

SCANDAL AND REFORM: Controlling Police Corruption. By Lawrence W. Sherman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, pp. xiii + 273.

The last two years have been good for students of American police. To the important books by Fogelson (*Big City Police*), Manning (*Police Work: The Organization of Policing*), Muir (*Streetcorner Politicians*) and Goldstein (*Policing a Free Society*) we can now add Sherman's book on efforts to control police corruption that grow out of scandals. If not as sweeping or descriptive as Fogelson, comprehensive as Goldstein, comparative as Manning, nor as innovative as Muir, Sherman offers us an intelligently written, clearly focused theoretically sound and empirically-grounded inquiry. This book along with his earlier collection of readings (*Police Corruption: A Sociological Perspective On Its Nature and Control*) clearly establishes Sherman as a major sociological figure in the study of police corruption. His topic is one of social and sociological significance about which there has been little research. The book will be of interest to students and reformers of police, and those interested in deviance and social control, public bureaucracies and the trust granted them, and more generally organizations and their environments.

The book grew out of Sherman's Ph.D. thesis at Yale. This in turn developed out of work begun in 1971 when the author worked as a research analyst for the New York City Police Department. Here Sherman sought "to do research that would provide policy guidance for reforming police executives by discovering the administrative policies most clearly associated with a decline in police corruption." In 1974, with a LEAA grant he then sought to actually "measure changes over time in police corruption in four American police departments." These departments (New York City, Newburgh, N.Y., Oakland, California, and an unnamed mid-sized, mid-Western city) had all experienced a major corruption scandal and a change in leadership.

The book has three major parts. It begins by describing the process of scandal and reform in the four police departments studied. Part I reviews the literature and suggests a theoretical framework for studying the social control of deviant organizations (rather than the more commonly studied deviant individuals). Corrupt police departments are then analyzed as deviant organizations. Part II analyzes efforts to control organizational corruption. Part III, which I found to be the least satisfying, seeks to measure over time the actual effects of social control policies on police corruption in the four departments studied. The conclusion draws out some generalizations with respect to reforming corrupt police departments.

Sherman's central task is to understand scandal and its implications for controlling police corruption. How is scandal mobilized? How do cities respond to scandal? Does it reform or demoralize? What control strategies with what likely consequences are available to reform executives? How can as hidden a phenomenon as organizational corruption be measured? What are the conditions and costs of successful reform in this area?

In his *ex post facto* analysis he identifies what seem to be necessary, though not necessarily sufficient, conditions for the reform of corrupt police departments. These involve both external and internal forms of social control. In the cases studied external control emerged out of a scandal. The mobilization of a scandal is dependent upon (A) a failure of information control about corrupt activities within the department, (B) the participation of other organizations such as newspapers or an aggrieved party in a conflict over the police department's goals and (C) the creation of a public image of the police department as a deviant organization.

With the above conditions a punitive scandal may emerge. This can have a short-term deterrent impact as one of the case studies suggests. But if reform is to go beyond this there must also be changes in internal control. New policies which reduce opportunity and also create a deterrent are needed. Three conditions relevant to these are (a) the creation of a new dominant coalition” which controls the department, (b) the removal of environmental influences which encourage corruption through insulating the department from its environment or changing it and (c) premonitory control policies seeking to prevent corruption or to detect it as it occurs.

In studying a sensitive topic when broad based systematic data collection is almost impossible Sherman was forced to fall back on indirect evidence. He does this with care and skill and an awareness of the limits on the data for conventional hypothesis testing. Unfortunately his awareness of the severe limitations of such testing does not prevent him from trying. Yet, what is suitable for a dissertation is not necessarily required for a book. I thus found the last section of the book to be a bit strained and unnecessarily detailed.

Sherman’s conclusions from this analysis are thoughtful and reasonable, but his basic points could have been made in a speculative chapter without devoting almost a third of the book to the actual analysis of a rather thin data base. This space might have been better given to more ethnographic materials (contrast the rich sociological implications of Robert Daly’s *The Prince of the City* about a corruption investigation in an elite New York City Police Department drug unit) or to more analysis on what is involved in doing research on such a sensitive topic. Sherman must have a wealth of stories and experiences to be shared here.

In a thoughtful conclusion of the type too rarely found among those led to do research because of their desire for social reform, Sherman offers a nice consideration of some possible costs of reform. These include a displacement of police corruption from organized to individualized forms and an increase in other forms of police misconduct, restrictions on the civil liberties of police, and a weakening of police morale.

Edward Shils has written of the complexity of virtue. In the same way we can write of the complexity of evil and see it as sometimes intertwined with virtue. While the positive aspects of police corruption and misconduct or costs of reform can easily be exaggerated to justify doing nothing, there are no simple solutions here. This is particularly true as long as prohibitions on gambling, sex, and drugs create environmental pressures for corruption and the U.S. maintains its civil liberties traditions.

Sherman’s study makes it clear there are no fixed social engineering principles for dealing with police corruption. Yet neither are we at the mercy of immutable and inscrutable historical, cultural, or structural forces as so many fashionable policy analysts are now arguing. As his case studies suggest a degree of change is possible where the will to do so is present.

Sherman’s contribution lies first in gaining access to study the most sensitive of topics in the most secretive of organizations. That he could do this and emerge with a balanced account and his integrity seemingly intact is impressive. He has further helped develop a middle range theory which orders the data, and can also contribute to better informed policy actions by spelling out the range of options available and the probable consequences of different tactics. Unlike much social problems, policy, and evaluation research this work makes a useful contribution to both sociological theory and to practice. Indeed the latter is possible precisely because of the former.

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