

Cops, Teachers, Counselors

“This is a beautifully written book that allows street-level bureaucrats to speak in their own voices and explain their own work. The authors have listened carefully and with great attention to the drama of everyday decision making. Their passion to show that street-level workers often go out of their way, put themselves at risk, or bend the rules to help their clients goes a long way toward giving these undervalued civil servants the dignity they deserve.”

—Ann Chih Lin, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy,
University of Michigan

“*Cops, Teachers, Counselors* brings a new dimension to scholarship on street-level bureaucracies and policy implementation. It also provides a valuable tool for the reflective practitioner or agency manager seeking to understand the complexities and nuances of the street-level experience.”

—Evelyn Brodtkin, School of Social Service Administration,
University of Chicago

“An insightful, readable, and fascinating addition to the literature on implementation. Maynard-Moody and Musheno have distilled the findings of three years of fieldwork to give us a compelling picture of the way that rules and moral judgments combine in the making of decisions by street-level workers.”

—Frances Fox Piven, City University of New York

Cops, Teachers, Counselors

Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service

Steven Maynard-Moody and Michael Musheno

The University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor

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for the storytellers

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Acknowledgments

The place was different but the moment was the same: for Michael it occurred in a police patrol car; for Steven it was in the meeting room of a vocational rehabilitation office. The moment was when each of us collected our first story, and we knew we were hearing and, in our mind's eyes, seeing governing at the front lines. We were entering the world of street-level work, a world of tensions, ambiguity, and difficult—often painful—choices and judgments. At these moments we were not sure what these first stories and the many stories that followed would tell us or if they would fit into a larger narrative.

Long before these first stories had been collected, we had formed a research team and worked out the details of selecting sites and storytellers and developed interview and story-collection protocols. The original research project had a third principal investigator, Marisa Kelly, associate professor of political science at the University of the Pacific. Marisa had to pull out of the research, but her insights helped form the foundation of this project, and we remain in her intellectual debt. The research team also included two extraordinary assistants: Trish Oberweis at Arizona State University and now assistant professor of sociology at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, and Suzanne Leland at the University of Kansas and now assistant professor of public administration at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Trish and Suzy put in the long hours and attention to detail so essential in field research, but more than labor they contributed ideas and insights. They were more our colleagues than our assistants, and we owe both of them more than we can acknowledge.

These first stories were preceded by two years spent crafting a grant proposal for the Law and Social Science Program of the National Science Foundation, receiving encouraging reviews but no funding, and making revisions and eventually receiving funding. We gratefully

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acknowledge the NSF funding, without which this research would not have been possible. Before collecting our first stories, we had to secure permission from top officials, supervisors, and the cops, teachers, and counselors themselves. We greatly appreciate all who opened the door to us and let us enter their worlds. They gave us their time and attention for what was an explicitly theoretical and academic research project.

As we sat in the police car and voc rehab office collecting our first stories, we had, in front of us, two more years of fieldwork plus three years of trying to make sense of it all and finding the words to express what we learned. But with so much yet to do, we felt it all coming together; we felt we were on to something, although at that time we had only the faintest clues about what that something was. This research project has been a wondrous intellectual adventure, and we thank all who made it possible.

The Japanese have a worthy tradition of dedicating books to the authors' teachers. We dedicate this book to our teachers, the storytellers. They let us into their work worlds and took the time to tell us their stories, stories that painted a multidimensional portrait of street-level work. They revealed the unseen positive and negative aspects of their views and actions. Like all great teachers, our storytellers posed great challenges to our theorizing. From our storytellers we learned—and have tried to capture in this book—a great deal that gives us confidence in the caring, good judgment, and responsible action of street-level workers. We also saw actions and heard judgments that raise concern. During discussion of the book manuscript in a graduate class, one student who worked in law enforcement commented, “You’re bipolar in your view of cops.” He was, of course, right.

Many of the observations in this book may upset those convinced that society and governance depend on accountability and law abidance. Their concerns are real but so, we believe, are our observations about street-level judgment. Although we may not convince some readers of the possibility of responsibility without traditional accountability and of front-line policy action disjointed from policy implementation, we do ask these and all readers to listen closely and with open minds to the stories told by cops, teachers, and counselors. The storytellers have much to say, more than any analysis—ours included—can capture. The full text of all stories, interviews, and questionnaire data used in this research are archived at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. We encourage others to look at these primary materials both to critically examine our interpretations and to add observations and interpretations.

Acknowledgments

This book and the research that supports it are collaborative in every sense of the term. Either of us working alone would have written a very different—and much less richly textured—book. We came to the research and writing from different (although not opposing) theoretical orientations, and each of us was confident of his views and interpretations. At times, lengthy phone calls and E-mails led to misunderstandings and disagreement, but our mutual stubbornness also led to deeper understanding. We learned much from each other and rediscovered the truth of the plural version of the writer's adage: we couldn't understand what we thought until we saw what we wrote. As we responded to each other's drafts, we found deeper understanding and agreement that our discussions often missed. This book was not, therefore, assembled like a jigsaw puzzle, with each of us fitting in his own pieces. It grew out of a dialogue of drafts in which the ideas and words of each author became so intermixed that it is now impossible to discern who thought and wrote what.

This book has greatly benefited from the close reading of many patient friends and colleagues who gave us what we needed most: encouragement that our ideas, however ill formed and poorly stated, had merit and criticism that showed us the way to greater clarity. We are grateful to Michael Brintnal, Evelyn Brodtkin, Gray Cavender, Susan Coutin, Robert Dingwall, Chuck Epp, George Frederickson, David Goldberg, Zeke Hasenfeld, Steve Hebert, Michael Lipsky, Bill Maurer, Marcia Meyers, Rosemary O'Leary, Dennis Palumbo, Norma Riccucci, Michael Smith, Cam Stivers, and Dvora Yanow. Storytelling builds community, and in telling the story of our research and in soliciting help in interpreting street-level worker stories, we felt emboldened and enlightened by this community of scholars.

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