



Making Crime Scene Technicians: Playful Professional Socialization

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses Swedish crime scene technicians' socialization into members of the profession. During crime scene simulations, students were taught not only how to work with crime scenes but also – and as importantly – which personal qualities they were expected to display in their professional practice. Desired and valued personality traits were, among others, diligence, humbleness, thoroughness, and reflection; traits that tie into ideals of how a crime scene examination should be performed. While personal, these traits were anchored in a (shifting) professional community that was evoked and reinforced by the same humor and playfulness that permeated the crime scene simulations, turning the students not only into proper crime scene technicians but also into members of their professional community. In other words, crime scene technician students are socialized into the personal qualities they are expected to display in their future role, as well as into their new position in the criminal justice system. This illustrates that a profession's reproduction may entail quite a bit more than teaching specific skills; in this way, this article contributes to understanding occupational values and cultures and their perpetuation.

Keywords: crime scene technicians, simulation, professional training, professional socialization, professional personality, humour

Introduction

Crime scene investigators are a staple of crime fiction. Wearing coveralls, gloves, and face masks, they are meticulously searching crime scenes and delivering crucial clues to the investigation just as it threatens to stall. They are also portrayed as knowledgeable, skilled, and, most of all, deeply dedicated to their work. Their non-fictional counterparts receive much less attention, both in the public eye and in scholarship. The results of their work – in the form of crime scene reports or court testimony – are visible, but most of the work itself takes place in cordoned-off sites, often shielded from sight. This obscurity in public perception is mirrored by how, for example, British crime scene examiners describe themselves as “quite happy being sat in the back and let[ting] somebody else take the glory” (quoted in Wilson-Kovacs 2014: 770).

This article discusses Swedish crime scene technicians' socialization into members of the profession. Through humour and playfulness, I will show, students are socialized into the personal qualities they are expected to display in their future role, as well as into their new place in the criminal justice system. This socialization provides insight not only into the profession, but also into the perpetuation of occupational values and cultures.

Swedish Crime Scene Technicians

Swedish crime technicians¹ examine the scenes of suspected crimes, documenting, recovering traces, and conveying their findings and conclusions in a crime scene report. They also mediate between other professions in the criminal justice system, for example explaining laboratory procedures to police investigators and prosecutors, and assisting investigation leaders in choosing laboratory analyses (Kruse 2020a). Typically, they are police officers (civilian crime scene technicians are rare), having undergone basic training at the police academy or, more recently, the training the Police Authority commissions from five Swedish universities. After that, they have worked as regular police officers, often in a succession of different positions, before applying to transfer to crime scene work and receiving specialized training for their new role.

Academic scholarship has focused rather little on crime scene examiners and their work. Exceptions are Williams's (2003, 2007) and Wyatt's (2014a) analyses of specific aspects of crime scene practices, Gassaway's (2007) account of crime scene examiners' management of disgust and other emotions at the crime scene, and my discussion of forensic objectivity at the crime scene (Kruse 2020b). With a slightly wider focus, Williams and Weetman (2013) have examined how crime scene work contributes to homicide investigations, Ludwig *et al.* (2012) have explored the role of crime scene examiners in the British criminal justice system, Wilson-Kovacs (2014) has examined British crime scene examiners' professional identities, and Kelty *et al.* (2011) have mapped personal attributes of successful crime scene examiners.

Crime scene technicians' training has received even less scholarly attention. Elsewhere, I have discussed Swedish crime scene technicians' training as a professionalization from the outside (Kruse 2020a), that is, by the forensic science laboratory rather than by crime scene technicians as an autonomous profession. Wyatt (2014b) has followed crime scene investigators' training in England and Wales, describing shadowing senior colleagues, theoretical training, and practical exercises, including crime scenes. From an Australian context, Stanley and Horswell (2004) emphasize the importance of developing scientific awareness in addition to training forensic skills; apparently, the Australian criminal justice system has developed work profiles simultaneously with training packages for its crime scene investigators. Unlike in Sweden, however, civilian crime scene investigators seem to be the norm in both contexts.

However, a profession's reproduction is not only about training new members in relevant skills – seeing (Goodwin 1994), performing surgery (e.g., Prentice 2005), or recovering fingerprints – but also about turning them into members of the profession. From historical material, Burney and Pemberton (2016: 11ff) name physical attributes as well as intellectual capabilities as crucial for crime scene work. Similarly, Kelty *et al.* enumerate “knowledge, life experience, professionalism, approach to life, communication, cognitive abilities, and stress management” as key attributes of Australian “top crime scene examiners” (Kelty *et al.* 2011: 175), and Skolnick describes the “working personality” of a US police officer as being “suspicious” (Skolnick 1994 [1966]: 41ff). In contrast, Traweek (1988) shows that physicists are socialized into being “meticulous and very hard-working” and displaying “self-assertion and bravado” (Traweek 1998: 75), that is, into *becoming* the kind of person regarded as suited to the profession by senior practitioners rather than being suited through

¹ In Swedish, they are called *kriminaltekniker*; literally, “forensic technicians.”

inherent traits.

For Swedish crime scene technicians, I will show, personal qualities are not an official part of the curriculum, but they are nonetheless conveyed – consciously or unconsciously – during training. In this article, I will focus on one part of crime scene technician training: crime scene exercises that, through being simulations – and thus relying on make-believe – made it easy to encourage the playfulness that facilitated conveying and developing professional qualities and identities.

Methods

This article draws on ethnographic fieldwork of crime scene technicians' formal training at the National Forensic Centre (NFC; the Swedish state-run forensic laboratory²), half a year's coursework spread out over a year. This formal training is preceded by aspiring crime scene technicians applying for transfer to a crime scene division and working there for at least a year, learning from senior colleagues; thus, even though the course is described as basic training, it is the continuation of a police career and builds on – albeit limited – prior practical experience with crime scene work.

I followed the class of 2013, ten women and ten men from all over the country, from the beginning of their training in January to its end in December. With few exceptions, I have observed all of the lectures, practical exercises, and crime scene examinations that made up the course – designed and taught largely (but not only) by forensic scientists, in collaboration with senior crime scene technicians. As many practical parts of the course were taught to half the class at a time on an alternating schedule, I have been able to observe central elements of the training, among them the crime scene exercises, twice, once with each half of the class. I have also listened to and participated in discussions in and out of the classroom and conducted informal interviews before and after classes and during breaks.

Among other things, this fieldwork has given me a sizable amount of material on how students learn to be crime scene technicians.³ Professional values, identities, and qualities were present (albeit often implicitly) throughout the course, but they became particularly visible during the three crime scene exercises.

Simulating Crime Scene Work

The course's three crime scene exercises took part in a structure composed of five rather sparse suites of rooms forming a house-like shape and placed in a large attic space in the NFC's training facility: three apartments, a hairdresser's salon, and a garage with an attached laundry room.

The first exercise focused on traces such as fingerprints, shoe and tool marks, the second included DNA as well as IT traces such as cameras, cell phones, and computers, and the third added narcotics, guns, and blood patterns, all of which had been covered in lectures and practical exercises leading up to each crime scene exercise. The crime scenes became successively more complex and the crimes more severe: a break-in, a sexual crime, and a

² At the time of my fieldwork, it was called the National Laboratory of Forensic Science.

³ While the course is continuously being developed – the involvement of crime scene technician teachers has been considerably deepened, for example (personal communication, 2024) – the crime scene exercises remain largely the same.

homicide. For each crime scene exercise, the teachers prepared five different scenarios, one in each suite of rooms. The students – half of the class at a time – were then assigned to the crime scenes in pairs, the crime scenes being refreshed in between.

Much like they would in everyday work – except for working in pairs⁴ – the students then searched for, documented, and recovered traces, with a (simulated) investigation going on in parallel with which they were in interaction. After the examination, the students discussed with the forensic scientist teachers about which analyses to order from the laboratory in which order of priority. Here, the teaching situation was on the forefront: While crime scene technicians do confer with forensic scientists in complex cases, the discussions on the course were much more extensive; the students also changed roles to analyse some of the traces they had recovered in the NFC's teaching laboratory, supervised and advised by forensic scientists. For most traces, however, the teachers gave the students made-up answers, trying to make it neither too easy nor too difficult to draw conclusions about the crime scene.

The students, still working in pairs, then wrote reports on their crime scene examinations to be discussed in the classroom – the last case study also included a trial exercise in one of the local district court's courtrooms – after which the teachers revealed what, in their words, “really happened” through photographs or films showing the teachers wearing (mismatched second-hand) clothes from the prop stash – some of which the course participants had been given to examine – and acting out (parts of) the crimes.⁵ The students then could ask about specific traces they had not been able to figure out. Thus, by the end of the exercise, there were no questions left open.

In this way, the crime scene exercises were training simulations, recreating crime scene examinations in both a safe and pedagogical manner (cf Dieckmann et al. 2012; Kihlgren et al. 2015): In medical training, simulations allow students to learn and practice procedures without putting patients at risk (e.g. Rall and Dieckmann 2005; Schuwirth and van der Vleuten 2003) and as often, and with as much variation as they wish (Prentice 2005: 861). Military training uses simulations, for example, to prepare soldiers for fraught and fragile, and thus potentially dangerous interactions with locals (Stone 2017, 2018). The crime scene simulations discussed here enabled the students to practice forensic skills without jeopardizing investigations or their own safety.

The professional practices that a simulation recreates and trains may crystallise around the simulator, but they are not defined by it: In medical simulations, for example, the simulator itself may not, and does not need to recreate the body in every detail; what is important is that it allows for recreating relevant practices (Johnson 2008a). In addition, a simulator does not need to cover all aspects of the targeted practice; participants seem to perceive the experience as just as valid, regardless of whether the cues on which they act come from the simulator, or are provided as written or verbal instructions (Dieckmann et al. 2007; Kihlgren et al. 2015). Thus, it was not surprising that both teachers and students in the crime scene simulations seemed to effortlessly combine interacting with the simulator – i.e. the suite of rooms they were assigned – with acting on supplementing information provided by the teachers.

⁴ Crime scene technicians often work alone; the teachers paired them up to force them to discuss their approach with each other and thus make their thinking explicit.

⁵ Enacting and filming the sexual crimes and homicides was, of course, not feasible, but the teachers still enacted and filmed parts of them, glossing over the violent parts with a narrated passage.

A simulation also encompasses more than the simulator itself. In the simulator's immediate vicinity, the absent parts of the patient's body may be reconstituted through the instructor's gestures (Johnson 2007: 598ff); similarly, the students in the crime scene exercises "cordoned off" an imaginary front lawn by gesturing at the linoleum floor. However, intrusions can also become part of a simulation. For example, when beeping pagers or someone entering the room disrupts a simulated operation, medical students learn how "to place themselves in relationship to others around them while they are becoming doctors" (Johnson 2008b: 73).

The latter also points to a less explicit function of training simulations, namely socializing students into their future professional role. Johnson (2008b) discusses medical students' (incidentally) learning to relate to other professions, Stone (2017, 2018) remarks on soldiers (deliberately) learning how to relate to civilians at their future place of deployment, and in the crime scene simulations, interacting with other professions in the criminal justice system was part of the exercises.

What facilitated this socialization in the crime scene exercises was the simulation framework of not being quite "real." In addition, like Bateson's metacommunication of "This is play" (Bateson 1972: 177ff), the teachers explicitly encouraged the students to "have fun" and "play around" – i.e., to try different technologies and methods – an approach that would jeopardize legal security at a "real" crime scene, but that makes it possible to gain deeper insight into different methods and their potential use.

This "play" with methods was continuously reinforced by playfulness on the part of the teachers. They had, for example, given flamboyantly fictitious names to streets and people in the mock police reports that provided information on the simulated cases: break-ins happened on Mischief Street, whereas sexual crimes took place on Smutty Street, and the police officers who had signed the mock reports were officers Kind and Handsome (*Snäll* and *Snygg*; both possible but unusual surnames; the pairing made the fictitiousness obvious and the names thus funny) or Kling and Klang (the fumbling police officers from *Pippi Longstocking*).

This playfulness may, in addition to being facilitated by the simulation format, be connected to the police context. Police humour as a specific form of workplace humour has been reported from different countries (e.g. Gayadeen and Philips 2016, Holdaway 1988, Granér 2014, Pogrebin and Poole 1988, Uhnöo 2019, Wieslander 2019). It aids emotion management (Innes 2002, Uhnöo 2019), helps to maintain social relations and deal with conflict within the organization (Granér 2014; Holdaway 1988), or can, conversely, create a space within which to bring up sensitive or controversial topics (Granér 2014; Wieslander 2014, chapter 13, Uhnöo 2019).

The link between humour and the social order (e.g., Billig 2005) is as ambivalent – humour and especially ridicule can subvert the prevailing order, but they can also reproduce and reinforce it (cf Billig 2001, 2005): On the one hand, it can challenge or ridicule the people in power, which may lead to changes, but on the other hand, it can also function as a metaphorical steam valve, letting off the pressure of unpleasantness or discontent and thus making it easier for the status quo to continue. Humour in the form of ridicule can also exert social pressure to conform or specifically to initiate newcomers into a workplace, both within the police (Granér 2014) and in other contexts (e.g., Paton and Filby 2019 [1996]): Through jokes, the professional order and people's place in it are conveyed to the novices,

and they are taught what is acceptable and desirable behaviour in their new role.

In the crime scene exercises, I will show, role-specific workplace humour became part of the playfulness of the simulation, encompassing jokes and teasing that socialized the crime scene technician students into their new profession. It playfully conveyed and reinforced the (desired) professional order in terms of appropriate crime scene technician personality, of placing crime scene technicians in relation to other professions in the criminal justice system, and of solving ideal cases that allowed the students to act as ideal crime scene technicians.

Performing Practitioners Appropriately

Like Traweek (1998: 75) points out for physicists, there was an appropriate performance of the self for Swedish crime scene technicians, intertwined with the appropriate performance of crime scene work. This appropriate performance emphasized diligence, humbleness, and impartiality as desirable – in fact, central – qualities.

These qualities and their desirability were conveyed through the teachers' modelling as well as through their jokes, like a senior crime scene technician's explaining his and a colleague's participation in the course as, "We're not here because we're better than others, but because everyone else declined." Such a remark might be dismissed as personal modesty if his self-mockery had not been echoed in many other comments that targeted qualities specific to crime scene technicians, for example jokingly calling the students "overly diligent types," very clearly including all crime scene technicians (himself included) in the epithet, thus playfully suggesting that their profession called for both diligence far beyond what others may find reasonable or tolerable and a capacity for self-irony.

Calling this a *performance* does not mean to suggest a (false) façade; I use the term in the sense of presenting the self in interaction with others. Butler, for example, argues that (gender) identity is a matter of performing oneself in a particular way, drawing on and embodying a repertoire of sociocultural norms. Moreover, to her, the discursive constitutes reality, so there is *only* performance (Butler 2006: 185); the self is being presented or performed in interaction with others.

The teachers added to the individual performance of the self a collective performance, for example through the plural "overly diligent types." This collective self-deprecation may be akin to Australian crime scene examiners' being described as "unassuming and modest about their ability" (Kelty et al. 2011) or British crime scene officers' embracing of a "back seat" position (Wilson-Kovacs 2014: 770). It should, however, also be seen in connection with the teachers' emphasis on the importance of admitting and acknowledging uncertainty. The students should, the teachers underlined – also, and especially in their future work – not be too proud to ask for help, and they should communicate uncertainty clearly. That is, humbleness was not an end in itself but was valued in relationship to crime scene examination: a diligent and humble person is more likely to think twice about what they are doing and less likely to exaggerate their findings or downplay their uncertainty.

Through teasing, the teachers reinforced these desirable qualities and norms further, compelling the students to perform themselves appropriately, too. A milder version of the ridicule discussed as a means of discipline by Billig (2005), the teasing gently steered the students towards the desired approach to the crime scenes, in particular impartiality. For instance, a senior crime scene technician reminded the students working one of the scenes, "We don't want the son in there as the murderer [i.e., find traces that tie the victim's son

to the place of the homicide], we want the *murderer* in there as the murderer.” That is, they stressed the need to (diligently and humbly) look for traces and think through their implications both for and against a suspect. This was particularly noticeable in the second and third case studies, where in most of the scenarios there were suspects from the beginning, either through plaintiffs or witnesses, or through the known circumstances of the case.

The students’ use of humour during the simulations differed from that of the teachers. A few times, their jokes subverted the prevailing order (cf Billig 2001, 2005); for example, a student quipped “Look at these tough guys!” at a photograph of their teachers in mismatched clothes posing as burglars about to break into an apartment, (mildly) ridiculing the people in power. Most of the time, however, the students used humour and playfulness to demonstrate their understanding of and compliance with professional norms and ideals.

An example was a pair of students examining a homicide scene in the hairdresser’s salon. Having dressed in protective clothing and set out footplates so they could enter the salon without stepping on the floor and potentially destroying traces, the students looked around the room with its reception desk, hairdresser stations, hair cuttings on the floor, blood spray on one wall, and foam dummy slumped in one of the chairs. One of them said, “I see a lot of hair – I wonder why that might be?” Her partner replied, without missing a beat, “I think you should tape it to an overhead sheet!” – that is, recover it in the way recommended for hair that is to be sent to the laboratory for comparison.

Such jokes demonstrated the students’ grasp of how to not only correctly recover traces but also approach crime scenes: a crime scene technician should work in a systematic and ordered way and process a crime scene in a mindful and meaningful way instead of collecting “everything” unthinkingly – including the hair cuttings that are to be expected in a hairdresser’s salon. What is more, the students demonstrated this in an entertaining and modest way, mirroring the teachers’ self-ironic performance. Their humour might also have contributed to their own learning experience – humour can fruitfully be used as a learning tool (Tidy et al 2024).

The students also used humour to manage discomfort, such as embarrassment about perceived failures. In one of the sexual crimes – a rape in the same salon – the students were packing up when a crime scene technician teacher dropped by to chat about their crime scene examination. Among other things, she asked if the students had found any IT-related traces. Just as they were shaking their heads, one of them noticed the camera mounted over the reception counter. The students were mortified – IT traces were one of the foci of the exercise, and yet they had not thought to wonder why they had not found any. In their classroom presentation of the case a few weeks later, they declared, with heavy irony and a meaningful glance at the teacher, “the first thing we noticed [at the scene] was the surveillance camera.”⁶

By joking about what they felt were shortcomings, the students engaged in what Goffman (1967: 5ff) calls “face-work,” that is, maintaining a positive image of themselves – in this case as competent and skilled professionals – by addressing these shortcomings before the teachers could. But the jokes also showed that they did not only know, but could play and joke with professional norms in an appropriate way, again mirroring (and thus reproducing) the teachers’ humbleness and self-deprecation.

⁶ This was clearly a performance for this particular teacher; she smiled appreciatively at the remark, whereas its irony seemed to pass unnoticed by the other teachers and students.

The students' face-work was supported by the teachers in a way that further underlined professional ideals. They reassured the students with the surveillance camera as well as another student who had found a gun under a pillow only on a second visit to the crime scene that the important thing was that they had been thorough and persistent – and that these qualities had led to finding those items and contributing usefully to the case in the end, which was what counted. In other words, they again foregrounded the students' diligence and perseverance as desirable professional qualities and as leading to the goal.

In this way, the crime scene exercises trained both the performance of crime scene work and that of crime scene *technicians* – the former as the explicit aim of the simulation, and the latter through the humour that was encouraged by the simulations' playfulness. These professional selves were anchored in a professional community and reinforced by often playful references to and performances of that community and its relation to other professions in the criminal justice system.

Invoking a Professional Community

Interactions with other professions were part of the crime scene simulations. The students discussed the progress of their crime scene examinations with investigation leaders, asked for car or house searches, or data from the different police databases, attended post-mortems (of foam dummies) conducted by medical examiners, or went through the traces they had recovered from the crime scenes with forensic scientists; except for the last, all of them impersonated by the senior crime scene technicians in charge of the simulation.

One of the lessons the teachers tried to convey through these interactions was the importance of asking the right questions – since no one else was familiar with the crime scene, they emphasized, no one else could know what was relevant to investigate. To underline that point, they deliberately only answered the questions they were asked, not the ones they thought the students should have asked. In this way, the simulated interactions explicitly placed the students' crime scene work within the larger context of the ongoing investigation and the criminal justice system and underlined the importance of the crime scene technicians' thinking about and taking responsibility for how their expertise could contribute to the investigation as a whole.

This context of the larger investigation and the involved professions also conveyed to the students how to relate to other professions in the criminal justice system (cf Johnson 2008b, Stone 2017, 2018) and provided a professional community in which to anchor one's professional identity. Both the teachers and, to some extent, the students, repeatedly alluded and referred to this professional community throughout the course, for example the teachers' emphasizing cooperativeness and being "on the same side," underlined by providing cell phone or extension numbers together with the encouragement to call with questions. There, the teachers' willingness to support the students in their work performed both teachers and students as belonging to a community with the same goals and with a clear norm of willing cooperation.

Many allusions to and performances of professional community, however, were made playfully: The course coordinator, for example, featured as a murder victim's late wife in a nightstand photograph; and there was a photograph of one of the NFC's former heads in the role of a plaintiff's boyfriend. The students' discovering them was not only entertaining to both them and the teachers, but the pictures also commented on the community to which the students now were expected to belong – outsiders would not recognize the people portrayed and thus would not be entertained. When the students appreciated the photographs, they

also demonstrated that they were knowledgeable members of their professional community.

This community, however, was far from clear-cut or constant. Where the photographs created a community tightly tied to the course and the NFC, other instances of humour shifted between encompassing only crime scene technicians to also including other police or the forensic scientists. In one case, for example, a crime scene technician teacher acting as a plaintiff whose phone had been stolen in a break-in described it to the students as “It was a black one, or was it red? A *mobile!*” As a simulation facilitator keeping track of five scenarios simultaneously, she might for the moment really have been confused about the colour of the telephone, but the students seemed to understand her as exaggeratedly portraying a plaintiff unable to describe her belongings in a useful way. This (inferred) portrayal was apparently highly entertaining, but it also performed a community of professionals – mainly crime scene technicians and police investigators – sharing exasperating experiences with muddled plaintiffs.

Conversely, during a coffee break, students talked about police patrols sawing out suspected bullet holes to be sent for analysis “because they have *training*” – the “training” stressed with an exaggerated eye roll – but not thinking to change the locks at an unguarded crime scene. Making fun of the uniformed police in this way performed a community of crime scene technicians who know better, and who at times are frustrated with police patrols. This community includes – or at least does not exclude – forensic scientists, who may not have practical experience of being responsible for crime scenes, but who underline the importance of reflection and thoroughness.

Yet, the students also joked about the NFC, for example tongue-in-cheek telling a crime scene technician teacher acting as investigation leader during one of the crime scene examinations, “I can do that [analysis] right now, or you can get an answer from the [NFC] in four months.” Here, the community performed was that of crime scene technicians who are exasperated with both the NFC’s turnaround times and some investigation leaders’ preference for analyses to be performed by the NFC (presumably in anticipation of the defence’s questions in court). There, the joke actively excluded the forensic scientists from the community that was being performed. Thus, the same community that was invoked by one joke could be subverted by another; the only constant were the crime scene technicians themselves.

This shifting belonging reflects the students’ changing identity. Their professional past is in police work, and they are still part of the police force, but the NFC is in charge of their training and professionalization.⁷ It also reflects the crime scene technicians’ in-between position in the criminal justice system. Apart from examining crime scenes, they mediate between the criminal justice system’s professions, particularly between the police and prosecution on the one hand and the NFC on the other (Kruse 2020a), for example explaining forensics to investigation leaders or translating the investigation’s questions into requests for laboratory analyses. These jokes enacted and reinforced in- and exclusions between professions, but, taken together, they also suggested that boundaries might (need to) shift with shifting situations and circumstances.

However, in this ambiguous place, the crime scene simulations conveyed, the crime scene technicians filled a central function in the criminal justice system. That is, the crime

⁷ For more about such a professionalization from the outside, see Wilson-Kovacs (2014) or Kruse (2020a).

scene simulations also idealized crime scene work and, by extension, crime scene technicians and their role.

Idealizing

The most palpable idealization in the simulations was that there was a clear answer to each crime scene, accessible through the photographs and films shown and discussed after the exercise. Together with the abundance of traces, these revelations made the crimes unambiguously and satisfactorily solvable, echoing fictional portrayals of criminal justice (Kruse 2010).

The solutions of the homicides also included motives, conveyed through clues at the crime scene and confirmed in the classroom discussion of the reports. For example, the teachers made the bedroom of one of the homicide victims – a former military officer – very plain and neat in contrast to the messy room in which his rather shady son had been staying. They also placed a newspaper on the father's bedside table, open on a page with advertisements for apartments, some of which had been circled. All of this was meant to describe the relationship between the two: they had very different outlooks on life, the father was getting tired of his drug-dealing son's disrupting his life, the only way he could see of getting rid of the son was moving to an apartment with room for only one person, and the son getting desperate and killing his father. The students duly and diligently picked up on those clues, and the strained relationship was brought up in the discussion, affirming the students' interpretation.

The desirable personal qualities discussed earlier were an integral part of solving these idealized cases, not least because the teachers actively emphasized them. At one of the crime scenes, for example, they very carefully nestled a "used" condom into the trash already sitting in a can. Things that are thrown away, they explained to me, often slide down between other items, and they wanted the students to not only understand but also experience the necessity of being tenacious and looking beyond the surface. In other words, the idealized teaching situation also encompassed the attitude expected from a crime scene technician.

Thus, the professional self-understanding the simulations facilitated was centred on perseverance and diligence being rewarded with a key role in solving crime. In other words, they substantially improved on the crime scene technicians' role in the criminal justice system: While they did allow for the students to train and display a range of skills, they also made it possible for them to solve the crime satisfactorily and almost single-handedly, whereas in everyday practice, crimes typically are solved through the cooperation of several professions in the criminal justice system contributing different competences (Kruse 2016).

In this achievability of certainty, the idealized crime scenes constituted a practice that differed at least in some aspects from the students' future work. While the clear and certain solutions were a satisfying conclusion to the exercise, such unambiguity is unattainable in everyday criminal justice. It is, of course, possible for crime scene technicians to encounter crime scenes whose traces allow them to conclude not only a course of events but also the reason for these events – however, they will never be entirely certain. As Taylor (2014) points out for medical training that has gone from clinical work to simulations, the unambiguity in training simulations also means that students are not trained in dealing with future ambiguity and uncertainty. There, the idealization of crime scene work is at odds with the training's emphasis on communicating uncertainty clearly. The idealization did, however,

reflect and magnify the emphasis the teachers placed on the crime scene technicians' work and expertise. As they frequently pointed out, crime scene technicians are the only members of the criminal justice system to see and process crime scenes;⁸ in the simulations, they even solved the crime.

Such idealizations reconstitute the facilitators' understanding – conscious or unconscious – of what the practice “really” is (or perhaps should be), which elements are essential, and which can be glossed over. The model on which a simulation is based may however, be idealized in a way that makes it different from the situation for which the participants of the simulation are being prepared. Stone (2017, 2018), for example, shows how the simulations she studied privileged the reconstitution of particular military practices – in the instructors' words, the “real thing” (Stone 2017: 156) – over the experience of the role-players' hired to stand in for civilians to train interactions.

That is, when instructors insisted the simulation be made “real” (as they put it), “cultural representations of the Middle East were shoehorned into specific conceptions of authenticity” (Stone 2017: 156). In consequence, the simulations' constituted and conveyed a “real thing” that differed at least partially from what participants will encounter in their future work: Although the role players on which Stone's work centres were specifically hired as cultural experts, their expertise and perspectives were subordinated to military objectives, perspectives, and understandings (Stone 2017: 156ff, 2018: 540f). In other words, the military simulations were idealizations that overrode the practice they were supposed to reconstitute.

A potential difficulty with that is that the understandings that shape the training situation may carry problematic values or stereotypes that then contribute to shaping professional practices – like, for example, understandings of Middle Eastern civilians. When it comes to the police, scholars have discussed stereotypical attitudes toward minorities (e.g., Sollund 2007; Uhnö 2015), problematic understandings of domestic violence (Loftus 2009: 128ff), a culture of silence (Ivković and O'Connor Shelley 2008, Wieslander 2019), (covert) resistance toward official discourses and values (Wieslander 2021, Workman-Stark 2022), and potentially problematic intra-professional loyalty (Löfgren and Wieslander 2020). Such problematic yet elusive aspects of professional cultures might very well be transported (also) through playful aspects of professional training.

In the simulations, the neat and tidy ex-military father in contrast to the slovenly drug-dealing son might touch upon a stereotypical understanding of victims and perpetrators, and naming an address Smutty Street may suggest the dismissal of sexual crime as not violence but indecency. Still, neither the teachers' nor the students' treatment of these crime scenes and scenarios themselves was dismissive, and there were also opportunities for stereotypes, not least minority stereotypes, that were not taken – fictitious names from the different cases that garnered comment were, for example, the rather neutral nickname “The Steak” (*Biffen*) for a suspect, or a person found dead at a gambling table carrying an identity card in the name of a former prime minister – names that did not carry connotations beyond the suspect's presumable brawn and the incongruousness of a former prime minister (who, in addition, was reputed to have business sense) gambling in a highly questionable garage. This may be due to the absence of stereotypes or, conversely, the teachers' awareness of them and

⁸ In complicated cases, the investigation leader or even the court may inspect the crime scene. Such an inspection, however, takes place after the crime scene technicians have processed and thus made sense of the crime scene.

their consequent adherence to official discourse.

In other words, the idealizations enabled by framing a simulation as not quite “real” are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they make it possible to convey and develop personal qualities and identities as part of crime scene practice. On the other hand, they harbour a risk of both deviating from the practice they are meant to train, and additionally, of conveying and perpetuating problematic ideals. That is, like for example canteen banter (Sollund 2007) and workplace joking in general (Paton and Filby 2019 [1996]), the playful parts of professional training are unregulated (and unregulatable) spaces where practices and values that might clash with an organization’s or profession’s official and formal values (cf Wieslander 2021) might be maintained, perpetuated, and internalized along with or instead of the official ones. This also suggests that bias might have a cultural dimension in addition to the case-specific, organizational, and cognitive factors that for example Dror (2025) discusses as sources of bias in forensics and criminal justice.

Conclusion: Making Professionals

The crime scene exercises show that training simulations not only train skills, but also shape (professional) personalities, anchored in a specific professional community. This suggests that, instead of (or in addition to) being searched for in recruitment, as proposed by Kelty (2011), personal qualities regarded as crucial for an occupation can be conveyed and cultivated during training. Being the right kind of person for the job may be a matter of *becoming* that person – that is, one can be taught to perform oneself as a diligent, humble crime scene technician, or an assertive physicist (Traweek 1998: 75), and in all probability also a suspicious police officer (Skolnick 1994 [1966]: 41ff).

In the crime scene exercises, this socialization was intertwined with humour and playfulness; elements that marked the exercises – and in particular the joking and teasing – as different from other teaching situations during the course. There are clear parallels to cultural performances, that is, events like ritual or theatre, that are set apart from everyday life and that combine the entertaining with the transformative; in this particular case humour and playfulness with becoming fully a member of a new profession. Similar to cultural performances, the serious and the entertaining depended on each other: the encouraged personal qualities complemented the “seriously” taught approaches to crime scene work, and the values conveyed through joking and teasing were present also in non-playful contexts. For example, the teachers sometimes noted or discussed how students cooperated with others or how they responded to critique or setbacks, so they were clearly paying attention to more than forensic skills. Still, if they talked to the students about this, it was outside of my hearing, and certainly not in the classroom setting – perhaps because intervening in students’ personal qualities would be considered difficult to reconcile with respect for the students’ personal integrity. Yet, the relative homogeneity of what the humour and playfulness conveyed – and the students’ capable participation – suggests that they, despite being marked as “play” (Bateson 1972), were an integral part of becoming a crime scene technician.

This suggests that close ethnographic attention to other occupations’ professional training, and in particular the parts of that at first glance may seem insignificant or not serious – like the disruptions Johnson (2008b) discussed, or the joking and playfulness in the crime scene simulations – may reveal ways of becoming a member of the profession

beyond acquiring the necessary skills. These parts may play an important role in conveying and perpetuating professional ideals and occupational culture, be it consciously or not.

In the case of the crime scene technicians, this acquired professional personality tied into and supported the skills and approaches taught in lectures and exercises: Diligence and humbleness supported the impartiality that is underlined in training as well as deliberately part of forensic objectivity (see Kruse 2020b), as well as being a shared value in the criminal justice system. They also supported the perseverance to look beyond the surface – not only of trash cans – and to thus make sure that a crime scene is examined thoroughly and systematically. In other words, socializing students into how to not only suitably perform crime scene examinations, but also *be* crime scene technicians contributes to future crime scene examinations that are closer to the criminal justice system's ideal (and the simulations' idealizations). In other cases of professional training, they might clash – and provide a different insight into occupational culture than the curriculum would on its own.

In addition, humour and playfulness may not be deemed an appropriate vehicle for socialization in all occupations; in the simulations, they can be connected to the humour that permeates also other parts of police work (e.g. Gayadeen and Philips 2016, Holdaway 1988, Granér 2014, Pogrebin and Poole 1988, Uhnöo 2019, Wieslander 2019). Other occupations may have other ways of conveying and cultivating a desired performance of self that tie into their particular occupational culture.

What the crime scene simulations illustrate, then, is that a profession's reproduction may entail quite a bit more than teaching specific skills. Turning a novice into a fully-fledged member of the profession is also a matter of conveying their place in the social order, both within the profession and in relation to others, as well as socializing them to perform appropriate professional personalities. The prominence of humour – also otherwise prevalent in the police context – in socializing crime scene technicians further suggests that *how* this socialization is accomplished provides further insights into the professional culture in question. In other words, the crime scene simulations contribute to understanding occupational values and cultures and their perpetuation.

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