

Preface

Research and reflection on the police has long acknowledged the important role that the informal occupational norms, values, and assumptions associated with the rank and file play in shaping their everyday decisions and practices. Ethnographic accounts of what has become known as police culture have spanned several decades, and continue to be widely debated in contemporary discussions of policing and police work (Banton 1964; Skolnick 1966; Westley 1970; Cain 1973; Rubinstein 1973; Reiner 1978; Punch 1979; Ericson 1982; Holdaway 1983; Smith and Gray 1985; Young 1991). Much of these works have identified recurring themes within police dispositions and practices over time and space. It is now cliché to refer to what Reiner (2000a: Chapter 3) describes as the ‘core characteristics’ of police culture. Police, it is said, have an exaggerated sense of mission towards their role and crave work that promises excitement. They celebrate masculine exploits, show willingness to use force and engage in informal working practices. Officers are also continually suspicious, lead isolated social lives, and display defensive solidarity with colleagues. Police are mainly conservative in politics and morality and their culture is marked by cynicism and pessimism. Their worldview includes a simplistic, decontextualized understanding of criminality, and they are intolerant towards people who challenge the status quo. Finally, racism has been identified as one of the most central and problematic features of police culture. These features are believed to arise as officers adapt to the demands of the police role, but two propositions have nevertheless remained central to understandings in this area. Firstly, police culture exerts considerable influence over the way officers think about and interact with different strata of the public and colleagues—often for the worse. Secondly, the informal ideologies which comprise the police identity can also undermine endeavours to reform the police.

Notwithstanding the wealth of literature in this area, recent understandings of police culture rely almost exclusively on the aforementioned bodies of work and accordingly reflect culture of a much earlier and different social, economic and political milieu.

Most of the studies were conducted over thirty years ago, while others were carried out in diverse urban settings. Our understanding of police culture is also shaped by pioneering work in the USA, while more recent contributions have examined police culture only in circumstances of social and political turmoil (Glaeser 2000; Altbeker 2005; Marks 2005). We are left, as a result, with an account of police culture which largely predates the transformations which have since taken place inside police organizations and in newly identified social fields of policing.

Since the classic ethnographies there have been many developments within policing contexts, many of which could be expected to impact upon the cultural expressions of the police. There has been a notable increase in the number of minority ethnic, female, and gay and lesbian police officers. An allied development is the changing face of police personnel under what is referred to as the workforce modernization agenda (HMIC 2004). Processes of civilianization carry considerable implications for cultural, ethnic, and gender diversification and may serve to dilute the traditional white, heterosexual, male composition of police organizations (Loveday 2007). Similarly, the archetypal young working class, high school educated workforce may become altered by the growing recruitment of more mature and better educated officers (Punch 2007). Reconfigurations in the external policing environment have also transformed the character of the differing 'publics' the police come into contact with. Post-war immigration and the recent expansion of the European Union has granted free movement to workers from former commonwealth countries and new member states into the United Kingdom. The upshot is that British society is more ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and culturally diverse. Added to this, political sensitivity around policing has changed remarkably since the early police ethnographies. A pivotal development is the emergence of respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities in policing discourse and practice. Not least in the aftermath of the Macpherson Report (1999), police organizations are under pressure to understand themselves as sites of diversity and as providers of a fair and equitable policing service. Yet this repositioning has also been encouraged by a broader shift in the political climate of society where minority groups are seeking recognition for their social differences (Parekh 2000; see also Fraser 1997; Taylor 1992). Recent years have also witnessed an unprecedented

rethinking of what public policing should comprise. Community policing has become adopted across nearly all police forces throughout the Western world, and requires officers to become better embedded in the communities they are charged with serving (Fielding 1995; Brogden and Nijhar 2005). The recasting of the public within policing discourse has likewise been accompanied by a shift in public sentiment towards the police. As Loader and Mulcahy (2003) observe, police organizations now deal with a less compliant and more demanding public.

It is also noteworthy that officers work in a markedly different environment where greater adherence to legal rules is required. This has been supplemented with enhanced demands and mechanisms for their accountability. Added to this, new public management, or NPM, has also had a significant impact on policing and refers to a variety of practices derived from the private sector and applied to the public sector, including performance management techniques and the creation of customers (McLaughlin *et al* 2001). At the same time, officers inhabit a moment where political discourse about 'law and order' has become intensely salient and increasingly punitive (Downes and Morgan 2002; Loader 2006; Reiner 2007). Alongside these changes in the political sphere, late modern societies are also characterized by widespread economic division (Dahrendorf 1985; Taylor 1999; Young 1999). Growing numbers of people are excluded from secure employment and experience burgeoning hardship and insecurity. We could add that the desire to integrate the new residuum into society has also waned. As Reiner (2000a) notes, the changes that have occurred in the political economy of Western capitalism have profound implications for a larger and increasingly alienated 'police property'.

The classic police culture paradigm which has been much invoked to describe and explain a range of police perspectives and behaviour appears today somewhat exhausted. New lines of research and reflection are needed to track how, exactly, these events are shaping the cultural manifestations of the police. It is, in other words, crucial to *revisit* the idea of police culture in this changed, and changing, world. What aspects of the occupational culture are enduring, and what have become discontinued? What do police officers think about greater social diversity in the external and internal policing environment? How do they experience the new policing realities? Have the reorganizations in policing posed any significant threat to established police

dispositions and practices? Answering these questions is vital if we are to develop sociological understanding of what policing culture in Britain currently looks like.

My purpose in this book is to document and make sense of how the occupational value systems and practices of officers have been shaped by two transitions in policing: firstly, the national context of social, economic and political change and, secondly, the local context of changes made to reform the culture of what I shall call Northshire Police Force. In recent years, senior officers have embarked on a top-down reform programme aimed primarily at improving the working conditions of personnel inside the organization and the delivery of an effective and equitable service to the various publics they are charged to serve. The case of Northshire Police provides an invaluable context for examining the relevance of previous studies of police culture for the altered landscape.

The empirical research underpinning the ensuing chapters derives from extensive fieldwork with front line officers and, in this sense, remains true to the tradition of the classic ethnographies. It draws upon of over 600 hours of direct observation of operational policing across two contrasting terrains, and thereby takes up Reiner's (2000*b*) recent appeal for police research to return to its ethnographic past in order to expose the low visibility practices of routine policing. In this book I foreground various features of police culture which have hitherto gone unnoticed, including an examination of how increasing diversification within and beyond policing organizations are shaping traditional relations, the impact of prevailing management practices on the way officers think about and perform their job, and the forms police culture takes under conditions of late modernity. By observing, documenting, and making sense of the values, beliefs, and outlooks police officers bring to bear on their work; *Police Culture in a Changing World* endeavours to produce a revised and fully contemporary account of police culture and accordingly extend our understanding of the inner-world of policing.

The book begins in Chapter 1 with a theoretical discussion of the concept of police culture. It addresses received understandings of the term, and explores the main properties of this phenomenon as identified by a long line of police scholars. I then examine recent thinking which challenges the conceptualization and existence of a monolithic police culture. In presenting the principal themes derived from research and reflection on

police culture, this chapter provides a platform on which to pose the following question: does this orthodox account of police culture still hold relevance today?

Chapter 2 traces the wider 'field' of contemporary British policing. In addition to outlining developments in the legal context, I am concerned primarily to locate the emergence of respect for diversity and political recognition of cultural and gendered identities in policing discourse, and the widespread economic exclusion of late modern societies. I argue that the new societal configuration raises seminal questions for police culture and the policing of social groups. Before presenting the findings from the empirical investigation, I bring into focus the research context and explain the methodology I employed in revisiting the occupational value systems and practices of the police.

Chapter 3 tracks the way in which Northshire Police has developed policies aimed at managing the current demands of greater diversity. Drawing on comments made by officers from different social backgrounds, I explore how the extension of recognition for hitherto marginalized groups has shaped the interior culture. In defence of threats to their increasingly beleaguered identity I show that white, heterosexual, male officers have emerged as prime propagators of resentful discourse that operates to devalue the revised accent on diversity and preserve the traditional culture.

Chapter 4 leaves aside seminal questions of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality and tests the contemporary relevance of other classic themes of police culture for the altered context of policing. The narrative captures interesting sources of variation between the cultures of those working within the two policing areas, but finds that officers mainly shared a related set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices which transcended the contrasting terrains. In exploring the endurance of these proverbial characteristics, I point to broader questions about the very essence of the police role.

Chapter 5 examines how the new policing realities have shaped relations between the police and those groups emphasized in 'policing diversity' policy agendas. I show that responses to the policing context are contradictory and uneven. In the wake of the diversity emphasis, aspects of the culture are being revised and unlearned. However, other features remain remarkably unchallenged by the reorganizations that have occurred in policing.

Chapter 6 questions the current dominance of diversity within policing agendas by demonstrating that issues of class remain

crucial in understanding policing discourses and practices. Taking class contempt as a relatively unexamined feature of police culture, I argue that sections of the white 'underclass' operate as uncontentiously legitimate terrain for the unchallenged exercise of police discretion and authority. This was also the group that occupied an overridingly prominent position in the police mind as socially defiling.

The book concludes in Chapters 7 and 8 with an identification of the main findings and implications of the research. My argument locates a tension between the changes that have clearly occurred in the policing landscape and the persistence of police cultural characteristics as observed by earlier scholars. In contradistinction with current scholarship I question the extent to which police culture has changed in light of developments in policing. Police culture endures, I argue, because the basic pressures associated with the police role have not been removed and because social transformations have exacerbated, rather than reduced, the basic definitions of inequality. These wider dilemmas underline the contradictions of achieving any meaningful reconfiguration of police culture.