

Good Cop, Bad Cop

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At the very beginning, we see a shot Frank Serpico, which shows the vulnerability of cops. Serpico is just a cop trying to better his community and help out all of his neighbors. He gets hard balled by every other person in his unit. They think he tries too hard or that he is not conforming to the group's beliefs, that he believes himself to be better than the system they have set up for themselves in the police department. Serpico is here to shake things up a bit. He is a bit of a straight shooter with a firm moral compass that is based on treating people like human beings. He wants to be a vigilante, to clean up the department all by himself. The rest of the cops are just hard guys trying to get the bad guys, at any cost. They do not mind roughing up the 'lowly'. Meanwhile, these cops do not practice what they preach. They accept bribes, smoke marijuana, and beat people senselessly, yet they arrest the civilians who do the same thing. They are as corrupt as the people they arrest but because they are the ones with the badges, it makes it all okay.

Now going into this movie, I did not know exactly what to expect. To me, it is pretty old so I did not expect the best cop business but there were some crazy instances of ethical dilemmas that would not be accepted or tolerated today, hopefully. The first was accepting free favors for looking the other way or ignoring violations of the law. At the diner, Serpico ordered a meal, fully accepting that he would pay for it. Instead, the owner changes his meal to something less expensive and his partner tells him to just accept the free meal, that the owner does this for his own gain. Even at Serpico's adamantness of willing to pay the extra for it. Then we see it again when he gets handed an envelope of cash that he does not know what to do with and ends up turning it in. "Who can trust a cop who won't take money. . . It's like severance pay." (Lumet, 1973, 1:16) Next is Serpico, accused of being homosexual. During the 1970's it was still very

taboo to be gay or anything rather than the norm. To be openly approached and outright accused of being homosexual, nowadays, does not majorly affect the person being accused but if proven to be discriminatory or used in a derogatory way, the employer can face repercussions. They also were smoking marijuana in a meeting brief to see what it feels like while discussing the repercussions of the general public doing it. While marijuana is decriminalized in some states, federally it is still illegal and all of the police departments that I know of do not allow any drugs, which includes marijuana. Another dilemma that would be significant in an evidence sort of way is recording phone conversations without the other's consent or knowledge.

Most of these men have behavioral issues and today, at least I would hope, would not be tolerated in the police force. Every single cop and pretty much every man in this movie seems to be teeming with anger. Some of the more notable instances included abusing authority and beating a suspect while in police custody to identify other perpetrators. Then saying if you run, I'll put a bullet in your back. Next we have Serpico's new partner Rubello using an unmarked police vehicle to hunt down someone he is exploiting money from and shouting expletives while he chases him down in reverse. Then beating him and shoving his head in the toilet. Finally, Serpico seems to crack under the pressure of fighting corruption in his department. He arrests a suspect and when he does not comply he responds by pushing him down, throwing the suspect against the wall, forcibly searching his pocket, then throwing him against the metal chain link jail cell, and then smashing a chair after he finally locked him up.

Over the past fifty years, times have dramatically changed, especially technology wise there are still dramatic renditions of police procedurals on television today that are much like Serpico's story. The stories seem to cycle and the same storyline can be seen sometimes more than once in these shows. Perception of the police on these shows has become very popular but

real everyday policing like Serpico went through would not be tolerated very well in this age of technology.

References

Lumet, S. (Director). (1973). *Serpico*. Artists Entertainment Complex.