Police reform, austerity and 'cop culture': time to change the record?

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Abstract

Austerity, a politicised police reform agenda and increasing demand for police services create the collective conditions that require classical views of police culture be seen through a fresh contextual lens. Triangulating participant observation, semi structured interviews and archival and documentary review within two UK police forces, we identify dramatic organisational and environmental changes across the UK policing landscape as the prime factors reconceptualising traditional views of police cultural theory. We argue for a context-specific, more pluralistic understanding, highlighting the importance within current police culture of public service motivation and the role of public servant, reduced intra-group solidarity and concepts of victim categorisation differing from previous typologies. Some facets of traditional concepts of police culture, such as residual racism, are resilient; other aspects, such as the role of autonomy and the meaning ascribed to getting a 'result', are now better understood in novel ways.

Keywords

Introduction: the landscape of UK policing

Studies of the culture of police work paint a generally introspective picture of what being a police officer means. Although research points to longitudinal and international variation, an introverted world within a world seeps through. In the UK, there have been a number of landmark studies that have helped to frame sharply an image of such 'cop culture'. Unfortunately, the dynamics of such an inward-looking culture have also gone some way to explaining the occurrence of various excesses and errors, and increasing political pressures, over at least the last two decades, for police reform. The underlying structure of UK policing has undergone significant changes in recent decades, emanating from diverse social, political and economic sources. Key developments include changes in delivery models, including collaboration and outsourcing, heightened expectations for the police to be more inclusive and diverse, and new mechanisms of accountability and control. A politicised workforce modernisation agenda has led to broad changes in the employment model of UK policing, with implications for police pay and conditions.

In addition, economic pressures on public services, including the police, occasioned by austerity over the past decade, have led to cuts in police and staff numbers, organisational and

workforce restructuring. Policing budgets have been markedly reduced in the period since 2010. Between 2010-11 and 2018-19, real-terms funding for the police in England and Wales fell by 19 per cent, with a 15 per cent reduction in the number of police officers (National Audit Office (NAO) 2018). The dramatic fall in the number of police officers not only threatens public confidence in policing, given the implications for front-line visibility, but also implies a retraction from some progressive forms of policing (Barton 2013, Hough 2013, Sindall and Sturgis 2013). There is clear evidence that budget cuts have compromised the effectiveness of police work, as shown by declining rates of crime reduction (College of Policing 2015) and adverse consequences for vulnerable people who need protection (NAO 2018). The financial squeeze also has consequences for the way in which police services are organised and delivered. The greater use of inter-force collaborative work, outsourcing arrangements and business partnerships, including with private sector organisations, reflect pressures on police forces to operate more efficiently (Smith 2012, White 2014, Terpstra and Fyfe 2015). Terpstra, Fyfe and Salet (2019) characterise this pursuit of efficiency in terms of a transition towards more abstract policing delivery, and signpost a range of contradictory emergent consequences. For Ellison and Brogden (2012), a narrow pursuit of financial savings exhibits a paucity of holistic understanding of the police role within society and alongside wider social and criminal justice agencies.

Austerity-based funding reductions are clearly a major challenge in their own right, but should be viewed in the context of a more politicised and centrally-controlled policing environment. In recent years, wide-ranging reform and 'modernisation' initiatives have been pursued, often imposed by government 'top down', and reflect growing politicisation of the police (Savage 2007, Gilling 2012). Politicisation is evident in both the workforce 'modernisation' agenda (Loveday, Williams and Scott 2008) and the questionable democratisation resulting from having directly-elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) responsible, among other things, for setting strategic policing objectives for their areas (Lister and Rowe 2015). These developments have implications for how the police operate and their priorities (Millie and Bullock 2013).

Another dimension to workforce 'modernisation' is more coercive. This involves arrangements designed to manage performance more tightly and realise efficiency savings through modifications to reward structures (Loveday, Williams and Scott 2008). Augmenting the combined influences of Neyroud's (2010) report on training and leadership and Hutton (2011) on pensions, the two-part Winsor (2011, 2012) report enabled far-reaching changes to

police officers' pay and conditions, including overtime arrangements, shift allowances, redundancy conditions, sickness benefits, pension arrangements and career routes. There is a strong belief among police officers that the Winsor reforms would adversely affect their ability to do their jobs (Hoggett et al. 2014).

If one combines the above developments, it behoves us to ask to what extent the traditional nature of police culture remains resilient as a result, or has been transformed due to internal or external factors? Through a qualitative case study of policing in two UK county forces, this paper addresses these central questions. As a result, the paper argues for a transformed understanding of police culture in the current environment.

Police Culture in an Age of Austerity and Reform

There is a divide between those who take a 'classic' approach to understanding police culture, based on the prevalence of a mission orientation, cynicism and solidarity in a policing environment which is routinely less exciting than anticipated, and those who contend that culture is contingent, something that varies over space, time and according to context (van Hulst 2013). The classic, traditional view of police culture often regards it as 'monolithic', in the sense that a certain set of beliefs and practices can be read off from the act of being a police officer and engaging in police work. Much of this doctrine originates in the work of seminal police ethnographers. As a Philadelphia police academy graduate Rubenstein (1973) developed ideas of street awareness and suspicion; whilst Banton (1964) progressed ideas of power differentials and alien communities and Manning (1997) charted the societal transition towards organisational bureaucracy. These early theorists influenced how a conceptualisation of police culture developed. For Paoline III (2003, p.204), this 'occupational account depicts police culture as widely shared attitudes, values, and norms, which serve to manage strains created by the nature of police work and the punitive practices of police management and supervision'. Police leaders tend to ascribe to a perception of culture which is both monolithic and largely negative (Paoline III and Gau 2018).

Although he rejects the assertion that police culture is monolithic, the leading 'classical' theorist is undoubtedly Reiner (2010), with his postulation of a 'cop-culture'. Reiner (2010, pp. 121-131) identifies a number of core facets of this 'cop-culture', including: mission-action-cynicism-pessimism; suspicion; isolation-solidarity; conservatism; machismo; racial prejudice; and pragmatism. Four key dimensions of police culture can be identified in Reiner's (2010) classic approach – an action orientation; the presence of a certain set of

values; a particular kind of identity; and the distinctive meaning attached to policing work. Given the influence of his key text – Reiner's work having become 'the cornerstone of policing courses for generations of criminology students' (Newburn 2016, p.842) – these themes frame this work, offering a benchmark for providing an applied understanding of police culture.

One important dimension of police culture concerns how police officers reflect on, understand and make sense of their behaviours in policing roles. In classic accounts this is dominated by an action orientation, linked to an enthusiasm for role excitement. Reiner (2010), for example, claims that officers feel that 'policing is not just a job but a way of life' (2010, p.119), and that in pursuit of a worthwhile goal an officer is given a 'licence for action' (2010, p.120). Crucially, it is this emphasis on the excitement and action that goes with their roles which is perceived as the key driver in police motivation; as a consequence activities such as community or neighbourhood policing are not perceived as appropriate police work (Loftus 2009. p.189), since they lack excitement, irrespective of how effectively they serve public need. Reiner (2010, p.120) recognises, however, that being involved in life-changing / -ending incidents is not the everyday experience of policing, and that the emphasis on action and excitement 'overlooks the mundane reality of everyday policing, which is often boring, messy, petty, trivial and venal'. For Reiner (2010, p.121), then, the 'characteristic police outlook is [a] subtle and complex intermingling of the themes of mission, hedonistic love of action and pessimistic cynicism. Each feeds off and reinforces the others.'

A second dimension of police culture concerns the values that police officers hold, and which inform and influence how they behave in their roles. The classic literature not only points to the importance of hierarchy and discipline as values, but also depicts the police as typically conservative, reactionary, resistant to change and even racist. Policing is marked by a notable belief in the virtues of order, discipline and hierarchical organisation, linked to an emphasis on command and control (Myhill and Bradford 2013, Silver et al. 2017). The stress accorded to hierarchy, order and discipline fosters a conservative political and moral world-view, which exhibits itself in a dislike for minority groups (Reiner 2010, Skolnick 2008). Despite most police officers traditionally coming from working class backgrounds, their constant interaction with the 'bottom layers of the social order' and their being 'routinely pitted against organised labour and the left' help to account for their conservative outlook (Reiner 2010, p.126). This reactionary world-view also manifests itself in a marked level of racial prejudice. Rowe (2004) and Souhami (2014), among others, have acknowledged the

important extent to which everyday prejudice manifests itself in, and helps to sustain, institutional racism.

A third dimension evident from the traditional, classic literature on police culture concerns the comparison between officers' self-identity and occupational role. Reiner (2010) points to the factors which isolate police officers from the outside world – including shift patterns, hostility from non-police, difficulties in switching off and recruitment and training practices – and the sense of internal solidarity experienced by officers. There is an expectation that they will be 'backed up' by their colleagues not just in a physical sense but also for the purpose of 'concealing minor violations' (Reiner 2010, p.122). Police officers, then, operate with a marked in-group mentality (Myhill and Bradford 2013). While this is effective in promoting and preserving a strong sense of internal solidarity, it also serves to conceal undesirable and harmful behaviours, can stymie reform efforts and render the police inward-looking and insular (Cochran and Bromley 2003, Skolnick 2008, Westmarland and Rowe 2018). There is a suspicion of leadership, and also the extent to which leaders can improve the effectiveness of policing work (Villiers 2003). This is all reinforced by the homogeneity of police teams, traditionally dominated by white males (Loftus 2009). There is a strong element of machismo evident among the police, something that can have adverse consequences for protecting women suffering from domestic violence (Lila et al. 2013).

The fourth classical dimension that can be adduced concerns the meaning that police officers attach to their work. It is often believed this is characterised by a strong sense of 'pessimistic cynicism' (Niederhoffer 1967, Reiner 2010), something which stems from the conflict that arises between the belief in the importance of pursuing action, on the one hand, and the frustrations that exist as a result of the mundane normality of the day-to-day policing experience. More recent work, however, indicates that cynicism is linked not so much to the mundane reality of policing, but arises as a response to perceived organisational injustice (Bradford and Quinton 2014).

This review of the 'classic' literature on police culture has highlighted four key dimensions, concerning policing behaviour, values, identity and the meaning police officers attach to their work. While the pertinence of the central tenets of the traditional approach to understanding policing culture has been acknowledged (Lumsden and Black 2017), the debate has become more nuanced. In particular, a more 'pluralistic' perspective on police culture has emerged, one which is concerned with 'teasing out important differences amongst officers' (Ingram et

al. 2013 p.369). Policing culture is more complex than previously thought (Paoline III 2003). The contingent nature of police culture is now recognised more explicitly. Over the years, Reiner (2010, 2015), for example, has developed a less deterministic view of police culture (Newburn 2016). The relevance of the specific societal context, and the influence of organisational factors, will affect police culture differently according to the environment (Reiner 2015, 2016, Loftus 2016). For example, Charman and Corcoran (2015) identify a conditionally adjusted police value set in response to an altered accountability framework in the Republic of Ireland, thus highlighting the complex relationship between structural and cultural change. Cordner (2017, p.22) attests to the significance of nuance and complexity when it comes to understanding police culture and that it must be understood in organisational rather than occupational terms. As Cordner (2017, p.22) argues, 'there is some sort of overlay of police occupational culture that exerts a degree of influence on police thinking and behaviour everywhere, but it is obviously not so strong that every police officer has to wear it like an iron suit'. All this raises doubts about the existence of a single, occupational policing culture of the kind which dominates traditional, 'classic' accounts.

Alongside this emphasis on context, there is also an appreciation of how increasing police diversity affects culture. Chan (1997 p.73) delineates distinct frames for police cultural understanding, including cognitive, phenomenological and relational conceptualisations before concluding that members of policing organisations have an active role in "reinforcing, resisting or transforming cultural knowledge" within the structural confines of their organisations. The importance of this contingent and contextual approach, and processes of respective reinforcement, resistance and transformation, to an understanding of police culture, are evident in three key respects.

The first of these concerns the implications of greater diversity, manifest in the increasing proportion of women and black and minority ethnic officers in policing roles. In the UK, by 2018 women comprised nearly a third (29.8 per cent) of police officers; with a rise to 6.6 per cent in the proportion of black and minority ethnic officers (Home Office 2018). Greater workforce diversity is changing policing; newer entrants are more ethnically and culturally diverse, and generally have higher educational qualifications than their predecessors (Skolnick 2008). They bring different values to police roles. New entrants typically 'share a scepticism of authority, are highly and openly diverse in culture, lifestyle, and behaviours, and have never known a world without global, always-on digital communications' (College of Policing 2015, p.14). The traditional macho culture has been moderated by a greater influx

of female officers, something that has implications for how policing work is undertaken, including the adoption of a 'model of policing which is largely progressive in its aims and objectives' (McCarthy 2013, p.275).

A second issue concerns the changing nature of policing, and a greater emphasis on openness and accountability in policing work. This is particularly apparent in the prominence of neighbourhood and community approaches to policing. Such a development implies a greater concern with developing relationships and forging partnerships with external agencies, with more of a focus on community service, as opposed to a traditional action motivation (Cochran and Bromley 2003, O'Neill and McCarthy 2014). Innovation and experimentation in policing activity, alongside increased demands for public accountability, make traditional hierarchical approaches impractical (Metcalfe 2017). A mature debate regarding the reciprocal nature of fairness and trust between the public and the police, and how neighbourhood policing faces hurdles in the absence of that trust, has arisen (Carr and Maxwell 2018). Moreover, the nature of policing, and the challenges police officers face, are changing. The rise of a 'human rights approach' to policing, for example, put a greater onus on the need for officers to make 'complex ethical judgements', in a way that is antithetical to traditional hierarchical approaches and bureaucratic control (Neyroud and Beckley 2001, p.92).

Third, there are clear consequential changes apparent in police leadership, which have notable implications for culture. Hoggett et al. (2014), for example, point to the evidence of interest in, and demand for, effective leadership in police services, linked to the belief in the importance of greater engagement. There is a recognition that front-line officers are eminently capable of engaging with, and finding methods of resolving, complex policing issues (Sklansky and Marks 2008). More extensive and better-quality communication between senior officers and the rank-and-file can help to facilitate dialogue and engagement (Hoggett et al. 2014). The influence of police practitioners themselves, who have become more involved in the research field, is a development of crucial importance in enriching cultural understanding (Cockcroft 2017). All these things have contributed to reduced hierarchy and greater openness, with the aim of producing a more engaged and empowered police workforce; thus eroding the traditional hierarchical, conservative and insular nature of police culture.

The scale and importance of work on the topic of police culture is clear. Recent contributions have focused, in particular, on the nature and characteristics of a more pluralist approach to understanding culture, one that pays greater heed to the importance of change, context and contingency, and casts doubt about the continuing relevance of the traditional, classic perspective. The question therefore arises whether contextual changes of recent decades, driven by factors such as austerity, politicisation and the workforce reform agenda, have now proven sufficient to undermine static, introspective, exclusionary models of police culture. If so, of what features would a more plural conceptualisation of police culture now consist? To what extent has it eclipsed the traditional view, and why? The next section presents data that aim to address such questions, through studying day-to-day policing work through the lived experiences of police officers themselves.

Method

Using evidence from a broader study (Caveney 2015), we draw on a critical realist approach to investigate police culture, in a case study setting (Easton 2010). A case study 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident' (Yin 2018, p15). Critical realism avoids the polarised debate surrounding quantitative vs qualitative research both in terms of what Howe (1992, p. 237) describes as issues of research design and data collection but also epistemological paradigms. It does this by focusing on the question of how methodology can deliver knowledge about the generative mechanisms of a social research setting.

We adopted Wynn and Williams' (2012, p. 796) five principles for conducting critical realist case study research: explication of events (studying police culture from experiences); explication of structure and context (explore elements of structure); retroduction (identify structures' hierarchy); empirical corroboration (multiple explanations) and triangulation and multiple methods (observation, interviews, secondary data). We specifically utilised four distinct data sources, namely documentary, archival, interview and (participant) observation from two county police forces, pseudonymised as Eastshire and Westshire, out of a possible forty three English and Welsh forces. Furthermore, to facilitate personal anonymity, individual police officer participants are psedonymised in what follows by a letter and an organisational identifier, organisational identifiers being either 'E' – Eastshire or 'W' – Westshire.

The first stage of data collection was via observation. Over eighty hours of ethnographic fieldwork observations were conducted between July 2013 – January 2014 in three frontline response/patrol teams within the two counties. The sample was accessed via senior managers, utilising a purposive sample to recruit participants for the study (Gioia et al. 2013, Creswell and Poth 2018). While using a convenience sample of this type is not without criticism, as it does not provide the foundation for generalisable results (Heckathorn and Cameron 2017), this strategy had the advantage of enabling access to police officers with the relevant experience. Participants formed three teams, one large team in Westshire (twenty officers) and a further two teams in Eastshire (circa ten officers each team) totalling forty officers. The relatively small sample limits the ability to generalise the findings, however the sample size is appropriate for such an exploratory study with a population that is difficult to access (Brewerton and Millward 2001).

Belur (2014, p. 185) comments on research power relations indicating 'that status dominates power negotiations in hierarchical organisations'. At the time of the research, the first-named author was a serving Chief Inspector, thus possible power imbalances were important factors to overcome and addressed as particular foci in the process of gaining ethical approval. Mitigation strategies included an informed formal consent process, a plain language briefing detailing the author's role as a researcher rather than a manager, the wearing of casual clothes, and time spent with the research subjects to build rapport. Research subjects expressed some early tension which they quickly overcame.

> You made it clear on that day that you were Nick and not working, but we were aware you were a Chief Inspector, we're not going to forget about it. It didn't bother me, I was happy to do things in the way I always do things and say things that I always say. (Officer AE)

Despite such initial status obstacles for the first-named author, possession of 'insider' status presented significant advantages in ease of being able to gain acceptance by participants. As a trained police officer the author was able to take part in operational activities (looking after a detained person in handcuffs whilst the research participants completed other administrative tasks, being in close proximity to the use of force, speaking with victims of crime in an informed manner), all of which served to break down barriers by providing something of tangible benefit to the participants. Identified disadvantages to 'insider' ethnographic research include: the tendency to be short sighted and to perceive the normal as unremarkable

(Ybema et al 2019); issues of multiple social identities and acceptance (Oliveira, 2019); and restrictions in issues of understanding of interconnectivity between public sector institutions (Cain, 1979). In contrast, Loftus (2009, pp. 202-209) reflects on the obstacles she encountered in moving past her outsider status. Indeed, she highlights a number of similar factors (interest in running, ethnicity, working class background) which provided her some anchor with those she was observing and some difference factors (vegetarian, non-drinker) which further isolated her from the research subjects. Compared to the 'outsider' hurdles experienced by Loftus (2009), the author's 'insider' experiences highlight the immediate advantage of conducting research within an existing environment even if so doing causes other issues that must be overcome (particularly rank). Recognising some of the disadvantages of insider status ultimately helped the study defend against them, whilst overcoming a range of outsider issues experienced by other researchers.

Observations guided question construction for twenty semi-structured interviews which were conducted and audio recorded. The demographic characteristics of the interview sample are given in Table 1.

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The final stage of data collection was by means of archival and documentary capture. This was primarily conducted in June and July 2014. This process involved an intranet search of both Eastshire and Westshire's intranet sites seeking documents such as leadership charters, policies, staff support information, and organisational mission statements. This element was conducted last in order to provide triangulation between employee and organisational representations and allow the author to reflect upon the observations and interviews in comparison to the organisational stance in published data. All of the documents assessed were detailed within a case study database.

Thematic analysis followed steps identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) commensurate with the critical realist research philosophy. Familiarisation with the material was gleaned throughout the initial observations and the maintenance of a field diary, whilst archival materials were physically reviewed and interviews transcribed. It was the initial coding of the observation data which guided the direction of the semi structured interviews. Coding was repeated after the collection of the entire data set and used to identify the prima facie observations before processes of searching for, identifying and defining of core themes, or in retroductive terms the underlying mechanisms which provided explanatory value to those

observations. There were a total of 227 identified data points throughout the study. A theme exhibited three or more data points, and triangulation was used to compare and contrast observations from the different data sources (original ethnographic observations, archival data, interviewee responses) thus themes typically exhibited multiple data points from a diverse range of data sources and provided explanatory value to the observed phenomena.

Cultural Change and Continuity

Findings from our data enable changing police culture to be framed within a number of emergent themes. In what follows, we catalogue these as: 'getting a result', the worth of which is reinterpreted in terms of benefit to the public; diluted intra-group solidarity; autonomy, construed as ability to unravel complex problems; identities; and the emergence of an altruistic public service ethos that, further, is partially expressed in officers redefining the concept of the 'proper victim'. At the same time, clear evidence was uncovered of, how elements of the traditional 'mission – action – cynicism – pessimism' culture have survived in adapted form. This section analyses how these partially contradictory tendencies were experienced by the participants.

Getting a 'Result'

A 'result' appeared more influenced in participants' minds by a level of desire to serve the public than by a purely internal hedonistic fulfilment, driven by love of action and excitement. A result is often perceived as the arrest of a criminal, who in the minds of the officers is particularly noteworthy, examples being burglars and sex offenders. Also, the recovery of stolen property or bringing an 'at risk' child into protective custody were both perceived as valuable. The important distinction from the traditional conceptualisation is the apparent motivation behind the act (delivery on behalf of the public) as an important persuading factor: what the achievement of the task represents in terms of benefit to the public, particularly its vulnerable members. Officers reflected on their experience of vulnerable people.

> Where there are vulnerable people, elderly or children. I've come from a childcare background so I feel I can make a difference because I have the experience…..I think it's our role to do what we can even if it's just sending an email to say they need some additional care. I think about what would happen if we didn't do something and I want to do as much as I can to protect them. (Officer LE)

> The times when I feel we make a difference are high risk missing persons…..the jobs where you get an elderly person who suffers from Alzheimers, 98% we are successful. (Officer CE)

Several officers reported a positive psychological impact on the day or time following a perceived result, also experienced as a group benefit with a sense of radiation between members of the team. An officer identified their frustration at a public appointment service and a need to spend more time than allotted by the system to properly assist a crime victim, thereby undermining their commitment to the public. These data support an emerging conceptualisation of officer motivation more closely linked to public service motivation than hedonism, which is similar to findings linking police public service motivation with more positive approaches to organisational change (Homberg et al., 2019).

Diluted Intra-Group Solidarity

Intra-group solidarity has been traditionally posited as a key factor in insulating police organisations from (internal) investigation and change. However, an overly simplistic view of a homogeneous unit solidarity misses the normal kind of interpersonal tension that is exhibited in any group setting.

> The dynamics of the shift at the time, as they do change over time. There are times when we're all getting on really well and there are times when there is 'clique-iness'. (Officer LE)

It is reasonable to question whether some of these fundamental structural changes in policing have influenced younger officers' perceptions of their role and how they interact with each other and the organisation. As response units are where officers start their careers, there is a disproportion of younger officers within them; thus these teams may be particularly susceptible to such influence. It is clear that whilst a strong interpersonal dimension between some officers of the same team was evident, a traditional conception of homogeneous solidarity within the unit did not endure in this sample.

The data revealed some evidence of the persistence of internal racism, despite greater diversity and the high-profile efforts devoted to eradicating racism since the Macpherson Report (Souhami 2014). In the observation data, an Asian Muslim officer reported both how he had experienced racism during his training with tutor officers and supervisors displaying behaviours which failed to take into account his natural cultural tendencies and also, later in

his career, an extreme overtly racist incident where he had received a bottle of wine and a pack of bacon as a 'gift'. The officer felt that the action had been intended as a joke. However, the instigators had simply failed to take account of the significant offence it caused. The officer indicated that most of his colleagues from similar minority backgrounds had also experienced some form of racism, particularly when they first join the organisation. It was anticipated that racism would be reduced in teams which displayed high levels of diversity, yet this was not the case; there was high ethnic diversity in this officer's team.

Autonomy as Problem-Solving

The autonomy of police work was viewed positively when officers were able to devote time and effort into more complex problem solving within a local community or trying to unravel socially complex issues. Both Eastshire and Westshire documents recognized the importance of people being involved in the generation of innovation and problem solving. Officers found greater congruence between their self-identity and role when seeking to deal more fundamentally with the cause of a problem as opposed to its symptoms or, at least, in dealing with the symptoms in a more thorough manner.

However, participants from both forces reported these factors negatively in their respective forced moves to short-term response policing, driven by the unrelenting workload. The removal of the neighbourhood role for Westshire officers also took away the individual ownership it entailed for them. Neighbourhood or community officers are those deployed to a local patrol area and typically engage in community cohesion and long term problem solving initiatives.

> For about seven years I was neighbourhood policing for the town centre and there was me and about five PCSOs.… We did a lot of operations…. Quite honestly, I had pretty much a handle on most people in the town. That was quite a successful time. I think I was making a difference due to the rapport I'd built up and they knew the line they couldn't cross, when before they were running amok…. It was the most satisfying job and fairly successful, I was sort of my own boss really and worked well /with the PCSOs. I thought it worked well, but then neighbourhood policing went out the window. (Officer MW)

At the extreme end of this continuum, officers expressed dissatisfaction when made to conduct what they perceived as unfocused tasks in which they had little control in design, were shown little trust and saw little chance of success.

> On the recent problem, just the fact that it appeared to be a knee jerk reaction, and we all knew that walking around at night in high vis was not going to work…. The fact that we were sent out with no real thought process made us feel like we were on a fruitless mission, whereas if they'd have had a little more conversation with us they may have come to a different decision about the deployment and in turn the officers would have been a little more motivated to get some results. I think I understand why things like that happen, expectations at higher ranks than me, but for me it was futile and the crime figures showed it had little or no impact. (Officer RE)

Traditionally police cultural interpretations have linked police autonomy and discretion with a range of negative societal outcomes including the use of force (Ariel et al, 2016), racial bias (Braun et al., 2018) and poor responses to domestic violence (Myhill and Johnson, 2016). Our research balances these more negative traits with more positive correlates with autonomy. This includes linkage between autonomy and community problem solving and officers' expressions of dissatisfaction at being unable to achieve more meaningful public outcomes when autonomy is curtailed.

Police Identities, Public Service and 'Proper Victims'

This study found the identity of 'crime fighter' to be enduring. Both organisational mission statements set a clear expectation of crime fighting as an expected behaviour. This was clearly identified with regular enthusiasm shown for hunting for wanted people, maximising evidential capture through post arrest searches, and stopping of vehicles late into a shift close to hand over time. There is therefore a clear first identity of 'crime fighter' within both organisations.

However, we found a second emergent identity of 'public servant', whereby the role of the officer, as both a member of and accountable to the community they serve, holds dear, again reflected in both organisational mission statements. In this category, levels of public service motivation appear particularly dominant in thought processes. The public servant identity was described variously as showing genuine care towards the public (such as one officer going back specifically to apologise to a homeowner whose garden had accidentally been entered,

while pursuing a suspect), and going the extra mile in dealing with a situation in which the police and partners deliver in unison. In reciprocation, officers find value in the personal thanks they receive from individuals, often in a very informal manner.

> For victims it depends how it affects them. Older people, people who have lost sentimental items, vulnerable people. To see someone walking out, shaking my hand thanking me. (Officer DE)

Officers also express satisfaction in being able to deal with members of the public using communication only without recourse to higher levels of force.

> Probably the way we speak to people. I work with a group of lads sometimes quite highly strung. I quite often change the way I speak to people particularly those kicking off and I become their friend and they become more reasonable. (Officer IE)

Financial and other restrictions throughout the public services led to reported high levels of interpersonal/interagency frustration when police attempts to 'make a difference' were not appropriately reciprocated by a partner agency or, indeed, the problem itself was perceived as due to negligence, reticence or torpor from a partner agency. This theme overlapped conceptually with the reported frustration surrounding a range of vulnerable people (mental ill-health, domestic violence, missing people) and was exclusively negative. Officers reported the police force being used as the back stop for failings in other agency services. Examples were provided of children's homes not adequately controlling children, leading to repeated missing reports, mental health hospitals failing to admit patients leading to those patients using emergency police section powers as a gateway to metal health services, and the failure of joint agencies to adequately manage domestic violence cases such that they became repeat cases.

Frustration was also expressed towards the court services in failing to provide adequate sentencing to deter or prevent offenders who then appeared back in communities to commit offences afresh. This theme of the buck effectively stopping with the police as other agencies withdraw is a probable effect of public sector cuts as part of successive UK government spending reviews. Certainly policing is perceived by officers as the agency which bears the brunt of other organisational withdrawal in an environment from which policing cannot withdraw.

Perceptions of domestic violence and the concept of 'proper victims' were particularly well delineated. There is a clear dichotomy in the way in which victims of crime were perceived, with the term 'proper victim' being coined to generally denote an individual who is perceived as genuinely requiring police help or vulnerable, but also as being free from social taint that might make them a frequent or repeat caller for police force. When describing categories of vulnerability, the elderly and children were frequently cited alongside domestic violence victims in a more nuanced manner. A good example of a perceived 'proper victim' is an elderly couple reporting a burglary, having never called police in their life before. Such a victim would be perceived as vulnerable by reason of age and 'proper' by reason of only having called upon police in the direst of circumstances. Conversely a repeat domestic victim to whom police had been called numerous times, would be seen as a futile or conveyor belt case, with officers reporting extreme frustration at the reported attitude of that victim in placing themselves in a position of repeated danger.

> The domestic type situation where they just want the quick fix, you know full well that they'll have them back. There's a family, they call in weekly, I've been there six or seven times, there's arguments and assaults, they call up, then when you get there the female just wants the male gone. You then have an argument with control, you can't have it closed without a crime. All she wants is for him to go and you know in a couple of weeks he'll be back again, it just goes round and round. All she wants is a letter saying she's been made homeless….It's probably the wrong phrase to use, proper victim, but people who want to help themselves as opposed people who don't want to help themselves. You do everything but you know they won't do anything you suggest for them to help themselves. (Officer KE)

The irony here is acute. Although an elderly couple having been a victim of burglary once do stand a higher chance of being a repeat victim, the chances of serious harm or death to a repeat domestic violence victim are far more significant. That 'repeat' victims are less likely to be perceived as 'proper' victims represents a risk of harm to those individuals by virtue of the lack of meaning which resides in those cases for those officers and the frustration they experience in making meaningful differences for them. Whilst officers do not express reduced effort towards those whom they perceive as less worthy victims, they do express sentiments of 'going the extra mile' for those whom they perceive as proper victims. It therefore follows that the most vulnerable are not receiving the best service as that service is

reserved for the 'proper' victim. Organisationally this presents a significant risk and a way needs to be found for officers to find meaning and satisfaction in these cases.

It is insufficient to interpret this as a replaying and confirmation of traditional theory surrounding police attitudes to domestic violence. In actuality, a different underlying construct is, to some extent, evident. It is resonant of the recent work of Charman (2019) and her thesis surrounding deserving and undeserving victims and the blurred boundaries between victims and offender categories. The research differs in the point of fulcrum. Charman (2019) identifies the boundary between victim-offender identity, whereas this research highlights the perceived efficacy of potential intervention. Both, however, identify a strikingly similar dichotomy.

Reported officer frustration appears to be felt despite interview evidence that the police view domestic violence work as inherently important. The problem in such 'repeat' cases lies in the officers' perceived inability to achieve a meaningful outcome to improve the situation. Some of that frustration is expressed towards the victim themselves, but ultimately it is born out of an underlying belief in the importance of the work. It is this frustration at their inability to effectively resolve the situation, exacerbated by a perceived lack of sufficient resources, which leads to their classification of these individuals as not 'proper victims' rather than their belonging to a particular minority group, or a disbelief in the value of the work per se. In pinpointing social identity role conflict for domestic violence officers between a social services (support) and more legalistic (enforcement) role, Balenovich et al's (2007) framework provides a deeper social identity explanation as to the causal mechanisms for the exhibited frustrations in this study. In short, officers who have developed an identity more supportive and public service oriented may be more likely to experience the frustrations identified in this study.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the above data we argue it is now possible to chart a notable degree of change in the structural conditions in policing. We argue that this is sufficient to have created a different contextual manifestation of police culture and, in so doing, challenge its monolithic credentials. This section summarises the main elements of continuity and change observed, and compares the findings to the themes identified from our review of existing literature.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Reviewing our data, there was certainly observed gratification following exciting interactions, but the base motivation for 'getting a result' appeared more attuned to outcomes in the public interest displaying an underlying public service motivation. The traditional role of crime fighter was evident, but so too was the role of public servant. Officers exhibited connection with value adding activity both in the public and internal organisational domains, particularly when addressing causal as opposed to symptomatic factors. There appears to be a link to the introduction of community/neighbourhood policing and a focus on longer term problem solving activities.

Much has been written of police solidarity (Bunyard 2003, p. 94, Skolnick 2008, p. 37) and the uniquely strong interpersonal bonds that build up particularly between officers of the same shift or unit. Whilst this dynamic was evident, characterising each team as a strongly cohesive unit hostile to outside influence and internally interdependent fails to recognise the normal complexities of interpersonal relationships. We found a reduced sense of intra-group solidarity, potentially related to increased diversity within teams. Pessimism and cynicism were evident, particularly where officers felt they were dealing with repetitive symptomatic issues which they had little ability to manage in the longer term. This was more acute where public sector partners were perceived as creating or failing to manage issues such as mental health which were more the responsibility of other institutions. Inevitably retraction within the public sector is a result of the policies of financial austerity. Racism, while not widely observed, was still highlighted as prevalent and highly damaging. There was less evidence to suggest officers categorised victims according to a conservative schema, but more to suggest their categorisation was based upon assumptions of their ability to make a meaningful impact. As such, their thinking appeared to misidentify the greatest future risk of harm. This resulted in a misaligned focus towards those who were willing to follow police advice, as opposed those who were most vulnerable.

The bases of what constitutes motivational fulfilment contrast notably with claims in previous literature. In Reiner's (2010, p. 119-121) traditional account, it is this absence of public orientation which leads to direct cynicism. Reiner (2010, p. 121) comments that 'many policeman see their combat with 'villains' as a ritualized game, a fun challenge with 'winning' by an arrest giving personal satisfaction rather than any sense of public service' although, of course, simultaneous public interest in neutralisation of criminals may well exist. There is no denying a level of frustration exhibited by the interviewees. However, their motivation seems more explicitly related to delivery on behalf of the public than traditional

accounts suggest. The dynamic should be described as 'getting a result', where the result indicates a meaningful outcome for the general public. 'Getting a result', and the public service motivation behind it, does not mean the removal of a sense of personal gratification. For example, the emphasis highlighted in our findings on communication style as the lowest end of the spectrum of force shows officers' focus on behaving in a manner truly in the interest of the people they serve and is in stark contradiction to some of the behaviours witnessed by Loftus (2009, p. 98), where a team is energised by the prospect of a violent interaction with a group of drunken students. The identity of public servant is an influential one which balances the more traditional crime fighting persona.

The public service ethos can also be seen, to some extent, in the changing view towards domestic violence, and the classification of 'proper' and 'improper' victims. Loftus (2009, p. 129) noted a lag in police attitudes towards domestic violence incidents; her participants labelled them as a 'crock of shit'. There is evidence here, however, that officer attitudes are developing some greater sensitivity to victim needs. Writing on sexual offences investigations and frustrations with the criminal justice sector, Spencer et al. (2018, p. 205) indicate that 'officers express an overall desire to be able to do more'. The motivation to 'do more', we suggest, is highly dependent on improved joint agency working and the incorporation of realistic threat assessments into officers' framing of the concept of a 'proper victim'. The doctrine of 'proper victim' can be described as a continuum, effectively mediated not by officers' prejudices towards a particular group of people, but by the ability of officer, organisation or joint organisations to make a meaningful intervention in that scenario, such that the intervention is not perceived as fruitless.

The concept of a continuum is also important in nuancing the apparent dichotomy in our discussion between a transition from an inward-looking 'private interest' towards a 'public interest' orientation. Evidence from this exploratory study confirms, for example, that some officers internalise a public orientation more than others, and there is scope – especially under conditions of austerity – for officers to ascribe inability to 'get a result' to the perceived failings of external organisations or of 'improper', yet objectively endangered, victims deemed to ignore police advice. While such a private / public continuum could be seen as a tenuous construct, we contend it is a potentially useful metaphor to denote a particular direction of travel in cultural change.

Overall, our research could be interpreted in a number of ways. First, some aspects of our evidence could partially support a conclusion that police culture is monolithic, and a core set of cultural themes endure. Indeed, Loftus (2010, p. 16) questions the 'extent to which police culture has changed in light of developments in policing'. Some themes (autonomy, some elements of pessimism, the prevalence of crime fighter perceptions, racism) show consistency with traditional cultural doctrine. A second interpretation could be that police culture retains some important residual elements that are associated with the 'classic' approach, but is also influenced by context: behind sufficient contextual change, culture will follow. However, this second view creates a logical impasse. We cannot simultaneously argue that some features of police culture have evolved, whilst also arguing that our comprehension maintains a monolithic corpus. If police culture is genuinely enduring, monolithic and fixed, then empirical evidence which threatens even one part of that monolith in reality threatens the validity of the entire conceptualisation.

Instead, we argue that abundant other material (predominance of public service motivation, reduced intragroup solidarity, victim classification based on officer's perception of likely impact, the positive aspects of autonomy) renders the cohesion of the traditional outlook as challenged. This leads to the conclusion that police culture is context-based, is pluralistic, and will be different dependent on the key societal, structural and organisational environments in which it exists, whilst maintaining some collective features, primarily because the context in organisations is sufficiently similar at this time. Arguably, the evidence here demonstrates evolution in the facets of police culture as a playing out of the tensions between structural factors such as austerity, workforce change, and governance and the institutional norms and experiences – in other words the "habitus" (Chan 1997). Many of the contextual changes arise as a result of various changes to the workforce mix and new ways of working. Chan's (1997) ideas about respective reinforcement, resistance and transformation between these structural conditions of the police and cultural knowledge and institutionalised practice help to explain the mechanism of the observed interactions.

In order to identify the traits of police culture, a form of analysis which seeks to understand the underlying issues within a specific context is necessary. In their research findings Westmarland and Rowe (2018, p. 865) exposed differences between rural and metropolitan organisations, thereby expressing the importance of context. Whilst never supporting a monolithic view of police culture, Reiner (2016, p. 238) most recently describes explicit support for a more contextually nuanced understanding indicating 'how variable or constant

particular facets of culture depends on whether they are rooted in changeable or intrinsic elements of policing in various environments'. Police ethnographic study which involves practitioners is a particularly helpful form of research to unearth such nuance, both because of acceptance issues (Cram 2016, p. 361) and because of the academic and contextual crossover it achieves (Cockcroft 2017, p. 232).

This study has certain limitations. The data set is focused within a critical realist methodology; however, the themes identified would benefit from both quantitative and qualitative research to further ascertain and develop the wider robustness of the conclusions derived therefrom. Our sample was limited to two research settings; further research would usefully compare a wider range of sites to identify elements of consistency and difference. The research was UK-focused; however, many of the underlying socioeconomic pressures (austerity/reform/politicisation) are common international themes and it would be useful to test ideas proposed here in different international contexts that exhibit similar socioeconomic environments. Whilst the study of police culture is well served by ethnographic studies, there has been a consistent tension between traditional and pluralistic theorists. Ethnographic and other qualitative methods are well placed to tease out contextual information. However, small-scale exploratory studies such as this cannot generate the volume of quantitative data that would enable the dimensions of our argument about police culture to be more rigorously verified, generalised or become more nuanced. Future researchers could apply more quantitative high volume respondent research methods to examine the statistical relationships between psychological factors (Graham et al., 2019). Such research is likely to both identify what relationships operate repeatedly across different research settings, and where different contexts influence the veracity of those relationships.

This study is of high importance for both academics and practitioners alike. A plural understanding of police culture challenges previous theory, yet simultaneously ratifies the case for context-specific policy interventions across policing. As the legitimate agents of force within society, understanding the cultural pressures upon the police, and having a sense of the likely avenues of successful organisational development are important factors in sustaining healthy democracy.

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Table 1: Characteristics of interview sample

Ethnicity	*Rank*	*Sex*	*Estimated Age*
15% BME 85% White	10% Sergeant 90% Constable	20% Female 80% Male	55% - 20-30years 35% - 30-40years 15% - 40-50years

Table 2: Observed manifestation of police culture

	Traditional model	*Observed manifestation*
Action	Hedonistic pursuit of excitement, action as self-gratification and gamification.	Action as intended to get a result of value to the public
Values	Solidarity, conservatism, racism	More diverse values diluting internal solidarity and conservatism; residual racism
Identity	Crime fighter	Crime fighter, public servant
Meaning	Pessimistic cynicism about leadership and lack of 'action'	Public service; ability to tackle causes rather than symptoms; achievement as ability to make meaningful impact for individuals deemed in need of police services (although irrespective of threat assessment); pessimistic cynicism if internal or external factors hinder the above.