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# **Police culture in a diverse society: a provincial police force in transition?**

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## Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic investigation into the occupational value systems and practices of contemporary police officers in a provincial English police force. Situated in the local context of Staffordshire Police, the thesis revisits the notion of 'police culture' in the light of recent changes to the social, economic, political and organisational context of policing in Britain. Drawing on direct observation of operational police work across two contrasting policing areas, the thesis tracks the narrative of Staffordshire Police as it has attempted to effect cultural change, in respect to improving both the working conditions of personnel inside the organisation and the delivery of an effective and equitable service to the various 'publics' outside the organisation.

The thesis identifies a number of new features of police culture which have, hitherto, gone unnoticed. In particular, the thesis provides a principal insight into how contemporary police officers have responded to a new policing environment in which respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities has become salient. It is demonstrated that the altered policing realities have transformed police culture in some important ways. However, the way in which officers have responded to the new policing landscape is neither universal nor uniform. While aspects of police culture are sensitive to the reorganisations which have taken place in the national and local context of British policing, it is illustrated that the persistence of entrenched ways of thinking and behaving serve to challenge efforts to reform the police. With these contrasting responses in mind, the thesis concludes that the story of contemporary police culture is one of both change *and* continuity.

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# Chapter One

## **Introduction:**

### **In Search of Contemporary Police Culture**

An abundance of police research has identified 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. Indeed, ethnographic accounts regarding the existence of 'police culture' have spanned a number of decades, and continue to be widely debated in contemporary discussions of policing and police work (Banton 1964; Skolnick 1966; Westley 1970; Cain 1973, Rubenstein 1973; Reiner 1978; 2000a; Punch 1979a; Ericson 1982; Holdaway 1983; Smith and Gray 1985; Young 1991; 1993). Although differences in the occupational culture have been identified, a number of common themes are present within the literature. Bringing together such research, Robert Reiner (2000a) has identified a number of 'core characteristics' of police culture which, for him, including the following: a sense of mission and thirst for action; suspicion, solidarity and isolation; pessimism and cynicism; an 'us' versus 'them' orientation to the social world; racial prejudice; machismo; pragmatism and conservatism. A central proposition to emerge from these studies is that the informal occupational assumptions and values of officers can exert significant influence over the character and working environment of police organisations, and the service that different sections of society receive.

However, recent understandings of the internal culture of police organisations rely heavily on these classic works and thus reflect police environments, and culture, of an earlier and different social, economic and political milieu. Many studies were conducted over thirty years ago (Banton 1964; Cain 1973), and were carried out within diverse urban settings (Smith and Gray 1985). Furthermore, contemporary understandings of police culture have been shaped by pioneering work conducted on the police in America (Skolnick 1966; Westley 1970; Rubenstein 1973), while more recent contributions have examined police culture 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 many of the significant transformations which have since taken place in police organisations, and in newly identified social fields of policing. Changes in the internal and external policing environment have altered both the composition of police organisations, and the character of the differing ‘publics’ with whom the police come into contact. Contemporary police organisations are under increasing pressure to understand, and indeed project themselves, as sites of ‘diversity’ and as providers of a fair and equitable policing service. These shifts highlight how the wider social, economic and political field of contemporary policing has changed. Not least in the aftermath of the Macpherson Report (1999), the current policing discourse is one in which respect for diversity, and recognition of cultural and gendered identities has become increasingly salient. Contemporary generations of officers are strongly encouraged to afford better regard and treatment to those groups which have previously not been equitably served by policing. In broader terms, such a move reflects the political climate of contemporary

British society where greater importance has been placed on the recognition of social and cultural diversity (Ray and Sayer 1999; see also Fraser 1997).

In conjunction with these political currents, however, contemporary societies are also increasingly characterised by widespread economic exclusion, division and fragmentation (Taylor 1999; Young 1999; Wacquant 2000). Excluded from the realms of employment and experiencing burgeoning economic insecurity, a growing number of people are barred from the way of life of the majority. This has important consequences for crime and sensibilities towards crime and its control (Reiner 2000a). In particular, changes in the major spheres of society have resulted in the growth of a structurally marginal 'underclass', a modern day form of the nineteenth century 'dangerous classes' (Young 1999; see also Crowther 2000a). These groups have always formed the enduring targets of police concern and practice, and have been termed 'police property' (Lee 1981). Characterised by their social, political and economic powerlessness, the 'police property' grouping has, for Reiner (2000a: 216), become 'far larger than ever before, and more fundamentally alienated' within this new social landscape.

The developments which have taken place in the national and local field of policing consequently generate fresh questions about the condition and scope of contemporary police culture. Indeed, against the backdrop of social, economic and political change, it is clear that the classic police culture paradigm which has been much invoked to describe and explain a range of police perspectives and behaviour has become, by now, somewhat

exhausted. What is needed, therefore, are new lines of research and reflection which track the shifts in the wider field of policing.

### **Research Questions and the Current Study**

The aim of this thesis is to revisit the notion of police culture through an ethnographic inquiry into the occupational value systems and practices of contemporary police officers. The study is situated in the local context of Staffordshire Police, a relatively small police force located in the West Midlands. The Force is responsible for serving approximately 240,000 people in the north of the county, and 800,000 in the south. According to official census data for 2001, the total minority ethnic population residing in the Staffordshire policing area is 31,653 (3.02%). Concentrated largely in the densely populated Stoke-on-Trent area, this figure mainly comprises those of Pakistani, Indian and Black Caribbean ethnic origin.

Having 2,325 sworn police officers, and covering a mixture of rural and urban geographical terrains, Staffordshire Police has attempted to effect structural and cultural transformation in recent years.<sup>1</sup> The impetus for change was primarily generated from within the organisation when an almost entirely new group of senior officers arrived in the Force during 1996. One of the principal changes to the overall structure of the organisation was to reduce the number of territorial divisions from ten to four.<sup>2</sup> Commanded by an Inspector, each division then became further divided into

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<sup>1</sup> As of March 2006, the Force also consists of 1,692 police staff, including 72 community support officers and 429 special constables.

<sup>2</sup> The four divisions are: Chase; Trent Valley; North Staffordshire; and Stoke on Trent. Each division is managed by a divisional commander at the rank of Chief Superintendent.

Neighbourhood Policing Units (NPU). This move was, in turn, accompanied by the creation of Community Action Teams (CAT) and Incident Management Units (IMU). While the latter are designed to manage those incidents requiring an immediate response or ones within short timescales, the former are involved principally in community work. Each NPU also consists of a specialist unit concerned to deal with specific types of crimes such as prostitution or football related violence.

Of greater significance is Staffordshire Police's involvement in a top-down drive to effect cultural change. The change programme has been primarily aimed at improving both the working conditions of personnel *inside* the organisation, and the delivery of an effective and equitable service to the various 'publics' *outside* the organisation. In an attempt to reinvent itself as a Force which meets the challenges of policing a diverse society, and equally, one that demonstrates equality in all aspects of its internal relations, questions of diversity and the problem of discrimination have become particularly central to the reform effort. While a range of policies and initiatives highlight this reform programme, some of the more notable efforts include: taking a positive approach towards the recruitment, retention and career progression of officers from minority backgrounds; increased improvement of diversity training; the introduction of support associations organised along the lines of ethnicity, gender and sexuality; and the official interdiction of discriminatory language and conduct. Externally, the recasting of diversity as a central policing concern has focused on the equitable policing of the community which the Force is charged with serving. In particular, the effective and equitable policing of minority ethnic, gay and lesbian communities and (mainly female) victims of domestic violence

have been placed high on the agenda. The effort to reform the way in which Staffordshire Police relates to its various ‘publics’ has also been supported by a broader move towards community policing.

With this local, and aforementioned wider, policing context in mind this thesis sets out to examine how the occupational culture of contemporary police officers have been shaped by two transitions:

1. First, the wider *national* context of social and political change.
2. Second, the *local* context of internal changes made in recent years to reform the organisational culture of Staffordshire Police.

Harnessing together such enquiries, a number of accompanying questions emerge which further highlights the need for a revised account of police culture. For example, what does contemporary English police culture look like? Does it share any similarities with the characteristics so often identified by previous research? If it does differ, what are these differences, and how can they be explained? Within the current policing climate, what are contemporary generations of officers’ dispositions towards different crimes, policing styles and priorities? What do police officers think about diversity, multiculturalism and equal opportunities? How do they experience ‘policing diversity’ policy agendas? In addition to these political currents, how have prevailing economic conditions shaped contemporary police culture? How does the relationship between the

police and those groups denied access to the realms of work and consumption become transformed in the wake of burgeoning economic inequality and division?

The overall aim of this thesis is to take the notion of police culture and re-examine it in the light of recent changes in the social, economic, political and organisational context of policing in Britain. By observing, documenting and making sense of the occupational perspectives and practices of contemporary police officers, the thesis provides an updated account of police culture in the new millennium. This is of further significance following recent calls for police research to return to its ethnographic past in order to expose the ‘low visibility’ practices of routine policing (Reiner 2000*b*). Furthermore, since the heyday of the classic ethnographies, there have also been advances in the theoretical frameworks used to explore police culture (Chan 1997; Waddington 1999*b*). In addition to responding to appeals for a revival of police ethnographies, this thesis also draws upon these new ways of envisaging the occupational culture of the police. Finally, by examining the occupational culture of the police in a provincial police force, the thesis provides an important insight into how changes in the internal and external policing environment play out beyond the metropolis.

### **Research Methods: Ethnography with the Police**

That the study adopted an ethnographic approach based primarily on direct observation of operational policing, raises a number of important methodological issues which require discussion here. The utility of such a method in uncovering, exploring and documenting the informal norms, values and practices of the police have been extensively debated

elsewhere (Cain 1973; Holdaway 1983; Brewer 1991; Punch 1993; Reiner 2000*b*; Marks 2004). Broadly speaking, nonetheless, ethnography is concerned with the discovery and description of the culture of particular social groups, and is thoroughly committed to the idea that the researcher must understand the 'symbolic world' in which people live (Fielding 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Ethnographic approaches are particularly suited to studying the deep-level assumptions of police officers because such assumptions tend to operate beneath the formal organisational structure of police organisations (Chan 1997). By involving themselves in their host society, the job of police researchers are to get underneath this structure and capture the informal face of the organisation (Van Maanen 1973). This inevitably involves developing rapport with officers over a period of time in order to witness their 'backstage performances' (Goffman 1990; see also Holdaway 1980).<sup>3</sup> It is primarily at this stage that the police researcher can unearth information about the rules and values that guide behaviour. Indeed, with its emphasis on grasping the meanings, motives and intentions behind social actions, ethnographic approaches ask researchers to immerse themselves in a particular setting in order to achieve an empathetic understanding of the actions of the groups being studied (see Liebling 2001*a*; 2001*b*). With its focus on participant observation, an ethnographic approach can therefore be seen as the most appropriate method available to access the perspectives and practices of police officers.

In order to explore contemporary police culture, I spent eighteen months accompanying rank and file officers from a range of shifts and units as they went about their ordinary

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<sup>3</sup> However, some ethnographers have stressed the need for the researcher to avoid becoming over-involved with the people being studied - otherwise known as 'going native' (see Punch 1979*a* for a police-related discussion).

duties, both on and off the streets.<sup>4</sup> It was decided that fieldwork for the project would take place in two contrasting NPUs across the Staffordshire Police Force area, with nine months being spent in each site. The sites were chosen in order to access a range of policing environments with respect to local social, economic and crime dynamics. The first of these was Burslem NPU which is situated in the Stoke-On-Trent policing division. Its patch covers an urban geographical area which is densely populated and home to a notable presence of minority ethnic communities. With this urban landscape also came a high level of social and economic deprivation. In contrast, the second site selected was Wombourne NPU which is located in the Chase division. Covering much of the affluent provinces of South Staffordshire, the NPU is responsible for policing a large and predominantly rural geographical terrain. This site provides an important opportunity to examine the occupational culture of contemporary police officers working within a rural context. With some notable exceptions, British policing scholarship in this area is largely under-explored (Cain 1973; Young 1993).

In addition to observing the police in their 'natural' setting, I also conducted a number of focus group discussions and interviews with police officers.<sup>5</sup> These constituted the more structured elements of the research, and the aim was to capture officers' perceptions and attitudes towards their job, the immediate policing environment and their understandings of recent national and local reform agendas. Over 50 officers took part in this aspect of

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<sup>4</sup> For the IMU, the shifts operated at the following times: 'earlies' (7am to 4pm); 'lates' (3pm to 12am); and 'nights' (10pm to 7am). There were some exceptions to this. For example, if a late shift fell on a weekend, a number of officers (on a rotation basis) were required to work a 'supernoon' shift, which ran from 4pm until 3am. CAT officers also worked a 9 hour shift, but generally speaking, began work no earlier than 8am and finished no later than 11pm.

<sup>5</sup> These were recorded. In order to maintain issues of anonymity and confidentiality, I transcribed each interview and focus group myself.

the research, and many of the interviews comprised those from a range of ranks, including probationers and the Chief Constable.<sup>6</sup> I also conducted 12 biographical interviews with a sample of female, gay, lesbian and minority ethnic officers whose views and experiences proved difficult for me to obtain during the course of the fieldwork. It emerged early on in the study that the majority of participants in the research were white, heterosexual males. Given that an important aspect of the research was to explore the impact of growing social diversity on police culture, the low numbers of female, (openly) gay and minority ethnic officers at both sites presented me with a methodological problem. I decided that a 'snowball sample' would be an appropriate method to gain access to these groups. As is conventional with this technique, I began to gain a sample 'from the top' by turning to the Force's support associations. These included the Multi-Cultural Association (MCA), the Female Support Network (FSN) and the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender Group (LGBTG). From here, I was put in contact with a number of minority officers: although it should be emphasised that some of the people who took part in the interviews were not involved in these associations. Rather, some members put me in contact with other colleagues and associates who, it was felt, would be able to assist me in my aim to explore any prior, and indeed contemporary, experiences of discrimination within the organisation.

In assessing the efforts already made to reform the organisation, it was also important to analyse a number of internal Force documents relating to diversity and equality issues. However, while documents are crucial for informing the reader about the intentions and

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<sup>6</sup> As I undertake the final revisions for this thesis, I have become aware that the Chief Constable who was in service as I undertook the study has recently retired from Staffordshire Police.

priorities of those producing them, they should not be read as objective statements of fact. Indeed, and as Sparks (1992, *cited in* May 1997: 58) argues, even formal documents are socially produced and may represent an 'attempt at persuasion'. As such, the formal documents which informed parts of this thesis were subjected to a critical interpretive analysis.

### **Gaining Formal Access: 'Getting In'**

As Reiner (2000*b*) notes, the problems of access and trust, which are integral to much social science research, are fundamentally exacerbated in police research. The methodological problems, he suggests, are 'primarily those of detectives and spies: how to get information from people who are (often rightly) suspicious of your motives, have much to hide and much to lose from its discovery' (*ibid.*: 225). Researchers have long documented the difficulties and issues associated with gaining access to the police organisation for academic study, and the fundamental challenges of doing research on, and in, the police (Fox and Lundman 1974; Holdaway 1983; Punch 1989; Young 1991). In such works, an important distinction can be made between what Cassell (1988) terms 'getting in' and 'getting on'. While the former describes the process of being granted formal access, the latter refers to the accomplishment of social access on an everyday, interpersonal level with those people under study.

In my case, gaining formal access was facilitated by an existing relationship between personnel from the department of Criminology at Keele University, and Staffordshire

Police.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, at the outset of the research it was necessary for me to become involved in a number of negotiations with senior officers and management personnel. After sending the proposed objectives and methodology of the project to various police command team meetings, initial introductions were held with the Chief Superintendent, and the Chief Inspectors who were responsible for the Force's operational activity and patrol areas. While there were no overt misgivings about the research, it was clear that some senior officers were concerned with the dissemination of the findings, and the logistics involved in allowing a 'civilian' to observe operational police work. However, with the assistance of an appropriate sponsor who worked within Staffordshire Police many of these fears were soon laid to rest.<sup>8</sup> In return for gaining entry, I was required throughout the research to write a number of reports which detailed key thematic findings (see Loftus 2005; 2006a; 2006b). I was also required to present the findings of the research to numerous police audiences at appropriate points during the research. While this 'research bargain' (Becker 1970) can invoke a number of ethical issues - ranging from confidentiality to the risk of 'biting the hand that feeds you' (see Young 1991) - giving informed feedback to the police, at least in my case, proved largely unproblematic.

Staffordshire Police's unfamiliarity with qualitative research methods such as participant observation raised a number of questions about personal safety. To minimise both the risks to which I might be exposed, and the impact of the research on the public, it was

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the initial conception for this thesis emerged from a working collaboration between academics from Keele University and senior officers from Staffordshire Police's Diversity Steering Group. The study represents one of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Collaborative Awards for Science and Engineering (CASE) studentships.

<sup>8</sup> As part of the CASE studentship, I was allocated a non-academic supervisor within the Force. Their role was to help facilitate access to the two research sites, and to indicate how the data and conclusions of the study might best inform any relevant policy conversations that were taking place inside the organisation.

decided that I would not accompany officers attending incidents where my personal safety might be in serious danger, or where my presence might be upsetting to a particularly vulnerable member of the public. In both these sets of circumstances, it was agreed that I would accept the advice of the officer(s) I was observing in deciding whether or not to accompany them to the scene of the incident in question. In practice, these occasions were extremely rare and therefore had little, if any, repercussions on the data that was collected.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most difficult encounter I experienced in securing formal access to the organisation was during a meeting with the Police Federation. Representatives appeared extremely concerned about the nature of the research, and the potential repercussions that it posed for rank and file officers. In particular, they were anxious that I would publicise negative research findings, and in so doing, subsequently identify individual officers. Their suspicion was exacerbated by a BBC documentary called *The Secret Policeman* which had been aired two months earlier in October 2003. The documentary was an undercover exposé on racism among new recruits at a number of police forces in the north of England and North Wales. In a similar manner to the publication of the Macpherson Report (1999), the documentary was instrumental in propelling the problem of police racism into the public sphere once again. During the meeting with the Federation, the following question was put to me, 'What happens if an officer admits to

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<sup>9</sup> On one occasion however, I was asked to stay in the police car when a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic (after being convinced that MI5 were spying on him) had decided to bring his collection of rifles, hand-guns and bullets to one of the rural satellite stations. Although he merely wanted to hand over his guns to the police, his irate and agitated manner was enough to convince officers that it was a potentially dangerous situation which could compromise my safety.

you that they are a member of the British National Party?’ I explained that while *all* individual officers in the study would have strict anonymity from management personnel, to omit such a disclosure from any final reports would be to overlook an important part of the research framework: namely, to examine officers’ thoughts towards multiculturalism, and current policy agendas which emphasised the equitable policing of minority ethnic communities. However, it was also made clear that given the current climate where police racism has been the subject of intense debate, such an admission would be extremely unlikely to occur. Although continuing to hold some reservations about the research, the local representatives of the Police Federation agreed to the study. Having now been granted formal access, I set about the task of gaining access to those people who would form the main participants of the research.

### **Accessing the Rank and File: ‘Getting On’**

A number of dilemmas, difficulties and rewards also arose in the ‘getting on’ stage of the research. As mentioned earlier, fieldwork for the study was organised primarily around direct observation of operational police work. My immersion into the police world began in Burslem NPU on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2004, and ended at Wombourne NPU in October 2005. While I principally observed the work of the Incident Management Unit (IMU) and the Community Action Team (CAT), I also accompanied officers from a range of specialist units, including: the Prostitution Unit; the Football Management Unit; the Pro-active Unit; and the Rural Crime Unit. Throughout the research period, I participated in an array of routine policing activity. While I cannot possibly list all of these instances here, I observed: organised drug raids; attended football matches with covert officers who were

involved in suppressing football violence; observed a diversity training module and partnership meetings between the police and other agencies. I also watched the running of custody suites; sat in while officers formally interviewed suspects; and once took up an opportunity to observe a private consultation between a solicitor and a suspect. I also attended court sessions with officers and completed a two-day Rural Policing Skills course, at the end of which I received a formal certificate. For the most part, however, I accompanied uniformed officers as they went about the business of performing routine police work.

In both research sites I would initially accompany one shift until I became familiar with the officers, the station and the policing area. Following this, I would then progress to other shifts.<sup>10</sup> I always sought permission in advance from the shift sergeant(s) to observe their officers, but on the one or two occasions where the lines of communication had been crossed, it was never a problem for me to just 'turn up'. While I made a point of accompanying as many officers and shifts as possible, my chief concern was to achieve a deeper-level of acceptance. In order to accomplish this, I tried to ensure that my presence at the station became something of the norm. Throughout the course of the fieldwork, I spent approximately 600 hours observing police operations and activity, as well as engaging in many informal conversations and discussions with officers.

While formal access had been approved at the top of the organisation, I was aware that a whole new process of negotiation was required in order to gain the acceptance of rank and file officers. As several writers have noted, being granted formal entry by senior

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<sup>10</sup> The IMU comprised of five separate shifts (1-5), while the CAT officers operated along one shift system.

officers can fundamentally heighten the suspicions of the lower ranking members (Ericson 1982; Reiner 2000b). When introducing the project to officers, it was important to provide them with information about its aims and objectives. In the first instance, officers were provided with 'information sheets' which detailed the nature of the research and the important issue of anonymity. The leaflet also dealt with the logistics of how the research would pan out in practice, with a particular focus on the issue of my (and officer) safety.<sup>11</sup> I felt that it would be helpful to introduce the research to officers in person, and I was allocated a short slot at the beginning of each shift in order to do this. More generally, officers were encouraged to ask questions about the study. Despite these attempts however, the initial stages of the research were characterised by widespread suspicion and scepticism towards the project, and my role within it.

### **Initial Suspicions and Trepidations**

Gaining the trust of the rank and file was something that I needed to negotiate, and indeed re-negotiate, on a day-to-day basis. I was, by all accounts, an 'outsider': a research position which can significantly impinge on the type of data and material that is accessed (Reiner 2000b; Ericson 1982; Brown 1996). In the early days of the research, officers were extremely suspicious of my presence at the station. Once again this was largely exacerbated by the airing of *The Secret Policeman*, and the media coverage which surrounded it (see McLaughlin 2007a). Certainly, while reflecting the general suspiciousness that the police have towards outside researchers, the concerns shared by officers fundamentally related to the fact that the research was undertaken in a rapidly

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<sup>11</sup> Please see Appendix A.

changing organisational, social and political context where problems of police racism and discrimination had been intensely emphasised.<sup>12</sup> On my first week with the police, I recall sitting in the parade room when one officer approached me and asked, 'Are you the girl who has come to see if we are all racist pigs'? Similarly, throughout much of the early days, it was also suggested that I was 'wearing a wire' and secretly recording the conversations and behaviour of officers.

There was also the more general problem that some officers saw me as a 'management spy' (see also Reiner 1978; 2000*b*). A few weeks into the research at Wombourne, for example, one officer whom I had been accompanying informed me that one of the other shifts had refused to co-operate with the research. This particular shift comprised of older officers, their nickname of 'Dad's Army' perhaps reflecting this. In essence, members of the shift had expressed concern that they had, 'Seen this type of thing loads of times. You talk to these outsiders and the next thing you know, you are called up to headquarters about your conduct'. While these officers subsequently appeared interested in the research, and indeed, often invited me to join them in the field, their initial reactions reflected their entrenched distrust of 'outsiders'.

Furthermore, although it was officially agreed that no shift or unit within the research sites were prohibited, a number of informal tactics were employed in an attempt to hinder my access to some behaviours and information. After changing to a new shift and asking

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<sup>12</sup> While I deal with the way in which my own characteristics and presentation of the self impacted on the research process in subsequent sections, I cannot help but think that in the current policing climate, my research experience - and thus the data I obtained - may have been significantly different if I was a researcher from a minority ethnic background. This point will become clearer as the thesis unfolds.

the sergeant whether he would mind if I came back the next day, he looked a little anxious as he said, 'Bloody hell, it took me a week to decide who to crew you with just for today'! That day I had in fact been paired with the only female on the shift who had been allocated the (unpopular) task of responding to the relatively trivial incidents that had been on the police system for a number of days. This task emphasised more of a 'customer focus' approach, and restricted the requirement to respond to any IR (Immediate Response) incidents. In order to overcome this potential dilemma, I explained to the sergeant that if I was to obtain a balanced and accurate picture of what officers thought about their work, and equally how it is performed, it would be helpful for me to observe the *range* of police officers on his shift. I felt that it was also important to reiterate my stance on the issue of anonymity. Ultimately however, if there were any further attempts made to put me with officers who could be trusted to behave appropriately, they were soon dispelled as my presence became more normal and accepted by the sergeant and his officers. And as a general rule, when observing shifts I tried to ensure that I accompanied most, if not all, officers from that shift.

### **Becoming 'Accepted'**

For the most part, there was never any overt hostility or resistance towards me or the project. On the contrary, once officers became more familiar with me, I was able to access much of the 'unspoken agenda' of operational police work (Young 1991).<sup>13</sup> And while it is problematic to suggest that a researcher can gain access to *all* areas of police life (Ericson 1982), I feel that a number of incidents demonstrated officers' willingness to

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<sup>13</sup> It was necessary for me to learn both the formal and informal language of the police. Please refer to Appendix B for a glossary outlining the main organisational acronyms referred to within this thesis.

accept me. That I was able to gain the trust of at least some of the officers that I was observing, was apparent on the occasions where I was introduced to members of the public as a colleague (see also Hobbs 1989), or when I assisted officers in operational police work. At the everyday level, it was suggested that I should 'earn my keep' by writing down license plate details of suspect vehicles, or keeping an eye out for those people already 'known' to the police.<sup>14</sup> While witnessing a drug transaction between a pimp and a prostitute in a car park, I once acted as a bogus 'girlfriend' of the plain-clothed officer that I was with. In order to appear congruent to the surroundings, the officer and I walked past the car with his arm around my shoulders. There were also some occasions where I assisted in the searching of vehicles, houses, and even some people. There are clearly legal limits to how far police researchers can participate, and it should be emphasised that such instances did not reflect the norm. As Van Maanen (1982) has noted, much police research has been carried out from the position of the 'fan', but with movement between other positions such as a 'spy', 'voyeur' and 'member'. Nonetheless, the fieldwork involved a number of tests of loyalty and bravery (see also Smith and Gray 1985; Reiner 1991; Norris 1993; Westmarland 2001a), and I was aware that an outright rejection of requests to assist officers may have reinforced my status as an outsider, and at worst, undone the trust and confidence that had been gradually built as the research progressed.

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<sup>14</sup> There were formal and informal aspects to being 'known' by the police. First, an individual could be *officially* 'known', having gone through the criminal justice system and thus being formally ascribed with a criminal record. Second, officers got to 'know' which people on their patch were likely to cause problems for them, and consequently organised their cognitive maps towards such individuals.

A number of other instances emerged during the research which led me to believe that I had become at least partly accepted by the police. I was often privy to much of the gossip which circulated inside the organisation and I was also invited along on social occasions, such as birthdays and general 'shift nights out'. More broadly, I even proved quite popular with some of those officers whom I had not managed to accompany. This was largely demonstrated by frequent inquiries about when I would be going out with them. On numerous occasions officers requested my presence during incidents and operations which they felt I would find helpful, interesting or 'exciting' (see also Marks 2005). Furthermore, although I was keen to emphasise my neutrality, many officers also seemed to appreciate the opportunity to air their views to someone who 'the gaffers would listen to'. In the organisational context of structural and cultural change, disgruntled constables and sergeants would often ask me to support their grievances about deteriorating resources, including 'slow' cars and malfunctioning radios, 'excessive' paperwork duties and staff shortages (see also Dixon 1999).

There is, however, no way of knowing for certain how much my presence contaminated the 'natural' behaviour of those officers whom I observed and talked to. Nonetheless, and following other researchers, I believe that the police would not have behaved in ways which could have caused them both 'embarrassment' (see Reiner 2000b: 220) and, in some instances, reprimand from senior officers if they had not accepted me to some degree (see also Norris 1993). While this can be demonstrated with reference to numerous incidents, two themes in particular come to mind. First, my participation in some instances of outrageous 'easing behaviour' (Cain 1973: 42) makes me believe that I

had gained a measure of acceptance. Second, I also recall three separate occasions where the officers I was accompanying used force that, to me, appeared somewhat excessive (see also Westmarland 2001a). After observing (usually) minor acts of police deviance, I was often told, 'Don't put that in your report'. More generally, there were various occasions where officers displayed disregard and contempt for those people whom they are charged with serving. I would also add that officers who have read the reports that I have written for the organisation, have also informed me that the findings, and accompanying field note extracts, are an accurate portrayal of the realities of front-line policing.

### **Reflexive Ethnography: Research Roles and Personal Biography**

It has become increasingly common for researchers to think reflexively about how their own personal biography and presentation of self impact upon the research process (May 1993; see also King and Wincup 2000). Factors such as age, class, ethnicity and gender can fundamentally shape the relations that are formed in the field. Relating this to the current context, Marks (2004: 869) suggests that the process of doing ethnographic research with the police, and the material that is derived from such a method, is largely dependant upon the personal 'identifiers' of the researcher. As the police in my study were overwhelmingly male, there is some question as to how far my own gender created a barrier in accessing the dominant male and, as was sometimes the case, highly heterosexist culture. In other words, as a female researcher I soon realised that I may not easily form 'part of the scenery' (Westmarland 2001b: 10). Furthermore, some aspects of my own culture were very different from that of the police's. As a health-conscious

vegetarian who does not drink alcohol, I did not easily blend in with officers' tales (and instances) of hardcore drinking, and interesting assortments of meals bought from local takeaways or otherwise. Nonetheless, while feeling alien to the research setting is a normal part of conducting ethnographic research (Van Maanen 1995), I do think that my 'quirkiness' actually facilitated research with officers. Indeed, my unfamiliarity with police operations and station etiquette was the source of amusement on some occasions. After arranging to accompany the Prostitution Unit, I once mistakenly turned up to the station at 6.45am, only to realise that I should have been there at 6.45pm. This error on my part meant that I was the butt of jokes for a short while afterwards. However, I am confident that this episode served to position me as someone who could 'take a joke', whilst equally dispelling any prior stereotypes of me as a 'cold, detached researcher': I was, in fact, human and made mistakes.

Although my gender may have presented initial problems of accessing the 'backstage performances' (Goffman 1990) of the rank and file, I found that being a young female researcher in a male dominated environment could be advantageous. Consistent with Marks's (2005) ethnographic research in a Public Order Policing (POP) unit in South Africa, I too would suggest that as a female I was seen as 'naturally' trustworthy and empathetic. Officers frequently confided in me about problems that they were experiencing, in both their working and personal lives. These moments were crucial in developing rapport and trust. This is not to imply that frames of masculinity failed to be imposed on me. Indeed, several writers have noted that women in police organisations are frequently asked to 'prove themselves', while at the same time remaining feminine

(Martin 1980; Young 1991; Heidensohn 1992). It was sometimes necessary for me to gain credibility by becoming involved in certain tests of trustworthiness and by demonstrating bravery through a number of initiation ceremonies (see also Westmarland 2000*b*). Much of this centred around 'gore' (see also Smith and Gray 1985), and I recall numerous instances when I was shown pictures of dead bodies. Similarly, after being asked if I had ever seen a 'real dead body', I was once driven to a morgue.<sup>15</sup> There were also moments where some officers made sexual advances towards me, and I was frequently asked about my relationship status. On one occasion, a young IMU officer rubbed his hand on my leg whilst we were sitting in the back of a police car. On another occasion, an older (and married) officer attempted to hold my hand as we walked through dense woodland during a night shift. However, it should be emphasised that these instances were atypical, and I never felt threatened. More generally, my relationship to some male officers was characterised by instances of harmless flirtation (see also Marks 2004).

In addition to my gender, many other aspects of my personal biography helped to ease access to the rank and file. First, my enthusiasm for long-distance running afforded me much respect with some officers who were also in the business of keeping fit. I attended the station gymnasium with officers, and was also invited along to a cross country run. These shared interests were important in developing rapport with officers. Second, originating from a working class background I did not necessarily coincide with the

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<sup>15</sup> Only to be 'saved by the bell' as the officer I was observing was diverted to an immediate response (IR) incident.

stereotype that officers may have had of a 'pompous' university graduate.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately however, I believe that my personality was paramount in accessing the culture of the lower-ranks. As Marks (2004: 881) has observed, 'the personality of the researcher is key to the stories that are told or hidden, and the exposure the researcher will be afforded'. During the fieldwork, I was perceived as someone who was: friendly and out-going; talkative and humorous; and eager to learn about operational policing. These features of my personality were arguably the most influential factor in developing rapport with officers (*ibid.*).

### **Impact of the Research on Members of the Public**

Attention should also be drawn to the range of other people who formed part of my ethnographic research. As we have seen, while the word 'observer' implies that I was somehow separate from the scene, it was not always the case. In addition to the officers themselves, I also came into contact with an array of non-police people. These other participants ranged from neutral members of the public to victims, suspects and witnesses: and draws further attention to issues of consent and confidentiality. While effort was always made to inform members of the public about the research, it was not always possible to do so because of the (sometimes) erratic and unpredictable nature of operational police work. In the instances that allowed for such disclosure however, I found that members of the public did not give much thought to my presence. Perhaps,

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<sup>16</sup> Throughout the research, I only came across four rank and file officers who informed me that they had been to university. For the most part, other officers appeared to hold a mixed view of university students which ranged from being arrogant and stuffy to lazy and polluting (see Young 1991). One officer was often parodied by his colleagues because he held a degree in philosophy. He had been nicknamed 'the vicar' for his displaying of relatively left-wing intellectual views: as one officer told me, 'Peter is a member of the Looney Left - he should have joined the church, not the job!'

and particularly in the case of suspects, they were more concerned with the police officers themselves. More generally, I was frequently mistaken for a police officer (occasionally by the police themselves) and, as it turned out, a number of other identities, including: a social worker; police cadet; psychologist; journalist; police suspect or 'prisoner'; prostitute; and independent police evaluator.<sup>17</sup> One instance, nonetheless, offers a useful example of how police researchers can disrupt the scene and impact on these often silent participants of their research. After arresting a woman for prostitution, the officer I was with explained to her that I was, 'a university student who is looking at policing', before asking her whether I could sit in during the police interview. Without warning, she marched up to me and angrily screamed in my face, 'My life is not a fucking university project'. In the main however, my perceived persona as a police officer often enabled me to fully observe the interactions between the police and those with whom they came into contact.

### **Recording the Field: Gathering Data, Confidentiality and Representation**

Following Norris (1993), I distinguished two types of data as particularly important in researching the occupational culture of the police. First, the way officers engaged in spontaneous *talk* with their colleagues, and second, descriptions of officers *doing* police work. I felt that the way officers talked about aspects of their role provided an important insight into their belief and value systems. Equally, I felt that the way officers dealt with

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<sup>17</sup> Indeed, in one instance whilst sitting in the custody suite, a white male in his 30's, who by all accounts appeared to be a 'regular client' of the police, saw me as something of an independent witness. He was telling me that the police had beaten him on previous occasions, and was shouting to the officers that they would not be able to hit him while I was there. Being perceived as a nuisance, his claims were not taken seriously by the officers in the suite.

particular situations could tell me a great deal about the norms and craft rules of routine policing. Once in the field however, it was paramount to be able to record these events and develop a store of data.

As I did not wish to disrupt the setting, field notes were collected relatively inconspicuously and thus intermittently, during the shift. My decision to take notes in a discreet manner was determined at the very beginning of the research when an IMU sergeant asked if he could examine my field notes at the end of every shift: as he put it, 'In case you write anything that we can use in court'. I do suspect, however, that he was eager to see how I had portrayed him and members of his shift in the notes. This episode clearly placed me in an awkward position, and despite telling him that my notes would merely be my own thoughts and 'academic scrawlings', he was particularly insistent that he should see them. In order to overcome this quandary, I told him that I would refrain from taking any notes whilst on his shift. Rather, it was explained that I would wait until I got home and into my own private space before writing anything down. He reluctantly agreed to this, and throughout the entire research I felt that it was important not to draw attention to my note-taking. I subsequently made notes in private settings including toilets (see also Reiner 2000*b*). However, a full set of field notes was always constructed at the end of each shift, and as far as possible in all circumstances, I aimed to record people, places, events, and conversations (see Lofland 1972).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> While some conversations were written verbatim, the majority represent a précis of what was said. In addition to recording field notes, I also kept a research diary. This would catalogue any initial feelings that I had about the research, and also offered the opportunity to identify any emerging themes.

Of course for some writers, the *real* ethnography begins when researchers return from the field, attempt to make sense of their data and present it to their audiences (Van Maanen 1988; 1995). A mention should therefore be made of how I gathered my field notes, and equally, how I intend to present them within this thesis. First, I cannot be sure if the themes identified here emerged from the 'objective' characteristics of the research settings, or were shaped by my own values, politics and pre-existing knowledge of research on police culture. This is a problem which is typical of all ethnographic research and cannot be easily overcome (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In examining contemporary police culture, I believe that I was influenced by a number of the classic police ethnographies that were briefly discussed earlier. As Bottoms (2000) notes, the dialectic relationship between literature and empirical research is one that is both inevitable, and to some extent, desirable. In addition to narrowing my attention to the core cultural characteristics of officers, it was felt that the previous research on police culture provided a useful point for comparison. However, against the backdrop of the changes which have taken place in the national and local policing context, I was primarily concerned to look out for any newly identified aspects of police culture. Second, while extracts from field notes are used to illustrate key points, I also subject them to further interpretation and analysis in order to draw the reader's attention to any specific themes that I may be unpacking from such notes. Moreover, in order to preserve the anonymity of individual officers, I always altered their names and some of the details of the research environment when recording my observations. In reproducing a number of field note extracts in this thesis, the same principle applies.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Equally, in writing the reports for Staffordshire Police, these measures were strictly conformed to. As far as I am aware, no officer has experienced any repercussions as a result of the dissemination of the reports.

## **Outline of the Thesis**

Having now provided a discussion of how the empirical data for this thesis was gathered, it is helpful to summarise the aims and objectives of the study, and to outline the manner in which the thesis will unfold. This thesis investigates the way in which changes in the local and national policing environment have impacted upon contemporary police culture. It follows the story of Staffordshire Police as it has attempted to effect cultural change in respect to improving both the working conditions of personnel inside the organisation, and the delivery of an effective and equitable service to the various 'publics' outside the organisation. By highlighting and seeking an explanation for any new and continuing aspects of police culture, the thesis aims to bring up-to-date an important strand of policing literature.

Chapter Two begins with a theoretical discussion of the concept of police culture. It addresses the competing definitions of the term, and provides an outline of its main sources and characteristics as identified by a long history of police scholars. In laying down the key debates which are present within the literature on police culture, this chapter provides an important basis on which to pose the question; does this description of police culture still hold relevance today?

Chapter Three outlines the wider social, economic and political field of contemporary British policing. In tracking the current policing landscape, the chapter argues that there are two, largely competing, components of this field. First, by drawing on two key moments in the relatively recent history of police-community relations, the chapter

demonstrates that a dominant political paradigm has emerged around the policing of 'diversity'. The current policing discourse, it is demonstrated, is one in which respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities has become salient. Second however, while the impact of this on the occupational culture of the police represents an integral part of this thesis, it is argued that this paradigm fundamentally overlooks the continuing significance of class in policing. Indeed, in addition to these political developments, it is the contention of this chapter that contemporary police culture should also be situated against the backdrop of a new societal configuration in which widespread economic inequality and exclusion feature prominently. As I demonstrate, these changes raise some fresh questions for the policing of a new 'policing property' (Lee 1981).

The following four chapters present the main findings from the empirical investigation. Chapter Four outlines Staffordshire Police's reform programme, and examines its impact upon the internal working environment. As I illustrate, what emerges are two contrasting and fragmented perspectives on the contemporary workplace. The first perspective, which is primarily articulated by what remains to be the dominant culture of the white, heterosexual, male officer, was characterised by resistance and resentment towards notions of diversity. Although not exclusively, the formal organisational approach to matters of diversity was viewed as excessive, divisive and unwarranted. Conversely, a number of minority ethnic, female and gay and lesbian officers described the continuation of a working environment which supports a white, heterosexual, male culture. For these officers, it is an environment in which exclusionary discourses and practices continue to operate. However, the articulation and performance of

discrimination has undergone transformation and reflects some new dynamics of police cultural change.

With a focus on the occupational perspectives and practices of officers as they went about policing their respective areas, Chapter Five considers the relevance of the 'classic' themes from the literature on police culture for the new policing context. It is demonstrated that many of the characteristics which were observed in the two research sites find remarkable similarity to those identified in earlier studies. Indeed, it is contended that the new principles underpinning contemporary policing agendas have not been significant enough to replace old ways of thinking about, and performing, the police role. However, while the chapter identifies numerous features of police culture in an almost clichéd manner, it also captures variations within the ideologies and practices of officers. It demonstrates that the occupational culture can be shaped by the local context in which officers work.

Chapter Six explores how the new policing realities have shaped relations between the police and those groups currently emphasised in 'policing diversity' policy agendas. It is demonstrated that within the contemporary policing environment, responses to the new and altered policing context are multifaceted and contradictory. While aspects of police culture are responsive to change processes, it is found that a number of problematic elements remain in respect to how officers perceive and treat those groups which have previously not been equitably served by policing. These responses are at odds with new

policing agendas, and reveal the continued pervasiveness of some familiar features of police culture.

With a different emphasis, Chapter Seven disrupts the examination of police culture within a framework of diversity by demonstrating that issues of class remain crucial in understanding contemporary policing discourses and practices. Returning to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three, the chapter exposes a fundamental contradiction which emerged between the dominant organisational discourse, and the realities of routine policing. Although interactions with their diverse ‘publics’ formed an important part of police work, it was predominantly poor and low status *white* males who occupied a central position in the police’s practical workload, and in their occupational consciousness. The chapter argues that in the wake of the police organisational accent on diversity, this group continue to operate as uncontentionally legitimate terrain for the unchallenged exercise of police discretion and authority.

With an identification of the main findings of the research, the thesis is then concluded in Chapter Eight. It is argued that the story of contemporary police culture is one of both change *and* continuity. While many of the features found by earlier researchers remain remarkably persistent today, it is demonstrated that the new policing realities have also transformed police culture in some new and complex ways. Yet the way in which officers have responded to the altered policing landscape is neither universal nor uniform. Police cultural change, in short, is fluid, complex and contradictory.

## Chapter Two

### **Clearing the Ground:**

#### **Issues and Debates in Police Occupational Culture**

This chapter provides a discussion of the key theoretical perspectives which have emerged surrounding police culture. In particular, it addresses the competing definitions of the term, and provides an outline of its main characteristics, and sources, as identified by a long history of policing scholars. Included here is an examination of a number of classic police ethnographies, and the works which have subsequently followed. The chapter then examines recent challenges to the idea of police culture, before highlighting the issues associated with police change. As I illustrate, in most accounts of police culture two points have assumed something of an academic orthodoxy. First, the occupational perspectives and practices of the police can influence the service that different sections of society receive. Second, police culture can impinge on relations inside the organisation, while simultaneously acting as an obstacle to external and internal efforts to reform the police. In setting out what has become recognised as the ‘core characteristics’ (Reiner 2000a) of police culture, this chapter provides an important basis on which to consider the relevance of these renowned features for the different context of policing in the new millennium. The main aim of this chapter is to present the key debates derived from the literature on police culture, for the empirical and analytical explorations that follow. Prior to doing so, it is necessary to reflect briefly upon who the police are.

## Police and Policing

For Skolnick (1966: 1), any analysis of the police should take as its starting point the question: 'For what social purpose do police exist'? Reiner (2000a: 1) suggests that modern societies are characterised by 'police fetishism', that is, 'the ideological assumption that the police are a functional prerequisite of social order so that without a police force chaos would ensue'. In fact however, many traditional societies have existed without a formal police force resembling contemporary bureaucratic police organisations. The police have only evolved as societies have become more complex, unequal and hierarchical (*ibid.*). Such a proposition therefore warrants a further deconstruction of what has become the taken-for-granted phenomenon of the police (see also Cain 1979).

Distinguishing between the concepts of 'the police' and 'policing' is particularly helpful in understanding the role and scope of the police. For Reiner (2000a: 1) the *police* refers to a 'particular kind of social institution, while *policing* implies a set of processes with specific social functions'. As Brogden *et al* (1988: 1) remind us, while we all may be involved in the regulation of others, it is the police as an occupation which is uniquely defined by 'its *specific mandate*, its *specific powers* and its *specific form of accountability*'. The police mandate emphasises upholding 'law and order', and the police are provided with a wide range of powers in order to fulfil this mandate. However, the uniqueness of the police is particularly marked by their general right to use coercive force. As Klockars (1985: 12) observes, 'police are institutions or individuals given the general right to use coercive force by the state within the state's domestic territory' (see also Bittner 1970). In so far as policing implies functions related to the regulation and

control of others, it is heavily related to aspects of social control. As Reiner (2000a: 2) reminds us, social control is defined by Cohen (1985: 1-2) as, 'the organised ways in which society responds to behaviour and people it regards as deviant, problematic, worrying, threatening, troublesome or undesirable'.

The police's relationship to the state also offers a comprehensive interpretation of their role. The claim that in their law enforcement the police are politically neutral is, for several authors, highly debateable. Many factors pattern the enforcement of law, yet they all reflect the political organisation of society. As Manning (1978a) argues, the law is intrinsically a political entity and because of this, the administration of criminal law unavoidably encompasses political values and political ends (see also Cohen 1997). The claim to legal and political impartiality is further undermined given that the police are situated in a social order in which power is unequally distributed (Cain 1979). Enforcement of the law is inevitably political in that powerless and marginal groups overwhelmingly receive differential treatment from the police. Indeed, and as Reiner (2000a: 8) observes, 'all relationships which have a power dimension are political. Policing is inherently and inescapably political in that sense'. In short, police organisations are inextricably bound up with politics because they function in political contexts, their mandate is defined politically, and they operate with the criminal law which is itself an interpretation of what is deemed acceptable behaviour from the perspective of the politically powerful (Manning 1978a; see also Box 1983). On a micro level, the occupational ideologies of the police themselves are important in understanding

not only their role in society, but also, their 'broad political function' (Reiner 2000a: 85).

It is to such ideologies that the chapter now turns.

## **Discovering Police Culture**

One of the central premises which have been reiterated throughout much of the research and theorising about police work is the suggestion that the police - especially the lower ranks of the police organisation - possess an exclusive occupational culture. The rank and file are perceived to hold a distinctive set of beliefs and assumptions which determines their behaviour, both within the 'canteen' and operationally out on the streets (Waddington 1999a). While most occupations arguably share some kind of cultural attributes among their members, it is the occupational perspectives and practices of the police which have received a significant amount of attention within the social sciences given the pervasiveness and longevity of some of its more problematic elements (*ibid.*).

The concept of police culture originally emerged following various ethnographic studies concerning the dynamics of routine police work (Reiner 1997). Academic interest was stimulated by two factors. First, depictions of police brutality and corruption during social unrest in the 1960s and 1970s led to an increasing concern with citizens' rights and a critical focus on state agencies such as the police (*ibid.*: see also Prenzler 1997). Second, concern with police culture also emerged from theoretical and methodological changes that were taking place within the social sciences at this time (Reiner 1997). Influenced by the theoretical shift towards microsociology, researchers sought to focus on the everyday dynamics of human action. Working within the tradition of symbolic

interactionism, Becker's (1963) notion of 'labelling' particularly gained prominence, and a new way of theorising deviancy emerged to shift attention from 'those who broke the law', to 'those who enforced it' (see Reiner 1997). This was also accompanied by a methodological shift away from positivistic research methods, and towards qualitative approaches such as ethnography and participant observation. By observing the police in naturally occurring situations, police researchers were able to document and understand the everyday norms and values which guided the police's routine decision making. What emerged was a fundamental distinction between the way police organisations formally presented themselves, and the informal 'reality' of their everyday practices (Van Maanen 1973; Manning 1978a).

One of the key debates surrounding these informal dimensions of police work was the empirical 'discovery' (Reiner 2000b) that the police could select which crimes to pay attention to (Goldstein 1960; see also Smith and Gray 1985). The realisation that the police had enormous discretionary powers - and more importantly, that the use of such powers were influenced by their cultural norms - meant that the role of the police in identifying and labelling people as deviant became a central focus for deviancy theorists. That the police-crime relationship was, in fact, 'flexible' consequently generated numerous studies of how the organisational and cultural biases of the police produced or amplified deviance (see Young 1971). Subsequent studies aimed to bring the social world of the police, including questions of discrimination (Lambert 1970) and police deviance (Punch 1979a; 1985) into a much sharper focus. Indeed, much of the research on police culture has been concerned with the relationship between the police and certain sections

of the population. The apparent racial discrimination within police practice has been explored (Chan 1997) along with other social divisions including age (Loader 1996), gender (Westmarland 2001b) and sexuality (Burke 1993). In order to capture the biases within police work, a number of expressions such as 'driving while black' (Harris 1997) and 'police property' (Lee 1981) have been coined. Scholars have also concentrated on the police construction of a 'suspect population' (McConville *et al* 1991), and the notion that relatively powerless sections of the population are 'informally disciplined' by the police (Choongh 1997).

As Prenzler notes (1997), there has been a notable increase in commissions of inquiry into police conduct across Western liberal democracies in recent decades.<sup>1</sup> He argues that such inquiries have contributed to a 'popularisation' of the term police culture in which a stereotyped image has developed of: police racism, homophobia and sexism; secrecy, corruption and brutality; biased law enforcement and anti-intellectualism. Moreover, the cultural attributes of the police are seen as working in opposition to public service ideals, and are equally believed to be subservient to efforts to reform the police (*ibid.*). As I demonstrate in the following chapter, recent critiques of the policing of ethnically and culturally diverse communities have left a lasting impression on the contemporary British policing landscape. While academic studies of police culture lapsed into obscurity during the mid 1990s, the Macpherson Report (1999) has been particularly instrumental in reviving both intellectual and public interest in the occupational culture of the police.

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, Prenzler (1997) refers to the findings of the Fitzgerald Inquiry (1989) in Australia, and the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service to highlight the way in which police culture has become closely linked to the problem of police corruption and brutality.

For a number of reasons, then, reaching an understanding of police culture and its social impact can be seen as an important task. As I have demonstrated, the police play a fundamental role in society. They are the visible symbol of the law in modern society (Van Maanen 1978*b*), and are granted vast discretionary powers to stop, search, detain and arrest individual members of the public; and can do so with a legitimate use of force. The police are typically the first agency that the suspect comes into contact with, and can therefore have a fundamental influence on 'who' gains entry to, and gets processed by, the criminal justice system (McConville *et al* 1991). Their use of discretionary powers also means that the police can influence what becomes defined as crime (Ericson 1993). Furthermore, because the police represent one of the most visible aspects of the body politic, the practice of policing provides people with one of their most tangible experiences of the state (Van Maanen 1978*b*).

Since emerging as an important area of study, an abundance of sociological literature on the working environment of the police has come to the fore. Police ethnographies and monographs have appeared over a number of decades, and their contents continue to be widely debated in contemporary discussions of policing (Banton 1964; Skolnick 1966; Bittner 1967; Westley 1970; Cain 1973; Rubenstein 1973; Van Maanen 1973; Reiner 1978; 2000*a*; Punch 1979*a*; Holdaway 1983; Smith and Gray 1985; Young 1991). These studies particularly highlighted the usefulness of police culture in understanding the many facets of policing from: learning the craft of policing to the day-to-day functioning of police work; police deviance; differential law enforcement; and the impact of reform initiatives (Paoline 2003). A significant weight of the research on police culture has

tended to describe the various elements of the phenomenon, and a number of 'core characteristics' have been distinguished. Certainly, it is now almost cliché to refer to Reiner's (2000a) conception of 'cop culture' which, for him, includes the following requisites: a sense of mission and thirst for action; suspicion, solidarity and isolation; cynicism and pragmatism; an 'us' versus 'them' orientation to the social world; racial prejudice; machismo and conservatism. Prior to exploring these characteristics more fully, it is important to briefly revisit the origins of a sociological policing scholarship which succeeded in bringing the informal dimensions of the police to the forefront.

## **Classic Perspectives**

Initial understandings of the internal culture of police organisations were the result of pioneering work conducted by scholars in America and Britain. One of the first studies of police culture was Skolnick's (1966) depiction of the police's 'working personality'. Skolnick (1966: 42) was primarily concerned with the 'effects of a man's work on his outlook of the world'. He argued that a collective culture shared primarily by the rank and file arises from the common dilemmas and tensions inherently associated with the job of being a police officer. Chief among these tensions is the potential *danger* which officers face in their day-to-day encounters with the public. The police role is unique in that its core task requires officers to confront situations in which there is an (unpredictable) element of risk of physical danger. Second, the fact that the police are the visible symbol of *authority* (backed by the potential to use legitimate coercive force) places them in a potentially alienated position from those they police. Indeed, being the visible symbol of state sanctioned authority can expose the police to a great deal of

antagonism and hostility from members of the public. Finally these distinctive elements of danger and authority in the police role are joined by a 'constant pressure to appear *efficient*' (*ibid.*: 44): or more simply, a pressure to 'get results'.

For Skolnick (1966: 42), these basic rudiments of the police environment converge to produce 'distinctive cognitive and behavioural responses in police: a working personality'. As a response to the inherent danger in police work, a primary part of the 'working personality' is suspiciousness towards certain people, places and events. Skolnick identifies the 'symbolic assailant' as a person whose 'gesture, language, and attire the policeman has come to recognise as a prelude to violence' (*ibid.*: 45). Second, as a consequence of their authority, officers become socially isolated from the outside world, and exhibit a high degree of internal solidarity with their colleagues. Finally, he identifies moral conservatism as a behavioural response in the police. As Skolnick explains, 'the fact that a man is engaged in enforcing a set of rules implies that he also becomes implicated in *affirming* them' (*ibid.*: 59).

A number of pioneering studies of the police can also be found in the works of Westley (1970), Banton (1964) and Cain (1973). While each study illustrated a different emphasis depending on the author's theoretical commitments, and indeed country of study, they all exposed some previously hidden elements of the police's occupational world. In seeking an explanation for police violence in an American town, Westley (1970) highlighted the importance of cultural norms and values in shaping the behaviour of officers. In similarity to Skolnick (1966), he identified the strained relationship between the police

and the public as a principal factor in generating distinctive group customs and beliefs amongst the police:

The duties of the policeman bring him into contact with greatly varied proportions of the public ... Sooner or later he meets them all and finds them in a range of human sentiments and human problems. Mostly he meets them in their evil, their sorrow, and their degradation and defeat ... He sees the public as a threat. He seldom meets it at its best and it seldom welcomes him. In spite of his ostensible function as protector he usually meets only those who he is protecting them from, and for him they have no love (*ibid.*: 49).

From the police's perspective, the public are the enemy. The response is that the police hold the public at a distance, and display cynicism and aggression towards them. Indeed, Westley (1970) found that violence was a central part of routine police work, and this was cemented by the cultural traits of silence, secrecy and solidarity. Thus with a focus on the demands of policing, both Skolnick (1966) and Westley (1970) retain the perception that danger, and a potentially hostile working environment, are fundamental factors in shaping the occupational norms and practices of the police.

The British works of Banton (1964) and Cain (1973) also emphasised various aspects of the police world which had previously gone unexplored.<sup>2</sup> While Banton's (1964: vii) study arose from the idea that it may be 'instructive to analyse institutions that are working well in order to see if anything can be learned from their success', his

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<sup>2</sup> See McLaughlin (2007a: chapter three) for a comprehensive discussion of these early policing perspectives - and particularly the work of British scholar Michael Banton.

examination of the *social* dimensions of the police role meant that his work represented a seminal account of police culture.

In a similar vein to Westley and Skolnick, Banton (1964) also recognised the police's unique position in society. He noted that in order to identify with the British public, the police were drawn primarily from the ordinary working classes, a group with whom they frequently came into contact. Banton found that this common background was integral for maintaining the relationship between the police and those they policed. However, the authority that the police employed over their community also made them a socially isolated grouping. While providing a comprehensive sociological understanding of the cultural responses that arose from the police role, one of the key findings of his work was the discovery that despite the popular public conception, the police did not operate primarily as 'law enforcers'. Rather, he found that they were predominantly engaged in an array of services to the public. The police, for Banton, could be better described as 'peace-keepers'. It is such previously unexplored aspects of the police role which provided an original, sociological insight into policing. Indeed, for McLaughlin (2007a), Banton's work paved the way for a new kind of British policing scholarship which extended beyond mere descriptions of police organisations.

However, and as Reiner (2000b: 213) notes, Banton's research 'assumed a primarily harmonious view of British society'. His work failed to provide an adequate insight into the problematic issues surrounding police corruption, and the adverse treatment of certain members of the community. Indeed, as McLaughlin (2007a: 45) puts it, 'there is almost

no public or 'policed' perspective in the study'. Cain's (1973) subsequent description of the informal norms and practices of the police offered a more critical analysis of the relationship between the police and the community. Observing police work in both rural and urban locations, Cain found that urban police constables were particularly orientated towards a crime-fighting image of their role, a task which in reality formed only a small part of their daily workload. However, in order to achieve an authentic policing experience as 'crime-fighters', she found that the police would focus on relatively petty crimes. Indeed, for the police, 'good' and 'proper' police work became associated with the act of arresting an individual. Urban officers viewed themselves as distinct to the public, and Cain noted rank and file prejudice and suspicion towards minority ethnic populations. Conversely, while crime-fighting appeared central to urban officers' definition of their role, Cain found that rural constables were more integrated into the community that they policed. Relations between the police and the public were friendly, and unlike their urban counterparts, rural patrols tended to be a 'quiet and leisurely affair' (*ibid.*: 75). In examining police culture within these two distinct settings, Cain (1973) offered a unique insight into how the immediate policing environment can shape the occupational assumptions and practices of police officers.

These early British and American studies allowed a much richer, sociological interpretation of the daily realities of the police's occupational world. In particular, they provided a deeper understanding of: how patrol officers used their time and made sense of their social world; how they related to members of the public in different settings; and the norms underpinning the police's use of discretionary powers (McLaughlin 2007a).

My aim here has been to highlight some of the more enduring studies of police culture. While representing the beginnings of research into police culture, these classic ethnographies also provided an important reference point for a number of subsequent studies.

## **Ensuing Themes and Debates**

The collective evidence of ethnographic studies of the police has identified a number of elements in the informal occupational ideologies and practices of police officers. Although there is no static definition, Reiner (1992*b*: 109) has described police culture as ‘the values, norms, perspectives and craft rules which inform police conduct’. Chan (1996: 110) similarly proposes a definition of police culture as the ‘informal occupational norms and values operating under the apparently rigid hierarchical structure of police organisations’. Additional understandings include Holdaway’s (1983: 143) who defines police culture as ‘the officers construction of what constitutes (and should constitute) police work – i.e. what police officers think they *should* be doing and how they think this can best be achieved’. Central to these understandings is the idea that the police possess a coherent set of informal norms, beliefs and values which informs their attitudes and behaviour. Depending on the paradigm of the discipline addressing it, ‘culture’ has many definitions. Often claiming it as their basic concept, anthropologists provide a particularly helpful insight. They refer to culture as the ‘way of life’ of a society or group of people, including: codes of manners and dress; a shared language; rituals and norms of behaviour; transmissions of myths and stories; and customs and systems of belief (Billington *et al* 1991; see also Van Maanen 1978*b*).

At the same time however, in order to provide a context for the current discussion, it is also important to address the meaning of organisational culture. Schein (1985: 6) suggests that culture is a 'deeper level of *basic assumptions and beliefs* that are shared by members of an organisation'. This draws attention to the way in which cultural cognitions are a *group*, rather than individual, phenomenon which becomes transmitted, learned and reproduced through group socialisation (see also Shearing 1981*b*). As several commentators have observed, unofficial and potentially 'disruptive' cultures can fundamentally challenge the formal face of organisations through undermining worker commitment, and the goals and outcomes of the organisation (Sackmann 1991; see also Hallett 2003).

That police organisations are often seen as typical examples of rationally bureaucratic organisations overlooks the many informal dimensions which are equally present in their day-to-day running (Holdaway 1980; Brogden *et al* 1988; Marks 2005). For many, the informal aspects of police organisations are paramount in shaping the way the rank and file think about, and perform, their role. What is of significance here is that these informal realities of the everyday workings of police organisations can function to subvert the way in which they present themselves to their public constituents (Manning 1978*a*; Foster 2003). Indeed, formal policies to reform police culture have generally failed because they do not taken into account the existence of the unofficial aspects of police organisations (Brogden *et al* 1988; Brogden and Shearing 1993; Marks 2005).

## **Police Culture: ‘Core Characteristics’**

Since the early ethnographic accounts of police culture, a number of further features of the police milieu have been distinguished. Indeed, many of the characteristics which were identified by the classic ethnographers are apparent in the occupational thinking and practices of subsequent generations of police officers. In his synthesis of the research, Reiner (2000a: chapter three) has arguably been the most prominent analyst of what he identifies as the ‘core characteristics’ of ‘cop culture’. In what follows I outline these key features of police culture. However, while each theme is presented as distinct, it should be noted that an overlap exists. In practice, the features of police culture draw upon and reinforce the other (Reiner 2000a; see also Crank 2004).

### ***Police As ‘Crime-Fighters’: Mission, Action and Excitement***

A primary characteristic of police culture is an exaggerated ‘sense of mission’ towards the task of policing (Reiner 2000a: 89). Police ascribe great pride to the job of policing, and acclaim its uniqueness and potential to make a difference. The result is that the police come to view themselves as the ‘thin blue line’ which stands between order and anarchy. This element of the police perspective means that officers interpret their role as one that, first and foremost, involves fighting crime (Cain 1973; Smith and Gray 1985). Certainly, while this traditional representation can be undermined once the real nature of public police work is examined, the *image* to which the police (and indeed, the public), subscribe is that of ‘crime-fighters’ (see also Manning 1978a). In his typology of police outlooks, Reiner (1978: 230) suggests that the ‘new centurion’ approximates to this type of idealised policing. As he puts it, ‘the *new centurion* is a man with a mission. He is

dedicated to a crusade against crime and disorder'. The centrality of the logic of mission in the police outlook has been used to account for incidents of police deviance, including engaging in 'bad practice' in order to get results (Box 1983; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993). These features of police culture can have important implications for police change. In particular, the 'moral imperative' (Reiner 2000a: 89) to fight crime can make the police resistant to efforts to redefine the police role (Bowling and Foster 2003).

Moreover, exacerbated by the reality that police work is predominantly uneventful and tedious, the crime-fighting outlook contributes to a tendency among officers to seek out work that is deemed to be challenging, exciting and action-packed. For example, Smith and Gray (1985) found that officers would drive at high speed to incidents that did not require a rapid response. From their observations, they also noted that officers took every opportunity to participate in *anything* that offered the promise of excitement. Various researchers have also drawn attention to the transmission of stories concerned with the 'search, chase and arrest' of individuals (*ibid.*: Ericson 1982; Waddington 1999b). In particular, the routine recounting of violent and confrontational encounters with members of the public is a central feature of police culture (Young 1991; Fielding 1994). Within the informal dimensions of police work, these 'war stories' (Punch 1979a: 87) act as an important source of information for the socialisation of new recruits, and are equally important in the maintenance of existing group norms (Van Maanen 1973; see also Fielding 1988).

The search for excitement and action means that certain aspects of routine policing are considered unimportant. As Holdaway (1983) observes, a strong sense of commitment to the values of 'real' police work frequently results in some incidents becoming dismissed as 'rubbish' (see also Reiner 2000a). As I discuss below, there has been no shortage of evidence that the police regard being called to domestic violence incidents as 'rubbish' work. The emphasis on excitement and action can impinge on organisational attempts to innovate the police role. In particular, alternative and 'softer' approaches to policing are rejected or subverted (Goldsmith 1990; Barton 2003). For the rank and file, the 'real' objectives of police work centre around notions of the 'good' arrest, the 'good' result, and the 'good' villain (Smith and Gray 1985: 345; see also Cain 1973). As I mentioned earlier however, the view of the police as engaged primarily in 'crime fighting' is largely inaccurate and somewhat misleading. It fails to acknowledge that routine policing predominantly involves dealing with incidents that are petty, tricky and even boring. (Reiner 2000a). More often than not, officers spend a great deal of time waiting to be called to an incident and completing paperwork (Manning 1977). Nonetheless, officers tend to focus on, and indeed celebrate, the exciting aspects of their role. The evident disparity between the police perception of their work and the reality of it was captured by Banton (1964: 156):

It is remarkable how frequently I have been assured by officers I have been accompanying on patrol ... that it has been an unusually quiet night. Either the laws of chance do not apply to patrol work or the busy shifts impress themselves on the patrolman's mind so strongly that all other ones seem to fall below standard.

In her study, Cain (1971: 72) found that the time between action-oriented incidents was defined as 'boring' by the police. Officers filled the time between these incidents by engaging in a range of 'easing behaviour', such as drinking cups of tea or visiting the local public house. One way of relieving the boredom of a shift was to make 'marginally legitimate arrests' (*ibid.*: 73). This provided officers with an opportunity for excitement, and also gave them some kudos. As Marks (2005) notes, however, the craving for action and excitement among the police means that they are motivated to focus only on the immediate, rather than long term, problems. The result is that the police are disinclined to undertake less adventurous forms of police work (see also Bowling and Foster 2003).

### ***Machismo: Masculinities and the Police***

Policing is overwhelmingly a white, heterosexual and male dominated occupation (Brown 1998; Walklate 2000; Westmarland 2001*b*). Such a demographic factor has important cultural dimensions. Indeed, another central characteristic of police culture is its strong and taken-for-granted masculine ethos (Reiner 2000*a*; Foster 2003). As Waddington (1999*b*: 99) notes, police officers are 'expected to be physically and emotionally tough, aggressive and engage in traditionally masculine activities'. Several pieces of research have highlighted the heavy drinking habits and robust heterosexuality of the rank and file (Smith and Gray 1985; Young 1991). These exaggerated heterosexual orientations tend to reflect misogynistic and patriarchal ideologies, while at the same time celebrating a discourse of violence (Fielding 1994: 46). Moreover, the centrality of a white, heterosexist, male culture within police organisations has important implications for those groups who do not correspond with this dominant norm as a result of their

gender, ethnicity and sexuality. There is an abundance of research which confirms that women, minority ethnic and gay and lesbian people encounter difficulties in gaining acceptance and recognition, both within and beyond police organisations.

Women officers have been particularly subjected to forms of sexual harassment and discrimination within the police (Smith and Gray 1985; Heidensohn 1992). While there is a broad absence of women in the police, female officers are particularly underrepresented within the higher ranks of the organisation (Walklate 2000).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, stereotypical assumptions regarding their gender underpin the *type* of work women perform as police officers (Martin 1980; Westmarland 2001*b*). In an influential ethnographic account of police culture, Young (1991) suggests that women who breach the boundary to penetrate the masculine world of the police can only be partially successful. In a highly gendered environment, women find themselves under pressure to either perform the roles which reinforce gender stereotypes, or alternatively, reject part of their femininity by adopting aspects of the male culture. Such a choice has been pertinently summed up by Martin (1980) who argues that as police officers, women are forced to choose between becoming *policewomen* or *policewomen*.

The 'cult of masculinity' (Smith and Gray 1985) within the police can also influence attitudes and behaviours towards female victims of crime. Edwards (1989) forcefully argues that it is the patriarchal sentiments of police culture which constructs domestic violence incidents as the inconclusive, low-status work which distracts the police from

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to identifying what she calls the 'greasy pole' of promotion for women in police organisations, the high profile claim of sexual discrimination brought by Assistant Chief Constable Alison Halford against Merseyside Police also exposed the persistence of machismo in the higher ranks (see Walklate 2000: 237).

their pursuit of 'real' police work.<sup>4</sup> In their practical dealings with such incidents, the police have frequently avoided arresting the (usually) male perpetrator, and in so doing, have undermined the legal implications of what has taken place. Indeed, the formal response by the police has been to merely provide 'advice' to the parties. The result is that the police have frequently redefined this criminal matter into a 'civil dispute' (Waddington 1999b). From an alternative perspective, however, Altbeker (2005) emphasises the difficulties that individual officers encounter when they are called to intervene in intimate family disputes. Nonetheless, recent policing agendas in this area have attempted to improve the way domestic violence incidents are responded to by the police. This point will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

The taken-for-granted ethos of heterosexual masculinity can also exclude those people whose sexuality is at odds with this dominant norm. Homosexual police officers have particularly reported their difficulty in gaining acceptance. In addition to experiencing a complex process of exclusion and marginalisation, gay officers have found themselves adopting the values and qualities associated with the dominant heterosexual culture. Burke (1993) found that gay men are held at a distance until they can 'prove' their masculine traits, such as 'backing up' their colleagues in a violent incident. In short, homosexuality is perceived negatively within police culture because it fundamentally challenges the dominance of heterosexist masculinity (*ibid.*: see also Young 1991).

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<sup>4</sup> Edwards (1989) also directs attention towards the wider role of the law and the state for this bias. I explore this point more fully in subsequent sections.

## *Racial Prejudice*

Racial prejudice and discrimination towards people from minority ethnic backgrounds has also been identified as a core feature of police culture (Skolnick 1966; Lambert 1970; Holdaway 1996; Reiner 2000a). In a similar vein to the gender and sexuality issues described above, minority ethnic officers have articulated their experiences of isolation and discrimination within police organisations (see Holdaway and Barron 1997).

Outside the organisation, there is a long history of persistent police harassment and prejudice towards members of minority ethnic groups. Indeed, as far back as 1966 Skolnick suggested that for American police officers, the African American constituted the 'symbolic assailant' (see also Westley 1970; Lambert 1970; Cain 1973). More recent scholars have similarly noted police suspiciousness, hostility and prejudice towards people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Smith and Gray 1985; Holdaway 1996; Chan 1997). In these discussions, the 'over-policing' of such groups have been particularly highlighted. During the 1980s, an in-depth study of the police in London found that police officers stopped disproportionate numbers of young Black Caribbean men.<sup>5</sup> In addition to observing the pervasive use of racist language among the police, Smith and Gray (1985: 129) also encountered one officer who stated the following:

'How does an experienced officer decide who to stop? Well, the one that you stop is often wearing a woolly hat ... is dark in complexion ... has thick lips, and usually has dark fuzzy hair'.

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<sup>5</sup> Recent debates have suggested that the 'stop and search' picture is much more complex than first believed (see Waddington *et al* 2004).

Racial bias can also occur in more subtle ways within police forces. Smith and Gray (1985) found reluctance on the part of the police to investigate adequately offences involving members of minority ethnic communities as victims of crime. As I explore more fully in the following chapter, this practice finds remarkable parallel with the more recent assertion that failure to properly investigate the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence was a consequence of 'institutional racism' (Macpherson Report 1999).

However, in examining the racist element of police culture, a number of points can be made. Observational research has noted a wide disparity between what the police *say* about minority ethnic people, and their actual *behaviour* when interacting with such groups (see Smith and Gray 1985). Some authors have also questioned whether the police are more racist than the non-police population: that is, society as a whole (Reiner 2000a). It is generally argued that police racism is a reflection of the racist tendencies of the broader society from which the police are drawn (*ibid.*: see also Marks 2005). Finally, hostility towards members of minority ethnic groups becomes reinforced in the localised experiences that the police have with such groups. As Reiner (2000a: 100) puts it:

The crucial source of police prejudice is societal racism, which places ethnic minorities disproportionately in those strata and situations from which the police derive their property. This structural feature of police-ethnic-minority relations bolsters any prior prejudice police officers have.

## *Suspicion and Stereotyping*

As the review of Skolnick's (1966) work demonstrated, suspicion is an integral part of the police's 'working personality'. It arises in response to the potential danger of policing. Indeed, the pervading sense of danger and unpredictability means that the police learn to become alert to anything suspicious. An abundance of other research has identified suspicion as a widely shared attribute of the police worldview (Sacks 1972; Rubenstein 1973; Brown 1981). In these works it is contended that incongruence is a primary basis for stimulating suspicion. Indeed, Sacks (1972: 285) proposes that in patrolling their patch, the police learn to treat their geographical domain as a 'territory of normal appearances'. The task of the officer is to become sensitive to the occasions when these expected appearances are in variance: that is, out of place. In particular, the police develop an extensive dictionary of indicators which, for them, signal a person's possible involvement in crime. Frequently, such indicators are driven by aesthetic and behavioural cues (*ibid.*: see also Brown 1981; Smith and Gray 1985). It should be noted, however, that while suspicion is a cultural response to the nature of the police role, it is also promoted by formal organisational training (Skolnick 1966; Reiner 2000a). More broadly, the notion of suspicion is also built into the law itself.<sup>6</sup>

One challenge here is that suspicion is related to the stereotyping of people, and indeed, geographical areas (see Chambliss 1994). It has long been recognised that police attention falls heavily on those marginal and excluded groups at the bottom of the social strata (Reiner 1997; Box 1987; 1994). Indeed, and as Reiner (2000a) notes, police

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<sup>6</sup> In the British context, the police need 'reasonable suspicion' to exercise their stop, search and arrest powers. However, this is a term that has been subjected to criticism as it is loosely defined and largely subjective (see Dixon 1997).

stereotyping both reflects and reinforces the patterns of disadvantage which characterise the broader social structure. A more detailed analysis of the people who find prominence within the police's occupational consciousnesses is presented below.

### ***Cynicism and Police Pessimism***

Cynicism, or police pessimism, has also been identified as a core feature of police culture. As noted by Westley (1970), the police have an intimate relationship with people who are profoundly disadvantaged and stripped of personal dignity. The police are also routinely called to deal with a range of difficult and challenging incidents. From this perspective, policing represents a type of 'dirty work' (Waddington 1999b). The police consequently 'develop a hard skin of bitterness, seeing all social trends in apocalyptic terms, with the police as a beleaguered minority about to be overrun by the forces of barbarism' (Reiner 2000a: 90; see also Reiner 1978). The police, it is said, develop a cynical and pessimistic attitude which becomes directed against the public, senior officers and the criminal justice system.

As McLaughlin (2007a: 55) notes, because the police frequently come into contact with 'heavy users' of policing services, they become acutely aware that their clientele may wish to manipulate their authority by lying to them (see also Van Maanen 1978a). As the police have 'seen it all before', they tend to discount what ordinary members of the public tell them. This is captured by Manning (1977: 26) who writes that:

...people in general are viewed as stupid, fallible, greedy, lustful, immoral and hypocritical. Man is seen as a translucent Machiavelli, easily uncovered by insightful probing or public action.

Scepticism and mistrust of the public tends to manifest itself in a detached, uninterested and seemingly unsympathetic manner during interactions (McLaughlin 2007a). A number of other important cultural responses underpin interactions with the public. In particular, the police feel the need to maintain control and demand deference from people who are seemingly disrespectful or defiant towards the symbolic dimensions of police authority (Sykes and Clarke 1975; Van Maanen 1978a; Smith and Gray 1985). It has been found that when people are disrespectful towards the police, a range of responses are provoked. As demonstrated by Smith and Gray (1985), reactions may range from officers invading the personal space of the public, to the threat or actual execution of a range of penalties, including arrest, unless they comply (see also Holdaway 1983). This 'contempt of cop' response, as Waddington (1999a: 154) suggests, is most readily invoked when the police have an audience, such as members of the public or a fellow colleague. It is on such occasions that officers feel the most need to 'save face' by maintaining, and displaying, their authority.

The cynical element of the police perspective also extends to senior officers in the police organisation. Rank and file officers believe that their superiors are fundamentally detached from the sharp end of 'real' police work. As Waddington (1999b: 231) observes, 'from their perspective, senior ranks are divorced from reality, living in a comfortable and trouble-free existence on the upper floors of police headquarters'. This

sense of betrayal by management serves to reinforce a strong sense of solidarity among the rank and file, and can also thwart 'top down' attempts to reform the police. Police cynicism also becomes directed towards the criminal justice system. Officers frequently complain that 'liberal' politicians, 'soft-touch' laws, and naive judges all hinder the police from properly 'nailing' criminals (Reiner 1978; see also Graef 1989). From the police perspective, the criminal justice system excessively favours the criminal, and therefore erodes all of the hard work they do to keep 'the streets' safe.

As a cultural characteristic, police cynicism tends to be expressed through police humour. While serving to release the tensions associated with their 'dirty work' environment, the features found in police humour can also reflect wider issues of power and undermine the imposition of external rules (Powell 1996). A shared sense of humour among the police also reinforces solidarity among the rank and file (Waddington 1999a).

### *Isolation and Solidarity*

That the police perceive themselves as distinct from the 'civilian' population is one of the main themes which have been found in much of the ethnographic research on policing (Skolnick 1966; Westley 1970; Holdaway 1983; Young 1991). As Waddington (1999b) notes, the police are a highly insular group and make a rigid distinction between 'us' (the police) and 'them' (the rest of the population). This strong sense of togetherness occurs for a number of reasons including: working the anti-social hours of the shift system together; difficulties in separating work from home life; needing to rely on colleagues in times of danger; and the isolating nature of their unique position as the impersonal face of

coercive authority (see Reiner 2000a: 91). As we have seen, the expression of a strong 'in-group' identity can create a gulf within the organisation: especially between the rank and file and senior officers. Added to this, a strong sense of solidarity among the police has also been used to explain the protection and 'covering up' of colleague infringements of procedure (Skolnick and Fyfe 1993). More generally, solidarity among the rank and file plays an important role in concealing minor acts of police deviance from supervisors (see Cain 1973).

For Van Maanen (1973; 1978a) the 'us' versus 'them' distinction within the police perspective is further secured by the police uniform because it symbolises, for officers, their isolation from the rest of society. In part, this outlook becomes expressed through the splitting of the public into those people considered as 'deserving' of police assistance. The police make an important distinction between the 'roughs' and the 'respectables' (Cain 1973; Shearing 1981a). Those falling into the former have been considered by the police as 'slags' (Smith and Gray 1985), 'pukes' (Ericson 1982), 'prigs' (Young 1991) and 'assholes' (Van Maanen 1978a).

Bringing together some of the research on the nuances of this 'us' versus 'them' outlook, Reiner (2000a: 93-4) identifies a number of groups who further challenge the police milieu. First, there are those people which Lee (1981: 53-4) has called '*police property*'.<sup>7</sup> The term is used to describe those socially, economically and politically powerless people who the majority see as problematic and offensive. Such groups are left for the

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<sup>7</sup> Although initially coined by Cray (1972), the concept of 'police property' has been subsequently developed by Lee (1981).

police to deal with and control. In the main, they include: the homeless; young 'deviant' sub-cultures; the unemployed; drug addicts; sections of minority ethnic communities; and prostitutes. These low status populations have always formed the core targets of adversarial policing, and closely track the pattern of disadvantage in the wider social structure. '*Rubbish*' is another category and refers to those people who, it is believed, make trivial calls to the police. As was noted earlier, domestic violence incidents form part of what is viewed as rubbish. '*Challengers*' refers to professionals from various disciplines that are in a position to scrutinise the work of the police (see Holdaway 1983). Along with civil libertarians and lawyers, academics are also seen as core challengers to the police milieu (see Young 1991). A final group are what Holdaway (1983:77-81) calls '*disarmers*'. These are socially fragile groups (such as children and the elderly) that the police find it difficult to deal with because of their potential to invoke public sympathy.

### ***Conservatism and Pragmatism***

A conservative outlook, coupled with a pragmatic attitude, serves to perpetuate these views of the public (Reiner 2000a). As we saw in Skolnick's (1966) characterisation of the 'working personality', police conservatism arises from the nature of the police role. Broadly speaking, the social and political perspectives of the police reflect the dominant ideologies of society. However, a conservative moral - and indeed political - outlook means that the police espouse right-wing views on social issues, and also express intolerance towards those groups who lead non-conventional lifestyles (*ibid.*). A related outlook is that of pragmatism. The police view their occupation as fundamentally 'practical', in which a healthy dose of 'common sense' is required (see Crank 2004). The

police, in short, just want to get the job done with a minimum of hassle (Reiner 2000a). However, the centrality of a pragmatic attitude within police culture often means that the rank and file are reluctant to embrace new ways to innovate the police role. They believe in existing ways of performing their role, and discard new concepts in favour of the familiar and reliable (Bowling and Foster 2002; Marks 2003; 2005).

## **Challenging Accepted Wisdoms**

The central contention in the above collection of characteristics is that the police possess a range of, predominantly negative, behavioural tendencies which develop from the nature of the police role. These characteristics, it is assumed, are culturally transmitted and reinforced through the immediate peer group of officers as they internalise the dilemmas of their working environment (McLaughlin 2007a). Although police recruitment patterns have changed in recent years, traditional strategies have overwhelmingly enlisted white, heterosexual males from a working class, or lower middle class, background (Reiner 1978; Paoline 2003). This recruit pattern has produced an apparently homogenous grouping.

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of the existence of 'police culture', a number of criticisms have recently arisen. Such challenges call into question both its conception and utility for explaining police discourses and behaviour.

### ***Police Culture as Homogenous and Fixed***

In its most basic form, police culture is often presented as homogenous, static and unchanging. In an influential critique of the way in which police culture has been conceptualised, Chan (1997: 66) argues that researchers should account for the presence of 'multiple cultures', both within and between police forces. Indeed, much of the research on police culture fails to recognise the important differences between ranks, departments and forces. Yet research has drawn distinctions between the cultural ideologies and practices of urban and rural police officers (Cain 1973; Young 1993). Differences in police culture have also been found at the local (Foster 1989) and international level (Bayley 1976). There are also important variations in the hierarchical composition of police organisations. For example, Reuss-Ianni and Ianni (1983) identified an important distinction between 'street cops' and 'management cops'. Similarly, Manning (1993, *cited in* Chan 1997) suggests that police organisations are characterised by three subcultures of policing according to rank: command, middle-management and lower participants (see also Holdaway 1983; Young 1991). As we saw earlier, Cain (1973) also identified differences in culture between rural and urban police officers (see also Young 1993). These propositions therefore support the contention that there are possible *sub-cultures* contained within what is usually presented as 'mainstream' police culture. Moreover, Fielding (1995) suggests that even these characterisations are too narrow because they overlook the varied conflicts between the officers themselves. On this individual level, Reiner (1978) demonstrates that there are important variations between police orientations and styles.

Despite the differences within and between police forces, representations of police culture have tended to generalise police culture as a singular and homogenous entity (Chan 1997). The problem, as Foster (2003) notes, is that researchers assume that the culture they are observing is representative of policing *per se*. As the diverse range of orientations and differences captured in the aforementioned studies illustrate, police officers are not all the same. In order to reflect the important differences in what has traditionally been seen as the dominant 'culture', recent scholars have pointed out that discussions of police culture are perhaps better referred to in the plural: that is, as police *cultures* (*ibid*; see also Cockcroft 2007).<sup>8</sup>

### ***Police as 'Cultural Dopes'***

The issue of homogeneity also draws our attention to the way in which individual officers become socialised into the occupational culture. Many accounts portray the 'acculturation process' (Chan 1997: 66) as one way, and in so doing, thus present the culture as a potent and pervasive influence on individual members. The result, as Fielding (1988) argues, is that police officers are portrayed as manipulated and docile learners within this process. Chan (1997) argues that this approach is too deterministic, and does not take into account the agency of the officers in making up their own mind as to whether or not to accept the features of the culture: and furthermore, to what *extent* they accept them. Drawing on

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<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, I intend to retain its singular use. In part, I do so in order to capture the commonalities between the cultural tendencies of officers that I observed. As McConville and Shepherd (1992) have argued, all police organisation share something of a common police culture (see also Crank 2004). At the same time, however, this does not mean that the variations in police culture will be ignored or overlooked. Indeed, where relevant such differences will be highlighted and explored. Nonetheless, my own conceptualisation of 'police culture' is understood as capable of incorporating both differences and similarities.

Fielding (1988: 10), Chan (1997: 66) demonstrates that the individual officer is the 'final arbitrator and mediator' in deciding whether to adopt the characteristics of police culture. Whether, if at all, new recruits accept the cultural values will depend on many factors including their own personal biography and personality. The recognition of the agency of officers has opened up debate about the space for creativity (Ericson and Shearing 1991) and change in police culture (Chan 1997; Foster 2003; Marks 2005).

Police culture, and its impact, is also presented as overwhelmingly negative. As Chan (1997: 10) observes, 'police culture has become a convenient label for a range of negative values, attitudes, and practice norms among police officers'. This is also taken up by Waddington (1999b: 107), who similarly argues that the concept of police culture has become synonymous with critiques of rank and file behaviour. For Waddington, the concept 'conveniently blames' individual officers for the wider biases of the criminal justice system. As I explore below, a number of writers have stressed the importance of broader legal, socio-economic, organisational and political processes in shaping police behaviour. For now however, it has been argued that by focusing only on the negative characteristics of police culture, researchers fail to take account the fact that *positive* police behaviours are equally identifiable. As Waddington (1999a; 1999b) notes, in a job that is difficult and occasionally dangerous, a strong bond of solidarity can help officers to cope with unpredictable situations. Similarly, a strong sense of mission and subscription to a crime-fighting image will usually mean that incidents receive immediate and prompt attention by officers. From this perspective, police culture is an important device for supporting officers and is, in many ways, a rational response to their unique

role. It is also important to note that even when aspects of police culture are internalised, they do not necessarily determine police behaviour. As Reiner (2000a: 85) contends, 'an important distinction can indeed be made between 'cop culture' - the orientations implied and expressed by officers in the course of their work - and 'canteen culture', the values and beliefs exhibited in off-duty socialising' (see also Waddington 1999a; 1999b).

### ***Police Culture as Autonomous from the Wider Context***

Another critique of the way in which police culture has been conceptualised relates to the idea that it is independent from the broader organisational, social, economic, political and legal context within which it is situated (see Chan 1997). As we have seen, 'culturalist' (Dixon 1997) interpretations of police culture emphasise the immediate peer group of officers, and posit that the police behave in the way that they do because a particularly 'strong' cultural force manipulates them. For some, such a narrowly focused framework fundamentally ignores the wider contextual influences which shape police thinking and behaviour. Indeed, in response to this critique a number of 'structuralist' (*ibid.*) interpretations have emerged. Here, researchers have moved beyond investigating the routine, day-to-day activities of those at the base of the organisation hierarchy. Rather, they have been concerned to expose the importance of formal organisational policy (Grimshaw and Jefferson 1987) and the law (McBarnet 1981) in structuring police behaviour.

While reflecting a departure from the ethnographic perspective of policing, these works are also symptomatic of the broader challenge of structuralism to interactionism in

criminology and the sociology of law (see Dixon 1997). Although not exclusively, structuralist perspectives draw upon strands of Marxism to explain the way in which broader social, economic and political objectives are served through policing. As I mentioned earlier, policing falls heavily on the marginal and powerless groups in society, with young, black, working class males forming the core targets of police concern and attention (Box 1987; Brodgen *et al* 1988; Jefferson 1991; Reiner 2000a). Questioning the extent to which such patterning is solely the product of rank and file prejudice, structuralist writers provide a critical examination of the relationship between the police, the permissive character of legal rules, police organisational rules and the political economy of policing. This direction involves examining the wider influences of policing and looking beyond the 'naïve sociological realism' (Kinsey and Baldwin 1982: 304) of the culturalist works which tend to ignore issues of power.

McBarnet (1981) provides a critical examination of the wider relationship between the police and what she sees as the enabling character of legal rules. With a particular concern to critically explore the high rate of convictions in a system 'allegedly geared in favour of the accused' (*ibid.*: 5), her starting point is that the law is an ideological mask based around the 'false dichotomies' of law in books (which stress rights and due process), and law in action (the way the law works in reality). She argues that the unequal operation of the law is not exclusively a product of the informalities and biases of individual police officers. Rather, the laws governing police practice are sufficiently permissive to enable the police to operate a dominant crime control process. As McBarnet (1981: 156) puts it:

The law on criminal procedure in its current form does not so much set a standard of legality from which the police deviate as provide a licence to ignore it. If we bring due process down from the dizzy heights of abstraction and subject it to empirical scrutiny, the conclusion must be that due process is *for* crime control.

From this perspective, the negative elements of police behaviour, such as prejudice and discrimination, do not arise exclusively from the ‘personal and bureaucratic motivations’ (*ibid.*: 34) of individual officers. More accurately, for McBarnet, bias and discrimination is a core component of the police function (see also Ericson 1981). McBarnet’s (1981) work illustrates the importance of examining state institutions. Indeed, she contends that by focusing exclusively on the ‘petty administrators of the law’, the police merely become the ‘fall guys’ of an unjust system (*ibid.*: 156).<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, however, other commentators have argued that by placing police culture in a subordinate position, McBarnet underestimates the impact and importance it plays in shaping, and being shaped by, the law. For Holdaway (1989), the idea that culturalists ignore the law misses the crucial point. He emphasises that the law and policies become *re-worked* to resonate with the preferences of the occupational culture (see also Ericson 1993). In a similar vein, McConville *et al* (1991) highlight the importance of the police’s ‘working rules’ in the construction of the ‘suspect population’.

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<sup>9</sup> These critiques also highlight the limitations of an ethnographic approach for understanding police culture. Indeed, preoccupation in sociological police studies with the day-to-day work of the rank and file has led some to comment that ‘studies of police culture have been coterminous with patrol culture’ (Reiner 2000a: 86). This focus leaves formal organisational policies and senior officers largely unexamined (see Grimshaw and Jefferson 1987; Dixon 1997).

Equally, however, they also recognise that policing takes place within a legal context which is sufficiently permissive to permit the police to work within police-defined objectives.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while McConville and his colleagues maintain the wider influences of police work, they revive the occupational culture as a core determinant of policing. The key for understanding the patterning of policing is, therefore, to recognise the importance of police culture *and* the wider context in which policing takes place (see also Grimshaw and Jefferson 1987; Choongh 1997; Chan 1997; Dixon 1997).<sup>11</sup>

Working within a similar framework, Reiner (2000a) has also noted that the themes contained in police culture do not exist in isolation. Rather, for him, there is an 'isomorphic relationship' (*ibid.*: 136) between the police and the wider ~~arrangements~~ of social disadvantage. Police culture is both generated and sustained by the problems and tensions in wider society. Above all, police work is structured by the core mandate and organisation of the police. The police mandate emphasises the control of public spaces which, in turn, is socially patterned by class, age, gender and ethnicity (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup> Police contact with young men from economically, and indeed, ethnically marginal groupings can be partly explained by the fact that this group are more likely to inhabit public (and therefore *police*) street space, and are also more likely to depend on the police for assistance (see also Box 1983; Brodgen *et al* 1988; Jefferson 1991). Overall, for Reiner (1997; 2000a), the prejudices that have been identified in police culture are a complex

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<sup>10</sup> In particular, they identify the political autonomy allowed to the police in enabling them to pursue a *police*-defined agenda (see also Choongh 1997).

<sup>11</sup> In order to offer a more inclusive explanation of police culture, this thesis aims to follow this line of reasoning by placing the micro-ideologies of the police within its broader structural context.

<sup>12</sup> Although it should also be emphasised that routine police work also involves widespread interaction with people in private spaces, including their homes.

product of their legal mandate, their occupational 'common-sense', and the socially structured nature of the society that they police.

### ***'Police Culture': A Useful Concept?***

The critiques outlined above suggest that the uniqueness, uniformity and autonomy of police culture have been overstated in some accounts. At the same time however, and as successive generations of police researchers have observed, a number of identifiable characteristics can be found in the occupational ideologies and practices of the police. It is the contention of this thesis that despite recent critiques, the concept of police culture continues to possess utility. However, this is not to overlook the recent challenges to the concept. Indeed, these new ways of envisaging police culture frame many of the assumptions in the thesis. Above all, it is argued that the concept of police culture holds particular value in explaining the way the police think about, and relate to, their colleagues and members of the public.

### **Changing Police Culture**

A key implication in debates about police culture is that it is predominantly negative (Prenzler 1997), and such a proposition has led to discussions about police reform. However, the police are afforded wide discretionary powers. As a consequence, much of their work takes place in conditions of low visibility, and thus beyond the effective scrutiny of supervisors (Goldstein 1960; Banton 1964). It is among such issues that *changing* police culture has been understood as extremely difficult (Wilson 1968). Indeed, that police culture is difficult to deconstruct and redefine has led some to identify

it as the 'Berlin wall' of policing (Savage 1991: 430; see also Goldsmith 1990; Savage 2003).

More recently, the work of Chan (1997) has transformed the debate about the possibilities for changing police culture. Her research was prompted by her view that prevailing approaches to police culture were limited because they used an outdated conceptual model. Instigating much of the criticism previously outlined, Chan provides a useful re-conceptualisation of police culture which allows for the possibility of change. Drawing upon Bourdieu's (1990) theory of culture and practice, and organisational theorists such as Sackmann (1991) and Schein (1985), she identifies the importance of examining the interaction between the *field* (the wider organisational, historical, social, economic and political conditions of police work) and the *habitus* (police dispositions and informal norms and values of officers). Police culture, argues Chan (1997), arises from the relationship between the field and the habitus. She contends that attempts to reform police culture remain limited when changes in the habitus are not supported by transformations in the field of policing.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, her study of attempts by the New South Wales Police in Australia to reform corruption and racism, suggests that external pressures can have some success in changing the police culture.

Attempts to reform police organisations have many dimensions: changes in policy, recruitment and training; an emphasis on progressive leadership; amendments in the composition of the workforce; the introduction of measures to mainstream equality; and

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note however, that recent writings on police reform have tended to relate to organisations situated in circumstances of intense social and political turmoil (Brogden and Shearing 1993; Glaeser 2000; Marks 2005).

shifts in the organisation's guiding principles, represent some of the main ways employed to effect police change. A number of important shifts have occurred in policing within recent decades that could be expected to dilute what has been considered as the 'mainstream' police culture. In particular, contemporary police organisations have begun to recruit groups that were previously excluded. This is largely demonstrated by the increasingly representation of minority ethnic, female, lesbian and gay officers within police forces. With this in mind, it is reasonable to suggest that these groups may reject and challenge the sexist, racist and homophobic elements of traditional police culture (Paoline 2003; Sklansky 2006). Similarly, the archetypal young working class, high school educated workforce may become altered by the growing recruitment of more mature and better educated officers (see Punch 2007). Alongside changes in the recruitment of police personnel, community policing philosophies have also been adopted across nearly all modern police forces throughout the Western world (Fielding 1995; Brogden 1999; Brogden and Nihjar 2005). Emphasising a closer relationship between the police and the community that they serve, such a philosophy may serve to erode the crime-fighting orientation so often noted in police research. As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, the Staffordshire Police initiative harnessed together various such approaches in an attempt to reform its organisational culture. As we will see in the following chapter, such moves closely track corresponding approaches taken in recent years by other British police forces.

## **Exploring Contemporary Police Culture: Continuity or Change?**

Chan's (1997) work suggests that social and political factors in the national policing environment have the potential to play an important role in shaping the character of police organisations, and their working cultures. The following chapter explores the contemporary British policing landscape. It demonstrates how recent inquiries into some of the more problematic elements of police culture have, at least at the level of rhetoric, been instrumental in transforming the current 'field' of policing in Britain. In particular, the recent publication of the Macpherson Report (1999) has been seen as changing the national political debate regarding the policing of minority ethnic communities. The question remains however; have these wider pressures changed the occupational culture of contemporary police officers?

This aim of this chapter has been to set out some of the principal themes in research and scholarship on police culture. It has explored the sources of police culture, and has identified some of its core characteristics as observed by a long history of policing scholars. In respect to this culture, two central points emerge. First, police culture can influence the service that different sections of society receive. Second, the informal norms and assumptions associated with the rank and file can impinge on relations within the organisation, while simultaneously acting as an obstacle to external and internal efforts to reform the police. Although the concept continues to offer utility, new ways of envisaging police culture can serve to deepen our understandings about its complex and fluid nature.

Thus, while enormous debt is owed to the classic police ethnographers, new lines of research and reflection are needed to track the changes which have taken place in the newly identified social fields of policing. After I outline the broader social, economic and political context of contemporary British policing, the remaining chapters then explore how changes in the local and national context of policing have impacted upon present-day police officers. In laying down the key debates which are present within the literature on police culture, this chapter provides an important basis on which to pose the following question; does this description of police culture still hold relevance today?

## Chapter Three

### **The New Social Field of Policing: Equality, Recognition and Political Economy**

*...it has never been more important to forge a critical police studies that is capable of conceptualising policing developments against socio-cultural, economic and political transformations. It remains the case that studying the police in the broadest contextual manner is of vital importance. (McLaughlin 2007: ix).*

As established in the previous chapter, the collective evidence of ethnographic studies of the police has identified a number of characteristics within the informal occupational ideologies and practices of rank and file officers. The assumptions and values associated with the occupational culture can exert significant influence over the character of police organisations, and the service that different sections of society receive. However, and drawing on one of the core criticisms of the concept, it was also recognised that the features found in police culture cannot be divorced from the broader social, economic, political and organisational context within which it is situated.

Having argued in Chapter One that a contemporary account of police culture needs to incorporate the shifts that have taken place in the social, economic and political climate

of society, the aim of this chapter is to outline the newly identified social field of contemporary policing. In so doing, I suggest that there are two, largely competing, components of this field. The first part demonstrates how the British policing landscape has been altered following official criticism of the philosophies and practices of the police as they relate to ethnically and culturally diverse communities. Drawing on two key moments in the relatively recent history of police-community relations, it is demonstrated that the current policing discourse is one in which respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities has become salient. The impact of this on the occupational culture of the police represents an integral part of this thesis. Second however, in addition to these political transformations, I argue that contemporary police culture should also be situated against the backdrop of a new societal configuration in which widespread economic inequality and exclusion feature prominently. It is argued that such transformations raise some new questions for police culture, and the policing of social groups in the new millennium. In particular, adverse changes in the realms of work and employment have created a structurally marginal 'underclass' (Young 1999). This group have always formed the enduring targets of police concern and practice, and have been termed 'police property' (Lee 1981). Characterised by their social, political and economic powerlessness, 'police property' groups have, for Reiner (2000a: 216), become 'far larger than ever before and more fundamentally alienated' in this new social landscape.

Notwithstanding the widening of economic inequality, the vision of 'equality' in the current policing discourse has become synonymous with the policing of ethnically

defined groups, and other cultural and gendered identities. The equitable policing of minority ethnic communities have been particularly emphasised. Indeed, this chapter argues that following recent official critiques of the police, a dominant political paradigm has emerged around the equitable policing of 'diversity'. While this is essential for those who have previously not been adequately served by policing, it is argued that this paradigm fails to capture the continuing significance of class in policing. I contend that in the new policing discourse of respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities, the enduring dimension of class has disappeared from view. In the context of widening economic inequality, an important contradiction emerges between contemporary policing discourses, and the continued policing of the poor.

### **Policing the Multicultural Society**

Following the rapid expansion of Britain's economy, and its subsequent requirement for an enlarged workforce, post-war immigration from the West Indies and the Asian subcontinent resulted in a British society that was more ethnically, culturally, linguistically, religiously and racially diverse (Solomos 1993). In line with other countries however, upon entering Britain, immigrants occupied employment which was low status and low paid. This had important secondary effects in terms of prejudice and discrimination towards this group. Urban decay and crime became associated with black and Asian immigrants (Lambert 1970), and led to an idea of such groups as materially and socially inferior (Solomos 1993). These processes, as Holdaway (1996) notes, are

important for structuring ethnic minorities' experiences of crime and policing.<sup>1</sup> While British society was becoming increasingly diverse, the police institution remained predominantly white (*ibid.*: see also McLaughlin 2007a).

The inherent challenges of policing increasingly multicultural populations, especially in major urban centres, resulted in growing tensions between the police and those multi-ethnic communities they were charged to serve. As Bowling and Phillips (2003) demonstrate, there is a long history of persistent police harassment of minority ethnic groups in Britain. Often locked in deprived inner city neighbourhoods as a result of their structural position within the economy, and the effects of institutional racism, such communities have frequently been subjected to adverse policing strategies. In recent decades, the problems of unwarranted 'over-policing' and the excessive use of police force against minority ethnic populations have led to the establishment of official critiques of policing practices. Following these critiques, a variety of initiatives have taken place at both the formal policy and operational level of police organisations in order to alter the way in which police services respond to the task of policing increasingly multicultural societies.

### ***Urban Unrest and the Scarman Report (1981)***

The Scarman Report (1981) is often taken to be the principal text which placed on the political agenda the way in which the policing of multi-ethnic populations was carried out

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that 'minority ethnic communities' are a heterogeneous population. There were, and indeed continue to be, important differences within and between this social category.

in Britain (Reiner 2000a; Newburn 2003).<sup>2</sup> The report emerged as a result of the violent disturbances in 1981 between the police and black youth in Brixton, South London. The catalyst for the riots was the implementation of Operation Swamp '81'. This was an aggressive policing strategy in which the police used their powers to conduct raids on houses, in addition to subjecting the predominantly minority ethnic residents to stop, search and arrest tactics.<sup>3</sup> This group perceived their intimidation by the police as racial harassment, and the event culminated in a spectacular and violent clash between the two groups. During the clash, more than 300 people sustained injuries, and many vehicles and buildings were destroyed (Bowling and Philips 2003).

Lord Scarman was appointed to chair an inquiry into the disturbances, and attempted to investigate both the source and the implications of the riots. From the viewpoint of the local black community, the persistent stops, use of paramilitary policing tactics, racially abusive language and violence displayed by the police, amounted to racial harassment (McLaughlin 2007a). There was also a broader perception that while black and minority ethnic groups were over-policed as *suspects* of crime, they were under-protected as *victims* of crime. Conversely, the police perspective was that such tactics were necessary because multiethnic areas such as Brixton were responsible for a large part of the crime problem (*ibid.*: see also Cashmore and McLaughlin 1991). The widespread belief that young minority ethnic men were the core perpetrators of crime was no doubt encouraged by the wider social construction of black youth as the core perpetrators of the 'mugging'

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<sup>2</sup> However, disturbances between the police and minority ethnic sections of society are not a new phenomenon. Consequently, my initial focus on the Scarman Report (1981) does not seek to overlook other important inquiries such as Lord Justice Salmon's inquiry into the 1958 Notting Hill riots, for example.

<sup>3</sup> The searches were facilitated by the Immigration Act (1971) which provided the police with extensive powers to control those suspected of breaking this act (see Bowling and Phillips 2003).

phenomenon which characterised debates about crime and urban centres during the 1970s (see Hall *et al* 1978). The Scarman report (1981) identified a number of problems contributing to the violence in Brixton, some of which were internal to the police themselves. Scarman particularly identified the racial prejudices of individual officers, and the paramilitary tactics as responsible for fuelling local resentment amongst the black communities, and thus contributing to the breakdown in relations between the two parties.

The recommendations of the report had a number of layers.<sup>4</sup> Central to its requests was the recognition that the predominantly white, working class, masculine composition of police organisations had to rethink the way they policed ethnically and culturally diverse communities (McLaughlin 2007a). The identification and disciplining of officers who displayed racist conduct became elevated as a pressing concern. In addition to highlighting the need for police organisations to recruit more minority ethnic officers, the report also called for officers to be better educated on the cultural and racial backgrounds of minority ethnic communities. Police officers were also expected to become better integrated in their community, and to demonstrate a commitment to treat minority ethnic people in a fair and respectful manner (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup> Lord Scarman also proposed that the maintenance of ‘public tranquillity’ should take precedence over law enforcement objectives (Bowling and Phillips 2003). Other measures included increasing the transparency of the police. Statutory police and community consultations (PACC) with

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<sup>4</sup> Aspects of the report were influential in underpinning the provisions of police conduct as set out in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE).

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, ‘community policing’ as both a philosophy and programme for implementation, came into prominence in Britain as a response to the decline in legitimacy of the police following the 1981 riots. However, see Brogden (1999) and Waddington (1999b) for a critique of the concept.

the community were established, along with the introduction of lay visitors to police stations.<sup>6</sup> In short, the recommendations which emerged from the report stressed the development of co-operative relations with minority ethnic communities based on tolerance and fairness.

Lord Scarman's explanation of the riots has, however, been the subject of much criticism. Refuting the existence of 'institutional' racism within the police, and indeed within British society, he strongly favoured a historical and social explanation for the riots (Bridges 1983). Coupled with unemployment and deteriorating social conditions, the riots were, according to Scarman (1981: 45), 'essentially an outburst of anger and resentment by young black people against the police' (*cited in*, Bowling and Phillips 2003: 531). Although he highlighted the sense of alienation and powerlessness experienced by black youth, Scarman's explanation of the riots separated wider issues of the police organisation, police powers and police conduct from the question of racial discrimination. Indeed, as Bridges (1983: 35) puts it, 'to Scarman the police were more victims than perpetrators of racial disadvantage, having to deal with ... 'hostile and resentful' young people and an 'idle' street culture'.

Despite such criticisms, the legitimacy of the police was fundamentally challenged by the disturbances of 1981 (Reiner 2000a). And while the Scarman Report (1981) failed to produce instant changes to the policing of minority ethnic communities it did highlight, as Reiner (2000a: 204) notes, the widespread need to invoke a 'multifaceted reorientation of police thinking'. In so doing, the report prepared the ground for a new way of thinking

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<sup>6</sup> PACC meetings have, however, been subjected to criticism (see Brogden *et al* 1988: 176).

about the way in which policing philosophies and provision was to be implemented throughout the 1980s (see also Newburn 2003). As McLaughlin (2007a: 145) has observed, in the wake of the report the police became 'immersed in reform initiatives that were intended to neutralise the impact of race on police work'. These focused on, first, a renewed commitment to recruit sections of minority ethnic communities into the police and, second, the introduction of community and race relations training to heighten the prospect of equitable policing (a term I explore below). The final initiative was a blanket reform programme which sought to insert notions of professional conduct and ethics into police work (*ibid.*).

However, wider debates which racialised crime as the problem of black youth intensified (Bridges 1983), and subsequent riots between the police and such groups occurred in Toxteth, Moss Side, Handsworth and Tottenham (Bowling and Phillips 2003). Research also demonstrated a wide level of variation in the way in which the new 'community policing' programmes were both implemented and received. On the ground, community police officers were frequently dismissed as marginal to the sharp end of 'real' police work (Holdaway 1996). Further evidence indicated widespread internal resistance towards minority ethnic officers by what remained a predominantly white police culture (Cashmore and McLaughlin 1991; Holdaway 1996). Indeed, the early nineties saw a number of high profile claims of discrimination within police organisations. The case brought by Constable Surinder Singh against Nottinghamshire Police highlighted a 'cancer of racism' (McLaughlin 1996: 80) at all levels of the organisation. Cultural

resistance against female and gay officers was also revealed (Smith and Gray 1985).<sup>7</sup> As McLaughlin (2007a) observes, the apparent continuation of discrimination within police forces resulted in a number of important events. The first was the establishment of the Black Police Association which, for the first time, provided minority ethnic officers with a collective voice on the problems facing them (see also Holdaway and O'Neill 2004). The second was that the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) appealed for the external help of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in producing an 'action plan' on all issues relating to diversity and equality (McLaughlin 2007a: 147).

Although elements of police culture remained problematic, the publication of the Scarman Report (1981) gave prominent attention to the need to change the police discipline code and system. In addition to changing the tactics for dealing with public order, it also called for the improvement of police training in relation to minority ethnic groups. The report also emphasised the need for the police to engage more closely with the community they served. More importantly, it represented a formal condemnation on the character of racism and its influence on policing. Overall, the most eminent effect of the report was that it generated a new way of thinking about, and structuring, policing provision (Reiner 2000a; Newburn 2003).

### ***Towards a New Agenda of 'Diversity': The Macpherson Report (1999)***

Despite the findings and recommendations of the Scarman Report (1981), the problem of police discrimination has further resonance in a second major report by Sir William

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<sup>7</sup> See also the case of Constable Sarah Locker who successfully brought an industrial tribunal claim against the Metropolitan Police Service for sex and race discrimination.

Macpherson in 1999. The report followed a public inquiry of the Metropolitan Police Service's investigation into the racist murder of black student, Stephen Lawrence, by white youths in South London during 1993. The Metropolitan Police Service was accused of conducting a police investigation which was deeply flawed and substandard. Indeed, despite a private prosecution brought by Stephen Lawrence's parents, all of the white perpetrators were acquitted of murder charges because of the inadequacies of the police investigation (McLaughlin and Murji 1999; Reiner 2000a).

The ensuing report on the police handling of the investigation, and its wider implications for policing in Britain, has been extensively debated (McLaughlin and Murji 1999; Marlow and Loveday 2000; Reiner 2000a; Bowling and Phillips 2003; McLaughlin 2007a). Broadly speaking, nonetheless, the inquiry team found a multitude of failings at nearly every level of the organisation. Indeed, the problems were so severe that for McLaughlin (2007a: 148), the report represented a 'public relations catastrophe' for the police. The report was in two parts. The first examined the police response to the murder, while the second explored the broader social and historical context of police-community relations (McLaughlin and Murji 1999). However, unlike the Scarman Report (1999) which had adopted the 'bad apple' theory of police racism (that is, that a handful of individual officers were culpable), the Macpherson Report (1999) asserted that the 'professional incompetence' of the Metropolitan Police Service to properly investigate the murder of Stephen Lawrence was a consequence of 'institutional racism'. This concept was defined in the following terms:

‘Institutional racism’ consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (Macpherson 1999: 6.34).

While over 70 recommendations were made in the report (Foster *et al* 2005), the two that prompted the most immediate action held, as Cashmore (2002) notes, remarkable similarity to those proposed in the Scarman Report (1981): namely, to recruit more minority ethnic officers and to improve community and race relations training. However, there were also some important differences between the reports. Greater prominence was given to the need for diversity awareness training to change the deeper-level attitudes of officers so that it impinged on their practices. One of the major recommendations was the realisation that police organisations needed to change the way reports of racist crime were recorded and investigated. The report also emphasised the enforcement of new disciplinary and complaints procedures, and particularly stressed the adoption of formal anti-racist policies. Similarly, the rules surrounding stop and search were also to be tightened, and there was a renewed focus on the need to recruit minority ethnic officers. Another important recommendation was to ensure that police forces were brought within the ambit of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. As I explore in the following chapter, this places a statutory responsibility on individual Chief Constables to implement policies to eliminate and prevent unlawful racial discrimination within their

organisation.<sup>8</sup> In short, the vast number of recommendations cited in the report has meant that it represents the largest ever reform programme undertaken in British policing (McLaughlin and Murji 1999; Bowling and Phillips 2003).

### ***'Diversity' in the Post-Macpherson Context***

Since the publication of the Macpherson Report (1999), police forces across Britain have embarked on conveying a strong symbolic message with respect to the issues of 'race' and diversity. This has been demonstrated by the multitude of anti-racist documents, and range of initiatives which have been instituted in the field of community and race relations. As McLaughlin (2007a) observes, these have generally fallen into three broad areas. The first relates to the ethnic and cultural diversification of police personnel. However, the issue of diversification has been accompanied by a particular emphasis on the retention and career progression of ethnic minority officers. The second involves ensuring that diversity training is made a core part of police education, while the third focuses on a revision of operational policing policies and practices which may lead to discrimination against minority ethnic communities (*ibid.*). A number of new accountability mechanisms with respect to policing and cultural diversity have also been established following the report.<sup>9</sup> In short, the widespread insertion of these new measures was considered necessary for transforming the relationship between the police and minority ethnic populations.

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<sup>8</sup> More broadly, this is to be augmented through Racial Equality Schemes.

<sup>9</sup> Most notably, the establishment of the Lawrence Steering Group by the Home Secretary to monitor implementation of the recommendations of the report, and more recently, the creation of a new Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in 2004.

In order to effect police change, contemporary police organisations are required to take seriously notions of diversity, discrimination and recognition. Indeed, there is now an active pursuit of a 'diversity agenda' by external official inspecting bodies, including the Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (see HMIC 1995). Furthermore, strict adherence to the issues of equality and diversity are increasingly important to career success. This is true not only for the rank and file, but also, for senior officers. While the shift towards New Public Management (NPM) in policing has placed a greater emphasis on quality and 'customer' demand, it has also recast the categories of ethnic origin, gender and sexuality as key administrative categories in documenting and monitoring the composition of the workforce (Long 2003). The classification of ethnic origin is also increasingly important for recording and examining the stop and search practices of officers. Put simply, present-day police organisations are required to manage 'race' in a new way (*ibid.*: see also Holdaway 1997).

At least at the level of rhetoric, contemporary police organisations have undergone significant change in relation to diversity. As I demonstrate in the following chapter, Staffordshire Police has taken these issues as a central component in its reincarnation as an organisation which meets the challenges of policing a diverse society, and equally, one that displays equality in all aspects of its internal relations. As illustrated here however, this local reform effort reflects the wider shift which has taken place in the broader field of policing.

## *Resistance and Resentment*

While a number of criticisms have been made regarding the Macpherson Report (see McLaughlin and Murji 1999: 374-5), it was the term institutional racism which generated the most debate at the time of its publication. In particular, it led to considerable confusion, and indeed resentment, within the police service. Although the term drew attention to how discrimination can play out through organisational policies and practices, it became interpreted as referring to *individual* racism. Indeed, alongside the concept of institutional racism, the inquiry also used expressions such as 'unwitting prejudice' and 'racist stereotyping' (Foster *et al* 2005: 4). This has particularly fuelled misunderstanding and anger amongst the rank and file who believe that the term has labelled individual police officers as racist (*ibid.*: see also Souhami 2007).

Despite extensive reform efforts, change within police organisations has been slow and uneven (Foster *et al* 2005; see also HMIC 1999). In particular, there is evidence to suggest that the institutionalisation of diversity has been resented across police organisations (McLaughlin 2007*b*). This was brought most forcefully into the public consciousness in October 2003 when an undercover BBC investigation entitled *The Secret Policeman* exposed overt displays of racist behaviour amongst new recruits. What is of significance here is that these were officers who had been recruited under the new context of concentrated policy reforms regarding diversity. McLaughlin (2007*a*) provides a comprehensive analysis of the programme's content, and suggests that the extreme racism captured within the investigation (including the footage of an officer posing as a member of the Klu Klux Klan) 'sent shockwaves through the police and the Home

Office' (*ibid.*: 162). While exposing the continuing problem of police racism, the programme also highlighted the endurance of a sexist and homophobic culture. Overall, it demonstrated pervasive resentment towards the Macpherson Report (1999), and the range of reforms which succeeded it. The disparity between the rhetoric of formal documents, and the 'success' of their implementation, has been central to recent discussions about police culture (Foster *et al* 2005).<sup>10</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, there is evidence to suggest that expressions of discrimination have undergone transformation. Police organisations, as McLaughlin (2007a: 170) are 'now grappling with the problem of 'stealth racism'' (see also Foster *et al* 2005). This new dynamic is not only a feature of police organisations. As Miles and Small (1999: 142) observe, the formal interdiction of racism within broader society has transformed the way in which racism is articulated and executed. Contemporary expressions of racism are increasingly subtle, and are performed through what they call 'coded racialised references' (*ibid.*). While no explicit reference is made to 'race', the words used are often loaded with meaning in which a particular social group is 'attributed with a fixed nature and/or whose presence is associated with a set of (usually undesirable) social consequences' (*ibid.*).<sup>11</sup> To illustrate this, Miles and Small (1999) suggest that references to the 'inner city' and the 'immigration problem', while on the face of it make no reference to 'race', are highly racialised. The relevance of these newly emerging dynamics surrounding contemporary discrimination is further explored in Chapter Four.

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<sup>10</sup> See also Cashmore (2002: 327). In his interviews with black and minority ethnic officers, formal policies were considered as 'window dressing': 'they contrive to give the appearance of progress while actually achieving little'.

<sup>11</sup> See also Barker's (1981) notion of the 'new racism'.

### ***Policing Diversity: A Dominant Political Paradigm***

While an important distinction is to be made between rhetoric and practice, the Macpherson Report (1999) has been instrumental in bringing the policing of minority ethnic communities to the national political forefront. In addition to highlighting the problem of racially motivated violence, it provided a fundamental insight into the way in which public institutions respond to people from minority ethnic backgrounds. With its recognition of 'institutional racism', the report carries enormous implications for all police forces across the Western world (Walklate 2000). The report has transformed the political debate about minority ethnic people and criminal justice in a way unmatched by previous inquiries (Reiner 2000a). It has been described as a 'landmark' and 'watershed' in policing. Indeed, for Foster *et al* (2005: i), the report is 'one of the defining moments in the recent history of the police service'. McLaughlin and Murji (1999: 372) likewise suggest that the consequences of the report will 'reverberate for years to come'. By its recognition of institutional racism, the report provides an 'authoritative' text on the way the police respond to their ethnically and culturally diverse 'publics' (*ibid.*).

At least at the level of discourse, the Macpherson Report (1999) has had a fundamental impact on the British policing landscape (Reiner 2000a). Indeed, it forms the backdrop to nearly all contemporary debates about the equitable policing of minority ethnic communities in Britain. But what does equitable policing mean in the contemporary policing context? On the face of it, the term asks the police to deal with minority ethnic communities in a neutral, impartial and unbiased manner. However, 'equity' in policing is considered increasingly problematic. As Brogden (1999: 169) explains, 'no longer are

communities regarded as homogeneous units consisting of citizens with legal and social rights'. Rather, it is increasingly recognised that processes of *inequality* should be recognised in the police's response to, and treatment of, certain groups. In other words, while citizens are legally *equal*, their place in the social order, which is patterned by ethnicity, class, gender and so on, renders them *unequal*. In the current context, the police, it is believed, should take into consideration the way in which wider inequalities in society can shape the social patterning of victimisation, and a person's involvement in crime. For Brogden (1999: 171), in order to reduce the presence of powerless groups in policing practices the police should recognise inequality, and thus act in a 'positively discriminatory fashion' (see also Grimshaw and Jefferson 1984).

Nonetheless, transforming this proposition into policing *practices* may prove problematic. For some, the problem is whether the police should treat *everybody* they come into contact with in the same manner or whether they should 'police according to need' (see Foster *et al* 2005: 4). In the past, the police have been required to deal with people in the same way. However, the Macpherson Report (1999) has a markedly different emphasis. It states that in attending to their diverse communities, the police should not deliver a service that is 'colour-blind'. Rather, they should deliver a service which 'recognises the different experiences, perceptions and needs of a diverse society' (paragraph 45.24, *cited in* Foster *et al* 2005: 61). For some commentators, this poses something of a contradiction in that officers are asked to treat everyone fairly, but are also asked to recognise cultural diversity in order to determine appropriate courses of

action and need (Stenning 2003). This is a contradiction which has caused much confusion among contemporary rank and file officers (see Foster *et al* 2005).

While I do not wish to debate this 'conceptual dilemma' (Stenning 2003: 32) further, what does remain clear is that within the contemporary policing landscape, the vision of 'equality' has become synonymous with the policing of minority ethnic communities. This was initiated by the Scarman (1981) report, but was fundamentally heightened by the publication of the Macpherson Report (1999). Achieving police change in the current British policing context refers almost exclusively to the requirement to move away from a policing service which is oppressive to minority ethnic sections of society. Contemporary generations of police officers are expected to provide a professional and thoughtful service to minority ethnic communities. This is to be achieved through: recognising and being respectful of cultural difference; taking seriously the victimisation of such groups; not holding or expressing racist views; or subjecting such communities to discriminatory practices. In short, the policing of minority ethnic communities has become politicised (Reiner 2000a). This, in turn, has also been reinforced by a recent shift where contemporary black and minority ethnic groups now have a 'clear identity and consciousness of being discriminated against' (*ibid.*: 79).

Moreover, and as I demonstrate in the following chapter, the importance placed on ethnicity in the contemporary British policing landscape has also extended to gender and sexuality (see Walklate 2000). In particular, the political agenda towards women as victims of physical and sexual crimes has been transformed within the recent years

(Hoyle 2000; Heidensohn 2003). The pro-active approach towards women as victims of domestic violence has been specifically emphasised. While there has been much debate about the success and appropriateness of mandatory arrest policies, the adoption of a model of policing domestic violence which directs constables to arrest the assaulting partner where there is evidence of an assault, has been adopted across all police forces (*ibid.*). This transformation of official police policy has resulted largely from feminist critiques of the way the police have traditionally responded to such incidents. Finally, crimes committed against members of the public who are gay or lesbian have also been brought into the remit of current diversity agendas. This can be seen in the establishment of specialist units to deal with homophobic motivated crime.

It is the contention of this chapter that the British policing landscape is characterised by a contemporary politics of what can be called, 'policing diversity'. While this is essential for those who have traditionally not been equitably served by policing, I propose that this paradigm fundamentally overlooks a large part of what routine policing involves: both historically and in the present. In the wake of the new policing discourse of respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities, it is argued that the enduring dimension of class has disappeared from view. In addition to the greater political recognition of social and cultural diversity, the current field of policing is *simultaneously* characterised by widespread economic exclusion and division. More importantly, the changes which have occurred in the political economy of Western capitalism have important implications for crime and its formal control by the police (Reiner 1992a). In

particular, it has important consequences for the policing of a new and marginal 'police property' (Lee 1981).

## **Beyond Diversity: The Economic Terrain of Contemporary Policing**

Commenting on the momentous social and economic changes which have taken place in contemporary societies, Reiner (2000a: 216) suggests the following:

While the majority participate, albeit very unevenly and insecurely, in unprecedented levels of consumption, a substantial and growing 'underclass' is permanently and hopelessly excluded. Certainly, with the political dominance of free-market economic policies there is no prospect at all of their incorporation into the general social order. In other words, the 'police property' group is far larger than ever before and more fundamentally alienated.

As Reiner (1992a; 2000a) observes, the British police as the image of order and national pride have become fundamentally eroded in recent decades (see also Loader 1997). A major challenge, as we have seen, has arisen from the police's tense relationship with minority ethnic communities. However, another key challenge has also emerged as a result of deeper social changes which have taken place in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In particular, increasing sections of the population are excluded from the realms of work and employment. Experiencing burgeoning economic insecurity, growing numbers of people are barred from the way of life of the majority. Rooted in structural changes which have occurred in the political economy of capitalism across Western

democracies, these transformations have important social consequences for crime and public sensibilities towards crime (Taylor 1999; Young 1999; Reiner 1992a; 2000a). More importantly, these changes also have important implications for the *control* of crime (*ibid.*). Transformations in the economic workings of society have resulted in the growth of a structurally marginal 'underclass', a modern day form of the nineteenth century 'dangerous classes' (Young 1999; Crowther 2000a; 2000b). As I demonstrate, such groups have historically occupied a prominent position in the police's occupational consciousness and practical workload. In order to reflect the way the police control them, such groups have been termed 'police property' (Lee 1981). Characterised by their social, political and economic powerlessness, 'police property' groups are, as the above quote suggests, distinctly larger and more excluded within this new landscape.

### ***A New Social Configuration***

A number of scholars have commented on the significant transformations which have occurred in the social, cultural and economic order of society in recent decades. These differing accounts of the emergence and consequence of societal changes have been accompanied with wide variation in the level of analysis. These have ranged from grand social theories (Dahrendorf 1985; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Taylor 1999; Young 1999; Bauman 2001) to empirical enquiries concerning the social and spatial consequences of such changes (Craine 1997; Williamson 1997; Wacquant 2000; Bourdieu *et al* 2002). However, all of these accounts agree that contemporary society is experiencing profound change. Indeed, for Reiner (2000a: 199), the social transformations are considered to be so intense that they indicate 'a fundamental break in the trajectory of world development

analogous in its scope to the rise of industrial capitalism some two centuries earlier'. While a number of concepts have been used to reflect the changes that have taken place in society (see Reiner 2000a: 200), it is the concepts of 'late modernity', 'postmodernity' and 'post-Fordism' which are used interchangeably in this chapter. However, I do hold central to my argument the remark made by Crompton (2005: 218) that 'whatever kinds of labels social scientists might apply to the prevailing order, these societies remain *capitalist societies*'.

### ***Economic Exclusion and Polarization***

The most common theme within debates about this new social order is the increasing economic exclusion experienced by large numbers of the population. However, that contemporary British society has become more fractured and unequal *since* the Second World War reveals something of a paradox. While the language of modernity emphasised equality of opportunity, economic prosperity and democracy (Young 1999), the booming economic prosperity characteristic of British society is not equally shared (Dahrendorf 1985; Hutton 1995).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, while more people than ever live comfortably and participate in mass consumerism, an increasing faction of the population experience extreme poverty and insecurity. Since 1979, the number of people living within the accepted definition of relative poverty has tripled, and currently stands at over 12 million (Toynbee 2003). Furthermore, as Taylor (1999: 15) demonstrates, the difference in income between the highest paid and the lowest paid is the largest it has been since records began in 1866. Drawing on research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note, however, that membership to the modernist project of 'inclusivity' (Young 1999) has not been equal for everyone (see Yar and Penna 2004).

Foundation (1995), Taylor also illustrates that, globally, there has been a complete shift in the distribution of wealth towards the richest populations of the world and away from the poorest sections. A number of phrases have been coined which reflect these new forms of social and economic division. Hutton (1995) has argued that Britain has become a '30:30:40' society. He demonstrates that while 40 per cent of the population are in stable employment, another 30 per cent are structurally insecure. Added to this, however, is another 30 per cent of the population who experience long term unemployment and consequently become marginalised through their poverty. The new societal arrangement has also been termed the 'two-thirds society' (Dahrendorf 1985: 103), in which two thirds are 'in' and one third is 'out': that is, excluded from citizenship and the prosperous economy.

For many commentators, these qualitative and quantitative forms of exclusion are a product of post-Fordism (Taylor 1999; Young 1999; Crowther 2000a; Wacquant 2000). While Fordist economic arrangements offered material security, low unemployment levels, job security and a stable income (*ibid.*), the post-Fordist culture of work is increasingly insecure. Post-Fordist economies are characterised by globalisation of capital, technological advancement and de-industrialisation and, for Taylor (1999: 13), have resulted in a 'massive haemorrhaging of full time employment throughout the Western world'. High rates of unemployment, long periods of unemployment and new insecure forms of work have emerged. That traditional sources of employment have greatly declined has resulted in large sections of the workforce becoming thrown on the 'scrapheap' (Young 1999: 22). There are distinctly gendered dimensions to this. Young

men are particularly affected by economic restructuring, and are more likely to experience long term unemployment and its related social and material disadvantage (MacDonald 1997; Blackman 1997; McDowell 2003). Excluded from both the spheres of work and those of consumption, Young (1999: 12) describes the following scenario:

Young men are bereft of social position and destiny ... they are cast adrift; a discarded irrelevance locked in a situation of structural unemployment. They are barred from the racetrack of the meritocratic society yet remain glued to the television sets and media which alluringly portray the glittering prizes of a wealthy society.

Long-term unemployment and increasing 'never-employment' (Reiner 1992a: 771) are products of the transition towards the new deregulated market place, and have been exacerbated by privatisation and the creation of 'flexible' labour markets. While the themes of unemployment and poverty find resonance across historical accounts of social stratification (see Yar and Penna 2004), the new aspects of inequality and exclusion can be emphasised. For Dahrendorf (1985: 98), the inevitable unemployment characteristic of contemporary societies is termed the '*new* unemployment'. Wacquant (2000: 107) similarly refers to the '*new* regime of urban marginality' to describe the recent polarisations which have removed whole populations from the middle to bottom layers of the class structure. The remaining inhabitants who occupy the lower strata have been termed the '*new* lumpen' (Hall 1983, *cited in* Crowther 2000b: 154). The Marxist overtone of the latter draws our attention to the shifting nature of capitalist economies. Indeed, the concept of 'turbo-capitalism' (Reiner 2000a: 200) aptly describes the way in

which capitalist thought and economy is becoming rapidly inserted into the everyday workings of society (see also Lawson 2006).

It is important to note that these new forms of unemployment and polarisation are not a consequence of temporary economic trends. Indeed, for Wacquant (2000: 107), the 'advanced marginality ... is not a residue from the past, as theories of de-industrialisation and skills or spatial mismatch have it, but rather, a harbinger of the future'. There is a structural inevitability to the unemployment of late modern economies. Moreover, the changes which have occurred within the economy have been used as an explanation for the emergence, and subsequent exclusion, of a structurally marginal 'underclass'. While I explore the concept more fully below, the burgeoning 'underclass' has been described as the people that 'modernity has left behind' (Young 1999: 12). They include: drug addicts; alcoholics; the unemployed; the homeless; the mentally ill; and other marginal groups. Because such groups are socially and spatially segregated, they become a recognisable and visible deviant 'other' (*ibid.*). Indeed, the 'underclass' overwhelmingly reside in impoverished and stigmatised neighbourhoods. As I explore below, while housing inequalities are manifestations of wider social and economic inequalities (Taylor 1999), large concentrations of the poor and disadvantaged contained in deprived housing estates is also an important theme in terms of policing and police culture.

### ***Cultural Shifts***

The economic changes which characterise late modernity have also been accompanied by fundamental transformations in the cultural domains of society. One primary change

relates to what Young (1999: vi) identifies as the 'patterns of desire'. Consumption is at the centre of everyday life, and increasingly represents the motivation for human action (see also Davis 1998; Taylor 1999; Bauman 2001). Contemporary inequalities are exacerbated by images of wealth, and living in poverty today is a distinctly different experience than it was during the nineteenth century, or the Great Depression of the 1930s. Indeed, not everyone can gain access to the extraordinary and frequently visible levels of personal wealth: a situation which reflects what Davis (1998) has termed the 'winner-loser culture' of contemporary society. Dominated by unfettered free-market economic policies and thinking, the prevailing 'market society' (Taylor 1999: 52) is a society in which *'everything'* (from consumer goods to public goods, like health or education) is 'for sale'. A major social consequence of this rampant consumerism is the elevation of self-interest over public interest (Hutton 1996; Young 1999).

The increasingly instable nature of the social structure has important implications for social relationships. Against the backdrop of rising economic insecurity and the cultural diversification of society, many people feel 'ontological precarious' (Young 1999: 12).<sup>13</sup> Because this sense of insecurity influences perceptions of 'others' and 'otherness', it has important consequences for marginal groups. According to Young (1999: vii):

Social blame and recrimination ricochets throughout the social structure: single mothers, the underclass, blacks, new age travellers, junkies, crackheads – the needle spins and points to some vulnerable section of the community to whom we can apportion blame and who can be demonised.

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<sup>13</sup> See also the notion of ontological insecurity, as discussed by Giddens (1991).

There has been a rise in the intolerance of the poor and a decline in the motivation to integrate such groups into society (*ibid.*: see also Young 2003). Moreover, marginal groups are subjected to a range of formal and informal social control mechanisms. With respect to the latter, a number of attempts are made to declare the poor as lacking in value. That economic insecurity breeds intolerance of the poor also becomes manifest in the drawing of moral boundaries between those at the bottom of the social strata and those who, for time being, are secure (Taylor 1999; Young 1999; Sayer 2005). Of greater significance, however, is that the exclusion of the poor and marginal becomes further manifest through the formal institution of policing. Such groups, in short, become the core 'police property' (Lee 1981).<sup>14</sup>

### ***Policing the Exclusive Society and the New 'Police Property'***

The economic and cultural shifts which characterise late modern societies have resulted in a more unstable social world. As we have seen, an increasing proportion of the population experience intense economic disadvantage. For Reiner (2000b: 209), the implications of this 'social earthquake' for crime, and social control responses to it, are profound. Since the 1950s to the mid 1990s there has been a significant rise in recorded crime (*ibid.*: see also Young 1999; Cohen 1997). While the link between poverty and crime is in no way clear-cut, involvement in crime may be a rational response to the pressures of growing relative deprivation and exclusion (Young 1999; Lawson 2006).<sup>15</sup>

As I have illustrated, one of the manifest demonstrations of exclusion under conditions of

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<sup>14</sup> While 'police property' does not exclusively have class (economic) connotations - it includes references to sexuality, radical politics and deviant subcultures - it is essentially characterised by those powerless populations which occupy the lower echelons of the social order.

<sup>15</sup> Equally however, this is not to overlook the interests served in defining and responding to what has become identified as 'crime'.

late modernity is the growth of a structurally marginal 'underclass'. For Dahrendorf (1985: 109), this group is an 'unmistakeable reminder of the precarious legitimacy of the social order'. While a great deal of debate surrounds the term, a number of authors have retained an understanding of the 'underclass' as an empirical reality which requires explanation.<sup>16</sup> Following Crowther (2000b), it is the contention of this chapter that the concept has important value for understanding the policing of this group.

The 'underclass' refers to: chronic unemployment and under-employment; low educational attainment; dependency on welfare; inter-generational diffusion of poverty; a shared spatial location including homelessness; and over-involvement in patterns of victimisation and the criminal justice system (*ibid.*: Katz 1989; Macdonald 1997).<sup>17</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter Two, that the police overwhelmingly come into contact with the least powerful and marginal groups in society is now something of an academic orthodoxy (Box 1994; Reiner 1997; Choongh 1998). These enduring targets of police concern and practice have been identified as 'police property' which, as Lee (1981: 53) suggests, are:

Any category of citizens who lack power in the major institutions of their society (institutions in the economy, polity, education, media, etc.) are liable to

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the concept of 'underclass' essentially arose from the Right and came to the fore in Britain through the controversial writings of Charles Murray (1996). However, as MacDonald (1997) argues, the association of the term with the Right has arguably impeded research into the experiential realities of the new poor and has arrested a critical focus on processes of stigmatisation (see Bagdoley and Mann 1992).

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted, however, that the 'underclass' is a heterogeneous population. As such, different individuals will experience differing levels of the above criterion depending on their age, ethnicity, and gender.

become police property ... that is, categories of people over whom the police successfully exert superior power.

A defining characteristic of 'police property' is that their control by the police is 'supported by an apparent social consensus to "let the police handle these people"' (*ibid.*). What I want to emphasise here is that the marginal 'underclass' created in contemporary Western societies can be recognised as a new and extended guise of 'police property' (see also Reiner 2000a). Poor young men increasingly constitute the 'never-employed' and are propelled, in turn, to live out more and more of their daily lives in public (and thus *police*) space. As Box (1994) reminds us, *male* unemployment has always appeared problematic following its perceived association with crime and disorder. Furthermore, against the backdrop of their social and economic marginalisation contemporary generations of young men struggle to construct some semblance of a masculine identity (McDowell 2003). Their arrested masculinity can manifest itself in what Connell (1995, *cited in* Taylor 1999: 77) calls 'protest masculinity'. This is a term which captures the way in which populations of young men become implicated in certain types of street crime and, as a consequence, experience adversarial contact with the police (see also Jamieson and Taylor 1997).

That the economically impoverished represent the main targets of policing is not a novel suggestion. Indeed, the poor have formed the enduring targets of police thinking and practical workload throughout history. As a visit to the historical literature would demonstrate, the initial development of the police was fundamentally rooted in the changes in capitalist and economic relations. The police, as Storch (1975) argues, were

created as an instrument to be used by those with the power to discipline, criminalise and control the growing urban 'dangerous classes'. In particular, the primary duty of the police was to confront the poor when they threatened bourgeois order, bourgeois property and bourgeois notions of respect and propriety (Brogden *et al* 1988). Frequent intrusion into working class recreational culture (see Brogden 1982; 1991) reflected the *real* function of the New Police (see also Cohen 1979). These works demonstrate that the main purpose of the police was to control the 'undesirables' who occupied the streets including: prostitutes; the homeless; the illiterate; and the unemployed.<sup>18</sup>

Another key issue is the way in which changes in the economy constructed a symbolic division between the 'rough' and 'respectable' populations. As Crowther (2000a: 39) puts it, 'the latter had a stake in society whereas the former did not, and their behaviour attracted the attention of the enforcers of bourgeois law and order'. The police have always perceived themselves as belonging to the 'respectable' classes. As many have noted, in their work the police differentiate between those they do things *for* and those they do things *to* (Shearing 1981a; see also Ericson 1982). Routine patrol work was aimed to target areas associated with the poor, a pattern which was not practiced in the stable working class and affluent areas (Emsley 1996). However, it would be incorrect to view the occupational preferences of the police as the only means in which the urban poor became controlled. Class bias in legislation, such as the New Poor Law 1834, successive vagrancy acts and the Contagious Disease Act 1864, also structured police decision-making. Public order law provided the primary enabling power to further control

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<sup>18</sup> There is evidence to suggest that the leisure activities of the poor, such as street trading and gambling, were actually an extra form of work (see Brogden *et al* 1988). Thus class bias in police patrol practices, and indeed criminal law, suppressed these informal economies of the poor (see also Cohen 1972).

those 'rough' populations that spent more time on the streets. Police culture developed on the streets in nineteenth century Britain (Emsley 1996), and was directly related to the social, economic and political changes that were taking place during this epoch. These changes ensured a practical focus on the poor, and equally guaranteed that they became an integral part of the police's occupational 'common sense'.

Today, the control of the 'dross' (Choongh 1998) is fundamental to the police role. Policing is informed by a cognitive map of the population which, in turn, is distinguished across broad class lines:

A special conception of social class, mixed with an idea of conventional or proper behaviour ... is just as important to the police officers as racial or ethnic groups. In this scale the 'respectable' working class and the suburban middle class stand highest while the 'underclass' of the poor and rootless ... stand lowest (Smith and Gray 1985: 389).

As I noted in the previous chapter, poor low status groups are described by the police using a range of derogatory epithets, including: 'slag'; 'shit'; 'prig' and 'scumbag' (*ibid*; see also Young 1991). There is also a spatial dimension to the focus on the poor, with research showing that the police overwhelmingly concentrate their resources in poor and decaying housing estates (Young 1991; Chambliss 1994; Choongh 1997; 1998).

### ***Protecting the 'Respectable': The Function of Contemporary Policing***

It is the contention of this chapter that the centrality of the poor within police culture takes on renewed significance under conditions of late modernity. New patterns of exclusion continue to place the most powerless groups in society within the confines of 'police property'. In the exclusive society (Young 1999), the function of the police is to control the human debris left by the adverse economic arrangements. It is to protect the materially stable populations from the burgeoning 'underclass'.

With the advent of 'mass private property' (Shearing and Stenning 1983), the public police compete with a range of policing bodies (see also Reiner 1992*a*; Reiner 2000*a*). 'Policing' is increasingly undertaken by an array of formal and informal social control mechanisms (Davis 1990; Johnston 1992; Shearing and Stenning 1996). What is of contemporary relevance is the impact of this shift for the public police in their control of the new poor. In the wake of increasing privatisation of public space, contemporary policing involves patrolling the residual areas of public space (Reiner 1992*a*). And as we have seen, this is a space to which the excluded 'underclass' are increasingly relegated. Today, policing entails guarding a social order which is divided between the 'dreadful enclosures' of the poor, and the defensible locales of the wealthy (*ibid.*). The style of policing to which these two environments are subjected also differs. As Reiner (2000*a*: 216-217) observes:

Local policing of particular communities remain, but with sharp differences between service-style organisations in stable suburban areas, and 'watchman'

bodies with the rump duties of the present police, keeping a lid on the underclass symbolic locations.

Within late modern societies, the police are forced to patrol the perimeters between the enclaves of the 'respectable' and the 'rough'. Exacerbated by external pressures to manage crime efficiently, the task of the police is to identify, isolate and regulate these groups. As Reiner (2000a: xi) puts it, contemporary policing is being 'pressured to have zero tolerance of the socially marginal and outsiders'. With this in mind, it is perhaps inevitable that the police's 'working rules' will direct practical attention towards those at the base of the social hierarchy (see Young 1999).

### **The Retreat of Class in the Age of 'Diversity' and Recognition**

The new market economy has intensified social distinctions of class, and forms an important part of the contemporary policing landscape. Indeed, in addition to the political concern with diversity and its recognition, this new landscape also forms the social context within which contemporary police culture is situated. However, the issue of class, notwithstanding the widening of economic inequality, is of declining interest in current social thought and political practice (Fraser 1997; Sayer 2005).

There are a number of reasons for the current lack of interest in class. It may be due to its previous association with socialist discourse, in which the axes of ethnicity, gender and sexuality were largely ignored (Sayer 2005). Also, because there has been a complex 'blurring of boundaries' between different class groupings, the idea of class has become

both theoretically and empirically problematic in recent decades (Crompton 2005).<sup>19</sup> For Sayer (2005), the lack of attention given to class in dominant political debates stems, in part, from New Labour's attempts to discard their Old Labour image. Not wishing to alienate the 'respectable' constituents of 'middle England' class has, for Sayer, become a 'risky concept' (*ibid.*: 12). Not unrelated, the working class have been unable to construct an authentic working class identity in recent years (Charlesworth 2000). As we have seen, the industry's on which class consciousness is built have become severely challenged under post-Fordism. The 'working class hero' of post-war Britain has also been replaced by the stigmatised identities of young, unemployed men (*ibid.*). Prevailing discourses about Britain as a 'classless society' has also rendered interest in class inequality somewhat old-fashioned. As Charlesworth (2000) reminds us however, this discourse itself serves class interests because it undermines the reality of class disadvantage in society (see also Adonis and Pollard 1998).

One of the main reasons for the decline of interest in class relates to the sharp rise of identity politics in recent decades (Fraser 1997). While greater political recognition of ethnic minorities, women and gay and lesbian people is incredibly important following their previous neglect, the recent ascendance of a politics based on culture and difference has depoliticised class and poverty (*ibid.*: see also Ray and Sayer 1999). Fraser (1997) identifies the 'postsocialist condition' as one which is characterised by the unravelling of political economy from cultural politics. Recent decades have witnessed an important

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<sup>19</sup> On this point, Haylett (2001) suggests that personal and political distance between academics and the working class has also contributed to an absence of class in contemporary scholarship. Indeed, it would appear that recent works on class has emerged from academics that are self-reflexive about their own working class origins (Charlesworth 2000; Sennett 2003).

shift in the 'grammar of political claims making' (*ibid.*: 2), where culturally defined groups along the axes of gender, ethnicity and sexuality have emerged to protect their identities. The ultimate goal of such groups is to seek recognition of their cultural and gendered differences. However, as claims for recognition of group difference have become salient, they have served to 'eclipse' (*ibid.*) the socialist political imagery which is primarily concerned with the problem of redistribution of wealth.<sup>20</sup> Connecting the apparently separate dilemmas of recognition and redistribution some authors have argued that, in addition to the problem of redistribution, the poor are equally bound up in the struggle for recognition. In order to explore this further, it is necessary to examine the way in which class, and the inequality it generates in everyday lives, has been conceptualised in recent works.

### *New ways of Viewing Class*

Despite the decline of political interest in class, it remains one of the main areas of disadvantage in society. For Sayer (2005), class matters not only because it affects material and economic security, but also, because it can interfere with a person's life chances. Class position shapes how others value and respond to individuals and, in this sense, can affect feelings of self worth. In order to revitalise and appreciate class today, Sayer suggests that we should examine the 'moral significance' of class: that is, the usually unacknowledged, ethical dimensions of class inequality. A limited number of other works have also explored these moral dimensions of class, and have shown that class is something that people live in and experience through their bodies and minds. In

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<sup>20</sup> Fraser's wider concern is to reconnect cultural politics to social politics: namely, through a 'bivalent' approach which does justice to the inequalities of culture *and* economic injustice.

such works, it is demonstrated that in equal measure to ethnicity, gender and sexuality, class has the potential to be a significant source of injury (Sennett and Cobb 1972; see also Charlesworth 2000; Bourdieu *et al* 2002).<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, class is a powerful exclusionary device which is played out in interactions across social fields. As Sayer (2005) argues, the retreat of class in social thinking and political practice is problematic because it permits 'class contempt' and other forms of symbolic domination to persist largely unobserved and unchallenged. For Sayer (2005: 163), class contempt:

... like other kinds of 'othering', ranges from visceral revulsion, disgust and sneering, through to the tendency not to see or hear others as people, to the subtlest form of aversion (see also Skeggs 2004).

It is contempt for people and their behaviour by virtue of their class position. At its core is the deep aversion to the class of a person (Sayer 2005). While it can be 'felt up or down' (*ibid.*: 164), it predominantly refers to the contempt felt towards the poor and impoverished. Not necessarily expressed verbally, class contempt can reveal itself through subtle and theatrical facial expressions – 'from the raising of the upper lip into a sneer' or 'from slightly grimaced smiles to aggressive sneers' (*ibid.*). It is a potent force of 'othering', and has the function of reifying class relations. It does this by maintaining the ideological facade that the lower-strata are lacking certain virtues that the majority

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<sup>21</sup> In this thesis I am particularly influenced by these new ways of viewing class. I conceptualise it as a site of political struggle, as opposed to narrow definitions based on traditional class categories.

have. Although experienced as an emotion, class contempt does have a tangible dimension. It manifests itself through a person's response to visual and moral 'markers' including: appearance and demeanour; accent and language; values, lifestyle and actions; and possessions (*ibid.*). What is important for Sayer (2005) is that these signifiers of class position serve as prompts for judgements of worth, and can colour with the way people are perceived and treated.

The injuries of class, therefore, are found not only in economic disadvantage, but also, in people's experiences of class contempt and symbolic domination. With a focus on the normative dimensions of class inequality, Charlesworth (2000) seeks to understand the personal testimony of people living in a milieu characterised by poverty.<sup>22</sup> He argues that the poorest classes find themselves 'linguistically dispossessed' (*ibid.*: 77) in describing their diminishing dignity and sense of alienation, frustration and domination. For Charlesworth, an inescapable conclusion of his work was the 'silence and inarticulacy' (*ibid.*) of those individuals most dispossessed. Lacking the resources necessary to represent and defend themselves against hegemony and symbolic domination, he suggests that the contemporary poor are essentially 'unreflective actors' (*ibid.*: 188).

It is important to explore a new addition to the debate about class disadvantage in the context of identity politics. While class inequality can be experienced in gendered and racialised ways, recent attention has been given to the exclusion of the *white* working class. While the general shift of attention from political economy to culture has served to de-centre class from discussions of social justice it has, for Haylett (2001), also positioned the

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<sup>22</sup> Most notably, unemployed people who live in a rapidly de-industrialised area of North Yorkshire.

white poor as 'illegitimate subjects'. Excluded from notions of multiculturalism and progress, this group are currently perceived as 'culturally burdensome' (*ibid.*: 130) and are subjected to a range of disparaging discourses. In such discourses, poor, young white *men* have emerged as the embodiment of disorder and distaste (see also McDowell 2003).<sup>23</sup>

A brief reflection on the 'whiteness' of this group is important in understanding their denigration. As Hallett (2001) demonstrates whiteness, like any other skin 'colour', is socially constructed (see also Frankenburg 1993*a*). Frequently, it is assumed to be a category of privilege. As Bonnett (1998) reminds us, however, such an assumption conceals the complex social, historical, economic and political character of its ascription to particular groups of people. In nineteenth century Britain, when racial purity was emphasised, the urban white poor were excluded from any such mark of privilege. They were, in short, not white *enough* (*ibid.*). Today, in contrast, in the current project of multiculturalism when the accent is on cultural diversity and recognition, it would seem that the white poor are *too* white. They are, as Haylett (2001: 355) notes 'offensively and embarrassingly white'. As I explore in Chapter Seven, the exclusion of the white poor from organisational notions of 'diversity' have important ramifications for the policing of this group.

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed, there is a range of disparaging representations of poor young white men in current popular discourses. As McDowell (2003: 63) notes, such representations would 'cause outcry' if used to refer to members of minority ethnic group or women (see also Charlesworth 2000).

## **Conclusion: The Competing Field of Contemporary Policing**

This chapter has attempted to develop a framework for understanding the structural conditions of contemporary policing as characterised by two distinctive features. First, by drawing on two key moments in the relatively recent history of police-community relations, the chapter has demonstrated that recognition and respect for diversity has become increasingly relevant to contemporary police organisations. In particular, the vision of 'equality' in the current policing discourse has become synonymous with the policing of ethnically defined groups and, indeed, other cultural and gendered identities. However, in a critique of the burgeoning emphasis on the equitable policing of 'diversity', I have argued that the contemporary field of policing is also characterised by widespread economic exclusion. This has important consequences for the policing of a new and extended guise of 'police property' (Lee 1981) under conditions of late modernity. In the wake of greater political recognition of social and cultural diversity, it is argued that the issue of class has disappeared from view. How, then, does the relationship between the police and those groups denied access to the realms of work and consumption become transformed in the wake of increasing economic inequality and division? I return to such themes in Chapter Seven. For now, however, the following chapter considers the significance of 'diversity' in contemporary police organisations, and outlines the way in which the formal reform agenda in Staffordshire has impacted upon the internal working environment.

## Chapter Four

### **Recognising and Resisting Diversity:**

#### **Internal Dynamics of Police Cultural Change**

Contemporary police organisations are under increasing pressure to understand, and indeed project, themselves as sites of diversity and as providers of a fair and equitable policing service. Having established that central to this understanding has been an acknowledgement that the working culture of police organisations requires an important reconfiguration, this chapter sketches a portrait of the internal character of Staffordshire Police, and explores the ways in which the organisation has attempted to effect cultural change in recent years. As I illustrate, questions of diversity, recognition and discrimination have become increasingly prominent in its reincarnation as an organisation which meets the challenges of policing a diverse society, and equally, one that demonstrates equality in all aspects of its internal relations. With an explicit focus on the latter, this chapter assesses the current ‘temperature’ of the organisation with respect to how such changes have resonated within the ideologies of those officers working within the organisation. What emerges, as I demonstrate, are two contrasting and fragmented perspectives on the contemporary working environment.

The first perspective, which is primarily articulated by what remains the dominant culture of the white, heterosexual, male officer, was characterised by resistance and resentment

towards notions of diversity. From this perspective, the formal organisational approach to matters of diversity was largely excessive, divisive and unnecessary. In particular, the new emphasis on diversity was seen as generating a situation in which the white, heterosexual, male had become 'marginalised'. Conversely, a number of female, minority ethnic, gay and lesbian officers described the continuation of a working environment which supports a white, heterosexual, male culture. For these officers, it is an environment in which exclusionary discourses and practices continue to operate. As I illustrate however, the articulation and performance of discrimination has undergone transformation, and reflects some new dynamics of police culture.

With these contrasting perspectives in mind, this chapter represents a multi-dimensional understanding of an organisation which has attempted to change its interior culture. In tracking this discursive environment, the chapter advances an understanding of how the current organisational accent on diversity has shaped internal relations. It shows that the formal institutionalisation of diversity has produced a workplace in which relations are sensitive and competing. In short, it is an environment where new cultures are emerging to challenge old ones. However, while these new challenges have generally evolved from minority officers, I also examine the conditions in which a number of white male officers, who are considered to comprise the dominant 'police culture', become reflexive actors and begin to question, and indeed confront, other officers' ideas about diversity. Prior to exploring this fluid and multifaceted environment, it is important to provide a brief history of the character of the organisation prior to the reform effort, and indeed, the core components of the formal change programme.

## Experiencing Discrimination Under the ‘Old Regime’

While I discuss below the ways in which Staffordshire Police has attempted to reform its organisational culture in recent years, the shift in the Force’s basic assumptions about its functions, objectives and delivery coincided with the arrival of a new Chief Constable, and an almost entirely new team of senior officers in 1996 (Loader 2001).<sup>1</sup> At this time, the new ACPO team recalled arriving at an organisation that was ‘traditional, centralised, a bit resistant to change’:

[It was] a deeply worrying, conservative organisation. Almost the police force that time had forgotten I think ... A force that was incredibly hierarchically aware and seemingly discipline minded. Very old fashioned, buttoned-down, repressed, hadn’t changed for decades quite frankly (*ibid.*: 6).

Externally, the idea of community and race relations was focused exclusively around a single department, and was marginal to both the Force’s philosophy and operational practices. Internally, the dominant composition of the organisation centred almost exclusively around the white, heterosexual male. Indeed, very few women, members of minority ethnic groups or gay and lesbian officers occupied posts, and particularly supervisory positions. The low statistical presence of such groups had important cultural repercussions. As explained in Chapter One, I decided that one way to capture the degree of change within the internal culture of the organisation was to conduct a number of

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<sup>1</sup> In discussing the initial impetus of organisational reform, I have made use of a report written by Loader (2001). The report cites the findings of a number of interviews held with Staffordshire Police’s Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) team. One of the main aims of the interviews was to elicit the views of the senior management team on the nature of the organisation upon their arrival. It is this aspect of the report that I principally draw upon.

biographical interviews with female, minority ethnic, gay and lesbian officers. In addition to providing an insight into any contemporary experiences of discrimination within the organisation, many of the interviews highlighted a range of negative experiences prior to the institution of change.

### *Heightened Visibility and Scrutiny*

As a consequence of the low numbers of female, ethnic minority, and gay and lesbian officers within the organisation, many respondents felt that they were highly visible and easily marked out. One black officer expressed her feelings of vulnerability in the following terms:

I always used to hate walking into the canteen, because when I walked in there,  
I felt all eyes are on me, and it was such an uncomfortable, oppressive feeling  
... I stood out, everyone knew who I was (Interview - December 2004).

Feelings of visibility also extended to other minority officers, especially those who had been successful in gaining promotion, or obtaining a place in a specialist unit:

In the late 1980s, I got promoted. I went on the mounted branch, and later firearms. My gender there was always an issue. I knew that there weren't any female sergeants on the mounted branch - nationally even - and I stuck out like a sore thumb. Even on the firearms ... I was always being looked at, examined (Interview with female inspector - May 2005).

An important aspect of this 'hyper' visibility was the associated feeling that the work undertaken was open to exaggerated scrutiny by colleagues. Many respondents described having to 'prove themselves' in order to acquire acceptance by their shift or unit. Female officers have routinely been perceived by their male counterparts as physically, and emotionally, 'weak' (Smith and Gray 1985; Young 1991), and as noted in Chapter Two, have frequently defined their occupational role as either *policewomen* or *policewomen* (Martin 1980). As the same officer recollects:

I always had a choice to use the weapon the men use, or a smaller one. I couldn't ever go for the smaller weapon because I felt my credibility was on the line. I couldn't go for anything that made me look less capable than a man.

This heightened sense of scrutiny was most profoundly experienced by gay officers who recalled occasions where they were met with suspicion and exclusion until they demonstrated their masculine traits: namely, through showing willingness to 'back up' fellow officers in incidents (see also Burke 1993), or uncomfortably adopting the heterosexist and 'macho' culture of their colleagues. Indeed, one gay officer described how, for three years, he pretended to have a girlfriend in order to conform to the dominant heterosexual culture.

### ***Individual Experiences of Discrimination***

Prior to the institution of the change programme, overt derogatory comments and discriminatory behaviour were also marked experiences of minority officers. Each respondent, sometimes painfully, recalled numerous incidents in which they had been

targeted by colleagues, supervisors and, in some cases, senior officers as a result of their ethnicity, gender or sexuality. As Burke (1993) suggests, homosexuality is constructed as particularly 'deviant' within the occupational culture of the police (see also Young 1991). As a result, homosexual officers experienced intense exclusion and marginalisation. This was evident in one gay officer's experiences of the organisation:

I had a lot of comments and homophobic behaviour directed against me personally. When I first joined and when in the firearms. And that was particularly difficult for me in that it was a job I really loved, wanted to stay. But it was a very difficult environment to stay in, very machoistic, particularly male dominated, heterosexual male dominated. And it was obvious what difficulties I was going to face really. I had a new uniform box through with a new uniform, and you would have things written across the box, homophobic things. And things that you would find in your locker [*long pause, respondent appears upset*], and my address details with things written all over it. (Interview - April 2005).

Other emotional recollections of discrimination revolved around instances of physical and sexual harassment. As many have noted, sexual harassment and discrimination has long been experienced by women working within the police (Smith and Gray 1985; Heidensohn 1992; Brown 1998). The following account provides an example of these early patterns of discrimination:

There was lots of harassment on there too - physical assault, sexual motive. You deal with it in different ways. The first person who assaulted me, I hit. A

senior officer, he took issue. And it was basically, I have hit you, but what have you done. I was married, I was a new female sergeant, and I'll tell my husband, and he'll flatten you. That was my way of dealing with it basically. I didn't feel like I could report it. (Interview with female inspector - June 2005)

Minority officers also worked in an environment where highly racialised terms were commonplace:

We went to a university complex to attend a reported smashed window. While speaking to the caretaker, my colleague said, 'Would you be able to give a description of the people who did it'? The caretaker said, 'No', and my colleague said, 'Well, would you be able to tell if they were Pakis or not'? And that was in my probation. I was coming up against those kinds of barriers and attitudes in my probation, so I knew it was going to be a real rough ride for me. (Interview with Asian officer - July 2005)

Similarly, after working in a station where terms such as 'nigger' and 'wog' were frequently employed by the rank and file and senior officers, one black officer emotionally described how she was held down by her white male colleagues as a wet mop was thrust up her skirt. Although this incident was presented as an 'initiation ceremony', for her, the assault was a consequence of her ethnicity. Ironically though, she does indicate that her gender may have softened the levels of racism she experienced:

I mean I saw what my male black colleague went through ... mine was slightly different. There was a hatred for him, a black male officer. He had a very difficult time as a black officer. He was treated so bad.

(Interview - December 2004).

### ***'Trouble-Makers'***

While overt verbal and physical discrimination formed part of many minority officers' routine experiences, all respondents described the mind-set of the organisation as being one in which discriminatory behaviour 'did not exist'. Upon reporting their experiences to supervisors, many officers described how they were merely turned away or brushed aside (see also Holdaway and Barron 1997). Frequently, they were labelled as 'trouble-makers' and physically moved to another shift, and in some instances, another station. This point was especially salient in the experiences of one female Asian officer. After complaining about ongoing racism and sexism she describes the following:

After I put a complaint in I got moved. *I got moved!* And then when the complaint was supposedly investigated, I wasn't told of the outcome or anything. I felt now that I had a label of my forehead saying 'trouble-maker'. So when I was moved to West Town it was like 'Oh! She's the one who made a complaint'. I felt ostracised and singled out. And I feel that the label has followed me since. (Interview - July 2005).

Another incident was recounted by a lesbian officer who describes how she was moved to an all male shift in order to prevent her from working alongside female officers. For a

number of minority officers, the discrimination experienced within the organisation was only exacerbated by their experiences of intolerance at the hands of members of the public. In particular, black officers described how they were routinely called 'Bounty Bar' and 'Coconut' by minority ethnic population.<sup>2</sup> When minority ethnic officers experienced overt racial abuse by white members of the public, it was felt that colleagues and supervisors failed to support them, or take this form of discrimination seriously:

I have been in incidents where I have been racially abused, spat at, ignored, and there has been up to 10 of my colleagues who haven't even battered an eyelid. It's like 'Well. It's ok to be racially abused because I should expect it because of the colour of my skin'. Nobody, my white colleagues have ever intervened, understood. (Interview with Asian female officer - July 2005)

Although I have provided only a snapshot of some of the major themes raised by officers in discussing the discrimination they faced, it was clear, for them, that their encounters were a consequence of their social difference and the dominance of a white, heterosexist male culture within the organisation. These routine and overt displays of discrimination before the implementation of the reform agenda have their foundations in the structural and cultural character of Staffordshire Police at this time. Issues of diversity, recognition and discrimination were marginal to the Force's working ethos. While such issues were formulated in official documents, they were not necessarily put into practice. Although the Scarman Report (1981) had, in national terms, called for the implementation of a new policing philosophy and provision (Reiner 2000a), the experiences described here

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<sup>2</sup> This terminology was explained to me by one minority ethnic officer, 'It's basically saying you have black skin colour on the outside, but you are white on the inside'.

occurred within a provincial policing context where such concerns were not necessarily stressed. However, and as the previous chapter made clear, in the post-Macpherson context, questions of diversity have (at least at the level of rhetoric) become integral to contemporary police organisations across Britain.

## **Changing Culture: The Insertion of Diversity and Recognition**

In recent years, Staffordshire Police has embarked on a top down reform effort which has been primarily aimed at improving both the working conditions of personnel *inside* the organisation, and the delivery of an effective and equitable service to the various publics *outside* the organisation. While the impetus for change was generated from within the senior management structure upon their arrival in 1996 (Loader 2001), the publication of the Macpherson Report (1999) fundamentally augmented the reform initiative. In the first instance, Staffordshire Police embarked on constructing a new force Diversity Strategy.<sup>3</sup> The range of initiatives introduced by Staffordshire has generally fallen into three broad areas. The first relates to a review of the organisation's guiding principles, and is demonstrated through an array of policy statements. In short, there has been a formal acknowledgement that diversity issues need to be integrated into the overall ethos and operational strategy of the Force. The second involves a commitment to diversifying the composition of the workforce, whilst simultaneously ensuring that cultural sensitivity training is made a core part of police education. The final reform effort involves a new focus on improving the service that is delivered to members of public within the county. In addition to encouraging a more pro-active approach towards minority groups as

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<sup>3</sup> Within the barrage of internal documentation relating to diversity, this formal initiative is also referred to as a 'Diversity Agenda'. As such, I use the two terms interchangeably.

victims of crime, a revision of operational policing policies and practices that may lead to discrimination was also placed high on the agenda.

### **1. A New Mission: Structures for Diversity and Guiding Principles**

In the immediate aftermath of the Macpherson Report (1999), a Chief Constable's Task Group on Diversity was set up in order to approve, and ensure implementation of, initiatives relating to diversity (Loader 2001). Bringing together senior officers from Staffordshire Police and representatives from the racial equality council and local minority ethnic community, the remit of the group was to identify areas and implement actions for improving the service and career opportunity for members of minority groups. More recently, a new Diversity Structure has been put in place in order to ensure that 'race and diversity issues are kept as a priority' (Staffordshire Police 2005: 6). Immediately underpinning the Chief Constable's Task Group is the Force's Tactical Diversity Group. Chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable, this group predominantly includes: specialists from human resources; hate crime officers; representatives from the community; and the Force's support associations. Following on from this, each of the four territorial divisions has set up Divisional Diversity Panels. Managed by a senior command team member, the panel's sphere of activity is to discuss local diversity issues. To support the new Diversity Structure, an 'Equality and Diversity Officer' has also been appointed to act as a central point for advice on equality issues, at both the Force and divisional level.

As we saw in the previous chapter, recent decades have witnessed an important shift in the 'grammar of political claims making' (Fraser 1997: 2). Culturally defined groups have emerged to defend their identities, and seek recognition of their social difference. In Staffordshire, the setting up of internal support associations organised around ethnicity, gender and sexuality represents one of the integral changes to the arrangements for diversity in recent years. Coming into fruition in 2000, the Multi-Cultural Association (MCA), the Female Support Network (FSN) and the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender Group (LGBTG) represent the main associations within the organisation.<sup>4</sup> In addition to providing support to their members, the stated aims of the groups are to: enhance knowledge and educate the police service about diversity issues; advocate reform within the organisation; and to consult on Force policies and documents.<sup>5</sup>

The integration of diversity into the overall philosophy and operation of the Force is demonstrated in relation to a number of policy statements. In particular, two key documents provide an important framework for recasting diversity within Staffordshire Police. The first is the *Staffordshire Police Race Equality Scheme 2005-2008*, the central purpose of which is to set out the Force's commitment to promote race equality within the Force.<sup>6</sup> The second major document I draw upon is the *Staffordshire Police Authority Race Equality Scheme* (2005). This document outlines the existing policies of 'promoting equality of opportunity, tackling racial discrimination and promoting harmonious and

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<sup>4</sup> While other groups have recently emerged, such as the Christian Police Association (CPA), the MCA, FSN and LGBTG represented the main associations of the organisation at the time of the research.

<sup>5</sup> The groups are local versions of national staff associations, including: the National Black Police Association (NBPA), British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP), and the Lesbian and Gay Police Association (LAGPA) respectively.

<sup>6</sup> While these documents are predominantly 'race' specific, they also outline the Force's stance towards gender and sexuality.

effective race relations through the Authority's and Force's area' (*ibid.*: 1). Both schemes specify the Force's and Authority's plans and arrangements for meeting the requirements placed upon them by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. More importantly, the documents define the current vision of Staffordshire Police in relation to how diversity and equality will be implemented, both inside and outside the organisation.

Internally, the scheme defines the nature of its commitment to diversity through the application of its Equal Opportunities Policy:

Staffordshire Police is committed to being an equal opportunities employer and to the creation of a working environment free from any discrimination, harassment or bullying, in particular on the grounds of sex, marital status, gender reassignment, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, religion, sexual orientation or age. We aim to have a culture where everyone is valued and where differences, whether visible or not, are welcomed, enabling everyone to make their unique contribution to providing a quality of service to the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

An Equality of Service policy statement is then provided in relation to the delivery of policing to the various populations that make up the county:

Staffordshire Police is committed to ensuring that no members of the public receive less favourable treatment or service on the grounds of race, colour, nationality or ethnic origins, gender, sexuality or disability or will be disadvantaged by any unjustifiable condition or requirement.

Bringing together these two statements, Staffordshire Police Authority (2005: 6) goes on to declare, 'we will continue to strive to create an environment of equality of opportunity, both for the recipients of the Force's services and the people that we employ'. These principles have been developed into an 'Anti-Discrimination Code of Conduct', which all officers and staff are required to sign up to.<sup>7</sup> While a number of expectations are set out in the code, officers and staff are particularly required to:

- treat all colleagues and members of the public appropriately, fairly and without discrimination
- actively identify and challenge racist, sexist and homophobic words and behaviour within the organisation
- recognise that the way to treat people fairly and without discrimination is not to treat everyone as the same, but to recognise and respect diversity in order to determine appropriate need
- understand that a person can be subjected to discrimination and harassment on grounds including: race, gender, religious or political beliefs, disability, age and sexual orientation
- treat everyone with whom they come into contact with dignity and respect

These new organisational philosophies have been supported by a number of practical efforts to promote diversity within and beyond the organisation.

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<sup>7</sup> The Anti-Discrimination Code of Conduct is monitored and assessed as part of an individual's performance development review (PDR) arrangements. According to the Race Equality Scheme, everyone's performance in relation to diversity is assessed using a one to five scoring scale: with 1 being not yet competent and 5 being exceptional.

## 2. Changes to Recruitment and Training

As noted in the previous chapter, one of the key themes arising from official critiques of the police relates to the need for police organisations to better reflect the composition of the community it is charged to serve (McLaughlin 2007a). The recruitment, retention and career progression of officers from minority backgrounds became one of the principal ways in which Staffordshire Police has attempted to mainstream equality. In working towards a representative police force, a set of recruitment objectives have been established (see also Staffordshire Police Authority 2002b). A commitment to recruit more women and ethnic minorities was particularly outlined, and the Force has embarked on recruitment campaigns to increase the number of female and minority ethnic applicants.<sup>8</sup> To support this, a minority ethnic proactive recruitment officer was appointed to target recruitment from within Staffordshire's minority ethnic communities. Similarly, new mandatory ethnic classifications were introduced in 2003 to monitor all aspects of employment, including applications for employment and promotion, and information on those who leave the force. Along with these measures, the stated commitment to recruit more women was underpinned by the introduction of a process to monitor any interim amendments to the Force's fitness assessment (*ibid.*).

Certainly within recent years, there has been a gradual rise in the number of female and minority ethnic officers in Staffordshire, some of whom have progressed to occupy supervisory positions. According to Staffordshire Police's *Equality and Diversity Monitoring Report* (2006), there are currently 75 ethnic minority personnel within the

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<sup>8</sup> Namely, through advertisements in the local press and the use of recruitment exhibitions to better attract minority ethnic recruits.

organisation, of whom 38 (1.6%) are sworn police officers. The number of minority ethnic people occupying the position of sergeant is 7 (1.7%), and the Force has 3 minority ethnic officers at the rank of inspector. The percentage of females in 2006 increased to 23.3% (552) of all police officers. In the same year, 13.6% of female police officers were ranked sergeant and, at 12.5%, there has also been an unprecedented rise in the number of female superintendents. Moreover, for the first time in Staffordshire Police history, the Force has recruited a female executive officer at the level of ACC.<sup>9</sup> However, while such patterns reflect the Force's commitment to recruiting a more diverse and varied workforce, from a statistical viewpoint, ethnic minority and female staff are still overshadowed by the dominant composition of the organisation. Indeed, out of the 2,325 sworn police officers within the organisation, the overwhelming majority continue to be white and male.<sup>10</sup> Despite attempts to diversify the composition of its personnel and better reflect the ethnic and cultural makeup of communities they police, the structure of Staffordshire Police thus remains out of alignment with the diverse communities which they serve.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Diversity Training***

Attempts have, nonetheless, been made to better educate officers on the cultural and racial backgrounds of people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Following an extensive

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<sup>9</sup> As I undertake the final revisions for this thesis, I have become aware that the female officer in question has subsequently left the Force. She has been replaced with a male ACC.

<sup>10</sup> These figures also find substance from the field work. During the observational stage of the research in both sites, I overwhelmingly accompanied white, heterosexual male officers. I say heterosexual in the sense that I did not meet any officers in the research sites who were *openly* gay. Due to their low number within the sites, I only occasionally had the opportunity to accompany female officers and I never accompanied any officers from a minority ethnic background.

<sup>11</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter One, Census (2001) data suggests that the number of members of minority ethnic populations residing in the Staffordshire policing area is 31,653 (3.02%). This number mainly comprises those of Pakistani, Indian and Black Caribbean ethnic origin.

review of its content, and the way in which its diversity training was delivered, April 2002 saw the emergence of a renewed programme for training officers in diversity issues (Staffordshire Police 2005). The first objective of the new 'Police Race and Diversity Learning and Development Programme' is to heighten officers' awareness and understandings of the values, beliefs and customs of people from differing ethnic backgrounds. Its second aim is to encourage a more understanding interaction between officers and those from minority backgrounds. Such an approach has been adopted by other training programmes in recent years (see Rowe and Garland 2003).

While a number of elements make-up the course, some of the more prominent features include a 'values session' which discusses the importance of understanding and respecting 'difference'. With a focus on the Sex Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act, other sessions reflect upon the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and *The Secret Policeman*. A central aspect of the training is a seminar with a 'community visitor' who comes into the classroom to discuss his/her life experiences, of both the police service and the wider society. While the visitors come from a range of backgrounds including disability, mental health and sexual orientation, they have predominantly reflected different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds (Staffordshire Police 2005).

### **3. Improving Service Delivery to Minority Groups**

Along with the Equality of Service policy statement described earlier, the revision of operational policing policies and practices has also been placed high on Staffordshire Police's reform agenda.

### ***Closer Consultation with Minority Groups***

Contemporary police organisations, as outlined in the previous chapter, have been encouraged to develop relationships with the community. In part, this is to be achieved through devices such as community forums and lay visiting practices. Such structures, it is believed, permit direct local interaction outside the conventional practices of routine police work, and have the potential to allow the community to influence day-to-day policing practices in the locality (see Brogden and Nijhar 2005).<sup>12</sup> In recent years, Staffordshire Police has attempted to establish closer consultation with minority groups. Through the Chief Constable's Task Group, it has actively sought to increase liaison with a number of local interest groups (Staffordshire Police 2005). These have included representatives from: the local Race Equality Council (REC); Partnership Against Racism in North Staffordshire (PARINS); Trent Valley Racial Harassment Forum; Staffordshire Domestic Violence Forum; and Chase Against Crimes of Hate (CACH).

### ***Community Policing***

The efforts to reform the way in which Staffordshire Police relates to its diverse 'publics' has also been supported by a broader move towards community policing. As both a philosophical movement and as a programme for implementation, 'community policing' initially came to prominence in Britain following the Scarman Report (1981). It will be recalled that central to the report was the need for the police to become more embedded in the community that they are charged with serving. Since this time, community policing philosophies have become adopted across nearly all police forces throughout the Western

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<sup>12</sup> A number of problems have been voiced, however, with respect to community forums. In particular, they are frequently atypical of local communities, and debate has tended to centre around trivial - as opposed to critical - policing issues (Stenning 2003; Brogden and Nijhar 2005).

world (Fielding 1995; Chan 1997; Brogden 1999; Tilley 2003; Brogden and Nijar 2005). Community policing, as Tilley (2003: 315) reminds us, stresses ‘policing *with* and *for* the community, rather than policing *of* the community’. The following statement highlights Staffordshire Police’s current policing style:

Staffordshire Police and Police Authority are committed to delivering a community-based policing style characterized by high-quality services focused on priorities identified through systematic consultation, engagement with communities and responsiveness to customer need.<sup>13</sup>

Underpinning this declaration is the idea that members of the public should be given a more active role in articulating their policing needs. The public, it is believed, should be treated as though they are users or stakeholders in a public service. As the above statement illustrates, central to this has been the redefinition of the public as police ‘customers’.<sup>14</sup> To support this style of policing, a number of Community Action Teams (CAT) have been created to work alongside Incident Management Units (IMU). While the latter are designed to manage those incidents that require an immediate response or ones within short timescales, the former are involved primarily in community work. Providing visibility and reassurance, Community Beat Officers (CBO’s) are assigned to a particular geographical area and attend those incidents which are non-urgent and local to that community. In contrast to the IMU, working on the CAT ‘presents an opportunity for the officer to develop long-term solutions’ (Staffordshire Police 2000a: 41). More

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<sup>13</sup> As set out in Staffordshire Police’s ‘Quality of Service Commitment’ (2004a).

<sup>14</sup> These changes are indicative of the broader shift towards new public management (NPM). See Long (2003) for a fuller discussion on the impact of this for the police.

recently, the Force has also recruited a number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) in order to provide further public reassurance.<sup>15</sup>

Along with the Equality of Service policy statement described earlier, the revision of operational policing policies and practices which may lead to discrimination against minority ethnic communities has also been placed high on the agenda. In response to the recommendations emanating from the Macpherson Report (1999), the Home Office in March 2004, issued the compulsory recording of stops as well as searches. This has been further supported by the introduction of mandatory ethnic monitoring processes in stop and search encounters. In order to meet the challenges of policing a society that is more ethnically and linguistically diverse, Staffordshire Police has also developed a 'language card' which is issued to officers (Staffordshire Police 2005).<sup>16</sup> Information about rights and entitlements in over 30 languages is held in custody suites, and a number of interpreters have also been employed in order to assist with interviewing suspects, victims and witnesses.

### *A New Approach towards Victimisation*

One of the key recommendations which emerged from the Macpherson Report (1999) was the requirement for police organisations to undertake fundamental changes to the way in which racially motivated incidents are reported, recorded and investigated. In the local context of Staffordshire, the recasting of diversity as a central policing concern has

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<sup>15</sup> PCSO's are police support (civilian) staff which have a limited number of police powers. They are expected to deal with low-level anti-social behaviour while providing a visible street presence (see Crawford 2003).

<sup>16</sup> The language card displays the following statement - 'to assist the officer point to a language you can speak'.

focused on a more pro-active approach towards minority groups as victims of crime. In particular, the improved recording, investigation and prosecution of 'hate crime' have been emphasised.<sup>17</sup> Hate crime officers are now employed throughout the organisation, and are responsible for five key areas of crime: racist; religious; homophobic; transphobic; and disability (Staffordshire Police 2005). The establishment of specialised officers responsible for responding to incidents of hate-motivated crime was also augmented into a project called 'True Vision'. Launched in 2004, the project aims to increase the reporting of hate crime in order to provide the police with a 'true vision' of victimisation.

As noted in the previous chapter, the political agenda towards women as victims of physical and sexual crimes has been fundamentally transformed within the recent years (Heidensohn 2003). Contemporary police organisations are actively encouraged to change in a direction which emphasises quality of service for victims of domestic violence. In Staffordshire, a more pro-active policing strategy towards female victimisation is another way in which the Force has linked questions of diversity to new policing agendas. The development of examination suites for victims of rape and enhanced training for officers surrounding the issue of rape has been adopted. In particular, a number of mechanisms have been established to encourage and support victims of domestic violence. One of the main efforts includes the adoption of a model

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<sup>17</sup> See Dixon and Gadd (2006) for a broader discussion on the concept of hate crime.

of policing domestic violence incidents which directs constables to arrest the assaulting partner where there is evidence of an assault (Staffordshire Police 2004b).<sup>18</sup>

A new domestic violence incident form called DIAL has also been created. In the case of an arrest, officers are required to complete a Domestic Investigation Arrest Log. If officers make no arrest, a similar form entitled the Domestic Intelligence Assessment Log is then completed. The log encourages officers to gather relevant evidence and intelligence on the perpetrators of domestic violence, and thus enables the Force to monitor and target offenders more closely. By following the prompts in DIAL, officers are able to make an early risk assessment and, if necessary, a 'tailored safety plan' for the victim (*ibid.*: 12). Finally, working within the Public Protection Team, each of the four divisions have also introduced a 'domestic violence perpetrator officer'. More broadly, the Force also consults with local interest groups, and is currently working towards the introduction of specialist domestic violence courts (*ibid.*).

### **Disseminating the New Organisational Ethos**

The dissemination of the organisation's Diversity Strategy was communicated internally, and relied on a number of organisational props. Diversity-related notice-boards, e-mails, general briefings and memoranda's, many of which emerged from the internal support associations, were employed. It was particularly interesting to note how architecture was used as a means of conveying the message: from the use of posters promoting the

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<sup>18</sup> Such moves are a local interpretation of recent Home Office circulars which have strongly advocated a mandatory arrest policy (see for example Home Office (2003) *Safety and Justice: The Government's Proposals on Domestic Violence*. CM5847, cited in Heidensohn 2003). The changes to the way in which domestic violence is policed have also been strengthened following the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004).

'celebration of cultural difference' through to messages officially abhorring discrimination being printed on Force mouse mats and coffee cups. Silverman (2001) suggests that the spatial arrangements of organisations are an important indicator of their intentions, priorities, and overall character (see also Hallett 2003). These subtle measures pertaining to cultural difference and recognition aptly capture the ways in which, officially at least, the organisation has become saturated with notions of diversity and its recognition.

Overall, it can be seen that Staffordshire Police has undertaken a range of measures which mirror the diversity context of contemporary policing. It has introduced a number of blanket reforms which seek to build a fair and equitable service, for both its internal personnel and those various 'publics' whom they are charged with serving. Although local in its implementation, the reform initiatives instituted in Staffordshire reflect the fundamental shift which has taken place in the broader field of policing. As I argued in the previous chapter, it is a field in which questions of diversity and its recognition have come to permeate contemporary police organisations. In tracking the 'success' of such reforms, a number of questions arise. First, how have such changes been received and understood by those officers at the base of the organisational hierarchy? Second, how has the organisational emphasis on diversity shaped internal relations? Indeed, how do those minority officers who have been emphasised in the diversity agenda experience the organisation today? What emerges, in addressing such questions, are two contrasting and fragmented perspectives on the contemporary working environment.

## **Dominant Cultures in Trouble: White Narratives of Decline**

As noted in Chapter Two, the disjuncture between the way in which police organisations formally present themselves, and the informal reality of their everyday practices, can be linked to questions of police culture (Manning 1978a; Holdaway 1980; Foster 2003). Furthermore, the informal occupational assumptions and values of the police can exert significant influence over the character and working environment of police organisations. While I am mindful of portraying this group as homogenous, in the current diversity context of Staffordshire Police it would appear that a recalcitrant narrative has emerged from white, heterosexual, male officers towards the diversity agenda.<sup>19</sup> From the perspective of this group, the formal emphasis on diversity is excessive, divisive and unwarranted. Within their occupational culture, the diversity agenda was largely resisted and resented.

### ***From Public to 'Customer'***

As mentioned earlier, a central principle of the move towards community policing has been to recast the public as police *customers*. At the time of the research, an initiative called 'customer focus' was being particularly promoted within the organisation. On one occasion, a Superintendent attended Burslem police station to give a talk to officers about the initiative. In so doing, he used a shop analogy which posed the police as 'shopkeepers', and members of the public as 'customers'. The plan was that police officers need to be helpful, courteous and provide a service to their customers. The following field note captures officers' initial thoughts on this:

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<sup>19</sup> This outlook is similar to what McLaughlin (2007a: 154) characterises as a 'white dissident perspective' in characterising the white Metropolitan Police officers' predominantly hostile reaction to the Macpherson Report (1999).

After the meeting, the shop analogy was caricatured and parodied by the officers in the parade room. Comments [in American accents] like *'Do you want fries with your stop and search record'*, *'I'm sorry we don't accept giros'*, and *'Here's three points on your licence, have a nice day now'* were just some of the banter flying around the room. (Field notes, Burslem - June 2004)

The idea of the police having to treat all members of the public as though they are 'customers' was inconsistent with officers' views of what 'real' police work was all about. The police, as we saw in Chapter Two, tend to interpret their role as one that, first and foremost, involves fighting crime (Cain 1973; Smith and Gray 1985). Yet this outlook can make the police resistant to efforts to redefine the police role (Marks 2005). As I explore in the following chapter, the CAT was viewed as marginal to operational policing and CAT officers were often disparaged by their IMU colleagues. Returning to the notion of customer focus, it would appear that the police are particularly critical of treating suspects and offenders as 'customers':

*Bethan:* One of the statements that Staffordshire Police says is that it delivers a service which 'reflects community needs', and is 'customer focused'. What are your views of that?

*Ron:* We're not fucking Sainsbury's [everyone laughs] ...

*Scott:* Staffordshire police is not a business and never will be. We don't have customers - we have complainants and offenders. It's as simple as that.

*Gareth:* The world has just gone politically mad. It's not, like Scott says, yeah there are members of the public out there, but the wording that the bosses use is

totally out of synch with the real world. I don't think it reflects what we are.

We are an emergency service rather than a, what am I trying to say...

Scott: A corporate entity ...

Gareth: Start talking about customers, you expect us to kiss feet.

(Focus Group, Burslem - August 2004)

The scepticism articulated towards viewing members of the public - and especially offenders - as 'customers', stands in sharp contrast to the organisational philosophy as stated in Staffordshire Police's 'Quality of Service Commitment' outlined earlier. The above extract also highlights officers' cynicism towards the management emphasis on such initiatives. That the rank and file perceive a wide disparity between the 'real world' of sharp end policing, and the seemingly bureaucratic world of management, is a theme noted in an abundance of police research (Ruess-Ianni and Ianni 1983; Waddington 1999b). I return to this point in subsequent sections.

### ***Police as 'Racist': Anxiety, Resentment and 'Political Correctness'***

A core policy focus of the Staffordshire reform initiative is the explicit official interdiction of discriminatory language and conduct. Expressions of racism have been especially deplored, and a strong disciplinary line is taken against racist comments or utterances. The current organisational emphasis on challenging and identifying words which are discriminatory therefore requires officers to examine the way they talk. This has involved learning which words and phrases are censured, and which ones are to be appropriately used in relation to those groups given prominence in the current climate of diversity:

*Collin:* Nowadays, you have to be so careful with what you say ... [murmurs of agreement]

*Tim:* You'd be out of a job ...

*Collin:* It's political correctness. It's all gone, it has gone mad

*Martin:* You are taught ... it's like half caste and gypsy, you can't even say them anymore. [Sarcastically] Now it's 'mixed heritage' and 'itinerant'. The words they use is like ...

*Tim:* You can't even say 'nitty gritty' now because it refers to the black slaves at the bottom of the slave boats or something. But it's daft.

*Neil:* It's like, I was on the air [the radio] the other week and I was trying to say mental asylum. I stopped myself and started stuttering. I couldn't think of the correct word ...

*Susan:* [Laughing] The funny farm, fruitcake - nut house!

*Neil:* Yeah! But I just couldn't think of what the politically correct word was.

(Focus Group, Wombourne - August 2005)

A clear awareness of the official hard-line against discrimination permeated the organisation. Much as in the study by Foster *et al* (2005), one of the striking features of the research was the broad *absence* of overt racist language among officers. This reflects an important and distinct change to the ostentatiously racist 'talk' as observed by previous police researchers (Smith and Gray 1985; Holdaway 1983; Young 1991). Moreover, as the previous accounts contained in the biographical interviews suggest, at the very least the present generation of Staffordshire Police officers manage their talk and behaviour somewhat differently from their predecessors.

It would appear, nonetheless, that the absence of racist language and use of 'politically correct' terminology is a consequence of a heightened awareness of the disciplinary line being taken against discriminatory language, and perhaps not reflective of a genuine change in officers' assumptions and understanding of issues surrounding discrimination. As I explore below, a number of minority officers suggest that prejudice and discrimination continues to form part of the organisation. However, and as the above extract demonstrates, because officers *know* which words are outlawed in the contemporary organisational climate the way in which discrimination is performed has undergone transformation. For now, nevertheless, although officers may change their language to avoid any potential disciplinary repercussions many perceived the use of anti-discriminatory words and phrases as excessive and vacuous.

Indeed, while the absence of overt discriminatory language signals a positive change in police culture, officers frequently bemoaned a situation in which the organisation had become enveloped in a claustrophobic atmosphere of 'political correctness'. Many complained that this new atmosphere had impinged on their immediate working environment in that seemingly harmless remarks made by officers could now be interpreted as discriminatory by 'over-sensitive' colleagues. As a result, officers felt that their language and behaviour were under intense scrutiny (see also Foster *et al* 2005). In particular, the term 'racist' carried an intense stigma (*ibid.*) and many officers were anxious about being labelled racist by the organisation and members of the public. During much of the research, officers appeared to have accusations of racism at the

forefronts of their minds. The following interview with a white male police sergeant illustrates the sensitive nature of this:

*Bethan:* It has often been said that Britain is a multicultural and diverse society.

Do you think that has affected the way you police? Perhaps you could talk around your own experiences, locally?

*Stephen:* I can honestly say that I don't know a racist officer, sexist officer. Yes jokes are cracked - the same as anywhere, jokes are cracked. But I don't know anyone who discriminates against anyone. And I am saying that honestly. I know this interview is supposed to be anonymous, but I honestly don't know a racist officer. (Interview, Wombourne - September 2005)

This extract, and others like it, demonstrates Stephen's anxiety when the words 'diversity' and 'multicultural' are invoked. Upon hearing the terms, he immediately associates them with the broader topic of police racism. For me, this extract is important because it offers an indication of what some officers understand by the term diversity, and more importantly, what the *implications* of diversity are for them. As the extract demonstrates, officers associate the issue of diversity with becoming accused of being racist.

Most officers believed that the police service in general is viewed negatively by the public for their race relations. For many, damaging portrayals of the police in the national and local media were primarily to blame for constructing a stereotyped image of police racism. However, it was considered largely unjust to label the police as racist, and many

officers adopted the 'bad apple' theory of police racism.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, considerable annoyance was expressed that police officers have too often become pathologized as endemically and congenitally racist. It was felt that the rank and file were used as scapegoats by the media, politicians and senior officers for the failings of wider society.

Officers' anger became apparent when discussing the notion of 'institutional racism' as highlighted in the Macpherson Report (see also Foster *et al* 2005; Souhami 2007). As we saw, although the term 'institutional racism' primarily draws attention to how discrimination can play out through organisational policies and practices, it has become interpreted by the police as referring almost exclusively to *individual* racism (*ibid.*). This invoked strong feelings amongst officers:

*Robert:* It annoys me. Institutional racism may be in the Met, but it ain't here  
[murmurs of agreement] ...

*Warren:* They have made a mess of their own backs down there ...

*Robert:* In my dealings with blacks. When I was in the Westshire Force (large police force covering a large multi-ethnic urban terrain) we had a place we called 'Little India', and it is predominantly Indian. And I have dealt with officers who you would probably say had a racist element. But they dealt with them as fairly as anybody else. So when the Force says to me about 'institutional racism', and the blacks pick up on it, it has made our job 10 times worse because you are coming from a point of defending everything you do. I'm not racist, I'm just trying to do my job. It has become such a political

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<sup>20</sup> That is, the notion that a few rogue officers had served to damage public confidence in the police.

bloody nightmare. There is nobody here openly racist. If London, that's London.

*James:* It's crap ...

*Warren:* It's all down to political correctness at the end of the day. It all boils down to that the world has gone crazy. The law has turned on us [...]

*Robert:* We've had our teeth taken away from us. Because of all this, the police are having to walk on an invisible tightrope. (Focus group, Wombourne - August 2005)

This extract also highlights another important theme regarding the way in which minority ethnic members of the public are viewed within the current policing climate. While I discuss this in more detail below (and in subsequent chapters), it was widely believed that minority ethnic people, as a result of their heightened political status, deliberately used their ethnicity in order to neutralise the effects of routine policing. For now however, although it was felt that its report was largely irrelevant to Staffordshire Police, it was widely believed that the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was the driving force behind the new climate of police scrutiny. At the extreme end of the spectrum, some officers articulated robust resentment towards the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, with one white male sergeant stating the following:

What people don't say, and I could be wrong ... I was told some years ago.

What people don't say is that Stephen Lawrence, which all this has come out

of, that Stephen Lawrence was up for attempted rape or rape. He was up on bail for it. [Sarcastically] Let's forget about that charge.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the research a small minority of officers also suggested that Stephen Lawrence's parents had exploited his death in order to benefit, both generally and financially. Somewhat disturbingly, these narratives are reminiscent of sentiments made in *The Secret Policeman* (see McLaughlin 2007a: 160). However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry had significantly impacted upon officers in Staffordshire. Rather, it was often viewed as relevant to those larger forces which are responsible for policing large multi-ethnic populations. Nonetheless, the inquiry, and its resulting report, was broadly conceived as being responsible for forcing officers into a 'politically correct' reform agenda.

### ***External and Internal Advantage: Playing the Discrimination Card***

As noted earlier, although Staffordshire Police has put in place a number of mechanisms to recruit more minority officers, the number of female and minority ethnic officers remains overshadowed by a predominantly white, male workforce. From the latter's perspective, it was strongly believed that recruits should only obtain employment on merit: and not by virtue of their ethnicity, gender or sexuality. In particular, it was seen that to employ recruits only because they were from a minority would be unfair and divisive.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, while Staffordshire Police operates an equal opportunities policy on recruitment and promotion, many officers expressed resentment towards a situation in

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<sup>21</sup> According to an article in *The Guardian* (17/09/99), Dwayne Brooks (Stephen Lawrence's friend) has been implicated in a rape case - but with no formal conviction.

<sup>22</sup> Some minority officers also rejected the notion of 'positive discrimination'. It was felt that the introduction of any such policy would serve to label them as 'second-rate' police officers.

which a perceived scheme of 'affirmative action' had served to marginalise white male officers from employment and internal promotion opportunities.<sup>23</sup> Many of these sentiments are captured in the following exchange during a focus group in Burslem:

*Martin:* It's the positive discrimination effect, it discriminates against white...

*Gary:* If people from the ethnic background or female background or whatever this non-white background is, if they want a job as a police officer they will come off their own steam, and *not* high profile leaflet campaigns or recruitment caravans parked on Tesco car park ...

*Bruce:* That's right. Imagine: mother, father and 18 year old white lad outside Tesco thinking, 'I would love to be a policeman. Can I go and have a look in the caravan mum'? And he gets there, and it's just ethnics and females.

*Howard:* Pakistani lads can't run: I know this from the TA [Territorial Army]. Genuinely, Pakistani lads can't run, they are known for it. And to get them up to the minimum standard they had to drop the standards for the entrance test. Now if that isn't positive discrimination ...

*Gary:* You're putting ethnic minorities on a pedestal - you're creating divisions before you even start. The Force is deterring potential candidates because they are white males. (September - 2004)

It was also strongly believed that minority groups had an unfair advantage in acquiring internal promotion. On one occasion, a white police constable who had failed a sergeant board for a third time returned to the station and said to his immediate shift:

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<sup>23</sup> Affirmative action (also referred to as 'positive discrimination') is not legally permitted in Britain.

If I was a black lesbian with a wooden leg you would be calling me Sergeant today. (Field notes - Wombourne, April 2005)

In short, it was believed that the diversity agenda had been taken 'too far'. Officers expressed robust resentment towards a situation in which a perceived 'reverse racism' (McLaughlin 2007a; 2007b) was resulting in under-qualified minority candidates being 'fast tracked' through recruitment and promotion processes. The effect, from this perspective, was that it served to exclude white males from career opportunities.

Outside the organisation, many officers also believed that minority groups had an unfair advantage in the current policing climate. This point was especially salient in relation to crimes with a potentially racial motive. The following extract illustrates two female officers talking about the new organisational response to hate crimes:

*Claire:* But they [the organisation] give it priority, but even if the IP [injured party] says, 'I have had my vehicle damaged, and I think this is racial', it's suddenly put to the top of the – whoof! But the little old lady, who is the same, is still at the bottom. She could drop dead before she sees an officer ...

*Catrin:* It's wrong isn't it?

*Claire:* But because they are from a minority, they go straight to the top. Wow. And everybody's bottom starts twitching and sirens go off.

(Focus Group - Burlsem October 2004)

As discussed earlier, the recasting of diversity within Staffordshire Police has focused on a more pro-active approach towards minority groups. In respect to minority ethnic communities this has two components. The first is the improved recording, investigation and prosecution of 'hate crime'. Second however, officers have been asked to be more sensitive towards the victimisation experienced by people from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, the comments articulated in the above extract demonstrate an irritation and a sense of unfairness about the prioritisation of racially motivated crimes.

While officers were anxious about being labelled racist by the organisation, they were also anxious about such an accusation in their interactions with minority ethnic groups. As I demonstrate in Chapter Six, this 'culture of anxiety' generated from within the organisation meant that some officers were reluctant to deal with members of minority ethnic communities on a day-to-day basis. However, this anxiety became an important part of the police's occupational ideologies, with many officers expressing resentment towards what they saw as minority ethnic people who 'played on the race card'. Indeed, many of the officers I accompanied believed themselves to be 'easy targets' for accusations of racism. This idea assumed an important place in officers' informal talk. In many of the 'backstage' (Goffman 1990a) arenas of police work - such as the canteen or the police car - officers routinely relayed stories to each other about incidents in which they had stopped a member of a minority ethnic group who had said; 'You only stopped me because I am black'. In responding to this, officers in both sites reported themselves as using quick-witted tactics to respond to this potentially damaging accusation:

The best one I have ever done is when they say, 'You only stopped me because I'm black', you say, 'You only said that because I am white'. It stops them dead in their tracks. Or you say to them, 'You only said that because I am white, which makes you racist, and I can lock you up for that'.

(Field notes, Wombourne - June 2005)

In short, it was widely believed that the 'race card' and the broader emphasis on 'political correctness' - that is, a perceived governmental and organisational attempt to restrict or change everyday attitudes and behaviour - has served to hinder contemporary police officers from doing their job properly. And I was frequently told that policing today was like 'walking on an invisible tightrope'. However, in the current policing climate where problems of racism and discrimination are emphasised, these responses are an important way of managing the tensions associated with the policing of minority ethnic communities. Nevertheless, such responses also become a way for officers to reinforce the idea that minority groups are problematic.

### ***Diversity Training as Informal Punishment***

One of the main themes which have emerged from official critiques of police behaviour is that officers are not sufficiently sensitive to differing cultures. In response to this criticism there have been widespread calls for the improvement of police training in relation to minority ethnic groups. As highlighted earlier, an increased emphasis on community and race relations training has been integral to Staffordshire Police's attempts to achieve cultural change. However, the way in which such training resonated within

officers' occupational culture indicates that it was viewed as unnecessary and irrelevant. Perhaps more poignantly, it was viewed as an informal form of punishment.

As noted, there was a strong resentment towards what was seen as the constant pressure put on officers to embrace diversity and to be 'politically correct'. While new recruits tend to be more accepting of Force training courses (see Chan *et al* 2003), one probationer in Wombourne suggested the following:

I mean with myself, I only have such a short service, eight months in. But I have had so many diversity courses, and they are nailing the lid in the coffin and stamping on it. It is just driving us insane. [...] They go through all these different things, and they labour the point and labour the point, and at the end of it I was thinking, 'For God's sake, I wasn't racist at the start of this, are you doing this for my benefit or yours? It's just pathetic. Let me go home'.

(Focus Group - August 2005)

Clear resentment and cynicism was expressed towards what officers viewed as the constant reaffirming of diversity related issues. Frequently, many officers felt 'insulted' that the diversity training assumes that the police are inherently racist and require specialist training. However, such a sentiment can be linked to the wider defensiveness mentioned earlier about the police being branded as 'racist' by the organisation and wider society. For some officers, this feeling was only exacerbated by the session with the community visitor:

We once had a black guy who came in to talk to us about his culture and experiences of the police. And I thought fair enough, you have had a pretty hard time. But another part of me thinks, maybe I should go out into their black community, and tell them how I get abused and treated by some of them.

(Field notes - Burslem, July 2004)

Another common theme, and particularly for the more experienced officers, was that officers developed their own personal style of dealing with people from different backgrounds, and did not need to be instructed on how to do their job. Many officers also saw the diversity training as representing another example of the managerial effort to drive through new disciplinary rules and 'tick boxes'. As one officer put it:

The diversity training is all about the organisation saying, 'This is the law - don't break it'. If you do drop a clanger, they aren't going to support you because they have ticked their boxes. (Focus Group, Wombourne - September 2005)

The cultural resistance towards the diversity training can also be explained by the perceived relevance of its content for operational policing (see also Rowe 2007). Scepticism about the impact of police courses on shaping police attitudes and practices has been noted in the academic literature. Indeed, several pieces of research have demonstrated that the principles taught in the classroom become challenged once recruits start working in the field (Van Maanen 1973; Chan *et al* 2003). In line with this observation, officers tended to argue that the diversity training is not applicable to the

'real world' of policing. From the rank and file perspective, 'soft' and liberal ideas about diversity are rendered ineffective when the police come to deal with the 'anti-social' behaviours of those groups they routinely encounter (see Rowe 2007). Similarly, and as noted by Southgate (1984, *cited in* Chan 1997), in seeking to educate officers on the cultural differences of groups, diversity training can actually reinforce existing stereotypes and prejudices. In one focus group, a number of white officers humorously recalled occasions when they had been told by trainers that they would be required to remove their boots whilst entering a mosque, and that in an Indian household, they should accept tea which was made with goat's milk. While the diversity training had sought to educate officers on the cultural customs of different ethnic groupings, these 'idiosyncrasies' reinforced the perception that such cultures are 'alien' to those of 'normal' society.

### ***A 'Dying Breed': The Marginalisation of the White, Heterosexual Male***

In the context of the organisational emphasis on diversity, it was widely believed that the white, heterosexual male officer was becoming marginalised. This belief was particularly encouraged by the introduction of the Force's support associations. Throughout the research, officers expressed clear resentment of, and suspicion towards, the MCA, FSN and LGBTG.<sup>24</sup> The associations were seen as exaggerating the cultural differences within the organisation, and were regarded as contributing to an 'Us' versus 'Them' culture. It was also suspected that some individuals were using the associations to gain promotion

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that those female officers who took part in the focus group discussions expressed strikingly similar views to their white, heterosexual male colleagues regarding the introduction of internal associations.

by playing on their status as members of a minority group. The feelings of exclusion, shared by many, are evident in the following comment made by one white officer:

I wish I had an association. Can I have an association? How about a white, heterosexual, male association, where we can sit and discuss at our private meetings that they can't come to? It's like an 'Us' versus 'Them' culture isn't it? You join your gang, and we'll join our gang. (Focus Group - Burslem, August 2004)

Confusion about the remit of the groups was also evident and contributed to the idea that the associations were somehow furthering political and individual objectives. In the main, officers placed a greater emphasis on the MCA in erecting this cultural barrier. Indeed, it was regularly described as a 'political pressure group' or 'splinter group' as opposed to an association:

*Bethan:* Another issue I would like to talk about is your thoughts on the introduction of the internal cultural associations. So, you have the MCA, FSN, LGBTG ...

*Jeremy:* It's rubbish ...

*Bethan:* Do you have any experiences of these associations?

*Jeremy:* I think it is rubbish. You have got the Police Federation which should cover everyone. Why have your blacks and gays and lesbians got their own Federation?

*Donna:* Your black police ...

*Jeremy:* Your ethnic groups, why have they got their own groupings?

Disability, yeah they need it. But they should get them through the Fed

*Warren:* White, Heterosexual Male Association ...

*Matthew and Jeremy:* [sarcastically] Oh! I'll have to join that one ...

*Colin:* Basically, regardless of whether you are disabled, your creed, colour or religion, you should go through the Fed. You should *not* need other organisations and splinter groups. [...]

*Desmond:* I fear for some of the motives. Like you said, with the black one for instance ... I'm just wondering that sometimes, some people - their motives are less than honourable. And I think that's what you have got to be careful of, especially because they are such powerful groups. The black association, whatever they might be, those are the real power groups aren't they? [...]

*Colin:* With all of these diverse groups forming now, the rest of us lot are becoming a dying breed. We are becoming the inferior ones, the white heterosexual male. (Focus Group, Wombourne - August 2005)

As this extract illustrates, it was often stated by officers that the Police Federation should be the only interest group as its core remit was to represent individuals *as police officers*. This reflects a lack of deeper understanding that while police officers do face similar dilemmas (in the course of their duty and pressure from management, for example), some officers experience distinct problems as a consequence of their ethnicity, gender and sexuality. While some officers understood the logic behind the creation of the associations, the majority appeared to display resentment and suspicion towards the groups. However, the discourses of exclusion put forward by these white, and predominantly, male rank and file officers were not seen as authentic by minority

officers. As I explore below, most of the minority officers I spoke with felt that being a member of the associations had a strong stigma attached to it.

### ***Understanding Resistance: Bosses as ‘Aliens’***

As noted in Chapter Two, police conservatism and pragmatism can make attempts to reform the police difficult (see Bowling and Foster 2002; Marks 2005). Moreover, the expression of a strong in-group identity among the rank and file can create a gulf within the organisation. In part, the sentiments of resistance articulated by officers in Staffordshire demonstrate their cynicism towards senior officers and management. As many of the extracts reproduced here reveal, officers’ narratives were frequently imbued with the idea that management and supervisors had ‘lost touch’ with the demands which face ‘beleaguered’ officers (Reiner 2000a). While this internal gulf has been a consistent feature of police organisations (see Ruess-Ianni and Ianni 1983; Graef 1989), this distinction, I suggest, has been exacerbated by the new external pressures on organisations to realign their culture with new agendas of equality, diversity and professionalism.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, senior personnel and middle managers are increasingly required to demonstrate commitment to the promotion and recognition of equality and diversity. For Waddington (1999b), the division between management and the rank and file is a consequence of their different, and contradictory, functions. Management play a pivotal role in protecting a formal image of the police organisation for public consumption (see also Manning 1977). From their perspective, such an image

can become undermined by the actions of the rank and file in their day-to-day dealings with the public. In Staffordshire, the cynicism and isolation felt towards senior officers was fundamentally exacerbated by what the rank and file saw as the irrelevant and inane 'management speak' that surrounds the 'politically correct' diversity agenda. The following field note extracts illustrate this:

Shaun described how some of the higher ranking officers came down to the station to give a talk on 'quality of service', 'Force direction' and 'performance'. He said, 'It was like listening to aliens. They were using all of these politically correct words, pie charts and graphs to show us how we can get better 'customer' satisfaction. We all just sat there thinking, 'Whatever you say has nothing to do with the real world'. (Field Notes - Wombourne, August 2005)

Christian told me that Chief Inspector Hook had come to the station to do some locker checks. He told officers that he did not want any pictures of semi-naked women around the lockers, because they were 'culturally offensive' and 'excluding' of the female personnel within the station. Christian thought this was completely out of order, and another example of senior management throwing their 'politically correct babble' around. (Field notes – Wombourne, July 2005)

As a cultural theme, cynicism tends to be expressed through police humour. While serving to release the tensions associated with their working environment (Waddington 1999a), the elements found in police humour can also reflect wider issues of power,

undermine reform efforts and reinforce solidarity among officers (Powell 1996). Cynicism towards management often manifested itself in the parodying of management personnel by officers. As the above extract shows, the latter were frequently called 'aliens'. More broadly however, humour and parody were significant elements in the subordination of aspects of the diversity agenda.

### *Dominant Cultures and 'Moments of Questioning'*

While many of the themes discussed in this chapter appear to point to the existence of a dissident white, heterosexual, male perspective (see also McLaughlin 2007a), it would be incorrect to portray officers as culturally homogeneous (see Chan 1997). Indeed, as Chapter Two illustrated, a number of studies support the contention that there are possible *sub-cultures* contained within what is usually presented as 'mainstream' police culture. Along with the differences between and within police forces, there are also various conflicts among the officers themselves (Fielding 1995). Moreover, Chan (1997) argues that officers bring their own experiences, personalities and variations of outlook to the police role. In order to reflect the important nuances in what has traditionally been seen as the dominant 'culture', it is, then, important to capture not only the commonalities in police dispositions, but also the important *differences* within and between officers. Indeed, the recognition of the agency of police officers offers the potential for exploring new policing cultures which exist outside, or in opposition, to what has been understood as mainstream police culture (*ibid.*: see also Foster 2003).

One way of exploring whether changes which have taken place in the national and local policing context have transformed contemporary police culture is to focus upon the ways in which some police officers become reflexive actors with regards to the institutionalisation of diversity. This is also important because the concept of police culture has given way to an image of police racism, sexism and resistance to change (Prenzler 1997). Focusing upon the ways in which white women unlearn, revise and reject white racist attitudes, Frankenburg (1993b: 78) identifies the importance of people's 'moments of questioning' in challenging the racist status quo.<sup>25</sup> This framework, I suggest, offers utility in understanding the transformations (however subtle) in police culture. Indeed, failure to acknowledge the moments when the police transcend what have been considered the 'core values' in police culture has the effect of portraying officers as 'cultural dopes' (Fielding 1988; Chan 1997).

A number of officers accommodated aspects of the new organisational stance towards diversity. During some focus group discussions, for example, there were several notable disagreements between officers in relation to the support associations, the idea of 'institutional racism', and the current emphasis on community policing. The following exchange is part of a heated discussion between one group of white officers about the place of the LGBTG within the organisation:

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<sup>25</sup> See also Tyler (2004) who explores the ways in which young white people confront and reflect upon others' racist beliefs and practices.

*Warren:* Obviously they have brought these associations in because these people feel inferior to everyone else, and in these groups they get more support. We are *all* police officers after all, and they should feel part of ...

*James:* But what about my support? Where has that gone? They've got the Fed. They don't need anyone else. It's, it's ...

*Jacqui:* That's not the point James, the point is ...                      *Right:* if you were gay and you were coming into work and experiencing problems, who do you go to? Would you go to the Fed who possibly doesn't understand, or do you go to the other gays in the job?

*James:* No but ... but there should be a point of contact in the Fed ...

*Darren:* But if you were gay and had the choice, which one would you go to?

*James:* No, you contact the head office of the Fed ...

*Warren:* But would they understand?

*Darren:* What if you were a closet gay and didn't want to speak to somebody in the Fed, but someone who is like you?

*James:* I just don't get it. I don't have a problem. My only problem is that it is not all equal.<sup>26</sup> (Focus Group - Wombourne, August 2005)

There was also evidence to suggest that young officers critically reflected on the beliefs of the older generation of officers:

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<sup>26</sup> After conducting this focus group, I wrote the following in my research diary: 'There were some arguments between the participants today. While discussing the support associations, James was very much against the associations but Warren, Jacqui and Darren appeared to understand the formation of the groups. At one point James was visibly annoyed that his colleagues were disagreeing with him, and was quiet for the remainder of the focus group'.

The officers who make remarks, they are mainly the older generation - officers with a minimum of about 18 years service. It is the original generation that is the problem. You still hear them saying the words 'coloured' and 'faggot'. Our generation, we are different from the last one. We don't use derogatory words.

We are much more modern ... have modern views, we are more tolerant.

(Interview with white male police constable - April 2005)

From the field work, I also recall an occasion where a white male officer was critical of his colleague for stopping and searching a young black man. More generally, by integrating the philosophies of community policing into their operational policing practices, some officers were able to develop their own policing styles. I return to these issues in subsequent chapters. Officers' questioning of their colleagues' conventional perspectives and practices highlight the fragmented condition of contemporary police culture (see also Loader and Mulcahy 2003). However slight, these conflicts are important for they illustrate the heterogeneity of officers' dispositions towards the issue of diversity.

In sum, I observed a range of different values, perspectives and practices of the rank and file, and some of these contradicted what could be regarded as the 'dominant' cultural attributes. However, most of the cultural characteristics which were observed indicated that acceptance of the new organisational ethos has been slow, uneven and outright resented. Moreover, in contrast to the narratives of decline as articulated by the dominant white culture, another perspective emerges and reveals a distinctly different working environment.

## Experiencing Contemporary Discrimination: Minority Perspectives

As mentioned earlier, another way of examining the 'success' of recent efforts to the reform the police can be found in capturing the *contemporary* experiences of officers from marginal backgrounds. As well as providing an insight into the organisation under the 'old regime', the biographical interviews with minority officers also offered the opportunity to explore their perceptions of organisational change, including any current experiences of discrimination. It was believed that while the reform effort had made some significant changes in mainstreaming equality and greatly reducing overt forms of discrimination, it was largely hampered by the continuation of a dominant white, heterosexual male culture that was resistant towards change.<sup>27</sup> Despite the multitude of initiatives introduced to improve the internal working environment for all its personnel, a number of minority officers continued to feel excluded by the dominant police culture.

### *New Exclusions: Hidden Discrimination and 'White Space'*

While all of the officers I interviewed suggested that instances of overt discrimination had been significantly reduced in line with the official reform agenda, many suggested that it had been replaced by more hidden and subtle forms of discrimination. There was a sense that this new form of discrimination reflected the deep-seated resentment towards the diversity agenda by white, male, heterosexual officers. Although pervasive, it was felt that contemporary experiences of exclusion were largely hard to describe, and thus difficult to identify (see also Foster *et al* 2005). The following extracts illustrate the nature of what is seen to be the contemporary nature of discrimination:

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<sup>27</sup> In line with Cashmore's (2002) interviews with minority ethnic officers however, a small number of respondents believed that the formal effort was largely cosmetic.

*Bethan:* What kind of issues come up today for gay officers, do you think?

*Simon:* It is still homophobic comments and inappropriate comments the majority of the time. But it's weird, I don't see it as any outright homophobia as in real, active or physical or anything like that. It is usually your subtle, low level type of discrimination. (Interview with gay police constable - April 2005)

There are still pockets that are holding us back. There is a subversive culture, a feeling: people generally don't feel part of ... On the face of it, it may appear like, and say the right things, and tick the boxes, and use photographs. Now it happens on a more informal basis. (Female Inspector - July 2005)

I was a victim of institutional racism. Racism can be used in many different ways to degrade you: it doesn't have to be in your face. When you hear it and see it, and it's in your face you can deal with it, but when you can't see it, and it's being done, you can't deal with it. Racism has gone underground now in the police service and people don't, they won't say it to your face. They choose their audiences carefully. (Interview with black officer - December 2004)

What these officers are describing is an atmosphere where forms of discrimination are pervasive, yet hidden. In short, there was the feeling that prejudice had gone 'underground'. This finds similarity with recent works that have discussed the importance of 'stealth' or 'covert' racism within contemporary police organisations (McLaughlin 2007a; see also Cashmore 2001; 2002; Foster *et al* 2005; Holdaway and O'Neill 2007).

Many of the officers felt that it was the robust and continuing presence of a white, heterosexual male culture which allows new forms of discrimination to operate. It was believed that this group continued to hold discriminatory views, but merely 'selected their audiences' when expressing them. This suggests that discriminatory language and behaviour takes place in what I would call 'white space': that is, spaces where white male officers feel able to resist and subvert aspects of the diversity agenda. This was alluded to in one interview with a gay white male officer:

I can go into some shifts and do a presentation, and on that shift you have got white, male officers - and they are *all* white, heterosexual, male officers [his emphasis]. And they'll feel like it is a safe environment to come out with comments. But they don't know who is walking in the door. You don't know the sexuality of anyone. It's not like race or gender is it?

(Interview - April 2005).

More generally, another gay officer describes how many policing spaces - such as the canteen and vehicles such as Force carriers - continue to support a particularly white, heterosexual and male form of banter and culture. Incidentally, the idea of 'white space' was also intimated during a focus group with white officers themselves:

*Andrew:* Now, there is always this constant demand. We are a PC [politically correct] Force now ...

*Simon:* You do. You have to be so politically correct and everything else.

*Andrew:* But within the confines of 4 walls, you are four or five people that can get on and have a laugh without offending people.

*Simon:* That is sometimes more important because you need to be able to vent steam somewhere. You can't do it to the public, you can't take it home with you ...

*Andrew:* You can get it out in the open here in a safe environment. We all have confidence and trust in one another and their approaches to the job. [...]

It's important to have that bond as a team.

(Focus Group - October, Wombourne 2005)

However, the elusive nature of contemporary discrimination has important implications for those officers wishing to make a complaint against colleagues. Indeed, the evidence needed to corroborate a claim of discrimination may be difficult to obtain as a result of its intangible nature. In dealing with this new form of discrimination, a number of officers drew upon a range of indicators which, for them, signaled a person's prejudiced disposition (see also Holdaway and O'Neill 2007). For example, one minority ethnic officer felt that colleagues who were awkward and silent around her could not be considered as trustworthy:

It's [discrimination] more underneath, without a doubt. Underneath. Because I have seen it, heard it and witnessed it on my own shift even. Where people have been talking or whispering, and as soon as I come in the room, they stop. But I have heard because the door was open; 'You watch Simea, you have to watch your P's and Q's around her, keep her at arms length. Be careful what you say'. (Interview - July 2005)

Indeed, many minority ethnic officers described feeling 'left out' from cliques that had developed on shifts. Other officers detected latent racism through the stereotypes often drawn upon by their white colleagues:

Some of the shift was talking about an Asian offender who had said to the sergeant, 'I bet your house isn't as big as mine'. And one of the lads said, 'It's because he lives with his entire family. They do that don't they? They have loads of family living with them'. And I'm thinking, 'Who are *they*'? And what is wrong having family living with you? Is that how you regard people of different ethnic origins? (Interview with black officer - February 2004)

It was widely felt that while changes had been made at the surface level, there was a subversive culture of resentment and discrimination 'bubbling underneath'. For one black officer, this is apparent in the dominant attitude towards diversity:

I don't think having diversity courses and all this matters. You only have to look at the attitudes of people who go on these. They are typical, 'Oh we don't want to go on that', and 'Why should we? Why do we need to know all this'? 'Waste of time'. Officers still now to this day feel that there is too much emphasis on being politically correct. (Interview - April 2005)

As we have seen, this proposition finds support in my own observations and focus group interviews with the rank and file who felt that the organisational approach to matters of diversity was excessive and largely unnecessary. For some, a further indication of the

relatively unchanged nature of the organisation related to the lack of understanding from colleagues of the difficulties faced by minority ethnic officers in their work. After arresting a white male for a public order offence, one female Asian officer felt unsupported by white colleagues:

When I took this particular lad into custody he called me a 'Paki' nine times until the custody sergeant said anything - and then he only says, 'What is all this Paki business about?' I had to remove myself from the cells because of the conflict. (Interview - July 2005)

### *The Face of Diversity: Tokenism and Scrutiny*

Some officers felt that their gender, sexuality and ethnicity was being used a 'token' by the organisation in their quest to be seen to be 'doing' diversity. This was particularly salient in relation to minority ethnic officers who had been promoted to a senior rank or specialist department. As one black female officer put it:

When I was promoted, I was really pleased to be promoted, but I also felt used because of my race. I know that I have been used as a token. I see where I have been used. But I have always thought that I have got my jobs on my ability. (Interview - December 2004)

Many described an irony of tokenism. On the one hand it was felt that successful promotion would be viewed sceptically by other officers. On the other hand however,

failure to get promotion would somehow 'confirm' that minority officers are not up to the job:

You can't win. If I get the promotion I know people will think, 'He only got it because he is black - the organisation needs to tick boxes'. But if I don't get it, they will think, 'He's obviously not good enough'. (Interview with black male officer - February 2005)

While this sense of a heightened visibility and scrutiny is particularly experienced by minority ethnic officers (Holdaway and Barron 1997; Foster *et al* 2005), it is also acutely experienced by women police officers (Heidensohn 1992). Frequently, these feelings of heightened visibility and scrutiny relate to an increased pressure to perform. One female inspector felt that the only way to get any recognition and credibility was to have a high performing NPU. Another officer who had been promoted to a Chief Inspector described how male colleagues had implied that she had played the 'gender card' in order to get the position. Such feelings were not only experienced by officers in more senior positions, but also by constables. For example, one minority ethnic officer felt that their work was being unfairly scrutinised by colleagues and immediate supervisors. While this may merely reflect an individual perception, it is important because it suggests that some officers continue to feel that their ethnicity, gender and sexuality could pose problems for them. Indeed, while there are a number of gay officers within Staffordshire Police, there are very few who are *openly* gay (see also Foster *et al* 2005).

### *The Stigma of Support Associations and the Hierarchy of Diversity*

As demonstrated earlier, it was widely believed that the Force's internal support associations contributed to an 'Us' v 'Them' culture within the organisation. While a number of officers understood the logic behind the creation of the associations, the majority appeared to display resentment and suspicion towards the groups. This point is further supported by my conversations and interviews with female, minority ethnic, gay and lesbian officers, some of whom were members of the associations. It was unanimously felt that being a member of an association had something of a stigma attached to it. One female inspector suggested the following:

I think one of the reasons I haven't become involved in the FSN is because of the predominantly heterosexual white male attitude towards it. And I think, I don't want anything used against me. I look at the way they [members of the FSN] are thought about in the Force, and I don't want people thinking of me like that. People, white males, look at you and you become a target then don't you? (Interview - May 2005)

It has been noted that the establishment of internal associations was closely related to the perception that the (predominantly white and male) Police Federation was not best placed to promote racial equality within police organisations (Holdaway and O'Neill 2004). Because of the widespread sentiment expressed within the focus groups that the associations were serving to marginalise the white, heterosexual, male officer, I decided to put this perception to one lesbian officer who is involved in the LGBTG. Her reply

suggests that the Police Federation is still perceived as being run along white male precepts:

*Bethan:* How do you think the white, heterosexual male officer views the associations? A number of officers have said to me for example, 'Why can't we have a white, heterosexual male association'? What are your views of that?

*Rachael:* That is the comment that is always thrown at us. And my reply to them is, 'You have, it's called the Police Federation'. (Interview - March 2005)

It was unanimously felt by members of the associations that their immediate colleagues and some supervisors resented the occasions when they were required to leave their shift early to fulfil an association commitment, such as attending meetings, for example. For many, this had the effect of further drawing attention to their gender, sexuality or ethnicity. This had discouraged some members from asking for time off to go to meetings, a point which perhaps explains the low turn out for group meetings. Indeed, all of the associations have many 'silent members': that is, those who are formal members, but who do not routinely participate in the activities or day-to-day running of the associations.

While the new organisational ethos states equality to women, minority ethnic, gay and lesbian officers, there was a view that some marginal groups had made more progress in attaining recognition than others. One senior officer I spoke with suggested the following:

On a scale of 1-10, our recognition towards race and ethnicity is probably an 8 or a 9. We have made huge strides there. Gender is at about a 6. We have some way to go, but we are getting there. But being gay or lesbian, that is down at a 2 or 3. And I worry about that. (Male chief inspector - October 2004)

In a number of ways, it is clear that some kind of cultural transformation has taken place in relation to minority ethnic groups. This is mainly reflected by the general absence of overtly racist language and behaviour among officers, and their visible anxiety around 'race' issues. However, some female and gay officers expressed the concern that the same prominence given to issues of ethnicity and racism had not been extended to either sexuality or gender. A number of officers described how displays of sexism and homophobia, while not as overt as prior to the reform effort, continues to be implicit in the organisational culture (see also Foster *et al* 2005). Officers in both research sites were predominantly white, heterosexual males, and tended to share a set of norms and values that were consistent with this dominant composition. Throughout the research, these norms and values manifested themselves in the form of a particularly *male* form of banter, or 'canteen' culture. Much as in research conducted by Martin (1980), a number of female officers appeared to accommodate the attitudes of their male colleagues:

When we got back to the station, we all went through to the canteen and started eating. Linda, a female Sergeant, was already in there and we started talking. The other eight officers, who were all male, were sitting around other tables. They were looking at FHM magazines, and holding up pictures of semi-naked

women to each other.<sup>28</sup> This was accompanied by highly sexualized language. Linda (who was having a relationship with one of the officers) glanced over at me and rolled her eyes in a 'boys-will-be-boys' way. Despite this, I felt that she was just as aware of her gender as I was. (Field notes - Burslem, May 2004)

Conversely, female supervisors which asserted their authority over their predominantly male constables were sometimes disparaged. After asking one officer why he had not yet attended an incident from earlier on in the day, one female sergeant in Wombourne was later called a 'jumped up bitch' for seemingly 'throwing her weight around'.

Explicit discussions about sexual encounters (real or exaggerated) were routine, and the use of sexualised language was tolerated. Officers who travelled in the station carrier (informally termed the 'fun bus') engaged in a particularly masculine form of culture in which women leaving the local pubs and nightclubs were routinely subjected to voyeuristic gazes and comments by male officers. Moreover, and as I illustrate Chapter Six, officers saw homosexuality as particularly deviant, and sought to informally discipline people who spent time in public areas 'known' for casual sexual relations between men.

Inside the organisation, I recall one occasion where an officer who had dyed his hair blonde was jokingly called 'gay' and a 'puufter' by his immediate shift.<sup>29</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>28</sup> FHM is an acronym for, 'For Him Magazine'. This is a popular magazine for men and covers a range of items to do with sport, 'women', cars and fashion.

<sup>29</sup> One gay officer who took part in the biographical interviews also recalls an incident where 'KY Jelly' (lubricant) was anonymously placed in the tray of one gay colleague.

another officer routinely used to answer his mobile telephone by humorously stating, 'Hello - this is the gay hotline'. The taken-for-granted ethos of robust, heterosexual masculinity within the research sites could sometimes exclude female members of the organisation, as this field note extract illustrates:

I went into the office to talk to Megan who was sitting and doing some paperwork at her desk. She said that she wanted to go into the other room to use the computers because hers was down, but she didn't want to go in there while 'all the lads' were in there. This was probably exacerbated by the noisy displays of bravado coming from the parade room. (Field notes, Wombourne – June 2005)

### *The Transformation of Contemporary Discrimination*

A number of minority officers therefore believed that discrimination continued to form part of the organisation. Crucially though, in the new organisational climate the articulation and execution of 'discrimination' has been transformed. It is less overt and performed through subtle assumptions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, contemporary expressions of racism are increasingly subtle and performed through what Miles and Small (1999: 142) call 'coded racialised references'. While no explicit reference is made to 'race', the words are often loaded with meaning and are intended to disparage and undermine particular social groups. This proposition can be utilised for the current discussion, as the following interview with a minority ethnic officer demonstrates:

On parade now, he [the shift sergeant] says in front of everyone, 'Did you know that the majority of people who commit robberies are black'. And he would look at me. He was looking straight at me. I challenged him, but he started coming out with all these statistics ... On the face of it, it was all innocent like, but he knew what he was doing. (July 2005)

This analysis can also be extended to gender and sexuality, as the following extracts illustrate:

Everything is aimed with a remark. When I came back off holiday from Ibiza, he [colleague] kept saying, 'I bet you shagged loads of girlies'. But he was saying it in such a way that he knows, but all the time testing your reactions. [...] He just looked across the car and said, 'You're like Stephen Gately [gay pop idol] aren't you?' I looked at him, and he said, 'No! I don't mean you're *like* Stephen Gately, you just look like him'. But I don't look anything like him, and he knows it. (Interview with gay officer - April 2005)

It's the little things. You go to a meeting, and you are the only female in the room. Or I get emails saying, 'Dear gentlemen'. You still hear people talking about officers being 'he'. You become hard to it, you learn to just deal with it. (Interview with female inspector - May 2005)

### ***Positive Changes***

Despite these experiences of exclusion, it was equally felt by those officers who were able to comment on the changing nature of the organisation, that the reform programme

has made some significant mileage in mainstreaming equality and significantly reducing overt forms of discrimination. In particular, some officers suggested that the organisation was characterised by a new atmosphere where discriminatory language and conduct could be challenged. This new atmosphere represented an important illustration of the organisation's commitment to improve the working environment of its personnel. One gay officer described the general 'spirit of inclusion' which he felt had enveloped the organisation within recent years. Indeed, it is worth noting that Staffordshire Police has successively won the accolade of most gay friendly employer of the year (2005 and 2006) by Stonewall for its formulation of key policies implemented to better serve lesbian and gay officers.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, some minority ethnic officers I spoke with also described how they felt 'empowered and represented' within this new organisational climate. It should be noted however, that this mainly related to their membership in the Force's MCA. More generally, many respondents commended the Chief Constable's commitment to change the culture of the Force, and congratulated the steps *actually* taken to put such principles into practice. However, there was a sense that the endeavours emanating from the top of the organisation were distinctly slow and uneven in reaching the ground. This was a consequence of the widespread resistance by what remains the dominant composition, and culture, of the organisation.

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<sup>30</sup> These have included: plans for the introduction of equal pension rights for the partners of officers in the event of loss of life; the positive approach taken to recruit and retain gay and lesbian officers; the setting up of 'True Vision', and also the commitment to eliminating homophobia inside and outside the organisation.

## **Conclusion: Newly Emerging Dynamics of Police Cultural Change**

Having outlined Staffordshire Police's organisational reform agenda, this chapter has examined its impact upon the internal working environment. While acknowledging the heterogeneity of police officers' dispositions towards 'diversity', what generally emerges are two contrasting and fragmented perspectives on the current condition of the organisation. The first perspective, which was primarily articulated by white, heterosexual, male officers, was characterised by resistance and resentment towards aspects of the diversity agenda. In particular, the new approach to matters of diversity was viewed as largely excessive, divisive and unwarranted. However, a contrasting perspective revealed a different type of working environment. A number of female, minority ethnic and gay and lesbian officers described the continuation of a working environment which supported a white, heterosexist, male culture.

What is of central interest here is the way in which the new programme has shaped internal relations. The internal responses to the reform effort reveal a number of conflicts between officers. A new theme appears to be the opposing and conflicting identities between rank and file officers, or what McLaughlin (2007a: 57) appropriately calls the 'copper versus copper' dynamic. The resistance towards minority ethnic officers suggests that they continue to represent the 'enemies within' (see Holdaway 1996). In the current context, however, the way in which discrimination becomes directed towards such 'enemies' has undergone transformation. As we saw, there was a sense among minority officers that discrimination continued to form part of the organisation, but that in the wake of the diversity agenda, it was more hidden.

Many of the themes discussed in this chapter relate to the rapidly changing context of policing in which greater political recognition of minority groups has become salient. The general response of white, heterosexual male officers towards the institutionalisation of diversity may, from this perspective, represent a 'rational' reaction to an organisation which is undergoing change. However, their reactions to the change processes may demonstrate something of a 'backlash' against the increasing recognition of minority groups at the (apparent) expense of the dominant group within the organisation. Above all, the resentment reflects a situation in which the dominant culture is becoming challenged and troubled by the new politics of identity and recognition.

## Chapter Five

### Old in New?

#### **Classic Themes in an Altered Policing Context**

In revisiting the question of police culture, this thesis aims to provide an in-depth account of the beliefs, values and outlooks that contemporary police officers bring to bear on their work. However, in addition to exploring the way in which questions of diversity have impacted upon rank and file culture, such a task also requires returning to a number of classic themes from the literature on police culture. What, for example, are contemporary officers' motivations for, and aspirations upon, joining the police occupation? What are their perceptions of 'the job' - its status, rewards and challenges? What are officers' dispositions towards different categories of crime and policing styles?

As discussed in Chapter Two, although differences in the conceptual nuances of the occupational culture exist, a number of common themes are present within the literature. Bringing together such research, Reiner (2000a) has identified a number of 'core characteristics' which, for him, include the following: a sense of mission and thirst for action; suspicion, solidarity and isolation; pessimism and cynicism; an 'us' versus 'them' orientation to the social world; racial prejudice; machismo; pragmatism and conservatism. While the following chapter explores how the new organisational accent on diversity has shaped perceptions towards, and interactions with, those 'publics' currently

emphasised in policing diversity policy agendas, this chapter returns to these traditional features of police culture.

With these other salient characteristics in mind, this chapter highlights a number of themes which were observed within the occupational culture of the police in Staffordshire. In so doing, it provides an important opportunity to test the contemporary relevance of the features so often identified within the policing literature. Indeed, against the backdrop of efforts to reform the occupational culture of the police, an exploration of the way in which officers think about, and perform, their role is of central importance. In particular, the themes found in police culture can serve to influence how the police perceive and treat those they principally come into contact with. As Marks (2005: 17) notes for example, 'when the police conceive themselves as the 'thin blue line' separating chaos from disorder in society, that is also a motivation for policing to be aggressive and action centered'. Police culture can also act as an obstacle to external and internal efforts to reform the police. Indeed, the desire for excitement and stimulation produces a reluctance to undertake more predictable and less adventurous forms of police work (*ibid.*: see also Bowling and Foster 2002). In highlighting the core occupational perspectives and practices of contemporary officers, this chapter considers the relevance of these classic themes for a new policing context.

As I demonstrate, many of the characteristics which were observed during the research find remarkable similarity with those identified in earlier studies. Furthermore, the informal occupational assumptions and outlooks of the rank and file continue to exercise

an important influence in the day-to-day functioning of the police. Equally however, while we can identify numerous themes of police culture in an almost clichéd manner, this chapter also highlights a number of differences within the cultural traits of officers. In particular, the occupational ideologies and practices of the police can be shaped by the context in which officers work. As outlined in Chapter One, fieldwork for the project took place across two different geographical areas: one urban and one rural. While a number of common themes emerge, and therefore suggest that the police shared a related set of assumptions, beliefs and practices, the content of each theme sometimes carried different meanings and emphasis. In the main, nevertheless, many themes were place-neutral and such differences were nuanced rather than striking. Indeed, while the geographies and socio-economic context of each site differed profoundly, to overstate the differences in police culture would be to ignore the centrality of these dominant themes. Above all, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate the continuing relevance of the 'essential features' (Holdaway 1989) of police culture as they adapt to the pressures and demands of the police role.

In what follows, I address the core cultural features which emerged during the research. Although each theme is presented as analytically distinct, it should be noted that an overlap exists (see also Reiner 2000a). In practice, each feature draws on and reinforces the others.

## The Research Sites

The interactions and cultural characteristics described and analysed in this chapter take place within distinct geographical and social contexts. It is important, then, to briefly outline the two different policing environments.

### *From 'Beirut' to the 'Mary Celeste'*

Burslem NPU is situated in the North of Staffordshire and is recognised as one of the busiest stations within the Stoke-On-Trent policing division.<sup>1</sup> It is a police station where many young officers are posted to serve their probationary period, although there is also a notable presence of older and experienced officers. While the station comprises mainly IMU officers, a CAT team is also situated within the NPU, along with a Prostitution Unit and a Priority Crime Unit. Its patch covers an urban geographical area which is densely populated, and in recent years has become home to a notable presence of minority ethnic communities. Official census data for 2001 suggests that black and minority ethnic populations represent 29.9 per cent of the areas demographic profile. Comprising mainly those of Pakistani, Indian and Black Caribbean ethnic origin, there is also a significant travelling populace and small Polish, Iraqi, Italian and Vietnamese communities. With this urban landscape comes a high level of social and economic deprivation. Burslem is characterised by: long-term and inter-generational unemployment; low income and wealth; low educational attainment; impoverished housing estates and terraced streets; and poor health and housing.

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<sup>1</sup> A typical shift in Burslem consisted of approximately 10 to 12 officers. As noted in Chapter One, the IMU comprised of five separate shifts (1-5). In contrast, eight officers worked on the station's CAT, and were supervised by two sergeants.

The tasks facing police officers during an ordinary day were: dealing with domestic violence and neighbour disputes; low level 'anti-social' behaviour involving youths; traffic accidents; stolen vehicles; suicide threats; missing persons; drug-related offences; prostitution; minor public order incidents; and an array of organisational commitments, such as completing paperwork. From a police perspective, Burslem represents an area that is particularly 'rough', disorganised and chaotic. Indeed, it was informally termed 'Beirut' among officers in order to reflect its perceived status as disorderly. The negative feelings towards the NPU were shaped by the fact that nearly all officers were essentially visitors to the area in that they merely commuted into Burslem for their work, but lived elsewhere in more affluent areas (see also Foster 1989).

In contrast, Wombourne NPU is positioned at the far corner of South Staffordshire, and is located in the Chase policing division. Covering a patch of approximately sixty eight square miles, the NPU is responsible for policing a large and predominantly rural geographical area.<sup>2</sup> While serving a number of satellite stations in surrounding villages, the majority of officers work out of the station in Wombourne. In contrast to their urban counterpart, the number of officers working within the NPU was significantly lower. Indeed, it was usual for a shift in Wombourne to operate with a maximum of 4 officers. While the station predominantly consisted of IMU officers, it also comprised a small number of officers who worked on the CAT. The station was also home to a Rural Crime Unit which was run by one police officer, and a member from the Force's civilian support staff.

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<sup>2</sup> The NPU is situated in between the surrounding counties of the West Midlands and Shropshire. These areas are policed by West Midlands Police Service and West Mercia Police Service respectively.

According to official census classification, the areas covered within the NPU represent some of the most affluent within Staffordshire. Wombourne is a commuter village and a number of those living within the area are high-earning senior officials, executives and professionals. While some social housing estates are present within the NPU, the majority of houses are privately owned with a standard market price which is higher than the national average. The population is overwhelmingly white (98.2 %), with only a small presence of black and minority ethnic populations.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to its urban counterpart, Wombourne NPU is typified by: vast spaces of fields and attractive woodland; small clusters of houses and large gated mansions; and a combination of fast open roads and narrow, winding country lanes. As a consequence of its relatively quiet and tranquil nature, some officers informally termed the NPU, the 'Mary Celeste'. This nickname also arose, however, from officers' perceptions that the NPU was a particularly 'peculiar' place to work.

### *Some Rural 'Peculiarities'*

In contrast to Burslem, a number of positive sentiments regarding the NPU came to the fore. Given its attractive rural landscape, this primarily related to the aesthetically pleasing nature of the policing area. It was common to hear officers describe the area as a 'pleasant place to police', and many lived locally. It was seen as a 'respectable' area, in which the majority of the local population were viewed as 'pro-police' and cooperative. While the volume of work was clearly lower, the typical policing tasks facing officers were analogous to their urban counterpart. There were, however, also some distinctly

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<sup>3</sup> These groups mainly comprise those of Pakistani, Indian, Black-Caribbean and Chinese ethnic origin.

rural aspects such as: dealing with escaped farm animals; stolen horses and theft of tractors and other farm equipment; and badger baiting.<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence of the NPU's geographical position, it was believed that Wombourne was an especially 'peculiar' place to police. First, given both its rural nature and remote, southerly position on the Staffordshire Police map, officers felt that Wombourne had become the 'forgotten' part of the Force. Common sentiments had it that Wombourne was the 'tail end' or 'little Italy' of Staffordshire Police, and as I demonstrate later, officers felt isolated and disconnected from the wider Force. Second, the fact that the NPU borders the urban sprawl of the West Midlands raised a number of issues for the officers in terms of the nature of local crime problems. *Indeed, despite the relatively quiet and tranquil nature of Wombourne, crime work occupied a central position in the police's value system.* And it is here that one obvious distinction emerged between the two research sites. While the crime problems facing officers in Burslem NPU were viewed as predominantly internal, in Wombourne NPU the problem was perceived as fundamentally external. It was widely believed that the NPU was under a constant threat from young, low status male 'outsiders' who originated from some of the West Midlands' less affluent areas.<sup>5</sup> 'Outsiders' were seen as responsible for the serious crimes which took place on the patch, including residential burglaries and theft of high performance cars. As I explore more fully in the following chapter, in the wake of officers' anxieties about crime in the area, these feelings of otherness took on a racialised dimension.

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<sup>4</sup> While the IMU and CAT would deal with escaped farm animals (they caused potential mayhem on the main roads) the NPU's rural crime officer would deal specifically with many of these other types of crime.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, Wolverhampton and Birmingham. The former is only four miles away from the NPU while the latter is approximately twenty.

There is, then, a distinct contrast between the geography and socio-economic arrangement of both of these policing environments. Given such differences, does the occupational culture of the police within these two locations differ? Or, conversely, can the traditional themes associated with police culture be found across both sites? In what follows, I outline the central features of the occupational perspectives and practices of the police in these two contrasting areas.

### **Images of Policing: The ‘Moral Mission’ and Crime-Fighting**

Police culture, as many have noted, includes the images that police have of their role along with their assumptions about their external reality, which in turn, includes their views about the public they police (Manning 1977). In the context of organisational reform, where traditional conceptions of policing are being challenged, an understanding of officers’ self-perceptions of their role is paramount.

#### ***Policing: A Moral Mission***

As noted in Chapter Two, a central feature of police culture is a heightened sense of mission towards the role of policing. As Reiner (2000a: 89) puts it, the function of policing is conceived as ‘the preservation of a valued way of life, and the protection of the weak against the predatory’. During the research, officers expressed great pride in the mission of police work, and celebrated its uniqueness and potential to make a difference. It was frequently stated that joining the police was distinctly different from other occupations, with officers couching it in terms of a vocation or calling. This was reflected during numerous focus group discussions:

*Bethan:* What were your motivations for wanting to become a police officer?  
Why did you join the job?

*Jake:* I know it sounds a bit corny, but I really wasn't happy with the way things were in society. People were being mugged, raped, burgled and I thought that I could make a difference. I wanted to make a difference to society, to help people and put something back into the community ...

*Rowan:* I joined for the same reasons. I didn't join to go on the CAT to be honest with you. I really joined to go out and lock up people. I think because my dad was in the job as well. You know, you hear the stories, and it sounds exciting and interesting ...

*Jake:* It's something different to everybody else's job you know?

*Rowan:* I wouldn't want to sit in an office for 40 years. That has no appeal to me whatsoever. It's nice to be outside, and it's nice to feel that sometimes you are making a difference. You see people being taken advantage of and it really winds me up, and I can do something about it from the position I am in ....

*Sam:* It's not a job though is it? It's a lifestyle [others agree]. You can't go home and think, 'I am not a police officer'. You go home, and you are who you are ...

*Bill:* It messes up your home life a vast amount though. Bringing the job home is something I always get in trouble for with my missus.

*Jake* I don't think it is just us who are in the police. It's the families as well, isn't it? (Burslem - August 2005)

This moral perspective on the police role was a central aspect of the occupational culture.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, some authors have highlighted the positive aspects of

police culture. In particular, Reiner (2000a: 89) has drawn attention to the fact that the logic of mission in the police milieu is primarily 'victim-centered' (see also Waddington 1999b). This finds relevance in the current study. On one occasion for example, all available patrols in Wombourne gave their immediate and prompt attention to a report of an autistic child who went missing from one of the area's supermarkets. Although the child was later found by a member of the public, officers demonstrated a strong desire to search for the child, and equally were extremely supportive and sympathetic towards the mother of the child who was, understandably, panic-stricken.

As Marks (2005) notes however, the centrality of a sense of mission can make the police resistant to efforts to reform or redefine the police role. In the research, this outlook made imperative the controlling of their 'patch', and also of certain people within the population. In their own estimation, officers were the 'thin blue line' (Reiner 2000a) which stood between anarchy and disorder. This was a perception which underpinned a crime-fighting image of their role, and robust cynicism towards a number of policing 'realities', such as dealing with mundane policing tasks and the completion of paperwork.

### ***'Crime-Fighters'***

An exaggerated sense of mission towards the police role provides an underlying influence on policing styles and practices. Indeed, and as several writers observe, the logic of mission in the police worldview means that the police come to interpret their role as one that, first and foremost, involves fighting crime (Cain 1973; Smith and Gray 1985). Although little time was spent on crime-related tasks, officers in both research sites were

predominantly orientated towards a crime-fighting image of their role.<sup>6</sup> Detecting and catching offenders were elevated as the core justification for contemporary policing:

*Bethan:* What do you think policing is for today?

*Geraint:* To get criminals off the streets ....

*Mike:* To lock up criminals. [...]

*Geraint:* I still like to see them locked up because that is the thrill of the job I joined for. The bosses are trying to change minds now. We have to be customer focused, to ring the IP [Injured Party], but all they do is moan ...

*James:* I have to be honest. I don't think that is my job. I am not a social worker. I'm not there to mollycoddle people. I am there to detect and prevent crime, to keep the streets safe. (Focus Group - Wombourne, October 2005)

Although not exclusively, officers in Burslem and Wombourne were predominantly orientated towards a crime-fighting image of their role. Detecting and catching offenders and investigating crimes were perceived as more important than other tasks. In contrast, tasks such as completing paperwork and incidents which involved a social service element were seen as not representing 'real' police work. However, a strong sense of commitment to the values of 'real' police work often results in certain jobs becoming considered as less important; or more simply, as 'rubbish' (Holdaway 1983). In the current study, incidents which did not conform to this conception of real police work were given a lowly status in the officers' sense of a 'crime hierarchy'. Domestic violence incidents, along with low level anti-social behaviour, were particularly likely to be

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<sup>6</sup> An abundance of research has indicated that in their day-to-day work, the police rarely discover crimes and detect offenders (see Morris and Heal 1981, cited in Waddington 1999b).

relegated to the lower end of this hierarchy. From my observations however, the types of incidents accorded this lowly status formed the main part of what officers actually dealt with on a day-to-day level. Moreover, as noted in previous chapters, the resolution of such incidents is strongly emphasised in current governmental and police agendas. I return to the policing of domestic violence incidents in the following chapter.

### ***Community Policing and 'Bullshit'***

This way of viewing the police mandate can interfere with external and internal efforts to redefine the police role. Contemporary police organisations, particularly in the aftermath of the Scarman Report (1981) and the Macpherson Report (1999), have been expected to become community and service orientated. An adaptable, rather than a rigid, policing style has been promoted. These new ways of envisaging the police role have become increasingly prominent in the reform effort in Staffordshire. In particular, the effort to change the way in which Staffordshire Police relates to its public constituents has been supported by a broad move towards community policing. As Tilley (2003: 315) reminds us, this stresses 'policing *with* and *for* the community, rather than policing *of* the community'. At an operational level, community policing asks front-line officers to engage more closely with the community they serve.

As noted in previous chapters, to support this style of policing, Community Action Teams (CAT) have been created to work alongside Incident Management Units (IMU). While a number of officers acquiesced in the ideologies underpinning community policing, the majority viewed the activities of the CAT as marginal to the task of 'real'

policing. During the research, it became apparent that there exists a symbolic separation of the IMU and the CAT. Officers who adopted this new community role were often disparaged by their immediate response colleagues. In short, they were viewed as not representing 'real' police officers (see also McConville and Shepherd 1992). In part, this manifested itself in IMU officers' referral to their community colleagues as the 'sleeping beauties' or the 'tea and sympathy brigade'. The formal acronym of CAT also became reworked within IMU officers' informal vocabulary to denote, 'Coffee And Tea' or 'Can't Attend This'.

At the same time, however, it would be incorrect to view those who worked on the CAT as subscribing wholeheartedly to the principles underpinning community policing. Indeed, a number of CAT officers in both sites viewed themselves as working not in a community policing role, but rather, as members of a pro-active unit whose function was to control crime and gather intelligence on the local criminals. One officer in Wombourne suggested that to work on the CAT for a period of time was largely beneficial for securing promotion to sergeant as it demonstrated a preparedness to, 'Jump on the diversity bandwagon'. The preoccupation with a dominant crime control image of policing meant that some CAT officers *themselves* disapproved of aspects of the new organisational emphasis on community policing:

Sergeant Adams asked Warren to go out into Dale Town and do some work for 'Operation Door to Door' [*a pseudonym*]: an initiative which requires officers to go door to door in the NPU and offer practical crime safety advice to members of the public. As Warren and I got into the car, I asked him what the

job entailed. After giving me a brief overview, he said that it was a 'crock' and he and the rest of his shift had nicknamed it, 'Operation Bullshit'. [...] A call came over the radio about a public order incident in the town centre. Warren expressed a lot of disquiet about the fact that he was 'stuck doing this bullshit' and could not attend. He put very little effort into the task and went back to the station as soon as it began to rain slightly. (Field notes – Burslem, May 2004)

The endorsement of a crime-fighting image meant that alternative forms of policing, particularly those based on community policing philosophies, became undermined. Against the backdrop of the police's masculine ethos, many of the skills and styles required to work on the CAT were delineated as feminine, and were undervalued within rank and file culture. The way in which 'Operation Door to Door' was held in contempt is consistent with the broader resentment expressed towards the recasting of the public as police 'customers', as outlined in Chapter Four. From an organisational viewpoint however, the opposition to community policing - particularly from CAT officers - is particularly problematic as it demonstrates that traditional rationales for police work remain.

It was also noted how the dominant ideal of policing as involving fighting crime served to challenge probationary officers' outlook towards certain incidents:

The job was to attend an incident where some neighbours were arguing with each other in the street. The argument had become very heated and a shoe had been

thrown at Miss X by Miss Y. When Simon (who was a probationary officer) and Tim arrived, much of the shift were already there and were trying to calm the situation. Frank said to Simon, 'Here you are. This is your chance to get some experience of a dispute'. Simon and the rest of us went into the house. In dealing with the incident, Simon was very attentive and sympathetic to Miss X who was saying that Miss Y's children had been harassing her and her family. [...] Over an hour later when Simon had taken a statement, Simon, Tim, Warren and I got back into the car the following general conversation developed:

Tim: You did well there Simon but I thought you were never going to get rid of that

Will: The thing with that type of incident is that it's rubbish. It's bullshit.

Tim: It is just people who can't look after their own lives and need us to come in and sort them out. Don't engage in conversation with them, just take down what's needed and get out of there.

Will: With that type of incident, just bat it out and move on to doing what we joined for. (Field notes – Burslem, April 2004)

Although, this type of incident formed part of what officers dealt with on a day-to-day basis, it was presented to probationers as 'bullshit' by the more experienced officers. I would add that the extract also illustrates how a common way of thinking is taught and learned on a shift (Van Maanen 1973; see Fielding 1988).

### ***Crime-Fighting: A Universal Image?***

It would be incorrect, however, to portray officers' subscription to a crime-fighting image as homogenous. As several pieces of research have highlighted, operational police work involves a variety of policing styles which range from peace-keeping to law enforcement (Banton 1964; Reiner 1978; Bittner 1967; Wilson 1968). While many officers in the study were particularly orientated towards a crime-fighting image of their role, there were important differences in respect of the context in which such a self-image was invoked. Especially in Wombourne, officers appeared to be more embedded in community life than their urban counterparts (see also Cain 1973). It was often remarked that the public liked to see them out and about, and on their patrols officers would often drive past schools, churches and some of the more affluent houses in order to engage in public reassurance policing - or 'flying the flag', as officers called it. It was also noted that in attending incidents which were not particularly serious, an easy-going and relaxed policing approach was adopted (see also Christenson and Crank 2001). Officers would take their time to deal with the problem effectively, and on many occasions, a relatively straightforward job would be drawn-out.

Paradoxically however, there were occasions when officers adopted a hostile and dominant crime control approach to policing which mirrored their urban counterparts. An understanding of why officers elected a non-confrontational and community policing style in some instances, and a crime orientation in others, fundamentally relates to the types of people, and crimes, which held significance within their cultural knowledge. As I explore more fully in the following chapter, based on the notion of 'outsiders' as core

perpetrators of crime in the area, officers frequently adopted a crime control orientation towards young, low status and/or minority ethnic males whose appearance was incongruent with the predominantly white, affluent surroundings.

Much as in other research, there were also important variations between individual police orientations and styles (see Reiner 1978; Marks 2005). It is important to note that not all officers in either site conceived their role primarily as crime-fighters. Some officers took an interest in addressing the mundane problems of everyday policing, and sought non-adversarial ways of dealing with these problems. Similarly, such officers came to understand that 'crime' does not exist in isolation, but rather, as a consequence of broader social problems including poverty and disadvantage. Within the new organisational climate, therefore, it would appear that some officers are able to develop new policing styles (see Chan 1997; Foster 2003). There was, however, a gendered dimension to this. In the main, it was *female* CAT officers who tended to perceive their role within this framework, and in broader terms, such an approach was overshadowed by the prevailing emphasis on crime-fighting. In the main, the preoccupation with crime-fighting both reflected and exacerbated the strong masculine ethos in both research sites.

### **Excitement, Confrontation: A Masculine Ethos of Policing**

As we have seen, contemporary police organisations have been expected to move in a direction which promotes consensual and service orientated, as opposed to confrontational, policing. As Crank (2004) notes, masculinity is a theme that infuses the police occupation: it encourages officers' self-image as crime-fighters, reinforces group

solidarity, devalues alternative approaches to policing; while serving to influence attitudes and behaviour towards people within and beyond the organisation (see also Brown and Heidensohn 2000; Westmarland 2001a). One of the striking features of the research was that officers in both research sites were predominantly white, heterosexual males. Such a demographic factor, as we have seen, acted as a pervasive cultural characteristic in which a number of minority officers felt excluded by the dominance of a white, heterosexist culture. The taken-for-granted ethos of robust, heterosexual masculinity also tended to manifest itself in the form of a particularly *male* form of banter, or 'canteen' culture. As I demonstrate in the following chapter, the masculinised ideologies characteristic of this canteen culture also influenced attitudes towards some female victims of sexual offences.

### ***Discourses of Violence: Confrontation and Excitement***

The norms and values associated with the dominant masculine culture were particularly apparent in the police's preoccupation with the imagery of conflict and danger. In line with previous research (Smith and Gray 1985), the routine recounting by officers of violent, dangerous, confrontational and exciting encounters was commonplace in both research sites.<sup>7</sup> The transmission of stories took place mainly during the quieter times of the shift (see also Cain 1972; Ericson 1982) and was important for the maintenance of group norms (Shearing and Ericson 1991; Waddington 1999a). What is of central interest is that the stories officers told continued to celebrate and thus preserve old attitudes and ways of doing things (see Marks 2003; 2005). Against the backdrop of attempts to

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<sup>7</sup> In practice however, these types of encounters were atypical.

reinvent the police role, such tropes and metaphors undermined aspects of the organisational reform effort.

The 'thirst for action' so often noted in previous research was one of the pervasive aspects of rank and file culture, and was fundamentally linked to officers' preoccupation with conflict and confrontation.<sup>8</sup> One incident captured in my field notes illustrates how this can become manifest in practice:

1.15am

We all went into the canteen. As everybody was eating, an IR call came over the radio for police assistance on Park Street – a part of the student union at the local University. The Area Control Room (ACR) said that there were approximately 200 drunken students out on the streets, and that their presence posed a potential public order threat. Officers in the canteen (9 - all male) immediately became really excited, grabbed their coats and started to run towards the 'Fun Bus'. As they were running, Justin was humorously shouting, 'Let's go student bashing!' We all got into the carrier and it was clear that they were genuinely excited about this incident, and all simultaneously started putting their leather gloves on. John, David and Don were laughing and saying that they should have put snooker balls in their gloves for extra impact during the fight. One officer said, 'Students - it will be all, 'I know my rights. You can't touch me'.

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a frequent line used by officers before embarking on their patrols was, 'Are you ready to go out and play'?

It was very much an atmosphere of humour, bravado and looking forward to a fight. The call definitely offered the officers a chance for excitement given that the night had been really quiet. Just as we were over half way there, the ACR came back on to tell the officers that the job was cancelled, and that the students were just leaving their end of term ball and were dispersing. This offered major disappointment to the officers and they started saying how ‘boring’ the ACR were. (Field notes – Burslem, June 2004)

An important distinction is to be made, however, between police ‘talk’ and actual practices (Waddington 1999a). It is debatable whether the officers would have actually fought with the students in the above incident. Indeed, I would suggest that the overt displays of aggression were merely bravado: a ‘backstage’ aspect of the role which is used to protect their occupational esteem in the actual *absence* of action and excitement (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, this incident does exemplify the way in which excitement and status attached to physical confrontation was important to the rank and file culture. Moreover, the prospect of action resulted in a prompt and heavy police presence at incidents which involved a public order element. This often took place in areas which were particularly deprived (especially in Burslem), and where relations between the police and some sections of the community may have already been strained.

The centrality of a discourse of violence (Fielding 1994) within officers’ culture also acted as an invaluable source of information for the socialisation of new recruits:

Jacqui gave Bob, who was a new probationer, a lift to one of the village stations. As part of his training, he had been stationed at the cells in Northville for the last couple of weeks. In the car, I asked him how he had found his period in the cells. Bob said that it was 'boring' because there had been no 'scraps' down there. When he left the car, Jacqui laughed and said, 'I see Bob is trying to become one of the boys, trying to be all macho. He is probably trying to make up for the fact that he is the new boy'. (Field notes - Wombourne, July 2005)

Much as in Smith and Gray's (1985) study, responding to emergencies occupied an important place in officers' cultural repertoire, and driving at high speed to incidents that did not necessarily require an immediate response (IR) was noted in both sites. Such occurrences demonstrate how police technology can become implicated within the occupational culture (see also Chan 2003). Officers frequently bemoaned the fact that police vehicles were being too slow, while at the same time expressed a desire to take part in high speed car pursuits:

A black Honda with tinted windows drove quickly past in the opposite direction. Tom suddenly shouted 'That's mine'! He then slammed on the brakes, did a 'wheel spin' in the middle of the road, and drove over 80 miles an hour until he could see the car in sight. He was saying, 'Go on, try and lose me', before asking me if I had ever been in a car pursuit before. However, the car pulled over. The occupant of the car was a middle-aged Black Caribbean woman who was apologetic and polite to Tom. He explained to her that he had stopped her because she was going too fast. She apologised again and was free

to leave. Walking back to the car, Tom said 'No! Don't be nice. Why can't they be arseholes? I don't mind getting naughty with arseholes'.

(Field notes - Wombourne, July 2005)

Another indication that officers craved action and excitement was also evident from the way officers replied to a question posed to them during the focus group discussions. When asked to describe their ideal working day, officers overwhelmingly gave replies such as catching burglars or drug dealers, engaging in high-speed car pursuits, and other action orientated tasks. Conversely, tasks associated with the more service elements of the police role were only rarely mentioned. Indeed, the centrality of a masculine ethos within the occupational culture is brought to the fore when one imagines the possibility of officers animatedly relaying stories about their exploits on a community policing task, or a time when they have assisted a vulnerable member of the public. On the contrary, some officers were known amongst their colleagues as the 'shit magnet' for their propensity to be 'disproportionately' called to 'domestic' incidents.

## **Challenging Police Conceptions: Organisational Realities**

As demonstrated earlier, officers mainly endorsed a crime-fighting image of their role. Coupled with a particularly masculinised view of policing, the strong sense of commitment to the values of 'real' police work often resulted in certain jobs and tasks becoming considered as less important; or more simply, as 'rubbish' or a 'waste of time'. For many, 'real' police work meant crime work. While incidents which corresponded with this definition occasionally occurred they were, nonetheless, uncommon. Rather, a typical day involved dealing with incidents that were relatively mundane. Furthermore, a

great deal of police time was actually spent waiting around and completing paperwork (see also Banton 1964; Manning 1977). As I explore below, these 'organisational realities' challenged this core ideal of the job and gave rise to a shared cynicism amongst officers.

### ***Antithesis of 'Real' Policing: The Paper Burden***

Although the completion of administrative tasks was a core aspect of police work in Staffordshire, it was met with widespread antipathy. Certainly, throughout the research 'paperwork' was the subject of the most forcefully expressed criticism of any aspect of the job. It was viewed as preventing officers from carrying out their preferred role as crime-fighters, and engaging in (mainly adversarial) outdoor activity with certain members of the public. It was also perceived as preventing officers from supporting their colleagues 'out on the streets'. The following was typical of the sentiments expressed:

*Tim:* I haven't been in the job that long but to me, it's totally not what I expected. It's like you do a job for ten minutes, and then sit around for hours doing all the paperwork. You've got the paperwork coming out of your ears ...

*David:* Instead of going out there and fighting crime, people are pushing you to be a secretary. Paperwork is deemed more important a lot of the time, and it gets you down. You can't get out there and do what you joined for. [...]

*Gary:* I have made the argument that we should get a civilian in to do it for us. Or one of the girls in the office could do the bits that we don't need to do ...

*Malcolm:* For 6 weeks I was released from paperwork and posted to Eastville.

And I have to say, they were the best 6 weeks I'd done in the job. You could go

out and look for crime, deal with problems. (Focus Group - Wombourne, August 2005)

As several commentators have noted, the effective completion of paperwork is a crucial aspect of the police role. For Foster (2003: 251), it provides a formal record of policing practices, and thus 'provides the foundation for transparency' (see also Fielding 1988). Moreover, the paperwork completed by officers is often used in securing a successful prosecution, and can thus have a fundamental influence on who gains entry to, and gets processed by, the criminal justice system (see McConville *et al* 1991). Most officers failed to acknowledge these wider issues, choosing instead to perceive this 'paper burden' as an inhibitor to their 'real' policing activities. Moreover, those officers who took their administrative duties seriously were considered as neglecting their 'real' policing activities:

*Jim:* The best bobbies, the ones that go hunting for it, those are usually the ones with the most outrageous paperwork tray ...

*Gary:* [Laughing] Yeah, that's me. I'm sorry boss, but it's more important ...

*Jim:* But the ones with no paperwork, you usually find they are the bone idle ones. They clearly don't get out of the station.

(Focus Group - Burslem, September 2005)

As mentioned in Chapter Two, cultural cognitions are a group rather than individual phenomena, and become transmitted, learned and reproduced through group socialisation

(Van Maanen 1973). The construction of paperwork as marginal to the police role was also taught to new recruits:

Edward was a new officer and was filling in some paperwork in the parade room. Alan came through and asked him what he was doing. When Edward replied that he was preparing something for the Criminal Justice Support Unit (CJSU), Alan said, 'You're keen aren't you? Don't worry; we'll soon knock that out of you'. (Field notes - Wombourne, June 2005)

Whether excessive paperwork duties were real or imagined, a cynical and resentful attitude towards such duties was pervasive. At the time of the research in Wombourne, a new domestic violence incident log had been launched. While the highly conscious effort of Staffordshire Police to promote a new policing strategy towards domestic violence incidents meant that some officers understood the logic behind the launch of the form it was, nonetheless, subject to intense criticism. As I explore in the following chapter, the antipathy felt towards the form tended to reinforce the longstanding perception that domestic violence incidents are both troublesome and time consuming.

The opposition articulated towards paperwork has a number of potential explanations. First, and as a number of extracts here illustrate, the process of doing paperwork fundamentally challenges the imagery that recruits had of the police role prior to joining the Force. Officers continued to invest in the atypical 'real policing' activities, and thus came to view the more trivial and mundane aspects of the police role as 'getting in the

way' of realising these idealised elements of policing. Second, officers' aversion to paperwork may reflect their antipathy towards education (see Young 1991), and in some cases, their limited educational achievement (see also Fielding 1988).<sup>9</sup> Finally however, paperwork is perceived as 'women's work' (Foster 2003). This is exemplified in one of the extracts quoted earlier where it was suggested that *female* members of police staff should be assigned the task of assisting officers with paperwork duties.

### ***Performance: The 'Numbers Game'***

In the current organisational context, efforts have been made to the development and use of performance indicators as productivity criteria (see also Long 2003).<sup>10</sup> At the ground level, the need to meet performance targets was another contentious subject among officers. It was strongly felt that much of the work that officers engaged in could not be quantified (such as undertaking high visibility patrol, for example), and was therefore not appreciated in organisational terms. In Wombourne, some officers felt that the importance placed on statistics could have a negative impact on their relationships with the 'respectable' sections of the population:

*Noel:* The job is getting harder. All they want is statistics, statistics, statistics.

They want me to ticket Mrs Smith on the road instead of asking her to move.

They want me to whack her for the figures, and then when I need her help with something she says, 'No. You gave me a ticket' ...

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout the research, I encountered very few rank and file officers who had a university degree. Broadly speaking, most officers had reached the level of secondary education only.

<sup>10</sup> Although it is important to note that the emphasis on performance is driven nationally by the Home Office.

*Jacqui:* Quality of service has gone. Now it is quantity of service. Are we giving the public a service, or are we actually going out there and getting as much crime as we can just to get our figures? What do they [management] want - quantity or quality? Because I don't think you can have both.

(Focus Group - Wombourne, August 2005)

From a cultural perspective, however, the rank and file perceive the 'numbers game' as an attempt by senior officers to keep highly autonomous officers accountable and under supervision (see Smith and Gray 1985). Paradoxically, despite the widespread criticism of the organisation's 'performance culture', the centrality of a crime control model of policing meant that the arrest of offender's carried enormous kudos (see also Cain 1973). Officers would often boast of their arrest rates, and within the occupational culture, those people arrested were referred to simply as 'bodies' or 'hits'. It was also considered a 'bonus' if the suspect or offender had any outstanding warrants. Moreover, one consequence of the organisational emphasis on performance was that officers targeted certain areas, and people, because they provided a higher opportunity of achieving results:

David had been set the following targets in his Performance Development Portfolio (PDP): three intelligence entries on SPIN, ten detections with a minimum of three arrests, submission of five stop and search forms, and the issuing of five Hort.1 forms ('producers'). I asked him how easy it was for him to meet these targets. He said they were all relatively simple, especially the 'producers' and the stop and search forms. David suggested that all that

was needed was for him to drive over to some of the car parks where the local 'druggies' hang out, or to the local council estate to see who was around. If he saw somebody who was 'known' to the police he would then say to them, 'We have had a number of burglaries in the area and I would like to search you for any material'. As he put it, 'If they say yes, then you can submit a form. If they say no then you bring them in, and you have satisfied one of your arrests'. (Field notes - Wombourne, June 2005)

This line of reasoning was also noted in Burslem where officers, in translating the organisational emphasis on performance into practice, would target certain locations and members of the public in order to satisfy their arrest rates. As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, police attention was frequently steered towards low status males and other 'police property' (Lee 1981) groups. More broadly, and as Crowther (2000*b*) observes, the external imposition of performance indicators reflects the state's increasingly punitive approach towards crime, and especially working class 'crime'.

The introduction of performance indicators hinders the extent to which community oriented policing can be put in place. Indeed, the organisational emphasis on performance means that success, and the rewards which go with it, are equated with arrests and detections (see also Smith and Gray 1985). In the wake of Staffordshire Police's adoption of community policing, an important contradiction thus emerges. While officers were encouraged to be 'community orientated' and 'customer focused', the importance placed on performance fundamentally reinforced the existing, and widespread, subscription to a crime control model of policing.

### *Welcome to the 'Police Family'? Civilianisation and Integration*

As mentioned in Chapter One, contemporary police organisations have undergone many changes since the early police culture studies. One such change has been a rapid expansion in civilian employment (see Newburn 2003). In recent years, such a move has become a reality in Staffordshire where civilian support staff have come to occupy a number of posts integral to the day-to-day running of the organisation. The use of civilian staff in the Force's Area Control Rooms (ACR) has been one of key changes in this area.

The civilianisation of the Force was a source of strong criticism among the rank and file. The appointment of civilians in the Area Control Room (ACR) was particularly deplored. Lacking any 'real understanding' of the seemingly 'special' rudiments of the police role, civilian support staff were often perceived as second rate and were accorded little status. In part, this was also echoed in the comments that officers used to describe their sworn colleagues who had elected to work in offices and non-operational posts. They were, as one officer put it, 'civilians on police wages'.<sup>11</sup>

There was significant opposition to the introduction of Police Community Support Officer's (PCSOs) in Staffordshire. Against the background of a perceived decline in police numbers, resentment was expressed towards the employment of personnel who had limited powers and were, therefore, not 'real' police officers:

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<sup>11</sup> This type of attitude was also apparent in the renaming of the Force's Public Service Desk (PSD) where many sworn officers worked. It was nicknamed as the 'Pregnant, Sick and Disabled' desk.

*Graham:* They can only really be the 'eyes and ears' for us so we can get on with doing real policing ...

*Jake:* But they get £15k a year. I would rather they employ one real police officer than two PCSOs. But apparently they are going to employ another 60 of them just in Chase ...

*Kate:* But the kids, they all know that they've got no powers and make fun of them. So now they are too frightened to go out on their own and rely on us to come and get them!

*Andy:* The uniforms look like something from the Thunderbirds! 'Yes Officer Plastic' ...

*Graham:* But they'll make the CAT redundant.

(Focus Group - Wombourne, August 2005)

Front-line officers have a strong sense of the uniqueness of their role. This engenders feelings of solidarity and contributes not only to a perception of themselves as separate from the public, but also to a gulf within the organisation. In the current context where policing provision is becoming increasingly diversified, some new dynamics thus emerge. While the traditional vertical split between 'street cops' and 'management cops' remains, a horizontal division between 'real (sworn) cops' and 'plastic cops' has also come to the fore.

## **The Development of Cynicism and Pessimism**

Officers found that rather than being an upholder of 'law and order', engaging in exciting tasks and being respected by the community, the police role is relatively unrewarding and

monotonous. It was found that police work involved 'mopping up' after people: mainly after the actual event, and often in the face of public contempt (see Van Maanen 1978*b*). To cope with these policing realities, in addition to developing a notion of 'real' police work, officers also developed a profoundly cynical and pessimistic view of their social world (Banton 1964; Reiner 1978; 2000*a*).

In part, such an outlook stems from officers' involvement in doing society's 'dirty work'. It also arises from the belief that the morality which they are attempting to defend is fast becoming eroded (Reiner 2000*a*; Waddington 1999*a*). The cynical and pessimistic outlook characteristic of their culture was apparent in officers' demonstration of a loss of faith in the public, the criminal justice system, and the police role. The idea of the police as a 'beleaguered minority' is relevant to understanding such cynicism.

### ***'Beleaguered Minority'***

One of the effects of a sense of mission in police culture is that the rank and file comes to see themselves as a small minority in the large fight against crime. As Reiner (2000*a*: 90) puts it, the police 'develop a hard skin of bitterness, seeing all social trends in apocalyptic terms, with the police as a beleaguered minority about to be overrun by the forces of barbarism'. Despite the distinct differences between the sites, the discourse of the police as a 'beleaguered minority' found enormous currency. The following extracts provide due illustration of this:

*Gary:* We've got how many thousands of people living in the NPU? And we just can't cope. We are run ragged all the time. We are overrun ...

*Scott:* We are overrun. Out there, we are outnumbered.

*Richard:* From a probationer's point of view I think that we are out of the frying pan and into the fire. You do 15 weeks initial training, and it just does not prepare you for what you are facing at all ...

*Gary:* Your uniform is only just on and it's, 'Get in the car and go and deal with them 20 people fighting' [...]

*Howard:* We're always chasing different problems. We are going round putting little plasters over massive gaping cracks, just juggling problems ...

*Gary:* Fighting fire with a thimble of water aren't we?

(Focus Group - Burslem, September 2004)

Despite the markedly lighter workload of officers in the rural environment of Wombourne NPU, this omnipresent pessimism was also a central characteristic:

*Wayne:* This is a thankless job to be honest. No matter what you do, you don't get any encouragement. It's a hard job we do out there. And down here we are working with skeleton staff and no resources. We are pushed to the hilt trying to protect the patch, but it is a thankless task ...

*Jacqui:* How great would it be to see an Inspector coming onto a shift and working alongside you? They don't know what its like out there. They lose sight of what we are facing because they don't go out there and do it ...

*Chris:* People don't realize what we have to deal with. When the wheel comes off down here, it's down hill all the way. (Focus Group - August 2005)

That the police view their social world as one that is on the 'verge of chaos' (Holdaway 1983) was also apparent in the widespread practice of refraining from saying out loud the word 'quiet' for fear that it would prompt a sudden burst of incidents.<sup>12</sup>

The police's vision of themselves as besieged by crime and disorder underpinned many complaints about issues which were seen as 'getting in the way' of them fulfilling their mission. As discussed earlier, officers frequently complained about excessive paperwork duties, inadequate or lack of resources and low-staffing levels.<sup>13</sup> The latter was especially prominent in Wombourne where it was felt that the low staffing levels represented another demonstration of Staffordshire Police's abandonment of the NPU.<sup>14</sup>

### *Failings of the Law and Criminal Justice System*

In the main, the criminal justice system became a principal focus for this cynical world view. Along with previous research (Reiner 1978; Graef 1989), officers frequently argued that irresponsible politicians, soft-touch laws and naive judges hindered the police in their mission to combat crime:

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout the research, after commenting on how quiet the shift had been I was frequently met with the response, 'Sshhh! don't say the Q word. If you say that, all hell will break loose'. For many officers my presence on their shift had 'jinxed' the excitement and activity that normally took place.

<sup>13</sup> In the wider context, and as noted by Reiner (1978; 2000a), the notion of the police as a 'beleaguered minority' is frequently mobilized to secure increased powers and extra resources.

<sup>14</sup> In reality, the perceived low staffing levels are almost certainly related to the structural transformations which have taken place since 1999 to reorganise the Force. Such moves have seen the redeployment of key staff from local stations to centralised units.

*Fraser:* There was a time when I had pride in this job. But when you constantly get kicked and keep getting back up ... I am at the stage now where I just do what I have to. [...]

*Philip:* I think the problem came in with the Human Rights Act because it really is designed not for the victim, but for the offender to be quite honest ...

*Fraser:* Gone now - there is no quality of justice for the victim. Now it is all for the offender. 'What can we do to stop you taking drugs? What can we do to stop you nicking cars'? It's all about them. Forget the victim. Forget the people who have just been raped, burgled and robbed ...

*Philip:* Let's look at the criminal justice system as a whole. Scrotes go into this so-called prison system and their cell. They have got everything: a TV; a sink; a bed; all mod cons. And what's happened to the IP [injured party]? It's a disgrace. The criminal justice system is a joke. Full stop. [...]

*Ian:* But they get minimal sentences. And once they are inside, they are just learning more stuff, chilling out with their mates ...

*Philip:* Then they come back out on the streets, and find better ways of getting away with it. (Focus Group - Wombourne, September 2005)

In Burslem, cynicism towards the criminal justice system was apparent in officers' referring to the local magistrate court as 'Joke-on-Trent' court for its seemingly lenient approach to offenders. Defence solicitors were also considered untrustworthy, and became core 'challengers' of the police (see Holdaway 1983; Reiner 2000a).

## *Conservative Ideologies*

These ideas about crime and justice served to strengthen police conservatism and many officers adopted a robust 'law and order' position on crime:

I know it sounds harsh, but fear works. Fear of being locked up, fear of a sentence, even fear of the police. Policing by consent doesn't work, policing by fear will. People are not afraid of the police any more, and I think people need to feel scared. (Field notes - Burslem, June 2004)

It was also frequently stated that 'boot camps' and the death penalty should be reinstated. The authoritarian moral ideologies frequently subscribed to by officers were also accompanied by a conservative political persuasion. The research in Wombourne coincided with the 2005 general elections, and many officers overtly articulated a strong preference for the Conservative party whose political package, at the time, contained policies that resonated with the existing norms and values of rank and file culture.<sup>15</sup>

As Skolnick (1966) reminds us, the cultural theme of conservatism emerges as a response to the uniqueness of the police role. As the police enforce the laws and rules of a society, it follows that that they will come to support such rules in their *moral* thinking. Indeed, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the conservative world-view meant that officers supported the dominant ideologies of society, and were often hostile towards those who challenged conventional morality. On a final point, however, it is worth noting that the

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<sup>15</sup> These included: the promise of extra police powers; an expansion of the prison system and more severe prison sentences; the reduction of police paperwork; and the enhanced recruitment of 'real' police officers (as opposed to civilian Police Community Support Officers, for example).

police work within a disciplined and hierarchical organisation. Thus, and as Reiner (2000a: 90) notes, a police officer who exhibits this conservatism is more likely to 'fit in' with the structure of the organisation.

### *Public as 'Stupid, Greedy, Fallible ...'*

While officers had a powerful sense of mission to protect the public from criminals, they also, somewhat paradoxically, possessed a robust cynicism and suspicion about the criminality, hostility, and unreliability of the public. While I explore the themes of suspicion, hostility and danger in subsequent sections, it was specifically felt that the public were unappreciative of the work that the police do. Against the backdrop of the current rhetoric of consumerism within policing (see Reiner 2000a; Long 2003), the public were viewed as excessively 'demanding':

*Jake:* You stop a member of the public now and they are like, 'How dare you stop me'. And they write in and complain. [...]

*Alistair:* It's their village ... and *we* work for *them*. That's their attitude.

*Philip:* I remember turning up at a job and the woman said, 'My boys are here' - as if she owned us! I don't think so missus. But she has got the ear of the Chief so you can't say that. You just have to touch your forelock and get on with it.

(Focus Group - Wombourne, August 2005)

However, one important source of police cynicism is that officers become acutely aware that members of the public may wish to manipulate their authority by lying to them (McLaughlin 2007a; see also Van Maanen 1978a). As noted in Chapter Two, because the

police have 'seen it all before', they tend to discount what members of the public tell them (see also Rubenstein 1973). Following Manning (1977: 26), members of the public were viewed as 'stupid, greedy, fallible, lustful, immoral and hypocritical', as the following extracts demonstrate:

The ACR dispatched Paul and Nick to a job. A car had crashed into the side of a terraced house in Hope Street, and had driven off. [...] A few bricks were missing from the house and there was glass all over the pavement. They cleaned up the mess and both surmised that the car was stolen. Two minutes later, the ACR passed all officers the details of a car that had just been reported stolen. Paul let out a sarcastic groan and suggested that the person who reported it was probably the driver of the car that had hit the house. As he said, 'He was probably drunk and faked the theft. This job makes you so cynical. You get to think the worst of everyone - even your own mother.'

(Field notes - Burslem, June 2004)

As McLaughlin (2007a) reminds us however, the views that the police hold of the public are fundamentally influenced by their contact with them. The police frequently come into contact with 'heavy users' of policing services (*ibid.*: 55) and are more likely to be disbelieving of this group. During interactions, cynicism tended to manifest itself in a detached, uninterested and seemingly unsympathetic manner when dealing with members of the public. The following extract records an incident where two IMU officers were dispatched to an incident involving a man who was threatening suicide by walking in the middle of a busy road at night time:

11.30pm

On the journey there, the officers were immediately very sceptical about the man's suicide bid. They surmised that he was probably drunk, wanted some attention and a taxi ride home from the police. [...] An ambulance crew had already arrived, and because the man had minor cuts on his hands, he was sitting in the back of the ambulance. Jake said that he recognised the man from a couple of months ago when he had threatened to do the same thing. The officers became even more dismissive, and openly told the ambulance crew that the man only wanted some attention and that they had better things to do. Anthony contacted the ACR and made out that the man had sustained serious injuries to his hands, and as a consequence, the man would be going into hospital for the night. They told the ACR that there was nothing else they could do, so could they close the incident down. (Field notes - Wombourne, April 2005)

While interactions with suspects were clearly fraught with distrust, victims of crime were also viewed with scepticism. Officers were sceptical of those who asked the police for a crime number as it denoted, for them, a potential 'inside job'.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, people who reported that they had been victims of an assault would be viewed less sympathetically if they brought up the subject of 'compensation'. More poignantly, officers expressed cynicism towards some female victims of crime. On one occasion, although a caring and sympathetic attitude was initially expressed towards a victim of rape, it was replaced by

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<sup>16</sup> Having a 'crime number' means that the incident has been officially logged by the police. In the main, insurance companies require a crime number prior to investigating a claim. One officer described crime numbers as a 'gateway to riches'.

scepticism when it emerged that she had reported a similar incident on a previous occasion. I return to such themes in the following chapter.

### *Dark Humour*

As we saw in Chapter Four, humour and parody were significant elements in the subordination of aspects of the diversity agenda. As a cultural theme, cynicism towards the public was also expressed through officers' tendency to joke about the human suffering which they routinely encountered:

Anton and Jeremy were called to a domestic incident at Old Road. After his girlfriend had ended their relationship, a man had locked himself in their house and tried to kill himself by drinking bleach and taking an assortment of pills. [...] There was vomit all over the floor and around the semi-conscious man's mouth. Repeating the man's name, Anton and Jeremy were trying to lay him on his side. [...] He was taken to the hospital by the ambulance crew. [...] At 5pm, the ACR contacted Anton to say that the man from the 'bleach incident' had done a runner from the hospital, and could he confirm what the man looked like, including what he was wearing. At this point all the officers began to snigger as he sarcastically replied to the ACR 'he is very *clean* shaven', 'his clothes are *clean*'. Later on in the shift, Sergeant Lewis asked Anton how the domestic incident at Old Road had been resolved, to which he jokingly replied, 'Don't you mean the '*Domestos*' incident?'<sup>17</sup> (Field notes - Wombourne, April 2005)

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<sup>17</sup> 'Domestos' is a brand name for a household bleach/cleaning fluid.

Similarly, I was once shown a photograph of a young boy who had been shot through the head. Pointing to the gaping hole in the victim's head, the officer said to me, 'It's like Derek [colleague]: in one ear and out of the other'! As Westley (1970) notes, however, there is little opportunity in police work to celebrate humanity. Such an observation is taken up by Waddington (1999a) who argues that the role of humour plays a crucial role in serving to release the tensions associated with the police's working environment. While on the face of it such dark humour can appear callous, it is a useful device which disassociates officers from the 'dirty work' that they are routinely called to deal with. As one officer put it:

*Noel: I think it takes a special person to take all the pressures of this job. You have got to have a warped sense of humour to cope with it ... If you didn't laugh, you would cry. (Focus Group - Burslem, August 2004)*

### **Maintaining Dominance: Deference and the 'Attitude Test'**

A number of other important cultural responses underpin interactions with the public. In particular, some researchers have noted the antagonistic reaction of officers to those they believe to be defiant and disrespectful towards the symbolic dimensions of police authority (Sykes and Clarke 1975; Van Maanen 1978a; Smith and Gray 1985).<sup>18</sup>

In striking similarity to earlier studies, the need to maintain control and extract deference from the public was a central component of police norms and values. Indeed, great value

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<sup>18</sup> In part, such a response has its foundations in the legitimate, coercive authority which officers bring to bear on interactions with members of the public (see also Waddington 1999b).

was placed on maintaining authority and extricating 'respect' from members of the public. While it is not unlawful to be impolite to a police officer (Van Maanen 1978a), those who challenged or were disrespectful towards officers' authority provoked a repertoire of responses.

In Burslem, the need to maintain authority was central to the development of an informal procedure called the 'attitude test', used when interacting with members of the public. In order to pass the 'attitude test', members of the public had to display deference to the officer through, for example, being polite, apologising or admitting their 'guilt':

Gareth stopped a black Peugeot which was being driven by a young Asian man.

Gareth took the car keys out of the ignition and asked the man to stand outside the car. The man did what he was told and assumed a subordinate role, just nodding and agreeing with what Gareth was saying. The general conversation centred around the following:

*Gareth:* I stopped you because you were going too fast over the speed bumps.

*Driver:* I'm sorry officer. I was trying to get home to watch the second half of the football. Are you following the match?

*Gareth:* [Detached manner] If I wanted to, I could keep you here and make you miss the rest of the match.

*Driver:* I'm sorry, I won't do it again.

*Gareth:* I'll let you off this time, but be careful, there are young kids on this estate.

When we got back into the car, I asked him why he took this course of action.

Gareth replied, 'He was alright. He passed the attitude test. Basically, I treat

people how they treat me. If they apologise straight away and don't get arsey, then they won't get a ticket. If he would have been cocky, I would have given him a producer, just to be a pain in his arse'. (Field Notes - Burslem, July 2004)

Removing keys from the ignition of cars was noted in many of these types of interactions, and further demonstrates the police's attempt to exert control over the situation.<sup>19</sup> As Foster (1989) found, some officers sought to 'wind people up' in order to create an explosive situation that could potentially result in an arrest:

Nigel and Jack were called to an incident at a local Indian restaurant. The owners were complaining that a man and a woman had eaten a meal, but did not have enough cash to pay for it. The man had written a cheque, but it was completely illegible, and he was being argumentative with the staff. After arriving at the restaurant the man, who looked much disheveled, started to tell the police that he was a diagnosed schizophrenic, and that he needed to go home to pick up his medication before he could write the cheque.

[...] The man was becoming quite irate and Nigel and Jack took him outside. While the man was shouting at them, they started to laugh in his face and were being contrary to everything the man was saying. The man was getting even more upset and was shouting louder. At one point he began to walk away and Nigel grasped his jacket and leaned him against the wall. After being threatened with being 'locked up', the man backed down and started to apologise for his attitude. [...] In the car afterwards, the officers were laughing at the situation and

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<sup>19</sup> As McBarnet (1981) notes however, this practice is unlawful as it effectively detains an individual.

Jack said, 'I couldn't believe it when he backed down, I was just about to do a section 5 on him. I was gutted - he was nearly playing the game'.

(Field notes - Burslem, August 2004)

On some occasions, failing the 'attitude test' resulted in the actual arrest of an individual. This generally happened over weekends when people who were drunk and leaving local nightclubs were 'mouthy' to officers intervening in minor public order incidents. What is notable in such cases was officers' use of section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. This piece of legislation provides arrest powers for relatively trivial offences, and was extensively used by the police in order to enforce their authority and engage in what Box (1987: 58) identifies as 'vigilante justice'; that is, where the police charge people for offences to which they have no real defence (see also McBarnet 1981; Dixon 1997). In the main, however, there was little intention of arrest. Rather, officers merely wished to stamp their authority, and in so doing, win a 'moral victory' (Choongh 1997) over those with whom they came into contact (see also Muir 1977).

### *'Saving Face'*

This 'contempt of cop' (Waddington 1999a: 154) response was most readily invoked when officers had an audience, such as members of the public or colleagues. Here, officers felt the need to 'save face' by maintaining, and displaying, their authority:

*Peter:* Most officers challenge it [swearing] ...

*Scott:* Yes, that's a big problem for me. I'm a big one for that. If someone swears at you, then they're coming in; I don't get paid for that. They wouldn't do it to a bus driver ...

*Gareth:* If there's an audience, there's no alternative.

*Jake:* If there's an audience, you've got to save face. You've got to take them away ...

*Scott:* Give them a chance to apologise. If they make the wrong decision, they'll get locked up and if they do, then they've learnt a lesson.

(Focus Group - Wombourne, September 2005)

This was also noted during observations. A group of IMU officers were in the station carrier when a middle-aged woman who was staggering along a pavement caught their attention. Tom, who was driving the carrier, pulled up next to her and asked her what she was doing:

The woman was fairly drunk and started saying 'Oh just fuck off. I've had a couple of drinks if that is OK with you lot.' Jonathon immediately jumped out of the carrier, stood very close to her face and threatened that he could 'bring her in' under Section 5 of the Public Order Act if he wanted to. The woman went quiet and Jonathon got back into the van and started to drive off. As he was doing so, the woman shouted, 'Fuck off pigs' - at which point all the rest of the shift started saying, 'Ooohhhh'. Jonathon slammed on the brakes and turned around in the middle of the road and sped back towards her. He jumped back out and said, 'What did I just say to you about swearing'? Just then a large man came running

up the road and told Jonathon that he was her husband, and that they had just had an argument in the pub. He was saying that he was a fire-fighter and started to give Jonathon his collar number (he was trying to find a common bond). Before getting back into the carrier Jonathon said to him, 'Keep your missus under control or she is coming in for the night'. After they moved on, he said to the rest of the shift, 'I don't give a fuck what your collar number is mate - just shut your missus up'. (Field notes - Burslem, May 2004)

Although they did not get involved in dealing with minor public order offences as frequently as their urban counterpart, the cultural norm of maintaining authority was also evident among officers in Wombourne:

Duncan noticed that a car had driven through a red light. He put his lights and siren on, and pulled the car over. He asked the driver whether he knew why he had been stopped, to which the driver replied that he did not know. Duncan asked, 'What colour were the traffic lights when you drove through'? The man said, 'They were on amber', at which point Duncan said, 'No. They were on red'. When the man contested this point, Duncan said, 'You can either admit that you drove through the light when it was on red, or we can argue this in court'. The man then admitted that he had driven through the red light and that he was sorry. (Field notes - Wombourne, April 2005)

As well as the threat and/or imposition of a range of penalties, including arrest, officers attempted to maintain their dominance in less overt ways (see also Smith and Gray 1985). When driving around on patrol, for example, officers would slow down and stare at

certain groups - particularly youths and those people already 'known' to officers - in order to assert their authority.

Once again however, it would be incorrect to portray all officers as acting in this way. Indeed, it was noted that some officers took a less confrontational approach. During the policing of a football match, members of the crowd began to jeer at officers who were forming a line across the pitch. When some officers were becoming visibly aggravated, one male sergeant said to the team, 'Don't let them rattle you. We are getting paid for getting wet, they aren't'! Similarly, as a couple of officers put it during a focus group:

*Nathan:* Unfortunately, there aren't any offences against lippiness and arseholes. You can't do anything about it, because you will just worsen the situation. You just have to ignore it and not rise to it ...

*Ian:* A lot of the time, they are just trying to get a reaction out of you, and wind you up ...

*Nathan:* You have to put a professional head on and ignore it.

(Burslem, October 2005)

However, responses of this kind tended to come from older and more experienced officers who had become accustomed to some of the comments and behaviours directed against the police by members of the public. Indeed, it was noted in both research sites that younger officers, and especially those who displayed the characteristics of the 'new centurion' (Reiner 1978: 230), tended to react more aggressively to any challenge to their authority.

The police are an integral part of the criminal justice system, and as a number of earlier extracts demonstrate, come to perceive themselves as intimately bound up with the delivery of justice and punishment (see also Smith and Gray 1985). From a police perspective, the perception that the criminal justice system fundamentally fails to punish offenders accordingly justifies the use of this type of informal punishment. Within the current policing climate, however, the pervasiveness of the 'attitude test' undermines the attempts by Staffordshire Police to redefine the public as police *customers*. It demonstrates that the police continue to approach some interactions with the public in an overtly controlling manner.

### **In-Group Perspectives: Isolation and Solidarity**

As noted in Chapter Two, much of the research on police culture has found that the police, as a result of their unique position in society, become socially isolated from the outside world and exhibit a high degree of internal solidarity with their colleagues (Banton 1964; Skolnick 1966; Westley 1970; Reiner 2000a). Equally, to outsiders, the police represent the impersonal face of authority (Reiner 2000a). During the research, many officers reported feeling alienated from the public, and in line with previous accounts, developed a strong sense of togetherness. In part, this stemmed from the hostility that the public exhibited towards the police.

### *Stigmatised Identities: Police, Hostility and Danger*

As Van Maanen (1978b) observes, the police uniform, as a symbol of coercive authority, places the police in a solitary position within society. Many officers were aware that their position as police officers served to isolate them from members of the public:

When is the last time a police officer turned up and gave you good news? 'I'm sorry your son is dead'. Or, 'You are coming with me down the nick'. We don't deliver lottery wins. People see the uniform and they know we are bad news. (Focus Group - Wombourne, September 2005)

The distinction between themselves and other members of the public was exacerbated by their pervading sense of danger (Skolnick 1966; Holdaway 1983; Crank 2004). In the deprived urban context of Burslem, feelings of isolation were especially prominent amongst officers, and were grounded in the perception that some sections of the local population were particularly hostile to the police:

*Gary:* We aren't liked in a nutshell. There are no two ways about it. Drive through any estate, and they will stop and stare at you, spit at you. They hate us. [...]

*Howard:* People are always trying to fill you in ...

*Scott:* It all comes down to that. You've always got to be wary that someone's going to have a go, and try to fill you. (Focus Group - Burslem, August 2004)

As documented by previous research, because of the isolation experienced by the police a rigid distinction between 'us' (the police) and 'them' (the rest of the population) develops (see Waddington 1999b). The following field note, which was recorded during the policing of a local football match, demonstrates how the element of danger can strengthen the sense of 'them' within police culture:

The fans were getting louder, and one officer was recording their behaviour on a camcorder. At one point, the fans were stamping their feet, chanting and throwing items onto the pitch. One of the young officers asked me if I had ever been involved a fight with football fans before. When I replied that I hadn't he said, 'It is really scary. Imagine being weighed down with loads of equipment, not being able to see properly and having 10,000 people shouting at you saying, 'You are next. I am going to kill you'. It really is you against them'. Because they anticipated a fight after the match, all of the rank and file officers kept together throughout the evening. (Field notes - Burslem, May 2004)

In contrast, the day-to-day preoccupation with public hostility was not experienced by officers in Wombourne NPU. The predominantly affluent, and thus 'respectable', public were viewed as 'pro-police', and in many respects, officers viewed themselves as working for this section of the population. As mentioned earlier, many officers lived locally and were more integrated in the local community than their urban counterparts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, during a local carnival some off-duty officers and their families participated in the day's events.

However, because of their preoccupation with ‘outsiders’, and the perception of low staffing levels, the concern with potential violence and physical risk was also an important cultural theme:

*Tim:* Morale is very low down here. It is such a rural, isolated area and safety is a major factor that is constantly being overlooked by senior management ...

*Rob:* Travelling criminals, they know we are thin on the ground. They know it takes 20 minutes for our nearest back up to get here. We are alone down here.

That is dangerous, for us and the public. (Focus Group - September 2005)

### *Shift Solidarity*

Internal solidarity is a consequence of the isolation and pervading sense of danger felt by the police (Banton 1964; Van Maanen 1978*b*; Reiner 2000*a*). Solidarity between officers on the same shift was consistently noted throughout the research, and was no doubt a feature exacerbated by the predominantly white, heterosexual male composition of such shifts. It was culturally transmitted and displayed in many different ways. As a cultural feature, solidarity was articulated in the following terms:

*Jack:* The biggest influence on you is your peers though ...

*Collin:* Yeah. It sounds really sad, but when you come into work it's very social. I see more of the lads than I do of my own family! And in a way you all become like family don't you?

*Matthew:* It's very social. My shift ... and down here, the team spirit is phenomenal. I once got a 3 month attachment to another squad, and I didn't want to leave my shift!

*Ian:* It's fantastic, a group of people who really give a monkeys about you. And you come back in after a good job that everyone has been involved in, you come back in and think, 'Good job. Team work' ...

*Jack:* You talk it out as a team. (Focus Group - Burslem, August 2004)

Officers had a clear sense of what characteristics were important in a colleague, as the following extract demonstrates:

*Bethan:* As a police officer, what do you think makes a good colleague?

*Simon:* You like to think of your colleague as a good friend. We are all good friends, and the police are a family at the end of the day ...

*David:* Yes, yes ...

*Simon:* Someone you can turn to in confidence, and someone who is going to back you up. Someone who you can trust and who is going to be there if you need them ...

*David:* Somebody you can talk to and have a laugh with.

*Simon:* We are all in the same boat doing the same job. And I like to think that we are all singing from the same hymn book ...

*David:* The ideal colleague is someone who is the same as you basically.

(Focus Group - Wombourne, October 2005)

On one level, a sense of solidarity is beneficial for the organisation as it demonstrates a high degree of team work. Throughout the field work, officers showed enormous willingness to 'back up' fellow officers in many incidents (see also Graef 1989). However, and as many have noted, solidarity can also contribute to an 'us' versus 'them'

orientation towards both the public and certain sections of the organisation. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, a number of the Force's cultural associations became devalued, and there was a wide gulf between the rank and file and senior officers.

### *Occupational Deviance*

A strong in-group identity amongst the rank and file can serve to conceal (usually minor) acts of occupational deviance from supervisory officers. In Wombourne, officers engaged in widespread 'easing' behaviour (Cain 1973: 42). This was made possible as a result of their autonomy, the vast rural landscape and low presence of supervisors. On one occasion, the officers I was accompanying attended a post-christening party that was being held in the station's police bar. The officers (and I) participated in the spirit of the party for over an hour: we ate sandwiches, drank soft drinks and talked to the guests, a number of whom were serving and retired police officers. On another occasion, the officers I was with noticed a member of the public waiting outside one of the satellite stations. As they did not want to deal with the inquiry (they would be the only officers at the station) they drove past the station, hid around the corner and went back once the coast was clear.<sup>21</sup> As the police were dependent on each other for keeping these instances of minor occupational deviance from the attention of supervisors, the demonstration of solidarity was reproduced and sustained.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> On the face of it, these instances of 'easing' demonstrate that not all officers shared a 'thirst for action', and worked within a dominant crime control framework of policing. However, only *certain* types of crime, and indeed people, were viewed within this framework.

<sup>22</sup> However, there was a limit of what acceptable 'easing' behaviour was. I recall one incident when some officers had been caught sleeping in the parade room during their night shift. This was heavily frowned upon by the other shifts as it meant that they had left their patch wide open to 'outsiders'.

Solidarity is a cultural characteristic that is closely related to police lying and secrecy (Westley 1970; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993). As Manning (1978*b*) suggests, the lies that the police tell result largely from the conflict between formal organisational rules and expectations, and the 'backstage' (Goffman 1990) realities of organisational life. The involvement of officers in instances of minor deception was noted throughout the research:

We were sitting outside the back of the station in the sun. Everyone was talking about the high-speed car pursuit that Keith had been involved in a couple of nights earlier. Keith had taken a bend in the road far too quickly, and he had crashed the car. No-one had been hurt, but the car had some damage to it. Nevertheless, and as is apparently usual in these circumstances, Keith was required to go to police head quarters to be debriefed about the incident. When Keith was relaying the incident to his colleagues, they were telling him to omit certain facts from his account when he visited HQ, including the speed at which he was traveling. His shift also offered him advice on how best to answer any potentially incriminating questions. (Field notes - Wombourne, August 2005)

Another example of how a strong in-group identity can protect colleague infringements of procedure was also noted in Burslem. After using what was perceived to be an unwarranted use of force to arrest a local white man, an onlooker asked one officer for the arresting officers' name and collar number. To evade this, another officer replied that they did not know the arresting officer as he was from a different station to theirs. This was untrue as all of the officers who were present worked in the same station, and indeed,

many worked on the same shift. Deception towards members of the public and supervisors represented a culturally supported norm. It should be emphasised, however, that the lies articulated by officers were mainly small scale, or 'white lies' (see Manning 1978b) as officers saw it. They were perceived as doing little harm, and some were even viewed as being in the public interest (*ibid.*). On one occasion for example, a grandmother reported to the police that her granddaughter had been physically assaulted by her partner. Upon being arrested, the perpetrator angrily demanded to know who had contacted the police. In order to prevent any future repercussions for both the grandmother and the granddaughter, the officer replied, 'It was just a passer by who heard all of the shouting coming from your house'.

### *Fractures, Conflicts and Divisions*

While solidarity was an important feature of rank and file culture, a number of important conflicts and fractures were evident (see also Manning 1977; Fielding 1995). Along with the conflict between ranks, there were also many divisions between shifts; and indeed, between individuals on shifts. The organisational emphasis on performance created an atmosphere of competitiveness between shifts and shift members. After telling one shift that I would be accompanying a different shift the following week, one officer in Burslem replied, 'We fucking hate them. They are always picking up our scraps and getting the numbers for it'. One shift in Wombourne was also disliked as its members were seen to be 'bone idle' and neglectful of their patch. Similarly, some officers did not like working with certain shift members due to a simple 'personality clash'. More generally, I have also drawn attention to the conflict between IMU and CAT officers.

And, as the previous chapter demonstrated, a number of tensions persist between the predominantly white, heterosexual male culture and minority officers.

It is also important to note that the 'them' element of the police outlook was also differentiated (Waddington 1999*b*; Reiner 2000*a*). The police viewed themselves as protecting the 'respectable' law-abiding majority from the disorderly, lawless and criminal. However, most police work involves dealing with 'police property' (Lee 1981): the young, poor marginal people that society leaves for the police to control. As I demonstrate in ensuing chapters, such individuals formed a core part of both the police's practical workload and occupational consciousness.

### **The Geography of Policing: Suspicion and Stereotyping**

An important part of police culture is a distinctive interpretation of the different people and places that the police encounter (Rubenstein 1973; Holdaway 1983; Crank 2004). Officers in both Wombourne and Burslem had a distinctive understanding of their policing environment, and demonstrated a rich local and geographical knowledge of their respective areas. On the ground, certain places stood out in officers' cultural knowledge as relevant to the contingencies of policing. While the geographical and contextual differences between the two sites gave rise to some differences in the police's 'mental maps' (Fyfe 1991), a number of commonalities can be drawn out.

For example, there were those places that were associated with particular forms of crime, deviance and disorderliness. In both sites, a number of council estates and other 'dreadful

enclosures' (Wilson 1972, *cited in* Damer 1989) became associated with where the 'rough' and 'anti-police' populations lived. Public houses with a history of disorderliness also emerged as potentially problematic within officers' cultural knowledge. While some areas became associated with youth sub-cultures and drug takers, others became linked with 'deviant' sexualities. In Burslem, certain streets within the NPU were notorious for prostitution, while in both sites, a number of public areas were 'known' for casual sexual relations between men. Concealed from the scrutiny of senior officers, there were a number of places that were associated with rest or refreshment while on duty, with many officers identifying what they termed 'brew stops'.<sup>23</sup> As I explore below, however, there were some subtle differences in the way officers perceived and policed their patch. Such differences demonstrate how occupational perspectives and practices are shaped by the distinctive characteristics of the unique areas in which the police work.

### *The Working Context of Suspicion: 'Proactive' Patrol*

Being engaged in patrol work was viewed as the pinnacle of police work, and was a task which carried a great deal of meaning for the police (see also Loader and Mulcahy 2003). Indeed, much as in other studies, the police displayed a strong protective interest towards their 'patch' (Holdaway 1983). Their policing areas were infused with important values, commitments and responsibilities. In the quiet moments of the shift, officers engaged in proactive patrol (see also Crank 2004). Acting on their own initiative, officers sought to develop information on crime and its spatial location. This served to increase their philosophies about what types of crime are important. Proactive patrol work was highly

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<sup>23</sup> In his ethnographic study, Holdaway (1983) identified such places as 'mump holes'.

valued in rank and file culture as it closely resembled the more traditional image of the police as crime-fighters and investigators. Proactive patrol was not random, but rather, was structured by an officer's concern with seeking out crime 'hot spots' and troublesome individuals (Rubenstein 1973). Broadly speaking though, being on patrol was the primary way in which officers located suspicious places and people.

### *Suspicion*

As demonstrated by Skolnick (1966), suspicion forms an integral part of the police's 'working personality', and arises as a product of the nature of police work. In Staffordshire, the ability to identify potential offenders was integral to the occupational culture, and indeed, was celebrated as a desirable talent. Many officers found it difficult to articulate the practical basis for their suspicion, with some suggesting that it was akin to something of a sixth sense, or 'instinct':

On the way to the Salvation Army, Don suddenly pulled up next to an old red Nissan car which was parked on the corner of a road with one light on. The car was empty and Don got out of the police car and started to look around the vehicle. Whilst doing so, Paul turned to me and said, 'Don is a big traffic offences guy - he has a really good instinct for it'. When Don got back into the car I asked him why he had decided to stop and have a look at the car. He replied, 'It's hard to explain. To you I bet it appears like a normal, run-of-the mill car, but to me, I see a car parked dangerously on a corner with one light on, and it has 'joy riders' written all over it'. (Field notes - Burslem, August 2004)

As Sacks (1972: 285) illustrates, in patrolling their patch the police learn to treat their geographical domain as a 'territory of normal appearances'. Their patch is infused with regular 'background expectancies' (*ibid.*). The job of the officer is to become sensitive to occasions when these expectancies are in variance, or 'out of place'. This found enormous support in the research, as the following extract demonstrates:

As we drove past Main Street, Duncan noticed that the 24-hour garage was in complete darkness. He thought that it was extremely unusual and stopped the car, turned it around and sped back towards the garage. Duncan suspected that the darkened garage might be a sign of a robbery as it gave the impression that it was closed for the evening. He parked the car up, got his torch out and approached the main hatch as I followed. As we got nearer however, a woman who was sitting inside the garage came over and said that everything was fine - apparently there was just a small problem with the electricity. Duncan kept asking her if she was sure everything was all right until he was satisfied that nothing untoward was taking place. (Field notes - Wombourne, May 2005)

### ***Stereotyping***

In both sites, the police developed an extensive dictionary of indicators which, for them, signalled a person's possible involvement in crime. It was frequently noted how certain characteristics or 'cues' in the working environment stimulated suspicion and became a basis for public contact (see also Brown 1981). However, on the spot decisions in policing their environment were frequently determined by classic stereotypes that the

police held about particular social groups and situations. More often than not, this led to patterns of differentiation along the lines of age, class, gender and race and ethnicity.

For example, while the presence of several teenagers or young men in dilapidated vehicles stimulated police suspicion, men who were parked up in areas associated with casual sexual encounters often became vulnerable to police questioning and/or searches. In Burslem, the operation of a red light district meant that women who were walking by themselves late at night, and who were near areas renowned for prostitution, came to be seen as potential prostitutes. Similarly, lone male drivers in the area were suspected as 'punters'. One of the most fundamental cues for stimulating police suspicion was whether the person was already 'known' by the police. Indeed, as Choongh (1997: 44) appropriately notes, individuals who are already known to the police represent the 'permanently suspect'.

Officers also held long-standing stereotypes about the involvement of minority ethnic men in local crime. However, the practical policing of such groups was contradictory and mixed. In Burslem, anxiety about being labelled as 'racist' sometimes led to the avoidance of proactive encounters with members of minority ethnic groups. A less ambiguous scenario was evident in Wombourne where the presence of predominantly poor and low status minority ethnic men was considered inconsistent with the white, affluent surroundings. The association of this group with the main crime problems of the area meant that officers' stop and search powers were often exercised against this group. Ultimately, the stereotypes drawn upon by the police often reflected the prevailing

structures of inequality and disadvantage (Reiner 2000a). Moreover, the stereotypes held by officers sometimes served to affect relations with members of the public, especially when such groups perceived the attention they receive from the police as disproportionate and unwarranted (Chan 1997). I return to these themes in subsequent chapters.

Thus, while suspicion cut across both research sites with striking similarity, some nuanced differences were noted. These differences highlight how suspicion can be driven by the everyday characteristics of the police's unique working environment. The perceived problems that Burslem NPU posed for officers meant that, for many, their task became one of *containing* the area (see also Bittner 1967; Chambliss 1994). Conversely, officers in Wombourne very much viewed themselves as *protecting* the patch from 'outsiders', and in practice, they policed their rural landscape in a continuously 'defensive state' (see Young 1993: 235). In attending to the 'decent' and 'respectable' populace, officers would drive by the affluent houses and look out for anything suspicious. As I demonstrate in Chapter Seven, however, the service values underpinning this type of preventative patrol did not extend to areas deemed problematic and rough. Rather, in both sites, when officers attended to the latter it was overwhelmingly with a dominant crime control outlook.

## **Rural and Urban Police Cultures: Differences and Similarities**

Thus officers in both Burslem and Wombourne shared a related set of occupational norms, values and behaviour. Nonetheless, a number of differences can be drawn out which highlight the idiosyncrasies of the contrasting working environments. Given its rural nature

and relatively low staffing levels, officers' sense of danger and vulnerability in Wombourne was heightened. Unlike Burslem which experienced higher staffing levels, there was an increased dependence on colleagues for 'backup'. Participation in widespread 'easing' behaviors was also made possible as a result of the size of the NPU and absence of effective supervision. The sentiment that the NPU was 'forgotten' by Staffordshire Police fostered a strong sense of solidarity among officers. Moreover, while officers in Burslem believed that 'the public' was hostile and anti-police, it was felt in Wombourne that the 'decent' local citizenry were pro-police, and duly deserving of policing services. Upon closer inspection, nevertheless, it was also felt that this group could be excessively demanding. Finally, and as we have just seen, for officers in Wombourne the crime problems facing them were perceived as fundamentally external.

Within the occupational culture of officers in these two sites there were, then, important sources of variation. Ultimately however, such differences were subtle rather than outstanding (see also Christenson and Crank 2001). Indeed, while there were obvious differences in the geography and socio-economic context of the research sites, the dominant cultural characteristics of officers across these rural and urban geographical terrains were remarkably similar. Officers were concerned about increased crime and hostility towards the police. Ideas about what constituted 'real' policing were shared in both locations, and the ability to 'fight crime' was viewed as being impeded by current 'organisational realities', such as paperwork. Moreover, the police had a strong protective interest over their respective policing areas, and were constantly on the lookout for signs of trouble and criminality. As I demonstrate more fully in subsequent chapters, stereotypes of

people influenced the day-to-day pattern of operational police work. Those groups ingrained in the cultural knowledge of officers as 'problematic' fundamentally reflected the wider social structures of power and disadvantage in society (see Reiner 2000a).

A particular construction of masculinity was also a theme that ran throughout much of the cultural characteristics identified here. It encouraged officers' self-image as crime-fighters, devalued 'softer' approaches to policing, reinforced group solidarity and underpinned the search for excitement and action. The maintenance of respect was also a widely shared norm. In Burslem, this became developed into an informal procedure called the 'attitude test'. Officers also developed a cynical perspective towards the public and notions of 'justice'. Cynicism tended to manifest itself in the expression of dark humour and the adoption of a broadly conservative outlook. Exacerbated by a shared sense of isolation from the outside world, many officers displayed an 'Us' versus 'Them' orientation towards the public. The divisions between this 'Them' category will become clearer in subsequent chapters.

## **Conclusion: Understanding the Endurance of Classic Themes**

Although police culture is neither static nor 'fixed' (Chan 1997; Reiner 2000a), many of the features identified in previous research appear powerfully enduring in the current study. Police organisations have undergone successive reforms since the early ethnographic studies of police culture, and much of this has centred on questions of 'diversity'. As demonstrated here, however, there is a set of 'core characteristics' which remain around: crime-fighting and its associated sense of mission; thirst for action and

excitement; a strong masculine ethos; cynicism and pessimism; suspicion, isolation and solidarity; moral and political conservatism, and pragmatism. While the following chapter deals explicitly with the policing of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, it is clear that many of these other 'classic' features of the occupational culture remain untouched by current change initiatives.

Such features do, nevertheless, have important implications for police change. The sense of mission and the associated view that policing predominantly involves crime-fighting, undermines organisational efforts to reinvent the police role (see Marks 2005). As noted in Chapter Four, the reform programme put in place in Staffordshire has emphasised a closer relationship between the police and society. Contemporary generations of officers have been encouraged to view members of the public, not as separate or distinct from the police, but rather, as people with a legitimate right to, and involvement in, policing services. Yet the celebration of action, excitement and confrontation can lead to the use of more coercive tactics. Similarly, the themes of conservatism and cynicism can affect perceptions of, and interactions with, members of the public. Moreover, while solidarity is important for concealing minor occupational deviance, feelings of isolation separate the police from the wider public: and as I discuss in Chapter Seven, there was a widespread antipathy towards some sections of the 'police property' (Lee 1981) grouping.

In short, by highlighting the persistence of these classic features, this chapter has assessed the ways in which the occupational culture continues to impede efforts to reform the

police. As I have emphasised, the informal realities of policing can serve to undermine the formal way in which the police organisation presents itself to its public constituents. An explanation for these seemingly persistent elements of police culture can be found by examining the continuing peculiarities and structural determinants of the police role. Police culture, as we have seen, arises from the common problems and tensions which are inherently associated with the job of being a police officer. For Skolnick (1966), these tensions are the potential *danger* that the police face in their day-to-day encounters with members of the public, the *authority* that they bring to bear on such encounters and the pressure to be *efficient*. The contemporary nature of police work continues to contain these basic rudiments of the police role, and thus maintains and reproduces such cognitive tendencies. Police forces, in all modern liberal democratic societies, face similar basic pressures and as officers adapt to the role, they continue to develop distinctive ways of viewing and behaving in their social world. As Reiner (2000a: 87) puts it, 'the culture survives because of its 'elective affinity', its psychological fit, with the demands of the rank and file condition'. Current organisational change programmes, with their principle focus on diversity, cannot possibly change these basic rudiments of the police role.

Questions of diversity have, nonetheless, become central to efforts to reform contemporary police organisations. With this in mind, the following chapter explores how questions of ethnicity, sexuality and gender have impacted upon the occupational culture of the police as they think about, and interact with, their diverse 'publics'.

## Chapter Six

### **Responding to the New Realities:**

#### **Policing the Diverse ‘Publics’**

In addition to exerting significant influence over the internal character of police organisations, the occupational perspectives and practices of the police can also influence the service that different sections of society receive. The informal aspects of rank and file culture can also serve to undermine the formal way that police organisations present themselves to the public (Manning 1978a; Foster 2003). Debates surrounding the existence of police culture have been principally concerned with the relationship between the police and certain sections of the population. The apparent racial discrimination within police practice has been thoroughly explored (Holdaway 1996; Chan 1997), along with how the police deal with other social divisions including gender (Edwards 1989) and sexuality (Burke 1993). However, a new generation of officers have been strongly encouraged to afford better and thoughtful regard and treatment to those groups which have previously not been equitably served by the police.

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the recent history of Staffordshire Police has seen its involvement in a top down drive to produce cultural change, both within and beyond the organisation. While the change initiative has focused on improving the working conditions of personnel inside the organisation, it has also been aimed at improving the

service that is delivered to members of the public.<sup>1</sup> Central to this has been the revision of operational policing philosophies and practices which may undermine the delivery of an effective and equitable service to certain populations outside the organisation. The reform effort has particularly focused on the equitable policing of minority ethnic and gay and lesbian communities, and (mainly female) victims of domestic violence.

A core aspect of this thesis is to consider whether police culture is responsive to, or at odds with, the rapidly changing context of contemporary policing in which the recognition of social and cultural diversity features prominently. How, then, have officers responded to the new policing realities of respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities? How have these wider changes impacted upon the narratives and practices of contemporary rank and file officers as they think about, and interact with, those groups currently emphasised in policing agendas? Does the occupational culture of contemporary police officers impact adversely upon minority groups in ways identified in earlier research? If differences exist, what are they, and how can they be explained?

Having explored in Chapter Four how the current organisational accent on diversity has shaped internal relations, this chapter examines its impact upon the occupational perspectives and practices of the rank and file as they policed their diverse 'publics'. As I demonstrate, within the contemporary policing environment, the responses to these new policing realities are contradictory and uneven. Against the backdrop of challenges to

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<sup>1</sup> It will be recalled that the Force's 'Equality of Service' policy statement defines the current vision of Staffordshire Police in relation to how the various populations that make up the county will be served by the police.

police culture, officers manage the altered policing terrain in different ways. On the one hand, we see the fruitful beginnings of multiple policing outlooks and styles, in which the organisational emphasis on diversity has impacted positively on the working culture. Fundamentally, what these new responses demonstrate is the potential for police culture to be responsive to external and internal change processes (see Chan 1997). Conversely however, a number of problematic elements remain in respect to how officers perceived and treated those groups which have previously not been equitably served by policing. Such responses are at odds with the new policing agenda and reveal the continued pervasiveness of some familiar features of police culture. Ultimately, despite the early emergence of new assumptions, values and practices, many aspects of the occupational culture remain unchallenged by the significant reorganisations which have taken place in the national and local field of policing.

This proposition finds support in both Burslem and Wombourne. Indeed, many of the themes identified here tended to cut across both research sites. This was especially the case in police responses to gender and sexuality. And, in a similar fashion to the previous chapter, where differences in police culture did exist, they were subtle rather than prominent. There were, however, some important differences between the two research sites in relation to how officers perceived and managed issues surrounding ethnicity. As I demonstrate, such variations highlight the unique social, economic and geographical context of the two policing areas.

## **New Agendas: Policing *for* Women?**

Debates about gender and police culture have tended to centre on police perceptions of, and responses to, women as victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. In the current policing context, the needs of women as users of policing services have become increasingly emphasised, and a range of initiatives have been introduced to better serve this section of the population.

### **Police Culture and Domestic Violence**

Being a victim of domestic violence is one of the key avenues through which women encounter the police (Hoyle 2000). However, there has been no shortage of evidence that police responses to domestic violence incidents have been particularly inadequate. Facilitated by wide ranging discretionary powers, the police have frequently avoided arresting the (predominantly) male perpetrators and, more generally, have disregarded such incidents as ‘rubbish’ (Holdaway 1983; Edwards 1989; Young 1991).

Contemporary police organisations are under pressure to change in a way which emphasises quality of service for victims of domestic violence. As Heidensohn (2003) notes, this has generally involved two shifts. First, police organisations are expected to take domestic violence incidents seriously and second, officers are being asked to be ‘supportive and sensitive’ in their response to such incidents (*ibid.*: 569). The improved resolution of domestic violence incidents have been emphasised in the Staffordshire Police reform programme. As described in Chapter Four, one of the main changes includes the adoption of a policy which directs constables to arrest the assaulting partner

where there is evidence of an assault.<sup>2</sup> The question remains however; in what ways have the new guidelines shaped police narratives and practices in this area?

### *New Practices, Old Assumptions*

In the instances that were observed, the police *did* predominantly arrest perpetrators of domestic violence. Most officers were acutely aware of the organisational stance towards this aspect of policing, and integrated it into their routine policing practices. In comparison with previous studies, this shift in police behaviour lends support to recent suggestions that police culture is not entirely independent of societal pressures and legal rules (Chan 1997). However, while the practices of officers generally conformed to the formal requirements, ‘domestics’ continued to occupy a particularly low position in officers’ occupational consciousness.<sup>3</sup> In striking similarity to previous studies, domestic violence incidents were viewed as troublesome, unexciting and trivial (Holdaway 1983; Smith and Gray 1985; Reiner 2000a). While a core part of day-to-day policing involved intervening in domestic violence incidents, this type of work was regarded as marginal to what many officers continued to celebrate as ‘real’ police work, as the following extract demonstrates:

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<sup>2</sup> This is, however, a local interpretation of a national trend. As Reiner (2000a) notes, the introduction of pro-arrest policies has thus shifted domestic violence incidents into the sphere of law enforcement.

<sup>3</sup> As Waddington (1999b) points out, for the rank and file ‘domestics’ can also include disputes between an array of family members - and can equally extend to arguments between neighbours. For the current context however, I am referring to the violence which is perpetrated largely by men against their (sometimes estranged) wives or partners.

*Gary:* You join the police and spend your lives dealing with domestics don't you?

*Edward:* It is the same places, same faces every single day. And that's another frustrating element because we are just mopping up after people again and again. [...] The gaffers are big on domestics at the moment, and because of that, we are not being able to do the things that interest us ...

*Andy:* The problem now is that we are going out dealing with those types of incidents. And fair enough, technically a crime has been committed by these inebriated people, but we've got paperwork to do for that, and we can't go out and catch the burglars, the rapists and the dealers. We are dealing with drunken domestics. It's crazy. (Focus Group - Burslem, August 2004)

While the improved response to domestic violence incidents was placed firmly in the organisational reform agenda, it was largely perceived as excessive and unreasonable within rank and file culture. Officers frequently bemoaned the occasions when they were dispatched to such disturbances, and it was common for officers to ignore requests from the ACR which invited any available patrol to attend this type of incident. It was also common for this type of work to be referred to by officers as a 'crock of shit'.

From the police perspective, a number of features rendered 'domestics' messy and low status. It was commonly believed that attending domestic violence incidents is particularly difficult because of their 'private' nature (see also Altbeker 2005).<sup>4</sup> In particular, the police often suggested that 'domestics' were frustrating because of their

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<sup>4</sup> As one officer in Wombourne put it, 'I would hate it if someone came around my house whilst having a barny with the missus and interfered. It's our private business'.

routine failure to lead to any conclusive results.<sup>5</sup> There was a widely held view that attending domestic violence disturbances was futile because the female victim frequently withdraws, or denies, the initial complaint. From my observations, women who failed to 'help themselves' were given little sympathy:

The report was of a woman being beaten on a street by a male who, it was believed, was her boyfriend. When Nathan and I arrived at the scene, there were four other male officers there from Shift X. They were standing around a young woman who was crying and whose arm was covered in blood. One of the officers was sympathetically trying to coax the name of her boyfriend out of the woman, but she was telling him to go away as she did not want to name him. Another officer became impatient and said, 'Look love, you are going to have to help yourself'; and, 'Only you can get yourself out of this situation'. It was agreed that there was nothing that they could do while she was withholding the boyfriend's name from them. While the first officer appeared genuinely frustrated at the prospect of not being able to help the young woman, the other officers displayed a striking lack of sympathy and virtually 'blamed' the woman for her position. Walking away, Nathan called her a 'stupid slag', and said that she deserved her abuse if she was not going to help herself. (Field notes - Burslem, May 2004)

There was an acceptable discourse amongst officers that in attending 'domestics', they do not have a legitimate role to play. Officers tended to view themselves as 'referees' in these incidents, as opposed to professional police officers intervening in a legitimate

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<sup>5</sup> A study by Horton and Smith (1988, *cited in* Waddington 1999b) found that victims of domestic violence rarely wanted their partners arrested. However, fear of future acts of violence (and economic hardship) may also explain some women's reluctance to pursue complaints (Edwards 1989; Hoyle 2000).

crime. Yet the effective and professional police intervention in domestic violence incidents is crucial to the protection of women (Edwards 1989) and, as I have emphasised, this new approach towards female victimisation is of central importance to the organisational reform agenda.

### *Masculine Sentiments and Gendered Assumptions*

A masculine ethos was a core feature of the occupational culture of the police in both research sites. And it has long been recognised that the norms and values associated with this masculine culture play a fundamental role in constructing domestic violence incidents as 'rubbish', low status work.

In attending 'domestics', officers tended to hold stereotypical assumptions about traditional gender roles, behaviour and family ideologies (see also Edwards 1989). During one incident, officers displayed empathy towards a man who had physically assaulted his wife after discovering that she was having an affair. More generally, it was routinely asserted that in cases of domestic violence there were 'always two sides to every story'. Police responses to such incidents were informed by the masculine sentiments of their occupational culture:

After attending a primary school to pick up her son, a woman found her child in her ex-husband's car. Following a heated argument, she rang the police and explained that her ex-husband's 'custody had been suspended'. [...] The woman was upset and shaking. After telling David and Ian the story, she told them that her ex-husband kept coming around to her house late at night and

looking through her window. She also said that she was receiving 'silent' phone calls late at night. Ultimately however, it appeared that the ex-husband's custody rights had only been temporarily suspended and there was no formal injunction against him contacting the woman or their son. Because of this, David said that he could only go and 'have a word' with the dad, and ask him to go through his solicitor in the future.

[...] In the car, it was clear that the officers sympathised with the father. Calling the woman a 'fretter', they surmised that it must be hard for the ex-husband not being able to see his son, and suggested that because the ex-husband had left his wife for another woman, she was probably trying to turn the child against his father.

We arrived at the house where the father and his new girlfriend lived. During the interaction, the atmosphere was one of 'I-am-on-your-side-mate', and David and Ian were almost apologetic to the man for the intrusion. The father was discrediting his ex-wife by saying that she was 'mental'. Ian brought up the subject of the silent phone calls and the late night visits. Although the man turned bright red, he denied them. The officers did not challenge him, but merely advised him that he needed to be careful in his actions because his ex-wife could 'use it in court'. No action was taken, and the officers told the ACR that it was a 'no-crime domestic'. In the car, and commenting on the attractiveness of the new girlfriend, David and Ian said, 'Bloody hell - he has upgraded hasn't he? No wonder he left his wife'. (Field notes - Wombourne, May 2005)

The particularly male way of viewing the situation interfered with the quality of service given to the victim. Despite describing to officers behaviours which appeared to amount to 'harassment' by her ex-husband, this information was not seized upon by the officers. Consequently, the potential for future conflict was overlooked. As discussed in Chapter Four, new ways of responding to domestic violence incidents have placed an onus on officers to record key information relating to the case so that specialist officers can make an early risk assessment and, if necessary, a 'tailored safety plan' for the victim. As I explore below, this has been further augmented into a new domestic violence form called the DIAL.

### ***Victimisation and 'Moral Character': Respectability and Femininity***

During the research it was noted that victims of domestic violence were subjected to a set of stereotypical notions regarding their femininity. This, in turn, related to their 'deservedness' as recipients of police protection (see also Grimshaw and Jefferson 1987). While officers were sympathetic to victims who were considered fragile or defenceless, such a response was not necessarily invoked if the victim was seen as somehow contributing to their victimisation. The latter was largely influenced by the police's perception of the complainant, with the perceived 'moral character' (Edwards 1989: 96) of the victim often interfering with the degree of sympathy and professionalism displayed by officers. The police were particularly unsympathetic if they perceived the complainant as 'rough', and this was further exacerbated if the victim had a 'history' of domestics. The following extract illustrates these issues:

An IR came through about a domestic violence incident on the Hammond housing estate. A woman had been heard shouting out of a top floor window that her husband had hit her. David and Acting Sergeant Jones recognised the address and started to say, 'Oh for fuck sake, not that daft cow again.' Apparently she had a 'history of domestics', and the police had been called there on a number of occasions.

When we arrived at the location, the woman was standing on the front door step and was arguing with her husband. She was drunk and was shouting to the police that her husband had hit her - but her husband was denying it. About seven officers had now turned up, and merely stood around and listened to the woman as she started to cry and shout. She was shouting that her baby nephew was dying in hospital, and that her husband had hit her for coming back late from visiting hours. She kept repeating the sentence, 'The system stinks', and as she was saying this, she began to stagger over to where we were standing. At one point when she fell over, her blouse lifted up and exposed her stomach and underwear. By now all of the (male) officers were looking on in amusement, and laughing amongst themselves. One officer said to another, 'If she doesn't fucking shut up, I am going to knock her out myself', while another said, "I'm going to lock *her* up if she doesn't shut up'.

[...] Acting Sergeant Jones went into the house to talk to the husband. After a while he came out and said apologetically to the other officers, 'I am going to have to lock him up. Logan will have my arse if I don't' [Logan was the Superintendent who was responsible for reiterating the current organisational drive on domestic violence incidents to the rank and file]. However, Jones told

his colleagues that the woman had come home drunk and probably 'wound up' the husband, who had therefore retaliated. Jones saw the arrest as an 'arse covering' exercise. (Field Notes - June 2004)

A central function of the police role is to enforce respectability (Ericson 1982). However, as Waddington (1999b: 61) reminds us, 'respectability is gendered'. Women who achieve respectability are those who do not 'challenge the boundaries of femininity' (*ibid.*). As noted earlier, in many cases that I observed, perpetrators of domestic violence were indeed arrested. Thus while highlighting an important distinction between police talk and practice, the above extract also demonstrates the importance of the new organisational guidelines in shaping police responses to such incidents. In this sense, a more positive approach towards female victims of domestic violence has taken place. Nevertheless, while the new organisational climate has challenged police discretion in relation to 'domestics', officers were merely concerned to 'cover their arse', as opposed to protecting and supporting female victims. Ultimately, while police practices are not wholly resistant to external pressures, a change in police *attitudes* is much more difficult to achieve (Marks 2003).

Despite the general change in police behaviour, there were occasions when officers continued to impose a temporary solution, such as separating the parties:

A woman with serious head injuries had been found at a house where an alcoholic called 'big Dave' lived. He lived on the Northville Estate and was

known to the police for his drinking binges. Given that the evening had so far been quiet, five patrols turned up to the incident.

Lying on the sofa was a large man who was drunk. A woman was lying on the floor and paramedics were trying to talk to her. Rob had previous knowledge of the couple and asked the man what had happened, and why the woman was covered in blood. He said that they were separated and that she had come around to his house to have a go at him. He said that she was really drunk, and as she was leaving, she had fallen over and knocked her head on the wall. The officers, and the paramedics, appeared not to be taking the incident seriously and made remarks to each other about the 'stench' of the house and the woman. [...] The police decided that they would take the woman to her sister's house a few houses away so she could sober up. About five officers carried her through the back alley and into the house. I went back to the house with Rob where he decided that 'big Dave' was 'harmless' and that he had not hit the woman. Rob notified the ACR that it was merely some kind of 'drunken accident' and could they clear it off the computer. (Field notes - Burslem, April 2004)

It was widely believed that domestic violence was a normal occurrence on impoverished housing estates and in other working class locations (see Edwards 1989). While I deal in Chapter Seven with the way in which issues of class pervade police culture, officers often failed to display sympathy or provide quality of service towards the poor. Working class women were seen as less deserving of police protection and, in some cases, as 'responsible' for their victimisation. As the extracts reproduced here make clear, this was

especially the case if the victim had transcended the boundaries of femininity, for example by consuming an excessive amount of alcohol, or being seemingly 'gobby'.

Paradoxically, what these extracts also demonstrate is how 'domestics' initially offer the prospect of excitement.<sup>6</sup> This was particularly the case if the incident had public order implications, for example if the male perpetrator was still present at the scene and behaving in an aggressive and rowdy manner. Officers saw such occasions as an opportunity to use their physical strength (see also Westmarland 2001a), and it was noted that in these instances, an unnecessarily large number of patrols would arrive at the location. However, when it became apparent that there was little chance of confrontation, officers soon lost interest.

### *Fuelling the Antipathy: 'Domestics' and the DIAL Form*

As noted in Chapter Four, another mechanism established by Staffordshire Police in its attempt to respond more effectively to victims of domestic violence, was the creation of a new domestic violence incident form entitled, DIAL.<sup>7</sup>

The new form was launched during the research in Wombourne and was the subject of intense criticism by officers. One of the problems was its 'invasive' character in that it required (predominantly male) officers to ask sensitive questions of (predominantly

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, an Immediate Response (IR) status is attached to these incidents. Thus, and as Westmarland (2001a) rightly observes, what is seen as 'rubbish' actually represents a significant distraction from the tediousness of routine patrolling.

<sup>7</sup> Presented in a large booklet, officers are required to complete a Domestic Investigation Arrest Log in the case of an arrest. If officers make no arrest, a similar form entitled the Domestic Intelligence Assessment Log is to be completed.

female) victims who had just experienced domestic violence. This complaint finds some support from the observational research. The form required women to answer in great detail a number of questions about their recent and past physical (and sexual) assault that they had experienced.<sup>8</sup> Officers also asked victims to provide detailed information on any children who may be present in the home.<sup>9</sup> One of the overarching characteristics of the DIAL form is its inference that the information provided by the victim might be passed on to other formal agencies, such as social services. In many of the cases I observed, the female victim displayed immense anxiety as to who would receive the information. In short, these features of the form often made the police-victim relationship difficult and strained.

From a police perspective, however, the primary complaint was the lengthy and time-consuming character of the DIAL, and there was a widespread perception that the form was unnecessary. Of course, while this no doubt represents a wider complaint about the 'paper burden', a point discussed in Chapter Five, a number of important issues arise in the current context. In particular, the antipathy felt towards the form tended to reinforce the longstanding perception that domestic violence incidents were both troublesome and time-consuming. The association of these critical incidents with the filling in of a long and intrusive form compromised the 'customer focus' that officers were supposed to display in these cases. In particular, some officers avoided filling in the form at the scene of the incident. Instead, they merely noted down certain key details (such as the victim's

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<sup>8</sup> Victims were also asked questions about their mental health, including any history of self harm.

<sup>9</sup> This information included: their age; schools attended; doctor's details, and whether they had been victims of assault within the household. Officers were also required to talk with the children in the home in order to assess their safety and risk of victimisation.

full name, address, date of birth and so on) and completed the form at a later time, and sometimes at a later date. The challenge here is that this informal practice could fail to provide an accurate picture of the victim's situation, and thus policing needs.

### **Gender, Police Culture and Sexual Assault**

Along with responses to domestic violence, contemporary policing policy also emphasises the sympathetic and professional treatment of victims of rape and sexual crime (see Heidensohn 2003). In Staffordshire, the development of examination suites for victims of rape and enhanced training for officers on how to respond to incidents of rape, have been adopted. Within the occupational culture, officers expressed distinct abhorrence towards *perpetrators* of sexual crimes such as rape. During some incidents however, it was noted that the perceived character of the *victim* interfered with officers' assessment of the complainants' credibility.

Despite the new organisational stance on these instances, a number of officers continued to hold stereotypical assumptions about rape, including victim precipitation. On one occasion, for example, two male officers were dispatched to a rape incident in Burslem.<sup>10</sup> Although a caring and sympathetic attitude was initially expressed towards the victim, it was later replaced by scepticism when it emerged that she had reported a similar incident on a previous occasion. The victim also told officers that she had been on a date with the perpetrator, and that she had invited him back to her home. These factors fundamentally

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<sup>10</sup> Ordinarily a female officer from their shift (who had received specialist training) would have been dispatched to such an incident. However, as it was 5am, the female officer had just left to go home. She was later called back to the station by her sergeant and subsequently arrived at the location to replace the male officers.

altered the officers' perceptions of the incident, and the legitimacy of the victim. Although such assumptions did not impinge on the practices of officers as they took down the details of the assailant, the comments which were later expressed in the privacy of the police car made clear their scepticism towards the victim's role in the event.

That there are a number of factors necessary to criminal justice agencies' views of a 'real' rape has long been recognised. As Christie (1986) notes, an 'ideal victim' must neither contribute to the circumstances leading up to the event, nor have any prior knowledge of their assailant. While scepticism was expressed towards women who had a 'history' of reporting sexual assault, it was exacerbated if the complainant was perceived to be suffering from a mental illness, as the following extract demonstrates:

Sergeant Smith started to tell the officers in the parade room about a 'nightmare job' he had been to that morning. He said that a 'Yam Yam'<sup>11</sup> had claimed that she had been raped in one of the local care homes. He described how, after asking the woman who had raped her, she pointed to an elderly man on a chair, who was 'just as loopy as she was'. There was an air of humour about the whole incident, and it was obvious that Sergeant Smith did not take the report seriously. He said that he 'got rid of it' by passing it over to one of the female officers. (Field notes - Wombourne, June 2005)

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<sup>11</sup> The term 'Yam Yam' is used to describe someone who comes from the Black Country in the West Midlands. Having a strong West Midlands accent, they are typically viewed as 'backward' and unintelligent.

While subscription to these ‘classic’ assumptions about sexual crimes and victim precipitation were apparent within the occupational culture, they found particular resonance when dealing with women who worked as prostitutes.<sup>12</sup>

### *A Despised Gender: ‘Prostitutes’ and Victimisation*

While some officers understood that working as a prostitute was a way of surviving poverty, unemployment and drug addiction, prostitutes were generally viewed with disdain.<sup>13</sup> While prostitutes formed the targets of routine police work (see also Edwards 1987; O’Neill *et al* 2001), their victimisation was given less prominence. Working as a prostitute carries enormous personal risk (*ibid.*), and in Burslem, many prostitutes were subjected to sexual and physical violence by their clients. Although some officers took such incidents seriously, many expressed the view that the violence experienced by these women was an ‘occupational hazard’. For example, after describing an incident in which a woman had been raped at knifepoint, one officer suggested, ‘However, it was a prostitute and you always have to be wary when they cry rape. Sometimes it is just to get back at a punter that hasn’t paid them’. Women suspected of working as prostitutes were routinely viewed with suspicion, and this affected the quality of service than more ‘respectable’ women would have been given:

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<sup>12</sup> While there was a visible street presence of prostitutes in Burslem, it was often believed that men would pick up prostitutes in Wolverhampton and bring them over to Wombourne NPU.

<sup>13</sup> As Jefferson (1993: 28) notes, one exception to the gendered element of ‘police property’ is the prostitute. They are ‘the one overwhelmingly female manifestation of the criminal Other’.

A young woman approached the police car and told Ray and Keith that she had just been 'touched up' and mugged by a man. After trying to drag her down a side street, he had grabbed her breasts and then stolen £20 from her. With no sense of urgency, the officers told her that they would drive up the road to see if they could see the man. However, once the woman was out of earshot, they told me that they would not bother going to look for the man because she was a 'known prostitute'. Ray suggested, 'With them, you can't believe a word they say. It was probably a punter who refused to pay her'.

(Field notes - Burslem, August 2004)

Police dealings with female victims of crime operate within a framework of masculinity (Edwards 1989; Smith and Gray 1985). During the research, ideas about prostitutes closely interacted with the patriarchal and misogynistic aspects of the occupational culture. Prostitutes were referred to using a range of derogatory epithets including: 'whore'; 'slag'; 'scrubber'; 'bint'; 'minger'; and 'slut'. As the above incidents demonstrate, this way of viewing prostitutes also set the rationale for policing practices.

### **Signs of a New Direction: Gender and Police Culture**

It would be inaccurate to portray officers as culturally homogeneous in their responses to the new organisational stance on gender. As noted in Chapter Four, an important step towards exploring whether changes which have taken place in the national and local policing context have transformed contemporary police culture, is to acknowledge the

'moments' where officers transcend what have been considered the core values in police culture.

The disparity found by previous researchers between police attitudes and practice was frequently noted (see Smith and Gray 1985; Waddington 1999a). While most officers made negative remarks about being dispatched to domestic violence incidents, a number displayed sympathy and professionalism when interacting with victims. In some cases, male officers viewed themselves as 'hero-protectors' (Westmarland's 2001a: 27) and demonstrated a strong sense of mission towards apprehending the perpetrator. Moreover, while male officers disparaged domestic violence incidents as being marginal to their 'real' policing duties, it was noted that female officers tended to view them as an essential part of the police role. Some women police officers also expressed concern about the effectiveness and desirability of the mandatory arrest policy. In particular, it was viewed as an initiative which could cause something of a 'backlash' against the victim by the abusive partner. It was felt that the mandatory arrest policy was another demonstration of the organisation's desire to increase its detection rates:

*Sarah:* I can't understand this, but we have a domestic policy where we have to put all violent perpetrators under arrest. But a lot of the time, the woman doesn't want us to because they are frightened. [...]

*Carol:* The women don't want him arrested - they want longer-term help on how to get out of the situation ...

*Sarah:* They want support from us, and not just a bloody detection.

*Carol:* [Sarcastically] We are not here to help people - we are here to make Staffordshire Police climb the league tables. So we are like, 'Tough duck, you're going to have a battering when you get home, but Staffordshire Police have got their detection. Hey I'm happy, I've got a detection. The bosses up there are happy. You aren't, but hey' ...

*Sarah:* You are either going to be dead under the patio, or get a good slapping because we have taken your choice away.

(Focus Group - Burslem, October 2004)

In Wombourne, some officers also understood the logic behind the new mechanisms pertaining to domestic violence:

*Patrick:* But it's the DIAL forms too. What do we have to do these for? There is no need to do a DIAL form, let's be honest.

*Andrew:* I can see the purpose of them. It's to assess the situation ...

*Patrick:* But you can assess the situation in your pocket book without spending two hours doing a domestic ...

*Andrew:* I can see where all of these things on domestics have come from. A lot of these things have come in because we have failed to do our jobs properly. I joined 17 years ago, and the job I joined then was different. Now we know that a domestic can escalate and the police have failed miserably in the past. There have been cases in the papers - and it must have been awful when we walked away because the victims were then thinking, 'The police have failed me again', you know? (Focus Group - Wombourne, September 2005)

More generally, while the *discursive* response to domestic violence remained remarkably unchanged, the new arrest guidelines had served to alter police *practices* in this area, and thus demonstrate how external factors have the potential to play a fundamental role in shaping the working behaviour of the police (Chan 1997).

There is also evidence to suggest that the misogynistic elements of police culture are being challenged. I recall one instance in which a male officer told his colleagues on his shift that a young woman who had been reported missing by her family was probably working as a 'smack-head prostitute' and getting 'spit roasted' nightly. This remark was overheard by a (male) station sergeant, and the officer involved was subsequently reprimanded. However, these signs of progress did not represent the norm. Ultimately, while there have been significant changes in formal mechanisms, and some changes in police practices in relation to gender, a number of old assumptions remain.

### **'Deviant' Sexualities: Masculinities and Public Space**

Despite some changes in the composition of personnel within Staffordshire Police, the dominant group continues to be that of the white, heterosexual male. And I refer to heterosexual in the sense that I did not meet any officers in the research sites who were *openly* gay. This demographic factor has an important cultural dimension in which an exaggerated heterosexual orientation features prominently within the occupational culture (see Holdaway 1983; Smith and Gray 1985; Fielding 1994). As discussed in Chapter Four, the dominance of a white, male, heterosexist culture has important implications for gay and lesbian members of the organisation, most notably, where some officers have

found themselves conforming to those values and qualities found in the dominant heterosexual culture.

Externally, the taken-for-granted ethos of heterosexual masculinity influenced attitudes and practices towards members of the public whose sexuality was at variance with this dominant norm. The manifestation of a dominant heterosexist culture became particularly apparent in the policing of casual sexual relationships amongst men within both research sites. These relationships took place in public areas frequented by gay men, and found an important place in the police's cultural knowledge. Officers conceived these casual relationships as exceptionally deviant, and in Burslem, this led to one area becoming stigmatised and routinely targeted:

The radio was quiet and Hayden drove down to Canal Lane, which is a public wooded area with picnic benches and a small car park. Officers often drove down here as it was known to be an area where gay men met for casual sex. Hayden told me that the area was 'well known for it' on the internet, and he himself had been on the web site in order to 'suss out' any patterns, arrangements and details of the men. The area had been re-named 'Anal Lane' by officers in order to capture its association with homosexual encounters, and officers would frequently come down here to try to 'catch them at it'.

(Field notes - July 2004)

From the observations, however, officers did not actually arrest any of the men 'discovered' in 'Anal Lane'. Rather, the area was a source of fascination and amusement,

with some officers preferring to subject those who went there to an informal type of discipline. This was also noted in Wombourne where one area had likewise become associated with 'deviant' sexualities. Suspicion of lone males in the area often acted as a basis for interactions between the police and this group:

11.30pm

Ian drove over to Wooton Common. He said that during the evening the Common became a gay meeting place. A number of cars were parked up and many had lone men sitting in them. For Neil, a lone man in a car signified a 'cruiser'. He contacted the ACR and did a check on one of the vehicles. It came back to a Hereford address and this aroused his suspicion because it was not local. Just as he was about to approach the car, a short round man came out of the woods. Neil shone his flashlight at the man, and asked him what he was doing in the area. The man said that he and his wife had an argument so he came out for a drive. An IR came over the radio so Neil finished the conversation.

Back in the car Neil sarcastically said to me, 'You'd be surprised how many blokes come here after having an argument with their wives'. He also said that when he stops men in the area he usually says to them, 'I would be careful around here at night if I were you. It's full of weirdoes and perverts'. He did this to let 'cruisers' know that the police were aware of what goes on in the area. (Field notes - Wombourne, June 2005)

Thus, lifestyles which challenged traditional norms of sexual conduct became constructed as deviant within the occupational culture, and became the basis for interactions between the police and people perceived as 'cruisers'. As many have noted, homosexuality is viewed negatively within police culture because it fundamentally challenges the dominance of heterosexist masculinity (Holdaway 1983; Young 1991). Coupled with the conservatism inherent within police culture, the police express intolerance towards those groups who challenge conventional morality (see Skolnick 1966; Reiner 1978; 2000a). Indeed, and as we saw earlier, while the police mandate emphasises the control of public spaces, the police are also prime enforcers of 'respectability' (Waddington 1999a).<sup>14</sup>

What is of significance in the current context is whether the police response to this section of the population accord to, or at odds with, the new organisational ethos. Staffordshire Police has recently won the accolade of most gay friendly employer of the year (2005 and 2006) for its formulation of key policies implemented to better serve lesbian and gay officers. While a number of initiatives were commended, some of the more notable efforts include the positive approach taken to recruit and retain gay and lesbian officers, and the commitment to eliminating homophobia inside and outside the organisation. In relation to the latter, the improved recording, investigation and prosecution of homophobic and transphobic crime have been placed high on the agenda. From an organisational perspective however, the norms and practices surrounding the policing of sexuality reveals an important tension between the formal commitments of the organisation, and the realities of day-to-day policing.

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<sup>14</sup> In the wider context however, some activities of gay men have always been subjected to criminalisation. As Brogden *et al* (1988: 114) remind us, various laws against 'importuning' have historically been used vindictively by the police to 'entrap' this section of the population.

## **Antipathy and Ambivalence: Policing the Multicultural Society**

There is a long history of persistent police harassment of minority ethnic groups in Britain (Holdaway 1996; Bowling 1999). Following a number of official critiques of the police, particularly the Scarman Report (1981) and the Macpherson Report (1999), a variety of initiatives have taken place at both the formal policy and operational level of contemporary police organisations in order to change the way in which they respond to the task of policing increasingly multicultural communities.

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, these new expectations have been embraced by Staffordshire Police, and the equitable policing of minority ethnic groups have been placed high on the organisational agenda. Police officers are expected to provide a professional and thoughtful service to minority ethnic communities. This is to be achieved principally through: recognising and being respectful of cultural difference; taking seriously the victimisation of such groups; not holding or expressing racist views; or subjecting people from minority ethnic communities to discriminatory practices. With these expectations in mind, how, then, have officers responded to their old adversaries within the new policing context?

### **Policing Diversity: the View from 'Beirut'**

As outlined in Chapter Five, Burslem NPU is responsible for policing an increasing multi-ethnic population. Although white people represent the dominant population within the NPU, there is a notable presence of minority ethnic groupings within the area. Comprising mainly those of Pakistani, Indian and Black Caribbean ethnic origin,

Burslem NPU is also home to an itinerant populace and small Polish, Iraqi, Italian and Vietnamese communities.

***‘Swamped’: Police Perspectives on a Changing Society***

It was often suggested that in comparison with other policing areas, Burslem was ‘overrun’ with differing minority ethnic communities, including asylum seekers and ‘foreign nationals’. The rapidly changing cultural scenario of Burslem was articulated in the following terms:

*Mark:* Burslem is a strange place. If you look at the north of the county as a whole, the area that Burslem covers has probably got 90 per cent of your different minorities within that area. But other places, the officers there don’t have any different cultures to contend with. Longton has got a growing Asian population, but Burslem’s is massive. It seems that year on year we are just getting swamped with your different minorities ...

*Tony:* With your minorities, there are a lot of issues though aren’t there? We have probably got *the* [his emphasis] biggest Iraqi community within the county. And you get their cultures which are frighteningly different than like ...

*Terence:* Even with what we have had to get used to with Asians and culture and everyone else, they are all still lumped onto Burslem aren’t they?

(Focus Group - September 2004)

The increasing diversification of Burslem’s population was not celebrated within officers’ culture, but rather, came to be viewed negatively. From the police perspective,

the increasing presence of members of minority ethnic groups had important, and overwhelmingly negative, implications for policing:

*Bethan:* From your experiences, what do you think the most difficult aspect of policing is today?

*Charlie:* Obviously diversity [murmurs of agreement]. All of the different ethnic groups in the community. It's definitely a big problem - not really them being there - but things like communicating and their cultures. They do things differently don't they?

*Nigel:* Definitely your different cultures. Someone said that there are 110 different nationalities within a one mile radius of our station, which I just find outrageous ...

*Ian:* [Laughing] I knew it wouldn't take you long!

*Nigel:* That was from immigration, and that is just ridiculous. You can't hope to communicate with all those people. And they have all got different ways of culturally dealing with things as well. An Asian gentleman will send his kids to the door to assault you, or will send his wife because they deem a woman to be a lower class citizen. So do you speak to his wife and agree with their system? Or play your system to theirs which would give you the upper hand? Or do you say, 'No I want to speak to the man, that's sexism'?

*Ian:* But they understand, and will play the game ...

*Nigel:* It's a really weird way of doing things, really odd. And you've got to understand different people to do it effectively. But with that many cultures out there it ...

*Graham:* Confuses you ...

*Nigel:* Well it does. I spoke to an Iraqi gentleman the other day. I called him over with my forefinger and said, 'Come over here'. Under interview he went off the scale (angry) because apparently, that is how the Ba'ath party police used to call them over, with that gesture ...

*Martin:* [Laughing] Like how are you supposed to know that?

*Nigel:* It's the tiny things ...

*Scott:* Have you seen the advert for HSBC? It's true ...

*Charlie:* 'Don't underestimate the importance of local knowledge'

*Scott:* That is true in Burslem. We have got everything here.

(Focus Group - August 2004)

Throughout the research, there was a prevalent narrative amongst officers that the increasing presence of minority ethnic populations within the NPU posed a range of difficulties for the police. While it was often stated that the distinct cultural and linguistic differences between the police and minority ethnic groups were problematic, the heightened political status of the latter was seen as one of the primary difficulties facing contemporary police officers. I return to these themes in subsequent sections.

### *Classic Stereotypes and 'Alien' Cultures*

While police work is largely influenced by officers' ideas about suspicious people or activities, a particular challenge is that suspicion is closely related to the stereotyping of certain people (Reiner 2000a). Members of minority ethnic communities have frequently been the objects of police stereotyping. In particular, such groups have been viewed as: anti-police; disorderly; suspicious; untrustworthy; and having a predisposition to crime

(Skolnick 1966; Holdaway 1983; Smith and Gray 1985; Young 1991; Chan 1997). It would appear that contemporary police officers continue to associate certain members of minority ethnic communities with particular forms of criminal activity.

First, and as noted in Chapter Five, in attending to their policing environment, a number of geographical spaces became associated with crime and disorder. In Burslem, a large council estate called The Grange was regarded as particularly disorderly. The estate is home to a large black and minority ethnic population and became associated with an array of criminal activity including: drugs and burglary; public order; prostitution; gangs and guns. Young Black Caribbean men were particularly associated with these forms of crime:

1pm

In the car, Scott remarked that I had chosen a good time to do my research with them because there were a lot of 'black gangsters' on their patch who were 'causing trouble' for the police. They suggested that The Grange Estate was the worst for gang crimes because of the high black population on the estate. Scott said that most of the 'black lads' on the estate hated the police, even though they were probably responsible for most of the gang and drug related crimes within the area. Scott and Darren then started to mimic strong Black Caribbean accents and parodied aspects of 'gang culture'. (Field notes - March 2004)

The mimicking of minority ethnic accents, including those of people from Pakistani backgrounds, was something that I noted on a number of occasions. Despite the

widespread perception about The Grange Estate, it was approached by the police with a mixture of apprehension and resentment. As a consequence of the heightened political status of minority ethnic groups, the area became a site of anxiety for many officers. During routine policing, some officers avoided patrolling the estate for fear of conflict with residents, and in particular, any subsequent reprimand from the organisation. It was believed that the delicate nature of relationships between the police and the minority ethnic community prevented the police from being able to control it properly. This was often resented by officers who argued that the estate, although 'rife' with crime, was essentially 'untouchable' because of the sensitivity of the area (see also Foster 1989). On the other hand however, because the estate was viewed as having an undercurrent of threat and unpredictability (*ibid.*), some officers deliberately patrolled the estate in order to assert their authority over the area. As I demonstrate later, this could cause friction between the police and some of the estate's minority ethnic residents.

Similarly, while accompanying officers on an organised drug operation I was told that the main 'drug dealers' in the area were Black Caribbean males. In practice, however, all of the houses which were raided that day belonged to white people. The assumption that minority ethnic males were involved in the area's crime problems sometimes meant that officers' stop and search powers were exercised against this group:

Shortly before 8pm, whilst patrolling near The Grange, Ian observes a woman wearing a short skirt and long boots leaning into the window of a silver BMW, and talking to a black male in his early 30s. Ian's immediate suspicion was that the woman was a prostitute, and that the man was supplying her with drugs.

Whilst approaching the car, Ian did a check with the ACR and SPIN to see if a silver BMW had been reported stolen in the area. Both inquiries came back negative.

The BMW started to drive off, and Ian drove quickly behind it in order to pull it over. As it was an unmarked police car, the BMW failed to respond to any of the flashes from the headlamps. For Ian, this was a sign of 'guilt', and he began to call for other patrols to assist him. However, the BMW soon pulled over and Ian jumped out of the car. He told me to wait in the car and said, 'These big dealers carry knives'. I watched the interaction through the car window. The man got out of the car and Ian started to search him, and then the car. Other patrols had now turned up and surrounded the car. Around five white officers assisted with the search. At one point, Ian came back to the police car and said to me, 'He's definitely a dealer, but has got nothing on him. He is too compliant to be innocent'. As Ian could not find anything, he issued the man with a 'producer'.<sup>15</sup> This was done to inconvenience the suspect. Ian put the man's details on SPIN so that if he was seen again in the area, other officers would know that he was a suspected drug dealer. (Field notes - May 2004)

This extract, and others like it, demonstrates the persistence of classic stereotypes of minority ethnic men in high performance cars as 'gangsters' or 'drug dealers' (see Smith and Gray 1985). Officers suggested that their occupational experiences 'confirmed' the stereotypical views about some members of minority ethnic groupings. What the above extract also reveals, however, is the way in which such stereotyping can result in an

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<sup>15</sup> This means that the man would be required to 'produce' his driver's license, vehicle registration and certificate of insurance to a police station.

unnecessarily large number of officers turning up to deal with such incidents. In the current policing context where the problems of racial prejudice and unwarranted 'over-policing' have been emphasised, the sudden and apparently strong police presence no doubt increases the level of distrust and hostility towards the police. Indeed, on another occasion, two black males were separated and subjected to a 'strip search' as it was believed they were carrying drugs. Nothing was found however, and the men were free to leave. One of the suspects was extremely angry with the police, and very much perceived the incident as racial harassment.

It has been suggested that within British society, some minority ethnic groups are perceived as inferior to others. Modood (1992), for example, argues that there is a particular hostility to those from Muslim and Arab backgrounds because their cultures are perceived as distinctly alien to that of white British culture. Bringing this in line with the current topic, Chakraborti (2007) argues that in the wake of concerns with global terrorism, the policing of Muslim communities are becoming increasingly defined by broader processes of xenophobia: and in particular, Islamophobia.

While young Black Caribbean males were viewed with suspicion, members of the Iraqi community, particular those seeking asylum, held a distinctly negative place in the rank and file culture. Although this negativity was not necessarily expressed in overtly racialised tones, many officers displayed hostility and insensitivity towards the cultural signifiers of this group, including their: religion and language; family values; and seemingly indolent work ethic. It was widely believed that Iraqi men were the main

clients of prostitutes in the area, and were responsible for much of the violence committed against this group. In many instances, this was explained by reference to Iraqi values:

Rob and Shaun were dispatched to Waterloo Road, a known red light area, in order to assist the prostitution unit. An unmarked police car with two members of the prostitution unit was parked in a bus stop there. One of the unit members called me over and told me to get into the car. I got in and realised that there was a man sitting in the back of the car. The officer explained to me that the man was from Iraq and had been seen driving around the red light area and because of this, he was suspected of looking for prostitutes. A vehicle check revealed that the man had no driving licence. The officer surmised that he was probably an asylum seeker which meant that he would have no insurance either. In the back of the car, one of the officers said sarcastically to me, 'He appears not to know the English language, so I am going to give him a warning letter in his own language'.

Rob and Shaun got back into the car and suggested that it was unsurprising that Iraqi men went with prostitutes because it was 'inbred' in their culture to treat women disrespectfully. They also surmised that they were 'sly'. For them, this was demonstrated through the man's (alleged) dishonesty about not being able to speak English: as Shaun suggested, 'I bet he would be able to say, 'How much for a blow job love'? (Field notes - April 2004)

The idea that minority ethnic groups deliberately used their own language, rather than English, in order to dupe the police was a common discourse put forward by officers. As I explore below, this perception could influence the quality of service afforded to such communities.

### ***The New Face of Organisational 'Trouble': Anxiety and Mutual Hostility***

The contemporary requirement for police organisations to respond to diversity resulted in a heightened anxiety about dealing with minority ethnic communities. While officers were particularly anxious about being labelled as racist within the organisation, 'race' was very much at the forefront of officers' minds when interacting with black and minority ethnic populations. This 'culture of anxiety' generated from within the organisation meant that officers were reluctant to deal with minority ethnic communities on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, it was noted during the observations that some officers consciously *avoided* initiating any proactive encounters with members of minority ethnic communities for fear of being reprimanded by the organisation should such an individual make a complaint against the officer. On the occasions where officers were called to incidents involving a person from a minority ethnic background, some displayed anxiety and were reluctant to attend:

12pm

Rachael was asked to attend a house which was occupied by a female Iraqi asylum seeker. The woman reported that someone had been kicking her front door in the night before as she lay in bed. As the woman did not speak English, it had been arranged that a friend would be there to interpret for the police. On the

way to the house, Rachael kept saying that she didn't like this type of job because the police are under enormous pressure to deal with potential hate crimes correctly. [...] Although Rachael took down the details in a very professional and sympathetic manner, once back in the car she said that she was 'glad to be out of there', and hoped that she didn't get called to a similar incident for a while.

(Field notes - July 2004)

As the extract demonstrates, the finely tuned awareness about the new organisational approach to minority ethnic people as victims of crime had the effect of ensuring that officers dealt with such incidents in an equitable, polite and professional manner. However, the extent to which this reflects a genuine desire by officers to help and support such groups, as opposed to fear of reprimand, is debatable.

As noted in Chapter Four, the term 'racist' carried a strong stigma within the organisation (see also Foster *et al* 2005). The enhanced political status afforded to people from minority ethnic backgrounds meant that they were perceived as a group that could cause problems for rank and file officers. In short, within the occupational culture, minority ethnic groups represented organisational 'trouble'. From this perspective, such groups may have come to resemble what Holdaway (1983: 77) terms a 'disarmer': that is, 'a member of a group who can weaken or neutralise police work as a result of their ability to invoke public sympathy'. However, while anxiety surrounding minority ethnic populations represents a new and important characteristic of contemporary police culture, it often manifested itself in resentment towards such communities. And as we have seen,

some sections of black and minority ethnic communities *continue* to form the targets of police suspicion, stereotyping and attention.

Many officers believed themselves to be 'easy targets' for accusations of racism. It was frequently argued that minority ethnic groups deliberately used their ethnicity as a powerful instrument during interactions with the police (see also Foster *et al* 2005). This was particularly the case in a stop and search context:

*John:* Some police I know won't stop any cars with blacks in now in case they get a complaint ...

*Derek:* It's the race card, the card. I'm not harassing anyone but they say, 'It's because we're Asian, it's because we're black' ...

*Mark:* It's dead easy for them to complain about you. And that's what they do. They see it as an easy way of getting at you don't they? But not because you've done anything wrong. 'I'm black - I'll have your job, watch this' ...

*Howard:* It gives you four hours of paperwork, and three months of grief.

[...]

*Sandra:* You do get people who abuse the fact that we have things in place to deal with race. You can go to what may or may not be a racial incident, and you will have people threatening you before they open the door. They will talk about the Racial Equality Council before they tell you the circumstances ...

*John:* It's open to abuse. Police are frightened of their own shadows. If they say jump, we jump. (Focus Group - September 2004)

As I noted in Chapter Four, the idea that people from minority ethnic backgrounds 'played on the race card' assumed an important place in officers' informal talk. It will be recalled that officers, upon being confronted with a member of a minority ethnic group who had said; 'You only stopped me because I am black', reported themselves as using quick-witted tactics to respond to this potentially damaging accusation.<sup>16</sup>

The idea that within the contemporary policing environment, minority ethnic people are able to neutralise the effects of routine policing through 'playing the race card', formed a core part of rank and file culture in both sites. While these narratives are an important way of managing the tensions associated with the policing of minority ethnic communities they do, nevertheless, also become a way for officers to reinforce the idea that minority ethnic groups are problematic.

### ***'Losing the Edge': Policing the Language Barrier***

Insensitivity to language and cultural difference has been the source of much criticism of the police's relationship with minority ethnic communities (Chan 1997). As outlined in Chapter Four, Staffordshire Police has developed a number of initiatives to better meet the challenges of policing a society that is more culturally and linguistically diverse. In addition to placing information about rights and entitlements in different languages in custody suites, the Force has also employed a number of interpreters in order to assist with interviewing suspects, victims and witnesses. On the ground however, the different languages of people that made up the area was viewed particularly negatively by officers.

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<sup>16</sup> The principal reply being, 'You only said that because I am white, which makes you racist and I can lock you up for that'.

Moreover, some officers diverged from these new organisational initiatives during their interactions with people who had little or no spoken English.

It was widely believed that during interactions, minority ethnic communities deliberately used their own language, rather than English, in order to gain an advantage over officers. The effect, for the police, was that they 'lost the edge' when dealing with potential offenders:

*Brendan:* We struggle don't we with a lot of the jobs we go to with your different cultures? We have an immigration department which works 9am until 5pm, Monday to Friday. Well, what use is that to us? That person can disappear into the asylum black hole for some time, and that is always happening ...

*Peter:* They are out there committing crime, driving around with no documents, illegal immigrants ...

*Scott:* You lose the edge as well I find, with people who speak a different language. When you've got a car full of Asian people, who start speaking a completely foreign language, it's a logistical nightmare. They could be saying quite openly in front of you: 'See that heroin in the back of the seat? Just chuck it out of the window for me'. And you're not going to have a clue. You completely lose the edge. Perhaps a better representation of that ethnicity would give us the edge back - or perhaps me getting off my arse and learning 10 different languages, which isn't going to happen.

(Focus Group - October 2004)

This widespread sentiment reflects a lack of understanding about the cultural idiosyncrasies of their diverse communities. More importantly, it also demonstrates that the current policing climate, which requires officers to be sensitive to cultural difference, is not seen as legitimate by officers. From the rank and file perspective, the organisational policies pertaining to 'cultural diversity' fundamentally challenges their need to maintain the edge over their adversaries.

During observations, the assumption that some minority ethnic groups deliberately concealed their ability to speak English prevented officers from making suitable arrangements to assist such groups. While some enlisted the assistance of friends and family of the suspect, victim or witness (see also Foster *et al* 2005), it was usual to merely assume that the person - particularly suspects - were being deceitful about their ability to speak English. During interactions, some officers became irritated with people who had little, if any, understanding of English (*ibid.*). On occasion, these ways of coping with the difficulties arising from language differences could have an adverse effect on the relationship between the police and such people. For example, after being stopped in the street by a Chinese woman with little spoken English, one officer became increasingly impatient and merely told her to ring the Force's public helpline.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Mutual Hostility***

In the main, the police viewed their relationship with local minority ethnic communities as one that was based on conflict and hostility. As one officer put it:

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<sup>17</sup> From what I could gather, the woman was trying to follow up an inquiry about an incident she had previously reported to the police.

You walk around Burslem and you can feel the tension in the air. But you go to say Manchester, and walk around their Asian communities, and it just doesn't feel so tense does it? But here, you walk around in your uniform and they start hissing at you and making comments. The tension is there all the time. (Focus Group - September 2004)

This perceived tension served to distance the police from local minority ethnic communities. While many officers were aware of the potential for conflict when interacting with members of ethnic minority groups, others appeared unconcerned about, and unaware of, the tension that their presence could cause. The relationship between the police and some members of the minority ethnic community could sometimes be strained and antagonistic:

A young Asian man was put into the back of the car with me. He had been arrested for assault, and it was thought that he had used a blue bike chain to hit another male. Acting Sergeant Evans told me to get in the car with him as he wanted to go to the garage where he thought the bike chain was being hidden by the suspect's family. The garage was run and owned by a middle-aged Asian man and all of the workers in the garage were also Asian. There was a great deal of suspicion and apprehension towards the police, and Evans thought they were hiding CCTV footage of the incident. He wanted to search the garage but the owner kept saying that they needed a warrant. This seemed to annoy Evans who then stated the legal conditions under which a search could be conducted.

The owner was still arguing and saying that he wanted to see a warrant. Evans then said, 'Fine. If you want me to get all of my officers down here, I will'. He then went on the radio and said loudly so that all of the shop could hear him, 'Can any crew come over to Cross Garage. We have a serious assault and a possible case of police obstruction'. The owner gave in and said, 'Fine. Look where you want'. A few minutes later six [all white and male] officers arrived and started to search the premises. The owner and the other Asian men stood around and watched. The whole atmosphere was very antagonistic and Evans whispered to me 'The Asians around here hate us – but as you can see they make our job more difficult.' Evans found a bike chain near a shelf in the garage and seized it as evidence. [...] He told me that he didn't think it was the chain used in the incident but that he wanted to inconvenience the shop keeper. 'While we have it, he [the Asian shop-keeper] won't be able to sell it'.

(Field notes - Burslem, August 2004)

As several writers have noted, black and minority ethnic communities often perceive any police attention as 'racial' (Foster *et al* 2005; see also McLaughlin 2007a). From the police perspective, however, young black and minority ethnic men are confrontational (Foster 1989; Bowling and Phillips 2003). During the field work, it was clear that police and members of minority ethnic groups anticipated hostility from each other during interactions. This mutual hostility and suspicion between the police and minority ethnic communities could manifest in conflict:

Gareth had been driving around The Grange Estate for half an hour. As we were leaving, a number of black and Asian young men were sitting on a wall at the entrance to the estate. Gareth pulled up and started to ask them what they were up to. Although this was not necessarily expressed in an accusing manner, the young men perceived it as such. One of the young men said to Gary, 'Go away and stop harassing us, all of you lot are the same'. Gary said sarcastically, 'I'm not harassing you. I am just doing my job, driving around this place to make sure all you lot are protected'. One of the other young men seemed to get cross and said, 'Look, just fuck off and stop harassing us'. Gareth quickly jumped out of the car, walked up to him and threatened, 'Don't swear at a police officer my friend, or you'll be coming in'. The same person loomed towards Gareth but then backed off and apologized for swearing. However, he still maintained, 'I just want you lot to go away and leave us alone'.

Just then an IR came in about a 'burglary in progress'. Gareth stared at the group of young men and said, 'You've been saved by the bell', and got back into the car. As we were driving off, Gareth said to me, 'Now you see the type of shit we have to put up with. We can't do anything, or we get called a racist. It's a political nightmare'. (Field notes - June 2004)

As demonstrated in Chapter Five, to be disrespectful to a police officer is an infringement of an important occupational law, and indeed, in this incident may partly explain the sudden conflict between the two parties. However, in the current policing climate where issues of diversity are salient, the *ethnicity* of the young man entered the equation and shaped the nature of interactions between the two. The extract also illustrates how the

anticipation of hostility can result in routine peacekeeping functions shifting towards a potential law enforcement objective (see Holdaway 1996). On a final note, contemporary police officers are encouraged to be aware of how their actions might be interpreted by minority ethnic groupings. While some officers were sensitive to the occasions where their presence may have caused conflict or anxiety, a number of officers failed to appreciate how their attitude and/or actions could lead to the inflammation of existing tensions. As Foster *et al* (2005: 67) note, negative experiences of policing can rapidly penetrate the 'community consciousness', and can undermine the positive work that police organisation's have already done to increase confidence in the police.

### **Policing Rural Diversity: 'Outsiders' and the Racialisation of the 'Other'**

Many of the narratives articulated in Burslem in relation to minority ethnic communities were equally apparent in Wombourne. In some respects however, a different set of dynamics emerged. It will be recalled from Chapter Five that while the crime problems facing officers in Burslem were viewed as predominantly *internal*, in Wombourne the problem was perceived as fundamentally *external*. These differences had important implications for the policing of members of minority ethnic groups and relate specifically to the distinct geographical and social context in which Wombourne officers worked.

As a result of its predominantly white and affluent surroundings, organisational notions of 'policing diversity' were considered largely irrelevant by officers in Wombourne.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, ideas about race and ethnicity became fundamentally associated with the core crime problems in the area. It was widely believed that young, low status male 'outsiders' who originated from the deprived and multi-ethnic centres of the West Midlands were responsible for the serious crimes which took place on the NPU, or as one sergeant put it:

Our number one problem is cross-border criminality. We are a nice affluent area so travelling criminals come onto us from across the border to commit crime. Because they know we are thin on the ground, we are an easy target.

[...] As long as we are Wombourne, our problem will be outsiders.

(Interview - October 2005)

It is perhaps worth noting, however, that those senior officers working away from the NPU disagreed with this assertion - much to the disapproval of the rank and file and some supervisors. The idea of 'travelling criminals' and 'outsiders' was often used by officers in their requests for extra resources. However, such requests were frequently turned down by senior officers who were sceptical about the real threat posed by 'outsiders'.

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<sup>18</sup> The composition of the area is overwhelmingly white at 98.2 per cent. The small presence of black and minority ethnic populations mainly comprise those of Pakistani, Indian, Black Caribbean and Chinese ethnic origin.

In the wake of officers' anxieties about crime in the area, these feelings of 'otherness' took on a racialised dimension. These themes are captured in the following exchange during a focus group:

*Bethan:* Going back to how changes have impacted on your work, it is often said that Britain is a multicultural and diverse society. Today, police organisations are having to respond to the challenges of policing diverse societies. Do you think that has had an impact on your job down here?

*Jennifer:* Not so much to be honest. It hasn't really had an impact. We do have a small pocket of ethnic minorities within the NPU, but it is not so much of an issue. We don't have a mosque or anything like that, which seems to have a major impact on how the community functions and focus. Because a lot of the time, they will have their own system before the police even become involved. Where it can be an issue ... we have a lot of travelling criminals ...

*Matt:* We always have to be aware that a lot of outsiders ...

*Jennifer:* We have to be careful that they are not being targeted because of their race. But we balance that with the fact that we know we have a low ethnic population, so unfortunately, people of colour do look out of place ...

*Matt:* It's true ...

*Jennifer:* So, it's not that they are being stopped because they are black or Indian or whatever. It is just that we don't carry that population. We know that they are not local, so they are stopped to find out what they are doing in the area ...

*Matt:* The same as any person for any other reason would be stopped if they are not local, and driving around Millionaire's Row at 2 o'clock in the morning.<sup>19</sup>

We want to know why they are here ...

*Jennifer:* But they are dealt with exactly the same: fairly and equally. [...] But diversity, it is not really relevant to us. It doesn't have so much of a major impact on your day-to-day policing because we don't really have any.

(Focus Group - Wombourne, October 2005)

As Holloway (2005) notes, dominant groups in rural communities tend to make finely tuned distinctions between themselves and 'others'. However, such distinctions are frequently racialised (*ibid.*). Indeed, against the backdrop of the white English village, members of minority ethnic groups are viewed as 'out of place'. They are, in short, seen as 'belonging' in the city (*ibid.*: see also Tyler 2003). Moreover, while villages are often depicted as 'white safe havens' (Neal 2002: 445), far removed from the perceived degeneration of the city, the latter is a space which has become increasingly synonymous with the 'undesirable black Other' (see also Hall *et al* 1978).

The juxtaposing of the 'respectable' rural white landscape with the 'rough' urban multi-ethnic city found strong support within the occupational consciousness of officers working in Wombourne. As the above extract demonstrates, in officers' ideas about crime work, the theme of spatial differentiation was heavily shaped by metaphors of 'outsiders' (see also Young 1993). While the discourse of minority ethnic groups as 'playing on the race card' was as prevalent in Burslem, it did not appear to hinder officers

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<sup>19</sup> Millionaire's Row was a nickname for an area which was characterised by particularly large and affluent houses.

in their interactions with such groups. Although officers did not necessarily articulate their suspicion towards 'outsiders' in overtly racialised terms, black and minority ethnic men held an important symbolic place in officers' cultural knowledge regarding crime and criminality.

Officers viewed themselves as 'protecting the patch' from 'outsiders', and they policed their rural landscape in a continuously 'defensive state' (see Young 1993: 235). As we have seen, in patrolling their patch, the police learn to treat their geographical domain as a 'territory of normal appearances' (Sacks 1972: 285). Their patch is saturated with regular 'background expectancies' (*ibid.*) and the job of the police is to become sensitive to occasions when these expectancies are in variance. Based on this notion of 'outsiders' as perpetrators of crime, Wombourne officers were routinely suspicious of people and vehicles which were 'out of place' in their white, affluent, rural surroundings. To this end, officers relied on their experience about what *types* of people and vehicles were potentially involved in crime. The standard from which to assess suspects seemed to me to be measured against what I would call a 'Mr and Mrs Wombourne' background appearance. In other words, the 'background expectancies' (*ibid.*) of the police related to predominantly white, middle-aged, middle-class and affluent people, and cars, which the police recognised as being local.

This occupational 'common-sense' also provided a rationale for police interactions with those perceived as 'outsiders'. As the following incident demonstrates, minority ethnic

men were often targets of police suspicion, and were subjected to police stop and search powers:

3.15am

As Nick and Tony pulled out of the station, they saw a dilapidated dark blue Peugeot which was full of passengers driving past. Nick accelerated out of the station and said 'Fucking outsiders, I bet you', before pulling the car over. Five young men were in the car. The driver was white and the front seat passenger seemed to be of mixed heritage. The three passengers in the back were all of Black Caribbean descent. Nick told the driver that he had stopped him as part of a routine vehicle check, before asking him where they had been, and where they were going now. The driver told him that they hadn't been anywhere in particular and that they had just been for a drive and were heading back to Birmingham. Nick sarcastically replied, 'I think you are a lot of junctions away mate. Decided to take a detour through sunny Wombourne did you'?

Meanwhile Tony began to question the passengers about their movements. One of them said that they had been to Manchester to see his dad. Seizing on this inconsistency, Nick and Tony began to search the passengers and the car. To justify this, Nick said that he could smell what he believed to be a 'controlled substance'. (I was later told that some officers often used this line so they can get access to a vehicle to do a search). Tony ran police checks on the young men and all of them had previous convictions for drugs and other offences, including burglary.

This was enough to do a very lengthy and rigorous search of the men and the car. While no drugs were found, they came across a hammer, a rusty chair leg, a pair of gloves and a hat. Nick took Tony and me to one side and said, 'They are definitely going equipped. I'm not racist, but why are black lads with records and from Birmingham over on us at this time of night'? They radioed through to Sergeant Peel and asked his advice. The sergeant told them to arrest them all for going equipped. [...] Sergeant Peel congratulated the officers for the 'good nick'. He thought the incident would teach 'outsiders' a valuable lesson, and show that officers on the patch weren't a 'soft touch'. (Field notes - July 2005)

Suspicion towards members of black and minority ethnic communities has been identified as a core feature of police culture (Skolnick 1966; Lambert 1970; Reiner 2000a). However, stereotyping can become a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Reiner 2000a) in which a disproportionate number of young, low status and in some instances, ethnic minority males are stopped, searched, and arrested. For Wombourne officers, the practice of stopping and searching minority ethnic men had the effect of 'confirming' the stereotype that young, low status males are indeed more likely to be criminal. Thus, while commonly held ideas about 'outsiders' became a guideline for police intervention, it also reinforced the differential treatment of certain groups.

Across both research sites, then, the practical policing of minority ethnic people was contradictory. While anxiety about being labelled 'racist' sometimes led to the avoidance of proactive encounters with members of minority ethnic groups in Burslem, a less ambiguous situation was evident in Wombourne where minority ethnic men became

frequent targets of police suspicion and attention. The differences in culture relate specifically to the distinct geographical and social context of the two research sites. While officers in Wombourne were highly autonomous and experienced a low level of supervisory oversight, officers in Burslem were under more scrutiny by their supervisors. Indeed, because Burselm was responsible for policing a notable minority ethnic community, it is an NPU which arguably sits at the forefront of 'policing diversity' policy agendas.

Returning to Wombourne however, while these extracts point to the continuation of antipathy and suspicion towards their minority ethnic 'publics', it would be incorrect to generalise the police's response towards such groups. Some officers expressed criticism towards their colleagues' propensity to be suspicious of members of minority ethnic communities, as the following field note demonstrates:

Jeremy was called to a youth club. An argument between a black teenager and a white teenager had broken out, and each of the teenagers' respective friends had become involved. Although there had been no physical assault, it was believed that a 'hammer had been waved around' by one of the group. The black teenager in question was the only person from a minority ethnic background at the youth club.

Mike and Anton were already at the scene. Anton had taken the black teenager to one side and was searching him. [...] While Mike and Jeremy walked back to their cars, they began to complain about Anton. Jeremy asked

Mike, 'I bet you Anton only searched the black lad didn't he? He only did it because he is black. He always does it'. After getting back into the car, Jeremy later said to me, 'Unfortunately some of our officers have old-fashioned views about black people and crime. Not all of us are like that though'. (Field notes - Wombourne, March 2005)

It is also notable that officers were not alone in viewing minority ethnic populations as suspicious, as the following incident demonstrates:

3.30pm

It was raining and we were just about to go off shift. As we were approaching the station, we saw four young black men walking up the hill with their hoods up. Jacqui laughed and said, 'I bet you we'll get a call about suspicious people from the public. If I asked the caller what was suspicious about them they would say, 'Well they *are* black! Wombourne is more racist than anything'. [...] As I was leaving the station, Jacqui told me that a caller had rung in expressing suspicion about the group of men - 'I told you Beth', she laughed. (Field notes - July 2005).

This extract highlights the important role that the public play in influencing the patterning of police attention (see also McConville *et al* 1991). Nonetheless, the role of local residents in constructing suspicion only served to reinforce the stereotypical cues drawn upon by officers in their attempts to protect their patch from 'outsiders'.

Finally, the ethnic component of police suspicion should not be overstated. An important aspect of police suspicion towards members of ethnic minority groups fundamentally relates to the low economic status of minority ethnic males. In their work, the police differentiate between the 'respectable' classes and the 'roughs' (Cain 1973). Ethnic minority populations are overwhelmingly relegated to the lower end of the class system in our society (Jefferson 1991). During the research, when officers did come into contact with minority ethnic groups, a central characteristic was indeed their particularly low economic position. Exacerbated by the low visible presence of black and minority ethnic populations in Wombourne, social class was an important underlying factor in shaping police concern and attention towards this group. Signs of 'roughness', including dilapidated vehicles and young men in shabby or dirty clothing, fundamentally precipitated police suspicion. From this perspective, young, poor *white* males also fell under police suspicion because they were incongruent with the respectable and affluent surroundings of the NPU.

## **Conclusion: The Changing Nature of Police Culture?**

This chapter has sought to understand how the new policing context has shaped relations with those groups which are currently emphasised in 'policing diversity' policy agendas. Contemporary police officers have been expected to put into operation a new series of principles and practices when responding to their socially and culturally diverse 'publics'. As this chapter demonstrates, officers manage these new policing realities in different ways. On the one hand, we see the fruitful beginnings of different policing outlooks and styles, in which the organisational emphasis on diversity has impacted positively on the

working culture. In the wake of the new organisational guidelines relating to the policing of domestic violence, a more positive approach towards women as victims of crime has taken place. Indeed, in contrast to earlier research when attending to domestic violence incidents many officers did arrest the predominantly male perpetrators.

Several new dynamics also emerge with respect to the policing of minority ethnic communities. In the current climate where problems of police racism and discrimination have been brought to the fore, officers demonstrated a heightened anxiety about dealing with such communities. Interactions between the police and minority ethnic communities were characterised by an acute awareness that the police should deal with such groups equitably. This heightened awareness had the effect of ensuring that some officers dealt with incidents involving members of minority ethnic communities in an equitable, thoughtful and professional manner. Especially in Burslem, many officers had begun to revise the way they policed such groups. Against the backdrop of a 'culture of anxiety', many officers avoided initiating any proactive encounters with minority ethnic communities for fear of reprimand from the organisation. Indeed, throughout the field work in Burslem the officers that I accompanied *infrequently* subjected members of minority ethnic groups to their stop and search powers. As I explore in the following chapter, officers primarily came into contact with *white* members of the public.<sup>20</sup>

It is also worth emphasising that overt racist language was broadly absent within rank and file culture. Indeed, some officers challenged the racist comments articulated by some members of the public. On one occasion, after picking up two teenage girls in the early

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<sup>20</sup> The high concentration of white people in both research sites would go some way in explaining this.

hours of the morning to give them a lift back to the local foster home, the following conversation occurred:

*Sergeant Williams:* You girls should be careful walking around by yourselves at this time of night. There was a nasty assault here last week.

*Girl A:* Well, last week a dirty Paki tried to grab me into his car ...

*Geraint:* [Shouting] Oi! What did you just say?

*Girl A:* Sorry - an 'Asian' [long and drawn out] tried to pull me into his car.

*Sergeant Williams:* That's better. Don't use that kind of language anymore please. (Field notes - Burslem, April 2004)

Overall, what these new responses demonstrate is the way in which aspects of police culture can be responsive to external and internal rules (Chan 1997).

On the other hand, however, a number of problematic elements remain in respect to how officers perceive and treat those groups which have previously not been equitably served by policing. Domestic violence incidents continue to occupy a particularly low position in officers' occupational ideologies. Responses to female victims of violence and sexual assault were influenced by police perceptions of the complainant, with the perceived 'moral character' (Edwards 1989) of the victim shaping the quality of service that they received. With respect to sexuality, officers in both sites saw homosexual behaviour amongst men in public places as particularly abhorrent, and targeted those members of the public who spent time in public areas 'known' for casual sexual relations between men.

Officers continued to hold stereotypical notions about the criminality of young, minority ethnic men. In policing this group, some officers appeared unconcerned with the tension and conflict that their presence could cause. While anxiety (especially in Burslem) often led to the avoidance of proactive encounters with minority ethnic groups - and indeed, reluctance to deal with them in reactive encounters - it became internalised within the occupational culture. As noted, many officers expressed clear resentment towards what they saw as minority ethnic people who 'played on the race card'. The idea that minority ethnic groups deliberately exploited their ethnicity in order to neutralise the effects of routine policing was pervasive in both sites. In broader terms, this narrative perpetuated the belief that minority ethnic groups were problematic because of their enhanced political status. Similarly, many officers displayed hostility and insensitivity towards the cultural signifiers of this group. It was particularly believed that minority ethnic communities deliberately used their own language, rather than English, in order to dupe police officers. Finally, the tension surrounding minority ethnic populations served to distance the police from this section of the community. While young black males were often viewed as provocative, this group also viewed the police with suspicion and hostility. Minority ethnic groups often interpreted police attention as racist. This mutual hostility could lead to the inflammation of interactions between the two groups.

With these contradictory responses in mind, this chapter uncovers a notable tension in the organisation's attempt to change police culture; while some police behaviours have changed, accepted ways of thinking have persisted (see also Marks 2003). I return to this point in Chapter Eight. For now, however, there are a number of possible explanations

for the different responses to the new policing realities. The first, as already mentioned, relates to the wider national and organisational context of contemporary British policing. The introduction of new policies, guidelines and the official interdiction of discrimination have changed some police practices. The second relates to the personal biography of the individual officer. As noted in Chapter Two, the police bring their own experiences, personalities and variations of outlook to the police role (Chan 1997). I would add that the different ways of viewing their work also interact with the age, gender and type of unit and shift the officer works on.

Ultimately nevertheless, despite the initial emergence of new policing identities, many aspects of the occupational culture remain unchallenged by the significant reorganisations which have taken place in the national and local field of policing. While attention has been given to improve the principles and structures for dealing with their socially and culturally diverse 'publics', some routine working perspectives and practices are at variance with these new structures. In the wake of the new policing approaches, the persistence of these accepted ways of thinking and behaving therefore demonstrates the tenacity of police culture.

Such themes are discussed further in Chapter Eight. For now, however, the following chapter disrupts the examination of contemporary police culture within a framework of diversity. Returning to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three, I demonstrate that in addition to diversity, issues of *class* remain crucial in understanding contemporary policing discourses and practices.

## Chapter Seven

### **Policing the 'Irrelevant':**

#### **Class, Diversity and Contemporary Police Culture**

Chapter Three presented the argument that a dominant political paradigm has emerged around the equitable policing of 'diversity'. In particular, it was suggested that the vision of equality in the current policing discourse has become synonymous with the policing of minority ethnic communities, along with other cultural and gendered identities. While such a move is essential for those groups who have previously not been equitably served by policing, it was argued that this paradigm fundamentally overlooks the continuing significance of class in policing. Indeed, it was contended that while the contemporary field of policing is one in which respect and recognition for diversity has become salient, it is a field which is also characterised by widespread economic exclusion and division. As several writers have suggested, the changes which have taken place in the political economy of Western capitalism have important implications for crime and its formal control (Reiner 1992*a*; 2000*a*; Taylor 1999; Young 1999). This chapter considers the consequences of such changes for those groups who have formed the enduring objects of police work, and its occupational culture.<sup>1</sup> Prior to providing an empirical exploration of this however, it is necessary to briefly return to a number of the key themes which were discussed within this earlier theoretical chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that a version of the following chapter has recently been published in an edited collection on contemporary police culture (see Loftus 2007).

## Policing, Exclusion and the New 'Police Property'

It is generally acknowledged that the characteristics of police culture are not divorced from the wider organisational and societal context; rather, they both reflect and reproduce the nature of the prevailing social structure (Reiner 2000a). The properties found in police culture therefore reflect the 'isomorphic relationship' (*ibid.*: 136) between the police and the wider arrangements of social disadvantage. As I mentioned a moment ago, a number of commentators have argued that late modern societies are increasingly characterised by widespread inequality and exclusion, in which a structurally marginal 'underclass' features prominently (Dahrendorf 1985; Young 1999; Crowther 2000a). Poor and marginal groups have always formed the enduring targets of police concern and practice, and have been termed 'police property' (Lee 1981). Characterised by their social, political and economic powerlessness, the 'police property' grouping has, for Reiner (2000a: 216), become 'far larger than ever before and more fundamentally alienated' in this new social landscape.

Despite the widening of economic inequality, class is of declining interest in current social thought and political practice. As Fraser (1997) observes, one of the reasons for this is the sharp rise of culture and identity politics in recent decades. Cultural groups defined along the axes of ethnicity, gender and sexuality have emerged to seek recognition of their social differences. However, while the turn away from political economy and towards culture (see Ray and Sayer 1997) has served to de-centre class from discussions of social justice, it has also positioned the *white* poor as 'illegitimate subjects' (Haylett 2001). Removed from notions of recognition, multiculturalism and

'progress', this group are perceived as culturally burdensome and are subject to a range of disparaging discourses. Gender may also be emphasised here. As McDowell (2003) notes, it is the young, white, working class *male* who currently constitutes the abject, and who is constructed as the embodiment of disorder and distaste (see also Collins 2004; The Economist 28/10/06).

Official concern with the promotion of 'diversity' has become increasingly relevant to contemporary police organisations within recent years. However, it is aspects of *class* which overwhelmingly pervade the daily narratives and interactions of officers. As I demonstrate, within the current policing landscape a fundamental contradiction emerges between the police organisation's highly concerted emphasis on diversity, and axes of class. While efforts aimed at changing police culture focused on the promotion of recognition and quality of service to its culturally diverse 'publics', it was predominantly poor and low status white males who occupied centre stage both in the practical workload of the police, and in their occupational consciousness. One prominent aspect of police culture was the 'class contempt' (Sayer 2005) displayed towards this classed group. Against the backdrop of the current preoccupation with the policing of 'diversity', this chapter appeals for a rethinking of police culture that recognises how class continues to permeate cultural knowledge and everyday practices.

### **Reawakening 'Police Culture' and the Omnipresence of Class Contempt**

A recurring theme of police research is the way in which low status groups feature heavily in the occupational culture of the police. Indeed, the idea that the police

overwhelmingly deal with the least powerful and marginal groups in society is now something of an academic orthodoxy. While the common denominator among these perennial police targets is their social, economic and political powerlessness, the class-natured aspects of this have become obscured in recent years. Recent debates around police culture have, quite rightly, been concerned with police perceptions and treatment of differing groups along axes of ethnicity (Chan 1997), gender (Westmarland 2001b) and sexuality (Burke 1993), both within and beyond the policing organisation. However, while there has been a great deal of academic, and indeed professional, debate concerning the policing of these social divisions, police perceptions of the poor, and their treatment of them, have been largely ignored. Such a proposition is particularly relevant in the case of the white poor.

Explicit reference to class is nearly always discussed in the historical literature of policing and in the literature on industrial conflict. In the first, it is demonstrated that the emergence of the New Police was fundamentally rooted in the changes in capitalist and economic relations (Storch 1975; Cohen 1979). The primary duty of the New Police was to confront the working class when it threatened bourgeois order, property and propriety (*ibid.*: see also Brogden *et al* 1988). Second, the class natured aspects of policing mainly receive attention when discussed in the context of 'high' policing and spectacular, but relatively rare, outbreaks of industrial conflict (see Scraton 1985; Green 1991). While acknowledging the classed dimension of relations between the police and those policed, these works inevitably present these dramatic moments as somehow 'set apart' from ordinary life. However, class is not just an occasional condition. As we saw in Chapter

Three, class is something that people live in and experience through their bodies and minds. In equal measure to gender, ethnicity and sexuality, class has the latent potential to be a significant source of injury (Sennett and Cobb 1972; see also Charlesworth 2000; Bourdieu *et al* 2002; Sayer 2005).

The purpose of this chapter is to foreground the importance of class in a 'low' policing context. That is, class as it was policed in the ordinary, the routine and mundane dimensions of police work. In so doing, it demonstrates that matters of class are highly relevant in understanding contemporary police culture. The focus on the ordinary has crucial significance in the general retreat from class in current discussions of social justice. As Sayer (2005) argues, the retreat from class in contemporary thinking and political practice is problematic as it allows 'class contempt' and other forms of symbolic domination to persist largely unobserved and unchallenged. A defining feature of symbolic domination, as Bourdieu *et al* (2002) remind us, is its capacity to persuade a subordinate group – through ideology and everyday practices and institutions – that certain moral, political and cultural occurrences are the 'natural order' of things. In the absence of a clear focus on aspects of class in current academic discussions of policing and reform programmes, it is the ordinary and mundane disposition of police culture in regard to the poor which needs to claim our attention.

As we saw in Chapter Three, in the wake of increasing social and economic insecurity, there has been a rise in the intolerance of the poor (Taylor 1999; Young 1999; 2003).

Exclusion of the poor can be seen through blatant and subtle manifestations of 'class contempt'. As Sayer (2005: 163) observes:

Class contempt, like other kinds of 'othering', ranges from visceral revulsion, disgust and sneering, through to the tendency not to see or hear others as people, to the subtlest form of aversion (see also Skeggs 2004).

While it can reveal itself verbally, class contempt can also be seen through a person's facial expressions - 'from the raising of the upper lip into a sneer' or 'from slightly grimaced smiles to aggressive sneers' (Sayer 2005: 163). It is an important form of 'othering', and because it preserves the idea that the poor are lacking the virtues of the majority, it also has a wider role in reproducing class relations (*ibid.*). Class contempt also manifests itself through a person's response to visual and moral 'markers', including: appearance and demeanour; accent and language; values and actions; possessions; and lifestyle (Sayer 2005: 163). What is important for the current context is that such signifiers of class serve as prompts for judgements of worth - or, more to the point, *worthlessness*. Describing someone as 'rough' or 'dirty' is a code for their perceived class and carries powerful moral connotations. At this most basic level, class contempt can shape the way people are perceived and treated, and can profoundly affect someone's life chances (*ibid.*).

As I demonstrate in subsequent sections, in their interactions with the public, the police make judgements based on the personal, behavioural and cultural traits of the poor. Moreover, such judgements are important in reproducing the symbolic domination of this

group. However, in the new organisational and operational policing context, where respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities has become salient, the enduring dimension of class tends to disappear from view. The continuing focus on the poor, including outright class contempt, remains simply taken-for-granted and unheeded in policing practice.

### **A Contradiction Emerges: Diversity and the White Working Class**

As this thesis has demonstrated, the recent history of Staffordshire Police has seen its involvement in a top down drive to produce cultural change. While the change initiative focused on improving the working conditions of personnel inside the organisation, the equitable policing of minority ethnic and gay and lesbian communities, and (mainly female) victims of domestic violence was placed high on the organisational agenda. A core policy focus was the explicit official interdiction of discriminatory conduct. Expressions of racism were especially deplored and a strong disciplinary line was taken against racist comments or utterances within and outside the organisation. The current organisational Diversity Agenda emphasised, and on some instances, *demand*ed that officers afford better regard and treatment to groups which have previously not been equitably served by the police. Officially at least, the organisation was saturated with notions of diversity and its recognition.

However, in assigning recognition to those socially and cultural diverse groups who have traditionally fallen outside of equitable policing, an important tension emerges. Although contact with their diverse ‘publics’ formed an important part of routine policing, the

*overwhelming* focus of police work was on sections of the white ‘underclass’: of which a large proportion was comprised of young men. Such a proposition finds support from recent statistics relating to police stop and search patterns. According to the Force’s *Equality and Diversity Monitoring Report* for 2004-2005, Staffordshire Police officers stopped and searched 1838 people from a minority ethnic background during this period. However, the police similarly subjected almost 18,000 white people to the same practice. In both cases, the majority of these were males. If the monitoring procedures further allowed for employment status, my observations suggest that the picture would demonstrate that a large number of unemployed white males had experienced an adversarial relationship with the police for that period.<sup>2</sup> From my observations, in addition to forming the practical targets of police work, this was the group that also occupied an overridingly prominent position in officers’ occupational consciousness as socially defiling, problematic and in need of control.

### **Policing the ‘Irrelevant’ in Context**

In order to understand how poor, young, white men became the enduring targets of the police in the current study, it is important briefly to locate officers’ occupational culture, and indeed their ‘property’, in the wider environmental context that shaped them both.

Despite its rich history of heavy industry, coal mining and the widespread production and exportation of mass manufacture, contemporary Burslem experiences extensive social and economic deprivation. Recent years have seen the closure of numerous factories and

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<sup>2</sup> While black and minority ethnic groups may be over-represented within recorded stop and search practices, the point I wish to emphasise is that in absolute numbers, the police came into contact with white people far more than their minority ethnic counterparts.

the systematic withdrawal of key employers. Having once contributed £13.4 million in profits to its parent company, one major employer has recently 'relocated production' to Indonesia, thus rupturing traditional employment structures in the area (Hart 2005). While factories have been closed down, little has emerged to replace them. In Burslem, and its neighbouring areas within Stoke-on-Trent, over 15,000 jobs were lost between 1998 and 2001 (*ibid.*). Such processes have resulted in an area which is now characterised by: long-term and inter-generational unemployment; low income and wealth; low educational attainment and poor health. The dramatic de-industrialisation of the area has left a landscape characterised by boarded up buildings and empty factories, derelict land, as well as pockets of chronic poverty in large housing estates and run-down terraced streets.

While the geographical, social and economic arrangement of Wombourne was markedly different to Burslem, the issue of class and economic exclusion is equally significant. As discussed in preceding chapters, the fact that Wombourne NPU borders the urban sprawl of the West Midlands raised a number of issues for the officers in terms of the area's crime problems. Much as in other large urban landscapes, high levels of social and economic deprivation and exclusion features prominently. It was widely believed that the NPU was under constant threat from young and low status male 'outsiders' from some of the West Midlands' less affluent areas. While ethnicity was an important factor in the police's identification of 'outsiders', it will be recalled that one of the underlying factors of police suspicion was heavily class related. In their search for travelling criminals, the police became attuned to signs of poverty, deprivation and 'roughness'. From this

perspective, young, poor *white* males also fell under police suspicion because they were incongruent with the respectable and affluent surroundings of the NPU.

Equally, however, to focus exclusively on officers' preoccupation with 'outsiders' would be to conceal the extent to which they attended to people deemed problematic *within* the NPU. While the small towns and villages covered within Wombourne NPU represent some of the most affluent parts of Staffordshire, there are also key pockets of poverty within these areas.<sup>3</sup> As Cloke (1997) argues, the popular assumption that rural communities are universally stable and affluent, serves to conceal rural poverty. Frequently, the unemployment and under-employment (including its related material disadvantage) experienced by those living in cities is replicated and compounded in rural areas.

Throughout the research, the economically excluded at the base of the social hierarchy formed the core targets of police concern and practice. In both sites, the police viewed themselves as locked in a constant battle with marginal groups who would otherwise 'infest' their respective areas. In the main, it was the 'scrotes' who came to symbolise trouble for the police. While I deal below with the etymology of this term, it was poor, white males to whom the concept was primarily aimed. In many respects, the police were 'street cleaners' (see Ericson 1982; Young 1991). Their work was inextricably linked to those who experience intense disadvantage, and who are stripped of personal dignity: the homeless; the unemployed; drug addicts; alcoholics; prostitutes; and those condemned to living in poverty. Officers viewed themselves as the 'thin blue line' protecting the moral

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Health (2006) *Health Profile for South Staffordshire 2006*. Staffordshire County Council.

majority from those at the bottom of the social strata. Moreover, policing the 'scrotes' became heroic, even exciting.

As demonstrated in Chapter Three, while local in their consequences these themes are symptoms of wider processes in which exclusion, fragmentation and inequality pervade the broad social structure. In contemporary Western liberal democracies, whole spheres of work have disappeared and have created a structurally marginal 'underclass' of the unemployed (Taylor 1999; Young 1999). Poor young men predominantly constitute the 'irrelevant' (Young 1999: 12), and are propelled, in turn, to live out more and more of their daily lives in public spaces. In both Burslem and Wombourne, young men have become particularly displaced. Compelled to occupy public, and thus *police*, space through lack of employment they have become a highly visible emblem of the post-Fordist paradigm.<sup>4</sup> In short, for the police they represent the face of disorder in their respective areas. The high and discernible concentration of 'whiteness' in both sites meant that the police frequently came into contact with poor, young, white men. This group also occupied a prominent position in officers' occupational consciousness as problematic.

A brief reflection on the emblematic whiteness of this group is important in understanding their denigration. Whiteness is a 'colour' which has strong associations with imperialism. As Haylett (2001: 355) argues, however, in the current project of multiculturalism large concentrations of poor white people undermine traditional systems of class and 'race' privilege. Combined with poverty, the whiteness of the poor becomes a source of

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<sup>4</sup> As I explore below, their concentration in impoverished and stigmatized housing estates also marks them out for police attention.

offensiveness and embarrassment. Put simply, the white poor are an 'ugly contradiction: abject *and* white' (*ibid.*: 352). Moreover, for the systems of class and race based advantage to maintain their legitimacy, it is necessary to separate the working class along the lines of 'deservedness' - with the 'roughs' becoming segregated from the 'respectable' working classes (Haylett 2001). As many have noted, the police perceive themselves as falling into the latter (Reiner 2000a) and in their work, differentiate between those they do things *for* and those they do things *to* (Shearing 1981a).<sup>5</sup>

In the context of the current study, despite being close in terms of ethnicity (white) and gender (male) to their 'property', officers were not sympathetic to this group and treated them with active disdain. One explanation for this hinges directly to class in what Taylor (1999: 17) identifies as the 'fear of falling'. In circumstances of economic insecurity, a fear of slipping in status permeates the social structure as a 'metaphorical displacement' (*ibid.*) of a wider set of fears about position in the economic order. This kind of uncertainty breeds intolerance of the poor, and manifests itself in the drawing of moral boundaries between those at the bottom of the social strata and those who, for time being, are secure. Officers in the study came, for the most part, from a 'respectable' working class background and displayed authoritarian and conservative moral ideologies. As I illustrate, they sought to distance themselves from those social groups below them. Moreover, in the wake of the police organisational accent on diversity, poor white males represent an irrelevant and forgotten part of the contemporary policing landscape. They continue to operate as

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<sup>5</sup> This was alluded to by one officer who told me that he did not like to focus his proactive work towards the 'Mr and Mrs Smith's of the world, because they paid into the system'. For him, policing was all about keeping the 'scrotes' in their place.

unproblematic targets for the police use of discretionary powers and authority. What I wish to emphasise is that the stigmatisation of this group in police cultural knowledge and practice as socially impure and disruptive sharply contrasts with the explicit police policy on the need to acknowledge 'diversity'.

### **Classed Places, Classed People: The Spatial Focus on the Poor**

The contemporary poor overwhelmingly reside in impoverished and stigmatised neighbourhoods. During the field work, this point represented an important theme in terms of policing and police culture (see also Young 1991; Chambliss 1994). In attending to their patch, certain places stood out in the contingencies of officers' cultural knowledge about the *who* and *where* of 'trouble': impoverished public housing estates, terraced streets, derelict buildings and other areas to which the most marginalised were relegated. In both Burslem and Wombourne, officers viewed lower working class areas as places to routinely target and gather intelligence. While stable areas were perceived as appreciative and duly deserving of policing services, poor and decaying areas were seen as containing 'anti-police' populations and 'criminal' families (see also Choongh 1998). Moreover, these were localities in which a *crime control* model of policing invariably took precedence. In addition to illustrating many of these themes, the following field note also describes a familiar interaction between the police and their 'property':

Scott and Andy decided it was time for some 'sneaky policing'. They drove to the Barracks Estate which was especially impoverished and known among some officers as 'scrote city'. They didn't like the layout of the estate because it has too many roads going into and out of it – 'the estate is like a rabbit warren, they

can hide anywhere', Andy said. Switching the car lights off so we would not be seen, Andy drove slowly round and round the same run-down streets paying particular attention to public walkways and addresses of those 'known' to them.

After a while they saw four young men sitting on a wall next to a street lamp, said 'Right, here's some shit', and pulled up next to them. They were local men who were white, aged between 17 and 22, and were smoking and drinking cans of beer. Andy asked them what they were doing out at this time of the night. They sheepishly murmured that they were just hanging around because there was nothing else to do. After making some small talk, Scott asked the group for their names, addresses and dates of birth and said, 'Will any of you be known to me?' The group nervously said no and consented to the questioning. None of them were 'known' and we left. Once back in the car, Scott and Andy were pleased that they had gathered some personal information from the 'scrotes' off the Barracks estate – and were particularly pleased that the young locals would go back and tell their associates about the encounter. For Scott and Andy, their presence would indicate to the rest of the 'scrotes' on the estate that the police 'were watching them'. (Field notes - Burslem, August 2004)

For officers, the Barracks Estate represented a 'problem' place which contained 'problem' and socially defiling people. In reality, it was a large and predominantly white council estate in which high levels of unemployment and deprivation were common features. The use of the word 'shit' to describe some of its residents - in this case young, white lower-working class males - appropriately reflects the disdain felt towards the estate and its inhabitants. However, officers were not necessarily concerned to make arrests. In the style

of policing noted by Choongh (1997), they were content to 'informally discipline' and subordinate this section of the community by sending out a symbolic message that the police had 'scrotes' on the estate under surveillance.

The spatial focus on the poor was also a central characteristic of police culture in Wombourne NPU. In particular, officers believed that the stable, affluent and picturesque landscape of Wombourne was fundamentally defiled by the presence of an impoverished housing estate. Inhabited overwhelmingly by a white working class population, the Brickworks Estate occupied a particularly negative place in officers' occupational ideologies. Frequently described as the 'thorn in Wombourne's side', the estate was viewed as disorderly and distasteful:

*Bethan:* What about on the patch? Are there any problems within the NPU?

*Jennifer:* Because of targets and paperwork, we can't patrol like we should. The Brickworks estate is a place that is left to run riot. Trying to deal with the people on there is just ...

*Matt:* It's one of those estates, everywhere has got one. But to us, it's the thorn in Wombourne's side isn't it?

*Jennifer:* It's one of those estates that constantly needs that extra presence and work to say to its residents, 'Well actually, this is *our* area and *we* are in control, not you' ...

*Matt:* You haven't got the time to constantly be on their backs - you know, just to remind them, 'Hey - settle it down a bit'. It's a never-ending cycle. If we could keep on top of it, it would settle. (Focus Group - October 2005)

As Cloke (1997) notes, in addition to experiencing material hardship, poor people living in rural areas are also stigmatised as deviant, dysfunctional, unintelligent and incestuous. These cultural images of the poor living on the Brickworks Estate found strong support within the occupational culture, and in similar fashion to their urban counterparts, officers viewed their task as one of *containing* the area (see also Bittner 1967).

It became increasingly apparent that a core function of the police in Wombourne NPU was to protect the materially affluent classes from the poor and low status groups: whether such a threat came from urban 'outsiders' or from the local 'rough' poor. The dominant crime control values underpinning the type of patrol undertaken on the Brickworks Estate did not extend to areas considered 'decent' and 'respectable'. Rather, when officers attended to the latter it was with a strong *service* outlook:

At around 8pm, an IR came over the radio. A burglar alarm was going off at Grand House (a private residential address) which was located at the other side of the NPU. Ben quickly jumped up, grabbed the car keys and blue-lighted to the address. He was convinced that the house was being burgled by 'outsiders' or other 'scrotes'.

We arrived 15 minutes later at a large gated property in a very secluded part of the NPU. As the house was very beautiful Ben commented, 'How the other half live, hey?' Ben parked the car and began to look around. The house had four tennis courts, approximately six garages and extensive gardens. After conducting a thorough search of the grounds, Ben contacted the ACR to report

that there were no signs of a break-in, nor were there any suspects in the vicinity. The ACR had located the owners of the property and informed Ben that they were on their way to switch off the alarm. Ben suggested that, to be 'on the safe side', we should sit in the car outside the property and wait for the owners to arrive. (Field notes - Wombourne, May 2005)

It is debatable whether such urgency and attention would have been given to this type of incident if it had taken place on the Brickworks Estate. As noted in Chapter Three, contemporary policing increasingly involves patrolling a social order which is divided between the 'dreadful enclosures' of the poor, and the defensible locales of the wealthy (Reiner 1992a). Moreover, the styles of policing to which these two are subjected also differ. While the police view themselves as serving the 'respectable' populations of the stable areas, they are merely concerned to 'keep the lid' (Reiner 2000a: 217) on the locations where the 'underclass' increasingly reside. As the extract demonstrates, contemporary police may be regarded as the 'bodyguards of the possessing classes' (see Altbeker 2005: 113).<sup>6</sup>

Overall, when officers attended to working class locales they were concerned to seek out criminal activity and 'troublesome' individuals. In targeting these areas, another notable contradiction emerges. In particular, the incongruity rule so often followed by officers became largely irrelevant. The police *deliberately* focused on those poor populations which resided on impoverished council estates: that is, those groups who were 'expected' to be there (see Mooney and Young 2000). Encouraged by external pressures to target

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<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps worth noting, however, that Altbeker's (2005) use of this metaphor relates to policing in South Africa.

crime in an efficient way (see Crowther 2000*b*), operational police work was aimed at those areas where sections of the ‘underclass’ were available for the culling. Indeed, and as Young (1999: 44) has noted, from the police perspective, it is easier to ‘trawl in those waters with the likeliest, richest harvest rather than take a ‘pea in a pod’ chance of making an arrest’. I would add that the police focus on working class areas and the petty ‘crimes’ of the poor, also enabled officers to achieve an authentic policing experience as crime-fighters (see Cain 1973).

### **The Language of Class Contempt**

While a striking feature of the research was the general absence of overtly racist language among officers, routine articulations of class contempt were pervasive. Although rarely employing specific class terminology, officers regularly drew upon powerful class imagery in their denigration of the poor:

Tom asked me, ‘Has anyone told you what a scrote is yet?’ After replying that no-one had, he offered me the following picture: ‘scrotes’ are ‘the dregs of society’, the ‘lazy’, ‘unemployed scum’ who reside on ‘shit estates that should have walls built around them to stop them from leaving’. And, just like their council houses, ‘scrotes’ are ‘dirty’ and ‘smelly’ – they are ‘like animals’. Tom assured me that I would meet a lot of ‘scrotes’ over the coming 18 months – particularly in ‘Beirut’ where policing the large number of ‘scrotes’ in the area was like ‘shovelling shit uphill’. (Field notes - Burslem, March 2004)

This field note was written following the first police shift I observed, and Tom's comments were made as he drove around in order to acquaint me with the patrol area. I recall being surprised at the matter-of-fact disparagement of the lower working class since he had otherwise presented himself as 'politically correct' - subscribing, on the face of it, to the language and spirit of the Force's Diversity Agenda. Indeed, moments earlier Tom had shown me where members of 'our local ethnic minority community' live. In addition to representing another illustration of how class permeated police culture, a number of other important issues are raised by this field note.

First, there is the term 'scrote'. Throughout the research, this term was routinely used by officers. Originating as a shortened version of 'scrotum', it was a specific descriptor for an identifiable section of the population in both research sites.<sup>7</sup> It was heavily loaded with meaning and was used to describe members of low status groups who were considered socially, economically and politically inferior: drug addicts; the homeless; residents of run-down streets and estates; the unemployed hanging around in public space; and individuals already 'known' to the police. While the term appears 'race' neutral, the most universal characteristic was that it indicated the low social, political and economic position of the person to whom it was being applied. And in practice, for the police, 'scrote' predominantly denoted 'young, poor, white male'. Privacy has an important class dimension (Stinchcombe 1965; see Reiner 2000a), and in the current social landscape

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<sup>7</sup>According to a number of dictionaries the meaning of 'scrote' ranges from 'a term of abuse' to a 'despicable person'. One dictionary refers to a newspaper article which features a man from West Belfast recounting his treatment by British paratroopers during the 'troubles'. He reported, 'they had a name for us - it was scrotes - they were young guys and aggressive' (*The Sunday Times* 29/01/05 cited in, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, A & C Black: London).

where young white males were relegated to living their lives in street space through lack of employment, the assigning of the term 'scrote' to this group may not be wholly surprising.

'Scrote' was a particularly derogatory epithet which reflected a moral judgement on the social, economic and cultural character of the local poor and powerless. Although there is no explicit reference to class, the classed component of the disparagement was clear. It symbolised police disdain at the lack of material possessions, and the associated lack of moral and cultural virtues of the poor at the bottom of the social hierarchy. 'Scrotes' were assumed to have a 'natural' propensity to crime because, for the police, they were 'too lazy to get a job', or because 'their scrote families are the same' (see also Young 1991). As the extract suggests, 'scrotes' stood as the omnipresent adversary of the police, most notably reflected in the remark that policing them was like 'shovelling shit uphill'. In short, 'scrote' operated as a comprehensive term for a range of negative meanings and provided the police with a population that they could readily recognise. As I explore below, this also shaped the way officers interacted with those individuals identified in this way.

That the concept assumed a common currency highlights the role of language in police culture. 'Scrote' is clearly a variation of the epithets used by the police to describe their 'property' in differing settings (see Ericson 1982; Smith and Gray 1985; Young 1991). An in-depth examination of the tacit meanings and stigmatisation processes behind police labelling has been provided by Van Maanen (1978a) who recognised the importance of assigning epithets to 'assholes'. The assigning of the label carries a number of important functions in police culture. One of the primary functions of this kind of labelling process is

its ability to establish social distance from those who are routinely policed. Second, it also gives meaning to the role of police officers as protectors and crime-fighters. 'Scrotes' represented not only the police's main adversaries, but equally, 'what was wrong with the world, out there' (*ibid.*: 224). Finally, as noted by Van Maanen (1978a: 235), the general currency of the expression 'solidifies police organisations around at least one common function'.<sup>8</sup>

Returning to the previous field note, a number of further points are important. Tom's comments were made in the context of his role as a police officer. He was extremely open about his contempt for the poor, but felt no need to *manage* his talk in relation to this group. One of the striking features of the research was the widespread expressions of class contempt among front line officers. Moreover, such sentiments did not attract any rebuke or moral condemnation either from immediate colleagues or, in some instances, from superiors. While some senior officers may have disapproved of such overtly explicit language, the officer's articulation of class contempt was both highly 'front-staged' (Goffman 1990a) and in no way atypical:

Duncan, Scott and Chris came into the parade room where Nick, Matt, Sergeant Jones and I were sitting. They seemed excited and were laughing as they began to recount an earlier incident involving themselves and Shaun – a 'known scrote' who, by all accounts, is homeless. The officers had initially suspected Shaun of having some drugs on him but, in the beginning, he would not let them search him. The

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<sup>8</sup> This latter point receives considerable support in the context of the present study, where photographs of 'scrotes' occupied a large section of wall space in police parade rooms. The official term for the mainly young, white males whose images were pinned up around the parade room walls was 'nominals'; yet scrawled next to the photographs on one wall was, 'scrotes'.

general conversation was very animated, full of bravado and laughter, and revolved around their disgust at Shaun's poverty and lack of dignity.

*Duncan:* The little scrote definitely had some on him but he was being an arsehole

*Scott:* Yeah, wouldn't let us touch him though – as if I wanted to. Honestly, if you could swap smack [heroin] for soap our job would be easier.

*Nick:* You should have done a section 5 [Public Order Act] on him, brought him in and stripped searched the dirty shit.

*Chris:* Fuck that - that's what he probably wanted. Dirty bastard gets a nice clean bed, cup of tea and a roof for the night.

*Sergeant Jones [Laughing]:* You wouldn't make it [tea] though! Did you take him in then?

*Duncan:* No – he let us search him in the end but we found nothing, probably swallowed it. (Field notes - Burslem, April 2004)

What needs to be emphasised here is that this pervasive, and widely tolerated, way of talking about the poor stands in sharp contrast to the current organisational stance towards discrimination: that is, where a strong disciplinary line is taken against expressions of racism, sexism and homophobia. While most officers were concerned to avoid using any overtly discriminatory language along the lines of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, they were distinctly unconcerned when talking derogatorily about the white poor.

'Police talk' has been much debated in recent years. On the one hand its value as an indicator of police behaviour has been criticised (Waddington 1999b). Conversely, while the relationship between words and behaviour is indicative of a more general problematic

in the social sciences, some critical linguists argue that language *itself* is a form of practice (Edley 2001). During the research, while the classed nature of police culture was apparent in officers' talk, it also manifested itself in the routine policing of the poor.

### **Classed Bodies: A Visual Register**

As Sayer (2005) notes, class contempt is acutely sensitive to indicators of appearance, accent, clothing and possessions. Moreover, he suggests that such markers extend into judgements of moral worth. In both sites, the poor were highly visible and recognisable within the occupational culture because they displayed important signifiers. Put simply, the police could *see* scrotes 'a mile off'. The following field note was recorded during the routine policing of a local football match and provides an illustration of this:

John and I went over to stand with two of the sergeants and their officers who were located by the parking bay. The stadium gate had now been opened and a number of fans started to get out of their buses and cars and make their way towards the entrance. Those coming through the gates were predominantly young (aged around 18–30) white men with short or shaven hair. As they started to walk past us the police stopped talking amongst themselves and stared intently at the group. Although some of the men stared back, many of them dropped their eyes to the floor and continued to walk towards the stadium. As they were doing so the following conversation ensued:

*Richard* [looking them up and down with a stern frown]: Look at them – they're like a bunch of animals

*Phillip*: I know. Why is it you can tell a scrote a mile off? I'm telling you, if you see anyone in shell suit [tracksuit] bottoms, cheap bling [jewellery], T-shirts with a waft of stale cigarettes and shit trailing behind them – a guaranteed scrote

*Shaun*: What gets me though is that they have started to wear Stone Ivory jumpers, £200 a piece, yet they can't be arsed to work and live in shit holes

*Richard* [sniggering]: They're probably nicked – they can't buy them with their giros [state benefits] can they? ...

Phillip then approached some of the young men and told them that there was a lot of bobbies about tonight and if there was any 'agro' they would all be 'coming in' for the night. There were some murmurings from the group, but no conflict on their part.

(Field notes - Burslem, May 2004)

Signs of class lifestyle are emblemised in the flesh; or as Bourdieu (1984: 190) puts it, 'the body is the most indisputable materialisation of class taste'. As well as reflecting the way in which sections of the poor were viewed within a framework of class, this incident also demonstrates how the bodies of the poor became implicated in the occupational consciousness of police officers. Marking of lower working class bodies as defiling and socially deficient came to be associated with a visual register held within the occupational culture, and officers readily recognised and delineated their 'property' through the associated markers (see also Young 1991).

For the police, clothes, bodily comportment, articulation and even smell (actual or imagined) all betrayed the class origins of 'scrotes'. Moreover, the identification of the

poor according to the officers' cultural dictionary (Chan 1997: 68) frequently set the rationale for interaction. Although this kind of recognition operates at the deeper level of cultural knowledge, it was also overtly acknowledged and used to the advantage of the organisation. For example, officers involved in covert operations to suppress certain forms of street crime often adopted the dress, manners and speech associated with 'scrotes' in order to pass as 'one of them'.<sup>9</sup>

The bodily appearance of the poor came to be associated not only with a perceived 'innate criminality', but also, their intrinsic lack of moral worth. The following extract records a shift in which I attended a court session with a community beat officer who was giving evidence against two 18-year old males charged with affray and criminal damage:

*Jim and Dave [the defendants] were outside the courthouse having a cigarette with Jim's dad when Matthew and I arrived. [...] We were sitting in the witness room when Jim and Dave came back up the stairs and walked past us. Matthew scowled and said angrily to me, 'It's disgusting that people think they can turn up to court dressed like that. It makes me sick. Have they no respect for anything?' Jim and Dave were pale and thin. They were wearing t-shirts, jeans, trainers and chunky gold jewellery. They both had skinheads with tram lines cut into the back of their hair. Matthew said that he couldn't wait to see them get 'potted' [sent to prison] as there would be 'two less scrotes to worry about' on his patch. (Field notes - Wombourne, June 2005)*

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<sup>9</sup> And as Box (1983; 1994) reminds us, the police focus on 'street crime' is inevitably aimed at those people with least resources.

As Sayer (2005) argues, a person's class can profoundly affect how others value and respond to him or her. The injuries of class are inflicted not only in economic disadvantage but also, crucially, in experiences of class contempt and symbolic domination - including a withholding of recognition. It is perhaps unsurprising that a frequent complaint made against the police is that they are impolite in their dealings with certain members of the public, with the unemployed feeling particularly disrespected (Choongh 1998). Equally, and referring back to the emotional aspects of class contempt, the facial expressions of the officers in the above extracts also betray their repulsion and disgust at the poor.

In both reactive and proactive encounters, the poor occupied a prominent place in officers' practical daily workload. As noted earlier, it is particularly important to focus on the latter type of encounter as the choices officers make regarding the *who* and *where* of crime conveys a great deal about their priorities, values and commitments in controlling their respective areas (Rubenstein 1973). As we saw, officers' rejection of the poor extended to whole areas such as public housing estates. These areas were frequently targeted and held significance in the police occupational culture as containing problematic populations, ranging from the 'disorderly' and 'criminal' to 'benefit scroungers' (see also Young 1991). Moreover, while the bodies of the poor were coded in terms of dirt and filth, their homes also represented sites of disorder and uncleanness, as captured during the following focus group:

*Samuel:* It was a big culture shock for me joining the job because I have walked into a house in West Street ... [all laughing: ahhh that one!]

*Howard:* Name and shame them, I would ...

*Samuel:* I walked into the house and my feet were sticking to the carpet it was that dirty. I actually couldn't breathe - the smell of piss. I had to say to the guy can you come and sit in the car ...

*Gary:* [Laughing] Your shift sent you there on purpose!

*Scott:* [Quite aggressively] People seem to not have a grasp of how to live their life. Their idea of a life is finally getting your house off the council, and then being able get your benefits ... to sit in, drink beer, smoke and watch television - and that's their life, their lifestyle. (Burslem - August 2004)

Officers' criticism of lower working class predicaments, such as being on state benefits and relegated to living in poor public housing, appears to be bound up with notions of cleanliness, dirt and 'respectability'. For Young (1991), the police are particularly averse to the poor because they stand in opposition to what the police themselves represent as enforcers of respectability (see also Ericson 1982). The organisational emphasis on discipline and uniformity accentuates police disdain for those regarded as 'falling short' of such standards. Nonetheless, Sibley (1995) argues that references to bodily waste, disease and impurity are an important factor in the exclusion of marginal groups. Indeed, exclusionary discourses in respect of the poor have always centred on notions of filth, disease and the attribution of animal characteristics to the impoverished (*ibid.*). While this is apparent in a number of extracts presented here, the police emphasis on dirt and disease also manifested itself in a directly physical aspect of police procedure: namely,

through putting on surgical gloves before touching those poor and dispossessed groups who were the subject of a policing operation.

### **Unemployment and the Erosion of Worth**

Unemployment was an issue that featured heavily throughout the research and presents a further instance of the way in which class pervades the occupational culture of the police. It had a practical dimension where the employment status of an individual needed to be established for some bureaucratic requirement, such as taking a formal statement or collating the file of a person brought into custody. However, it was also clear that 'unemployed' was in itself a category saturated with meaning and signalling the moral worth of a person. Officers routinely asked their 'property' for their employment status: often in the *absence* of any bureaucratic need. The question, 'Are you working?' was a generally loaded one aimed at exposing the moral worth of that person. It was also principally directed towards males. The following field note demonstrates the way in which these notions of worth played out in the course of everyday interactions:

A young boy had been hit by a car in Lower Lane – a narrow terraced and rather run down and dilapidated street. Will and I were at the other side of the NPU and arrived just after the rest of the shift and the ambulance crew. [...] Residents had come out of their houses to see what was going on and were standing around and watching all of the commotion. Will was approaching some of them and asking whether anybody had seen anything. He saw Jamie sitting on a kerb (a white male who was in his 20s). He was wearing a scruffy white vest, tracksuit bottoms with holes in them and had a

muddy face and hands. Will said, 'Come on Beth, let's go and check out this scrote while we are here'.

Will walked over, stood over the lad and said, 'I know you don't I'? Jamie uncomfortably shuffled and replied, 'Don't know'. Will then asked him, 'Are you still on the bad stuff [drugs] or the good stuff now'? Jamie said that he was being good and staying out of trouble. Finally Will asked, 'Are you working?' When Jamie answered that he wasn't, Will turned to me, rolled his eyes and gave me a knowing smirk. Walking away, Will commented that: 'If he can't be arsed getting a job he is never going to sort his shit out'. (Field notes - Burslem, March 2004)

For the police, the unemployed represent the 'social dirt' (Young 1991: 13) of society and are viewed with particular disdain. More generally, and in more private spaces such as the police car, officers would routinely give moral lectures to (what they termed) 'prisoners' in which a central feature would be to 'get themselves a job'. For the police, getting a job was the surest route to respectability and staying out of trouble.

Ironically, because of current structural arrangements in which generations of young men are excluded from traditional employment trajectories, officers *did* frequently come into contact with people who had no legitimate employment. It was, then, just a short step for the police to associate unemployment with crime and disorderliness. Males who inhabited public space during the days and times associated with 'work' were viewed with suspicion:

John and Martin were driving through one of the more affluent areas of the NPU. A white male in his late 20s with no shirt on (it was tucked into his jeans) was walking in the opposite direction. John said, 'What the hell is he doing walking around here on a Monday afternoon'? He turned the car around, pulled up next to the man and asked, 'Hey mate - do you mind if I ask you what you are doing around these parts'? The man replied that he had stayed with some friends over the weekend in the area, and was walking to the bus stop. John started to ask where his friends lived. Annoyed at the police intrusion, the man began to question why he had been stopped, but was subsequently allowed to go.

In the car, Martin said that his suspicion had become aroused because that 'type' of person looked out of place in the area. He explained that a lot of burglars know that the people who live in the nice houses are out at work during the daytime, and because 'criminals don't have jobs' it is a perfect time to steal from them. (Field Notes - Wombourne, May 2005)

Young unemployed males were perceived as problematic because work is believed to be the main way in which males both acquire discipline and their major source of identity (Box 1987; 1994). These cultural meanings of work found support in the occupational consciousness of officers. For the police, the unemployed are more likely both to commit economic forms of crime such as burglary and theft, and to occupy public street space: that is, space which it is the police's function to keep orderly (Ericson 1982). As noted earlier, the police also view themselves as guardians of public morality. In so doing, they juxtapose the 'rough' lower unemployed classes with the 'respectable' *working* classes,

and are committed to supporting the interests of the latter in both discourse and practice (Shearing 1981a; Reiner 2000a).

### **Under-acknowledged: Victimisation and the White Poor**

The improved recording, investigation and prosecution of crime committed against minority ethnic, gay and lesbian people and women have been placed high on Staffordshire Police's reform agenda. However, the new organisational approach to the victimisation of these groups did not seem to be considered when officers responded to some sections of the white 'underclass'.

Poor and low status members of the public were frequently viewed with suspicion, and this was heightened if the person was previously 'known' to the police. While having a record of past criminal encounters with the police served as an important prompt for police attention (see also Smith and Gray 1985; Choongh 1997), it could also shape police responses to *victims* of crime. In particular, some officers failed to display sympathy or quality of service towards people seen as 'scrotes':

Collin and Don responded to an incident on the Westville Estate. The ACR was giving them further details as they drove there: a young couple had been lying in bed when they heard their front living room window get smashed in. The boyfriend came downstairs to find two bricks on his living room floor and the girlfriend, who was still upstairs, saw three men running away into the night. When we arrived at the house Collin said, 'I'm sure I've been here before. If it's the same guy, he's known'. We walked into a run down house with no

carpets and hardly any furniture to find glass shattered all over the front room, which the young woman was brushing up. Her boyfriend came through from the kitchen and was annoyed at what had happened. He told the officers to go and find out who had done it. This seemed to annoy Don who appeared to be very 'standoffish' and unsympathetic. Collin was also very blasé and told the couple that they would drive around the estate to see if they could see anyone.

However, the main solution offered by the officers was that they would send another officer around in the morning to take a proper statement. [...] Back in the car, Collin surmised that the boyfriend was only a 'scrote' drug dealer who had probably had his window smashed by disgruntled customers or people to whom he owed money. He then did a police check on the boyfriend – despite him being the victim of criminal damage. He was 'known' on SPIN but had no formal record. Very little effort was put into the search for the perpetrators of the incident, and it seemed to me that the low status of the victim profoundly influenced the officers' response to the situation.

(Field notes - Burslem, June 2004).

As Choongh (1997: 46) notes, people who have been found guilty of past crimes, or indeed are merely suspected of being involved in criminal matters, are never considered as 'entirely innocent'. However, while the combination of being poor and 'known' were crucial factors in the nonchalant police response, I would also add that the *whiteness* of the complainant played a subtle role in this incident. Current organisational drives emphasise a distinctly proactive policing approach towards the victimisation experienced by minority ethnic, gay, lesbian and female members of the public. As illustrated in

Chapter Six, when officers were called to incidents involving minority ethnic people as victims of crime, some displayed visible anxiety. This anxiety stemmed principally from their acute awareness that they are under pressure to deal with potential 'hate crime' incidents in a thorough, sensitive and professional manner. This new understanding often impacted upon the practices of officers as they dealt with such incidents. However, if members of minority ethnic communities represent organisational 'trouble' within police culture, poor white members of the 'underclass' fundamentally do not.

As reflected in the above extract, both the discursive and practical response to the poor and low status white complainant is in sharp contrast to the current organisational stance towards members of minority groups as victims of crime. Yet this is particularly problematic when the poorest sections of society experience the highest levels of victimisation (Young 1999; Mooney and Young 2000). While poor and low status groups have the greatest need for policing services, it would appear that the white poor occasionally fail to receive an equivalent level of recognition to their socially and culturally 'diverse' counterparts.

In addition to promoting a more proactive approach to victimisation, it will also be recalled that the Force's 'Anti-Discrimination Code of Conduct' places an onus on individual officers to treat everyone with whom they come into contact with dignity and respect. Officers sometimes failed to conform to this ruling when dealing with sections of the white 'underclass':

While sitting in the parade room, Paul and Nick were asked to respond to a report of a man who was lying, apparently unconscious, down an alleyway in Cobble Street. Although it was dark, it became clear that a middle-aged white man was curled up on the floor with his eyes closed. He was wearing a thick overcoat and looked very dishevelled. A dog was standing over him and began to bark at the police car. Almost immediately, the officers presumed that the man was a homeless person who was drunk. Because of this assumption, they didn't get out of the police car to attend to him. Instead, they began to shout and throw sweets at the man in an attempt to wake him up. When the man looked up and began to mutter and ramble, the officers decided that he was indeed a 'homeless drunk', and drove away. (Field notes - Burslem, June 2004)

### **'Redundant' Identities: Consent and Compliance**

What is notable in some of the extracts reproduced here is the way in which sections of the white 'underclass' merely consented to police intrusion. Indeed, while some interactions between the police and this group were characterised by friction and hostility, one of the striking features of the research was the level of compliance demonstrated by the white poor during their encounters with the police. In stop and search contexts (and indeed during arrest and detention), it was noted that a significant number of interactions were largely unproblematic and seemingly consensual. The following extract, which was written after an organised drugs raid, demonstrates this:

The 'sniffer' dog started to bark at the sofa. Tony and Stephen cut the lining of the sofa open and found a pipe which they suspected was being used to smoke crack and heroin. Tony also found a small amount of heroin in a hole

in the floor. The man who lived there was a chronic heroin addict. He was extremely thin and many of his teeth were missing. After being subjected to a strip search, he was now sitting on the uncarpeted floor in handcuffs. The man was co-operative throughout, and was even laughing and joking with the police. He seemed to know the officers, and the relationship between the police and the man was very relaxed, friendly and consensual. At one point, the arresting officer asked him, 'Do you want a brief [solicitor], or shall we keep this quick'? The man answered that he would rather 'get it over and done with' as he didn't want to spend the night in the cells. The officer replied, 'Yeah - no problem mate. If you don't have a brief you should be out by tonight'. (Field notes - Burslem, March 2004).

As Dixon (1997: 92) notes, while interactions between the police and the subject of their attention may be sociable, 'they are never equal exchanges'. In addition to reflecting how some officers discouraged access to a solicitor, this extract also raises the issue of consent and compliance. As many have noted, the police prefer to obtain the consent of those with whom they come into contact, rather than to rely on their legal powers (McBarnet 1981; McConville *et al* 1991; Dixon 1997). While a number of reasons may explain why people readily submit to police intrusion, fear of the police and a lack of knowledge about rights are particularly important.<sup>10</sup> However, to view the issue of consent as based solely on ignorance about rights is to overlook the social, economic and political position of those who form the objects of routine policing (Dixon 1997).

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<sup>10</sup> Highly valued aspects of police culture such as maintaining authority, and wider influences such as the grammar of the law as authoritative, can also serve to subdue people during police encounters (see McConville *et al* 1991).

As noted in Chapter Three, Charlesworth (2000: 77) argues that the poorest sections of the working class find themselves 'linguistically dispossessed' in describing their diminishing dignity and sense of alienation, frustration and domination. He warned that, in the wake of their increasing exclusion from the major spheres of social life, the poor have become 'unreflective actors': they lack the resources necessary to represent and defend themselves against hegemony and symbolic domination. Without wishing to portray the poor as 'cultural dopes', what I want to emphasise here is that as a result of their lack of social, economic and political power, sections of the white 'underclass' are unable to defend themselves against police intrusion. Frequently, they handed themselves over to the police as passive and submissive 'bodies':

Mark drove up to a group of older teenagers/young men who were huddled around an old bike outside one of the houses on the Brickworks Estate. Pulling up to the group, he wound down his window and said, 'Simon says put your hands in the air'. Looking apprehensive, the group began to put their hands in the air. Laughing, Mark asked the group why they were not in work or college. Most of them said that they didn't have a job but were looking for one. Although he already knew some of them, Mark asked each of the group for their names, dates of birth and addresses. As he explained, 'I want to check whether any of you were wanted by the police for anything'. All members of the group consented to the checks, which came back clear. Mark later suggested that one of the lads had an older brother who had been in prison, and because of this, he wanted to keep an extra eye on him. (Field notes - Wombourne, June 2005).

What transpired during the research was an apparent difference between those groups which demonstrated a heightened awareness regarding their position as enduring targets of policing, and those that did not. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, the relationship between the police and certain members of minority ethnic communities could be strained and fraught with conflict. Although not exclusively, this was often the result of the latter's belief that their ethnicity was the basis for police attention; a factor, it will be recalled, which caused a great deal of anxiety and resentment amongst the police.

Conversely however, the white poor have been unable to construct an authentic political identity in recent years (Haylett 2001).<sup>11</sup> While a number of social groups have experienced increasing recognition of their social and cultural differences, the white 'underclass' have failed to gain access to prevailing notions of recognition. Rather, their identities have become increasingly 'redundant' (McDowell 2003) and stigmatised (Haylett 2001). Moreover, a defining characteristic of 'police property' is that their control by the police is 'supported by an apparent social consensus to 'let the police handle these people'' (Lee 1981: 53). Against the backdrop of their social, political, and economic exclusion, poor white men represent a reliable and 'safe' population for the police to control without risk of recrimination or reproach from both the organisation and the wider public.

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<sup>11</sup> Recent discussions about the predicament of the white working class have come from the far Right – most notably through the British National Party (BNP). However, this kind of association arguably dampens the likelihood of sympathetic debate about the white poor.

## **Fractures in the Occupational Culture: Understanding the ‘Crime Problem’**

In order to provide a more inclusive account of contemporary police culture, preceding chapters have considered the ways in which the police transcend what is regarded as the core values in police culture. It is, then, important to demonstrate the differences that were observed in relation to the classed nature of police culture.

While the idea that police work impacts most heavily on the marginal and dispossessed has achieved something of an academic orthodoxy, it is worth noting that the police *themselves* are aware that the bulk of their work involves dealing with the poor and disadvantaged. However, while class contempt towards the poor represented a pervasive feature of police culture, some officers adopted a sympathetic attitude towards the predicament of this group:

Jacqui headed to the Brickworks Estate for a drive around. It is quite a large estate with a mixture of council and owner occupied properties. Many parts of it are very run down and it has gained a reputation among officers as where the local criminals come from. Pulling into the estate, Jacqui was critical of some of her colleagues’ targeting of the estate, and said that she liked to talk to the residents to show that the police were ‘human’.

Even though it was pouring with rain, a few older teenagers were hanging around on River Street, and were kicking a football against a garage wall. Jacqui pulled up in the car to talk to them. They were familiar with her, and she was asking them why they were out in the rain. The group were saying that

there was nothing for them to do in the area, and that they were bored. Jacqui agreed and was encouraging them to write to their local Member of Parliament to try to get a new park, or other facilities, set up. After we drove off, Jacqui expressed a lot of sympathy for the group, and said that she could understand how young people became involved in crime, and how more should be done to 'help get them off the streets'. (Field notes – Wombourne, April 2005).

While this response may have a gendered dimension, it also demonstrates the different policing outlooks towards the poor.<sup>12</sup> As Reiner (1978; 2000a) notes, the police - through their occupational experiences - are well attuned to the status divisions which characterise the social structure. Arising partly from their involvement in dealing with society's 'dirty work' (Hughes 1962, *cited in* Waddington 1999b), the police become acutely aware that 'society does not bestow fair and equal chances' (Reiner 2000a: 92-93). While most officers adopted particularly narrow and individualistic views of the 'crime problem', a number of officers understood that 'crime' does not exist in isolation, but is rather, a consequence of broader social and economic problems. The following exchange between some CAT officers in Burslem provides an illustration of this view:

*Robert:* I think with Burslem because of the decline of the pottery industry ...

*Neil:* It's a very depressed area ...

*Robert:* There's a whole lot of people who were good, hardworking people but have had their livelihoods just snatched away from them. And now, there

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<sup>12</sup> As several scholars have observed, women police officers often take a more sensitive and less confrontational approach to their work (Young 1991; Westmarland 2001b). It may also be worth noting that Jacqui was a lone parent with a teenage son, a point which may also explain her sympathetic treatment of the young men in the above extract.

is nothing else for them. So it's a depressed place, and I think that's where a lot of crime is generated from. A lot of the people that you arrest or speak to, because they are on these drugs, were once hardworking and decent people.

*Ken:* Or it's their families - the children of the parents who were in industry but have been made redundant. Then the family life has gone down and the children ... it splinters out into all sorts of crime.

*Robert:* There is a saying about this area. They say, 'No-one retires from the pottery industry, they are made redundant'. For the last decade or so that is true.

*Neil:* There's nothing. They have a few call centres up and coming, but there's nothing in this area. If you weren't born here you wouldn't move here. There is nothing in Stoke that would attract people. So being so depressed is one of our greatest problems for crime.

(Focus Group - November 2005)

In addition to reflecting officers' preoccupation with employment as an indicator of 'decency', this extract also demonstrates a deeper-level understanding of how adverse economic restructuring can impact upon a person's involvement in behaviours which are defined as crime.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the public initiated some of the interactions between the police and sections of the lower-working class. From this perspective, the police's contact with the poor was, in part, influenced by deployment patterns. Crucially however, what this chapter has attempted to emphasise is that the police's acquired cultural knowledge informed them that, *primarily*, it was those residual working class populations

on impoverished housing estates and public spaces that were more likely to engage in crime and deviance. And as we have seen, within their occupational consciousness such groups were reviled and viewed with disdain. Moreover, during *proactive* patrols this way of viewing the poor routinely prompted police suspicion and became the basis for contact with this section of society.

### **Conclusion: Policing and the Continuing Significance of Class**

As this chapter demonstrates, the targets of operational police work are essentially unchanged in contemporary society. Much as in the past, the objective of the police is to control the economically excluded (Crowther 2000a; Young 1999; 2003). In particular, while interactions with their diverse 'publics' formed an important part of police work, the *overwhelming* focus of police attention was on the white 'underclass'. In this regard, an important contradiction thus emerges between the dominant organisational discourse, and the realities of routine policing. Staffordshire Police's reform agenda has strongly emphasised the equitable policing of minority ethnic, gay, lesbian and female members of the public. As demonstrated here, however, there is no similar injunction on the police to treat the white poor in the same manner. While a heightened anxiety and awareness about the equitable policing of minority ethnic communities pervades contemporary police ideologies and practices, officers were distinctly unconcerned in their dealings with white 'scrotes'. From this perspective, the official emphasis on respect for 'diversity' would appear to have the effect of delivering up young, powerless, white males as uncontentionally legitimate objects for the unchallenged exercise of police discretion and authority. Moreover, despite its absence in prevailing police discussions and reform

agendas, the focus on the poor fundamentally highlights the enduring dimension of class in policing. In the new organisational and operational policing context where respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities has become salient, the importance of class - including class contempt - remains simply taken-for-granted and unchallenged in policing practice

As I have demonstrated, issues of class pervaded daily narratives and interactions. In particular, 'class contempt' (Sayer 2005: 163) was a pervasive and seemingly acceptable feature of the occupational culture of officers in the study. While class did not necessarily operate at the surface level of officers' discourse and interactions, the class iconography often drawn upon by officers implies that it was present at the deeper level. In police practices, officers' informal cultural knowledge was infused with class themes and orientated them towards those whose bodily appearance and comportment betrayed their class origins. Although the police have always controlled and displayed contempt towards the lower strata, what is *new* is that it is happening against the backdrop of a policing agenda which overwhelmingly emphasises diversity. As we have seen however, in addition to the problem of redistribution, the poor also become implicated in the struggle for recognition (*ibid.*: see also Charlesworth 2000; Bourdieu *et al* 2002).

A number of wider issues are important here. First, the police act as an important carrier and authoriser of class contempt. At an implicit level, the value choices reflected in their cultural knowledge (Chan 1997), along with the routine attention devoted by the police to lower working-class crime and localities, serve to reinforce the more widely diffused

disregard for the poor in society at large. Second, the impunity with which officers focus on, and talk about the white poor also reiterates, or 'confirms', their status as legitimate targets for contempt. Exacerbated by the current emphasis on 'performance', the result is that the main focus of street policing continues to be on working class crimes and areas. In focusing unproblematically on the poorest sections of the working class, the police continue to reproduce the exclusion and symbolic domination of this group (see also Manning 1994).

Taking class contempt as a relatively unexamined aspect of police culture, this chapter accordingly raises questions about the place of class, explored here through the white poor, in current 'policing diversity' debates. While contemporary notions of diversity are functional for promoting a better public image of the police organisation, they can obscure the realities of day-to-day policing. Indeed, while the accent on 'diversity' is paramount for those groups who have previously not been equitably served by the police, it is somewhat risky as a result of its potential to divert attention away from the policing of the white 'underclass'. I return to a number of these issues in the following, and final, chapter.

## Chapter Eight

### **Continuity and Change in Police Occupational Culture**

Adopting an ethnographic approach, this thesis has explored how changes in the social, economic, political and organisational context of policing have impacted upon the occupational value systems and practices of contemporary police officers. The study was conducted in the local context of Staffordshire Police which, in recent years, has been concerned to effect cultural change. The reform programme has been aimed at both improving relations inside the organisation, and the delivery of an effective and equitable service to the diverse 'publics' that make up the county. In broader terms, the case of Staffordshire Police provides an important context for examining the extent to which social, economic and political change has transformed contemporary police culture.

In Chapter One, I argued that in order to provide an up to date account of police culture new lines of research and reflection which could track the shifts in the wider field of policing were needed. Having provided a discussion about the sources and characteristics of police culture in Chapter Two, the following chapter then outlined the broader social, economic and political field of contemporary British policing. The following four chapters presented the core findings from the empirical investigation. While Chapter Four outlined Staffordshire Police's reform agenda and examined its impact upon the organisation's internal working environment, Chapter Five considered the relevance of

the ‘classic’ themes from the literature on police culture for the new policing context. Chapter Six sought to understand how the new policing realities have shaped relations between the police and those groups currently emphasised in ‘policing diversity’ policy agendas. With a focus on the policing of the white poor, Chapter Seven demonstrated that issues of class remain crucial in understanding contemporary policing discourses and practices.

With these brief summaries in mind, it is possible to begin to address some of the key questions that instigated this thesis. It will be recalled that the overarching research framework was to examine how the occupational culture of the police has been shaped by two transitions. First, the wider *national* context of social and political change, and second, the *local* context of internal changes made since 1996 to reform the organisational culture of Staffordshire Police. Harnessing together such enquiries, how then, can we best sum up the way in which changes in the external and internal policing environment have impacted upon the values, assumptions and practices of officers in the new millennium?

Many of the features found by earlier researchers remain remarkably persistent today. However, the new policing realities have also transformed police culture in complex ways. Growing social diversity inside and outside the police organisation has undoubtedly impacted upon current police perspectives and practices. Yet the way in which officers have responded to the altered policing landscape is neither universal nor

uniform. Police cultural change, in short, is fluid, complex and contradictory. The story of contemporary police culture, therefore, is one of both change *and* continuity.

In addressing this, I will return to three central themes which cut across the preceding chapters. The first is the relative endurance of some classic themes of police culture. The second relates to how the national and local emphasis on diversity has impacted upon the police as they relate to their socially and culturally diverse colleagues and members of the public. The final theme returns to the continuing dimension of class in policing.

### **Classic Themes in a Contemporary Policing Context**

One of the striking features of the research was the persistence of a substantially similar set of characteristics of police culture to those identified almost half a century ago by previous police research. Indeed, despite the significant changes that have occurred in policing between this study and the classic ethnographies, the continuities in police culture were more evident than the differences. A collection of ‘core characteristics’ (Reiner 2000a) remain around: crime-fighting and its associated sense of mission; thirst for action and excitement; a strong masculine ethos; cynicism and pessimism; suspicion, isolation and solidarity; moral and political conservatism; and pragmatism.

Of contemporary relevance, however, is how these established norms and values interact with the new and altered policing environment. Since the classic ethnographies, processes of diversification and new ways of envisaging the police role have become increasingly prominent. In particular, efforts to reform the way contemporary police organisations

relate to their 'publics' have been supported by a broad move towards community policing. New generations of police officers are required to adopt a responsive, rather than a rigid, policing style. Moreover, officers are also expected to move in a direction which promotes consensual and service orientated, as opposed to confrontational, policing. Central to these shifts has been the redefinition of the public as police 'customers'. In Staffordshire, the enduring characteristics of police culture predominantly conflicted with, and undermined, these contemporary reform efforts. While a number of officers acquiesced in the ideologies underpinning community policing, the majority were orientated towards a 'crime-fighting' image of their role. As a consequence, new community initiatives were substantially disparaged and undermined. Similarly, the overarching preoccupation with the imagery of confrontation and excitement could lead to the use of more coercive tactics during interactions with members of the public. More generally, the theme of solidarity was important for perpetuating feelings of isolation from the wider public. As we saw, on-the-spot decisions in policing their external environment were frequently determined by classic stereotypes that the police held about particular social groups and situations. This could lead to patterns of differentiation along the lines of age, class, gender and race and ethnicity.

It has long been recognised that formal policies and training do not necessarily shape rank and file perspectives and practices. The police learn the accepted ways of dealing with people and situations 'out on the streets', and become accustomed to the norms and values of the subculture through an array of informal means, including 'war stories' (Punch 1979a; Shearing and Ericson 1991). These informal aspects of the police

organisation played an important role in subverting the new initiatives promoted by management.

However, while we can identify numerous features of police culture in an almost clichéd manner, the thesis also captures variations within the occupational ideologies and practices of officers. In a break with most previous research, this study provides a clear insight into the occupational culture of the police in a rural context. While officers in both Burslem and Wombourne shared a related set of occupational norms, values and behaviour, there were some important differences between the two sites. In comparison with their urban counterparts, officers in Wombourne engaged in some outrageous ‘easing’ behaviour (Cain 1973). This was made possible as a result of the size of the NPU and absence of effective supervision. Similarly, precisely because of its rural nature and relatively low staffing levels, officers’ sense of danger and vulnerability was heightened. One of the crucial differences between the two sites related to perceptions of ‘crime work’. While the crime problems facing officers in Burslem were viewed as predominantly *internal*, in Wombourne the problem was perceived as fundamentally *external*. In the latter, suspicion was directed towards young, low status male ‘outsiders’ who originated from the deprived and multi-ethnic centres of the West Midlands. Such groups were considered incongruous with the white, affluent surroundings, and as a result, were often subjected to the police’s stop and search powers. Thus, while the core themes of suspicion and danger are characteristic of police working in rural and urban settings, I have illustrated that there are subtle differences in how these features are enacted. Furthermore, by capturing and exploring the finely grained distinctions between

the occupational cultures of the police in distinct environments, this thesis has highlighted the importance of accounting for contextual and localised differences in shaping police culture.

Apart from highlighting the continuity and endurance of these classic features, this thesis also identifies a number of newly emerging themes within contemporary police culture. In particular, it provides a range of important insights regarding how police officers have responded to an altered policing environment in which respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities has become salient. To this end, it is necessary to establish how the national and local accent on diversity has impacted upon the police as they relate to their socially and culturally diverse colleagues, and members of the public.

## **Police Culture in a Diverse Society**

A principal aim of Staffordshire Police's reform effort has been to improve the working conditions of personnel inside the organisation. A stated commitment to recruit more officers from minority backgrounds was particularly outlined. To some extent, this process of diversification has begun to take shape. Within recent years, there has been a gradual rise in the number of female, minority ethnic and gay and lesbian officers in Staffordshire, some of whom have progressed to occupy supervisory positions. This is supported by an array of internal associations organised around ethnicity, gender and sexuality. The institutionalisation of diversity has altered the interior culture of the organisation in some important, albeit contradictory, ways.

Of particular importance here is to acknowledge minority officers' sense of how the working environment has been transformed in recent years. As we saw in Chapter Four, there is now a widespread perception amongst minority officers that discrimination can be challenged within the organisation. Moreover, many minority officers believed that formal complaints would be listened to, and acted upon, by managers. At the very least, it was felt that the emphasis on diversity and discrimination had served to significantly reduce overt forms and expressions of discrimination. Indeed, it will be recalled that an established feature of police culture has been challenged and consequently unlearned. The general absence of overtly racist language within contemporary police culture is an important and manifest demonstration of change. Finally, some minority officers described feeling 'empowered and represented' within the current organisational climate. These new feelings of confidence among minority officers indicate the way in which the organisational reform agenda has, in many ways, been successful.

However, the way in which discrimination is articulated and performed has undergone an important transformation in the contemporary policing environment. In many instances, the diversification of the internal environment has produced a workplace in which relations are competing and sensitive. Following Loader and Mulcahy (2003), I would also suggest that the sentiments that comprise the traditional white, heterosexual male 'police culture' no longer remain dominant. The contemporary police organisation is, in short, an environment where new cultures are emerging to challenge old ones. While these new challenges have generally evolved from minority officers, new generations of white, heterosexual male officers have also confronted and questioned established

sentiments about diversity. This multitude of different outlooks and identities captures the fragmented condition of contemporary police culture. It suggests that the culture which has dominated the organisational environment is becoming eroded.

At the same time, however, it would be incorrect to overstate the extent to which these new emerging cultures have displaced the hegemonic police culture. While the institutionalisation of diversity has begun to reform the internal culture, its impact has not yet been decisive. The considerable resentment and hostility displayed by the prevailing white, heterosexual male culture towards the increasing recognition of minority groups demonstrates that the challenges to the 'old' police culture remain partial. Three broad themes of resentment towards diversity can be discerned. First, there is a prevailing narrative that the diversity agenda has all but 'marginalised' the white, heterosexual, male officer. Against the backdrop of the recognition given to minority officers, members of this hegemonic group feel that they have become, as one officer put it, a 'dying breed'. Particular resentment was expressed towards what was perceived to be a scheme of 'affirmative action' which has excluded white men from employment and internal promotion opportunities. However, these discourses of exclusion are somewhat contradictory when white, heterosexual males continue to form the dominant composition of the organisation. A second strand of resentment is also evident in officers' hostility towards the Force's internal support associations. Indeed, the strong opposition towards the Multi-Cultural Association suggests that the feelings of marginalisation have become racialised. Finally, the seemingly claustrophobic atmosphere of 'political correctness'

within the organisation was vehemently criticised. From the perspective of the dominant culture, the diversity agenda has, in short, been taken 'too far'.

What these white male narratives of decline reflect is a new organisational configuration in which the single and cohesive masculine culture has come to be both challenged and troubled by the national and local currents of change. Yet the dominant narrative that the emphasis on diversity is excessive and unnecessary stands in sharp contrast to the perspective of minority officers who continue to feel excluded and discriminated against. Indeed, it is precisely these conflicting interpretations of the contemporary working environment which encapsulate the emergence of new cultures and contestations. While there has been a rise in the presence of female, minority ethnic and gay and lesbian officers, the organisation remains overwhelmingly white, heterosexual and male. This demographic factor continues to have important cultural consequences for those groups who do not correspond with this dominant norm. As we saw, some minority officers continue to feel discriminated against by the hegemonic white, heterosexist male culture. While changes have been made at the surface level of the organisation, there is a subversive culture of resentment and discrimination. In the contemporary policing environment, subtle forms of discrimination have replaced the more overt instances. This new form of discrimination stems largely from the official interdiction of discriminatory language and conduct. Officers are aware of the strong disciplinary line being taken against discrimination, and this has almost eradicated overt forms of discrimination. Nevertheless, sections of the dominant white heterosexual male culture have developed spaces where they feel able to resist and subvert aspects of the diversity agenda. These

issues reflect the deep-seated resentment towards the diversification of the organisation by the prevailing culture. Thus, although we see indications of how the new politics of recognition can challenge traditional police culture, widespread change in the internal environment remains slow and uneven.

Several new dynamics also emerge in relation to how police officers perceive and interact with those members of the public who are currently emphasised in reform programmes. In particular, the position of minority ethnic groups has been shifted within contemporary police culture. The enhanced political status afforded to people from minority ethnic backgrounds has developed into a perception that such groups can cause considerable problems for rank and file officers. Indeed, within the occupational culture, minority ethnic groups now represent 'organisational trouble'. In some respects, members of such groups have become 'disarmers' (Holdaway 1983: 77). The heightened anxiety about dealing with minority ethnic communities has resulted in a revision of the way the police interact with black and minority ethnic people. In contrast to the nature of policing as observed by earlier police researchers, some contemporary officers consciously avoid initiating proactive encounters with members of minority ethnic communities for fear of being reprimanded should such an individual make a complaint against the officer. The finely tuned awareness about the new organisational approach to those from minority ethnic backgrounds has, therefore, had the effect of ensuring that officers do not deal with such groups in an overtly controlling and discriminatory manner.

Alongside shifts in the policing of minority ethnic communities, a distinct change in police behaviour is also evident in officers' response towards domestic violence incidents. In the wake of the new organisational guidelines relating to such incidents, a more positive approach towards women as victims of crime has taken place. In addition to taking the time to log the relevant evidence, most officers had incorporated the pro-arrest policy into their routine policing practices. For the most part, the practices of officers therefore conformed to the new model of policing. Once again, when contrasted with previous research, this demonstrates a further development in police culture.

These new ways of dealing with members of minority ethnic communities and victims of domestic violence demonstrate the ways in which aspects of police culture have been responsive to the altered context of contemporary policing. The shift in police behaviour demonstrates that police culture is not entirely independent of external pressures and rules. The changes are the result of transformations which have taken place in the wider 'field' of policing (see Chan 1997). The British policing landscape has been transformed following official criticism of the philosophies and practices of the policing of ethnically and socially diverse groups. Especially in the aftermath of the Macpherson Report (1999), current policing agendas emphasise, and on some issues, *demand* that officers afford better regard and treatment to groups which have previously not been equitably served by policing. The rank and file are acutely aware of the current policing demands. They are equally aware that their working practices require a shift in order to meet these new requirements. New generations of officers are alert to the heightened political recognition of minority groups, and particularly members of minority ethnic

communities. As we have seen, the needs of women as 'customers' of policing services have also become increasingly emphasised, and a range of initiatives have been introduced to better serve this section of the population. Within the current policing environment, the police are therefore aware that their behaviour is closely monitored. In relation to their diverse 'publics', the police have *had* to change their (public) behaviour in order to conform to the new social, political and institutional changes that have occurred in British policing. In many ways, therefore, police behaviour has been sensitive to the altered policing landscape.

However, the extent to which these shifts reflect a genuine commitment amongst officers to provide a more equitable policing service to those groups emphasised in current diversity agendas, as opposed to fear of reprimand, is not so evident. As Marks (2005) argues, real police transformation must encompass not only structural and behavioural changes, but also *attitudinal* shifts. And while the thesis finds changes in police behaviour, these are not matched by transformations in the dispositions of officers.

Certainly, while anxiety and revision of policing practices in relation to minority ethnic populations represents a new feature of contemporary police culture, the culture still manifests a sense of antipathy towards such groups. The enhanced political status afforded to people from minority ethnic backgrounds is vehemently resented within police value systems. This was apparent in the research, where many officers expressed clear hostility and resentment towards what they saw as minority ethnic people who 'played on the race card'. As perpetrators of crime, black and minority ethnic people are

currently perceived by many officers as 'untouchable' because of their heightened political status. Although these narratives are a useful device for managing the new tensions associated with the policing of minority ethnic communities, they also maintain the idea that such groups are problematic. In short, from the perspective of the rank and file, the insertion of 'diversity' into operational policing has severely hindered officers in doing their job properly. Similarly, despite the new rules relating to 'domestics' these incidents continued to be viewed as troublesome, unexciting and trivial. Intervening in domestic violence incidents is still regarded as marginal to what most officers celebrate as 'real' police work. Put simply, officers were more concerned to 'cover their arse', than to protect and support female victims. The predisposition for officers to 'cover their arse' is a deeply ingrained feature of police culture. As Van Maanen (1978*b*) reminds us, it is a behavioural response which prompts officers primarily to conform with organisational directives. What is of contemporary relevance, however, is that the new political and organisational context has strengthened the desire for officers to conform to the organisational rules, and thus avoid the scrutiny of management.

There is, then, an important contradiction in the formal diversity agenda's attempt to change police culture; while there has been a general shift in police behaviour, old occupational norms and assumptions have persisted (see also Marks 2003; 2005). Indeed, far from constituting a genuine change in the entrenched values and beliefs of officers, the observed change in behaviour represents a mechanical response to external and organisational constraints. Supervisors and managers *directed* officers to change their behaviour in accordance with new rules. While these instructions were important, and

indeed relatively successful, change processes did not fully penetrate the deeper level cultural knowledge of the police.

That the diversity agenda was able to engender changes in police behaviour, but without impacting upon police attitudes and beliefs, has at least two implications for understanding and reforming police culture. Within the literature, police culture is conventionally understood as a distinctive set of values, beliefs and assumptions which *determines* police behaviour. As this thesis has shown, this is not always the case. Following Waddington (1999a), I have also found that police behaviours and practices can have a relative autonomy from attitudes and beliefs. In attempting to reform police practices through the implementation of rules for conduct, the diversity agenda was, to a certain extent, able to bypass and override the entrenched occupational attitudes. Police managers tend to concentrate on the visible outcomes of reforms efforts, such as behaviour (Marks 2005; see also Chan 1997). Less attention is often given to changing the informal values and belief systems of the police (*ibid.*: see also Brogden and Shearing 1993). Yet the persistence of extant norms and assumptions is problematic for attempts to reform the police. Under certain conditions, deeply ingrained attitudes continue to inform negative police behaviours. Indeed, and as this thesis has demonstrated, there were a number of occasions when officers undermined the requirements of the diversity agenda in both discourse *and* practice. These incidents highlight the need to consider attitudes as much as behaviours and organisational structures for any lasting police change.

## **Beyond Diversity: the Enduring Dimension of Class**

There is also a requirement, however, to move beyond the notion of diversity. Contemporary police culture needs also to be situated against the backdrop of a new societal configuration in which widespread economic inequality and exclusion feature prominently. Indeed, the new millennium foregrounds some equally important questions for police culture and for the policing of certain sections of society. In particular, 'police property' (Lee 1981) has become reconstituted under conditions of late modernity. Characterised by increasing social, political and economic powerlessness, this durable police target has grown and has become more excluded than ever before (Reiner 2000a). By focusing attention on those poor, excluded groups at the bottom of the social strata, this thesis has demonstrated that class continues to be one of the most enduring aspects of contemporary policing.

Of course, the police have always controlled and displayed contempt towards their 'property'. This in itself is nothing new. What is of contemporary significance, however, is that it occurs against the backdrop of a new policing agenda which explicitly emphasises respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities. While current police policies instruct officers to afford better regard and treatment to their socially and culturally diverse 'publics', there is no similar injunction on the police to treat the white poor in the same manner. And yet this is a group that occupy a prominent position in officers' occupational consciousness and practices as socially defiling. Indeed, such was the pervasiveness of class contempt towards this group that I suggest it should be considered as a 'core characteristic' of contemporary police culture. In the wake of the

diversity agenda, the white 'underclass' operate as apparently legitimate targets for the unchallenged exercise of police discretion and authority. This exposes an important disjuncture between the police organisational emphasis on diversity and class difference. In addition, academic interest in the classed nature of policing has also been superseded by concern with police perceptions and treatment of differing groups along axes of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. As a result, the contemporary policing of the poor has been fundamentally overlooked. There is, therefore, an increasing need to bring class back into both academic and policy debates about policing and police culture. One way of doing so, is to appreciate the moral dimensions of class inequality (see Sayer 2005). Current reform efforts around equitable policing should be widened in order to recognise that in equal measure to ethnicity, gender and sexuality, class is also an important source of disadvantage. In other words, the white poor are also bound up in the struggle for recognition and respect.

The broader concern with class is also relevant to reforming the policing of other social groups. Indeed, the poorest classes are not homogenously white. Rather, they are fractured by age, ethnicity and gender. Part of the police treatment directed towards minority ethnic communities, and indeed women, is heavily class related (see also Brogden *et al* 1988). While members of minority ethnic communities and females are given prominence in current diversity agendas, *poor* minority ethnic males and *poor* females continue to form the objects of police concern and attention. In order to provide a more encompassing account of policing, the enduring dimension of class needs to be considered to a much

greater extent. This would deepen understandings about the policing of *all* the social divisions which currently characterise the social structure.

## **Conclusion: The Contradictions of Police Change**

In many ways, then, contemporary police culture is in transition. As well as continuities, there have also been important ruptures with the past. The altered local and national policing climate has transformed important aspects of police culture. Broadly speaking, however, these newly identified features sit alongside, and do not necessarily replace, the familiar characteristics. While this thesis has highlighted important developments in police culture, this should not be at the expense of overlooking the similarities between the current study and a history of previous research. For while there have been important transformations in the wider field of policing, such changes are incomplete. British society continues to be characterised by deep social and economic divisions, and many of the people who form the targets of police culture remain socially, economically and politically marginalised. The ‘success’ of initiatives to change police culture is thus undermined by the inability of the police to remedy the underlying causes of continuing structural problems (see Manning 1978*a*; Stenning 2003). On the ground, the rank and file acutely experience, and indeed perpetuate, these wider divisions. Furthermore, the occupational culture is relatively enduring because the nature of police work continues to contain the basic pressures and strains which generate and reproduce the cognitive tendencies and practices of officers. These wider dilemmas highlight the contradictions inherent in attempting to fully reconfigure police culture.

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### **RESEARCH IN BURSLEM LPU - Information for officers and staff**

This information sheet is to let you know about some research that is going to be taking place in Burslem LPU over the next few months. This sheet was written by Dr. Bill Dixon and Bethan Loftus and endorsed by ACC Huw Jones and Inspector Jim Wood on behalf of Staffordshire Police and Arthur Jackson and Mark Judson on behalf of Staffordshire Police Federation and Unison.

#### **Background to the research**

The research project is funded jointly by the government-sponsored Economic and Social Research Council and Staffordshire Police. Bethan Loftus will be carrying out the research. She is a doctoral (PhD) student in the Department of Criminology at Keele University. A team consisting of Professor Ian Loader and Dr. Bill Dixon from Keele and Ms Deborah Wilne from the Performance Development Unit of Staffordshire Police is supervising her work.

#### **About the research**

The research is about the effect on police officers and staff of two changes: 1) growing social diversity in the policing environment and 2) the package of reforms put in place inside Staffordshire Police since 1996.

As part of her research, Bethan will be spending the next six months (March - August) in and around Burslem LPU observing police operations and other activities, such as shift briefings and planning meetings. After this period Bethan will then be organising some more formal interviews and focus group discussions with officers.

During the initial observation phase of the research Bethan will be spending time with both IMU and CAT officers as well as locally based police staff. She would like to see the work officers and staff do on the streets and in the police station. She would like to hear how you feel about your job and the police organisation, and how, if at all, your attitudes towards them have changed in recent years.

#### **Benefits and safeguards**

By talking to Bethan, and allowing her to observe your work, you will be communicating directly with management about how their policies, and changes in the external policing environment, have affected the way you think about and perform your work. And you will be doing so in a way that preserves your anonymity because Bethan - like all academic researchers (and unlike some journalists!) - is bound by a strict code of research ethics. This means that her research notes and reports will be written up so as to prevent either individual members of staff or their shifts being identifiable in any way. Bethan's work is not an 'undercover investigation' but a serious attempt to understand recent changes in policing and their impact upon the working lives of officers and staff.

Following a detailed risk assessment, Bethan has been fully briefed on the hazards associated with research on operational policing. To minimise both the risks to which she might be exposed, and the impact of the research on the public, she will not accompany officers attending incidents where her personal safety might be in serious danger, or where her presence might be upsetting to a particularly vulnerable member of the public. In both these sets of circumstances she will accept the advice of the officer(s) she is observing in deciding whether or not to accompany them to the scene of the incident in question.

#### **How you can help**

Over the next few months Bethan will be coming into Burslem police station around 2-3 times a week to observe various kinds of police activity. She will make the necessary arrangements for this with the relevant supervisors.

All that remains is for us to take this opportunity to ask you to contribute to Bethan's research by talking to her about your work and allowing her to observe what you do. If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Bill Dixon at Keele University on 01782 583 546 or by e-mail at [w.j.dixon@crim.keele.ac.uk](mailto:w.j.dixon@crim.keele.ac.uk). You can also contact Bethan on 07765 425 917 or by e-mail at [b.loftus@crim.keele.ac.uk](mailto:b.loftus@crim.keele.ac.uk).

## Appendix B

### GLOSSARY

**ACR** - Area Control Room

**BAWP** - British Association for Women in Policing

**CAT** – Community Action Team

**CBO** – Community Beat Officer

**DIAL** – Domestic Investigation Arrest Log/Domestic Intelligence Assessment Log

**FSN** - Female Support Network

**HMIC** - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

**IMU** – Incident Management Unit

**IP** – Injured Party

**IR** – Immediate Response

**LAGPA** - Lesbian and Gay Police Association (national staff association)

**LGBTG** - Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender Group

**MCA** - Multi-Cultural Association

**NBPA** - National Black Police Association

**NPU** – Neighbourhood Policing Unit

**PCSO** – Police Community Support Officer

**PDP** - Performance Development Portfolio

**PDR** - Performance Development Review

**PNC** – Police National Computer

**SPIN** – Staffordshire Police Intelligent Network