A Guide for Establishing a Practice in

Police Preemployment Post-Offer Psychological Evaluations

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Abstract

This article provides a guide focusing on ethics and competence issues for psychologists considering a specialization in conducting police preemployment post-offer psychological evaluations (PEPOPEs). Discussion first addresses the importance of relevant training and practical experiences, involvement in pertinent professional associations, and adherence to rigorous standards and guidelines for conducting this specialized form of assessment. The specific components of a comprehensive assessment are then enumerated and discussed. The article concludes with a consideration of ethical dilemmas and challenges involved in this realm of psychological practice, and a vignette highlights some possible pitfalls for psychologists who are insufficiently prepared for conducting PEPOPEs.

Keywords: police psychology, psychological testing, preemployment post-offer psychological evaluation, police selection, police candidates
Police psychology involves both the generation and the application of psychological knowledge to police settings and problems. Specifically, more than 50 proficiencies comprise four core domains that define the police psychology field: (1) assessment related activities, (2) intervention services, (3) operational support, and (4) organizational/management consultation (Aumiller & Corey, 2007). A preemployment post-offer psychological evaluation (PEPOPE) is an assessment proficiency that is a usual component of the police selection process, which also typically involves a physical agility test, written test, background investigation, and police interview. Generally, qualified licensed psychologists (or psychiatrists) who have acquired assessment expertise through education, training, and experience conduct PEPOPEs for the purpose of assessing a candidate’s ability to perform essential job-related functions. Some police hiring authorities (e.g., police agency, township, or city), however, may have some latitude in selecting other qualified professionals to conduct PEPOPEs. Psychologists who conduct PEPOPEs must have expertise so they can provide police agencies with accurate assessment-related information about the psychological suitability of police candidates for law enforcement work.

This article discusses issues pertaining to competence and ethics for psychologists who are considering specialization in conducting PEPOPEs. We outline components essential to the development and maintenance of practice in this subfield of assessment including relevant education, practical training, involvement in continuing professional development, and adherence to rigorous standards and guidelines. We explain some of the ways in which psychologists can acquire expertise, and what they must do in their assessment work to adhere to
the highest standards of ethical practice. The possibility that some psychologists who conduct PEPOPEs lack relevant education and training should raise ethical concerns for the hiring agencies, as well for the psychologists who are acting outside their areas of competence. In this article, we discuss credentialing criteria for psychologists who want to engage in this form of specialized assessment, and we discuss some of the ethical challenges inherent in conducting such work. Throughout the article, we anchor our discussion in the American Psychological Association (APA) Code of Ethics, which should assist practicing psychologists in using the Ethics Code to establish a practice in conducting PEPOPEs effectively.

**Education**

“Psychologists provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations and in areas only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience” (APA, 2002, p. 1063; Standard 2.01a Boundaries of Competence). For psychologists who conduct police PEPOPEs, competence in clinical psychology is necessary but usually insufficient because doctoral education is typically general in the area of assessment. Conducting police PEPOPEs requires more detailed training and attention to “…the unique domain knowledge necessary for effective functioning in the position” (Bennett et al., 2006, p. 151). To provide psychological services within the realm of police psychology, psychologists should have, at a minimum, knowledge of several issues including: the police role, essential police functions, unique police work conditions, police occupational stress, and unique aspects of confidentiality and testimonial privilege. In addition to these foundational expectations, they should have advanced assessment skills and knowledge about PEPOPEs (APA, 2010). Ideally, then, individuals aspiring to become involved in police psychology should take courses during their undergraduate or
graduate education to obtain knowledge in areas pertaining to police psychology and the specialized methods for assessing applicants and candidates for police work.

Since 2008 when the APA Council of Representatives voted to approve the recognition of police psychology as a proficiency in professional psychology, several organizations have developed graduate, postdoctoral, and continuing education standards and opportunities for individuals planning careers in police psychology. Table 1 lists these groups, which include the Police and Public Safety Section of APA Division 18 (Psychologists in Public Service), the Society of Police and Criminal Psychology (SPCP), the Psychological Services Section of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and APA Division 41 (American Psychology-Law Society). Furthermore, there are several clinical and nonclinical graduate training programs with concentrations in forensics or in psychology and law that provide training in the delivery of psychological services to the police.

Presumably some psychologists who now want to become involved in conducting police PEPOPEs did not anticipate this interest during their college years or during doctoral training. Consequently, they may lack assessment training and experience requisite for evaluating police candidates, and should consider postdoctoral training in one of several training contexts. For example, the Honolulu Police Department (HPD) Human Services Unit (http://www.honolulupd.org/hsu/index.htm) employs a staff of police psychologists and postdoctoral psychology fellows who provide psychological services, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (http://sheriff.lacounty.gov) Employee Support Services Bureau provides postdoctoral training. Psychologists looking for postdoctoral training can also work
under the supervision of a local licensed psychologist with expertise and a practice in this area, and who is ideally affiliated with an APA accredited postdoctoral training program (e.g., Nicoletti-Flater Associates, http://www.n-fa.com).

Although there are only a few postdoctoral training opportunities for individuals interested in establishing a career in police psychology, the Psychological Services Section of the IACP is working with police departments to establish training fellowships. Meanwhile, psychologists may obtain specialized education in conducting police PEPOPEs through continuing professional programs offered by professional organizations listed in Table 1. The American Psychology-Law Society (APLS), for example, offers continuing education for psychologists at its annual conferences. In 2009, the APLS conference provided a workshop on the use of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2-Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF) in forensic assessments including screening police candidates for employment positions. Also, the SPCP offered at its 2010 annual conference training on topics such as the development of a semi-structured interview for police PEPOPEs, the empirical validation of the Personality Assessment Inventory in police selection, and criterion-related validity in police psychological evaluations.

Some state psychological associations also offer training related to issues pertaining to PEPOPEs. For example, in 2009, the Massachusetts Psychological Association (http://www.masspsych.org) offered training on legal and ethical risk management in professional psychological practice, including discussions of risk management strategies for preemployment screenings of special populations such as the police.
Practical Training

In addition to educational credentialing, the criteria for PEPOPE competence should include practical experiences in a police setting. As early as possible in the education and training sequence, psychologists seeking PEPOPE specialization should become involved in traineeships within police departments where they can develop an understanding about the nature of policing. For example, psychologists may participate in ride-along programs to observe the work of police officers in the field. They may also participate in a citizen-police academy. For example, psychologists in the Miami Beach area can participate in a 12-week academy (http://www.citizenspoliceacademy.com/main.php) where they learn about topics such as police organizational structure and the law, and participate in hands-on workshops on topics such as police tactics and firearms safety. Immersion in hands-on experiences demonstrates that a psychologist has taken steps to become informed about the work of the police, and more competent to conduct police PEPOPEs, thereby satisfying APA standards for Boundaries of Competence (APA, 2002).

Professional Affiliations

“Psychologists undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence” (APA, 2002, p. 1064; Standard 2.03 Maintaining Competence). Participation in relevant professional associations (see Table 1) provide psychologists with opportunities to remain informed about developments in the general field of police psychology and about issues pertaining to the PEPOPE proficiency. Psychologists can obtain relevant information by attending conferences and workshops, and by subscribing to journals, newsletters, listservs, and other media sources.
PEPOPE psychologists should be active in local, state, regional, and, or national police organizations interested in issues surrounding police selection. For example, the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST; http://www.iadlest.org) is a group of training managers and executives committed to researching, developing, and sharing information that helps states establish effective employment and training standards for police officers. The Association’s website provides information about membership and the names of members and their contact information. Psychologists may contact members to learn more about local training, education, research, and consulting opportunities. Some states also have police trainers’ associations, which psychologists can join. California psychologists, for example, may join the California Association of Police Training Officers (CAPTO; http://www.capto-online.org). Nationally, psychologists can join the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILEETA; http://www.ileeta.org). An excellent source of police information available on the web is PoliceOne.com (http://www.policeone.com). Psychologists who participate in relevant professional organizations demonstrate their commitment to maintaining competence and staying informed about contemporary professional issues affecting assessment related activities, particularly PEPOPE proficiency.

Assessment Standards

Standards and guidelines for evaluating the psychological suitability of candidates for police work exist in several professional organizations, in government legislation, and in law enforcement protocols (Dantzker & McCoy, 2006). For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; 1990) prohibits discrimination in hiring and employment screening for persons with mental disabilities. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC; 1978) provides guidelines for employee selection procedures. The Society for Industrial and
Organizational Psychology (APA Division 14) specifies procedures for validating personnel selection methods (Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology, 2003). The IACP Psychological Services Section specifies recommendations for the preemployment psychological evaluation of police candidates (2009). The APA also has standards for conducting psychological evaluations ethically and competently (APA, 2002).

Psychologists conducting PEPOPEs should be familiar with the standards, policies, and laws relevant to their assessment work in this field. Police hiring authorities have an overriding duty to protect the public from the hiring of psychologically unqualified candidates with mental disabilities, which would impair their ability to perform police work; therefore, police hiring authorities employ psychologists to conduct PEPOPEs for the purpose of screening out psychologically unqualified candidates (McKenna v. Fargo, 1978/1979). In fact, a failure to include psychological screening in the police selection process may amount to a negligent hiring practice (Bonsignore v. City of New York, 1981/1982). The assessment of psychological suitability should include a psychological test battery and a face-to-face psychological interview before making a selection recommendation.

**Psychological Test Battery**

“Psychologists administer, adapt, score, interpret or use assessment techniques, interviews, tests, or instruments in a manner and for purposes that are appropriate in light of the research on or evidence of the usefulness and proper application of the techniques” (APA, 2002, p. 1071; Standard 9.02a Use of Assessments). The goal of the PEPOPE is not psychiatric diagnosis, but instead a determination of whether candidates have mental or emotional conditions that would probably and substantially impair their performance of essential job-related functions with or without reasonable accommodations. Under the Americans with
Disabilities Act (1990), an employer may ask disability-related questions about a job applicant’s physical and/or mental condition but only after the employer makes a conditional offer of employment to the job applicant. This helps to ensure that the employer does not exclude the applicant with a possible hidden disability before the employer evaluates the applicant’s ability to perform essential job-related functions. Therefore, the PEPOPE is classified in terms of employment law as a medical examination. This examination takes place after a conditional job offer and consists of tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2), which may lead to confirmation that the candidate has a diagnosable mental or emotional disorder as specified by the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Although employers cannot ask disability-related questions before a job offer is made, during pre-offer job screenings employers can evaluate an applicant’s non-medical qualifications and skills; for example, employers can evaluate the applicant’s ability to perform physical requirements of the job. Employers may also ask psychologists to conduct non-medical assessments of normal personality traits, behaviors, and competencies. Such screenings can involve the administration of tests such as the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and/or other measures (e.g., personal history questionnaire) to predict the ability of applicants to complete law enforcement training and perform essential job-related functions. Psychologists cannot use measures designed to identify or diagnose mental or emotional disorders before the hiring authority makes a conditional offer of employment.

Psychological tests validated for use with police populations include those that assess psychopathology such as the MMPI-2, those that assess normal psychological functioning such as the CPI, and those that measure cognitive abilities such as the Wonderlic Personnel Test (WPT). Varela, Boccaccini, Scogin, Stump, and Caputo (2004) conducted a meta-analytic
review of studies that used the MMPI, CPI, and the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI) to predict the job performance of law enforcement officers. In these studies, which sampled police, correctional, government security, and other law enforcement personnel, there was a statistically significant relationship between officers’ personality test scores and their job performance data (e.g., absenteeism, tardiness, citizen complaints, and supervisory ratings).

Psychologists have also used other tests in their assessment procedures to screen police candidates such as the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16-PF), PAI, State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2), OMNI Personality Inventory, the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R), and the Rotter Incomplete Sentence Blank (RISB) (e.g., Cochrane, Tett, & Vandecreek, 2003; Dantzker & McCoy, 2006; Super, 2006). The most widely used psychological tests are the MMPI-2 and the CPI (Cochrane et al., 2003).

Psychologists vary, however, in what and how many psychological tests they use for screening police officers partly because there are no standards on how many tests to use; also, some psychologists may be unfamiliar with valid test procedures, or police departments may have different job-related criteria. For example, Dantzker and McCoy (2006) found that psychologists were using a range of psychological test batteries to screen police candidates in 18 Texas police departments. Overall, they used 17 different tests, ranging from two to six instruments in a typical battery (e.g., MMPI-2 and 16-PF; PAI and NEO PI-R; and MMPI-2, IPI, and RISB).

Although there is no standard battery for police assessment, a test battery that includes a measure of psychopathology as well as a measure of normal psychological functioning provides more useful screening information than would an assessment limited to psychopathology
(Cochrane et al., 2003; Varela et al., 2004). For example, Varela et al., (2004) found that officers’ scores on the CPI were more predictive of their job performance than were scores on the MMPI and the IPI. A possible explanation is that the usual pre-offer screening components of the job already screen out most pathological police applicants. Therefore, personality tests that measure normal characteristics (e.g., CPI) may be better predictors of on-the-job performance than are personality tests designed to detect psychopathology (e.g., MMPI-2).

Psychologists should consider a test battery that provides results beyond an assessment of psychopathology because the number of candidates rejected solely on the basis of results from a psychological assessment tends to be small (Md = 5%; Cochrane et al., 2003). A psychologist may administer, for example, (1) the MMPI-2 (or MMPI-2-RF) and the RISB to identify any hidden psychopathology during the pre-offer job screening, (2) the CPI to obtain information about normal personality traits not evaluated during the pre-offer screening, (3) the IPI for predicting specific police job criteria such as absenteeism and lateness, and (4) the WPT to predict cognitive abilities to complete police academy training and to solve problems on the job. This battery of tests should provide a better snapshot of a candidate’s mental and emotional conditions from which a psychologist can get an impression of how the candidate might approach law enforcement activities at the recruit and in-service levels. This battery also facilitates a preferred selection strategy of selecting-in the “good candidates” who demonstrate desirable behaviors and attributes and screening-out the “less good” candidates who demonstrate undesirable behaviors and attributes (Benner, 1986). Psychologists should be aware though that combining information from different psychological tests to improve the prediction of job performance is inappropriate when they interpret the meaning of test scales, which have the same names, as related but which are empirically unrelated or have very low correlations (Barrett,
Miguel, Hurd, Lueke, & Tan, 2003). This practice raises questions about construct validity, which may ultimately provoke objections about the meaning of test results and trigger a licensing complaint by a candidate removed from the hiring pool because of his or her test scores.

Most importantly, of course, psychologists conducting PEPOPEs must “…use assessment instruments whose validity and reliability have been established for use with members of the population tested” (APA, 2002, p. 1071; Standard 9.02b Use of Assessment). “When such validity or reliability has not been established, psychologists describe the strengths and limitations of test results and interpretation” (APA, 2002, p. 1071; Standard 9.02b Use of Assessment) in their psychological reports.

**Psychological Interview**

In the psychological interview, which rounds out the PEPOPE, the psychologist asks the candidate questions based on a review of the candidate’s psychological test data and information from the hiring authority’s background investigation of the candidate’s personal history. This face-to-face, semi-structured interview should include open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, and probing inquiries. Interview questions may come from a Personal History Checklist (Schinka, 1989), which covers areas such as medical history and current health, family background, family status, childhood, adolescence, current living situation, educational and occupational history, diet and exercise habits, and law enforcement questions that address the candidate's social history and reasons for entering law enforcement. The candidate may also answer questions pertaining to a Personal Problem Checklist (Schinka, 1984) about legal, financial, vocational, and military problems that may have bearing on future job performance. The hiring authority may also submit questions from its background investigation, and psychologists may ask follow-up questions about behaviors and personal history data revealed by
the candidate during the face-to-face interview. One example of a semi-structured interview for the screening of law enforcement candidates is a questionnaire developed by Varela, Scogin, and Vipperman (1999). The interview includes biographical questions and psychopathology items drawn from screening instruments used in PEPOPEs (e.g., IPI). In preliminary validation work, Varela et al. found that interview scores correlated with measures of academy performance (i.e., final grade point average, peer and supervisor ranking of academy performance).

Selection Recommendation

After the interview, the psychologist makes a selection recommendation to the police hiring authority based on the psychologist’s assessment of the candidate’s behavior across psychological tests, the interview, and other data sources such as background information provided by the hiring authority. To interpret correctly the candidate’s sample of behavior across measures, the psychologist must be familiar with police normative data. Psychological tests validated for use in police selection should have normative reports available to read. Because most test authors did not design their instruments solely for the purpose of selecting police candidates, it is not unusual to observe that police candidates vary from other normed referenced groups. For example, compared to the general population, police officers generally show elevated scores on scales measuring defensiveness (Weiss, Weiss, Cain, & Manley, 2009). More specifically, on the MMPI-2, police officers consistently have high K scores and high L scores, which suggest overly positive impression management (Sellbom, Fischler, & Ben-Porath, 2007). Ordinarily, the denial of psychological adjustment problems and the claiming of rare moral attributes or activities in order to create a favorable impression would invalidate MMPI-2 profiles; thus, it is important for the psychologist to be informed about the particular MMPI-2 profile common among police candidates.
Regardless of the measures used, psychologists should be aware in their decision-making process and selection recommendation that police candidates are likely to present themselves in the best possible light. This response style could reflect a high moralistic orientation, or reflect an attempt to hide psychological problems in an effort to “get hired,” which is probably true of job candidates in other professions. Therefore, the psychologist should consider all data sources available on a candidate before invalidating test data or eliminating the candidate from employment consideration.

Psychologists should include language in test instructions that clearly encourages candidates to answer questions candidly, and to refrain from answering questions in a way that they “think” gives them the best chance of getting hired, because false self-presentation could be costly (e.g., test scores that suggest an effort to present a favorable impression or reflect untruthfulness may lead to an invalid test profile and a rejection recommendation). Of course, a rejected candidate may retake tests after a prescribed period such as one year, and should be informed of this fact in a thorough informed consent (IACP Psychological Services Section, 2009).

A comprehensive understanding of the job requirements is also a necessary part of psychologists’ decision-making process and selection recommendation. The psychologist evaluates the candidate’s data in terms of the individual’s suitability for performing essential police duties (See APA [2002] Standards 9.01a Bases for Assessment and 2.04 Bases for Scientific and Professional Judgments). Knowledge about police work may come from a job-task analysis, interviews, surveys, or other applicable sources that identify behaviors and attributes that contribute to anticipated job performance success and difficulties. For example, the California Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (2006) identified 10 areas in
which patrol officers might experience job performance problems: social competence, teamwork, adaptability/flexibility, conscientiousness/dependability, impulse control/attention to safety, integrity/ethics, emotional regulation and stress tolerance, decision-making and judgment, assertiveness/persuasiveness, and avoidance of substance abuse and other risk-taking behavior. A California psychologist who conducts a PEPOPE would then need to communicate in his or her report whether the candidate presents mental or emotional conditions that would probably and substantially impair the individual from performing these 10 essential job-related tasks with or without reasonable accommodations.

If the police hiring authority does not define essential job-related tasks, then the psychologist should work with the hiring authority to help develop job performance measures that reflect area-relevant tasks and contemporary police practices. The hiring authority may need to revise these criterion measures because of the evolving nature of policing. The psychologist would also need to revise the assessment of psychological suitability in an effort to address new policing demands. For example, police work in some places shifted in the 1990s from car-based patrols to problem-oriented policing, which focused on reducing crime in problem areas (Reitzel, Piquero, & Piquero, 2005). Police departments that implemented such problem-solving efforts recognized a need to change the ways in which they selected officers; the new selection process involved selecting officers who had particular problem-solving abilities to scan, analyze, respond, and assess public-safety problems.

Ultimately, the psychologist makes a selection recommendation that may be a simple dichotomy between qualified and unqualified. The designation of qualified means that the candidate’s psychological makeup is such that he or she is unlikely to be substantially impaired in performing essential job-related tasks with or without reasonable accommodations. The
designation of unqualified means that the candidate presents with mental or emotional conditions that are likely to substantially impair him or her. As an alternative to the qualified/unqualified dichotomy, the psychologist may instead use a Likert-type evaluative scale with descriptors such as follows: (1) unsuitability, (2) poor suitability, (3) marginal suitability, (4) good suitability, or (5), excellent suitability. The psychologist’s choice of rating approach may depend on state laws pertaining to the administration of PEPOPEs. In Massachusetts, for instance, psychologists must make a determination of qualified or unqualified in accordance with procedures specified by civil service rules when followed by the police hiring authority. In contrast, there are no such procedures in place for Rhode Island psychologists who have the choice of using a Likert-type rating scale. So, if a Rhode Island psychologist uses a rating scale or qualified-versus-unqualified dichotomy, the psychologist should have evidence that supports the procedure’s validity and utility in the selection of police candidates (EEOC, 1978).

Regardless of the recommendation scale used, the psychological report should contain information regarding the benefits and limitations of the psychological screening procedures to help the hiring authority make informed and realistic selection decisions. The report should contain only essential information dealing with the referral question, namely whether the candidate has mental or emotional conditions that would probably and substantially impair him or her from performing essential job-related functions with or without reasonable accommodations.

**Ethical Dilemmas**

Psychologists conducting PEPOPEs must be exceptionally well versed about and sensitive to the ethical issues, challenges, and dilemmas inherent in this form of professional work. They must attend to (1) who is the client and (2) what are the relationships among all
individuals involved. In addressing these questions, psychologists must keep in mind that there are several stakeholders who have an interest in the assessment of psychological suitability: the police hiring authority, the candidate, the psychologist, the psychology profession, and the community. Each of these stakeholders shares some interest, directly or indirectly, in the selection of a psychologically suitable police candidate. Before beginning the assessment, the psychologist has a responsibility to carefully explain to the candidate and to the hiring authority who the client is and what the relationships are among all parties involved.

Using a comprehensive Informed Consent statement, the psychologist takes the necessary steps to ensure that the candidate understands the nature of the assessment, the possible outcomes, and the fact that the psychologist is working for the hiring authority. The psychologist solicits informed consent from the candidate, and does whatever is necessary to ensure that the candidate has an opportunity to ask questions and receive answers (APA, 2002; See Standards 3.10 Informed Consent and 9.03 Informed Consent in Assessment). Specifically, details should include an identification of the police hiring authority as the client (e.g., consent to the procurement of a report), the nature of the assessment (e.g., personality, psychopathology, normal psychological functioning, employment skills, cognitive abilities), the procedures and testing format (e.g., written self-report tests, oral interview), the duration of the assessment (e.g., hours or multiple sessions), the purpose of the assessment (e.g., employment decisions), the period of time for which the assessment results are valid (e.g., one year or a legally prescribed period), the method of communicating the results of the psychological assessment (e.g., a written letter, access to the written report and, or formative feedback from the psychologist), a right to appeal a psychological disqualification or obtain a second opinion if permitted by law or the hiring agency, and the limits to confidentiality and to whom the psychologist will provide results
of the assessment (e.g., the police hiring authority) (APA, 2002, Standards 3.07 Third-Party Requests for Services and 9.03 Informed Consent in Assessment; IACP Psychological Services Section, 2009; Fisher, 2009). If the hiring authority’s practice is to deny a disqualified candidate access to the psychological report or individual feedback from the psychologist, this should be stated in the informed consent. The disqualified candidate may still appeal the psychological determination and/or file a complaint on the basis of discrimination, for example, with the state licensing board or with the Court.

Psychologists conducting PEPOPEs should be especially alert to the risks involved in this work, even when their assessment work is in line with the highest standards of practice. Most notably, they should prepare for the likelihood that a candidate evaluated as “unqualified” may be angry about what he or she sees as an inaccurate or unjustified determination. Such a disgruntled candidate may take issue with the psychologist by filing a complaint with the psychology licensing board, in which case the psychologist must prepare to provide a defense for the determination, including an articulation of the ways in which the psychologist adhered to the highest standards of professional practice in conducting the assessment. Consider the following hypothetical situation:

A police department hired Dr. P, a clinical psychologist to evaluate whether a police candidate was suitable for law enforcement work. Dr. P had graduated from a respected doctoral program, had been in private practice for 20 years, and had regularly administered batteries of psychological tests at a psychiatric hospital for the purposes of diagnosis and treatment planning. Dr. P viewed himself as quite capable of taking on the assessment requested by the police department, and gave little thought to whether he possessed the specialized competency to make an employment recommendation in the
field of policing. After conducting the evaluation, Dr. P concluded that the job candidate suffered from a mental disorder that could seriously impair her ability to perform police work. Dr. P designated the candidate as “unqualified,” thereby closing the door on the hiring of this candidate. Angered by what she saw as a capricious and uninformed determination, the candidate filed a complaint with the state Board of Registration of Psychologists, asserting that Dr. P conducted the assessment outside his area of expertise. The Board concurred with the complainant and found Dr. P in violation of ethical and professional standards of practice.

The above vignette highlights the naïveté, not so uncommon among clinical psychologists, that general training in clinical psychology and experience in psychological assessment are sufficient for conducting specialized forms of assessment. Before psychologists opt to evaluate police candidates, they must first evaluate themselves. They must honestly ask about the extent of their knowledge of policing, about the extent of their training and experience in this specialized form of assessment, and about their understanding of the ethical standards of practice in this arena. Otherwise, they are engaging in unethical practice, placing society at risk, and setting themselves up for ethical complaints and determinations of malpractice.

Final Remarks

Psychologists have long been a part of the preemployment psychological screening of police candidates because of their assessment training, knowledge, and skills. Ethical challenges accompany their involvement in this proficiency area of police psychology. Most notably, psychologists would be naïve to think that competence solely in clinical psychology is sufficient for conducting PEPOPEs with police candidates. To engage in this specialized practice, psychologists must: (1) acquire relevant education, (2) participate in practical training, (3)
partake in continuing professional development, and (4) adhere to standards for this specialized form of psychological assessment, all of which we have outlined in this article. These credentialing criteria not only legitimize PEPOPE practitioners, but also protect police stakeholders from the employment of psychologically unqualified police candidates.

Psychologists who conduct PEPOPEs must also be attuned to the issues pertaining to risk management, anticipating the considerable possibility that a job candidate deemed to be unqualified may file a complaint against the psychologist with the licensing board. However, psychologists who have accrued appropriate training and experience, and who abide by the procedures detailed in this article should feel secure in the fact that they are adhering to the highest standards of practice in this specialized domain of psychology. Such psychologists should feel confident that fellow professionals, police stakeholders, and the public will respect their integrity and their diligent commitment to professionalism.

In summary, this article provides a practical guide for psychologists not already immersed in the work of providing psychological services to the police. It goes beyond broader issues surrounding psychology and police selection and evaluation found in forensic psychology textbooks and articles (e.g., Bartol & Bartol, 2008; Otto & Heilbrun, 2002; Packer, 2008), and focuses just on the police PEPOPE. It also integrates ethical issues in professional psychology and addresses standards and practices in the field of police assessment to provide practicing psychologists a shopping cart of items necessary to establish a practice in conducting police PEPOPEs.
References


**Table 1**

*Major Professional Group Memberships Available to Psychologists Interested in Police PEPOPEs*

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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Web Site</th>
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<tr>
<td>APA Division 18 Police and Public Safety Section</td>
<td>The Division is comprised of APA and non-APA members who provide services to public safety personnel such as psychologists involved in police selection.</td>
<td>Psychological Services</td>
<td><a href="http://apadivision18.org/">http://apadivision18.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>APA Division 41 American Psychology Law Society</td>
<td>The Division is comprised of APA and non-APA members who focus on scholarship, practice, and public service in psychology and law. It provides a comprehensive list of relevant police education and training programs and many other resources for career psychologists in policing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IACP Police Psychological Services Section</td>
<td>The Section is comprised of licensed psychologists who provide psychological services to the police such as preemployment screening and fitness for duty evaluations.</td>
<td>**</td>
<td><a href="http://www.theiACP.org/psych_services_section">http://www.theiACP.org/psych_services_section</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Police and Criminal Psychology</td>
<td>The Group is comprised of members from any profession having a concern for the police and criminal justice system. It provides a limited list of relevant police education and training programs available.</td>
<td>Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology</td>
<td><a href="http://psychweb.cisat.jmu.edu/spcp/">http://psychweb.cisat.jmu.edu/spcp/</a></td>
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*Note.* ** = does not publish a journal; APA = American Psychological Association; IACP = International Association of Chiefs of Police. All these groups hold an annual conference, provide education and training opportunities, facilitate a discussion forum such as a listserv, and produce a newsletter for its members, except the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology does not produce a newsletter.