

COPS AND BLOGGERS: EXPLORING THE PRESENCE OF POLICE CULTURE ON THE WEB

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Abstract

The presence and impact of 'police culture' has been scrutinized both on the streets (Sherman, 1980; Smith and Gray, 1983; Reiner, 1985; Chan, 1997; Loftus 2010) and in the confines of the police canteen (Waddington, 1999). The traits of conservatism, suspicion, cynicism, sense of mission, machismo and pragmatism (Reiner, 1985) among police officers are widely acknowledged, but still there are debates as to the impact such traits may have on operational policing. More recently, media representations of policing have also been examined in the context of police culture, specifically in relation to fictional depictions which compare the British police past and present (Garland and Bilby, 2011). Police culture has been cited as an organizational influence which impedes reform (Loftus, 2010) but caution over its impact on behaviour has been noted, in relation to the distinction between patrol officers and those in management positions (Chan, 1997). The internet can be an important tool for researching distinct populations (Hine, 2000) and this paper explores one such population, namely commentators (presenting themselves as police officers) on policing themed computer-mediated-communications, or 'blogs.' Such blogs may present a forum in which 'cop culture' as it is understood is widely expressed, possibly due to a key feature being anonymity and freedom of expression. Whilst acknowledging issues of authenticity, the continuing presence of police culture characteristics within these blogs again raises questions about the impact they may have on operational policing, or whether such forums must be viewed as an important outlet for serving officers.

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Cops and Bloggers: Exploring the presence of police culture on the web

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that ‘cop culture’ is represented by a range of distinct characteristics observable among police officers, including conservatism, suspicion, cynicism, a strong sense of mission and pragmatism (Reiner, 1978, 1985). Waddington (1999) has also discussed the presence of police culture in the confines of the police station canteen and questioned whether these traits are a cause for concern or to be seen as a positive aspect of police officers’ experience. Many others have explored the existence of ‘cop culture’ and considered the influences this has on operational policing, both in negative ways (for example reinforcing stereotypes) and positive aspects (such as promoting professionalism and an action centred approach) (Sherman, 1980; Smith and Gray, 1983; Foster and Newburn, 2003; Loftus 2010). It is also important to note the recent examination of police culture as represented in the media, for example in Garland and Bilby’s (2011) work on analysis of British policing in the television series ‘Life on Mars’ and the impact this has on perceptions of the police, or on police officers themselves towards their role. Chan (1997) offers a note of caution as to the extent of the influence of ‘cop culture’ on policing and it is also important to consider the positives aspects which a distinct organizational culture can offer, particularly one which purports to be task oriented, offering solidarity, promotes professionalism and develops officers ability to face risky and even dangerous situations (Holdaway, 1977, Reiner, 1992; Skolnick, 1966).

Policing in the UK is widely discussed in the form of computer mediated communications, or so called ‘blogging’ websites (one of the most well known examples being that of PC David Copperfield). These sites offer a forum by which authors can anonymously express themselves on a range of issues. For the purposes of this paper, this includes those authors presenting themselves as serving police officers commentating on their feelings towards the ‘job’ alongside current affairs, political issues and national changes to policing. The internet has been identified as an important resource for researching distinct populations (Hine, 2000), but it has also raised important methodological issues concerning ethics, concerns over authenticity and how best to select and analyse such data (Stewart and Williams, 2005; Shank and Cunningham, 1996; Sterne, 1999; Teli et al, 2007).

This paper explores the views expressed by an ‘online’ population – those commentators who present themselves as serving officers using blogging websites, in an attempt to understand whether ‘cop culture’ is being kept alive and well in this forum. The content analysis of a selection of blogs over a distinct period of time reveals examples of police culture characteristics expressed as viewpoints on policing and a wide range of issues, which feasibly extends the presence of police culture beyond the physical world. This

raises the question again about the impact that such expression, wherever it may be, has on operational policing – it could be viewed both as an important outlet for authors who are serving police officers or a potential risk of reinforcing stereotypes and impeding reform in policing.

Exploring cop culture

An understanding of the functions of the police along with how they represent the state is inextricably bound in research into ‘cop culture’ as identified by Reiner (1978; 1992) and others (Sherman, 1980; Smith and Gray, 1983; Waddington, 1999, Loftus 2010). ‘Cop culture’ emerged from discussion over the use of police discretion and the well worn tenets of the ‘Ways and Means Act’ embedded into police practice and justified as central to ‘crime control’ (Packer, 1968 cited by Reiner, 1992). It is the gap between the word of the law and its implementation in practice in which ‘cop culture’ sits, as an explanation of police practice on the streets and behaviour towards citizens and among colleagues. ‘Cop culture’ is also manifest in the views expressed by serving police officers on their role, the public they serve and a range of issues, therefore possibly providing a means by which officers can cope with the execution of their duties to meet the tensions of public demands, efficiency targets and maintaining the rights of citizens (Waddington, 1999). Perhaps another strategy adopted by some police officers, certainly in the past prior to increased scrutiny and accountability of police officers, to meet demands placed upon them is that of ‘noble cause corruption’ i.e. those practices which must be described as corrupt but are not for personal or financial gain of officers. Instead the aim is to resolve a case and protect victims, therefore it is viewed as a legitimate means by which to disregard codes of conduct or professional standards in the name of seeking justice (see Chibnall, 1977, Punch 1985). Aspects of culture are also said to be continually reinforced by subsequent generations of officers, socialised into an institutional culture which often appears to meet their expectations of the job, or in which they acquiesce to in order avoid any form of exclusion (Reiner, 1992). The diversity of police officers within the British police service in relation to race, gender, age and experience on joining and learning ability does raise the question as to the different impact police organizational culture may have on certain groups. Much work has been done to explore the impact of policing on communities as it relates to police culture (Chan, 1997; Loftus 2010) but there is scope for exploring how police officers from various background themselves embrace or reject the organizational culture they may find themselves in.

Additional research attempting to identify police officer characteristics have pointed to the acceptance and even desire for danger and risk (Skolnick, 1966), along with a recognition of their role as ‘street corner politician’, mediating between the state and the public (Muir, 1977). However, as Reiner (1992) notes, the notion of risk in police work is

quite distinct from quantifiable risks many professionals attempt to guard against through health and safety assessments, due to the need for police officers to expect the unexpected. As a matter of routine they are dealing with members of the public whose behaviour they cannot predict and as communities become more diverse in all aspects of the term, it becomes increasingly challenging to assess and predict impact of their practices on all citizens. In light of the authority the police have over citizens, tensions can arise which present another element of risk. In a profession characterised by both high risk and mundane duties, there exists within cop culture a sense of mission and vocation to the role (Reiner, 1978; 1985; 1992), which could arguably be an important way to cope with the demands of police work (Waddington, 1999; Loftus, 2010). Holdaway (1977) has also identified the need for action and a desire to face risk and danger, suggesting that police officers hold a sense of value in their work and are particularly focused on meeting victims' needs and achieving justice, as they see it (Loftus, 2010).

The idealised intentions of police officers at the start of their careers can be overwhelmed by experience as the traits of cynicism and pessimism emerge (Reiner, 1978). A coping strategy employed by many officers is the need to develop a sense of humour, even about tragic incidences or injustices which occur in order to cope emotionally with the demands of the role (Reiner, 1978; Holdaway 1983; Waddington, 1999). A sense of cynicism it seems can also develop from a constant state of suspicion and need to be aware of what can go wrong in any given situation. It is not surprising then that a form of 'deviancy amplification' (Cohen, 1985) takes place among police officers and also that stereotypes emerge from experiences with repeat offenders or certain groups, who then find themselves targeted by the police. Police officers within their culture may cultivate moral panics and identify folk devils (Cohen 1985) which can be based on experience and intelligence rather than the media, but which nevertheless could reinforce their beliefs and possible biases about the public they serve. Reiner (1978) has also identified among serving police officers, negative views towards citizens as a result of a general view of a society declining in moral standards. This cycle of deviancy amplification continues perhaps to be perpetuated as police officers deal mostly with problems, complaints and conflict situations which can be further reinforced by media headlines of 'broken Britain' and constant scrutiny over the effectiveness of the police and reports of their failings.

However, it must be noted that there are those who argue the labels associated with police culture should not be universally accepted or viewed as barriers to reform, such as Chan (1997). Chan also seeks to make a distinction in organizational culture as it impacts on practice between street cops and management, a view which was also previously purported by Reuss-Ianni (1983). Chan (1997) acknowledges the influence of culture, but argues that it can be resisted and offers an alternative framework for understanding police culture as it contributes to reform. This requires taking into account the specific role police officers are undertaking, political and social contexts of policing, needs of citizens,

need for accountability, links with the community and attempting to prevent crime and disorder.

Garland and Bilby (2011) emphasize the scope of influence of the media including fictional representations of policing which reflect society and which in turn allow audiences to ‘make sense of the criminal justice system.....and have their expectations shaped by the images which are broadcast’ (2011:116). The unique context for the television series, ‘Life on Mars’ presents a fictional television drama set in the past – 1973 – but as seen through the eyes of a 21st century police officer (Sam Tyler). Tyler finds himself in a world in conflict, where unacceptable police practices and attitudes are rife and where he struggles to challenge such behaviour, all the while trying to acknowledge that the officers involved are a product of their time. Terminology not longer acceptable is widely used such as ‘spastic’ and ‘paki’ with no consideration of its impact, a direct conflict for Tyler to face coming from an age where the use of such terms is not only deemed politically incorrect but which can also be seen as offending behaviour. Indeed in a reversal of this conflict, DCI Hunt is confused by the use of the term ‘hate crime’ by Tyler – a known concept in 21st century criminal justice policy and practice to denote crime motivated by prejudice, but which in 1973 is as alien as the technology now used by police officers which was non-existent in 1973. Garland and Bilby (2011) emphasized the placing of ‘Life on Mars’ as prior to the Scarman (1981) enquiry, the development of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984) codes of conduct, and modern perspective of the police coming after the MacPherson Report (1999) all of which are argued to have produced a more ‘liberal....21st century fully ‘diversified’ police officer’ in Tyler’s character (Garland and Bilby, 2011: 122).

Reiner (2010) has explored the continuing presence of elements of police culture in 21st century policing and emphasizes the challenge in eradicating many aspects of this as officers are socialized and see acceptance of this culture as important, in order to be accepted themselves. The language and behaviour may not be as explicit in the public face of the police and on the streets in their interactions with citizens but it can still be observed in closed quarters and also in forums in which officers feel safe expressing their true thoughts and opinions, for example, in computer mediated communications, or ‘blogs’.

The perceived unjust nature of police work which can potentially undermine citizens rights and in the case of stop and search practices, demonstrably targets ethnic minorities have been shown to be counter-productive and can generate feelings of hostility and lack of trust among whole communities towards the police (Brunson and Miller 2006; Sharp and Atherton, 2007). This could reinforce the sense of isolation from the public leading to solidarity among police officers, to overcome this and also to justify their actions. A

recent study by Loftus (2010) has placed police culture back into debates about the nature of policing:

‘police culture exerts considerable influence over the way officers think about and interact with their publics – often for the worse. Second, the sensibilities that comprise the police identity can also undermine reform endeavours.’ (Loftus, 2010:2).

Loftus suggests in light of this, the time has come for a rethink about the impact of police culture on operational duties and public perceptions. Further findings from Loftus’ study emphasises the sense of vocation, the uniqueness of police work and how it is changing, for example police officers viewing their role solely as crime fighters and viewing the public as complainants or offenders, not consumers of police services such as aspects of community safety (Loftus, 2010). This perhaps demonstrates the distinction made between different philosophies of approach in policing, from crime control to neighbourhood policing which encompasses the contribution the police service makes to safer communities and the publics’ confidence in the criminal justice system and the state.

The public interest into policing as described by police officers arguably began with the publication of PC David Copperfield’s text ‘Wasting Police Time’ based on his anonymous blog postings. It is also suggested that for PC Copperfield and others, the use of blogs to express their ‘reality’ of policing negate the negative impact of press reporting on the police service and also to present a more realistic picture of what being a police means in the 21st century (Hobbs, 2008). The different views about policing, how it is defined, how it is changing, how it is received by citizens and the many different roles within the police service all provide rich sources of debate for commentators on blogging websites relating to policing, who present themselves as serving police officers. This along with political, social and cultural contexts which effect policing and the impact of crime and disorder has resulted in the creation of numerous blogging sites, being constantly updated ranging from a critique of policing (often in the form of serving officers critiquing policy, management or the public) to the promotion of the value of police officers work and the sacrifices made in the name of maintaining law and order. This paper scrutinizes a selection of such websites, to attempt to identify characteristics of cop culture as manifest within such expressions.

Methodology

The observations of blogs on policing began with a review of how police officers and police work is represented in the media. Recognising the internet as a form of 'new media', it was clear that it was necessary to view this forum describing the work and opinions of the police to expand understanding of the representations of the police in the 21st century. A cursory glance at some interesting blog entries for the purposes of a one off lecture began to evolve into a more systematic and in depth study of this forum, to explore specifically the presence or otherwise of established and accepted characteristics of police culture.

The systematic approach taken began at first with selecting blog entries by date, to avoid the bias of selecting those which presented as clear examples of police culture characteristics. However, many of the titles of blog entries clearly indicate some nod to such characteristics of cynicism, pessimism, conservatism so it is likely that such bias was difficult to fully avoid. In addition, the question of authenticity of the blogs as being written by serving or ex-police officers does need to be addressed. Whilst it is clearly an important consideration, it is also possible to bypass this consideration and simply view the blogs as a unit of analysis presenting themselves simply as a representation of policing. Holge-Hazelton (2002) has highlighted this issue previously during a study using online forums to be accessed by diabetics, where it was concluded that the likelihood of authors falsely presenting themselves as suffering from diabetes, requiring insight into the symptoms and treatment is small. The same could be said about policing blogs, in that scrutiny of some blogs does reveal specialist knowledge and operational expertise which is clearly attributed to police work.

The first steps in selecting the blogs was aided by a website which provided links to numerous blogging websites in existence (<http://coppersblog.blogspot.com/>). In order to avoid the immediate bias (by selecting title such as, 'worldwearydetective.com' and 'cynicalofficer.com') an approach of selecting every fifth link was adopted, until approximately 30 had been selected for viewing. Due to time restrictions and the sheer volume of material present in just one blog, 20 websites were viewed and scrutiny of the blogs was limited to first entries, i.e. additional comments from other web users were not viewed. It was important to restrict the timeframe scrutinized, in order to control the wealth of material it presented a variable which would help to counter any author bias or leaning towards content which supported the view of the presence of police culture characteristics. Further research on a select few blogs to see how views change with time, especially in light of calls for reforms to policing and cuts to services is certainly warranted. This study is limited to a relatively superficial exploration of representations of policing in new media forums, but it is hoped some interesting themes will emerge.

Among the sites, were those categorized as 'regular' which were active and updated frequently and those who were 'new' or 'no longer active', at the time of their scrutiny for this research. For regular sites it was fairly straightforward to use the method of selecting blogs randomly and then to have entries within the date ranges chosen. Others took more scrutiny and this is where bias of seeking sites which reinforce the characteristics of police culture would undoubtedly have crept in. To keep the focus of this research on commentaries of policing in the UK, the blogs from other countries were disregarded – already this presents a possibility for further research, perhaps of a comparative nature. Almost all sites did not reveal their rank, age, gender or ethnicity possibly as a means to maintain anonymity, but there were a few exceptions denoting rank (predominantly Police Constable) and gender (predominantly male). Therefore further research to make comparisons based on such variables would be valuable, along with considering the various roles of police officers and also of the wider policing family, such as police community support officers. This study does not have the space to make any sort of clear comparisons based on noted differences of the authors, which again emphasises the scope for further research and need for wider scrutiny of policing blogs.

Once the websites had been selected, it then became necessary to select entries as randomly as possible, using dates rather than viewing entries based on subject matter. The period of time chosen was May to June 2010. However, such a process is, and was, open to some flexibility, simply due to some subjects being chosen as topical and particularly interesting and also the regularity in which some sites where updated varied, occasionally necessitating the need to expand this time period. Further research in this area will require a more systematic approach, which more time and resources will allow. In addition, this may also enable the possibility of testing for authenticity of the blogs and also to scrutinize comments raised by blog entries.

Little has been said about the ethics of using existing communications publicly available on the internet, perhaps because of their normally anonymous nature and the view that authors are well aware their views will be read by anyone who can access the internet. Stewart and Williams (2005) rightly point out that the increasing use of research using online settings has necessitated a re-examining of ethics, representation of data and authenticity in this arena. The benefits using the internet as the source of data for research enables researchers to conduct their study without the usual time and space restrictions. There may be fewer logistical issues and therefore reduced costs in time and management of conducting fieldwork and potentially being able to access larger number of participants, which can be especially liberating for those wanting to focus on qualitative or ethnographic forms of research (Sterne, 1999; Holge-Hazelton, 2002; Stewart and Williams, 2005). The scope of data available on the internet through blogs sites, forums

and numerous other means of communication has been nicely summed up by Teli et al, who describe the internet as a 'library of people.' (2007: 3).

Findings

The data presented in this section follows the characteristics of police culture as previously identified by various authors, using a content analysis approach to highlight examples of such characteristics. The number of sites chosen was done in part to simplify the sheer amount of data available, but it is acknowledged that this raises issues for further research into police culture on the web and also, in relation to the use of blogging websites as a unit of analysis. The key characteristics currently identified for this paper are cynicism, a sense of mission (linked to vocation and support for victims of crime), desire for risk taking, conservatism, solidarity and a general theme of wit and humour about their lives and work. Table one shows the coding frame used in the analysis, by means of selecting terms associated with police culture and associated words. The examples presented below are not an exhaustive list, but indicative of content in addition to that presented in the findings section. It is clear a more systematic and comprehensive review of blog sites over a longer period of time could quantify the frequency of police culture expressions and also offer a means of comparison relating to author's profiles.

Table 1: Coding frame used for content analysis of blogs

COP CULTURE CHARACTERISTIC	INITIAL TERMS SOUGHT/BLOGS RELATED TO	EXAMPLES (AUTHOR, DATE AND TITLE)
CONSERVATISM / CRITICISM OF LABOUR	Government, Labour, Conservative, Tory, Liberal, right, left	<p>200 WEEKS, May 7th, 2010, Priorities</p> <p>200 WEEKS, April 12th, 2010, Of double whammys</p> <p>BIG FELLA IN BLUE, 3 April 2010, Discretion</p> <p>WORLD WEARY DETECTIVE, 28 April 2010 Good old British Bigot Time!,</p> <p>THE THINKING POLICEMAN, 13 May 2012, My values are all wrong</p> <p>STRESSED OUT COP, May, 2010, Carry On Laughing</p> <p>OFFICER DRIBBLE, April 19, 2010, Doors closing.... now shut up</p>
SOLIDARITY	Fallen, sacrifice, hero	<p>200 WEEKS May 15th, 2010</p> <p>Hymn to the Fallen</p> <p>200 WEEKS, May 22nd, 2010</p> <p>Two more...</p>
CYNICISM	Senior Management, new initiatives, media, press reporting	<p>200 WEEKS May 14th, 2010</p> <p>Its all a bit O/T .</p> <p>WORLD WEARY DETECTIVE, April 2010, The thorny issue of single patrol...</p> <p>THIN BLUE LINE Wednesday, 19 May 2010, Too Many Chiefs? Part 1 - The Bonus Scandal Exposed</p> <p>STRESSED OUT COP, 4 April 2010, What Is The Public Interest?</p> <p>YOU' RE NICKED, June 2012, I wish I could be an armchair hero.</p>
ACTION CENTRED/MISSION	Job done, the job, getting stuck in	<p>BLUE LIGHT RUN (about author).</p> <p>THINKING POLICEMAN, 2 May 2010, Neighbourhood Priorities.</p>
RISK TAKING	Up against it, sacrifice, danger	<p>BLUE LIGHT RUN, 27 May 2010</p> <p>There may be trouble ahead.</p>

At times the use of long quotes is necessary to include important context to authors views. Not all aspects of police culture were evident in the sites chosen, therefore the findings below represent examples of characteristics which were evident across different sites or which present clear examples of police culture expressed as perspectives, political beliefs or views on the 'job.' The availability of material from just 20 sites demonstrates much more can be done in researching blogs as a unit of analysis for the police and other professions, to explore differences in rank, age, gender, ethnicity and police role.

Cynicism

Cynicism among police officers has been linked to key themes of boredom, expectations not being met about being a police officer and the advent of new managerialism (Hobbs 2008). Equally important are features related to the pressures of police work in which cynical traits are viewed as a positive aspect of police culture, offering a coping mechanism and sense of unity among officers (Chan, 1997, Waddington, 1999a, 2005; Reiner, 1992; Foster and Newburn, 2003).

There were clear examples of cynicism expressed about new policies, members of the public, senior management and other agencies in the criminal justice system. Towards senior management exists a sense of 'them and us' between managers and front line officers, particularly with reference to attempts at reform and target setting:

Inspector Gadget: The SMT's are constantly changing the way they view police work, one day it's about *Crime Detection*, another it's all about *Public Confidence*.....posters go up, like Orwellian screens, proclaiming that Neighbourhood Policing is the way ahead, then they come down, replaced by others urging compliance to some new trend or other.

This quote implies a transient nature to some police policies which on the surface can be seen as serving the public, but for some authors, there is a perception that the introduction of new schemes offers opportunities for those seeking promotion rather than improving services:

The Thinking policeman: I get fed up, and quite frankly embarrassed, when I see some of the gimmicks that neighbourhood teams sometimes dream up to get a bit of publicity. Or is it someone trying to make a name for themselves when they put in for their promotion board?

The cynicism and pessimism regarding the decisions and actions of senior management have also been linked to recent changes in governments, who are seeking to make cuts in public services. The spending review and cuts to services presented commentators with a range of concerns:

200 weeks: You can bet that there is someone in an office at every police HQ with a spreadsheet and a calculator working out just how much can be savedI can't help but think the only people to suffer will be the poor bloody infantry on the front line, again.

Note here the alliance with the armed services, referring to police officers as 'infantry on the front line', highlighting also a sense of solidarity with other services which serve the public and maintain security.

Sense of mission, vocation and victim support

The importance of police officers sense of mission and vocation can also be viewed as positive in line with the support police officers offer victims and the police viewing themselves as the 'thin blue line' and protectors of civil society (Waddington 1999). There is also the view that the mission of policing is central to the justification of the use of force (Harris, 2009) and tactics such as stop and search, even at the expense of relations with ethnic minority groups (Sharp and Atherton, 2007; Brunson and Miller, 2006).

Clear examples of the sense of vocation were present throughout the blogs, with authors expressing a deep sense of attachment to their job despite their frustrations with management, government and sometimes, the reaction from the public:

Blue light run: At social functions I often get asked 'how do you do your job' and 'i couldn't do it'. My reply is that I get paid to drive fast cars, deprive bad guys of their liberty and give help to those who need it. Admittedly there are things I don't like, for instance spending hours on end standing around in custody, the command teams never ending quest for detections and some of the bureaucratic bollocks that seems to pour down from the top floor, but for the most part it is a most excellent vocation.

The blogs display a sense of mission, but often also (as noted above) alongside the desire for risk taking behaviours and as noted below, the frustration relating to the many roles police officers are meant to fulfill and the conflicting desires of their managers and the public they serve:

Police boy: And finally there is the third job. The job I end up doing. After the meetings, and the charts, and the figures, and the technology, and the forms, and the evaluations ... there is just me. When people ask for help, I give it to them. I find missing children, I catch thieves red-handed and I sweep up glass after crashes. I run into burning buildings, crush people's lives with news they never wanted to hear and have literally been the last thing somebody saw before they died. So, if the next time you speak with an Officer, they seem a little slow to react, forgive them; they're just trying to work out who you want them to be.

These entries and others do highlight some of the more positive aspects of police culture and how important these are in reinforcing officers ability to continue in their job, to show qualities of bravery and supporting victims in the face of adversity. Many authors spoke of the reasons they became police officers as a desire to 'make a difference', to do something out of the ordinary.

However, even this strong sense of mission and vocation can be undermined by perceptions of some authors of a public who rely too heavily on the state, specifically on the police as 'symbolic authority' (Reiner, 1992):

Thinking Policeman: Public services cannot be held responsible for every aspect of peoples lives. We don't live in a society with infinite resources and we cannot stop everyone from harming themselves. We always need

to act reasonably but we are not responsible for every problem in society.
People and families need to take more responsibility for themselves.

Blog authors often included entries regarding public order incidents, dealing with town centre activities on weekends and particularly traumatic experiences. Often they appeared to be an outlet to express frustration, bemusement and sadness over their experiences. Very rarely did authors write about the more mundane aspects of their role, or the satisfaction of engaging in crime prevention or community safety focused duties. Indeed, as demonstrated below, such duties were often held in disdain as a necessary step towards promotion:

Big Fella in Blue: New Sergeant -the challenge is now a running a ruralshire neighbourhood community policing team covering a large area.....There are going to be fairs and fetes, heads of WI, town commerce chiefs, retired generals and the like.... I know I may have to change some of my thinking and do some pink and fluffy stuff, but its better than rolling around with drunken muppets on a Saturday nights - or is it??? Anyone know anything about the badger act??

Conservatism/criticism of government

Conservative views as traditionally understood point to a 'sense of resistance to change and a tendency to prefer a safe, traditional and conventional forms of institutions and behaviour ' (Wilson, 1975:6 in Colman and Gorman, 1982). Studies have shown there exists a higher number of conservative views among police officers in comparison to control groups (e.g. Colman and Gorman, 1982; Stack and Cao, 1998).

Rather than being able to present clear evidence of conservative and right wing political views, many of the blogs cited dissatisfaction with liberal values which they attributed to New Labour's government, alongside generally cynical views of politicians:

Stressed out cop: I'm tactically voting this election and voting **TORY** but it's a vote on loan. There is no difference between any of them in my eyes as they battle for the centre ground. I go Tory only in the hope they are true to form and swing to the right if gaining power and try to sort out this mess of a

country..... Firm but fair policing is all that anybody wants. I do have some hope that they might actually be the party of law and order.

Some authors make links between too many rights for offenders and not enough powers for police officers to the governance of New Labour, and indeed cite having right wings views as perceived as negative. Authors linked liberal values also to other agencies they work with to resolve problems such as anti-social behaviour, citing these as in conflict with common sense values of policing and getting results:

Thinking policeman: I pointed out that if the family chose to live in a filthy mess and their children were model citizens who were not being arrested almost daily andthe parents were not drug dealing but set a good example they might have a point.....I was stared at as if I was some right wing bigot for whom there was no hope..... These services decided that the 'work' they were doing with this family was perfectly adequate and they didn't need to be doing any more..... This usually means seeing them once every week or two and having a nice chat. I hope to God that the new Government addresses the liberal (small l) cesspit that has been allowed to take over all levels of the criminal justice system and we get back to some common sense and reality as soon as possible.

The presence of the general election during the period selected for the blogs offers some insight into politics of the authors, which do at times correspond to the conservative views previously identified (Reiner, 1985, 1992, Colman and Gorman 1982, Stack and Cao, 1998). There are clear expressions of hope that the new government would implement change, often a desire to revert back to previous strategies in policing, specifically before pivotal enquiries such as the MacPherson Report and the advent of new public management:

Inspector Gadget: We hope to see the back of the Diversity Monitoring and Training Department, the endless Crime and Performance Analysts, the Crime Audit Teams and the layers of Neighbourhood Chief Inspectors.

Indeed, the disrespect for senior managers is directly attributed to the principles of the previous government:

Inspector Gadget: For senior officers, the problem is particularly acute.....this evidence has to demonstrate how ferociously they have forced reluctant staff to adopt the latest government spin on whatever issue the socialist liberal elite have decided is important.

Direct reference was often made to previous Labour government policies, usually expressed as promises made and not met and also a desire for more punitive measures towards offenders:

You're nicked: As proof that the Labour Party are tough on crime, this “career criminal” was given an indefinite sentence. When I was at school, indefinite implied a very long period of time. Three years does not strike me as indefinite. Now thirty three years – that would be a more suitable indefinite sentence for a “career criminal”.

As an example of the desire to go back to old methods of policing and dealing with cases, the entry below refers to the proposed changes to the role of the CPS in charging decisions and the greater role for police officers in this process – a direct change back to dealing with prosecutions prior to the introduction of the CPS in the mid 1980s:

Inspector Gadget: Police being able to decide, will certainly allow custody to be emptied more quickly “out of hours” because we are always available. **CPS = Couldn't Prosecute Satan/Can't Prosecute Sorry/Criminal Protection Service.**

The change in government also appeared to generate levels of cynicism with regards to a sense that little would change and examples of cynicism towards politicians in general:

Duty Sergeant: Along with most Constables I'm waiting to see what changes the new Government make to the Police and other emergency services. All the junk mail I got pushed through my letter box by various parties during the election campaign highlighted how each MP had PERSONALLY changed the Police for

the better and PERSONALLY reduced crime. I double checked all the pictures of the grinning buffoons that came with the propaganda leaflets and can confirm that I've never seen ANY of them by my side on busy Friday night in the town centre struggling with angry violent drunks.

Some were much more explicit in their views on the failings of the Labour government:

The Thin Blue Line: They FAILED on law and order, their mantra "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" becoming a national joke.....Smirking criminals routinely walk free in the name of political correctness, while decent people live in a virtual police state of snooping cameras and petty officials empowered to spy and to punish.

Solidarity

As a key component of the culture of the police service, solidarity again introduces positives aspects to help support officers in a demanding role (Waddington, 1999) alongside concerns over isolation from the public and unwavering support for officers in misconduct cases (Chan, 1997, Reiner 1992).

Solidarity for fellow officers often appeared in the form of memorials for those who lose their lives during operational duties or messages of support for injured officers. It seems this is a very important outlet to show support and also bring such incidents to the attention of the public who access the internet. The follow UK based author has reproduced a blog from an American webpage, which acts as a memorial for fallen officers:

200 weeks: First he takes the oath...Now look at all he takes...He takes it in stride when people call him pig....He takes his life into own hands on a daily basis...He takes in sights that would make you cry...If he is lucky, he takes retirement.

Reports of the outcomes of cases are also presented in blogs, offering commentary on the injustice felt by officers from other forces. The entry below refers to the stabbing of a police officer in the south east:

Inspector Gadget: My sources both in Surrey and TVP tell me that officers are furious. Shocked and sad; understandable, but *furious*? Because in 2006, Kes Nattriss was sentenced to seven years and nine months in prison for a spree of attacks on off-licences in Woking and Bracknell. This means that *he should have been in prison* until 2014. But it's 2010 isn't it?

Solidarity is also observed particular among 'front line' police constables as compared to management and also other departments. The entry below refers to one authors concerns over the treatment of fellow officers taking sick leave due to the impact of being on duty:

Hog Day Afternoon: We looked after our less physically able in those days. I would rather have any one of these officers watching my back, anytime, anywhere, in any frontline- supporting department, rather than the entire plethora of nebulous numpties that have infiltrated the nebulous numpty departments laughingly classified as 'support'. So bring on the surgery as you must, wield the bloody knife, but please.... cut the crap.

Feelings of solidarity, a sense of 'them and us' again were also expressed by many authors trying to make sense of negative views of the public, and also how they are represented in the media in light of the sometime dangerous and risky duties they undertake. There were numerous entries regarding concerns over the impact of the World Cup taking place in South Africa and televised in city centres on large screens:

You're nicked: Tonight, police officers up and down the country will be called in to mediate in disputes and arguments, without the benefit of an action replay or a goal line camera. They will make decisions on the spot, in the heat of the moment, based on what they see. Tomorrow morning, a lot of those decisions will be carved apart by people who claim to know better but who don't work weekend nights.

There was a real sense among many commentators over the lack of understanding as to what police officers do and the conflicting demands of their job. Many made reference to the risk and danger associated with their work:

Inspector Gadget: Every time we stumble across a crime, every time we go to make an arrest, someone could pull out a knife and put us within an inch of our lives.....we still get scared. Scared that we're fighting a losing battle, and that one day no one will care when they see our name in the headlines.

Wit and humour

An important element to highlight for the majority of blog entries is the element of wit and humour, often about emotive and 'dark' subjects, also previously identified among police officers in the physical world (Waddington, 1999). The blogs in this sense seem to be an important outlet for frustrations but also as a means of more creative expression and a forum where authors can reveal their true feelings:

Blue light run: Welcome to my little corner. Here I hope to engage you in tales of 'daring do', bravery beyond the call of duty and how I manage to get the girl every time....in fact you are more likely to get bored with me rambling on about the British legal system, the monotony and madness of modern day policing in the UK and my growing resentment of the soul sucking social under class that is now prevalent in our society.

Authors used their blogs to inform viewers about their lives outside work and their observations of society which are not inhibited by constraints of professional practice requirements and presenting a non-judgemental approach:

Travails: From Here to Maternity Part III - Well, Junior is nearly four weeks old now so about time I climbed back in the saddle and started being productive I think I'll make the effort and stick to policey stuff - after all, that's what it says on the can. Although there are parallels . . .Fr'instance, from

my personal observations Midwifery bears a striking resemblance to Police work: We both work for organisations that promise a personal service, yet in the UK of 2010 are so overwhelmed with demand from the public that just getting through the shift has become the objective. Both professions involve rubber gloves and a wide spectrum of bodily fluids, and both certainly involve inevitable exposure to bad language. Midwives do seem to get considerably more tins of Cadbury's *Heroes* donated though. Bagsy the Maltesers.

The tales told in many entries highlight authors consternations about the world around them whether within the police service or with those they work and interact with:

Officer Dribble: I was visiting someone in the University College Hospital in Central London recently. It was in the evening. The main wards are based on one tower block and I get myself into the lift. As the door closed we were greeted by the lift voice 'please refrain from discussing personal information whilst in the lift...' This repeated for about 7 floors as we wended our way to the top. There were no medical staff at any point in that journey. We all looked at each other at every call at each floor. At one point I felt like blurting out 'at least Mr Jones hemorrhoids are responding to treatment'...just to break the tension.

The entries above represent the best examples of each trait of police culture found among most of the entries scrutinised. Certainly, elements of each section above were found to have recurring themes, which is why they have been highlighted for this paper. Some traits were more evident than others, it was relatively easy to find examples of cynicism, conservative views and solidarity. Other traits such as sense of mission, isolation from the public and pragmatism were not as prevalent, but there were some examples of these. The traits of machismo could be attributed to the focus on risky and dangerous incidents, but there were no clear declarations of this trait – interestingly, however, none of the blogs scrutinised had authors which proclaimed to be female. In addition, from reading the samples above, there are clear expressions of the wit and humour of the authors often seemingly used a coping strategy, but certainly a recurrent theme all in the blogs.

Conclusion

The methodological concerns raised with this type of research warrant further exploration into such an approach but also, there is clearly scope for a more systematic and

comprehensive review of blog entries on policing as an example of the continuing presence of police culture in a new forum. The sample of blogs presented above show examples of expression of particular aspects of 'cop culture' as identified by Reiner and others. For example, many included cynical views on a range of subjects, preference for action oriented policing, disdain for New Labour developments and support for the new coalition, solidarity and sense of isolation from the public and a clear demonstration of wit and sense of humour in the face of adversity. Machismo did not appear to be widely expressed, apart from perhaps in the form of preference for action centred policing and a general negativity towards the focus on diversity issues. Pragmatism was also a recurring theme in many of the entries, expressed as a desire to get things done in the face of bureaucratic barriers, public dissatisfaction and un-cooperative victims, witnesses or suspects. There is clear scope for exploring more entries which could identify all aspects of police culture and demonstrate its presence and prevalence.

Waddington (1999) has expressed the concern as to whether the characteristics of police culture are to be condemned or appreciated, which is also a concern for the existence of the blogs, if they are to be taken as authentic accounts of policing by police officers. For many authors the anonymity of the web provides a forum for freedom of expression and an outlet for releasing stress and making sense of the world. The desire for and time given to discussing specific incidents involving danger and conflict was clear among many of the entries, therefore such traits show an acceptance of this as part of police work (Skolnick, 1966), but also a desire for getting involved in such situations (Waddington, 1999). The political views expressed in many of the blog entries seem to be an important outlet but also perhaps an extension of what Muir (1977) has identified as an important part of the police role as 'street corner politician.' Among many of the blog entries scrutinized, there were conservative views expressed, but this could be attributed to reflecting the general population, as dissatisfaction with the Labour party rather than inherently a right wing political stance. However, evidence of this was apparent in some entries through support and hope for change from the new government. Some of the entries above demonstrate a sense of cynicism about reform and also pessimism over the likelihood of change they want to see – often a return to previous approaches in policing. There are some entries who display a desire to move away from neighbourhood policing approaches, back to the law enforcement role which was superseded by this approach in the late 1980s (Miller, 1999). It would be interesting to gauge from further scrutiny of blogs how police officers in the 21st century view the various aspects of their role, especially given recent cuts to budgets and the police service as a whole needing to re focus on what their core functions are.

As identified by Reiner (1978) many authors referred to examples of declining in morals in society and frustrations about perceived lack of action to deal with this. This also corresponds with the pragmatic and action-oriented nature of police work – a desire to make changes, specifically to bring back a sense of a cohesive society and

safer communities. Such expressions are also present in the hero worship of DCI Hunt from *Life on Mars* by blog authors, where they may feel Hunts 'working class voice has been lost in the liberal chatter of new policing methods and post-Blair British Society' (Garland and Bilby, 2011:130). Many blog authors referred to the desire to uphold or return to more traditional methods of policing as opposed to embracing the Neighbourhood Policing approach, much of which incorporates multi-agency working, community engagement and rebuilding trust and confidence in the police (Home Office 2007).

The study by Loftus (2010) demonstrates succinctly the concerns over the impact of a distinct police culture, not least on efforts to reform the role of the police. The desires expressed in some blogs for a return back to traditional methods and highlights the validity of Loftus' concerns and the need to better understand how the expression and maintenance of police culture can impact the desire for change.

Chan (1997) highlights the sense of 'professionalism' as manifested in more recent times in the better understanding of communities served by the police, attempts to define and disseminate good practice and utilize problem solving approaches. There is a sense that such changes are linked to police officers joining up with more professionally recognized qualifications including links with higher education and additional training in areas such as diversity awareness. However, some entries refer directly to such training as an unnecessary component of police training and a frustration of the attitudes and values of other agencies. In an age where multi-agency working is central to addressing crime and disorder, a culture which impedes understanding of the work of other agencies and the diversity of communities could be seen to undermine the professionalism of the police service (Pycroft and Gough, 2010).

The diversity of police officers within the British police service in relation to race, gender, age and experience on joining and learning ability does raise the question as to the different impact police organizational culture may have on certain groups. Much work has been done to explore the impact of policing on communities as it relates to police culture (Chan, 1997; Loftus 2010) but there is scope for exploring how police officers from various background themselves embrace or reject the organizational culture they may find themselves in.

The entries relating to the sense of isolation from the public and concerns over the public as 'consumers' of policing emphasises what has been identified by Loader and Mulcahy

(2003) as an additional demand on police officers, along with increased scrutiny from the media and various oversight organizations. However, if the hopes for reform in the police rest on newly trained officers (Foster and Newburn, 2003) there is a concern that the use of blogs and scrutiny by probationary police officers could actually socialize new recruits into the existing police culture, in much the same way as experience does (Reiner, 1992).

It appears then that the core characteristics of police culture identified since the late 1970s continue to thrive in a number of spaces and places. As budget cuts necessitate a need for change in policing, debates about the impact of a distinct police culture on reform must continue. The presence of this culture whether on the streets, in more private spheres of the canteen or via anonymous expressions on the web highlights another aspect of potential socialization into the police culture and the need to better understand this.

Various authors have sought to emphasise the positive aspect of police culture in providing solidarity and a means of coping with the stress of police work (Foster and Newburn, 2003; Hobbs 2008). It is also important to note the limitations of police research, including that conducted for this paper, providing us only with a snapshot of policing (in this sense, literally in the form of sporadic entries by authors) (Hobbs, 2008). Hobbs also argues that civilian researchers are subject to interpreting behaviours as fitting in with the well trodden themes of police culture, which perhaps emphasizes the need for more robust and empirically valid research into the presence of police culture on the web. Further research into this field can only ever hope to contribute to our understanding of police culture and how the police view themselves and the world around them, alongside more robust empirical and longitudinal studies or those conducted by 'inside insiders' (Reiner, 2000). Since the characteristics of police culture were first identified and discussed it has become necessary to revise and adapt to researching the forums in which this culture is expressed and maintained and to continue to scrutinize its impact on operational policing, both positive and negative and therefore on scope for reform and change within the police service. This article is intended to reflect the findings from a small scale research study, undertaken out of interest in policing relating blogs and it is clear there is scope for further research into the expressions of police culture characteristics and also other expressions and views on policing. Comparative research offers numerous options from a much wider and more comprehensive review of the blogs, of which there are many more than reviewed in this study. In many ways, this research represents a snap shot of policing, by blog authors on a limited range of issues, but it is hoped it does show how this forum is used and how it extends police culture beyond the physical world. This forum in itself might be viewed as a safe space to express views deemed unprofessional on the streets, but which maintain and preserve police culture characteristics in the form of a 'virtual canteen.' A better understanding of the authenticity of the blogs, who uses them and why is needed to truly grasp if this is a reflection of the views of serving officers and therefore, a continuation of police culture

as well as raising questions over its impact, whether as an impediment to reform (Loftus, 2010) or an important outlet to deal with the demands of the 'job' (Waddington, 1999).

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Appendix 1:

List of links for websites scrutinized for research:

1. 200 weeks - <http://200weeks.police999.com/>
2. Big Fella in Blue - <http://bigfellainblue.blogspot.com/>
3. Officer Dribble - <http://officerdibble01.blogspot.com/>
4. World weary detective - <http://worldwearydetective.blogspot.com/>
5. The Thin Blue Line - <http://thinbluelineuk.blogspot.com/>
6. Another Bloody Grumpy Copper -
<http://anotherbloodygrumpycopper.blogspot.com/>
7. Adventures of Police Boy - <http://policeboy.wordpress.com/>
8. South Coventry Police Office - <http://alastaiorencas.wordpress.com/>
9. Inspector Gadget – <http://inspectorgadget.wordpress.com/>
10. Stressed out cop – <http://stressedoutcop.blogspot.com/>
11. You're nicked – <http://stanstill.wordpress.com/>
12. Hog Day Afternoon – <http://hogday-afternoon.blogspot.com/>
13. Blue Light Run – <http://thebluelightrun.blogspot.com>
14. Duty Sergeant – <http://thedutysgt.blogspot.com/>
15. Old Plod of Plympton – <http://old-plod-of-plympton.blogspot.com/>
16. PC Bloggs – <http://pcbloggs.blogspot.com/>
17. The Thinking Policeman – <http://www.thethinkingpoliceman.blogspot.com/>
18. Travails blog – <http://prolege.blogspot.com>
19. You want to be a hero – <http://hero90.blogspot.com/>
20. Police boy - <http://policeboy.wordpress.com>