'I wannabe a copper': The engagement of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) with the dominant police occupational culture'

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Abstract

Drawing upon ethnographic research with PCSOs working in two neighbourhood policing teams in Northern England, this article presents a typology of PCSO orientations to work and for the first time details the ways in which PCSOs utilise aspects of the dominant culture to manage the discord between aspirations and opportunities within the PCSO role. Engagement with aspects of the dominant culture varied according to career aspirations and orientations to work; 'Frustrated PCSOs' were most likely to endorse cultural characteristics as a means of facilitating integration and enhancing opportunities for crime control, whilst Professional PCSOs adopted aspects of the dominant culture when doing so diversified their deployment, enhanced effectiveness and the acquisition of craft skills to support future applications to become police officers. The article concludes by considering the resilience of the traditional police culture, particularly the dominant crimefighting ethos therein and the implications presented for the future of the PCSO role.

Keywords

police culture, crime control, policing, PCSOs, neighbourhood policing

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Introduction

The multifaceted mandate of the modern police encompasses a wide range of responsibilities and functions including crime prevention, detection and prosecution, and maintaining order. The police however have been active in constructing a dominant image of themselves as professional crimefighters as a means of legitimising their role to themselves and the public. The creation of this symbolic role, according to Manning (1979), served to heighten public expectations leading to an 'impossible mandate' for the police to achieve. Consequently, throughout the 1990s the British police focused on satisfying the demands of a 'performance culture that counts crimes and detections, [and] skewed police activity heavily towards these areas' (Povey, 2001; 167) distancing them from local communities and leaving often pervasive disorder and anti-social behaviour unchecked. The introduction of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) under the Police Reform Act 2002 provided an opportunity to 'open out' the police mandate beyond crime-fighting (Innes, 2004) and deliver a visible and accessible community focused policing style that could encourage familiarity with the public and respond to local needs.

Today, PCSOs undertake a vast range of supporting activities including intelligence gathering, monitoring known offenders, supporting crime victims and working with young people and schools, although high visibility patrol and reassurance remain central functions. Operating within a restricted remit and with limited powers of enforcement compared to their police officer counterparts, the role continues to be clearly demarcated from that of the police constable;

> "We need to be clear about the core PCSO role and how that complements but does not replace police constables. We have always maintained that PCSOs have a distinct and separate role, based on high visibility patrol, reassurance, community engagement and problem solving" (Home Office, 2008; 17).

Their limited remit and their structured position as non-sworn officers within the organisation have significant implications for the ways in which PCSOs perceive their role, form attitudes towards the public and colleagues, and carve out an occupational identity for themselves. As civilian officers, the distinction of PCSOs from the public is less pronounced, even ambiguous. Their civilian status positions them as members of the community and affirms their principal responsibility to community needs and concerns, whilst their membership within the extended police family aligns them with the organisation. In a similar way documented by Cherney and Chui (2010) concerning police auxiliaries in Australia, this dual positioning of PCSOs raises the potential for role conflict and divided loyalties in meeting the expectations of those within the organisation and those of local communities.

The consolidation of PCSOs into the policing landscape and police organisation has been well documented (Crawford and Lister, 2004, Jones and Newburn, 2006), and yet, research into PCSOs has principally been concerned with impact (Cooper et al, 2004), their evolving role (Merritt, 2010), and/or their potential for improving equality and diversity (Johnston, 2007). Research has begun to emerge which documents the tensions within the PCSO role, specifically the prioritisation and value of crime control over engagement (Cosgrove and Ramshaw, 2015, O'Neill, 2015). Cosgrove and Ramshaw (2015) detail how the acceptance, integration and credibility of individual PCSOs within neighbourhood policing teams by police officer colleagues is dependent on their ability to contribute to enforcement and wider crime control efforts. Echoing these findings O'Neill's (2015) recent observational study of PCSOs working within two northern police forces provides additional insight regarding tensions between PCSOs and police officers. Utilising Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor of the 'stage', O'Neill (2015) documents the daily struggles by many PCSOs to present a 'believable performance' to police officers as competent and useful members of the team in an effort to mitigate against scepticism and hostility, including

collating and internally distributing community intelligence regarding police suspects and engaging in storytelling (Shearing and Ericson, 1991) with police colleagues to dramatize their occupational experiences.

The studies above have added to understanding regarding the interaction between PCSOs and police officers, limited attention has hitherto been paid to PCSO engagement with aspects of the police occupational culture, specifically the extent to which PCSOs 'have assimilated these aspects, adapted to them, or resisted their seductions' (Johnston, 2006; 30) and its relation to integration. As part of their socialisation into the organisation, PCSOs must either endorse the cultural beliefs, attitudes and values to which they are exposed, or construct cultural meanings and distinct orientations to their work that reflect their unique position and differential experience. However, debates surrounding police occupational culture continue to be polarised; evidence of a dominant police culture resilient to reform continues to emerge (Loftus, 2010, Crank, 2004) whilst conversely, there is a growing body of literature that challenges the notion of a 'universal' police culture (Chan, 1996, Herbert, 1998, Waddington, 1999, Foster, 2003) presenting culture as a complex, multi-faceted concept within which multiple cultures or subcultures emerge. Operating in a climate of increasing pluralisation, understanding the ways in which PCSOs engage with and add to occupational culture(s), specifically of the uniformed patrol officer, is central to this debate.

Equally, understanding PCSO orientations to work and their engagement with police cultural values is especially pertinent at a time when the police mandate is undergoing a process of 'contraction and constraint' (Millie, 2012). Under pressure to streamline the police task to accommodate austerity measures, the Coalition government's programme of police reform advocates a narrowing of the police role to one of crime reduction which contrasts sharply to PCSOs' raison d'etre of reassurance. The

potential detrimental impact of such narrowing upon neighbourhood policing has not gone unnoticed (HMIC, 2013, IPCC, 2013). Within this climate, there is a danger that non-adversarial engagement will be downgraded and commanders will look to PCSOs to feed crime reduction objectives, encouraging PCSOs to adopt a role orientation commensurate with 'crimefighting', as opposed to their original purpose of reassurance.

Drawing upon findings of a doctoral study of PCSOs, this article adds to this body of knowledge by offering a framework for understanding the ways in which PCSO respond to the inherent contradictions in their role through their engagement with the dominant occupational culture. The overall aim of the study was to critically explore the existence and characteristics of a PCSO occupational culture within the context of organisational structures, PCSO working practices and their occupational environment. Findings suggest that PCSOs did not construct their own distinct subcultural characteristics. Rather, they adopt similar orientations to work and cultural attributes identified in police and private security typological research (Reiner, 1978, Miccuci, 1998, Rigakos, 2002). PCSOs endorsed aspects of the dominant culture both as a means of securing integration and of coping with their occupational environment (Paoline, 2003) and limited powers of enforcement. The article begins by revisiting the scholarly literature on police (sub) culture before outlining the methodological approach taken. Key research findings regarding PCSO engagement with police occupational cultural values are subsequently examined before considering the implications presented for the integration of PCSOs and the delivery of neighbourhood policing.

Unpacking police culture

Police culture has a long history within sociological studies of the police. Ethnographic studies of police (patrol) officers have constructed a common understanding of culture as the 'core skills, cognitions, and affect which define 'good police work'…which includes accepted practices, rules and principles of conduct that are situationally applied and generalised rationales and beliefs" (Manning, 1989, 360). The common assertion within these works is that police officers form specific cultural attitudes, values and beliefs due to their common experience of the strains and challenges associated with police work (Skolnick, 1966, Van Maanen, 1974, Reiner, 2010) which are subsequently internalised to inform police attitudes and approaches to their work and the public. However, there is a disagreement regarding the universality of such attributes and their effects upon police behaviour. Some authors direct attention to the resilience of cultural attitudes and orientations to work across forces, ranks and remits over time owing to the reproduced strains and demands of police work (Skolnick, 1966, Holdaway, 1983) whilst others argue that the notion of a collective occupational culture is misleading, and provides an imbalanced account of the existence and expression of police culture (Foster, 2003).

In his assessment of police cultural research, Reiner (2010) identifies seven dominant characteristics of police culture that have been consistently documented within police cultural research; a sense of mission; a love of action; cynicism; pessimism; suspicion; isolation/solidarity; conservatism; machismo; racial prejudice; and pragmatism. Jerome Skolnick's classic study 'Justice Without Trial' (1966) suggests that the recurrent danger to which officers are exposed and the authority inherent within their role concurrently draws officers together for protection when in need and sets them apart from the public since they can never be certain who does and does not present a threat. A 'culture of suspicion' and the construction of a 'them' and 'us' mentality between the police and public subsequently emerges.

Ratifying Skolnick's work, subsequent studies pay particular regard to the central features of suspicion, authority and isolation (Van Maanen, 1974, Holdaway, 1983, Young 1991) consistently documenting the separation of the police from the public, the application of derogatory labels to suspects or prisoners and the construction of 'ideal types' of individuals depending upon their level of perceived threat. Such suspicion and mistrust is not limited to suspects or the non-respectable. Officers within Loftus' (2010) study demonstrated similar tendencies but extended their suspicion and cynicism towards certain victims of crime whose victim-status and degree of culpability could be contested.

A collection of studies have also drawn attention to an exaggerated sense of mission within the police culture due to the complexities of the police role and the presentation of the police as 'guardians of the symbolic order' (Manning, 1989). As explained by Reiner (2010; 89) 'policing is conceived as the preservation of a valued way of life, and the protection of the weak against the predatory'. Excessive demands placed upon police officers and the presentational strategies utilised by the police to portray their organisational valued role of crimefighter' (Manning, 1978) cause police to downgrade the service aspects of the role due to its low status and lack of official rewards. This ethos reinforces a cynical worldview, creating a love of action and isolating officers from the public.

Reiner (2010) however qualifies that such commonality across studies is not indicative of an unchanging, monolithic police culture. Rejecting the inter-transmission of culture, he stresses that police culture is by no means static or impervious to changes in the social, cultural and political environment in which policing occurs. Rather, characteristics become dominant as they offer 'a patterned set of understandings that help officers cope with the pressures and tensions' (Reiner, 2010: 118) to which they are exposed. Echoing Skolnick (1966), Loftus (2010) asserts that continuities in themes of police culture continue to occur because the demands of the police role and the inevitable conflict, coercion and control therein

haven't changed. This is a view supported by Millie (2013; 7) who suggests that the 'expansion of policing into non-traditional activities' encouraged through the criminalisation of social policy has served to further intensify demands and conflicts.

Police typologies suggest that police officers develop contradictory and conflicting perspectives leading to variation in cultural values and styles of working. All typologies identify an 'ideal type' who hold a worldview similar to that promoted by traditional representations of police culture, (e.g. Muir's, 1977, 'Enforcer', Reiner's, 1978, 'New Centurion', and Cochran and Bromley's, 2003, 'sub-cultural adherent') but they equally identify an ideal type, for example Reiner's 'Bobby', who possesses good judgement, balances the needs of the community and the organisation, and is less inclined to adhere to a strict crime fighting orientation to work (Paoline, 2003). However, there are tensions between ideal types which can undermine organisational goals and reinforce traditional values.

Notwithstanding the degree of consistency within police cultural studies, there is now an established body of research that challenges the notion of a shared culture. These studies argue that officers have an active role in adopting or rejecting aspects of the culture and associated working rules that they find personally acceptable and which enable them to effectively conduct their duties (Fielding, 1988). As such, officers construct cultural attitudes, working rules and accepted behaviour depending upon individual experience, role orientations, relationships with others and the organisational and political climate in which they work (Chan 1996, Chan et al, 2003). Seeking to provide a more nuanced understanding of the expression of cultural values (Foster, 2003) these studies present culture as a complex, multi-faceted concept within with multiple cultures emerge.

The transmission of police culture to other police staff within the organisation is yet to be established (Johnston, 2006). However, evidence of the assimilation of dominant police cultural values by private security officers has been documented in both Canada (Micucci, 1998, Rigakos, 2002) and the UK (Button, 2007). Rigakos' (2002) ethnographic study of a Toronto-based private security company identifies the widespread existence of a crimefighting 'wannabe' culture that 'permeates the private policing organisation in a very similar fashion to matching tendencies in public policing organisations' (Singh and Kempa, 2007; 301). When this 'parapolicing mission' cannot be realised, officers suffer from low morale, status frustration and disillusionment with the role. Conversely, research conducted by Miccucci (1998) and Button (2007) suggest private security officers develop distinct, often divisive orientations to the role leading to the differential endorsement of subcultural values. Similar to adaptations reported by Reiner (1978), Micucci documents three competing work styles amongst security officers; guards, bureaucratic cops and crime-fighters, with the latter being more closely associated with characteristics of the traditional culture. Button's (2007) study of a retail leisure facility and private security organisation in the UK suggests greater variation in orientations and cultural values whereby security officers instead fall under a continuum from watchmen at one end of the spectrum to parapolice at the other depending upon working environment, organisational needs and individual aspirations. Significantly, both accounts identify a body of officers who, in managing their aspirations to become police officers and the low status of security work, assume cultural characteristics traditionally associated with the dominant culture of uniformed patrol officers.

Methodology

The findings discussed in this article are derived from a doctoral ethnographic study conducted in one large police force in Northern England between May 2007 and June 2008. Ethnography is particularly suited to the study of police culture and has a long history within police cultural research due to its

capacity for richness of data and to uncover the complexities of police work. From early pioneering studies from the likes of Banton (1964) to studies documenting the traditional police culture (Holdaway, 1983) and Punch, 1979), ethnographic studies of police work have sought to understand the routine activities involved in police work, police decision-making, and interaction of officers with the public. Whilst "ultimately there is no way of knowing whether what police do in front of observers or what they say to interviewers is intended to present an acceptable face to outsiders" (Reiner and Newburn, 2008; 355) ethnographic approaches, through sustained participant observation, enable the researcher to secure sustained levels of contact and more familiar relations with the researched increasing their ability to contextualise attitudes and meanings attached to police work.

As such, a localised, ethnographic study with sustained observation was deemed the only way in which an in-depth understanding of the relationship between PCSO attitudes, experiences, practices and identities, and wider police organisational structures and dominant cultural values could be achieved The study therefore involved participant observation and individual interviews with 12 PCSOs working within two neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs), referred to throughout as NPT A and NPT B, within one urban area command. Two focus groups, each involving four neighbourhood police officers working within each NPT, were also undertaken to explore PCSO integration, contribution and value to the organisation.

NPTs were selected in consultation with senior officers working within the chosen area command based upon the volume of PCSOs working within their boundaries and the perceived challenging environments within which PCSOs worked, resulting from the complexity of social problems and tensions between police and local communities within their respective boundaries. It was expected that working within such conditions would not only provide a greater variation of PCSO working practices but would test the

interpersonal skills of PCSOs and potentially make the delivery of reassurance and engagement an even greater challenge and achievement, if secured. The area policed by NPTA has well established residential communities with successive generations of residents living within and an established active community, but suffered from very high levels of limiting long term illness and included the two most deprived wards in the area command in relation to education and income. The communities located within the boundaries of NPTB are more ethnically diverse than the former with vibrant Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese communities and benefit from a growing voluntary sector and community infrastructure. However, the wards encompassed within NPT B have experienced significant population decline since the 1970s due to persistent disadvantage, economic restructuring, lack of housing choice and relative poor educational performance of local schools.

Participation in the study was voluntary. All PCSOs and NPOs working within both teams, were given a written outline of the rationale, aims and objectives and methodology, and were informed that there were no ramifications should they not choose to participate and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. All twelve PCSOs and all twelve NPOs working across both NPTs agreed to participate in the study.

One hundred and fifty hours of participant observation were undertaken with PCSOs within each NP; occurring between May and November 2007 in NPTA, and between January and June 2008 in NPTB. Participant observation involves varying levels of participation, from non to full participation, and from full to marginal involvement in the activities being observed. An 'observer as participant' role (Gold, 1958) was deemed most appropriate since this enabled the researcher to accompany PCSOs in execution of their duties without direct participation and avoided any deception. However, as recognised by Van Maanen (1978), researcher roles are not fixed, but shift as relations and trust develops. Indeed, there were times when PCSOs would welcome my input in relation to incidents and/or individuals encountered on

patrol and would sometimes ask me to assist in conducting duties (for example, by carrying confiscated alcohol back to the station) which moved me closer towards the role of a full participant.

Periods of observations varied in context, scope and duration; PCSOs were observed whilst on patrol, when in the station, when dealing with incidents, and when engaging with the public. PCSOs, for the most part, were observed when working in pairs but were also observed when working individually and when working alongside neighbourhood police officers (NPOs). Individual periods of observation were subject to variation in shift patterns, PCSO involvement in broader police operations (whereby observations were deemed unsuitable) and PCSO attrition. Thirty-two periods of observation took place within each NPT, with each period of observation lasting between three and eight hours, and with each PCSO being observed between 20 and 79 hours. Observations were subsequently indexed by area and numbered accordingly. It was not uncommon for PCSOs to be without a specific task or purpose during a particular shift; particularly during day shifts when there was little activity on the streets or when there was limited tasking provided by supervising officers, causing PCSOs to fall back on undirected foot patrol. Despite leading to frustration and sometimes boredom on the part of PCSOs, these periods were invaluable in developing rapport and trust encouraging PCSOs to reflect on their occupational experiences, the organisation and their place within it.

Table 1 below provides a breakdown of individual PCSO participants by neighbourhood police team. The sample of PCSOs did not reflect the gendered force composition of PCSOs, which in March 2007 was a 60%/40% split, with 149 males and 100 females respectively (Bullock and Gunning, 2007). Only 2% of PCSOs at this time were minority ethnic. PCSOs participants had a mean age of 31; the youngest being 23 and the oldest 56; however age was not a defining factor in their orientation to their role or their engagement with cultural values. The twelve PCSOs were categorised into three ideal types – the

Professional, Frustrated and Disillusioned – according to their role perceptions, career aspirations, and perceptions of and behaviour towards the public. These classifications are discussed in detail within the findings section.

Table 1: Characteristics of PCSOs by NPT

Officer	NPT	Gender	Ethnicity	Age		PCSO Classification
PCSO1	A	Female	White British	24		Frustrated
PCSO2	A	Male	White British	30		Disillusioned
PCSO3	A	Female	White British	44		Professional
PCSO4	A	Female	White British	23		Professional
PCSO5	A	Male	White British	25		Frustrated
PCSO6	A	Female	Mixed White & Asian	38		Professional
PCSO7	B	Male	White British	31		Professional
PCSO8	B	Female	White British	28		Professional
PCSO9	B	Female	White British	24		Professional
PCSO10	B	Female	White British	27		Frustrated
PCSO11	B	Male	White British	56		Disillusioned
PCSO12	B	Female	White British	24		Disillusioned

Findings

The research evidence presented here suggests that PCSOs draw upon aspects of the dominant culture as a means of carving out an occupational identity for themselves and furthering their aspirations to become police officers. Variations in orientations to work and degrees of assimilation of culture were identified across the two NPTs. However, the majority of PCSOs recognised the functional benefits of assimilating (or being seen to assimilate) dominant cultural characteristics, with the majority doing so as a means of furthering their aspirations to become police officers or to facilitate integration. The following section

begins by outlining PCSO motivations and orientations to the role in the form of a three-fold typology before documenting the ways in which these orientations shape PCSO engagement with, and endorsement of, dominant cultural values.

Motivation and role orientations

Despite possessing benevolent intentions of 'making a difference' to local communities PCSOs were not attracted to the role out of a desire to deliver reassurance or prevention crime but out of a desire to engage in crime control activities and become police officers. Reflective of evaluative findings by Crawford et al (2004) in West Yorkshire, and Johnston (2006, 2007) within the Metropolitan Police, ten of the twelve PCSOs engaged in the study became a PCSO due to its perceived capacity to act a stepping stone to becoming a police officer or as a testing ground for assessing their suitability to police work;

> "I'd applied for the force but had got knocked back so they suggested I apply for this to get experience….It might take me a few years but at least I'll have the chance of helping police make the streets a little safer in the meantime" (Observation with PCSO1, NPT A, 11, p5)

> "I was ready to do something different but didn't know whether being a police officer was right for me. So I thought it would make sense to do this for a while, see how I get on and then if I'm still interested, it'll stand me in good stead when I apply to be a PC" (Observation with PCSO12, NPT B, 10, p3).

Career aspirations also determined PCSO orientations to the role and organisation. Heightened aspirations to become police officers led to higher levels of anticipatory socialisation (Van Maanen, 1976) and

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unrealistic expectations of their likely involvement in crime control once in post. As indicated within Table 1 three distinct ideal types similar to those documented within police typological research (Reiner, 1978, Muir, 1977), , can be discerned from the data.

The 'Professional PCSO'. Similar to Reiner's (1978) 'bobby', Professional PCSOs adopt a role orientation commensurate with their original intent and purpose. Professional PCSOs recognise that their value, effectiveness and career advancement lies in achieving a balance between control, order maintenance and community engagement aspects of their remit. Professional PCSOs are therefore motivated by the potential for accumulating valuable experience and accruing essential police craft skills to support their future career development. Six of the twelve PCSOs; PCSOs 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9, were identified as Professional PCSOs.

The Frustrated PCSO. Similar to Reiner's (1978) 'New Centurion', Frustrated PCSOs define their role in terms of crimefighting and control. Motivated by heightened aspirations to become police officers, Frustrated PCSOs only secure job satisfaction when engaging in crime control and supporting the arrest and prosecution of suspects, and are consequently more likely to endorse cultural characteristics of suspicion, isolation, solidarity and sense of mission/love of action towards these ends. Unlike Professional PCSOs, Frustrated PCSOs are less inclined to use discretion and more likely to adopt an authoritative approach in their dealings with the public leading to isolation from the public and greater dependence on police officers to secure compliance and dispel conflict. Three of the twelve PCSOs; PCSOs 1, 5 and 10, were identified as Frustrated PCSOs.

The Disillusioned PCSO. Deeply frustrated with the role due to its lack of variation and limited capacity for enforcement, Disillusioned PCSOs have become apathetic to its purpose. The limited authority within

the role not only affords them subordinate status in the organisation, but undermines their capacity for engagement and meeting public expectations. Whilst more likely to adopt a befriending than authoritative approach when dealing with the public, they are less successful in securing compliance due to their limited command of craft skills and poor work ethic. Disillusioned PCSOs are suspicious, cynical and are less concerned to prove themselves leading to lower levels of integration. Three of the twelve PCSOs; PCSOs 2, 11 and 12, were identified as Disillusioned PCSOs

PCSO engagement and endorsement of the dominant culture

Neighbourhood police officers (NPOs) working across both neighbourhood police teams held cultural attributes associated with traditional accounts of police culture. Reflecting findings from O'Neill (2015), all but one of the twelve NPOs working within the two sectors valued PCSOs when they acted as intelligence gatherers for the purposes of crime control and enforcement. Officers defined their role as 'crimefighters' and prioritised the pursuit 'real police work' (Manning, 1997) and concurrently valued autonomy and loyalty within the team. Such was NPOs commitment to crime control and the organisational pressure to be productive, a number expressed frustrated with the limitations imposed by PCSO role restrictions and limited powers of enforcement during focus group discussions;

> "They're being held back by this force defining what they are about in terms of visibility that it's difficult to keep them challenged ....intelligence gathering is their biggest strength so we help them to capitalise on that to get the best possible outcomes for the team" (NPO Focus Group NPT 2, p4).

These defining characteristics were keenly felt by PCSOs, playing a central role in their socialisation into the NPTs. Both Frustrated and Professional PCSOs shared the same aspirations for action, variety and excitement as sworn police officers as represented in traditional accounts of police culture (Skolnick, 1966, Holdaway, 1983) but endorsed dominant characteristics of the culture to varying degrees depending upon the strength of their aspirations to become police officers and individual orientations to the role. PCSOs most likely to endorse traditional characteristics (the 'Frustrated PCSO') held high aspirations to become police officers, adopted a narrow, crimefighting orientation and expressed high levels of frustration due to their limited capacity to engage in crime control.

Suspicion. Like fully sworn officers, PCSOs must become especially attentive to the threat of confrontation and violence due to their limited authority and legitimate use of force. Developing an enhanced sense of suspicion and mistrust of the public operated as a form of self-preservation and means of securing legitimacy, particularly for Frustrated and Disillusioned PCSOs;

> Whilst on patrol in NPT 1, we noticed a group of teenage girls congregating outside the newsagents. The PCSOs were immediately suspicious.
>
> PCSO4 – "They'll be asking people to go into the shop to get them cigarettes or over the road for some drink. We'll just stand here and keep an eye on them".
>
> After a few minutes, a boy, aged around 10 years of age, approached PCSO5 saying he had found a samurai sword on the lawn outside the neighbour's back door. PCSO5 asked the boy to lead us to his home to collect it. As we walked away PCSO5 asked, "You're not wasting our time are you? Moving us away from the shop so your friends can get drunk?" (Observation, NPT A, 15, p4)

"What a hell-hole this is!' PCSO5 remarked. "Ah, it's alright when the sun shines", the NPO replied. "You reckon? Watching all the SRNs [police targets] hanging around outside the [employment centre]? It's a shame they don't have their numbers in neon above their heads – they'd be easier to chase. Saying that they all look the same so it's not too hard!" (Observation, NPT A, 17, p3)

However, rather than being driven by judgements regarding the potential criminality of members of the public, Professional PCSOs developed a sense of suspicion as a means of protection owing to the lack of powers of enforcement and personal protective equipment possessed by PCSOs, as the excerpt below aptly demonstrates;

"You don't know who you're dealing with so you've got to treat everyone with caution on the one hand and a bit of suspicion on the other...You quickly learn to go with your gut… we need to be attuned to any threat as we've very little to defend ourselves" (Observation with PCSO3, NPT A, 12, p5))

Having the correct 'instinct' for suspicious activity was highlighted as an indicator of competence and good judgement. Suspicion was therefore deemed an essential skill and cultural attribute due to its potential for protection and capacity for crime control. Those PCSOs who successfully developed this craft skill were more likely to receive support, be respected and become integrated within the team than those who failed to do so, as articulated by one supervising NPO;

"There are certain PCSOs we have here who, if they say they suspect something is going on then I'll be more inclined to react, and I think they know that. Purely because I know that they only contact us when there's good reason" (NPO, NPT 2).

Solidarity. Shared experiences of police work unites PCSOs with each other and with NPOs providing essential back up when needed (Skolnick, 1966). PCSOs are mutually dependent on each other and sworn officer colleagues to operate effectively and maintain order. PCSOs were acutely aware of the importance of working in partnership and presenting a united 'presentational' front to the public;

"We all know we need to work together, draw on each other's strengths to stay safe and be effective. We're all after the same goals and there's no time for heroes as the job's risky enough. We need to be united in presenting ourselves to the public so there's no room for fractions within the team" (Interview with PCSO6, p8)

The establishment of trust and solidarity within each neighbourhood team was thus a core aspect of PCSO socialisation, operation and integration. However, as the quote above implies this was not automatically granted by, or to, all PCSOs. Professional PCSOs actively sought in-group solidarity with other PCSOs, to maximise local knowledge and effectiveness, and with sworn officers as a means of facilitating integration and more varied occupational experiences. In contrast, Disillusioned PCSOs rejected solidarity as a cultural value, choosing to distance themselves from other PCSOs and making little attempt to impress senior officers. Solidarity with sworn officers was valued most highly by Frustrated PCSOs who perceived it as a self-affirming legitimising tool that helped them overcome the limited authority in the role and foster a sense of value. Whilst accompanying PCSO1 on patrol I asked her to describe what she enjoyed most about the role and the circumstances when she gained satisfaction;

"There's nothing better than when we're out on an operation. Yeah, we mightn't know the entirety of what's going on but we're part of it and we can feel like we've had a role in getting those scumbags locked up. It's the only time I feel valued and appreciated" (Observation with PCSO1, NPT A, 8, p8)

Reflective of occupational relationships documented in Rigakos' (2002) research, inter-organisational relationships were therefore defined by a hierarchy of solidarity according to PCSO orientations to the role and career aspirations. Professional PCSOs afforded immediate loyalty to partner PCSOs followed closely by NPOs in order to maximise skill development and effectiveness. Whilst Frustrated PCSOs sought to impress and establish trust from NPOs, Disillusioned PCSOs were wary of trusting sworn officers, only building relationships with selected individual officers for protection.

Isolation. In managing their occupational environment, PCSOs also engage in the classification of clientele. Employing similar labels documented in police cultural research to refer to those with whom they come into contact, such as 'scumbags' and 'scrotes' (Van Maanen, 1974, Smith and Gray, 1985), Frustrated and Disillusioned PCSOs particularly set themselves apart from local communities due to feelings of distrust and perceptions of widespread criminality within:

"I know a lot of them haven't had a very good start in life but that's no excuse. When you ask them what they want to do all they can say is drink. They're not interested in anything else...You do feel sorry for them when the house is in a state and their parents are drunks, but these little shits [anti-social young people] have everything and play on the fact that their parents can't discipline them" (Observation with PCSO5, A15, p4).

In contrast, Professional PCSOs tended to take a much more empathetic view to the problems experienced by residents, particularly to parents whose children were engaged in disorderly behaviour, as the following example demonstrates;

> PCSO6 and I left the property having been in there for well over half an hour. I remarked how patient I felt she had been with the mother of the child who was rumoured to be causing criminal damage to other properties in the area. PCSO6 remarked "a lot of these kids don't have anyone to look after them so it's hardly surprising when they get into trouble… I know they're [parents]going to react, they probably feel like they themselves are being judged, so I always try and put myself in that situation when I need to talk to them about what their son or daughter has been up to" (Observation with PCSO6, NPT A, 13, p6).

Machismo, crimefighting and mission. In prioritising crime control aspects of the police mandate and promoting physical strength and emotional resilience to the demands of police work, masculine occupational values (Fielding, 1994) were pervasive within both neighbourhood police teams. This sent a clear message to PCSOs regarding which behavioural, arguably gendered, attributes and which orientations to the role were valued within the organisation.

Female PCSOs were acutely aware of the need to control their emotions with a number suggesting they needed to endure, even tolerate, masculine values and accompanying sexist attitudes from male officers in order to develop relationships, facilitate integration, and further their careers within the organisation. In many respects, doing so was a means of managing their presentation of self, in this case as part of their

front stage performance (Goffman, 1990) to sworn officers, and their acceptance into the team as demonstrated by the following excerpts;

"Yeah I've had stick and they test you all of the time in how you react to stuff. But it's all bravado with most of them in the force. You've got to be able to take it...not be sensitive" (Interview with PCSO10, p6).

"A lot of the time you just have to go along with the banter or at least look like it as it's no good making waves. Some of their attitudes stink...I keep reminding myself that I need people on my side to get where I want to be" (Interview with PCSO9)

Such was the pervasiveness of masculinity within neighbourhood teams that some female PCSOs felt that male PCSOs were more likely to be legitimised by police officers and instantly accepted into the masculinised dominant culture due to their enhanced capacity to use physical force. The masculinist culture is therefore ultimately divisive and exclusionary.

"He [PCSO05] does rib me all of the time about being over-conscientious...he keeps saying, "you've got to learn to have a skive, that's what the job's all about". I don't like the thoughts of people thinking I'm a skiver....I'm not about to do his job for him but they [NPOs] do think he's the blue eyed boy and can do no wrong...if there's a time when they need an extra body to do something that carries any possible risk they'll go to him first" (Observation with PCSO4, p9).

This masculinist culture and the dominant crime control ethos within police work reinforces Frustrated PCSOs' sense of mission, as documented by the following comment made by one Frustrated PCSO whilst assisting in a drugs raid:

> We waited at the rear of the building in the event that [name of suspect] would try to escape through the back door…PCSO8 remarked, "I know we've got to be here in case they try it, but at the same time you feel you're missing out. You know you're a part of the job but I just want to see his face when they cuff him" (Observation with PCSO8, NPTA, 25, p6)

PCSOs were therefore left with little doubt that they must align themselves with this dominant crime control ethos in order to secure a sense of value and to become accepted and integrated (Cosgrove and Ramshaw, 2015). In reaction, PCSOs pursued the possibility for crime control during times of inactivity and limited tasking. During these quiet shifts, PCSOs either spent their time patrolling disorder hotspots, monitoring the movements of young people or patrolling the vicinity of the homes of suspects. Disillusioned PCSOs engaged in these activities on occasion to 'keep busy' or pass the time, Professional PCSOs perceived these periods as opportunities to develop relationships with young people and gather community intelligence, whilst Frustrated PCSOs did so due to the possibility of action. Frustrated PCSOs relished any opportunity to accompany NPOs on duty and to attend 'jobs' if they were lucky enough to arrive at the scene before another officer did so.

The pressure to feed into the performance culture of the organisation however was a source of frustration for Disillusioned PCSOs due to their limited powers of enforcement and the lack of value attached to engagement or reassurance. PCSO2 below had entered the role with a broad role orientation and a

commitment to engagement and reassurance but had abandoned such devotion due to the lack of priority given to such ends;

> "I'd only been in the job for five weeks when I was called in to discuss why I wasn't putting stop forms in for every encounter, why I wasn't doing radio checks as often as they wanted…. they're only concerned with judging what you do in that way, how it might lead to arrests and what have you" (Observation with PCSO2, NPT 1, 4, p1).

The dominant crimefighting ethos conjointly encourages the assimilation of other cultural characteristics including a strong sense of mission, enhanced suspicion and inter-group solidarity. PCSOs however are concomitantly excluded from the masculinized culture, participating only from the 'sidelines' and securing transitory membership.

The dominant culture was therefore embodied by PCSOs to varying degrees according to their orientation to the role, desire for integration and career aspirations. The embodiment of dominant cultural characteristics provides functional benefits of for all PCSOs from providing a protective framework for coping with the demands of their occupational environment (Fielding, 1994, Paoline, 2003) to fostering a sense of value and integration through their resulting engagement in crime control activities. However, in adopting a wider role orientation and exposing themselves to a wider array of experiences, Professional PCSOs develop a command of essential craft skills and are better able to demonstrate their effectiveness in engaging with the community and gathering intelligence. Their wider role orientation also has dividends in relation to integration. In demonstrating their willingness to engage in the more mundane 'service' style tasks and demonstrating their reliability when called to do so, Professional PCSOs are

deployed in more diverse ways than their counterparts and thereby become integrated without having to demonstrate an exaggerated commitment to traditional values;

> "[PCSO9] has really proved her weight in gold. She's always there when you need her, doesn't moan on and consistently shows good judgement and discretion. I don't have to worry about her…she's one of us" (NPO Focus Group NPT A, p3)

> "You go out there and you do your job. When it comes to jobs and scenes, you shout up and you get yourself known…you're willing to get stuck in and help…I like the fact that people [NPOs] would come to me first as they knew they could rely on me" (Interview with PCSO8, NPT A, p14).

As emphasised by Fielding (1988) and Chan (1998) in relation to police officers engagement with cultural values, Professional PCSOs negotiate aspects of the police culture when doing so expedites trust and integration with sworn officers and facilitates opportunities for further skill development.

Discussion

Echoing the work of Loftus (2008, 2010) and Crank (2014), findings presented here suggest that the defining characteristics of the traditional culture – specifically suspicion, solidarity, isolation and mission –have not only been resilient to police modernisation but have extended their reach and found resonance amongst PCSOs as members of the extended police family. This is explained by the functional benefits these characteristics afford for PCSOs due to their limited authority and legitimacy, their desire for

integration and aspirations to become police officers, and the absence of alternative internal career development opportunities. Reiner's (2010; 188) assertion that cultural characteristics become dominant as they offer 'a patterned set of understandings that help officers cope with the pressures and tensions confronting the police' also applies to the experience(s) of PCSOs. PCSOs were fully attuned to the danger exposed to whilst on patrol; exacerbated by their limited powers of enforcement, protective equipment, training and subsequent credibility within certain sections of local communities. For many, particularly in the first 12 months of being in post when their policing craft skills were still in their infancy, the culture, especially solidarity with police officer colleagues and established sense of mission, supported PCSOs in carrying out their role and upholding credibility.

The prevailing pull of the performance culture and widespread aspirations to become police officers have thus encouraged PCSOs to become passive recipients of the traditional occupational culture and inhibited the development of a distinct PCSO occupational subculture. Whilst PCSOs are socialised into the traditional culture and its associated working rules, they are also excluded from it. In a similar but more demoralizing vein to that documented by Rigakos (1998) owing to PCSOs' membership within organisation, PCSOs' limited authority and restricted capacity to engage in 'real police work' distances them from fully sworn officers as they are denied full membership within the culture. Regardless of how convincing PCSOs are in endorsing dominant attitudes or in proving their value to sworn officers, PCSOs cannot circumvent their 'outsider' status and can only secure marginal membership, leading to some, identified here as Disillusioned PCSOs, to disassociate themselves with the role and organisation, and others, Frustrated PCSOs, to commit more strongly to their aspirations to become fully sworn police officers.

Both the typology outlined above and supporting evidence of PCSOs endorsement of the traditional culture present implications for police cultural reform, PCSO integration and the viability of PCSOs as dedicated patrol officers tasked with the primary aim of reassurance. The typology presented here clearly demonstrates how PCSOs aspirations and desire for acceptance re-energises traditional cultural values due to the reassurance, personal satisfaction and contribution to aspirations endorsement brings. The masculinised nature of police work and the ingrained value attached to crimefighting and securing results (Loftus, 2010, Cosgrove and Ramshaw, 2015, O'Neill, 2015) will continue to undermine efforts towards cultural reform. Reform efforts designed to improve diversity, transparency and openness, and/or operational effectiveness through citizen-informed policing for example, might help improve public confidence and even reduce isolation between officers and the public if embraced. However, old habits die hard and officers will continue to protect and endorse aspects of the traditional culture due to the reassurance and functional benefits it brings, both in terms of practice and role in constructing occupational identities. Only when police officer orientations and organisational value attached to 'softer' forms of policing change and when the organisation demonstrates a greater commitment to developing the craft of PCSO work, specifically the skills of communication, persuasion and negotiation, will PCSOs look less to traditional cultural values as a structure towards acceptance and integration, or as a basis from which to forge their occupational identities. Perhaps then, the battle for acceptance will be eased and PCSOs might be granted the space to develop more distinct subcultural values as envisioned within more appreciative accounts of police culture (Waddington, 1999, Foster, 2003).

Whilst half of the PCSOs engaged in the study adopted a role orientation comparable to their original intent and purpose, the other half exhibited cultural characteristics and orientations that were entirely inconsistent with their primary role of reassurance and community engagement. Whilst more readily endorsed by Frustrated PCSOs, the dominant police performance culture also permeates the role

orientations and behaviour of Professional PCSOs due to their desire for integration and pursuit of 'craftskills' of policing (Chatterton, 1995) to support future applications to become police officers, albeit to a lesser degree. Government efforts to reinstate quality of service and order maintenance within local policing and to realign the police with the public via neighbourhood policing (Quinton and Morris, 2008), is mitigated by the resilience of the dominant traditional police culture. It would appear that whilst PCSOs have supported diversity within the organisation (Johnston, 2006) the pull of the performance culture and the alliance of crime control with notions of 'real police work' is embraced by PCSOs. It seems fitting therefore to expect that the precedence given to crimefighting by the current Coalition government will be welcomed by PCSOs, if this provides additional opportunities for engaging more directly in crime control activities.

There are however a number of caveats to the findings presented in this article. Firstly, this study cannot deduce generalisations about occupational attitudes and characteristics held by PCSOs within other forces where the traditional police culture may be less pronounced. There may be a greater organisational commitment towards community oriented policing within other forces that potentially could lead a reduced likelihood of endorsement of the more negative aspects of the culture (Cochran and Bromley 2003). Secondly, this research was conducted amongst PCSOs with limited powers of enforcement; PCSOs operating with an extended range of powers, might secure a greater sense of value from the role resulting in less variation in orientations and alignment with aspects of the traditional culture. Thirdly, typologies only categorise individuals into ideal types at a particular point in time; role orientations of individual PCSOs, and their endorsement of the cultural characteristics above, are subject to a range of powerful influences including the political culture in which they operate and their immediate occupational environment (Loftus, 2008). The individual will continue to exert a powerful influence on the acceptance or rejection of cultural values (Chan et al, 2003). As identified by Herbert (1998) individual PCSOs may

develop individual normative orders to direct their behaviour according to their experiences on the street whereby allegiances to a particular ideal type and the functional benefit of specific aspects of the culture varies over time. However, what is clear from the findings presented here is that there is a tendency for PCSOs to view the role as stepping stone to something better.

Whilst driven by career aspirations to become police officers, this viewpoint was confounded by the lack of opportunities for advancement within the role. It is regrettable that the intended professional PCSO career pathway outlined by the National Police Improvement Agency (Home Office, 2010) has been shelved during the current period of austerity. Given that PCSOs operate within communities of conflict with limited authority and powers of enforcement, this structure, providing PCSOs were concomitantly encouraged to develop essential craft skills, particularly communication and conflict resolution, may have helped to retain the more experienced, skilful PCSO, akin to the Professional PCSO, within the post.

Despite variation in organisational styles, powers of enforcement held by PCSOs across forces and shifts in alliances to particular ideal types, the traditional police culture, where dominant, will impact upon PCSO socialisation and orientations to their role. PCSOs will still share the same role, status and limited authority and are thus likely to experience similar challenges in securing an occupational identity and achieving a sense of value. The precedence given to crime control and enforcement perpetuates cultural values that encourage a narrow role orientation and an alignment to the organisation rather than the community. If engagement and community development are deemed secondary concerns, the essential 'craftskills' of negotiation, persuasion and communication that accompany such activities, and upon which PCSOs must depend on to be effective and maintain order, risk being undermined. Further, the more PCSOs are involved in enforcement, the closer aligned to police officers they become (Cosgrove and Ramshaw, 2015) and more distanced they will become from local communities and relationships

developed therein. Therefore, whilst O'Neill and McCarthy's (2014) research of neighbourhood police teams provides room for optimism regarding the potential of partnership working to overcome previously perceived negative aspects of police culture, this study suggests that the traditional features of police culture are very much at work and are serving to undermine broader efforts towards 'softer' forms of policing and the realisation of PCSOs' unique role as 'bridge-builder' (Merritt, 2010) between the police and local communities.

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