

## **The culture of the police service**

### **1 Introduction**

This paper will focus on the organisational and occupational culture of the police service, clarifying the difference between these two concepts and their impact on members of the service. In particular it will focus on the informal occupational culture of the police service: the way in which it has developed and why, when combined with the peculiar demands of policing, this could create an environment where it is acknowledged that “overt and covert racism still exists” (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC), 1999: 5.1.5) and bullying might be particularly problematic, “ There’s a lost [sic] of bullying here. It really shakes your confidence” (HMIC, 2000a:7.14).

### **2 Organisational and occupational culture**

Anthropology identified that the ideologies and behaviours of people from different countries are culturally specific. However, since the 1980’s there has also been a growing interest in the notion that cultural influences exist within organisations with employees coming to share the system of meanings, understandings, values and beliefs of their company (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985). In this way the culture of an organisation serves to reduce employee uncertainties by providing acceptable and accepted ways of expressing these ideologies (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Thus the influence of organisational culture is seen as operating from the top down, i.e. from management to workers. As such organisational culture does not reflect the formal stance of the organisation as represented by official documentation and policy: organisational culture is formulated through the actual behaviour condoned by the management. This contrasts with occupational culture where the source of such influence is seen as emanating from the front-line workers themselves (Paoline, 2003). Both provide an explanation as to why individuals who deviate from cultural expectations can be seen as troublesome and may therefore become marginalized.

According to the Concise English Dictionary, culture is ‘the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which constitute the shared basis of action’. It encompasses ‘taken-for-granted’ emotionally charged beliefs guiding behaviour, and cultural forms, which are the overt expressions of those beliefs (Trice, 1993). Culture is seen as fulfilling the need to construct collective meanings in order to manage uncertainty and anxiety. These meanings may, and indeed do, change over time and space but they act as the guiding principles for members of a community. As such they can also have implications for non-members. For example in a service such as policing the way officers treat each other is seen as an important indicator as to the way they will interact with the public: “If officers treat each other in a fair and non-discriminatory way, this will manifest itself in an improved service to the public” (HMIC, 1999: 5.1.6).

Organisational culture might serve as a unifying mechanism, but Martin (1992) cautions that it should not be thought of as a stable objective reality but as fluid and dynamic changing between and within organisations. Her interpretation of organisational culture recognised that, even intra-organisationally, there is the potential for sub-cultures to exist: perhaps here referring to occupational cultural influences. Therefore, in looking at the culture of the police service, both of these aspects will be explored.

### **3 The characterisation of police culture**

There has been a considerable body of research into the occupational culture of the police service (e.g. Fielding, 1988; Reiner, 1985, 2000; Waddington, 1999a) which has identified the core elements as being “its sense of mission; the desire for action and excitement, especially the glorification of violence; an ‘Us/Them’ division of the social world with its in-group isolation and solidarity on one hand, and racist components on the other; its authoritarian conservatism; and its suspicion and cynicism, especially towards the law and legal procedures” (Waddington, 1999a: 287). It is further suggested that these occupational cultural elements are to be found

in police organisations throughout the world, e.g. Britain, U.S.A. and Japan, despite major differences in national cultures (Waddington, 1999a), and possibly in the organisational cultures embedded within the occupational culture (Paoline, 2003).

It is argued that traces of the present can be located with the heroes and traditions of the past, and that to understand the present police culture it is necessary to consider it in its historical context. Seleti (1998, cited in Marks, 2000) asserts that police institutions retain and even maintain legacies of historical behaviour, which are revitalised through the ceremonial rituals such as passing out parades performed by each new generation of officers bonding the past and present through their shared memory.

The structure of the police service was based on a military model: hierarchical and disciplined and recruiting primarily from the blue-collar and working-class communities and as such associated with a form of masculinity that emphasises physical strength (Miller, 1977; Miller, Forest & Jurik, 1999). As such it retains traces of the military ethos reflected in the cultural forms of uniform, rank, drill and saluting and in the ideological focus on exclusivity, masculinity, desire for action and an exalted view of violence. Dunivin (1994) describes the traditional model of military culture as based on conservatism, masculinity, warrior status, exclusivity, homogeneity, hostility towards minorities, and separatism. The band of brothers represented in the thin red line of soldiers defending the country is replaced in policing terms by what Reiner (1992:112) describes as the thin blue line between anarchy and order.

It might be expected that modern-day police officers are far removed from their military inception and that they would be better represented in Reiner's terms as 'citizens-in-uniform' (Reiner, 1992:68). However, Scraton, Sim & Skidmore (1990) argue that the powers invested in the office (e.g. the use of the truncheon and firearms with restrictions) and armed and special powers status, mark a perceived return towards para-militarism.

Even in day-to-day policing where much of the work is both routine and tedious the myth persists of frequent high-speed chases and violent encounters with criminals (e.g. Smith & Gray, 1983; Fielding, 1994). In more recent research, Ford (2003) describes the role of 'war stories', which recount tales of heroic extreme, presenting images of policing removed from tedium and often contradicting official procedures. This emphasis on danger and violence strengthens the perceived importance of the cohesive informal occupational group and heightens the barriers to informal acceptance for anyone perceived as an 'outsider', and who, therefore, cannot be counted on to conform to the group norms (Martin, 1989). It also perpetuates the notion of the police service as a masculine culture, and one in which the denigration of women, an intolerance of homosexuality (Smith & Gray, 1983), and an expectation that members should be physically and mentally brave and reliable is normative. Blumenfeld (1992) noted that any suggestion of feminine traits such as gentleness or sensitivity encouraged colleagues to brand men as 'sissies' or 'faggots'.

Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory provides some additional explanation as to why the focus on masculinity is relevant to issues of bullying. Bem lists as typical and exclusively masculine traits, aggressiveness, assertiveness, forcefulness, willingness to take a stand, and willingness to take risks. Whilst the masculine trait of aggression has been directly linked to bullying (e.g. Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Zapf & Leymann, 1996), the association between masculinity and risk-taking has also been linked with attitudes confirming the importance of toughness and lack of feeling (Ainsworth, 1995) and contempt for the more "caring" aspects of police work (Stanley, 2002). Findings are also available that would suggest that continuous testing, even to excess, of member's ability to tolerate teasing, ridicule and horseplay is a characteristic of male-dominated organisations (Brodsky, 1976; Collinson, 1988) and that this may lead to normalisation of intimidation or bullying behaviour (Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia, 1995). An over-emphasis on masculinity could therefore be seen as contributing towards a bullying environment.

There has been a considerable amount of interest in the ways in which the traditional culture of the service is reflected in the treatment of its officers. HMIC (2000a: 2.3)

reporting on their discussions with officers and staff across a number of constabularies stated, “There was a general feeling that the Service lacked a cultural or managerial ethos on how to treat staff”. This finding has been supported by a recent study investigating resignations and transfers from ten constabularies, in which 67% of the respondents reported that management behaviour and 53% that organisational culture had fallen below expectations during their probationary period (Cooper & Ingram, 2004). These figures rose to 75% and 60% respectively if the time-frame reflected the last six months’ service.

HMIC might have been referring to the organisational culture of the police service, but the traits of conservatism and authoritarianism forming part of the occupational culture have been linked to police officers’ reluctance to tolerate divergence from the norm in their own colleagues and society generally (Reiner, 1992). This might also lead to unfair treatment of those not conforming to expectations.

In addition to carrying out audits on individual constabularies, HMIC also carries out thematic investigations into subject matters of concern to the service generally. There have been no thematics addressing the issue of bullying *per se*, but there have been seven major reports on race and diversity issued by HMIC in the last ten years (Equal Opportunities within the Police Service, 1993 (HMIC, 1993); Developing Diversity in the Police Service, 1995 (HMIC, 2000a); Winning the Race – Policing Plural Communities, 1997 (HMIC1997); Winning the Race Revisited, 1999 (HMIC, 1999); Policing London – Winning Consent, 2000 (HMIC, 2000b); Winning the Race Embracing Diversity, 2001(HMIC, 2001a); and Diversity Matters, 2003 (HMIC, 2003a).

It is argued that parallels can be drawn between the way the service treats minority groups and the way it treats officers on grounds of individual difference, and that the thematics focussing on diversity may therefore hold some relevance to bullying. It has also been noted that harassment on specific categorical grounds such as sex, race or religion, which may be mentioned in investigations into racism or sexism within the police service, can equally be regarded as manifestations of bullying (Björkqvist,

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Österman & Hjelt-Back, 1994). However, unlike generic bullying these specific forms of harassment are subject to anti-discrimination legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, 2003, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

The number of thematic investigations into issues of tolerance and diversity has increased in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (McPherson, 1999), which again raised awareness of issues of racism within the police service. These have highlighted the difficulties encountered by black officers trying to integrate into a predominantly white police service, and on the ways in which this impacts on the interactions of the police with a multi-cultural public. For example in their report 'Winning the Race – Revisited' (HMIC, 1999:9) HMIC note that "A minority of officers and some civilian staff still exhibit inappropriate racist language and behaviour with and towards colleagues. It stretches credibility to accept that the use of such language or behaviour does not surface in their dealings with the public."

HMIC in their report Diversity Matters (2003a: 3.46) concluded that some sections of "the force/organisation did not seek to embrace or deliver change" in respect to diversity amongst officers. If the acceptability of recruits or probationers is based on a favourable comparison with the existing proto-typical service member then any person who does not conform to the 'white, working-class male' may be seen as unacceptable. Furthermore if acceptability to the current service members is confused with suitability to the police service then these same officers might be subjected to those informal practices designed to discourage 'unsuitable' or 'unreliable' probationers (Fielding, 1988). According to Fielding these activities are considered justified by experienced officers, who seek to maintain the coherence and integrity of the service. As such they may be explained in terms of the core cultural component of conservatism.

Women officers may be similarly discriminated against. 'The Gender Agenda' (British Association of Women Police, 2000) was developed to address the issues affecting the ability of women officers being able to reach their true potential and to

challenge inappropriate and gender-biased testing. In so doing it recognised that the traditional masculine culture of the police service may create an environment that is unfavourable to women. This would seem to be supported by findings that there is an imbalance of women officers across the rank structure and the specialisms of the service (HMIC, 2000a: 7.6). In that testing procedures and promotional boards are determined at higher levels it might be supposed that these reflect the organisational culture of the police service. As such the message as to the equality of women officers might be perceived as ambivalent. McNeill (1996: 5) argues that until the overall composition of the police service is changed dramatically women will never be totally accepted because they belong to the one of the 'out-groups' in an environment where the 'in-group' is 'white, Anglo-Saxon, and male'.

It is not only members of obvious minorities such as blacks, women and gays who might be perceived as different from the mainstream. There are cultural similarities, e.g. ranks, discipline and uniform, between the fire service and the police service, so that lessons learned in one may be applicable to the other. In looking at bullying within the fire service Archer (1999) reported on the arbitrariness of individual differences, or 'otherness', resulting in bullying, these included: not liking football, not wishing to go to the pub every day, possessing a university degree, being young, being female and being black.

McNeill (1996) notes that the cult of masculinity encourages the drinking of alcohol and other behaviours serving as signs of manliness. Archer's (1999) findings regarding the bullying of individuals not wishing to join in such activities, resonate in McNeill's work which features quotes from officers, such as:

*"New people come in, they find out quickly that this is the way you've got to be: you've got to slag off your wife, you've got to slag off women, you've got to talk about sex, and if you don't there's something wrong with you and you won't fit in. And the people who don't join in are seen as outcasts, and I guess, effeminate for the guys, maybe, or just not good police officers."* (McNeill, 1996:4).

The notion of otherness or separateness when applied inter-organisationally is not unique to the police service. Indeed it is a well-documented aspect of group process underpinning social psychological theories such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981). It does, however, have particular ramifications within the police setting when it is applied intra-organisationally. It has been pointed out that individuals not matching the social prototype may face artificial problems that make it extremely difficult for them to perform successfully in their work (Miller *et al*, 1999). Officers seen to be different in any way from their colleagues are also at risk of becoming marginalized and losing the support of fellow officers. This form of isolation, which may be regarded as bullying (e.g. Einarsen, 2000; Leymann, 1989) can also result in psychological stress. As collegiate support has been shown to serve an important function in mitigating the effects of stress on police officers (Brown & Campbell, 1994), it might be expected that the stress associated with social isolation would be compounded by the withdrawal of such support.

Ainsworth, (1995: 148) reports that in a study of the training priorities of law enforcement agencies in America the ability to handle personal stress headed the list. This therefore represents something of a 'Catch 22' situation for a bullied officer: in order to stay in the service and stop the bullying (s)he would need to complain, but if (s)he was ideal officer material (s)he would not be isolated and would have the support of colleagues and would be able to withstand bullying and would not need to complain, in complaining (s)he might be seen as not being able to handle personal stress and therefore not ideal officer material. At the same time from the perspective of the bully the victim's act of complaining confirms their unsuitability for the job and justifies the bullying.

This association between otherness and bullying is a problem recognised by the service. For example the report 'Diversity Matters' (HMIC, 2003a) which addressed the need for the service to accept and appreciate officers from different backgrounds and with different skills, attitudes and experiences expressed the need for a "working environment free from any unfair practice, bullying, prejudice and discrimination, in

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order to underpin their retention and to enable them to develop to their full potential.” (HMIC, 2003a: 1.10).

Prenzler (1997) explains how the division of the social world into ‘us and them’ lead police officers to experience a sense of isolation from the public, and how this coupled with cynicism of the law results in shared feelings of solidarity within the service. This may be considered as unsurprising given the dependence upon fellow officers in both the working and social environment: shared histories, shared challenges and shared fates. However, this system, which encourages an *esprit de corps*, and as such is good for morale and efficiency (Hain, 1979), can also have negative repercussions for outsiders or even insiders seen as different in some way from the norm or seeking to question the activities of other group members.

Examples have already been given as to the way in which this ‘us/them’ division may extend internally within the police service such that officers perceived in any way as ‘other’ may be excluded from this solidarity. Research has also shown that an adverse effect of group solidarity is manifested in the covering up of officers’ mistakes (Holdaway, 1983) and a reluctance to co-operate with investigations into misconduct (e.g. Stoddard, 1968; Westley, 1970). Goldsmith (1990) draws attention to the reciprocity of solidarity:

*“In an environment perceived as hostile and unpredictable the police culture offers its members reassurance that the other officers will pull their weight in police work, that they will defend, back up and assist their colleagues when confronted with external threats and that they will maintain secrecy in the face of external investigations. In return for loyalty and solidarity members of the police culture enjoy considerable individual autonomy to get on with the job.”*  
(Goldsmith, 1990: 93)

The notion of solidarity with its associated code of silence would also help to explain the reluctance of victims and witnesses of bullying to report such incidents to senior

officers. A similar effect has been recorded on the other side of the forensic divide where the presence of a code of silence in the inmate subculture of prisons leads to the expectation that prisoners should not inform on fellow inmates. Individuals who report bullying are not only likely to be ostracised but their action is taken as justification for further bullying (Ireland, 2000).

HMIC recorded levels of formal complaints resulting in grievance procedures are low. In the HMIC (2000a: 9.2) equal opportunities thematic report 'Developing Diversity in the Police Service' a quote from a male constable interviewed during the process serves to illustrate the problem as reflected in the low usage of the grievance procedure, "I felt if I raised a grievance it would ruin my career".

#### **4 The role of training and socialisation**

Moreland & Levine (1989) suggest that newcomers to a group adopt the role of "new member" displaying greater actual (or seeming) anxiety, passivity, dependence and conformity than established group members, and in so doing facilitate their own socialisation.

The culture of the police service is inculcated through the initial training process ("the planned efforts of the organisation to transform recruits into novice members" Fielding, 1988: 1) and consolidated through informal socialisation occurring in contact with existing members (Fielding, 1988). In essence socialisation represents the process of identity transformation (Fielding, 1988).

As the service operates as a closed system all of the basic, and much of the specialist training, is carried out in-house by personnel who will themselves have undergone a similar exercise in previous years reflecting the assumption that "he [sic] who has been accustomed to submit to discipline will be considered best qualified to command" (Miller, 1977:40). This coupled with the policy of promoting from within

serves to ensure continuity and cultural knowledge but it also encourages insularity and weakens ties with the outside world.

According to Trice & Beyer (1993) the socialisation process shapes individuals to fit within and continue the prevailing social order by imparting the knowledge to new members of how to think and behave to conform to the needs of the social group. This would seem to be supported by Berg (1990) who noted that training was so structured as to limit individual initiative thereby increasing individual levels of insecurity and uncertainty and exposing recruits to the effects of peer pressure and group norming.

The training of new police recruits includes a twelve-week residential course at a dedicated centre removing them from familial and familiar surroundings and immersing them in both the formal and informal rules of police conduct. During their time at the training centre it has been noted that in addition to the formal lessons of policing covering issues such as procedures, policies and practices elaborated through Force Orders, the attention to smartness and the emphasis on adherence to discipline teach the recruits the importance of compliance within the organisation (Fielding, 1988).

This same training and socialisation process also exposes recruits to an unwritten agenda on the informal rules of policing such as the code of silence and loyalty to fellow officers. There is some evidence to suggest that at least a proportion of this informal cultural knowledge is at odds with the stated organisational ideology. An extreme example would be the anti-social behaviour noted at Hendon Police Training Academy (Marzouk, 2004) where Commander Stephen Allen of the Metropolitan Police Diversity Directorate, confirmed a problem with racism and bullying within the centre, but other examples also exist. For instance Prokos & Padavic (2002) noted that, although the service specifically embraces gender equality so that both the student policy manual and the explicit programme are scrupulously gender-neutral, recruits receive oblique instruction inflating the role of masculinity in the service and denigrating women. Their study makes two important contributions to the

understanding of why police culture might foster bullying: a) it draws the distinction between the formal and informal line, and b) it lends support to Waddington's (1999a) assertion that masculinity is one of the core elements of the culture. As such it also provides a possible explanation as to why bullying could represent a recurring problem within the service.

Mention has already been made of the rites designed to put under pressure probationers who may prove to be unreliable colleagues (Fielding, 1988). Similar activity has been recorded in the construction industry where work teams were seen to use teasing and ridicule to push new apprentices to the limit as a means of testing their ability to surmount their difficult working conditions (Riemer, 1979). In this way psychological stressors are used as informal tools testing the resilience of recruits in terms of masculine traits. Supposedly this is to ensure their suitability for the job, but in the process this also serves to signal and perpetuate the culture of masculinity.

It might be argued that, as initiation processes are a time-limited rite of passage experienced by all recruits to the organisation, they are qualitatively different to bullying and that as such their study contributes little to the understanding of the bullying phenomenon. The counter-arguments are that a) initiation rites are an example of informally socially sanctioned behaviour of an aggressive, oppressive or exclusory nature conforming to those indicated in the bullying literature; b) as such they are likely to be experienced as bullying by at least some of the recipients; and c) that this process might set a pattern for behaviour against which subsequent intra-organisational inter-personal behaviour is measured. In other words barracking, teasing and ridiculing might be seen as the cultural norm.

Within the police setting, practices testing the resilience of recruits have been defended on the grounds that "whatever the police organization dishes out the public can exceed" (Fielding, 1988:68). This suggests a perception of the public as hostile thereby validating the need for 'strong' officers. As such it also emphasises the perceived divide between the police and the public ('us/them').

As Fielding's (1988) research was carried out some time ago it might be hoped that this attitude has changed, but more recent research in the Fire Service, which is comparable in many ways to the Police Service has highlighted similar activities (Archer, 1999).

The informal education of a police officer that runs in parallel with the formal component taught in training school is continued in the police community through the socialisation process. Early patrol experience is often gained in the company of tutor constables (TCs) who impart valuable knowledge on the practicalities of policing, some of which may well diverge from approved procedures (Fielding, 1988). For instance Smith & Gray (1983) describe how newcomers may be exposed to minor infringements of organisational policy as a test of their reliability and solidarity with the group. Newcomers acquiescing with the group might be acting in such a way in order to avoid conflict whilst at the same time retaining their previous attitude, i.e. compliance without internalisation, or their actions might indicate a change in their attitudes at a deeper and more permanent level, i.e. internalisation of the cultural values. Socialisation provides the means by which recruits absorb and are absorbed into the culture, although there is some debate as to the degree to which this is effective (Fielding, 1988) and as to whether these processes occur throughout the service or only within segments of the police ranks (Cochran & Bromley, 2003).

By this stage the recruits have been separated from their traditional support network of family and friends and have been physically and socially relocated so that their separation extends beyond the work and training environment. Cain (1973) points out that the role of police officer sets individuals apart from society and that it is difficult for them to manage non-police relationships which might be compromised by the requirements of the job or which, according to Stanley (2002), might compromise their job. This leads them to develop off-duty friendship networks with fellow officers thereby strengthening their bonds with the police and isolating them still further from their communities and even families. With so much overlap between the social and professional network there is a strong motivation for officers to understand and to adhere to the police occupational culture. This is reflected in Fielding's

(1988:190) observation that “probationers might go along with expressions of racial prejudice in order to ‘fit in’ with occupational culture”: the same could be said of bullying.

Through this process of training and socialisation officers become bonded together, sharing views of the world, social ties and commitment. The cultural group becomes a reference group for its members who look to each other for emotional support and confirmation of the meanings they ascribe to events. Members thereby develop an awareness of their own and others’ position and identity in terms of the cognitive, emotional and social framework provided by their cultural beliefs and practices (Trice & Beyer, 1993). A change of social group with a different culture or sub-culture will result in a change of self-image. Sub-cultures may arise when members develop competing ideologies regarding for example the nature of the work the choice of appropriate techniques the correct stance toward outsiders or the best way to treat people (Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). In an organisation such as the police service, where officers may make vertical and horizontal moves for instance to a higher rank or a different department with particular requirements the possibility of sub-cultural differences needs to be considered.

## **5 Evidence for sub-cultures in the police service**

The core elements of the culture of policing might be universal but there is “a growing body of knowledge on the police that highlights cultural segmentation over homogeneity” (Paoline, 2003: 206).

Research has identified cultural differences associated with the various management roles of policing. However, the findings depend upon the way in which these roles are defined. For instance Reuss-Ianni & Ianni (1983) noted that differences could be identified between so-called ‘street cop culture’ and ‘management cop culture’. In such a cultural division the behavioural norm is more likely to be determined by the numerically superior group, i.e. the street cops, who also paradoxically have more

discretionary powers than their superiors. As such it would be expected that in terms of categorising bullying, the management contingent would be more influenced by organisational culture and therefore closely aligned to policy definitions of bullying, whereas the 'street cops' would be more influenced by the occupational culture and therefore more likely to base their assessment on the behavioural norm.

Manning (1993) identified a different set of subcultures of policing within the service reflecting command, middle-management and lower participants. The HMIC Inspection Report of Dyfed-Powys Police (HMIC, 2001c: 3.10), which recorded that middle managers developed a culture of bullying through their emphasis upon performance at the expense of working relationships, suggests that such a cultural divide may be relevant to the present study. Wortley & Homel, (1995) note differences in regional or station management reflecting the prevailing local conditions. It is possible to explain these differences in terms of Sackman's (1992) 'axiomatic knowledge', which describes knowledge in the form of those guiding principles held by management not necessarily shared or even communicated across all organisational levels.

Given that Trice & Beyer (1993) suggest that subcultures are more likely to be realised under conditions of collective socialisation, high task interdependencies and physical proximity between individuals, it is not surprising that support has also been forthcoming for the existence of sub-cultures founded on departmental membership. Manning's (1980) work on the drug squad suggests that the departure from the normal police environment leads to a change in officer's interpretative apparatus, and Skolnick & Fyfe (1993) in trying to explain the beating by Los Angeles Police Department officers of Rodney King in 1991 attributed police over-zealousness in the use of violence to the peculiar demands and distinctive cultures of certain police departments. The links have already been drawn between masculinity and bullying, so it would be anticipated that there would be differences in perceptions of bullying between departments, depending on their relative emphasis on a 'macho' culture.

A logically extension of the findings of the research demonstrating sub-cultural influences in particular departments would be that there is a widespread network of department-specific cultures, reflecting differences in their operational roles and missions (service or law enforcement).

Apart from differences between management levels and departments, sub-cultural influences have also been found in a number of other areas of policing, for instance between officers serving in community policing and their counterparts serving in traditional roles (Fielding, 1995) and between officers serving in urban and rural settings (Websdale & Johnson, 1997) with those in the urban community showing a higher degree of detachment than their rural counterparts, and therefore being more likely to share the notions of bullying with their colleagues.

## **6 Anti-bullying policies**

It should not be presumed that the culture to which an organisation aspires as might be indicated in various work policies and declared values, is an accurate reflection of the organisation's cultural reality as measured by managerial attention and rewarded behaviour (Hagberg & Heifetz, 2000). Fielding (1989) draws attention to the analytic distinction to be made between formal and informal aspects of organisation. The fact that formal models do not square with what members actually do has led to descriptions of the informal organisation as a patchwork of unofficial work practices and norms. The problem that this difference represents was acknowledged in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report :

*“I think that the problem is not one of individual predisposition to wrongdoing but of structure, or what I have earlier called cultural failure. The culture of the police and some procedures in the criminal justice system actually make it totally improbable that all police officers will behave as the system lays down that they should.” (MacPherson, 1999: 6.61)*

Hoel (1999) points to the importance of developing bespoke policy documents, reflecting cultural and organisational factors. This he suggests reduces the risk that employees will perceive the document as ‘window dressing’.

Adams (1992b) drew attention to the gap between the way in which organisations describe their management and what they actually do in practice, and how this might have implications for bullying within the organisation. The publication of anti-bullying and / or diversity policies are ideals which might suggest to the outside world that the organisation has an ethos of fairness in the workplace, but if bullying behaviour goes unchallenged and managers experienced as bullies receive acclaim for meeting targets irrespective of the means by which these are accomplished, internally it is probable that staff will perceive a culture which tolerates, condones or even encourages bullying. Bruhn (2001) points out that when an organisation fails to match words and deeds, members become cynical and mistrust its integrity and ethos. Thus cynicism, which was listed as a core component of the occupational police culture (Waddington, 1999a), is the public signal that the members no longer perceive congruence between the words and action of the organization (Reiser, 1994).

Since the HMIC thematics on diversity, constabularies have been under pressure to develop formal policies outlining a positive attitude towards diversity, equal opportunities and training. During inspections the HMIC review such policies in addition to questioning the rank and file to assess the extent of awareness, e.g. “Despite real achievements in development of policies and procedures, the latest inspection indicated that uncertainty remains” (HMIC, 2000a: 2.5).

## **7 Survey of constabularies’ anti-bullying policies and grievance figures**

In April, 2003 an e-mail / postal survey was conducted of all constabularies countrywide (45 UK constabularies + Police Service of Northern Ireland), requesting details of any anti-bullying policies together with available figures on bullying

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grievances recorded over the last three years. Assurance was given that grievance figures and policy information would not be attributable.

Of twenty-eight constabularies responding (60.87% response rate) one had a policy not to take part in such research, one was not willing to take part, five had no specific document addressing bullying of officers *per se*, and one had such documentation as a 'work in progress'. There were noticeable differences in the comprehensiveness of approach, with the most thorough (Constabulary 1) describing the phenomenon, giving guidance both for those considering making a complaint and for members of staff dealing with such complaints, advising on confidentiality, representation, time limits, formal and informal complaints procedures, providing sources of advice and counselling services, and giving a flow chart of the pathway of grievance procedures.

The timbre of all the policies received was clear: "Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated or condoned" (Constabulary 8); "Bullying is a disciplinary offence and in any form, for whatever reason, will not be tolerated" (Constabulary 12); "No form of bullying or harassment will be tolerated" (Constabulary 19); "Bullying of a physical or mental nature, whether or not amounting to sexual or religious harassment will not be tolerated" (Constabulary 24).

Where mentioned, the main responsibility for carrying out the policy was variously vested in: "all line managers" (Constabulary 12); "managers and supervisors" (Constabulary 6), and "all members of the Service" (Constabulary 18). Complainants were advised that the issue could be dealt with formally or informally. The informal approach suggested that they should attempt to stop or resolve the bullying issue at an early stage either personally or with help from their supervisor or some form of first contact advisor. If this failed, or if they preferred they were advised that they could opt for the formal procedure although once a complainant embarked on this route the constabularies reserved the right to progress any complaint to a higher, i.e. disciplinary, level, irrespective of the wishes of the complainant, if this was considered appropriate.

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Many constabularies (e.g. Constabulary 2, 12, 15, 18) issue details of support bodies such as the Police Federation, Black Police Association, Equal Opportunities Commission etc., alongside their policy documents.

Statements such as the “transfer of a member of staff who originates an issue... should only be considered where it is requested, with care taken to ensure the move is voluntary and is what the originator really wants” (Constabulary 1), and that “The transfer of an aggrieved person or the person complained of should not be resorted to simply to resolve a grievance or disciplinary action.... In any such case the reasons for the move must be thoroughly investigated and recorded to ensure that the reasons for the move will not be misconstrued as discreditable...” (Constabulary 18), acknowledge that the relocation of parties involved in bullying might be perceived as additional victimisation.

Not all constabularies provide a definition of bullying in their policies. Where the anti-bullying policy is incorporated with ‘Dignity at Work’ guidance the emphasis may be placed upon how individuals should behave rather than on how they should not behave, e.g. “All staff have a responsibility as individuals to challenge inappropriate or bullying language or behaviour” (Constabulary 16). Where definitions do exist, there is a considerable amount of consensus as to which behaviours constitute bullying, for example:

Constabulary 1: *“Bullying can be defined as persistent offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable which undermines their self confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress.”*

Constabulary 8: *“[bullying is] and abuse or a misuse of power or position by one or more colleagues towards another or others which intimidates, oppresses or adversely affects the recipients dignity or self esteem. Abusive conduct may include behaviour that is offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating.”*

Constabulary 15: “*Bullying can be defined as offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour. It can also be abuse of power or authority which attempts to undermine an individual or group and which may cause them to suffer stress, interferes with job performance, undermines job security or creates a threatening or otherwise unpleasant work environment. Bullying can happen to anyone.*”

Constabulary 19: “*Bullying consists of offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair sanctions which make the victim feel upset threatened, humiliated or vulnerable. This can undermine self confidence cause stress and may affect health.*”

Constabulary 28: “*[Bullying is] an abuse or a misuse of power or status by one colleague towards another or more colleagues which intimidates, oppresses or adversely affects the recipients dignity and self esteem.*”

Research by Miller *et al* (1999) issues a caution to constabularies assuming that the adoption of a zero tolerance policy to bullying will improve the situation. They posit that, although this action might be seen as giving victims a means by which to challenge bullying behaviour, it also increases the profile of the bullied who become subjected to enhanced scrutiny. It also affords the socially dominant group the opportunity to establish barriers between themselves and the bullied minority through processes such as exclusion.

The thirteen constabularies giving actual figures regarding bullying suggest an average of 5.97 (range 0-26) formal complaints about bullying per constabulary per year. This figure contrasts with in-house surveys carried out by Constabularies 10 and 20, which record bullying rates of between 16 and 26%, although the figures for Constabulary 10 represent a five-year time period.

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## 8 Bullying in the police service

In the HMIC (2000a: 9.2) equal opportunities thematic report ‘Developing Diversity in the Police Service’ it was acknowledged that the number of formal complaints was low. However, HMIC inspection reports of individual constabularies do suggest that there are problem areas, for example:

*“...members are losing confidence in the procedures to deal with bullying and harassment (most frequently – pressurising to get work done).”* (HMIC, 2000c: 4.40)

*“... an examination of grievances during 1999/2000 showed that of the 24 made, 50% related to bullying in the workplace.”* (HMIC, 2001b: 6.20)

*“A concern that was brought to the attention of Her Majesty’s Inspector on a number of occasions and by a range of staff related to the presence of a bullying culture in some parts of the organisation.”* (HMIC, 2001c: 3.10)

*“... the focus of most grievances is bullying and harassment rather than policy issues.”* (HMIC, 2003b: 111)

*“Her Majesty’s Inspector was disappointed to hear evidence from individuals within the Force that there may be instances of an unacceptable tolerance of bullying, racist or sexist behaviour.”* (HMIC, 2003c: 2.39)

In common with other types of organisation defensive of their public relations position (Rayner & Cooper, 1997), many constabularies are unwilling or unable to divulge figures relating to internal complaints. Although the 5.97 yearly average for bullying complaints per constabulary obtained in the survey described in the previous section (Section 7) does not include cases dealt with informally, it is smaller than the empirical findings of external researchers would suggest. Research by Cooper & Ingram (2004) might provide an explanation for the difference in a reluctance to complain about such behaviour. In their exit study of police officers they noted that whereas only eight per cent of respondents spontaneously said that bullying and/or

discrimination was an important factor in their decision to leave, when asked directly this figure increased to nearly one-third (31%).

It is also possible that the low reporting of bullying could reflect the findings of the Cultural Audit Report published on the Internet by South Yorkshire Police (2002), which reported that subtle forms of harassment were not recognised as such by respondents (4.5.5: 8). They also reported uncertainty about the support for people reporting inappropriate behaviour (4.5.5: 9) and uncertainty about dealing with bullying and harassment in the workplace. This was accompanied by a negative counter-perception of anti-bullying procedures with some respondents expressing the opinion that the service had become too politically correct and accusations by some male officers of the organisation, “wrapping people in cotton wool” (4.5.6).

In a survey of bullying in the workplace conducted by Hoel & Cooper (2000b), 12% of all the police service respondents claimed that they had been bullied in the previous six months. This figure increased to 29% when the period was extended to the previous five years, with 45% of respondents reporting that they had witnessed bullying in the same time frame. These figures place the police service in the top five occupations at risk of bullying.

In the same year Rayner carried out a survey on behalf of UNISON of police support staff members. Results revealed 21% of respondents who reported that they were currently being bullied. This, coupled with the fact that 39% of all respondents attributed bullying to the Police Service culture, prompted UNISON to state:

*“In UNISON’s view the results show that bullying has become part of the management culture of many police forces, and it is often being allowed to happen and carry on unchecked. The survey clearly demonstrates that bullies can get away with it and that this goes unchecked because workers are scared to report it” (Rayner, 2000:5)*

Rayner (2000) clearly locates the problem of bullying in the organisational culture of the police service and in the lack of confidence in the formal complaints procedure. An alternative explanation is not that officers are scared to report bullying but that there is an incongruity between the constructs of masculinity and bullying, such that it is difficult for officers to see themselves in the role of victim. In their exposition on the failure of victimology to address issues of victim status and masculinity Newburn & Stanko (1994) posit that the label of victim is built on the premise that it applies to the relatively powerless, and that victims are characterised as helpless and vulnerable. The stereotypical hegemonic masculinity, as reflected in the ideology of the informal police culture portraying men as powerful, controlling and invulnerable could explain officers' unwillingness to talk about or admit 'weakness', as would be inferred in complaints about bullying.

## **9 Conclusion**

This paper reported on the culture of the police service. The core elements were described together with an explanation as to how these might lead to harassing or bullying behaviour. However, even with the limited amount of research reported here for illustrative purposes, it is apparent that the police service is not a monolithic organisation with a single perspective. Sub-cultural influences have been located across the range of vertical (hierarchical) groupings such as management structures, and horizontal (equal power) groupings such as departments and community contexts. This raises the possibility that there will be differences in the degree to which they reflect the core elements of the culture of the police service generically.

One way of looking anew at this issue is to examine the way in which the occupational culture influences the social construction of the meanings associated with bullying that have been negotiated through the rhetoric and interaction that form commonly accepted situations. In this way it should be possible to show how police officers share, to varying degrees, the substance and form of police culture holding common ideologies on acceptable behaviour formed through collective experience

and social interaction. By looking at the strength of associations between the social representations and personal perception of bullying it should also be possible to identify any dominant group influences.