

Becoming a police officer – Being a police officer.

Published as: Schäfer, Miriam (2021): Polizist*in werden – Polizist*in sein. Strukturen und Widersprüche polizeilicher Arbeit, Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Subject and the Course of the Research
- 1.2 The Positioning of the Study
- 1.3 The Outline of the Chapters

2 The Police Organization

- 2.1 Theoretical Perspective I: Police, Power, and Violence
- 2.2 The History of the Organization
- 2.3 The Organizational and Training Structure of the Police in the Lower Saxony

3 Doing Research on Police

- 3.1 The Subject of the Research in the Context of Police Research
- 3.2 Theoretical Perspective II: Action, Interaction, and Biography
- 3.3 Methodical Approach

4 The Context of Action and Interaction in Police Work

- 4.1 We- and They-Images in the Police
- 4.2 Processes of Interpretation in Police Situations
- 4.3 Structures and Ambivalences in Police Work

5 Becoming and Being a Police Officer

- 5.1 Becoming and Being a Police Officer as a Handling of Biographical Insecurity:
The Case of Melanie Wegener
- 5.2 Becoming and Being a Police Officer as a Process of Empowerment:
The Case of Markus Holtzmann

6 Key Findings and Theoretical Generalizations

- 6.1 Structures of the Context of Action and Interaction in Police Work
- 6.2 Biographical Structuring and Patterns of Action
- 6.3 The Relationship between Biography and Occupation

7 Conclusion and Outlook

8 Appendix

- 8.1 Abbreviations
- 8.2 Transcription Codes

Bibliography

Summary

In public discourses in Germany, the police as an institution is presented on the one hand as our “friend and helper” and the guarantor of law and order, and on the other hand as an organization with a monopoly on violence that (illegally) practices violence. Police officers are presented correspondingly as actors in the sphere of security and prevention of violence, and as victims or perpetrators of illegitimate violence. Beyond reflecting on these complementary images, this sociological study looks at the everyday work of the police and reconstructs this complex field of action. Using a combination of theoretical approaches from biographical research, social constructivism and figural sociology, this empirical study of the work of uniformed police officers in Lower Saxony shows how their actions are processed in the context of specific organizational conditions and the biographical experiences of the individuals concerned. It is found that the structural features of police actions and interpretations are located at the interface between organization and biography: organizational orientations for police action and their interactive implementation in concrete situations and in the daily routines of the organization are closely intertwined with the biographies of the police officers concerned. The study shows that concrete police practices are not only influenced by socialization within the organization, but are also linked to biographical experiences and stocks of knowledge. This study thus contributes to our understanding of careers in the police, police work and everyday practice. Beyond this it provides general insights into the interrelationship between organizations and biographies.