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Golden Ages, Red Herrings and Post-Keynesian Policing

Understanding the Role of Police Culture in the Police Professionalism Debate

Tom Cockcroft

Senior Lecturer, Leeds Beckett University, England

email: T.W.Cockcroft@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to further our understanding of the role played by police culture in debates surrounding police professionalization. It begins with a brief overview of the ‘Golden Age’ of policing which has become the benchmark for public satisfaction against which subsequent eras of British policing are now judged. This is followed by an introduction to the concepts of police professionalism and police culture and an overview of some existing literature that highlights the cultural challenges of police ‘professionalization’. The paper then seeks to position police professionalization agendas as a direct result of social change and the emergence of *post-Keynesian* policing. This leads into an exploration on how professionalization agendas (in their broadest sense) can be viewed as an attempt to impose, rather than remove, control from practitioners. Finally, the paper develops two related themes. First, that the discretion which is synonymous with the police role makes the imposition of greater occupational control problematic and, second, that being seen to control occupational culture is increasingly viewed as a measure of effective police leadership.

INTRODUCTION: THE DECLINE OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF POLICING AND THE RISE OF POLICE CULTURE

Police culture has long been viewed as an essentially negative concept (by the majority of British criminologists if not by all organizational theorists) in both its processes and its outcomes. As a result, police culture has been presented as an explanation for inappropriate ongoing practices, for example, engaging in racist ‘banter’ (Waddington, 1999) and, similarly, as a driver for illicit behaviours that might lead to positive or beneficial occupational outcomes, for example fabrication of evidence. A number of factors might explain this phenomenon. First, that the study of police culture was, partially at least, encouraged through the anti-authoritarian rhetoric of the mid to late 1960s (Cockcroft, 2012). Second, that it emerged in parallel to debates around the ‘crisis in policing’ (Waddington, 1998), precipitated, in the popular consciousness at least, by well-documented problems of probity within police organizations. Thirdly, that, in the context of policing in England and Wales, if not further afield, that the


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post-World War II social democratic consensus (Garland, 2001) led to what some commentators (for example, Reiner, 2010; Emsley, 1996; Rawlings, 2002) referred to as a Golden Age of policing. It is perhaps ironic that this Golden Age is represented not by a 'real life' police officer but by the fictional lead of a TV police show, *Dixon of Dock Green*. Over time, *Dixon of Dock Green* became a synonym for the British Bobby, and by extension, in the words of Barbara Weinberger (1995), for, 'the best police in the world'. Whilst it would be wrong to conceive of the Golden Age of British Policing as ending spectacularly or as a result of one particular occurrence, it is worth noting that even as late as the mid-1960s, British social scientists were pronouncing the British Police as a success story. For example, Banton (1964) begins his sociological comparison of Scottish and American policing with a statement of support for the British police, which he described as a successfully functioning institution. By the 1980s, as Waddington (1998) suggests, a vague sense of 'crisis' (or perhaps more accurately, an increased questioning of legitimacy) surrounded policing in much of the Western world. As Cockcroft (2012) notes, we do not have empirical evidence to suggest that the 1960s heralded a substantive decline in the behaviour of either individual officers or particular police forces and, as Emsley (2005) shows, the history of English policing is punctuated with examples of corruption and 'unprofessionalism'. However, the 1960s provided a protracted turning point, if not in police behaviour, then in the level of scrutiny directed at police behaviour by academic and media commentators. And certainly in terms of the latter, the 1960s signalled that the symbolic potency of *Dixon of Dock Green* iconography was, 'rapidly appearing out of touch with the irreverent mood of the time' (Cockcroft, 2012, p. 20). The concept of the Golden Age therefore underpins this paper as it allows us to understand that, in many cases, our expectations of the police are contingent upon socially constructed and idealized conceptions of policing. In an illuminating account of the symbolic meaning of policing, Loader (1997) shows how such Golden Ages not only provide us with a lens through which we see the past but, crucially in terms of our understanding of police professionalism, are used to facilitate the contextualization of contemporary challenges. That is to say, contemporary debates in policing (including those around professionalization) are often, and perhaps unfairly, framed against a world, and a police, that no longer exist.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF POLICE PROFESSIONALISM

At this juncture, it may be appropriate to consider the different ways in which we can contextualize police professionalism. Sklansky (2014) suggests that police professionalism can be seen in four very different ways. First, it can be viewed, as in the rationale for the introduction of London's Metropolitan Police in 1829, as referring to raising the expectation of the level of conduct of police officers. In other words, the introduction of a system that is intolerant of poor practice. Second, it can refer to self-regulation whereby the institution operates autonomously, particularly in respect of political interference (see Davis, 1991). Third, Sklansky identifies that some proponents of police professionalism take

the idea to refer to policing as being knowledge-based rather than intuitive, in that it distinguishes professionals from amateurs. Importantly, this interpretation suggests that police practitioners have access to, and draw upon, a stock of professional knowledge. Finally, to some commentators, police professionalism is evidenced through police officers internalizing norms rather than responding to the controlling influence of internal organizational structures or external bodies. These four factors can be seen, according to Sklansky, to enjoy a somewhat complex relationship. Whilst at times they have been presented as opposing positions in the professionalism debate, at others they have been viewed as mutually reinforcing. But as Sklansky cogently suggests, 'Still, they do not necessarily travel together' (2014, p. 345). For example, he goes on to draw attention to the perceived tension between 'community' policing and 'professional' policing as a way of showing that 'professionalism', as a concept, is often hard to understand in any meaningful way. This can be further compounded by debates highlighting the tensions between occupations and professions (Davis, 1991, and Evetts, 2003), which rarely prove helpful when applied to the broad array of roles brought together under the term 'policing'. The final factor that tends to render progression with the debate difficult is the distinction between 'professional' and 'accountable' policing. For example, Van Maanen (1978) states that professionalization inhibits accountability by increasing autonomy. The terms 'professionalism' and 'professionalization' are therefore difficult to apply to policing in a uniform fashion without further contextualization and caveat. Similarly, it is important to acknowledge that the relationship between professionalism and accountability has become more convoluted as the notion of accountability, in policing contexts at least, has been transformed over recent years. For example, Mawby and Wright (2005) show how changing political pressures have shifted the form and nature of accountability debates from those targeting issues of control to those of enhancing 'effectiveness'. In other words, «the focus of policing shifted to the management rather than the substance of policing» (Tilley and Laycock, 2014, p. 370). Accountable policing, in many contexts, has therefore subsequently become synonymous with 'cost effective' policing.

WHAT IS POLICE CULTURE?

Given that police culture is a central theme in this paper, it is appropriate at this point to provide a brief overview of the concept in order to bring meaning to the arguments being presented. The last 50 years have seen a wealth of literature in the area of police culture and the term has become widely accepted amongst police, policy and academic audiences. In its less problematic interpretations, police culture is viewed as enhancing officers' working lives by offering:

... frames of reference, coping strategies, practical knowledge and 'commonsense' understandings about how to view their external environment and how and why policing should and can be done in any situation (Bacon, 2014, p. 104).

Implicit here is the perennial challenge of understanding the fragile and intangible concept of culture in even a general sense. Explanations and definitions often fall victim to conflating what police culture *is* with what police culture *does*. Notwithstanding this fundamental difficulty, recent literature in the area has drawn attention to the increasing complexity of the concept. Debates have emerged over the issue of whether we should refer to police culture or police cultures (Chan, 1997), whether police culture should be conceptualized as a culture or a sub-culture (see Bacon, 2014) and the extent to which some reference points within the culture persist over time whilst others are more temporary (Loftus, 2010). Ignoring, for a moment, these contested areas, traditional definitions provide a workable understanding of the basic premise of police culture. These suggest that, despite an apparently rigid hierarchy, the specific roles and pressures of police organizations lead to the development of informal cultural elements that facilitate officers' working lives through providing a framework for both thought and action.

Social scientists were quick to seize upon the concept of police culture as a focal point for poor police practice despite historical accounts that indicated the existence of cultural drivers for unprofessional, illicit and corrupt police practices throughout the early to mid-twentieth century (see, for example, accounts of police oral histories provided by Weinberger, 1995, and Cockcroft, 2005). It is possible, therefore, to argue that although cultural accounts of unprofessional policing only started to become popularized during the politically charged 1960s, these cultural understandings of policework have become an integral factor in the subsequent ongoing and politicized debates about the role, function and form of the police. The net result of this is that cultural accounts have therefore become synonymous with 'bad' policing and that the 'problem' of police culture drove the introduction of change projects, especially under the aegis of the New Public Management (NPM) of recent years (see Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009).

THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF POLICE PROFESSIONALIZATION

Whilst the convergence of police professionalization and police culture will be a recurrent theme in this paper, at this point it might be useful to identify three particular pieces of research that have explicitly addressed elements of this relationship. Mike Rowe's work provides an explicit example of the ways in which the professionalization agenda can be seen as a means of countering police occupational culture. Rowe details the introduction of a positive arrest policy in an English police force that limited police officer discretion by actively encouraging them to engage proactively in domestic violence incidents. The intention of this move was to generate a greater number of successful convictions. Traditionally, police officers had, when dealing with this form of offence, used a high degree of professional judgment in respect of deciding whether to proceed formally or informally in respect of further police action. For many officers in Rowe's research this reduction in discretion was effec-

tively an attack on their professional judgement, leading Rowe to conclude that, 'the traditional role of the police officer was being eroded' (2007, p. 293). Furthermore, as Rowe suggests, that such moves to increase police 'performance' can have a negative impact on police use of discretion has been recognized as far back as the seminal work of Wilson (1968).

Similar sentiments can be found in the work of Heslop (2011) who draws upon Ritzer's notion of 'McDonaldization' (2004) as a tool through which to understand the impact of the professionalization agenda within policing. Simply put, Ritzer suggests that the management model used to run fast-food retail establishments is increasingly being used in a wider range of industries and services. This management model, which is based upon principles of calculability, efficiency, predictability and control (Heslop, 2011, p. 312), ostensibly allows for a rational and effective use of resources and a correspondingly rational and effective delivery of service. Central to Ritzer's model, however, is the assertion that 'McDonaldized' organizations, as a result of this apparently rational process, produce irrationalities, or unwanted consequences. To Heslop these irrationalities are essentially negative, lead to increased bureaucracy and a subsequent deskilling of police staff, and are at odds with traditional notions of police work.

Whilst Heslop's work allows us to understand how these irrationalities connect managerialism and the police and its culture at an operational level, the work of Robert Adlam applies concepts of government rationalities to police leadership. In doing so, he illustrates how the apparent mismatch of leadership 'innovations' to the reality of police work is understandable, and inevitable. Indeed, he suggests that:

... there remains little relationship between the language of leadership and the actual provision of policing services. The core police culture ... is set to remain relatively immune to the delicately contrived discourses of its leadership (2002, p. 33).

Adlam's work is important here as it reinforces a fundamental feature within the police professionalism debate. Despite the breadth of changes that have been introduced to police organizations under the guise of 'professionalization', the rhetoric of police professionalism often has little impact on the realities of police work and the occupational behaviours and dispositions of police officers.

POST-KEYNESIAN POLICING AND THE RISE OF PROFESSIONALISM

History shows, however, that there are some broader nuances that should be appreciated when exploring 'unprofessional' police behaviour. Not least, changes to the way in which social scientists conceptualize the relationship

between the individual and the state have created new ways of explaining and responding to individual behaviour, whether we be referring to criminals or police officers. As Reiner and Newburn (2007) illustrate, police research can be conceptualized as having passed, chronologically, through five distinct phases – ‘consensus’, ‘controversy’, ‘conflict’, ‘contradiction’ and ‘crime control’, broadly reflecting the parallel development of Western criminology through orthodox, conflict and realist stages to what Young (1994) would refer to as ‘administrative’ criminology. It is the spirit of the latter which has allowed the state to reconceptualize the criminal from *homo sociologicus* to *homo economicus* (Baert, 1998), thus redefining the problem of crime as an individual problem rather than a social problem. This notion of economic rationality has permeated contemporary policing to such an extent that it is now possible to conceive of Western policing as post-Keynesian (O’Malley and Palmer, 1996). In experiencing such a shift of rationality regarding human behaviour, founded upon simple cost-benefit analogy, we have witnessed attempts to define, measure and control the effectiveness of the police along similar lines, via NPM (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009, Cockcroft, 2012, 2014). Unfortunately, and as several pieces of research highlight (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009, Levi 2008, Butler, 2000), professionalization initiatives, predicated upon transactional performance management techniques, are simply insufficiently sophisticated to capture or appreciate the complexity of the police role. Nor have they been sufficiently successful in overriding police officers’ own perception of what constitutes ‘good’ policing. It can be argued that the lack of finesse of NPM techniques, coupled with the challenges of articulating ‘professionalism’ in any meaningful way within police contexts, has allowed contemporary debates around police reform and professionalism to become largely meaningless.

PROFESSIONALIZATION AND CONTROL

The work of writers such as Fournier (1999) and Evetts (2013), whilst writing at a general level, is invaluable as a means by which we can seek to understand how the discourse of professionalism is being applied to new occupational and organizational contexts such as, in this case, policing. In particular, much of their value lies in recasting modern readings of professionalism to suggest the external imposition of order rather than, as might be assumed, any self-directed internally governed autonomy. For example, Evetts (2013) suggests that there are three interpretations of the concept of professionalism. The first broadly sees professionalism in a positive light, whereby it represents a particular form of control and regulation that helps civil society function effectively, by effectively redressing other more negative aspects of societal functioning. The second approaches the concept of professionalism negatively and conceives of it operating in professions’ self-interest as a form of market closure. To proponents of this explanation, professions monopolize to ensure dominance of their occupational sphere. Thirdly, and finally, professionalism can be viewed as a ‘disciplinary mechanism’ (Fournier, 1999, p. 281). To Fournier

(1999), the advent of late modernity, and the associated destructuring of work practices in some occupations, has led to a ‘disciplinary gap’ (Fournier, 1999, p. 281) that demands that some form of control is exerted to ensure appropriate regulation. Under this conception of professionalism, to become professionalized is to succumb to a particular form of ‘disciplinary logic’ (Fournier, 1999, p. 288). Evetts (2013) draws on this distinct discourse of contemporary professionalism to propose that it equates essentially to ‘organizational professionalism’ (p. 787) whereby professionalism, rather than emanating from *within* the professionals themselves, is enforced from *above* through managers.

As can be inferred from the above, the concept of professionalism is a contested and challenging one within the police context. Apart from the troubling lack of an unambiguous definition, police professionalization (as a concept) has a complex relationship with wider issues of police accountability (which, of course, represents another model of control). The issue becomes even more convoluted when one acknowledges that the notion of professionalism has varying constructions or meanings in different national contexts (Bayley, 1979). Furthermore, such cross-national distinctions have historically been mirrored at the local level. For example, Wilson’s (1968) seminal analysis of different police styles within the United States showed that different typologies of police department had widely varying approaches to embedding professionalism in their practice.

However, there are two areas to which the paper now briefly draws attention, and which receive insufficient attention in police professionalism debates, despite being fundamental to any informed discussion. Both, it can be argued, are also rooted broadly in the idea of ‘control’. The first concerns the issue of police discretion and the role which it takes within modern ‘professionalized’ police forces. The second addresses the ways in which police organizations misrepresent behavioural change as cultural change due, in part, to the pressures brought to bear under the NPM agenda.

Police discretion has, for thirty years, been considered as problematic within Western policing debates, and scholars of police culture have traditionally portrayed the concept of discretion as a form of ‘necessary evil’. Whilst it is fundamental to the police role, at the same time it has been linked to many of the more negative elements of culturally motivated behaviour (Cockcroft, 2012). Fundamentally, the challenge of police discretion can be reduced to one of ensuring that police officers have sufficient professional autonomy with which to discharge their challenging and varied role efficiently, whilst simultaneously ensuring that they have insufficient freedom to engage in inappropriate, illegitimate or corrupt behaviour. This, of course, is a false distinction, as one cannot easily control discretion by degrees. What is fundamental to these debates, at least within the UK context, is that police professionalization initiatives which target cultural change essentially focus on reducing the discretion available to police officers. Increasingly, police managers seek to limit, or rein in, the culture of the lower ranks of the police, and do so by invoking the con-

cept of professionalism as both the preferred driver and outcome. For example, Brogden and Shearing (1993, p. 109) explore the conditions under which police professionalism can be 'effective as a device that will restrain police culture'. Similarly, Brown (1988) identifies, 'The palpable conflict in contemporary police departments between the values of the police culture and those of professionalism' (p. 50).

What we are witnessing then is essentially a culture war between two opposing sides, both of which claim the right to define and shape the meaning of 'professionalism' within policing. Of interest here is the fact that 'traditional' and 'management' articulations of professionalism refer to substantively different roles and qualities. For example, Monique Marks, writing about the relationship between police unionism and police culture, reinforces this when she reflects:

Going hand in hand with notions of self-regulation is a preoccupation with increased 'professionalism'. The favoured new managerial mechanisms of building police professionalism are stepped-up training, micro performance management and certification ... These new disciplinary technologies are, not surprisingly, sharply contested, especially by police unions who are not generally disposed to abandon more traditional models of police 'professionalism' that emphasize notions of autonomy, discretion and legitimacy (2007, p. 237).

The second point to be developed here, that of effectively measuring cultural change, can, as a starting point, begin with an acknowledgement of the seeming obsession within management circles of change management (FitzGerald, Hough, Joseph, and Qureshi, 2002; Kelling and Wycoff, 2002). Perhaps the Holy Grail of change management, in police circles at least, is to be able to evidence cultural change. William Bratton, a police leader widely credited with turning around a number of 'failing' police departments in the United States, articulated this sentiment in the context of the issues faced by the Metropolitan Police in the aftermath of the London Riots of 2011. He stated, in an interview for *The Guardian* newspaper, that, 'Bureaucrats change processes, leaders change culture. I think of myself as a transformational leader who changes cultures' (Dodd and Stratton, 2011, no page). The concept of transformational leadership has, not least because of Bratton's influence, become increasingly popular in the lexicon of police leaders over recent years (Mastrofski, 2004, Silvestri, 2007) and as a result has become entwined with the idea of police professionalization. Its popularity lies largely in the assumption that it provides a managerial tool with which to challenge elements of the traditional police occupational culture (Foster, 2003; Mastrofski, 2004).

Whilst writers such as Pawar (2003) provide detailed criticisms of transformational leadership at the conceptual level, it is not within the remit of this paper to provide a general critique of the concept. What the paper will do, however, is to return to a critique originally outlined by Cockcroft (2014). Quite simply,

this suggests that police leaders often fail to view police culture, and the issue of *cultural* change, with a sufficient level of complexity. This can be evidenced through reference to Schein's work on organizational culture. As a starting point, he defines culture, in its broadest sense, as:

... a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2004, p. 17).

Crucially, Schein exposes the complexity of culture and how it functions within organizational contexts. This is shown by his identification of three different levels at which culture operates: 'artifacts'; 'espoused beliefs and values'; and 'underlying assumptions'. There is a tendency within police organizations to utilize relatively simplistic and inaccurate instruments with which to measure police 'performance' (see Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009). These challenges become ever more acute when one attempts to measure cultural change. Whilst culture has no objective reality and cannot tangibly be experienced, police organizations have been very keen to apparently measure, evidence and proclaim success in effecting cultural 'change'. Using Schein's distinction between different levels of culture, what becomes clear is that what is often lauded as cultural change is, in reality, behavioural change. That is, we have changed the *artifacts* displayed or presented by a group of people but not their *underlying assumptions*. We change their language or their behaviour, but fail to change the way they think (see Cockcroft, 2014). The work of Loftus (2009) provides a fascinating glimpse into how this issue has manifested itself in respect of police/ethnic minority relations. Increasingly, police officers lack confidence in articulating or speaking about issues of race, due to the rise of identity politics, yet find themselves working in an occupational context where racial issues are embedded (not least through the historical dynamics of police/ethnic minority relations). It becomes evident, therefore, that police reform, the professionalism context and police culture have become incredibly intertwined in a way that simplistic or superficial explanations will fail to reflect. The widely prevailing idea that police culture enjoys an antithetical relationship with professionalism, and that it actively inhibits appropriate policing practices, fails to bear relevance in the light of any complex reading of the idea of culture. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary do much to reinforce this point when they write:

The journalistic shorthand that summarises the thinking of operational police officers as being explained by 'a canteen culture' is as misleading as it is mischievous ... These very canteens witness the conversations of officers who still see service to all members of the public as an intrinsic part of their vocation. The number of officers who are nominated each year for community awards are part of this same culture (1999, p. 29).

DISCRETION, RISK AVERSION AND THE NEW POLICING PROFESSIONALISM

It is possible to argue that the predominant wisdom, that challenging police culture is a means of raising the level of policing professionalism, is essentially what the English might refer to as a ‘red herring’. This idiom has popularly been used to denote one of the fallacies described within Aristotelian logic (see Parry and Hacker, 1991) as *ignoratio elenchi* or ‘irrelevant conclusion’. That is, that whilst the logic of the argument might be appropriate, that the real issue is essentially ignored. The rhetoric of professionalism, whilst suggesting an effective up-skilling of lower-ranking officers, has, arguably, been used to restrict the power of lower-ranking police officers. Currie and Lockett (2007), for example, chart the rise of what they call the ‘professional bureaucrat archetype’ (p. 345) that has seen, within the public sector, a focus on professionalism that ignores the professional values of lower-ranking workers. Somewhat ironically, therefore, given the direction of the debate regarding police professionalization, we have witnessed a decrease in the influence of professionals since the advent of NPM (Levi, 2008).

Moves towards police professionalization have resulted in a corresponding decrease in police professional discretion. Again, one cannot escape the irony that police professionalization has been achieved not only by disempowering practitioners, but also through the subsequent disintegration of personal accountability at the level of individual officers (Flanagan, 2008, Cockcroft, 2012). The Royal Commission (1961, p. 16) found that police officers might exercise their discretion «more wisely and uniformly», and since that time we have seen a concerted effort to enforce control over the decisions made and the behaviours engaged in by police officers. This has resulted in the identification of an emergent risk aversion within British policing (Flanagan, 2008, Risk and Regulation Advisory Council [RRAC], 2009; Heaton, 2010) as police institutions seek to focus on evidencing success in achieving more easily met internal goals rather than the more problematic external ones (Garland, 2001). This presents a peculiar situation as risk aversion, rather than solving the problems facing police institutions in late modern society, exacerbates them by encouraging excessive rule-following rather than a, ‘flexible policing environment’ (RRAC, 2009, p. 19).

Rather than encouraging or enhancing police professionalism, therefore, it can be argued that the rhetoric of ‘police professionalism’ can be seen as encouraging new forms of control being brought to bear on police officers of the lower ranks. This can be seen as representing an attempt to reverse the embedded ideal of policework that the greatest power is wielded by those of the lower ranks (Waddington, 1998). Thus, the contemporary use of the term ‘professionalism’ in debates of police reform represents a shift in meaning from those that are synonymous with traditional conceptions of police culture. Whereas, traditionally, discretion was viewed as an ‘emblem of their professionalism’ (Cockcroft, 2012, p. 46) police officers have seen the joint issues of risk aversion and private sector management techniques serve to erode this hallmark of

their workplace autonomy. And whilst factors such as risk aversion remind us of the external drivers towards reduced autonomy, Fielding's (1988) work shows us that as far back as the 1980s, the professionalism of rank and file officers was being challenged by increases to the administrative and bureaucratic elements of officers' workloads.

One particular example of this is evidenced by Cockcroft and Beattie's evaluation of a performance measurement regime in a British police force (2009). The regime itself was based on Kaplan and Norton's Balanced Scorecard approach and entailed officers being awarded points for engaging in certain types of behaviour. For example, officers making arrests in key crime domains ('hot spots', repeat offenders, domestic violence or hate crime) attracted greater numbers of points. One member of the implementation team was quite forthcoming about the motivation behind the scheme, suggesting that it was based on a 'carrot and the stick' approach (p. 532) which was designed to subconsciously affect police behaviour and decision-making. As strategic aims become increasingly reduced to the level of key performance indicators, these become transposed to directives that seek to reinforce the increasingly narrow set of behaviours that constitute policework by reducing individual discretion.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted not so much to solve questions as to raise problems through a cursory explanation of police professionalism, police culture and some of the issues that provide explanatory links between the two (for example, NPM). In doing so, it has hopefully, and in some small way, helped to build on the work of others in providing a voice of criticality in these important, and on-going, debates about police professionalism. Underlying these, often semantic discussions regarding culture and professionalism lie some more embedded and fundamental challenges. Whilst it would be inappropriate to engage with these issues, here, in anything more than a superficial way, it is at least worthy to set them out in the broadest of terms. The first is that the police need to engage with the concept of culture in a more critical way by seeking to understand that culture is not fully synonymous with either behaviour or language. Changing the things that police do and say should not automatically be taken as representing cultural change. Whilst the professionalization agenda seeks to evidence such change, it sets the dangerous precedent of simplifying complex organizational processes that are fluid and changing in character, yet which have a sustained impact on police officers and how they work. The second point relates less to police culture at an organizational level and more towards police culture at a conceptual level. If one looks back throughout the rich literature of police occupational culture, one issue becomes abundantly clear. Progressively, from the work of Banton onwards, we have seen a noticeable move towards a normative model of police culture. That is, the way in which we use the concept has increasingly changed. Early research into police culture emerged from sociological questions about the relationship between

the state and the individual. The police became a focus for understanding ‘big’ questions over legitimacy and power. Increasingly, it is possible to argue that police culture has been recast as a ‘technical’ as opposed to a sociological issue. It is, therefore, in danger of being reduced to a phrase that denotes nothing more than an array of problems displayed by police officers and which require relatively straightforward interventions to rectify. In other words, there is a risk that the study of police culture has become essentially acultural. To advocate this type of approach is to ignore the actual roots of the academy’s interest in police culture. More seriously, however, to advocate this type of approach is to abandon any pretence to *understanding* rather than just *responding* to police behaviour.

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