable one. In this way the outcome of these calls match the ordinary citizen's ideal of how it is that policemen work -- speedily ready to act at the citizens' request, to fulfill their roles as fighters of crime, as keepers of order in the community.

More typically the caller's account will be questioned, discussed, and even speculated upon as the staff member attempts to discover those features of the situation that will determine whether it is a police matter within the constraints of the administrative structure. For example:

Staff:  Vancouver Police 896.
Caller:  I'd like to report...I'm Mrs. Porteous.
Staff:  Uh huh.
Caller:  and what happened, I received a telephone call a little while ago from a tenant and he asked me to send my husband there to collect the rent, so I told him my husband is not here...a...and some other time. So what he did came all the way up and he knocked the door, so I told him who it was and he told me it was the tenant, and I prepared a receipt for him and what he did, while I opened the door with the chain to give him the receipt to give me the money, he was trying to take the receipt away and not to give me any money. So finally he put his hand in and he was trying to grab me, so he forced his way in and my chain came out just as I was trying to close the door, and how he left, and I was alone at the time.

Staff:  Did he take the receipt?
Caller:  No, he was not able to take it because this time I close the door.
Staff:  I see.
Caller:  But he forced his way in and just attack me, you know, scratch me and so. What I can do? Can I...
Staff:  He scratched you, did he?
Caller:  Yes.
Staff:  Where is your husband? Why...Why would he do this? Is there any reason/like did he s...
Caller:  /I am afraid he wanted to grab the receipt from me and...you know, be like he paid
his rent or something like that. This is a
company.
Staff: Had...had...thank you...had he been drinking?
Caller: I don't know.
Staff: Well, you'll have to discuss it with your husband
and if you so...if you so wish/
Caller: /my husband, he just
came in and thought we must report because/
Staff: /Yeah.
Where does this man live? Very far from you?
Caller: Ah, he lives at 1234 Henry Street and/
Staff: /And where
do you live?
Caller: I live at 1234 West 71st Avenue.
Staff: That's...you don't live too far from him, eh?
Caller: No, I don't.
Staff: Right. Well, what is your name, Mrs./
Caller: /Porteos.
Staff: How do you spell it?
Caller: I'm sorry, P-o-r-t-e-o-s.
Staff: P-o-r-t-e-o-u-s.
Caller: E-D=S.
Staff: And your address.
Caller: 1234 West 71st Avenue.
Staff: 1234 West 71st.
Caller: Yes.
Staff: And your phone number there.
Caller: My phone number is 261-1234.
Staff: 1234.
Caller: And his name is Brian Smith.
Staff: Have you had any trouble with him before:
Caller: Well, he is...um...a new tenant, just a month ago he
rent the place and I don't know what character
he is/
Staff: /Yeah...uh/
Caller: /but he don't look very good to me.
Staff: Right. Well, we'll send someone to take a report
and you discuss it with them, then, eh?
Caller: Thank you.
Staff: Right. Bye-bye.

(call complete)

In this call the staff is attempting to determine what
administrative category the event might fall into by such questions
as "did he take the receipt?" and "had he been drinking?" In filling
out the dispatch form requisitioning a car the staff member in
this case called the "nature of complaint" a "Pos(sible) assault".

Occasionally the staff will "assist" a caller with his or
her account, if the account is initially one that would not
ordinarily be a police matter. A caller describing an argument
with a neighbour, for instance, might be asked, "Did he threaten
you?" an action that would warrant police intervention where an
ordinary argument would not.

Callers, as well, will amend their initial account,
particularly in the face of what they perceive to be police re-
luctance to act, or to accept their account as given, by adding
details that they feel will merit police interest. A refrigerator
abandoned in an alley will be described as dangerous in that
children could become trapped in it; people parking an old
"unsightly" car in a neighbourhood will be described as "hippies
with long hair"; to a description of a noisy party will be added,
"there's some little children in there".

Simply adding details that the caller feels will appeal to
a shared set of values, norms, or motives does not arouse police
action independent of the given occasion. Staff must fit the
occurrence into the legal and administrative categories over which
they have jurisdiction. Thus, action was taken on the refrigerator,
since refrigerators left in places where the public has access
(the staff first attempted to discover whether someone was moving
in or out) must have the doors removed; the other two calls were
not acted upon. A good example of a situation in which the caller
felt he was appealing to such a shared set of norms in adding to
his account went as follows:

    Staff:  Vancouver Police 896.
    Caller:  Yeah, can I con..talk to somebody about obscene..
            obscene movies, please?
    Staff:  Obscene movies?
    Caller:  Yeah.
Staff: Uh, what/is this some mo...
Caller: /Well hurry up because I haven't got much time.
Staff: Well, is this a movie that's in some theatre or what?
Caller: No, it's in a house.
Staff: At a private party?
Caller: Right.
Staff: Uh..like a/
Caller: /Now look't, take the address, will you?
Staff: I can't talk.
Caller: Well, uh/
Staff: /1234. It's at Boundary Road and Madison Drive. Hurry up. Quick. They got enough cars around here, raid the place.
Caller: No, its..its Madison Drive.
Staff: 1234 Madison Drive.
Caller: Yeah, right.
Staff: Well, is this a stag party in a private home?
Caller: They got girls, and I'm quite sure they got pot and dope. Make it down here quick.
Staff: Well I/
Caller: /My brother's there.
Staff: Your brother's there. How old is he?
Caller: Just get the cops down here, OK?
Staff: Why don't you go and yank him out?

(Caller hangs up)

This call was not acted upon not because the events described by the caller would not have been of interest to the police in and of themselves, but because they were described by the caller as taking place in a private house and are therefore outside police jurisdiction. "Obscene" movies in a theatre or even in a private club where admission is charged will be seen to be in a public domain where police intervention is authorized and proper. Similarly, prostitution is not an offence; only soliciting in a public place. Possession of "pot and dope" is an offence, whether in public or private, but police are not particularly interested in going into a private home, which necessitates a warrant if a search for drugs is to be made, unless they are reasonably sure of an arrest. It was suggested to me that the way this caller presented his account
of "pot and dope" and the lack of priority he gave it did not
give the staff "reasonable cause to believe" that such an offence
was actually taking place. To send a policeman out, I was told,
would probably be a "wild goose chase". The staff member
commented, "He's probably just annoyed because he wasn't invited."

**Police Terminology**

If a call is determined by the staff member to be about an
occurrence that is a police matter it must be labelled in such a
way as to convey to other personnel that will become involved,
either directly or within the administrative structure, that it is
a police matter and what the nature of it is. In cases where staff
themselves take the initial report this is done simply by filling
out the proper form; for instance, a "Stolen Motor-Vehicle Report",
and "Abandoned Vehicle Report", or a "Missing Persons Report".
In most cases, however, police intervention as a result of a call
to the phone room results in the dispatching of a patrol car. In
these cases, phone room staff requisition a car by filling out a
"Radio Dispatcher's Report", and must label the occurrence in a
space marked "Nature of Complaint". This label consists of a word
or phrase that must justify the requisitioning of a patrol car,
and must convey to the dispatcher, who subsequently conveys it to
the patrol car, the nature of the occurrence as briefly as possible.
This word or phrase becomes the only record of the call, the only
account of the call that phone room staff make that is ever seen or
used by other members of the force, and is the distillation of the
entire process of determining if the caller is the "correct" person
to call, and if their account of an event contains features that
staff can recognize as constituting a police matter. There is no official list of appropriate categories to choose from in describing the "Nature of Complaint" on a dispatch form; staff learn them by experience and observation. A socialized member of the community might expect that police would categorize calls by the use of some sort of internal code numbers, as they do on television, for instance. In fact, staff seldom use such codes, the only exception being the general use of "223", a number referring to that section of the Criminal Code that refers to drunken driving. Nevertheless there is a certain uniformity in the words and phrases used and in the meaning taken from them by the dispatcher, and they come by usage to be proper administrative categories, conveying to all who will use them the same information and carrying the same implications for subsequent procedures. Some of these labels match legal categories that describe the nature of the offence, such as "theft", "B&E (Breaking and Entering)", or "Assault", and these may be modified to "Pos(sible) assault" or "Pos. B&E in progress". Others are descriptive of a situation that does not or does not yet fit into a legal category of deviance, such as "Pos. Mental Woman", or "Suspicious Vehicle".

The importance of these labels for police procedure is that they carry implicit information to the dispatcher as to the nature of the situation and what is to be done, and it is from this information that he formulates his instructions to the patrolmen. "Assault", for instance, describes an event that has already been completed; the dispatcher knows that the patrolman will not be "running into trouble", a matter of some significance to the dispatcher since many of the cars are "one-man" cars and can only be dispatched
to situations that one man can handle. His instruction will be something like "take a report on an assault", an instruction that in turn conveys to the patrolman what he might reasonably expect when he arrives on the scene. The label "Fight", on the other hand, indicates to the dispatcher a disturbance in progress, the nature or escalation of which he has no way of knowing, and he will dispatch other cars to "cover" the area car and give assistance if necessary. One call, labelled on the requisition form "Big fight" was translated by the dispatcher as "We've got a riot going", and all available cars and motorcycles in or near the area were dispatched. The label "Dispute" indicates to the dispatcher a situation which is under control but which might possibly erupt into violence, and his instruction to the patrolman will likely be "Stand by to keep the peace". This conveys to the patrolman that while there may be nothing he can "do" in terms of direct police intervention, such as making an arrest, he is authorized by the dispatcher (a sargeant) to use his presence and the authority of his uniform to prevent "trouble" from happening. The label "Man down" indicates that a man is lying in the street either sick, injured, drunk, or dead, and an ambulance or inhalator will usually be dispatched at the same time as the patrol car.

It is in this way, and through this symbolic sort of summing up in the form of these labels produced by the phone room staff, that an act or event or a series of them becomes a social "fact", a "police matter" and sets in motion a set of procedures that has important implications for others.

Occasionally the label chosen by the phone room staff will be "wrong", will give a quality and meaning to an act or event
that turn out "not to be the case". For instance, a call was categorized as "Mental Woman". This label conveys to the dispatcher that a patrolman will be required to deal with a woman who is causing disturbance or concern in the community. In this case, it turned out to be nothing more than an argument between neighbours. Another call, labelled "Fight", and to which three cars were sent, was reported back by the area car to be "nothing... a family quarrel". Phone room staff, during my observation, were never criticized for, called upon to explain, or held accountable for such incorrect labelling, though the possibility of such criticism is often mentioned by staff as constituting one of the pressures of phone room work. In practice, it is assumed that some mistakes will be made, given that phone room staff ultimately make such categorizations based on a citizen's accounts, and that these accounts are seen to be selective and often fragmentary. Only if a staff member is consistently "wrong" does it become a matter of concern to the administration. Such consistent incorrectness seems to become known by other staff members rather than by other members of the force and is recognized while the process of labelling is actually going on, rather than when the patrolman's report comes back. New staff are expected to learn how to categorize a call properly within a reasonable amount of time, and, given the physical set-up of the phone room it is relatively easy for others to monitor what a new staff member is doing. New staff frequently ask for help in categorizing, but such requests are expected to diminish. While I was there one staff member, a reserve policeman, became recognized as such a problem and staff were heard to remark in his absence, "He's hopeless" and "He's got
to go." This evaluation and the reasons for it were brought to the attention of the corporal and eventually the man left.

It was also suggested to me that incorrect labelling might become an accountable matter if it results in a situation that "blows up"; that is to say, if three cars, for instance, are sent to cover a "fight" that turns out to be "nothing" and meanwhile a serious event occurs in an area that is thereby left uncovered. An individual experienced staff member would not likely be held personally responsible, since it is accepted that he or she cannot be right all the time, but the staff as a whole would "get it" and would be instructed to "be more careful".

As will be discussed in the following chapter, staff members occasionally make use of this more or less unquestioned acceptance of their categorizing to deal with calls that are in some way problematic to them.

In the course of their work police phone room staff use many "everyday" words both in ways that are commonly accepted, and also in special ways that correspond to definitions that have implications for subsequent police procedure. In phone room talk, for instance, "citizen" is used as I have used it to refer to any member of the public calling in other than those mentioned earlier as standing in a special relationship to phone room staff. "Witness" and "victim" might also be used in phone room talk in the way that I have used them to describe the relationship of the caller to the event being reported; however, in all official phone room communication -- procedure manuals, forms, conversations with supervisors -- callers are "complainants" and the matters reported are "complaints". Other official documents used elsewhere in the police
department use the terms "witness" and "victim", but the warranted use of these terms means to those who use them that additional procedures of investigation have been gone through in order to make them proper categories. These distinctions make no noticeable difference to the caller in his interaction with phone room staff. It can only be a matter of speculation that it may make a difference in the line he or she chooses to call in on. A person whose house has been broken into, for instance, may not readily see that matter as a "complaint", and therefore would not use the number listed "Complaints and Enquiries".

Other terms, however, do have consequences for how the call is to be handled and what the outcome will be. "Theft", "robbery", or "stolen", for instance, have, in addition to the meanings understood by socialized members of society, special definitions for the police that correspond to legal categories within which they work. During my observation the ordinary citizen's use of these words was never taken to correspond to police definitions, but was always "checked out". A person stating "I wish to report a theft" might be asked "what is the nature of the theft?" or someone stating, "I want to speak to somebody about an assault", might be asked "what is the situation?" Even a report of a stolen car will be checked to see first whether it is on the impounded list. A report of an abandoned car in front of someone's property is not defined by the police as "abandoned" until it has been there ten days, and so on.

The word "robbery" is one of the words most commonly "misused" in terms of police definition. Robbery legally means "theft from the person". Callers frequently use it to describe any situation
where something is stolen; staff know this and simply ask for the details, as they do on other accounts, before making their own "proper" categorization. One exception was as follows:

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: I want to report a robbery.
Staff: Yeah? Someone held you up?
Caller: Oh no, no, I just...some things were stolen from my apartment.
Staff: Then you want to report a breaking and entering.

The staff member's correction of the caller by providing her with the proper police category was unusual, particularly since the category supplied is one that is not commonly shared by other members of society, and it is not expected that anyone will, in fact, report a matter as a "breaking and entering". I took it that the staff, a policeman, was taking the opportunity to demonstrate his expertise.

Often the use of proper terminology has important procedural consequences in enabling work to get done. This is illustrated by the following examples where "correct" labelling became problematic.

In the first, a staff member working on a call said to the corporal, "It's a guy from Acme Typewriter Rentals. A girl rented a typewriter six weeks ago and now she's moved away and they haven't got the typewriter back. Can we call that theft?" The corporal quoted the "official" definition of theft -- "taking an article for your own personal use or profit" and then said "Yeah, I think if she's been gone that long she's kept it for her own personal use. Yeah, we can call that theft." The staff member proceeded on that basis.

In the second situation a car company reported one of their demonstrator cars stolen. In taking the details, the staff elicited
the account that a man had purchased a car by cheque, but had been given a demonstrator until his car was ready and his cheque had been cleared. The cheque did not clear and the man had not returned with the demonstrator. The staff member categorized the call as "car for location" rather than "stolen", since by police definition the car had not been stolen but had been lent to the man voluntarily by the company. Neither had the man committed any offence by presenting a "bad" cheque, since he had not received any goods for it. Patrol cars were given a description of the car, but if they found it would only report its location; they would not arrest the man. Subsequently the car company phoned in to report that the "stolen" car had been found; since another staff member took this second call she checked the stolen car lists, could not find the car, eventually asked other staff members if they knew about it, and found out the car was "for location". She expressed some annoyance about this to other staff, and in fact blamed the caller for his use of incorrect terminology and the subsequent "waste of her time".

Callers cannot choose the category into which their call will be slotted; neither in some sense can they refuse to choose the category. In one call a man reported that one of his workers had "taken off" with his truck and he wanted the truck back. When asked if he wanted to then report a stolen vehicle he replied, "No, I don't want to get the guy into trouble, I just want my truck." The staff member refused to act on his call. Another converse situation went as follows (description taken from field notes):

A girl phones in to report that her boyfriend has stolen her car. She tells policeman where he is heading, and adds that he is drunk. The policeman
takes the description of the car and the licence number. She asks what will happen. The policeman says "We'll arrest him." The girl says she doesn't want that, says to cancel the call, thanks the police, hangs up.

The staff member then filled out a requisition for a patrol car describing the nature of the complaint as "Stolen car 223" (drunk driver). He turned to me and said "It's not up to her to decide what we're going to do."

Summary

This chapter has focussed on those features of the caller and of the caller's account that phone room staff attend to in deciding whether or not the call fits into the administrative categories that are properly seen as police work. There was some discussion of kinds of callers who stand in a special relationship to the police in deciding what is a police matter, and, as well, a discussion of the importance of how a caller identifies him- or herself in relation to the event being reported. A section of this chapter dealt with the administrative categories police use, what features of the situation they attend to in assigning these labels, and the meaning conveyed by these labels to other police personnel. There was some discussion of police terminology and its significance for subsequent police procedures.
CHAPTER 3

SOME ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS IN EXERCISING DISCRETIONARY POWER

Bittner has suggested that police have a mandate to intervene in situations that fall within two areas.\(^1\) One is that area in which their intervention is authorized by statute -- the Criminal Code, other laws, by-laws, and so on -- and which makes up what is commonly understood to be "law enforcement". The other is that area which may be described as "peace keeping", a term which Bittner uses to encompass those situation involving police where any consideration of legality is secondary, if it is a consideration at all, to a concern for keeping order in the community such that members of the community can go about their business "as usual".

Phone room staff commonly describe calls that come in to the police as falling into three categories -- "criminal matters", "civil matters", and "keeping the peace" -- and police intervention in an event in any one of these categories makes that event a "police matter". Phone room staff clearly will not set in motion police intervention in situations where they do not feel they have a mandate to intervene; however, it is also quickly very clear to the observer that not everything that appears to fall within the powers of the police mandate gets to become a "police matter". Staff make no attempt to intervene in all situations that appear to fall within their official powers to act, nor do they appear to
consider this a goal of phone room work. It is understood that they "cannot deal with everything," but only with "as much as they can handle" and that thereby they will "keep the lid on"; that is to say, they will cover situations that occur in the community such that a certain amount of order is maintained and there is a minimum of dissatisfaction from the public and from other members of the organization. It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss some of the organizational factors phone room staff take into account in exercising their discretionary powers within their official mandate to intervene.

The "official" duty of the phone room staff is to ".... receive, screen, and process all calls by phone....and to take appropriate action." Staff see that duty as involving a responsibility for the most efficient use of the men and equipment available -- a rather significant responsibility since much of the use of patrol car time is determined by the activities of the phone room staff. Staff continually orient to, and display in their talk with each other, the administrative dictum that there are not enough cars. Much of the decision-making activity revolves around a concern with the efficient use of this resource, and "appropriate action" for phone room staff in terms of dispatching cars often means "sending cars where they will do the most good".

Such concern with efficient use of resources is generally of no interest to the citizen who feels him- or herself in need of a policeman's help. The fact that phone room staff hear accounts of crime and misery all the time and establish priorities as to what is to be handled often gives rise to a certain amount of anger and outrage on the part of the caller whose needs are not
going to be met in the way that he or she feels is required.
To deal with such dissatisfaction then becomes another task
of phone room staff since a caller who is not pacified may go on
to complain to people higher up in the administrative structure
and thereby "make trouble" for the staff who would then "hear about
it". Efficient use of resources extends to the use of all personnel,
and what the start would "hear about" was not the decision regarding
the call, but that it had been handled in such a way that a senior
officer had to "waste his time on it".

For staff, the problem of maintaining a balance between the
efficient use of resources and "satisfying the public" or "keeping
the lid on" that might be seen at least partially to contribute to
what Zimmerman\(^2\) has called the recalcitrant nature of the arena
where what is to become a social "fact", a recognized "police matter",
is negotiated. It is this feature of phone room work that led one
staff member to say, as quoted earlier, "If we send out too many
cars we're wrong. If we don't send out enough, we're wrong. We
get it either way."

**Criminal Matters**

For most people, the main function of the police is under-
stood and expected to be the control of crime. In some ways phone
room staff share this definition in that what they consider to be
"real police work" is that which deals with crime. In talking
about their own work staff would in general state that all calls
regarding crime would become police matters. There are, never-
theless, calls that appear to concern crime where the phone room
staff do not act, or where they do not involve other police personnel.
It must be pointed out here that what phone room staff consider "serious" crime makes up a very small portion of the numbers of calls received, and some serious crimes may not be reported to the phone room at all. So-called "organized crime" does not come to the attention of the phone room staff; neither do the "vices" -- prostitution, book-making, or boot-legging, for instance -- since they either are not visible to the public or the public are more or less willing participants. Other kinds of serious crimes occur with comparative infrequency. I never observed a report of a murder, an armed robbery, or a bank hold-up, for example, in the time that I was there. Other kinds of crimes -- theft, breaking and entering, car-stealing, and so on -- occur with such frequency, on the other hand, that they are seen by the phone room staff as more or less a stable part of community life. They are and always will be happening, and they excite more than routine interest only when they occur with "more than average" frequency. Staff are occasionally heard to make such comments as "they sure stole a lot of cars this weekend" or "that's the third B&E from that block this morning."

Staff therefore exercise discretion in the deployment of cars and patrolmen. In criminal matters they frequently take into account other aspects of the judicial process, and since their activities in this area are related to the legal prosecution of offenders, their decisions are often constrained by the prospect of future disposition in the courts.

In deciding whether a patrol car "could do any good" in terms of this prospect, staff attempt to assess whether a "case"
can be made; whether there is a chance of capturing a suspect, obtaining evidence, and so on.

One feature of a reported event that is of primary interest here is the time of its occurrence, since if an event has just happened, or more particularly if it is in progress, the possibility of successful intervention in police terms is more likely. Consequently, phone room staff frequently ask questions to determine the immediacy of the event, such as "Did it just occur, ma'am?" "Did it just happen?" or "Right now, eh?" Phone room staff often express annoyance, sometimes to the caller, and sometimes to each other about an event that is reported "too late". A woman who called to report that some men had followed her three nights ago was given a little lecture on how she should have acted and was told that police could now "do nothing" other than take a report, in contrast to an event that is "in progress" or has "just happened". In these latter cases a car is dispatched at least partly in the hope of capturing the offender.

Staff attempt to ascertain whether the caller can be of any help in determining "who did it" since the caller's information will frequently be the only evidence available. Callers are asked, "Do you suspicion anyone?" or Could you identify the girl?" An affirmative answer receives more interested and prompt attention. For instance, a man reported his wallet stolen by a girl he had taken to a hotel room, and when he stated that he could probably identify the girl a car was dispatched because of the possibility of finding a suspect. In contrast, staff answering a call from a man who had had his coat stolen from a restaurant simply filled
out a "Miscellaneous Report" since there was no hope of finding out who did it.

On several occasions callers reported that they or someone with them had caught a suspect, and staff reaction was prompt. Such situations were described on the Radio dispatch form by adding the word "holding," such as "Holding H&R 223" to describe a situation where a woman had reported that her husband had caught a drunk driver who had smashed into their car, had driven off, and had hit a pole further down the street. "Holding theft" described a situation where a man had been locked in a room after he was discovered going through cars in the parking lot of some business premises. Such calls are dealt with with some urgency by the dispatcher and the patrol car.

Theft and breaking and entering are reported with such frequency that they attract little interest from phone room staff unless the above conditions are met, or unless the article stolen is of some value and can be positively identified should it turn up in a second hand store or pawn shop. This means that the caller must be able to provide serial numbers or some other identifying mark, and few are able to do this. In cases of reported theft or breaking and entering police phone room staff cannot choose to do absolutely nothing, since these acts occur within that sphere where police not only have a mandate to act, but also must act if they are to be seen as properly doing their job; nevertheless they have discretion as to how they act. When the theft is of one or two items, and there seems little prospect of capturing a suspect, phone room staff will simply fill out a "Miscellaneous Report" which goes on file. They consider this "just a formality" and implied
that nothing further would be done other than making the theft a matter of record. They often assume that such a report is also "just a formality" on the part of the caller as well, and told me, "They have to report it to us -- otherwise they can't collect their insurance." In cases of breaking and entering, or when a number of items have been stolen, a patrol car will usually be sent to "take a full report" and to check for the possibility of finger prints. This is not considered an urgent matter, and often the caller will be prepared to expect some delay. "A car will be around later -- maybe this evening when we're not so busy," or, "We'll send somebody around -- it may take a while." In fact the staff's requisition is passed to the dispatcher in the same way as all such requisitions are; these remarks by the staff are based on the recognition that the patrolman will set his own priorities and is a "cover" for the possibility that he may place this matter rather low on his work schedule.

Phone room staff consider it their prerogative to judge whether a policeman attending the scene "can do any good" and do not expect that the caller will do anything to interfere with police investigation, whether or not a caller has any way of knowing what that investigation would be. A caretaker of an apartment building, for instance, phoned to report that the mail boxes in the building had been broken into, and when she volunteered that she had already had them fixed the staff member said with obvious annoyance "What did you do that for? How can we get fingerprints now?" He considered not sending a car, but after consultation with the corporal ("we can't do anything now, can we?") one was sent. Similarly, a man who had reported his car stolen called back to say he had
found it himself a few blocks away and had driven it home. He was told "You shouldn't have done that. We might have been able to get fingerprint. How do you expect us to catch the guys?"

The dispatching of "emergency cars" which staff signify by the use of yellow requisition forms rather than the usual white, is similarly based on the staff member's judgement as to whether an emergency car "would do any good". "Emergency" means that the patrolman will go to the scene "with all possible speed", perhaps by using his siren, and there are clearly some urgent situations where this would be a detriment to successful police work. Staff, I was told, might not send an "emergency" car to a crime in progress, for instance, since the suspects would be warned of police approaching and escape. In fact, the only instances where I saw emergency cars routinely dispatched were to fires and in cases where someone was sick or injured.

On yellow dispatch forms common descriptions of the "Nature of Complaint" are "Pos(sible) Overdose" or "MVA (motor vehicle accident) boy injured". The urgency of other situations is implicit in the labels given them (as has been described in the previous chapter) and the speed with which the patrolman proceeds to them is based on his evaluation of that description.

There is one area where phone room staff do not have an official mandate to act, even in criminal matters, and that is those calls which come from outside the geographic boundaries where the Vancouver City Police have jurisdiction. Burnaby, Richmond, the University Endowment Lands, and the North Shore are under the surveillance of the RCMP. Callers from these areas who phone in
will be given the proper number to call, or if the event is of a serious nature, staff will call themselves on direct lines, particularly if the event is "just occurring".

In one instance, a staff member was observed to refer to and make use of these geographical distinctions to conserve the use of his "own" resources. A Vancouver resident phoned to complain about an obscene publication that had come into his home. The staff member elicited that it was the engineers' edition of the Ubyssey and told the caller it was a matter for the police in that area. Even though the caller insisted that it had been printed in the Vancouver area, the staff member maintained that since it had been distributed at the University it must be reported to the RCMP on campus. The staff member seemed pleased to be able to dispose of the call in this way, and said to me, "Nobody here would give a damn about that."

Civil Matters

"Civil matter" is a term used by phone room staff to encompass a number of "borderline" situations which, though they may involve a violation of a statute or by-law, or may be in some other way matters which fall within the jurisdiction of the courts, are nevertheless not seen as 'criminal' and are therefore outside the main function of the police. In the Procedure Manual a list of civil matters includes such things as noisy parties, neighbour disputes, marital disputes, landlord-tenant disputes, and business affairs. Phone room staff add such things as violations of custody orders pertaining to children, unpaid bills, and stray dogs. Staff "formally" maintain that they have no
jurisdiction in these matters, that they are matters to be settled between the parties concerned, and that there is "nothing a policeman could do".

Phone room staff nevertheless receive and process many calls of this nature. Occasionally they deal with such calls by simply firmly maintaining the official stance that the complaint the caller is making is a civil matter not a police matter, and the caller is left to his or her own devices. More commonly they also give advice. This may consist of instructions as to who else to call who may be of assistance -- a lawyer, the clerk of the small claims court, or the city pound, for instance. An example from field notes is as follows:

A woman states that she bought a piano and bench from a private party. The piano was delivered but not the bench. The person she bought it from has moved and the room mate won't release the bench. She is told this is not a police matter -- that she should try again to resolve it with the room mate, and if this doesn't work to threaten to call a lawyer, and then be prepared to call a lawyer if she has to.

Sometimes "common sense" solutions may be offered. A man who called in complaining that children in the neighbourhood were doing damage to people's gardens and had broken some windows in his greenhouse was told to try to find out who the children's parents were and talk to them, or, if this was not possible, to get together with other neighbours and do their own "policing".

Since there is no policy governing the giving of advice, no specific administrative mandate to do so, and no records kept, if such advice "backfires" it becomes a sanctionable matter. It is an embarrassment to the administration to be held accountable for activities over which it has no control, and one of the "stories" that is known to
staff members is one that was mentioned earlier in which a civilian
staff member was fired for placing the administration in this
predicament. Probably for this reason it was usually experienced
staff members who were observed to give this kind of advice.

Police do, however, intervene directly in civil matters
in certain circumstances. Though these matters are defined as
private matters between the individuals involved, they occasionally
"spill over" into the public sphere which is seen as properly the
police domain. It is not enough just that a dispute or whatever
is taking place in public (for instance, neighbours arguing about
a fence line or something); staff take into account whether the
situation is such that it might likely accelerate and thereby
become a police concern. A private dispute may become public
disorder; an argument may terminate in violence. In these cases,
while phone room staff still maintain that there is "nothing a
policeman can do" until the situation does change, they will
nevertheless dispatch a car since it is felt that the "presence
of the uniform" might prevent such trouble occurring and might
"help the participants to stay calm". This "presence", as has
been mentioned, is routinely supplied to bailiffs who are repossessing
items. It is also provided to ambulance personnel to assist them
to take a disturbed person to the hospital. One caller requested
police assistance with a person who was "suicidal" and when he was
told to take the person to the emergency ward, he replied, "she
won't go." Staff then instructed him to "call the ambulance.
They'll come and get her and the police will stand by."

"Ordinary" citizens also frequently call in requesting the
benefit of the policeman's uniform, but unlike the bailiff, who
simply labels the situation, citizens must demonstrate by their account that the situation is about to "get out of hand". One "successful" call described an argument between owners of adjacent stores who were arguing about the placement of garbage cans. Features that the staff attended to were that the dispute was occurring in the lane, was getting louder, threats were being exchanged, a garbage can had been knocked over, and so on. The staff member requisitioned a car with the label "Dispute" and the dispatcher ordered the patrolman to "Stand by to keep the peace."

Though staff then, have no official mandate to intervene in civil matters, they accomplish this right to intervene as the situation requires by transferring such matters into the category of "keeping the peace" where they do see themselves as having a mandate to intervene. This is discussed in the following section.

Keeping the peace

Phone room staff use this category to describe almost all the other kinds of calls that come into the phone room, except those that request specific information of one kind or another. Calls pertaining to "keeping the peace" will include reports of various kinds of "public" disorder that the callers feel impede them in going about their business and may concern anything from demonstrations to merchandise placed on the sidewalk in front of stores. Other calls may simply be requests for help. Calls come from people who are locked out of their houses, are sick, lost, without money, or frightened; who want to get in touch with relatives, need counselling of various kinds, or just seem to want someone to talk to.
Staff maintain that most of this is "not real police work", that it is only "public relations" and involvement in such work is not considered to have very high prestige. Bittner suggests that such work is in fact generally considered by most people to be "marginal" to the main function of the police, which is to control crime, and further, that this aspect of police work has attracted very little interest among researchers who study the activities of a police force. One author who did study this aspect of police work seemed to suggest that police "ought not" to become involved in many of the kinds of situations mentioned above, since they do not have the proper training. This view of the "peace-keeping" aspects of police work does not appear to take into account that policemen do this work, that there is considerable demand that they do this work, and that a great deal of time, manpower, and resources are spent in this field. Further, though there is no "legal mandate" of the kind that empowers police to intervene in criminal matters -- in fact, there is no specific mandate at all -- police nevertheless see themselves as having the power to intervene in keeping the peace largely because the public expects and insists that they do so. Though there may be no criminal aspects or even legal aspects in a given situation that would appear to warrant police action, callers still require of the police that they "keep order" in the community, and that they aid people in trouble.

Commonly, in deciding whether dispatching a car would "do any good" in situations that involve public order, phone room staff orient to the same considerations that have already been
mentioned; whether or not the situation has features that indicate a possibility that trouble will proliferate, such as the acceleration toward possible violence described in the dispute in the previous section, or is "just occurring" and may therefore change in character. The man reporting children vandalizing his garden was simply given advice, since the event was over and therefore in some sense defined or contained. In comparison, a car was sent to investigate some youths reported to be "burning something" at the side of a road, to make sure the situation stayed under control. Though police are aware of and use the authority of their uniform in peace-keeping activities, they are also aware that there are situations in which the visible presence of a policeman may actually promote trouble and therefore they may choose not to intervene. In one instance a patrol car radioed in to the dispatcher that there were "about three or four hundred students marching north across the Burrard Street Bridge." In this case the actual public disturbance and the potential for increased disorder might be seen to be much greater than, for instance, youths burning something at the side of the road. Nevertheless the dispatcher ordered the patrolman to "stay out of it. We don't want anything done about it as long as they're orderly." He remarked to me "Those guys see a policeman, they're liable to freak."

Complaints about an event from more than one person will usually result in police action even if the police themselves do not consider it necessarily warranted. Again, the physical proximity of staff to each other makes this information readily available and allows for this kind of assessment. A caller who reported that "some teenagers were drinking behind PW school" was dismissed with
the ambiguous response "Thanks for calling", but no car was dispatched. A staff member who took a second complaint, however, announced to the room at large, "we've had a second call on this," and requisitioned a car. Staff then were able to say to subsequent callers that "cars had already gone out". The first staff member was reluctant to send out a car for two reasons: first, police authority as to the kind of action they can take with regard to juveniles is somewhat limited under present legislation, and since teenagers in particular are felt to be aware of this, to go out on such calls is considered a "waste of time". One staff remarked, "They know we can't do anything but talk nice." Secondly, it is not the kind of situation that phone room staff consider to be very serious. This was evident in the way they discussed it, and even in the way the dispatch form was filled out -- "Drinking and carrying on at PU school". One staff member remarked, "So they're drinking behind the school. Nothing wrong with that. I even had a drink today." Another added, "Such a deal."

People who phone in requesting help with personal problems are usually given the name and number of an appropriate agency or resource where such help might be available. For this purpose staff have access to a list of community resources and the kinds of situations they are equipped to deal with. Welfare agencies, the Crisis Centre, and the emergency ward of the two major hospitals are places to which callers are frequently referred.

Police intervene, however, when it is apparent to them that the person requiring help is unable to or cannot be expected to cope with carrying out such a referral. People phone in, for
instance, with the relatively minor problem of having locked them­
selves out of their houses. This, I was told, is a carryover
from earlier times when both police and firemen aided in such a
predicament, but neither will "go out" on these calls any more.
(We'd be doing nothing else but"). However, I saw this done on
two occasions; on one, the woman locked out was reported to be
"over eighty"; on another, the woman had a small baby with her. In
both cases it was felt that the women could not be expected to go
through the procedure of finding the alternate resources a staff
member might suggest.

Police frequently intervene on behalf of sick people who
appear to be unable to seek medical help or who have no relative
to act on their behalf. I was told this was quite common on the
skid road area, where people have few connections of any sort. A
car was dispatched, for instance, at the request of a landlord
in that area who reported that one of his tenants, an elderly
Chinese man, was sick. It was considered by the staff that the
landlord would not and could not be expected to take responsibility,
and they saw themselves as having the authority to act in the absence
of any known relatives and to mobilize resources "on behalf of the
citizen".

On another occasion I watched through the phone room
window as two elderly men, both poorly dressed, assisted with a
great deal of difficulty a third elderly man, obviously sick,
across the street and into the police station. "That happens all
the time," a staff member told me. "They know if they come here
they'll get medical attention. They got no other place to go." He
added, "nobody ever hears about that kind of thing." This last
remark, I felt, was directed to me because I was a student reporting on police work, and reflected the belief of most staff that members of the public see the police as hostile and punitive, never as helpful. While they themselves consider "peace keeping" activities low status police work, they nevertheless frequently talk about it as being important and feel such work is not fully appreciated.

Phone room staff frequently dispatch cars to "pick up" people who are reported to be confused or lost. Staff exercise their discretionary powers to intervene in these situations based at least partially on some of the following justifications: there is no one else to do it; police have the resources to find out where such a person belongs; and a person wandering in such a state has the potential of proliferating trouble for the police by "being a danger to himself". Callers provide an account for the staff as to the features of the person's dress and behavior that lead them to the conclusion that the person is not able to manage in the setting where he or she is observed, and the following call is included here as an example of the way in which a member of the community monitors the behavior of another and interprets what is seen as warranting some kind of intervention.

Staff: Vancouver Police 896.
Caller: Ummm I'd just like to report...uh...uh...something that I saw on Broadway...um...a lady...ah...is this the party I would/
Staff: /Yes, yes. Did it just occur, ma'am?
Caller: Beg pardon?
Staff: Did it just occur?
(silence)
Staff: Just happen?
Caller: Well, nothing happened. This lady seems to be walking around in circles on the corner there
Staff: /what address?
Caller: Beg pardon?
Staff: The corner of where ma'am?
Caller: On the corner of Broadway and..ah..Cambie.
Staff: And Cambie.
Caller: Yes. She seems to be walking around in circles and then she would go around the..ah..stop light, you know, the signal light against the light (Staff: yeah) and then she'd go back to the corner (Staff: Yeah) again on the..ah..west..ah southwest corner and walk around in circles. She seems confused.

Staff: Right. What is...what is she wearing?
Caller: She just might be missing, you know.
Staff: Right. We'll have it checked.
Caller: She has kind of a beige over-the-knee length coat, a housedress I can see under it and..a.. ankle shoes, like they may be overshoes, no hat. She looks a bit tousled lookin'....

Staff: Ah..how old would you say she is?
Caller: Oh, I'd say fortyish.

Staff: In her forties. And she was just recently at Broadway and Cambie. Do you know what...is she just sort of going/

Caller: /Yeah. She has no purse.

Staff: No purse.
Caller: But she has an umbrella under her arm.

Staff: Umbrella under arm.
Caller: She looks like she's oblivious to (Staff: uh..huh) her surroundings.

Staff: How long ago was it you left that..
Caller: Well, I went over to drive my sister over about half an hour ago and when I came back on the same route she was still there walking in circles.

Staff: Right. We'll have her checked out. Thank you for calling.

Caller: Yeah. OK. Bye.

(Call completed)

Patrolmen usually try to find out from the person "where they belong" and only bring them in to the station "as a last resort", usually checking back with the phone room before doing so to see whether the person has been reported missing. I was told the person would then be held in the station for "a couple of hours", pending the possibility of a call, before being turned over to some other agency such as the hospital or the Salvation Army. Phone room staff
keep a file a old people who frequently wander from where they belong and have come to police attention several times because of this, and refer to this file to "match" lost people with their addresses.

Small children who are found wandering are not brought into the station. Occasionally patrolmen will take the child around the neighbourhood in which he was found on the assumption that he cannot have gone too far from where he belongs, and in the hope that the child might recognize his house or that they might encounter a distraught mother "out looking". Frequent checks are made with the phone room to see whether the child has "been reported". If these efforts fail, the child is taken to one of several day care centres until he is missed.

**Family disputes - a special problem**

Phone room staff receive many calls from women claiming that their husbands have beaten them up. For staff, these calls present particular problems as to the kind of intervention that is possible. Such events appear as if they could be classified as "assault" which ordinarily makes that event a "criminal matter". Further, these events have usually just occurred, and the suspects can be identified by the caller, both features of the situation that would, in other criminal matters, give the situation some priority in terms of initiating police intervention. On one occasion that was labelled 'assault', for instance, a man called in reporting that another man had kicked him, and a car was sent immediately. In fact, the staff almost dispatched an emergency car in case the assailant would try to escape, but decided on the 'white' dispatch form since
the caller could identify his assailant and therefore he could probably be "picked up". Similarly, in the call discussed earlier in which a tenant had scratched the caretaker of his apartment while attempting to take a receipt without giving any money, a car was also dispatched with the label "Pos(sible) Assault". In both these cases the callers, in addition to reporting the situation, had indicated their willingness to "follow it through". The first caller had been told "You'll have to lay a charge" and had replied, "I certainly want to do that." In the second, the information that both the caller and her husband had felt that they should call the police had been considered sufficient indication of such willingness, and thereby justified the involvement of patrol car personnel.

In cases of wife-beating, however, none of these criteria apply in determining whether police intervention is warranted. The Procedure Manual states that no cars are to be sent to family disputes unless the calls are first "screened by the corporal". In actual practice by phone room staff this rule in fact becomes interpreted to mean "no cars are to be sent out at all to family disputes" since competent phone room work is seen to aim at the most efficient use of resources and personnel, and therefore at least partly involves the ability on the part of the staff to make decisions on their own without having to "bother" superiors needlessly. I never saw the corporal consulted on a call of this kind.

The staff, then, are in the position of having to treat a situation which they themselves see as assault, a criminal matter, as if it officially falls into the category "civil matter", about which there is "nothing a policeman can do". Women who call in with these complaints are routinely advised of this, and are told
that if they want to do anything further they can come down to
the police station and lay a complaint with the Justice of the
Peace. The woman's insistence that she wants to "lay a charge"
or whatever is necessary is not sufficient to convince staff that
the situation warrants police intervention, as it is in the other
cases of assault mentioned. She is left to demonstrate the
seriousness of her intentions by further actions on her own.

That the procedure for dealing with this kind of assault
was seen by the staff as a "special case" was at least partly
demonstrated by the necessity staff felt to explain to me how this
procedure was arrived at. Previously, I was told, police had
treated these kinds of calls as criminal matters in the same way
as other instances of assault were treated and a patrolman had been
sent out to intervene or investigate. Police had ceased this
practice for two reasons. First, when police arrived they frequently
found that women were unwilling to have the police take further
action and would not lay a charge that would enable police to do so,
or if the woman did lay a charge she would subsequently withdraw it;
and secondly, such calls had become too numerous. Even though the
presence of a policeman might have a temporary calming influence on
the situation, a role police see themselves as properly and usefully
fulfilling on some of the other occasions mentioned, the frequency
with which family disputes occurred made it increasingly a "waste
of time" for policemen, since these calls rarely became "successful"
cases in the way that success is defined in dealing with criminal
matters; that is to say, no arrest was possible. Staff expressed
the feeling that women just wanted to "use the police to get back
at the old man" by "scaring him" and felt this was a misuse of the
authority of the policeman's uniform. Staff who had been patrolmen and had had experience in dealing with these situations provided anecdotes to support this evaluation and to justify their present procedures. I was told of women who had been so badly beaten as to require hospitalization still refusing to lay a charge, or of women who had "turned and attacked" policemen attempting to arrest their husbands. These stories were felt to illustrate that women really did not want the police to act.

A call of this kind went as follows:

Staff: Police enquiries 896.
Caller: Yes. I was wondering if you could help me. I'd like to speak to somebody in command in the...ah..I don't know which division it would be. I guess the division of assault.
Staff: Oh. What is the situation?
Caller: Ah, well, I've got a witness here...my husband has just assaulted me and he has walked out and I want to file an assault charge.
Staff: Oh, well, what you have to do is come down and see the Justice of the Peace and lay the complaint with him and then it's up to the Justice of the Peace to...to take the charge.
Caller: Oh. 'Cause you see, I used to live in Coquitlam and the RCMP came right to the door./
Staff: /No, we don't because they...you have to come down here and lay the charge...the charge has to be laid before the Justice of the Peace. There's no point in sending a policeman around to the home...there isn't anything he can do.
Caller: Oh, no. I mean, he has left.
Staff: Yeah. Well. It's...it's...you have to come down to 312 Main Street.
Caller: Three/
Staff: /Twelve Main.
Caller: Twelve Main.
Staff: That's right.
Caller: And it's not open till Monday, I guess.
Staff: Oh. No. It's open now.
Caller: Is it?
Staff: Oh yes, you can come down right now.
Caller: (Pause) Well, I was wondering if I could speak with somebody, because I don't know whether it's going to be any good for me or not. I've got two small children and one nine-month-old baby
and I'd have to get a baby sitter to look after them while I came down.

Staff: Well...uh...you have to come down and lay the charge... ah...regardless of when you come.

Caller: Well, I don't know whether I've, I...ah...ah...don't know whether I've got enough grounds, this is it...I don't know whether/

Staff: /Well, you'll have to phone the JP on the night number...684/

Caller: /Just a moment please, 684.../Staff: 1234.
Caller: 1234?
Staff: Yeah.
Caller: Will it be too late really to phone him?
Staff: Oh, no, he just came on duty, the one that's on duty...for the night.
Caller: Now, 684-1234.
Staff: Right.
Caller: Oh, fine, thank you very much.
Staff: OK. Bye.

(call complete)

This was considered by the staff to be "typical" of calls involving family disputes. The woman did not seem to be too upset; it had apparently happened before; she was "used to" having the police attend, but since the assaults continued to happen the assumption was that she had not been prepared to treat the matter seriously enough in the past to "follow through on it", and the problems she raised about coming down to the station were interpreted to mean that she was still reluctant.

Police would only intervene, I was told, if the woman's husband was preventing her from leaving the house. Even then they would not take her complaint directly, but would escort her to the station to the Justice of the Peace. The presence of small children, as in this call, was not considered reason enough to warrant police assistance as it had been, for instance, in the case of the woman with a small baby who had locked herself out of her house.
Staff do not find all calls regarding wife-beating as easy to deal with as the one just recorded. Women sometimes call in great distress and describe rather horrifying situations, and these appear to present personal difficulties to the staff in dealing with them in the "official" manner. A woman who is very upset is seen to present the risk of evoking an "emotional" response from the staff, particularly civilian female staff, thereby increasing the chances that the call will not be dealt with "properly". In hiring civilian personnel an attempt is made to screen out people whom it is felt may be inclined toward personal involvement. In fact, most staff at one time or another expressed dislike at having to take a "hard line" in these kinds of calls ("people think we're real brutes") even though they maintain that intervention would be "a waste of time". At least partly for this reason calls regarding family matters were often talked about as being one of the more disagreeable aspects of phone room work.

On occasion staff were observed to circumvent the official rule on the basis of what appeared to be purely an "emotional" response. One staff member, a policeman, told me he "usually sent out a car" if he could hear children crying in the background. Another staff member, also a policeman, received a call from a child regarding a family matter and handled it as follows:

Staff: Vancouver Police.
Caller: Can you send a policeman out here right away?
Staff: What seems to be the trouble?
Caller: My stepfather's beating up my mother and my sister.
Staff: He is, eh?
Caller: Yes.
Staff: How old are you, sonny?
Caller: Ten.
Staff: OK. What's your address?
Caller: 1234 Parkway.
Staff: OK. We'll have somebody out there right away.
Caller: Bye.
Staff: Bye Bye.

(call complete)

The staff member filled out a dispatch form, then said in answer to my question "I felt sorry for the kid."

Whatever the reason the staff member chooses for justifying his or her dispatching of a car to intervene in a family matter, the problem still remains that it is "against the rules", and there is no label or category available to describe the "Nature of Complaint" such that the dispatching of a car could be seen to be warranted. Staff then accomplish this by choosing from other categories that are properly seen as police matters. In the call just recorded, the staff member labelled the complaint "Fight", and three cars were dispatched; subsequently the patrolman reported back that the call was "nothing...a family quarrel." As has been mentioned earlier, such "incorrect" categorizing is seldom questioned by the dispatcher and staff count on this and make use of it in dealing with calls that are problematic to them.

Some other justifications for exercising discretion to intervene

As has been mentioned in the previous section, staff will occasionally circumvent rules or "proper" procedure and initiate unwarranted intervention if they "feel sorry for" the caller. Staff also were observed to justify intervention on what appeared to be other kinds of personal reactions, or on certain features of the situation that would not otherwise warrant intervention. They also
occasionally provided excuses for a decision not to intervene when that decision did not appear to be based on the caller's account.

Staff tend to initiate action either of their own or of other personnel on "unwarranted" occasions if they perceive the caller as being relatively "helpless" to follow other advice or to make use of other community resources. Children, as has been shown, receive special consideration from phone room staff, and even if they call about relatively trivial matters such as lost dogs, staff commonly spend a considerable amount of time with them. Old people sometimes receive the same response, and cars are occasionally dispatched to assist them with matters that other callers would be expected to handle themselves. Phone room staff were occasionally observed to spend more time on calls from people who had difficulty speaking English, generally on the assumption that people who could not speak the language well were less able to cope with the community and thereby to make use of other resources. On one occasion a very distraught woman phoned and stated in broken English that someone had just called her and told her that her husband "had been poisoned." With some difficulty, the staff member was able to ascertain that the husband had left for work that morning, and to obtain the name of the company where he worked. He then phoned the husband's place of employment, found out that he was there alive and well, and instructed him to phone his wife. Ordinarily, a citizen in better command of the language would have been instructed to take this kind of action herself.

Phone room staff will sometimes decide to initiate action if the caller is exceptionally persistent or insistent, often just to "get rid of" the caller when it seems apparent that the caller
is not going to accept other kinds of solutions. One woman called with a lengthy and confused story of a disagreement with her neighbour over the placement of a ladder between their properties. It was apparent that this was not a police matter, though the staff tried to elicit from her some kind of information that would allow him to categorize her account in this way. ("Did she threaten you?"), but the caller simply became more upset and insistent and added more embellishment to the story. Eventually the staff member told the caller that "someone would be along". "I had to", he said to me. "I'd have been on there all day." He described the Nature of Complaint as "Pos(sible) Mental Woman", a sufficiently imprecise category allowing him to transfer the situation from being a civil matter which it "properly" was, into becoming a matter of "peace keeping", which justified the use of a patrol car. The patrolman subsequently reported back that it was "Nothing...a neighbour dispute." This same staff member then took a second call in which a woman launched into a long story concerning a quarrel with her neighbour over the delivery of a letter. In the middle of her account, the staff member closed the phoneline key so he couldn't be heard by the caller and said to me, "Oh, no. Not another one. That's two in a row. I can't stand it." In this case he spent some time with the woman and was able to convince her with a mixture of teasing and sympathy that the matter was not serious. The woman eventually began laughing and hung up, apparently satisfied.

In some cases insistence on the part of the caller will get action, partly so the staff can get rid of the caller, but also because to initiate action will in the long run accommodate the "economy" rule of using resources efficiently. A woman who
called up complaining that someone had put a garbage can on top of a hydro pole refused to accept the staff member's instruction to call the B. C. Hydro, but insisted if the staff member did not "do something", she would go out on a main street near where she lived and flag down a police car. The staff member then called the B. C. Hydro himself to prevent this possible intrusion on patrol car time.

A person who acts too belligerently, or who appears to have been drinking, does not meet with a co-operative response, even though there is a likelihood that he or she will call again and perhaps even succeed in getting through to a more senior member of the force, thereby using more personnel time. Even though this does not follow the "economy" rule, staff feel they do not have to "put up with" these kinds of calls and generally support each other in this. On occasion belligerent callers have phoned back as many as four times, eventually reaching the corporal, but the response is usually the same.

Occasionally staff will attempt to get the caller to abandon or withdraw his or her complaint, even though the complaint appears to be one that would usually be a police matter. These are always cases that the phone room staff consider trivial, and usually are those that involve some paper work on the part of the staff. A man who called to report a car that had been sitting in front of his property for "a couple of weeks" was told, after staff had checked that the car was not on the stolen car lists, "If we remove the car wrongfully, the owner may take it to court and you'll have to appear as a witness. Are you prepared to do that?" In fact, there
are by-laws that limit parking on all streets of the city, so there is virtually no way that police could remove a car wrongfully if it had been in the same place for the length of time reported by the caller. The caller, however, stated he was not prepared to go to court, and the staff member thereby avoided the somewhat tedious matter of filling out an "Abandoned Vehicle Report".

Summary

This chapter has dealt with some of the organizational factors that phone room staff consider in deciding whether or not to intervene in a situation and what form, if any, the intervention will take. Police have a two-fold mandate to intervene; a legal mandate to intervene in criminal matters, and a mandate granted by public insistence and expectation to intervene in keeping the peace. In exercising discretion to use the legal mandate staff were shown to take into account factors relating to the future disposition of the matter in court, such as the likelihood of catching a suspect or of obtaining evidence. In deciding whether or not to intervene in matters of keeping the peace, staff were shown to consider such factors as the possibility of trouble accelerating, the public or private nature of the situation, and the ability of the caller to marshall other assistance from the community. Other factors such as limited resources, limited availability of other personnel, and personal reactions were shown to influence police discretion. Family disputes were presented as a special problem for phone room staff in exercising discretionary power.
Footnotes


2Don H. Zimmerman and Melvin Pollner, "The Everyday World as a Phenomenon" in Jack Douglas, ed., Understanding Everyday Life. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971. The authors suggest that a member sees a setting as "an objective recalcitrant arena of his actions". I take that to mean, at least in part, that there are features of the setting which a member sees as presenting or as potentially presenting difficulties for him in accomplishing what he has set out to do.


"MISSING PERSONS" AND "CRANK CALLERS": Two Typifications

Some of the discussion in previous chapters has dealt with the procedures whereby events become fitted into administrative categories, and has considered some of the implications of this labelling for subsequent police action. Phone room staff must occasionally fit people into administrative categories as well. Such labelling again is the result of a process. Staff attend to certain features of the person's behavior or the caller's account of the person's behavior, take into consideration certain organizational concerns, evaluate features of the call in the context of staff members' knowledge of the community, etc. As is the case with the labelling of events, the labelling of people into "official" categories has implications for subsequent police procedure. This chapter considers two of these typifications -- "missing persons" and "crank callers."

Missing Persons

For the person who decides that one of his or her relatives is missing, the police are seen as the appropriate agency to call for two reasons. It is usually implicit in such a decision that the person missing has met with foul play or accident, which are properly police matters, and that the police maintain surveillance
of the community and have access to information such that they will be able to find the person. Police generally share this evaluation of the reasons for their expected interest and subsequent role in dealing with the report of a missing person. There is this difference however -- what to the caller is usually a unique and frightening situation, to the police is merely one of many that are reported. Staff are personally aware of the outcome of most of these, both from their own work experiences and as a result of conversational exchanges with other staff members. Phone room staff build up a kind of "list" of other possible events besides foul play and accidents that could cause a person to be missing. They therefore attend to and seek out certain features of a particular situation that they see as being necessary to help them determine which of the possible alternatives might be likely.

While always orienting to the possibility that the person may have met with foul play or accident, in the case of adults police also always work on the assumption that the person may be missing because he wants to be. Most adults who are reported missing are men (only one woman was reported missing during the time I observed) and most of these are reported by their wives. Based on the results of many such calls, phone room staff have accumulated a knowledge of "typical" reasons why these situations come about and of certain kinds of behavior people engage in such that their families come to consider them "missing". Staff commonly assume that a man who is reported missing is probably out drinking, that he has a girlfriend, or that he is escaping a marital dispute, and some of their subsequent ways of dealing with the call are based on these assumptions. Staff frame their questions with this in mind. To the
beginning observer, and one may assume to the caller as well, these questions seem to indicate an almost "magical" knowledge of the "missing" person and his behavior. The following segment of a "missing person" call illustrates this.

(The caller reported that her husband had been missing for four days)

Staff: He's your husband, eh?
Caller: Yes.
Staff: Your legal husband?
Caller: Yes.
Staff: What's your address?
Caller: Well, right now I'm staying with a friend over on/
Staff: /Well, where did he leave you from?
Caller: Well, he left home about noon on Tuesday, it's at...he left from 1810 Parkway.
Staff: How do you know he isn't back there?
Caller: Oh, he's not there. He wasn't there this morning, and I just called my neighbour to look, and he isn't there yet.
Staff: What does he do for a living? Did he show up at work?
Caller: Oh, he was laid off last...about the middle of April...he's...we're on Welfare at the moment.
Staff: Well, what does he do when he's working?
Caller: He usually works in construction...the last place he worked was/
Staff: /How much money did he have?
Caller: Well, he should have, I guess about a hundred and sixty dollars...he's just cashed the welfare check.
Staff: Does he drink?
Caller: Well, yes, he/
Staff: /Where does he usually drink?
Caller: Well, usually along Hastings, in the Abbotsford sometimes/
Staff: /Does he use another name?
Caller: Sometimes Murdock. Sometimes Frank Miller.
Staff: When was he last in our jail?
Caller: In July.
Staff: Hold on a minute.

(Staff member leaves the phone room, comes back in a couple of minutes)

Staff: He's not in our jail. Did you check with North Van?
Caller: No, he wouldn't be there.
Staff: Why not?
Caller: Well, he doesn't go there...he doesn't know anybody there.
Staff: Well, he's not in our jail.
The staff member then proceeded to take down the description of the man on an Interim Missing Person form.

In this case the staff member's assumptions appeared to be "right"; what seemed at first to be a rather ominous situation -- a man missing for four days -- was "normalized" by the staff member's questioning into a situation that appeared to be simply a man out on a four-day drunk, and furthermore, something that the man had done in the past. An Interim Report was filled out "just in case" but the man would not be considered "officially" missing until other information was received. I was told that the man's description would be broadcast and the Interim Report sent to the Inspector in charge of Missing Persons. I was also told that if the patrolman "found" the man and he was all right, they would not necessarily report back to his wife, since it was felt that a man had the right to be missing if he wanted to be, and that was his business.

The Inspector in charge of Missing Persons frequently came into the phone room for coffee, and told me on one of these occasions that he routinely called up wives who had reported their husbands missing, and who had come to his attention by way of the Interim Report, to try to determine whether there had been marital difficulties. He made use of such information, he said, in trying to determine whether the man might really be missing or had "just taken off".

Calls regarding men in their sixties or over were usually taken "more seriously". In one call a man of sixty-three was reported four hours overdue in returning from work. Though staff
do not consider an adult to be missing until he or she has been
gone for twenty-four hours, in this case the man's description and
his usual route home were given to the area car, after the staff
member had ascertained that he did not drink. "You never know,"
the staff member said to me. "Man of that age, he might have had
a heart attack or something." Staff routinely ask, when an older
person is reported missing, "Is he sound of mind and body?" and a
negative answer usually results in prompt attention.

In the one instance where a woman was reported missing,
the report was made by her thirteen-year-old son who called at about
two o'clock in the morning to say that his mother had not come
home. The staff member ascertained that he had no father, that
his fourteen-year-old sister was home with him, and that there were
no younger children in the house. He asked if the boy had phoned
his mother's friends (he had) and whether his mother had ever done
this before (she hadn't). He then spent some time reassuring the
boy..."she's probably just got talking to somebody and forgot the
time...you probably know how your mum is when she gets talking".
He took the phone number and advised the boy to "go to sleep. When
you wake up she'll be home". The staff member told me he wouldn't
"do anything more about it...she's probably just got into a good
party"; however, he called the number just before his shift ended
at seven a.m. and the mother herself answered.

Missing children receive different treatment. While adults
are not usually considered missing until twenty-four hours have
elapsed, and callers reporting before that time are usually asked
to phone in again after twenty-four hours at which time an Interim
Report will be taken, young children are considered missing after three or four hours. After this time period it is felt that there is no place that children could legitimately be that their parents wouldn't have knowledge of. In one case, a seven year old girl was reported missing when she didn't arrive home from school at three o'clock, and the area car was immediately given her description. By six-thirty an Interim Report was made and her description was broadcast to all cars. By one-thirty a.m. she was officially "missing", by which time a full scale search was underway.

Older children and teen-agers are usually considered, at the outset, to be missing "because they want to be"; to have "gotten into some fun and forgotten the time"; or just "not to feel like going home". Phone room staff are generally aware of places or events in the community that are likely to attract the attention of older children and teen-agers and make use of this information in dealing with reports of missing children in this age group. For instance, when one mother called one night to report that her fifteen-year-old was missing, she was told that there was a rock festival in Langley and that her child was probably there. The staff member remarked to me after the call, "We'll be getting them all night. Every time there's a rock festival." Children who have a propensity toward going off without telling their parents, along with children who frequently "run away" from foster homes or institutions make up the "Frequently Missing Children" file, a file of index cards kept in the phone room containing the names and addresses of these children. Children become known as "repeaters" partly through shared information in the phone room, but more es-
especially through the patrolmen, who are familiar with their area and know when reports are coming repeatedly from the same source. Phone room staff state they don't "get too excited" when the child is a known "repeater". On one occasion a woman called at about one a.m. to report that her fifteen-year-old daughter had left at five p.m. with a friend and had not returned. On hearing the name of the friend, the staff member replied that the friend was known to him. "She's always running away...we don't take reports on her any more. If they're not home in the morning you can call us again."

The existence and use of a file labelled "Frequently Missing Old People" has been mentioned previously; when an old person is found wandering, once the patrolman knows that person's name he can check back with the phone room, and if the person's name appears on this file he is able to match him or her with the address given. For old people who live in resthomes or with relatives this is simply a matter of efficiency for all concerned; for old people living alone, however, this can have different consequences. If such people come to the attention of the community and thereby to phone room staff and patrolmen by frequently being "lost" or appearing confused in public places, the sharing of this information becomes almost like a "case history" from which police judge the competence of that person to be alone. One old woman who became known in this way was eventually taken to the Vancouver General Emergency, and in the absence of any known relatives who could assume responsibility for her, procedures were begun to have her admitted to Valleyview Provincial Home for the Aged.
Crank Callers

Phone room staff refer to certain kinds of calls as "crank calls" and to those that make them as "crank callers". In making this typification, staff more or less share with lay people a common sense definition of what constitutes a "crank". There is no special expertise called upon in arriving at this typification as there was, for instance, in deciding who was a "missing person", and I as an observer could "recognize" an eccentric or crotchety person as a "crank" in apparently much the same way as the staff.

For the most part, this typification is used in casual phone room conversation, but it is also an "official" category, and a "Crank File" is maintained containing the names, addresses, and the "nature of complaint" of those officially designated as "crank callers".

I never saw this file used. I was told it was there for reference so that if staff received a report from a person they thought was a crank, confirmation could be sought by checking to see whether the person was listed in the Crank File. The staff member would then know in what light to consider the report. Staff members, however, seemed to experience little doubt as to whether a call they were receiving was a "crank call" or not, and never were observed to seek this kind of confirmation. As well, staff seemed to know the contents of the Crank File by memory. I occasionally asked about names that were on file and staff would tell me about the person, about his or her circumstances, how frequently they called, etc. What seemed to be most useful to staff was the process by which a person's name came to be entered on the file.
The file is made up on the basis of information shared among phone room staff and patrolmen, after final consultation with the corporal. It was through this sharing that staff came to know who the "repeaters" were, and the discussion around the decision to enter a person's name on the file seemed largely to serve the purpose more or less of formally informing everyone of this.

Some callers phone in repeatedly reporting absurd or bizarre situations, and in other settings -- social work agencies or hospitals, for instance -- these callers might be labelled as paranoid or hallucinatory. Though phone room staff occasionally talk about such callers in these terms, more often they simply share a layman's definition of the person as "crazy" or "nuts". In dealing with these calls, staff tend, as Bittner has described, "to fall back on being formally correct" representatives of the police force, and to treat the call in a very matter-of-fact fashion. Even the description of the complaints on the file cards tend to be stated as the caller has given them, matter-of-factly as are other reports, as if they were "ordinary" accounts. Some examples from this file are "complaints re: electricity from walls and ceiling", "is international agent with information useful to police" or "receiving coded messages through TV set".

In dealing with these kinds of callers, staff never question the "truth" of the report, but rather focus on the ordinary aspects of what the person is saying about the situation. One woman called in complaining that teenagers with motorcycles were attempting to harrass her by causing vibrations to come from her television set and thereby ruining her nerves. The staff member sympathized about
the troublesome, noisy aspects of motorcycles, recognized the possibility that motors interfered with TV reception, and stated that there was nothing the police could do since the teenagers were out on the public street, but that the area patrolman would undoubtedly be keeping his eye on them. She hung up, apparently satisfied. The staff member then announced "I've just had Eleanor W. again. She wasn't too bad tonight." Though these calls are in some ways seen to be troublesome in that they require a lot of listening and a certain kind of diplomacy, they often serve to lighten what is often a boring job, and are usually shared with other members of the staff. I was told of "interesting" callers who did not phone in while I was there, and of solutions that some staff members had arrived at in handling them. One staff member stated he had put a man who was a "great detective" in touch with another man who had information about a Scandinavian spy ring plotting to overthrow the government. Another staff member stated that at one time when he was on the patrol cars he had assisted a man to tape up his electric wall plugs to prevent "electricity" from leaking out into the room. Such solutions are seen as quite satisfactory; the staff are not concerned with the long range prognosis for such a person, but only in alleviating the present situation that comes to their attention. Staff state a person "has the right to do or think what he likes, as long as he's not a danger to himself or others." I was told of a man who had come to the attention of the police through his landlord because of continued complaints about moving floors and electric waves. In talking to the man, police learned that he had large sums of money in his room and on his person and they arranged to have him admitted to hospital. It was felt
that a man "in his state of mind", carrying large sums of money, was a "danger to himself" as a tempting potential victim of robbery.

A caller who is more problematic to the phone room staff is the person who reports that a crime of one kind or another has been committed, but which turns out upon investigation never to have been committed at all. If this happens more than two or three times it is very quickly known to the staff via the patrolman's report, and even though the caller may be classified as a crank, phone room staff can never really ignore the call or "put off" the caller "in case it really happened this time". Such callers' cards in the Crank File usually carry a notation something like "reports thefts. Check all calls with corporal". The corporal stated that he himself would usually then talk to these callers and question them to try to discover details that would lend credence to the story and would help him to decide whether the complaint was "bona fide".

A third kind of caller who may come to be classified in the "crank" category is a person who repeatedly calls in about real but minor infractions. Police feel that every citizen in the course of his daily life sees minor violations of the law without becoming too concerned; that we all share in the notion that there will never be perfect order in the community and that the police will not be able to nor can be expected to "catch everything". Consequently, people who are overzealous in their reporting of minor matters are themselves seen to be somewhat deviant, to be "cranks". Police phone room staff are not in a position to be able to say they don't want to hear about the matter or they are not interested in minor offences, nevertheless a caller who continually reports these becomes
a nuisance, and may be "put off". For example, one woman's card on the Crank File carried the notation "phones in 4-6 parking violations". A staff member remarked "Oh, her. She lives on Oak Street and sits there all day in her apartment waiting for someone to park after four o'clock. We just can't pay attention to her all the time."

It has been stated that people come to be classified as cranks through information shared by phone room staff amongst each other and with patrolmen. The beginnings of the process whereby this information is shared and thereby accumulated into a case for making this kind of classification can be illustrated by the following two incidents.

A woman called and when the staff answered her call with the standard "Vancouver Police" she replied "This isn't the Vancouver Police. This isn't the Vancouver Police. I want protection." During subsequent questioning the woman produced a disjointed story about bad service in a restaurant. She was told that nothing could be done, and hung up, after some angry words. The staff member said to the room at large, "Who's that woman with the strong English accent that's always phoning in? I just had her again." Someone replied, "I don't know, I had her yesterday. Does she drink or what?" A third person remarked, "If she keeps phoning we should put her on the Crank File."

In the second incident a woman called, apparently crying, and said someone was trying to break the window in her back door. She stated "It goes on all the time. I can't stand it any more." A dispatch form was filled out with the label "Malicious Damage to
Property*. When the dispatcher radioed the area car the patrolman replied "We know that address. She's a repeater," but was instructed, "Check it out anyway." This could be seen as the possible first step whereby the woman would come to be classified as a "crank". If the patrolman continued to investigate her complaints and they continued to be unfounded, that is to say she continued to be a "repeater", further complaints by the patrolman might result in that information being conveyed to phone room staff, and the entry of her name in the Crank File. As has been demonstrated, this would then have possible implications for the way in which her future complaints were dealt with.

Summary

This chapter has dealt briefly with two kinds of typifications made by phone room staff -- "missing persons" and "crank callers". In deciding whether to label a person "missing" or not, staff were observed to take into account their knowledge of the community and of "peoples' behavior, based on their experience with many reports and subsequent investigations of people considered by their families to be missing. The typification "crank caller" appeared to conform more closely to a layman's definition of such a person, and the "official" labelling of a person as a "crank caller" was shown to be largely a way in which staff could share knowledge and keep track of "repeaters".
Footnotes

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The process studied in this thesis has been that whereby the varieties of trouble treated by lay members of the community as grounds for calling upon the police, are sorted and placed into administrative categories. In this process lay problems and troubles of all kinds, which are described and defined by the callers in all kinds of ways, become worked up into the forms in which they are recognizable and made properly actionable by the police. We are seeing here the production of a "bureaucratic reality" in which a social fact, a police matter, is constituted and made actionable in the routine practices of interaction between the public and the phone room staff.

In chapter 2 we discussed: callers who are entitled to make an account because of their relationship to the event they are reporting; callers who stand in a special relationship to the police in sharing the right to determine what is to become a police matter; and those features of the caller's account that police attend to in assigning the event described in the call to an administrative category.

In chapter 3 we considered the police mandate to take action and some of the organizational factors phone room staff take into account in exercising discretionary power to use that mandate. It was shown, for instance, that staff are oriented to the economical
use of limited resources and personnel. In exercising discretion staff were shown to orient to the possible future disposition of the case in court, and to consider such factors as the possibility of obtaining evidence and making an arrest. In exercising the mandate to keep the peace, police were seen to consider such factors as the possible acceleration of trouble, and whether or not the caller or the people involved had access to or the ability to involve other community resources.

Chapter 4 dealt with two typifications of people commonly made by the phone room staff -- "missing persons" and "crank callers". In arriving at the typification "missing person" staff were shown to base the typification on their knowledge of the community and of peoples' behavior based on their previous experiences of these kinds of situations. In typifying people as "crank callers" police were generally observed to share the same definition that might be used by laymen. They used such typifications to keep track of repetitious callers who are problematic to them in that their complaints are defined as eccentric or absurd.

One of the limitations in this kind of study is that one sees only part of the process. Though the observer in the setting sees it as much as possible from the point of view of the actor, such observation creates its own restriction of focus and is only partial. In Chapter 3, for instance, though Zimmerman's concept of the "occasioned corpus" was helpful in focusing on those elements that police take into account in determining how things are going to work, it also served to restrict the focus and to isolate the setting observed. Some aspects of how that setting is connected with other settings do not become readily observable.
For example, the assignment of a label does not appear to involve the phone room worker in an explicit orientation toward those members of the force involved at the next stage of the process. Categories themselves "carry" fairly determinate indications and are used by phone room members as a matter of course without attention to those indications. Phone room workers were oriented to the "next stage" of police work only when they became concerned to elicit a definite type of action in response to a call. They did so by choosing the category with respect to how it would "instruct" the dispatcher. This becomes apparent not directly as a matter of observation or recording, but only as the observer comes to reflect on the way in which her method isolates the situation she observes.

The self-contained picture obtained by the methods used in observation and analysis of one aspect of police work seems to require, then, that the reader be reminded that it is only partial. Much of what phone room staff rely on, attend to, and use as the basis for action on any given occasion was not visible to me. Nevertheless I, and I take it the phone room workers took for granted in interpreting and making sense of their routine practices, that they were aimed at and oriented to an organizational process of which they were only a part.

For example, in making sense of what was done and said reference has been made in this study to policies which must have been arrived at in routine daily practices of quite different kinds elsewhere in the police organization. How these policies were conveyed to the phone room staff, what uses were made of them, and how they oriented towards them in their work did not become observable.
I could be aware of them only as I saw them displayed in the procedures used by staff in dealing with a particular call, in accomplishing what was to become a police matter, and in my own assumption that their practice was properly warranted by such administrative policy.
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