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**THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY
OF STOPPING AN ACTIVE SHOOTER**

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Abstract:

The purpose of this single instance phenomenological psychological study was to explore what it is like for a police officer to use deadly force to stop an active shooter in an urban city of the Western US. While many police officers responded to the report of an active shooter at an urban shopping center, the participant in this study located, shot, and killed the perpetrator. The 15 constituents discovered in this study that constituted the lived-experience were, (a) Self-in-Squad Identification, (b) Alert to Dangerous Situation, (c) Desire to Cooperate with Other Police Officers, (d) Gather Information about Situation, (e) Dynamically-Aggressive Response, (f) Drawing from the Past for Understanding, (g) Anxiety provoked by Ambiguities, (h) Equipment Integrity Management, (i) Existential Danger Signs, (j) Surreal Phenomenal Anomalies, (k) Volitional Fiat to Shoot, (l) Perceptions of Wounding the Assailant, (m) Duty Fulfillment, (n) Realization of the Catastrophic Destruction, (o) Caring Compassion for Victims and (p) Connection with Home. The experience unfolded for the officer in a way that objectively seems to be “textbook” for this incident. Nevertheless, there are experienced paradoxical aspects that emerge and create dissonance for the participant. These paradoxes are felt conflicts between values the officer holds both personally and professionally. Police officers, police trainers, law enforcement leadership, and police psychologists may all draw insights from this study’s findings to better perform their professional functions. A significant limitation to this study is that it only involves one officer’s account of his experience. Future studies are needed to extend the subject matter of this inquiry. Nevertheless, the account and analysis of this study provide extremely important information about what it is like to use deadly force as a police officer to stop an active shooter.

Keywords: police, active shooter, phenomenological, psychology

Introduction

The purpose of this single instance phenomenological psychological study was to explore what it is like for a police officer to use deadly force to stop an active shooter in an urban city of the Western United States. Spree shootings or as it became cliché in the 1980s “Going Postal” emerged as a social phenomenon in which disgruntled employees, whose employment was terminated, returned to work with a firearm and shot up their workplace to include killing supervisors and some co-workers (Ames, 2005). School shootings emerged later that followed the same kind of pattern and destruction. Children for various social reasons planned, coordinated, and executed the mass shootings of other children and adults in the schools they attended (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004).

Some research suggests that this social phenomenon is idealized in the media and practiced in military-originated simulation combat video games that teach people how to strategically plan and move, tactically locate and engage targets, all the while considering the activity instrumentally intriguing (Ferguson et al., 2008; Grossman, 2014; 2016). The military developed these simulations and training exercises to increase shot-performance in soldiers when it was found that many would fire over the heads of their enemy in an instinctual aversion to committing homicide (Grossman, 2009). But a lot of this literature is aimed at trying to find out what initiates, motivates, and puts a person into action to arrive at a place that would typically be considered “their place” to rapidly shoot and kill other people with the intentions of making a public terroristic gesture (Newman et al., 2004). Police respond to such incidents to stop the homicidal destruction and enable emergency medical services (EMS) workers to save as many people as possible. However, there has not been research conducted up until now that explores the first-person perspective of the officers charged with the duty to respond, locate, and stop the assailant from continuing the homicidal destruction. We can reasonably suggest then, that it is not known what it is like for a police officer to use deadly force to stop an active shooter who is in the process of executing a mass spree shooting on an assembly of other people.

Literature Review

The emergency event known as an “active shooter” which was previously characterized as a “spree shooter,” is a (relatively) low-frequency yet high-impact crisis event in society when compared to other violent crimes. “Lone-wolf” and ideological spree shooters have become regarded as, not only a threat to society, but further a threat to national security in the United States (Capellan, 2015). The intention of the active shooter is to kill as many people as possible before being confronted by authorities. Although the research shows that the higher the body count, the randomness of victims, and more public the place, the more likely the assailant is to end up dead by self-inflicted wounds or being shot by police (Lindsay, & Lester, 2004). It is therefore seen by researchers and authorities that the goal of the active shooter is a high body count (Capellan, 2015). For this reason, often times the location of the attack is a place where people are least likely to have an ability to effectively respond to the military-style assault by the assailant.

There are at least two reasons for the increased instances of active shooters. First, mass murder in the form of “mass shootings” is a new emergent kind of public massacre that originated sometime in the 1960s and it has been increasing. Aside from the lethality, the unique dimensions of these active shooter incidents are that they are executed in schools by teenagers or young adults (in the case of events in institutions of higher education.) Secondly, an active shooter phenomenon supersedes previous definitions of mass murder. There has been controversy among scholars pertaining to the number of victims that constitutes a “mass murder” (Huff-Corzine et al., 2014). However, Capellan (2015) points out that the intent of the assailant is more important to understanding this phenomenon than that actual outcome of the actions.

The psychology of homicide reveals that the mentalities of murderers is quite different from both suicidal people and police officers who deploy legal uses of force as part of their duties. Athens (1992) showed that violent criminals are constituted as such over time. These people often mentally and physically rehearse acts of violence prior to executing physical hostilities on others. Samenow (2004) explains how criminal cognition is marked by self-gain whether it is motivated to protect or get social power or material things. Athens (1992) and Samenow (2004) both have discovered that violent criminals will often interpret other people's behaviors, such as facial expressions, looks, or gestures, as a confrontational challenge. Violent criminals will react aggressively to their interpretations of such non-verbal challenges.

There has always been anxiety and concern of police abuse of power and uses of excessive force. However, Broomé (2011) found in the training of police cadets practicing deadly force in simulated lethal encounters, that the goal of the use of force is to stop a violent act by a criminal. Furthermore, when real police officers deploy deadly force in lethal encounters, they not only intend to stop the violent criminals but also seem to hold their fire until they believe that shooting is a last resort (Broomé, 2013a). Therefore, the phenomenology of violence versus protective force is quite different in both their purpose and intentionality.

Aggression, violence, and force can be behaviorally similar, but are psychologically different. Dodd (2009) says that violence is destructive, and force is intended to preserve the status quo order or to regulate a situation. Aggression can run an entire range from verbal to lethal assaults. There is even such a thing as passive-aggressive behavior that is a way of indirectly resisting or withholding something from another person to avoid a direct confrontation. Therefore, the phenomenology of aggression can be quite a range of experiences for people in a variety of social contexts.

Context is important to understanding the lived-experiences of people (Giorgi, 1985). The contextual differences between police cadets simulating deadly force and working police who deploy actual deadly force that results in the death of the suspect are quite different. The existential aspects of police shootings ("shoot to save your own life") are visceral and go beyond the performance pressure experienced by police cadets in lethal encounter role-play exercises (Broomé, 2011; 2013). One might wonder if the clearer the lethal encounter is for the officers to identify, the less troubling the post-shooting ruminations about the experience are. For example, one officer who shot a man with a knife at close range had significant psychological disruption due to the characterization of the assailant as "mentally disturbed" by others. However, another officer who shot and killed an unarmed drug dealer that he perceived had a gun when he shot him, described a lot less emotional disturbance in the aftermath (Broomé, 2013a). It appears then that the context and degree to which the suspect meets a "bad-guy" profile in terms of being a malevolent actor is a key dimension to a police officers' self-reconciliation with taking the person's life.

Egnoto and Griffin (2016) studied the written artifacts of college students, suicidal people, and spree shooters to explore them for variation in content. The texts of students and suicidal people were not so dissimilar, but the writings of spree shooters were oriented toward anger and other negative effects and expressions. This means that people who self-harm are not malevolent personalities in the way that spree shooters are (Egnoto & Griffin, 2016). Perhaps this is the key difference that makes exposure to violence in the media and combat video games not a "cause" but a contributor to the rising frequency of active shooters (Grossman, 2014). Therefore, it seems reasonable to accept too, that deadly-force training for police officers does not change them into malevolent people either, while there still are some cops who become criminals. It simply shows that the Reality Based Training (RBT) works to "train-out" the natural inhibition and aversion humans have to killing others (Grossman, 2009; Murray, 2006).

The meaning making about a shooting that a police officer does in the post-shooting ruminations is a crucial aspect to understanding how trauma affects him or her. This study explored what it is like for a police officer to use deadly force to stop an active shooter with the anticipation that such an extreme "textbook" situation that required deadly force to stop the assailant would be less traumatizing. Greening (1997) says that one is traumatized when he or she experiences a threat on

his or her (a) basic right to live, (b) identity (self-concept and self-worth) and his or her (c) sense that the world (and other people) supports human life. The posttraumatic growth (PTG) research on emergency workers reports that

Officers may feel that, despite the horror, they value the traumatic event as a learning and growth experience and, interpret them as rewarding and satisfying. Officers report the knowledge of being able to exercise professional skills to achieve highly meaningful outcomes in a manner rarely possible in routine contexts as a significant positive outcome. They have also reported PTG, a sense of personal and professional development, a greater appreciation for family, life, and colleagues, and an enhanced sense of control of significant adverse events. (Paton, 2006, p. 226).

Summary of the Literature

For this particular study, the researchers anticipated that the officer, who quickly arrived and located the assailant and shot him consequently ending the shooting spree, would have little psychological disruption because the officer exemplified a heroic preservation of life and fulfilled his duty without error (Paton, 2006). However, there were some paradoxical findings that emerged from the data that are worthy of discussion. It appears that while the participant seems to have been quite resilient from his lethal confrontation with the assailant, he did not make a “clean get away” from having some troublesome thoughts and emotions from the experience. As such, the descriptive phenomenological psychological approach to study the officer’s experience was selected to discover what it was like from his first-person perspective.

Methodology

The descriptive phenomenological psychological method provides a general structure of the lived-experience in a particular kind of situation. Giorgi (1985) explains that lived-experiences are made up of “constituents” rather than “elements” because constituents are always context laden. He draws this distinction from Husserl’s (2001) explanation of “pieces” versus “parts” or “moments.” Pieces are elements of something that by themselves are “wholes” that are not dependent on anything else.

The first task of conducting a phenomenological psychological research is to select participants who have the lived-experience that the researcher is interested in analyzing. The participant for this single event study was a police officer in a large agency in the Western US who responded to the report of an active-shooter in-progress at a retail shopping mall. The participant was one of many officers that converged on the mass-murder scene, but his squad was the first to locate the suspect and the participant fired and mortally wounded the assailant. Data collection was an in-person interview that was audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The transcribed accounts served as the raw data to be analyzed using the 5-Step descriptive phenomenological psychological method (Broomé, 2011; Giorgi, 2009).

The descriptive phenomenological psychological method is a systematic approach for analyzing the psychological level of the participant’s consciousness. Giorgi (2009) created the five step phenomenological psychological analysis by employing Husserl’s phenomenological epistemological principles. The analysis has been fruitful in previous studies of police work and had good promise of doing so in this case (Broomé, 2011; Broomé, 2013a; Broomé, 2013b).

Once the transcript was complete, the five steps used to analyze the data were, (1) Assume and maintain the phenomenological attitude throughout the analysis, (2) Read the entire account of the experience to gain a sense of the *whole*, (3) Delineate *meaning units* so that the account is divided up into manageable parts, (4) Transform each meaning unit into a psychologically oriented expression of its essential lived-meaning, and (5) Synthesize the *General Structure* from the constituent meanings found in the transformations into one coherent psychological description. The general structure is “thing” from which elaboration and interpretation takes place.

The structure allows researchers to see how the thoughts, feelings, motivations, anticipations and so forth unfold in a general sense so they can be critically reviewed, discussed and compared to the findings of similar research. The general structure is found in a mode of discovery rather than in a mode of validation, but there may be aspects discovered that have a veridical nature or call into question previously accepted theories or other findings (Giorgi, 2009). In this manner, science is practiced through a methodical, systematic, general and critical with rigor oriented toward the qualities of the lived-experience in its everyday context (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). While many quantitative modes of research deliberately abstract the personal meanings out of the data to achieve mathematical exactness, a descriptive phenomenological approach sought to maintain the lived-meanings to learn more from a person who experienced the subject matter under study.

Results

The participant did not act alone in terms of his response to the scene, engagement with the assailant, and his experiencing of the aftermath. However, he self-identifies as an officer who fired a fatal shot. The following is the *Individually Situated Structure of the Experience*. Because this is a single participant study, a *General Structure of the Experience* could not be generated though synthesizing the constituents from multiple participant accounts, as is customary in phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985; 2009).

Individually Situated Structure of the Experience

P's as a member of a special squad was alerted to an actively unfolding mass-murder at a shopping center involving a heavily armed gunman. P joined his squad in an aggressively-dynamic response to the scene to intervene and save the victims from the assailant. P worked to cooperate with other police officers in gathering information, maneuvering, and deploying deadly force resulting in the death of the assailant. P felt salient anxiety about the ambiguities in the context of existential danger signs, which were also accompanied by surreal phenomenal anomalies in his perceptions. P perceived his wounding impact on the assailant, caringly and compassionately helped victims, and realized the catastrophic destruction that had occurred prior to his arrival to people and property in the shopping center. The magnitude of the devastating destruction and death drew P to desire and connect with home. P experienced grief over the realization that he had killed the assailant who was such a young person magnified the finality of his actions. P experienced mixed feelings regarding paradoxes emerging from competing professional and personal values that guided his thoughts and actions. P's mixed emotions increased upon his self-critical reflections about the fulfillment of his vocational mission. P strived to understand the situation as it unfolded in his post-shooting ruminations, by drawing from past experiences and information in his evaluation of the conditions of the incident. P had heroically fulfilled his vocational mission but paradoxically, there are aspects of the experience continue to trouble him personally.

Phenomenological Psychological Constituents

The 15 constituents discovered in this study that constituted the lived-experience were, (a) Self-in-Squad Identification, (b) Alert to Dangerous Situation, (c) Desire to Cooperate with Other Police Officers, (d) Gather Information about Situation, (e) Dynamically-Aggressive Response, (f) Drawing from the Past for Understanding, (g) Anxiety provoked by Ambiguities, (h) Equipment Integrity Management, (i) Existential Danger Signs, (j) Surreal Phenomenal Anomalies, (k) Volitional Fiat to Shoot, (l) Perceptions of Wounding the Assailant, (m) Duty Fulfillment, (n) Realization of the Catastrophic Destruction, (o) Caring Compassion for Victims and (p) Connection with Home. These psychological aspects of the experience are essential, such that, they interdependently emerged as the participant navigated this horrific, dynamic, and rapidly evolving lethal-encounter. Table 1

provides empirical examples from the transcript that demonstrate the constituents as they presented themselves to the participant during the incident

Table 1 Empirical Examples from the Participant's Transcript (below)

Table 1 Empirical Examples from the Participant's Transcript

Constituents	Empirical Examples from P's Own Words
1. Self-in-Squad Identification	<p>...I had been on S.W.A.T. now for several years and I was now part of the gang unit. We were upstairs on our forth floor...we had 4 other guys and a sergeant working...They were in uniform and we were all sitting around...debating on where we wanted to go to dinner that night. Um, and I'm half paying attention, half not, just joking around and I'm wearing blue levis and a brown collared kind of polo type shirt and tennis shoes.</p> <p>And the first thing I started to realize was that I'm not in uniform and this is going to be pretty stupid...as I am driving, I reach back into the back seat and there's a jacket in there. "Okay, I got my police jacket."</p>
2. Alert to Dangerous Situation	<p>...there was a call that came out about a shooting in the area of the mall. ...[initially] We figured it was just a gang shooting over there and that we're just going to drive in the area and obviously not going to find anything and just clear...within about 30 seconds Jackson came running back in the room and said this is an active shooter let's go, let's go.</p> <p>I...started driving...and listening to updates about how he is inside the mall now.</p> <p>I was making a left turn at 15th Street to go into the mall, there's a guy or a couple of people standing on the corner waving saying, "In here! In here! In here!"</p>
3. Desire to Cooperate with Other Police Officers	<p>So we all jump and we started running down the hallway got to the elevator and past the elevator to the stairs and just ran down the stairs; Ran down all four flights of stairs.</p> <p>...so I will just follow them, follow them wherever their going, I got into my car and we started driving...cruising down pretty quick; and staying behind him... I parked my car and I got out...and I ran over to the sergeant's truck. And uh, said, okay what's the plan. And he said...</p> <p>"Find somebody and we're going to set up an [emergency action team] EAT." I looked over and I saw a guy that was kind of hunkered down behind a cement pillar holding a rifle or a shotgun. I grabbed him, I didn't know who he was, he was in a uniform but he was a newer guy. And I asked him, "do you know what an EAT is?" And he said "yeah." I said, "okay, you're going to be a recover." And I went to, so I said "okay, you're with us" and I went to the sergeant and okay, let's go with EAT...Let's go!" And the sergeant led us...</p>

Table 1. Continues.

Table 1. Continued.

Constituents	Empirical Examples from P's Own Words
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4. Gather Information about Situation	<p>...and listening to updates about how he is inside the mall now.</p> <p>I was making a left turn at 15th Street to go into the mall, there's a guy or a couple of people standing on the corner waving saying, "In here! In here! In here!"</p> <p>I remember smelling sulfur the gunpowder you smell on a range. And uh, I remember saying "This isn't right. You shouldn't be smelling this right here. This is a mall."</p>
5. Dynamically-Aggressive Response	<p>So we all jump and we started running down the hallway got to the elevator and past the elevator to the stairs and just ran down the stairs; Ran down all four flights of stairs.</p> <p>I got into my car and we started driving...and I flipped on my lights and siren. The sergeant was in his truck and he was cruising down pretty quick.</p> <p>...as I'm driving, I try to put on my jacket; almost rear-end a fire engine...But I get it on and go around the fire engine...</p> <p>And as we went down, we had to go between the counter and the wall...we had to go single file. So the sergeant went first, then I went and then Jackson went. And as the sergeant got up to the corner, he started peeking around and he started firing his gun.</p>
6. Drawing from the Past for Understanding	<p>We figured it was just a gang shooting over there and that we're just going to drive in the area and obviously not going to find anything and just clear and we'll go eat.</p> <p>I was trying to, like figure like, okay like active shooter...we haven't had one of those. What the hell? At least I haven't been part of one.</p> <p>I parked my car and I got out. And I remember smelling sulfur; the gunpowder you smell on a range. And uh, it felt kind of like it was a training scenario we were rushing in.</p> <p>And I started thinking to myself you've been in a shooting before; you know what is going to happen. So I started trying to find everyone who had shot...I was trying to do the same thing they did to me, trying to sequester everybody and get them isolated instead of letting them finish their job.</p> <p>I was a little worried that...uh, I had just heard horror stories in the past, about officers that have a shooting that don't go so well. A bad shooting. And their lives turn out like shit. And I didn't want that for me.</p>

Table 1. Continues.

Table 1. Continued

Constituents	Empirical Examples from P's Own Words
7. Anxiety provoked by Ambiguities	<p>... okay like active shooter, active shooter we haven't had one of those. What the hell? At least I haven't been part of one.</p> <p>...you could hear uh, a shot inside the mall; you didn't know necessarily where. And a part of me was a little bit excited, because we train for this.</p> <p>And we couldn't see where it was coming from so, I thought, "none of us are hit, so let's go" we started going down towards where the gunfire was...</p> <p>And I looked around and the guy that I told to be our rear cover, I couldn't see him. He was gone. So I started getting pissed off.</p> <p>I started worrying about was that he wasn't facing us when we started shooting. But he was holding the gun, and I thought man this was...I started thinking about being fired again. Whether I was going to lose my job because I got in a shooting again.</p> <p>I started to get really panicked because I was starting to remember what this kid looked like. Because he looked like a kid; Like a young kid.</p> <p>I started thinking about how that was going to play out. I was a little worried that...uh, I had just heard horror stories in the past, about officers that have a shooting that don't go so well. A bad shooting. And their lives turn out like shit. And I didn't want that for me.</p>
8. Equipment Integrity Management	<p>I was in a loaner car, unmarked loaner car, so I sort of shoved everything in there. It was normally, it wasn't put where I normally have everything. I looked at it all and I saw my mp5 and I just grabbed my mp5, the magazine was in it, so I slapped the bolt down and I put it over my shoulder, and I had the radio clipped to my pocket.</p> <p>All of a sudden one of the girls moves...And she's whimpering...She said, "I need to call somebody." And I immediately, what I heard was that she needed to use my phone. And I don't know if it is just being in the habit of never letting anyone use my phone, but I immediately thought, "You're not going to use my phone."</p>

Table 1. Continues

Table 1. Continued.

Constituents	Empirical Examples from P's Own Words
9. Existential Danger Signs	<p>I remember smelling sulfur the gunpowder you smell on a range... And as soon as we got there, you could hear uh, a shot inside the mall... we heard a shot "bam!" one of the loudest gunshots I had ever heard in my life. I remember hearing somebody yell fuck you and then there was another shot. Then there were some other little sounds or shots. And as the sergeant got up to the corner, he started peeking around and he started firing his gun... I saw a guy who was kind of turned away from us but he was turn back toward us. And he had a gun. And he had this look on his face that was like kind of a grin, it wasn't like he was happy, but he had a little bit of a grin on his face. And I saw him holding a shotgun, I knew he'd been shooting, and he was turning around toward us.</p>
10. Surreal Phenomenal Anomalies	<p>I remember the sergeant pulling his trigger. I actually remember a seeing a round go right out of his gun and into his head right here. And uh as soon as that happened he just froze up, and kind of like if he was hit by a Taser, just locked up and went straight down to the ground. I remember a guy standing in the middle of the sporting goods store. And he's um just standing there petrified. He is almost like he's frozen. But I've got total tunnel vision. I can, I can, I can look and I can see him, and then when I look down I can see them, and he completely goes out. It was weird that I had that total tunnel vision.</p>
11. Volitional Fiat to Shoot	<p>I saw him holding a shotgun ...turning around toward us. I so I pulled on my trigger. And I was used to shooting an MP-5 fully automatic so I pulled the trigger once and I know a lot of rounds went out. And he was there so I pulled it again. And another couple of rounds.</p>
12. Perceptions of Wounding the Assailant	<p>I actually remember a seeing a round go right out of his gun and into his head right here. And uh as soon as that happened he just froze up, and kind of like if he was hit by a Taser, just locked up and went straight down to the ground.</p>

Table 1. Continues.

Table 1. Continued.

Constituents	Empirical Examples from P's Own Words
13. Duty Fulfillment	<p>I so I pulled on my trigger...I pulled the trigger once and I know a lot of rounds went out. And he was there so I pulled it again. And another couple of rounds.</p> <p>We put him in handcuffs and we looked up and everybody was there...now we had everybody coming in and going oh cool, he's done he's done he's done.</p> <p>People were patting us on the back saying good job.</p> <p>And I started to cry just a little bit. Because I knew I killed him. The other guy just got wounded this guy was dead.</p> <p>And so, she's talking, she's calling on the phone and I start looking up, and I'm starting to feel really guilty about not letting her use my phone</p> <p>I started to feel guilt because I didn't help look for the second shooter when I shot him. I kind of stopped. I helped with the victims and I went back. But I didn't really go and look. Jackson was all business. Soon as he shot, he went looking for that second shooter.</p>
14. Realization of the Catastrophic Destruction	<p>I looked over and saw a bunch of broken glass and blood all over at a sporting goods store. I remember a guy standing in the middle of the sporting goods store. And he's...just standing there petrified. He is almost like he's frozen.</p> <p>I look over and I see victims. There were a group of people lying on the floor, blood everywhere. And I thought, "Holy shit, these guys are dead." And trying to watch where I'm stepping, because there's a lot of blood. But I look up and there's just broken glass... I started looking around. I am just trying to get my bearings.</p>
15. Caring Compassion for Victims	<p>I remember a guy standing in the middle of the sporting goods store. And he's um just standing there petrified. He is almost like he's frozen.</p> <p>All of a sudden one of the girls moves...and she's crying so I get down, and I ask her, and as I asked these questions, immediately I'm going "what the hell did you ask that for? That's a stupid question." I asked her "are you okay?"</p> <p>I look over and I see victims. There were a group of people lying on the floor, blood everywhere. And I thought, "Holy shit, these guys are dead."</p>

Table 1. Continues.

Table 1. Continued.

Constituents	Empirical Examples from P's Own Words
16. Connecting with Home	I remember thinking to myself "This one is going to be big, I probably better let people know." I immediately called my wife, I said, "hey, we just got in a shooting. But don't worry, I'm okay." So one of our other guys was busy and I called his wife and let her know. "Just to let you know everybody is okay, but if you're watching the news, everybody is okay." She was just like, "okay."

Existential-Phenomenological Paradoxes

Once the meaning units were transformed into essential psychological re-statements, the constituents of P's experience emerged. Upon further examination and the process of synthesizing the Individually Situated Structure of his experience, the interrelation of certain constituents revealed existential-phenomenological paradoxes that gave P a felt-sense of contradiction in his personal and professional values constellation. These paradoxes appear in the data to be those aspects associated with his expressions of emotional disruption.

Serve and Protect Paradox.

An example of a paradox that emerged within the interrelations of a cluster of constituents, (8) Equipment Integrity Management, (13) Duty Fulfillment, (15) Caring Compassion for Victims, and (16) Connecting with Home, demonstrate how decisions and actions P took were overall embedded in his desire to perform his sworn duty to serve and protect. P says about his response to the incident, *"And as soon as we got there, you could hear uh, a shot inside the mall; you didn't know necessarily where. And a part of me was a little bit excited, because we train for this."* Having successfully stopped the suspect through a use of deadly force, P went on to find a woman who was wounded and lying next to her murdered daughter. In attempts to be helpful, P felt awkward when he spoke to her, *"And she's crying so I get down, and I ask her, ...immediately I'm going 'what the hell did you ask that for? That's a stupid question.' I asked her 'are you okay? And she's whimpering and she says, 'My daughter! My daughter!' and I looked down and her daughter; and she was holding her hand and her daughter was just done."* While being compassionate toward this woman, she mentions that she needs to make a phone call and P reactively thinks, *"I don't know if it is just being in the habit of never letting anyone use my phone, but I immediately thought, 'You're not going to use my phone.' But I said, 'you wanna what?' she said I need to call somebody. And I was debating on whether I wanted to let her use my phone or not"* After searching for and retrieving a cell phone from the body of the woman's murdered daughter and giving it to her, P immediately felt guilty about not lending his own phone to her. However, while the woman was talking on the phone, P decided to "hold watch" for her and keep her protected, *"I'm going to stay here then and make sure she's okay."* *And so she's talking, she's calling on the phone and I start looking up, and I'm starting to feel really guilty about not letting her use my phone."*

Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath in the middle of the mass-murder scene, P describes, *"...I remember thinking to myself 'This one is going to be big, I probably better let people know.' I immediately called my wife, I said, 'hey, we just got in a shooting. But don't worry, I'm okay.' I remember her saying, 'well, who's not okay.' And I said, 'the other guy but its fine. If you see the news you'll know.' So one of our other guys was busy and I called his wife and let her know. 'Just to let you know everybody is okay, but if you're watching the news, everybody is okay.' She was just like, 'okay.'" The paradox here is that, by having trained and developed the value to keep his equipment handy for emergency use, not lending the aforementioned woman his phone was actually what enabled him to connect with home and aid another officer by telephoning his wife too.*

Deadly Force Paradox.

The deadly force paradox emerged in the interrelations between (5) Dynamically-Aggressive Response, (11) Volitional Fiat to Shoot, (12) Perceptions of Wounding the Assailant, (13) Duty Fulfillment, and (15) Caring Compassion for Victims. The Duty Fulfillment in this context required a Dynamically-Aggressive Response by the police to stop the suspect. As such, when locating the assailant, P describes, *"And I saw him holding a shotgun, I knew he'd been shooting, and he was turning around toward us. I so I pulled on my trigger. And I was used to shooting an MP-5 fully automatic so I pulled the trigger once and I know a lot of rounds went out. And he was there so I pulled it again; and another couple of rounds. And right as I was pulling it again, I remember the sergeant pulling his trigger, I actually remember a seeing a round go right out of his gun and into his head right here. And uh as soon as that happened he just froze up, and kind of like if he was hit by a*

Taser, just locked up and went straight down to the ground. He went straight down to the ground and we all went toward him and the sergeant was standing over him. And they flipped him over because they were going to put him in handcuffs.” The Perceptions of Wounding the Suspect were seen by P as physiological incapacitations due to a successfully landed head shot. Once the suspect was handcuffed, that meant he was successfully under control and no longer a lethal threat. However, P moments later said, *“People were patting us on the back saying good job. And I remember looking at the kid and I was pissed off. I was pissed off that he made me shoot him. I started running through my head again with everything that could have possibly been wrong with my shooting. And I thought, ‘man, this is golden.’ The only thing I started worrying about was that he wasn’t facing us when we started shooting. But he was holding the gun, and I thought man this was...I started thinking about being fired again. Whether I was going to lose my job because I got in a shooting again.”* So even though P and his squad had saved many lives through their heroically aggressive actions, P felt frustrated that the assailant’s actions caused the Volitional Fiat to Shoot for P to shoot him. While P pointed out that he was a little excited to put his training to the test, his Caring Compassion for Victims emerged when he saw the young assailant lying on the ground shot to death.

Cooperation and Competition Paradox.

A paradox emerged between the (1) Self-in-Squad Identification, (3) Desire to Cooperate with Other Police Officers, and (13) Duty Fulfillment, constituents. P’s Self-in-Squad Identification emerged initially in his self-recognition as a member of a special police squad trained for the most dangerous situations. His Desire to Cooperate with Other Police, particularly the others in his squad, was salient throughout the incident. P helped coordinate actions of other officers, maintained awareness of his squad’s unit integrity before, during, and after engaging the assailant with deadly force. He even tried to sequester his EAT for the post-shooting investigation that he anticipated. However, when he was going through the post-shooting process at the police station, he described, *“And they [investigators] took us up to the 8th floor and this is where I am going to be kind of brutally honest. And I remember sitting with everybody and a little bit of competition started setting in on my mind. I wanted to be the one who had shot him. There were people who had said...I looked and I saw some other people up there and I said, ‘I didn’t know you shot at him.’ And they said, ‘Yeah, I shot him! I shot him!’ and I thought, ‘you may have shot at him, but I don’t think you hit him; I hit him.’ And so there was some competition in my mind setting in. But I was also trying, at the same time, I was being a little bit to a help to the people that were in the situation. Because I had been in a shooting before they never had.”* P’s competitiveness and trying to help his colleagues who had never been in a shooting before was paradoxical, but his desire to be deemed the officer who had shot the assailant associated directly with his experienced Duty Fulfillment. Having deployed to the scene with his close colleagues, engage and neutralize the threat of the assailant, and be helpful to other officers was all part of P’s Self-in-Squad Identity as a veteran police officer.

Paradoxical Ruminations. P tried to sort out for himself what had all happened and how he felt about his experience. P describes, *“So I started trying not to think about it. I started trying to justify everything I did that night. I knew I was okay. Started to feel guilt because...I started to feel guilt because I didn’t help look for the second shooter when I shot him. I kind of stopped. I helped with the victims and I went back. But I didn’t really go and look. Jackson was all business. Soon as he shot, he went looking for that second shooter. So I started feeling a little bit jealous that I wasn’t as strong as Jackson was able to keep going and look for the guy. And I started feeling, I still feel guilty about the phone thing. And then I started feeling guilty, it wasn’t guilt, it was more just I wanted answers. It was the whole competition thing. We were up there. We just wanted answers right now. And most of all, I just wanted to go home.”* P’s ruminations about the incident were troubling him to some extent because it would have been impossible for P to fulfill all of his personal and professional values. P made choices between options that could not be performed in terms of his actions at the scene. He reflected on his actions that were associated with his sense of self and who

he was for others during their interactions. P having accomplished his Duty Fulfillment had become tired and desired to go home to rest and connect with his spouse. It appears that the paradoxes described above are likely this source for P's troublesome thoughts and feelings regarding his experience.

Discussion

Police officers' use of deadly force has been controversial since the United States officers of the law have been carrying firearms (Mays & Taggart, 1985). There is public critique of the "militarization" of the police in their equipment motif as the US Military developed many aspects of contemporary police safety equipment and weaponry. However, the initiation of special squads (i.e., S.W.A.T.) was developed in response to the incidents involving heavily armed violent criminals in the later part of the 20th Century. With the rise of the active-shooter in the United States, both police departments and many kinds of non-law enforcement organizations that seem to be likely targets for them have been training and preparing to react to these acts of terror. One aspect of the public dialog in the media seems to be a desire by citizens for the officers to capture these assailants alive and hold them for criminal prosecution. Therefore, active-shooter engagement with deadly force almost seems completely uncontroversial in the sociopolitical sphere of society.

Police uses of deadly force have been found phenomenologically to involve some paradox(es). Broomé (2013a) discovered the Deadly Force Paradox when conducting phenomenological psychological research on police officers that shot and killed suspected criminals. Each officer was confronted with a lethal attack on his life and reacted with a Volitional Fiat to Shoot. The officers literally felt forced to shoot their suspects in the same way that P felt in this study. The paradox is that one must take a human life to save a human life, or lives, which in their case was their own life (Broomé, 2013a). P's decision to shoot the assailant in this study was based on the gunman being heavily armed and already having been shooting innocent people. While this situation passes muster with legal, ethical, and perhaps most moral tenets regarding homicide, P felt angry-resentment toward the young shooter for forcing him to shoot him. The magnitude of the assailant's actions puts the police's actions into the general category of heroic by most, if not all.

The police officer's identity as a "good guy" is psychologically dependent on the identity of a "bad guy." Police officers primarily see themselves as crime fighters (Broomé, 2013a). This study reveals how the "necessary evil" of deadly force in an active-shooter situation is experienced by one of the good guys. Moreover, P's ruminations involved self-critical fault-searching to validate his actions, legally, procedurally, and inherently morally. Police culture as a problem-solving milieu, can be quite self-critical and self-punishing for mistakes. Emergency work altogether is defined by its time-pressure and potential tragic consequences. Therefore, it is already part of the workplace to "problematize" people and situations as proactive enforcers of the law and keepers of the peace (Wender, 2008). P's salient nagging worry is that he somehow overlooked something that the post-shooting investigation might reveal, or that someone could "twist" into something he did wrong. This was exacerbated during P's interview with the investigating attorney, as P recounts, *"So I started...wondering about how that was going to play out with the interview with the D.A. But then I had the interview with the D.A. and um, and that one I was a lot more confident. Until the lawyer said, 'The only thing I am worried about...' and he said, 'I think you guys are golden, but if there is anything that they could possibly catch you up on is that you didn't say 'police' or 'drop the gun' or 'give a verbal warning before you shot.'"* The attorney's words here place into question to some degree, P's solid identity and integrity as a good guy. Perhaps if this shooting were more controvertible the possibility that the attorney was posing would feel ever worse to the officer. Authorities handling officers in post-shooting situations could exercise more sensitivity, if they can know the impact of what they say on the officer's self-concept and self-worth (Greening, 1997). Moreover, clinical treatment after a shooting should be sensitive and deliberately supportive of the police officers' good-guy self-concept. We can see that P's good-guy identity as a well-trained veteran, is the prelude to his narrative about this experience.

Throughout the entire experience, it was the uncertainties about the situation and how it would be deemed right or wrong that provoked P's anxiety. As he mentions, P had been in a previous non-fatal shooting for which he was deemed *justified* by legal authorities. But in this situation the assailant died and P expresses being upset, "*I started to get really panicked because I was starting to remember what this kid looked like. Because he looked like a kid; like a young kid. And I started to cry just a little bit. Because I knew I killed him. The other guy just got wounded this guy was dead.*" It is a confrontation with finitude that makes this situation different for P and new uncharted territory. It is the existential aspects of police shootings that seem to be the content of their ruminations and source of trauma (Greening, 1997; Paton, 2006). It is important for clinicians that would work with emergency responders to have both a cultural competency for working with these professionals and also develop adequate existential sensibilities about emergency and crisis work. This would enable the mental health professional to (a) forge an appropriate clinical relationship, (b) hold a compassionate clinical presence (c) avoid drawing clinical inferences about the responder based on civilian norms, and (d) help the responder to see potential blind-spots in their ruminations, like elucidating any paradoxes or presuppositions.

Conclusions

It is now better known what it is like for a police officer to use deadly force to stop an active shooter in an urban city of the Western United States. One can conclude that no matter how uncontroversial or necessary it may be, taking the life of a human being by a police officer is always psychologically disruptive. We can also see that the disruption seems embedded in the existential aspects of the experience with the confrontation with human finitude being possibly the most prominent. But it is not just the threat and taking of life that is traumatizing. The officer's coping with a threat to his or her self-concept and potential loss of his or her livelihood play a salient role.

The significance of this study's findings is that police leaders, handling attorneys, mental health professionals, can all understand more what goes on for the officer just before, during, and after a fatal use of deadly force. Moreover, police officers themselves may better socially support one another by better understanding what it is like for officers to live-through a deadly force encounter.

The limitations to this study include that it has one sole participant. Often times in other qualitative researches, the sample size is regarded as important to make more theoretical generalizations through inductive processes. However, in this case we used an *eidetic* process to discover a stable Individually Situated Structure of the lived-experience of the participant (Wertz, 2014). Moreover, the Unit of Analysis in a descriptive phenomenological psychological inquiry is the lived-experience of the person, not the person him or herself. Therefore, it is the volume of data and the relative number of meaning units delineated that correspond more to a quantitative study's sampling of individual people for statistical power. In this single event account, 115 meaning units were delineated and analyzed to discover the stable structure presented here.

Active-shooters are known as low-frequency/high-severity events in emergency work. So this study while small, still presented a stable structure that is valuable but could be supported by future replication studies. It is through qualitative research, and particularly a descriptive phenomenological approach, that policy-makers, training personnel and educators, and mental health workers can see the importance of the emergency workers' perspectives. It is the project of descriptive scientific phenomenological research to discover and represent the lived-experiences of the participants with fidelity (Wertz, 2014). Society as a whole, generally only understands police, fire, EMS, and other work through the sensational lens of journalism or videography. This study clarifies the personal side of the lived-experience we studied.

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