Foreword

Some authors may promise more in the title than is justified by the content of their publication. But this book by Lawrence Sherman, although modestly presented as a study in controlling police corruption by examining organizational scandal and reform in police departments, is much more than that. What is said about police and their departments is often true for many public organizations as a simple substitution of any other public official for that of the police makes abundantly clear. Moreover, this volume by drawing upon organizational theory challenges traditional notions about the intractability of corruption and the limited possibilities for organizational change. Weaving the woof of political and occupational cultures with the warp of organizational structure and leadership in administration, Sherman clarifies their connections. The strategic focus on scandal and its role in organizational reform sheds new light upon the connections between organizations and their environment. All of this is done in a convincing way that should make sense to those who make public policy or administer organizations.

Unlike much work on deviant behavior, the focus of this study is on deviant organizations rather than their deviant actors, not on corrupt police officers, but on corrupt police organizations. The symbolic nature of police corruption and the organizational control of corrupt behavior are central threads in the analysis.

Something more is involved in the corruption of public organizations than employee crime and failing to abide by organizational rules. That something more
comes about when behavior violates a fiduciary relationship, when it violates a public trust and corrupts public virtue. This is evident in the symbolic nature of corruption.

Defining criminal conduct by public officials as corrupt behavior rather than as criminal conduct is in itself symbolic. Investigation into "police corruption" rather than into "criminal police officers" symbolizes a public unwillingness to regard criminal and other forms of misconduct by public officials simply as criminal matters that require criminal sanctions. It is not the misdeeds of officials that are corrupt but that such behavior by persons in their public role is a misuse of power and authority that is a matter of public trust in public organizations.

Scandal is a symbolic public reaction to an organizational breach of trust. Sherman's trenchant analysis of how breaches of public trust are transformed into organizational scandal increases our understanding of how violations of public trust become transformed into a collective response of public moral outrage, one that defines a public organization as responsible for violation of trust.

There is a delicate balance between police misconduct and the symbolic labeling of a department as corrupt. The dilemmas and risks police administrators face in exposing and cloaking employee subversion of the organization's goals are sympathetically and systematically explored by Sherman. Both the role of leadership in administration and organization strategies and tactics to control corruption are examined.

Scandal does not necessarily lead to the control of police misconduct. While scandal ordinarily realigns the structure of power in an organization by replacements and shifts in the top echelon of administration and by their reform strategies, the new structure may be no more stable than one it replaces since the causes of instability are endemic to an organization and its environment. Much depends, therefore, on what policies are selected to control misconduct.
Sherman enhances our understanding of both the power of such strategies to bring about control of official misconduct and their limits. He systematically explores two major types of strategies. Premonitory strategies restrict opportunities for misconduct while proactive strategies of investigation detect and apprehend officers whose behavior subverts the organization's goals. Particularly illuminating is the analysis of how such strategies are limited in controlling different kinds of misconduct. What is clear is that the more organized the subversion within an organization, the more amenable it is to both types of strategies. Since unorganized strategies are least amenable to control by administrative policies, strategies, and tactics, an organization is always vulnerable to the least organized forms of misconduct. Fortunately for police administrators, an organization is most vulnerable to scandal when organized forms of misconduct are exposed.

The central role of leadership in reform administration exposes yet another source of organizational control of misconduct, that of normative control. Selznick has emphasized that the central role of leadership in administration is to infuse an organization with value. What seems clear in Sherman's analysis of reform chiefs who appear to transform their organization is that they infuse their organization with moral values, often ones that go far beyond the simple bounds of an organization's domain. Reform chiefs characteristically adopt a stance of moral virtue and outrage but more to the point perhaps they are aware that public officials, like Caesar's wife, must be beyond reproach. Breaches of the moral order are mended and public trust restored by visible normative control.

The visibility of official behavior is a critical element in both organizational control of officials and public trust in the organization. The less visible official behavior to both organizational and public scrutiny, exaggerated as it is in police departments by the necessity of official secrets, the more considerable the capacity of
officials and their organizations to thwart control in the public interest. Sherman's book makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the amenability of official behavior to organizational control. At the same time it lays the groundwork to explore broader questions of how trust relationships are built and maintained as well as of how they are violated and can be controlled.

The price of scandal as a public response to the violation of public trust comes high and may often outweigh the gains of reform. The infusion of public office with official trust lies at the heart of public trust. Our understanding of the violation of public trust and its control will be greatly enhanced when we better understand how trust relationships are built and maintained. The capacity of guardians to control, while considerable, is limited and no one guards the guardians well on a routine basis. Paradoxically, trust has always been regarded as a solution to the problem that not one of us can always be watched.

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