

Blue Code of Force: The Exonerated 5

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Crime, deviance, and unethical conduct can be found within almost every occupation and profession. Police ethics is the conduct that everyone is most concerned with. Police officers enter into an occupation that shares many characteristics of other career fields, but it also has unique responsibilities that deal with conduct and behavior. The Netflix documentary: The Exonerated Five, demonstrates one of the most common misconduct issues that the criminal justice professionals deal with: Blue code of force. The film investigates the miscarriage of justice of four Black and one Latino teenager from Harlem, who were wrongly convicted of the brutal beating and rape of a white woman in New York City's Central Park.

This is where the blue code of force, otherwise known as the blue wall of silence, would come into play. Each and every officer that interrogated The Exonerated Five knew what laws they were breaking when they brought them in. None of them ever reported the misconduct, crime, or the brutality that was put upon the kids at that time. Because no one involved in the interrogations spoke up about the mistreatment. The young boys were sent to trial to be convicted of a murder that they had no parts of.

The most common type of police officer corruption is groups of officers banding together to commit deviant acts. The idea of this corruption is that nothing is wrong with the situation, that deviance is individual, not rampant (Pollack, 2014). Deviant officers that go through a moral career pass through various stages of justification to more serious misdeeds in a progressed and systematic way. Once an individual is able to get past the first moral crisis, it becomes less difficult to rationalize new and more unethical behaviors (Pollack, 2014).

The police went forward with this case even when the evidence didn't not support their conclusion by using their discretion to determine if the teenagers were innocent or guilty. Discretion is defined as the power to make a choice. All ethical dilemmas involve making choices, but not all ethical dilemmas are labeled as moral or immoral. In these situations, officers can feel uncomfortable about what the law or regulations require them to do, or they were honestly confused as to what was the appropriate course of action (Braswell, McCarthy & McCarthy, 2012). In this situation however, the police knew what the law required them to do and the appropriate course of action to act ethical within the investigation. As individuals in this case, the police officers displayed noble cause corruption. The officers employed some unethical means to get confessions and a conviction because it is the right thing to do in their eyes. The officers felt that with the community safety at a low, it was their job to fulfil their moral commitment to make the city a safer place to live (Braswell, McCarthy & McCarthy, 2012).

A noble-cause explanation is a type of deviance, where officers lie or commit other unethical acts to catch criminals. Organizational leaders can contribute to the unethical actions of their employees. Organizations create unethical employees through an atmosphere of administrative irrelevance toward integrity, ignoring ethical problems, hypocrisy and fear-dominated culture, and survival of the fittest (Pollack, 2014).

When this Central park case was made public, the New York Police Department and District Attorney office's main focus was to solve the case as quickly as possible. When the five teenagers were found "wilding" in the park the night of the women's death, the police believed they had found the suspects. The police were so confident of the teenager's guiltiness, the five boys were interrogated of their involvement in the crime. The police used their authority and persuasion to get the boys to confess and promise them that they would go home if they talked. Through strenuous and intense interrogation, the five boys confessed to the killing and rape of the young women on videotape. These confessions were given even though the suspects didn't know when the crime happened that night, where the crime happened in the park, or how the crime happened.

Furthermore, on the night of April 19, 1989 five boys were brought into a New York precinct due to what the police and media called a "wolf pack" of about 30 or more teens that were going around the neighborhood assaulting and robbing people. About 30 minutes after the assaults and robberies, 12 teenage boys were stopped and arrested. (Paul,2019). Two out of three of the now Exonerated Five, which were Kevin Richardson (15) and Raymond Santana (14) , was accused of being a part of the "pack" and was arrested for unlawful assembly. While Santana and Richardson were still detained at the precinct the body of Trisha Meili, who was jogging in the same park the same night as the "wolf pack", was found the Next morning, on April 20th. It was stated that Meili was raped and brutally beaten. It was so bad that as a result she was in a 12-day coma with no memory as to what happened to her. She was left bleeding from five wounds on her forehead and scalp, a fractured skull, an eye that had to be placed back into her head, and extreme swelling of her brain. (History).

Moreover, the night that her body was found the rest of the exonerated rated 5 which were, Yusef Salaam (15), Antron McCray (15) were brought into custody for questioning. Korey Wise (16) however, was only there in support of his friend Yusef Salaam but somehow also detained and brought to the back for questioning. They were each questioned for about 6-7 hours which added up to be about 30 hours in all without a legal guardian present. Which is illegal in the state of New York. The New York Statute of (McKinney's Family Court Act, § 305.2) states that when an officer arrests a child 16 and younger and takes them into custody, that officer must notify that child's parents or legal guardians. It also states that, that child may not be asked questions with their parents or guardian and that child would have the right to remain silent and to request an attorney, which is also their right of due process according to the fifth amendment (George Coppolo, 2000).

The Exonerated Five explained how they were beaten, starved, and coerced into making recorded confessions about the assault and rape of Meili. The following quote states, " In a 2016 interview with the guardian, Salaam said: "I would hear them beating up Korey Wise in the next room. They would come and look at me and say: 'You realize you're next.' " "The fear made me feel really like I was not going to be able to make it out". (Central Park five: The true story behind when they see us, 2019). Salaam stated the following, "When we were arrested, the police deprived us of food, drink or sleep for more than 24 Salaam wrote in the *Washington Post* years later in 2016. "Under duress, we falsely confessed. Though we were innocent, we spent our formative years in prison, branded as rapists.'" (History).

With their recorded tapes used as a disadvantage towards them in court, the New York Police Department went through a lot of trouble in getting these children to admit to the crimes against Tricia Meili. The boys, under the impression that they would leave if they complied, gave statements that incriminated themselves as they were eager to just go home. After the false confessions, the five teens were headed to trial with Linda Fairstein as their head prosecutor. Salaam, Santana, and McCray were all tried together. In this trial, they were not only tried for the assault and rape of Meili, but also for two of the victims that were harmed and/ or robbed by some of the teens that were in the park that night. One victim was a jogger named David Lewis, testified he was chased and bombarded with sticks and stones. The following quote says, “Lewis remembered “two kids crouched down in a football stance” and about five others approaching him from behind.” He escaped unharmed. (Washington Post). The second victim that they were tried for was Loughlin, who was attacked. He stated that he saw what looked like a fight and heard someone try to break up the fight. He stated that someone spotted him and called him a “vigilante” He stated the following, “I don’t remember what happened next. My next memory was lying face down on the ground and being hit very hard with a heavy object in the head” (Paul, 2019).

After 8 weeks at trial and ten days to deliberate, the jury convicted them on the charge of first- degree assault and first-degree rape of Meili. The charges of the three other victims that were harmed that night were also added to their list of charges along with Meili’s. They were also charged with the first-degree robbery of Loughlin, second- degree assault of Lewis, and the first-degree riot. However, they were acquitted of the attempted from the attempted first-degree murder and first-degree sodomy of Meili (Paul, 2019). Two months after their trial, they started

the trial for Richardson and Wise. After 11 days the jury found decided to convict Richardson on all 13 counts and Wise was convicted of first-degree assault, first degree sexual abuse of Meili and first-degree riot. Everyone in the exonerated 5 sentences to six to seven years in prison except for Kory Wise. Wise was sentenced to about 13 years in prison because he was 16 at the time which meant that he was legally able to be tried as an adult (Paul,2019).

In a report (2000-R-0282) from March 1, 2000 BY chief Attorney, George Coppolo stated that New York does not prohibit the police from interrogating 16,17, and 18 years olds without their parents or guardians (Coppolo,2000).

The DNA taken from each boy, and was a negative match to the actual killers'. Weeks after the confessions, there was an assault that was identical to the current crime. The police cited a man that had a record of sexual assaults on women in parks, and was a well known serial killer. The police collected his DNA but didn't bother checking if he was a possible match and if the two crimes were related. From the very beginning of the case the police had no concrete evidence that any of the teenagers committed the crime. The police knew that there was no DNA match, and ignored the possibility that a recently arrested serial killer could be a possible suspect in the crime. From the very beginning of the case, the police controlled the story, and they worked very closely with the prosecutor to railroad this case through the court system.

On another note, it took for the suspect who actually committed the crime to come forward and free the boys of their convictions. As stated by Bruney from Esquire, a serial killer by the name of Matias Reyes, was the sole and only culprit in the violent offenses committed against Meili. Bruney stated that "Reyes came forward about the crime because 'it was the right thing to do.' His admission in the case led to the release of the Central Park Five, who were originally convicted of the crime." With the Central Park boys receiving settlements for the cases, many

ignorant police officers and prosecutors were persistent that the boys were accomplices to the crime, and that Reyes motive was to get near Wise as protection from rivalry prison gangs. Although none of the law officials that were active in the case at the time admitted to any of the mistreatment claims made, it is clear to the public that there was corruption and abuse of power that was present during the case. From the interrogations with unaccompanied minors, to coerced confession tapes, physical abuse, and overall ill-treatment by law enforcers, many of the background officials present in the case could have spoken up about the injustices happening. Sadly, no one was yearning to expose what occurred behind the scenes and that is due to the blue code of silence implied by sworn law officials.

The exonerated five case exemplifies the blue code of silence because it showed how it is an unofficial oath of silence in numerous law departments that indicates the loyalty behind the officers and the duty to stay loyal behind fellow officers even if immoral acts were performed. The police proceeded with this case in any event, when the evidence did not help their decision on the grounds that the officials grouped together to convict the teenagers. This can be dangerous, as there is the unknown possibility of previous incidents that were overlooked or disregarded because of hidden sworn loyalty. In this case, everyone present during the processing of the defendants fell under this rule as they did not come clean about how the boys were actually treated while in their custody.

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