

## Chapter 2

# Understanding Police Culture

**Abstract** Parts of the police culture may need to evolve in order to establish a more inclusive internal climate. Yet before seeking to influence a culture shift police leaders first need to understand it. This chapter provides an overview of the common descriptions of the police culture, how the culture might have changed over time and how new recruits are socialized. This chapter also highlights the types of cultures that tend to be found within policing as well as the different cultures that might emerge from one police organization to another. Excerpts from interviews with current and former serving police officers are also included to illustrate their experiences as they relate to key points discussed throughout this chapter.

Culture is to a group as personality and character are to an individual. We can observe the resulting behavior but we really do not understand what is happening below the surface to influence such behavior. Renowned culture expert, Edgar Schein, suggests that just as personality and character guide and constrain our behavior, so too does culture guide and constrain the behavior of members of a group [53].

Culture continues to be of significant interest due to its influence on individual, group and organisational behaviors. For instance, culture is significantly associated with psychological strain, employee retention, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment [37].

Culture also refers to a wide range of observable events and underlying forces that operate at three levels within organizations: the visible surface level artifacts such as physical environment, order of dress, language, stories told, and observable rituals and ceremonies; the publicly espoused beliefs and values; and the basic underlying assumptions. These assumptions clarify what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations [53].

Culture at this level also provides a basic sense of identity and the values that provide self-esteem. Specifically, culture tells people who they are, how they should behave toward each other and how to feel good about themselves [23].

Beyond a specific organization, Edgar Schein proposes that cultures may also evolve as occupational cultures, particularly if members are largely trained in the same way with the same values. Shared assumptions stem from common origins, educational backgrounds, the requirements of a given occupation such as training, and the shared contact with others in the same occupation [53]. Based on this description it is clear there is an occupational culture that is associated with policing, and this is the one that often gets the most attention. For the purposes of this book I will use the term culture to refer to the ideas and informal practices and procedures that develop in the course of doing police work.

## 2.1 Common Depictions of Police Culture

The police culture has been the subject of intense interest since it was first studied in the US in the 1960s, largely due to the impact it is believed to have on police behavior. This early research proposed that police behavior was influenced by the police culture and the working-class backgrounds of police recruits who tended to view violence as legitimate and were preoccupied with maintaining self-respect, proving masculinity, and *not taking any crap* [74].

In one of the first published works on police culture in 1966, Jerome Skolnick argued that police culture arises from the common tensions that are associated with the job of being a police officer. These include the potential danger that officers face in their encounters with the public, the authority they are able to draw upon during such encounters and the pressure to be efficient [59].

Beginning from these early studies, and largely focused at the level of patrol officer, the police culture has been frequently described in such terms as monolithic, homogeneous, authoritarian, suspicious, cynical, pessimistic, macho, elitist, misogynist, distrustful, insular, socially isolated, and highly resistant to change [10, 26, 48].

Police culture has also been generally regarded as the bi-product of modern police work [39, 46, 66, 73], with common themes relating to the danger of the street environment, the authority to use violence, officer discretion, isolation from the public, shift-work, bureaucracy, conflict between front-line officers and managers, and vague and conflicting mandates. It is often viewed as a set of beliefs shared by all police officers that stem from an adaptation to hostile working conditions and are reinforced through a process of socialization and solidarity [14, 58].

### 2.1.1 *Solidarity and Suspicion*

The investigative nature of policing and the dangerous occupational environment in which police officers work are believed to reinforce an attitude of suspiciousness toward both members of the public and even new colleagues. For example, police

culture has been described as being characterized by two primary tenets: don't trust someone new and don't share more information than is required [51].

This *blue wall of silence* is also referenced as a potential dark side to policing, with the idea that officers will maintain secrecy and silence during formal investigations of their colleagues [26]. Though this depiction may not necessarily hold true across all police organizations or in all countries. In a recent study involving thirty-one police agencies in Canada, 66% of survey respondents indicated that they would report officer misconduct [32].

A sense of solidarity or brotherhood among police officers provides reassurance that colleagues will defend and back each other up in dangerous situations [51]. At the same time, a sense of solidarity may also lead to officers becoming isolated from the public, thereby producing an *us versus them* mentality [5, 13, 33, 36, 49]. This mentality is generally believed to be held by more cynical officers who see the world as primarily comprised of people that do not share their values, actively work to conspire against them and have little regard for their authority. While police interactions with community members may fuel such cynicism [21], informal interactions among peers [69], and formal interactions with supervisors have also been identified as contributing factors [19].

Up until a few years ago Jim was a police officer in southern Ontario where he had the opportunity to work with two different platoons (patrol units). The first platoon operated under the view that it was them against the world—the media, the public, the courts and the criminal element. Because this latter group “lived in the mud” officers were advised by supervisors that they also needed “to get dirty”. This often involved a form of noble corruption in which potential suspects were beat if they ran from the police or they were provoked to the point that they could be arrested for a bogus infraction only for the purpose of verifying their identity. It was also common for officers to carry a bit of crack-cocaine in their vests that they could “throw down” when necessary, such as during a traffic stop to facilitate a bust of someone they knew was dirty. Unit supervisors further reinforced this behavior by isolating and protecting platoon members from senior officers; for example, by warning the platoon in advance of any personal locker inspections so that they could remove the drugs in their possession.

As a young recruit, Jim was encouraged to be aggressive and to just do “what it takes” to prove himself, even if it meant violating someone's civil rights. Jim described this team as a “cowboy” platoon that was all about proving they were “man enough” to do the job and the things no one else wanted to do. Women had it particularly tough as they had to work twice as hard to prove themselves as “real men” and as capable as their male colleagues, yet they were often just as aggressive and committed to doing “whatever it takes”.

Platoon members viewed themselves as above the law and having to work around a justice system that protected criminals rather than actively facilitating their prosecution and conviction. Cheating on their spouses, driving drunk and bullying those who did not fit in were also accepted group norms.

When Jim was later transferred to another platoon he discovered a completely different environment. Platoon supervisors influenced and encouraged a team

culture that was about doing the right thing, upholding the law and the rights of civilians, and treating team members with respect.

Jim's experience with this police service emphasizes the role supervisors and peers have in creating and maintaining team cultural norms, and how under the right kind of leadership group culture can be positively influenced. In a later section in this chapter I discuss the different cultures that can exist within police organizations, including those that differ across teams and functions.

### ***2.1.2 Proving Masculinity***

To the extent that policing involves dangerous work, the presence of physical risk reinforces a culture of masculinity and the dominant image of the ideal man as autonomous, brave and strong. Given this, male officers are expected to exert significant effort to demonstrate these masculine attributes in order to prove their worth and fit in [17]. The outcome can be intense pressure to conform to a masculine identity that values the image of the physical crime fighter, downplays social service aspects of the job that are perceived as feminine work [47], and "prizes stoicism, composure, and self-control" [44: 140].

Displaying emotion, other than anger, has been typically regarded as a weakness; therefore, the norms and values of police culture have tended to prevent officers from talking about their emotions in order to preserve this masculine identity [50]. Officers who do not conform may be viewed as nurturing or weak and subjected to ridicule and shame from peers [40].

Jim learned early on not to show emotion, as it was a sign of weakness, and to deal with any emotions associated to the job on his own. His supervisors were able to "suck it up" throughout their careers and therefore newer recruits were expected to do the same. Senior managers were promoting mental health training but there was real skepticism if they would actually support someone who came forward due to the stigma associated with seeking help.

In a police setting, where rejection by peers might mean isolation, to avoid shaming, officers may overemphasize their masculinity and repress emotions so as not to appear vulnerable or feminine [1]. The costs of such displays can be high, with both individuals and organizations paying a price. For instance, long-term withholding or covering of emotional reactions has been linked to poor physical and psychological health among emergency first responders [72].

Members routinely return to work still suffering from the physical and/or psychological effects of those experiences, because of the stigma attached to PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder).

Bad things happen to all of us. Talking it out in a professional setting helps to deal with the issues. In my case, I have been branded with an alcohol problem when in fact it was simply the misuse of alcohol to deal with external factors with the issues that lead to the misuse. But the stigma remains. Real help early on would have assisted me greatly. Instead I was told to "suck it up".

I believe members are now faced with non-disclosure of PTSD issues due to the effects this will have on job status.

Attempts by male officers to maintain an image of hyper masculinity have led to excessive risk taking, poor-quality decisions, the violation of civil and human rights, the alienation of men from their health, emotions, and relationships with others, and the marginalization of female colleagues [17]. This form of masculinity has been shown to be manifested through words, acts, and in some cases, through organizational policies [24], where the outcome of such a masculine police culture is a “boys’ club” that may exclude and isolate members who are not part of the in-group or perceived as a weak fit.

The old boys club exists and has been demonstrated by various senior managers throughout the XXX. Nepotism is alive and well and if you are not part of the club your performance is meaningless. This has a significant impact on advancements and opportunities.

...still a climate of “old boys club” where females are not welcome in traditionally male sections. Advancement opportunities seem to be based on knowing the right people, not on merit or experience.

I am a female in an extremely male-dominated culture. It is truly the “Old Boys Club”... No matter how hard I work, a male will get more recognition than I will.

As noted above, the majority of descriptions of police culture portray it through a negative lens. For instance, police culture is noted as a barrier to reform [22, 55, 56], as an obstacle to police accountability and as a cause of police abuse of authority [57]. But there are positive aspects of police culture that should not be overlooked.

### ***2.1.3 Positive Elements of Police Culture***

One prominent feature of police culture is a sense of duty and a focus on the mission of policing. This particular feature is associated with the belief that policing is not just a job and that the police have a meaningful purpose in society [30, 38]. I shared this same sentiment during my years in the RCMP and I have continued to hear the same views in my work with police services in Canada and elsewhere. In one specific organization members articulated that their work is important and fulfilling, that they make a difference, that they work with good people, that there is good camaraderie and a sense of family within their units, and that they support and back each other up when needed.

I joined to live the life and have a career where I could make a difference in people’s lives. I would be a policeman for free. There is nothing else I would have done in my life.

I am proud of the service I have provided to Canadians.

I think that it is a sacred DUTY to provide policing to the citizens of this country.

There are often personal sacrifices on the life side of the work/life balance. That though, causes me no regret. The work I do is tied to the community I live in and the positive influences my job allows me to make in the community. The work I do when I make the sacrifices has deep meaning. Perhaps not for family, but in the long run I can only hope family members understand that I am always there for them as I am for the community.

The police culture has also been identified as a valuable mechanism for coping with the problems and tensions that confront police officers in their daily work [9, 10, 42, 49]. For example, what is often referred to as *black humor* is an important tool for releasing tensions associated with both the internal and external working environments [69]. I cannot recall the number of times when *black humor* has helped me overcome the tragedy of a situation. From suicides to sudden deaths to fatal car accidents, humor was often the only way to cope.

A former colleague described how humor helped her cope after responding to a suicide within her first month on-the-job. One morning when she came into work she was asked to accompany a senior officer to check in on someone who had not been seen in a few days. Upon arriving at the residence, she was the first to discover the victim who had shot himself in the face. Recognizing that she was having difficulty with the scene and trying not to appear weak her partner made a joke about her trying to revive the victim—when it was clearly obvious that the victim was deceased. His joke caused her to laugh and helped ease her tension at the scene.

The positive aspects of police culture, such as the sense of duty, have also been regarded as important elements that can be leveraged for police reform efforts and to prevent police misconduct from occurring. They are also essential for teaching new recruits about their important roles as police officers [35].

Overall the police culture is considered to be a useful concept for understanding many facets of policing. However as I briefly alluded to in the previous section, police culture is also influenced by individual, societal and other contextual factors such as the police organization itself, rank and individual officer style [34, 42]. As such, the occupational police culture also generates different types of cultures that cut across police organizations and various occupational groups.

## 2.2 Types of Cultures in Policing

In policing, different cultures may arise across functions and teams such as bomb disposal, tactical response, patrol, intelligence, school resource or community policing, and detective work. However, distinctions by rank or level within the organization continue to represent the more prominent descriptions of cultures in policing.

### 2.2.1 Differences by Rank

Based on research conducted within the NYPD, Elizabeth Reuss-Ianni identified two distinct cultures differentiated by rank: the street cop culture and the

management cop culture. Whereas the street cop culture is found at the lower rank patrol officers, and is consistent with the occupational police culture I discussed earlier in this chapter, the management cop culture primarily consists of a commitment to rules and regulations [51].

Other research suggests that the management culture is actually comprised of two distinct parts: middle management and the top command/senior executive ranks [18, 34]. In contrast to the street cop culture, which is focused on the immediate aspects of the job and the risks of the street, the middle management culture is more concerned with management functions and acts as a buffer between patrol officers and upper management. In turn, the top command is consumed with the politics of managing police organizations and being accountable to external stakeholders [41]. Essentially, each level holds different concerns, values and norms that act as some form of insulation from other ranks [18].

These separate cultures emerged as a result of a weakening of the broader police occupational culture through some of the changes that I described in Chap. 1, including social and political forces, management practices, greater emphasis on accountability and productivity, and pressures from minority groups to provide adequate services and to enhance minority recruitment.

The impact of these changes on the relationships between the lower and upper level ranks is mixed. Some studies indicate that the relationship between patrol officers and their supervisors is fraught with uncertainty [41]. Others suggest that officers are actually more positive about their immediate supervisor [31, 60]. On the other hand, a number of studies have identified a deep divide between patrol officers and the management hierarchy typically found in a headquarters environment [51].

When there is a greater distance between the front line officer and the supervisor, both by rank and geographic distance, there is a greater likelihood for officers to feel a sense of distrust and alienation. Headquarters is “always out to screw you while protecting their own ass” [51: 49–50]. Recent feedback from police officers has revealed a similar divide.

Too much nepotism, favoritism, and old boys club mentality.

Great organization but at this time it seems that mid-level management is not able to deliver. Strong disconnect between senior management and members.

Upper management has different standards for those people within their club and outside it. They use the people outside of the club to make an example out of.

Cultural differences by rank or level are not unique to policing. Different cultures exist at various levels within all organizations. As an example, the operator culture relates to the idea that front-line employees really run things and are the backbone of the organization [53].

Front line operators tend to be of the view that events are often unpredictable, and despite the existence of clear rules and procedures for different operational conditions, they must be able to draw upon their skills and expertise to respond to a given situation. Similar to policing, operators may consider that rules and hierarchy

get in the way in some circumstances; therefore, they learn to deviate from formal procedures to get the job done and to push back against perceived unreasonable demands from management [53].

Front-line supervisors and middle managers are also considered to have unique cultures. Although front-line supervisors have the distinction of identifying with both the rank-and-file and management, middle managers perceive that they do not possess power or autonomy and therefore must adapt to an ambiguous authority environment.

In contrast, the executive culture is characterized by increased responsibility and accountability, a preoccupation with financial matters, and managing from a distance through control systems and routines that increasingly see people as impersonal resources [53]. Arguably, moves to professionalize the police have resulted in a further distancing between the ranks, with top executives now consumed more with process over people, and concerns from the front-line that the executives will not support them in a time of need, such as a police-involved shooting.

### ***2.2.2 Differences by Individual Style***

In addition to cultural influences by rank, a relationship between police culture and individual officer working styles has also been acknowledged. In particular, three different working styles have been identified and validated: the traditional crime fighter style, the order maintenance/service provider style that is focused on visible presence, preventive surveillance and service; and the professional style. Officers who adhere more to the professional style are more concerned with providing a visible presence and service to citizens, yet they also consider crime fighting to be important [60].

The emergence of different working styles indicates that officers may not cope or respond to their work environment in the same way, which is in direct contrast to the commonly held idea that all officers view the police reality in the same way [6, 60]. What this suggests is that traditional views of police culture are changing and that different functions correlate with different working styles. Given the focus on recruiting more diverse personnel, it is likely that these changes, along with a shift in policing philosophy toward greater community engagement, has also influenced officers to select positions that align more with their individual working styles.

Notwithstanding these changes, the traditional crime fighter style is still the predominate style associated with patrol officers. As such a cultural clash might emerge between officers who value traditional modes of policing and those who might advocate for a more progressive approach that involves closer relationships with communities.



On Jim's first platoon a clear distinction was made between being a "cop" and being a "police officer". Police officers were considered to follow the rules and write tickets, whereas the "real cops" did what it took to put bad guys in jail. No one wanted to be recognized as a good police officer as this would mean isolation from the rest of the platoon. I identified a similar cultural clash during my work with a municipal police service in Canada. Front line members frequently expressed frustration with the competing priorities of traditional law enforcement and community policing efforts and mixed signals regarding the value and relevance of each.

I did not sign up to be a Victim Services worker, a youth worker or a molly maid. I joined so that I could enforce the law. We desperately need to get back to doing our jobs as police officers and leave all the hand holding to our partners who specialize in the hand holding field.

For police leaders who are seeking to influence cultural change and create a more inclusive workplace, evidence of a weakening overarching police culture holds promise that police culture may not be the barrier to reform it was once thought to be. However, leaders still need to understand and appreciate the different cultures that might exist in different functions and at different levels in order to implement effective strategies for change as a one size fits all approach is unlikely to be successful.

### ***2.2.3 Differences by Organization***

The behavior of police officers is also influenced by the culture of the organization itself [42]. Though the police culture originates and is maintained by front-line workers [63], organizational culture is usually defined from the top of the organization down [53]. This presents an added advantage for a change process as senior leaders are uniquely placed to influence changes in behavior.

Through their words and actions, police executives establish norms about risk-taking, health and wellness, employee empowerment, dress and deportment, and the actions that are more favorably viewed in terms of promotions, job assignments, and other types of rewards. Specifically, executives can indicate what is important in the organization by the things that pay attention to, measure and control [53].

For example, in Ferguson, Missouri, US Department of Justice investigators concluded that the City's law enforcement practices were shaped by a focus on revenue rather than by public safety needs, thereby compromising the integrity and legitimacy of Ferguson's Police Department. The end result was a pattern of illegitimate policing that inflicted unnecessary harm on a specific segment of the Ferguson community [62].

Conversely, police leaders who monitor and reward community engagement efforts will signal to their membership that this work is important and should be

embraced. At the same time, police leaders can recognize and reward more supportive leadership behaviors that may overcome some of the cynicism that is created through adversarial relationships. In this regard, culture is considered to be a method of social control due to its influence on members to think and feel about things in certain ways [27].

After organizational culture has been established, it is passed on to newcomers through a process of socialization [64, 65]. In the next section of this chapter I discuss how new recruits are introduced and socialized to aspects of the police culture and also to the culture of a particular police organization.

## 2.3 The Socialization Process

The informal norms and values that exist within policing are generally agreed to evolve in two ways: through recruitment of like-minded individuals who import the same values [15], or through on the job learning. Some experts suggest that socialization is largely in place when recruits are hired due to selection processes that screen for certain traits [15]. In many instances this is proposed to be the result of new recruits determining from an early age that they wanted to be police officers, and therefore they adopted the requisite values [12]. In this context, socialization is thought to play more of a minor role as recruits import established values [61].

Despite the foregoing arguments, no significant differences have been identified between the characteristics of police recruits versus that of the general population [8, 52]. Yet it has been shown that within a short period of exposure to the police occupation, recruit attitudes and values undergo significant change and begin to differ from the general population [14, 31, 51]. Accordingly, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that police values and attitudes are actually learned on the job [31, 39, 51, 67], and that new police officers are more likely to be heavily influenced in their first few years of service when they are most vulnerable to organizational influences [3, 12, 67].

The process of socialization occurs in all organizations not just policing, and for the most part it has a positive influence on newcomers. It also tends to consist of three stages: prearrival, encounter and metamorphosis (Langton et al. 2016). The prearrival stage considers that newcomers arrive with a set of values, attitudes and expectations about the work and the organization (p. 360). Thus during the selection process organizations are able to choose candidates who are presumed to be the right fit. In the encounter stage, when newcomers enter an organization they soon determine if the reality they discovered is consistent with their preexisting ideas.

In the metamorphosis stage, if leaders rely on fixed socialization programs out of concerns for following the rules and order, it is more likely that newcomer differences and perspectives will be removed and replaced by standardized behaviors [28]. Although this socialization process is heavily relied upon to assist new recruits with coping with occupational isolation and the perceived threat of danger [68], it can also lead to assimilation and the suppression of differences in people. This

outcome has been a common criticism of many traditional diversity efforts associated with policing whereby women and minority officers tend to be assimilated and concentrated at the bottom levels of police organizations, and therefore unable to assume sufficient levels of power that are required to influence culture change.

Albeit the socialization process commences as candidates are progressing through the recruit selection process, it is during the introduction period, which begins in the training academy, where new recruits learn about the policing environment and the paramilitary training and language [29]. Uniformity in appearance, attitude, and behavior, as well as strict adherence to rules and procedures, is expected of all recruits.

For example, the uniform is considered to be a symbol of social control by controlling the behaviors of officers and maintaining social distance from outsiders [7]. Recruits are also exposed to a collective form of discipline such that if one recruit is late the entire class is penalized, thereby building and reinforcing group solidarity [11].

My own experiences at the RCMP Training Academy in 1992 are consistent with the socialization process I described. Despite growing up in rural New Brunswick, an eastern province in Canada, where the RCMP were very much a part of the community and local members were often at my family's house for dinner, I was completely unaware of the paramilitary influence. I was initially astounded at how much attention was given to strict rules of discipline and uniformity.

One of my former colleagues, who graduated a few years ahead of me, described the Academy as a bullying environment in which those who were different were not accepted. It was a common practice for troops to force out the weaker recruits through exclusionary behaviors that forced them to quit, and her troop was no exception. Repeatedly told that they did not belong, she and her all-female troop members were also subjected to a socialization process that was highly gendered and reinforcing of the dominant role of men and the subservient position of women. This is the downside of socialization if steps are not taken to correct it.

Effectively, the academy socialization experience is intended to strip recruits of their personal characteristics so that they can embrace the *ethos* of the organization [2]. More critical assessments of this socialization period argue that it is so pervasive that it can also create an *us versus them* mentality [11], not only with recruits who are deemed a weak fit and are the brunt of jokes and sarcasm, but often with the community as well.

The socialization process intensifies when new recruits graduate from the academy and begin on-the-job training. Though contact with training officers represents more of a formal socialization process, whereby recruits are shown what to do and expect, contact with senior officers and other peers is informal in nature and likely to be more about how things operate in the real world [20]. On this point, it is very rare to encounter other officers who do not have the shared experience of being told to forget all the *crap* they learned at the academy, as they are now in the real world.

Beyond this, there may also be concern that more cynical officers can significantly influence new recruits. I saw this throughout my time in the RCMP and recently through my work with other police organizations. Here, the effect of socialization is significant as it can eliminate the positive influences gained through formal training and introduce the recruit to negative aspects of the police subculture through exposure to police officers who may possess deeply cynical or questionable qualities [16, 68].

Understandably the socialization process may produce both positive and negative outcomes for policing for a variety of reasons that have been discussed. Whereas, exposure to certain officers can lead to a small percentage of officers to display inappropriate behavior, socialization with senior officers or other peer group members who embody appropriate values contributes to the learning of these positive values as well as the overall craft of policing [43]. This is where police leaders have an opportunity to influence the adoption of appropriate cultural norms.

## 2.4 Changes in Police Culture

Much of the understanding of police culture has relied on studies that largely predate many of the significant transformations that have occurred within policing and police organizations. In recent years there is a growing consensus that police culture is in transition, although just how far it has come is still debated. Certainly, social media and the increased political sensitivities around policing have influenced the working practices of police officers [30].

As I described in Chap. 1, external influences have also resulted in improvements to human resources practices through merit-based hiring practices and personnel evaluation standards, the implementation of modern management principles, greater retention of officers and increased training [25, 70, 71].

Another pivotal development was the shift towards community policing which required officers to become more deeply embedded in the communities they are charged with serving [19]. This shift was coupled with some movement away from physicality and brute strength as measures of competence, to qualities that facilitate greater engagement with members of the public. To a great extent, this particular change created a more welcoming environment for women and minority officers. Traditional recruitment patterns overwhelmingly selected white, heterosexual, male officers, but in recent years the changing face of police personnel has been demonstrated through a gradual rise in members from minority ethnic, female, and gay and lesbian backgrounds [54].

Marianne was able to take advantage of a shift away from physicality and toward a greater focus on interpersonal skills when she joined the ranks of the RCMP in the 1980s. Her first posting near Thompson, Manitoba was a rewarding experience as she learned the valuable lesson that she could be 6'6 and it still would not make her safer. Talking to people was much more effective than relying on physical strength

or brute force, and in her early years of service she was able to hone her interpersonal skills by taking advantage of “open doors” in the community.

Given these changes, it is reasonable to believe that the enduring police culture schema may be out of date as the broader police workforce is no longer insular or homogeneous. But this optimism is countered with signs that the pace of change is not universal across all police departments. While community policing has often been considered an important change due to its focus on building trust between the public and the police, there is sufficient evidence that this philosophy has not been fully embraced.

In addition, the pace at which women are recruited appears to be slowing [45]. There is also increasing evidence that many of the traditional depictions of police culture remain. For instance, a recent study of a police department in the UK revealed a lingering preoccupation with the crime fighter style of policing and the existence of a masculine ethos that was wrapped up in an image of conflict and danger [30]. Despite the presence of female officers, who adopted a more service-oriented approach to policing, this approach was overshadowed by the prevailing crime control mindset [30]. Similarly, the study identified further evidence of the continued existence of common traditional elements of police culture, including cynicism and pessimism, maintaining dominance and isolation from the public.

The continued emergence of sexual harassment and gender discrimination complaints, that I described in Chap. 1, also suggest that policing remains a male-dominated and hyper-masculine occupation that is somewhat closed to the full integration of women.

### Summary

This chapter has provided an in depth overview of the police culture which is influenced by a variety of factors; including job function, rank, individual working style, and police organizations themselves. Moreover, the police culture is frequently identified as a significant obstacle to organizational change and as a factor that preserves negative practices such as abuse of authority, sexual harassment and discrimination and excessive force [4]. The police culture has also tended to be described as hostile to democratic values, thereby leading to police reform efforts that manage change through top-down processes and through judicial and civilian oversight [54].

Notwithstanding that community policing has been hailed as central to changing the police ethos, in many instances it has been inadvertently thwarted through an emphasis on achieving results. New performance indicators have only served to reinforce the existing crime control mindset rather than support the introduction of new modes of policing [30].

David Sklansky, a law professor at Stanford University, has argued that more meaningful avenues of police reform have been overlooked, such as focusing on the differences between officers rather than similarities among them, and rank and file participation rather than top-down control. Specifically, opportunities have been lost to adopt an appreciative inquiry mode of change whereby good officers are identified, rewarded and learned from [54]. A further criticism pertains to missed

opportunities to fully embrace the concept of workplace democracy, thereby relegating policing to an authoritarian form of management practice with police officers continuing to be viewed as automatons and expected to comply with expectations without independent thought [54].

Another concern is the growing distrust between the junior and senior ranks and the view by officers that they are usually recognized for something that they have done wrong rather than for something they have done well [41]. I have discovered similar concerns in my work with police in Canada, with frequent references to a *blame* culture. I will come back to this issue in Chap. 5.

Although police culture continues to be almost universally characterized in terms of its more undesirable qualities, this traditional stereotype may no longer be universally applicable to all police personnel and all police departments. Turning to the future of policing and individual police organizations, there are significant opportunities to build on the more constructive changes that have occurred, and to leverage the positive aspects of police culture to help facilitate these changes. These overlooked opportunities for change will be the focus of a later chapter in this book. In Chap. 3 I explore the concepts of identity and belonging and their relevance for policing and for facilitating change.

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Inclusive Policing from the Inside Out

Workman-Stark, A.L.

2017, XVII, 204 p. 4 illus., 2 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-53308-7