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Using Police Culture to Understand Barriers to Effective Investigation

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Overview

- An introduction to police culture
- Police culture and the victim
- Police culture and the child victim
- Emerging issues
- Conclusion

An Introduction to Police Culture

“a layer of informal occupational norms and values operating under the apparently rigid hierarchical structure of police organisations” Chan (1997, p.43)”

“accepted practices, rules, and principles of conduct that are situationally applied, and generalized rationales and beliefs” (Manning 1989, p.360)

“Cop culture has developed as a patterned set of understandings which help to cope with and adjust to the pressures and tensions which confront the police” Reiner (1992, p.109)

Traditional Approaches

Suspicion

Racism

Sexism

Camaraderie/Solidarity

Pursuit of Excitement

Pragmatism

Conservatism

Cynicism

Pessimism

Challenges

Deterministic

Ignores the breadth of police roles

A-cultural

Ignores variations in police behaviour

‘...just as the culture of the police is seen as encouraging a rigidified and narrow interpretation of the social world within which police officers exist, so our ideas about how this process works are similarly grounded in assumption’ (Cockcroft, 2013, p. 79)

Contemporary Versions

Discretion

Managerialism

Leadership

Variation

Professionalism

Further challenges

The 'politicisation' of cultural change

Measuring cultural change

Negotiating academic and practitioner understandings of culture

Does culture have an impact on 'emotional' responses to policework

Police Culture and the Child Victim

- "We hated sex offenders, child murderers...we had one at St. Thomas's...a bloke goes in there and takes a nine week old baby, buggers it, and rapes it, and he was still in the grounds when we got there and we got him...We didn't touch him...I felt like it, I felt like it,...oh, I honestly did...but we didn't touch him...could've killed him. A thing like that, it's hard to keep your hands off of him but we did it by the book. Otherwise, if you didn't do it by the book, you'd lose him in court. How we kept our hands off him...there was an awful lot of people itching but nobody laid a finger on him...we took him in...you do get hatred towards them".

(Metropolitan Police Officer, served 1952-1978, PC, Aide to CID, CID)

"...if anybody ever assaulted a child for instance....he was 'seen to'. In other words, when he got to the station he got a good hiding...I can remember one bloke I knocked off for assaulting a little girl of 3...he was a foreigner...what he did was...he took this child into a house...he sexually abused her...so anyway...we took this bloke to the station and the first thing that happened to him when he got to the station was he got taken to the CID office and the CID bloke.. said, "Why did you do this to the child?" He gave some excuse...admitted it. So he said, "Take your belt off"...He said, "Bend over" and gave him 12 cuts across his behind with his belt...that's the sort of thing that happened in those days. Now this bloke was charged and taken down to a cell...at 2 o'clock a Scotch PC came on and said, "Where's this bloke whose assaulted this little girl"..."Oh, he's down in number 3 cell down the passage there"...He said, "Give us the keys". So he was given the keys by the Sergeant and he went down there and said to him, "Don't mark him too much". He went in there and gave him one or two. But no you would never tell on the PC who did that"

(Metropolitan Police Officer, served 1934-1959, PC)

“I've had a child...a case of infanticide where a child's head was cut off and then the body was hanging off...I'm going back some years. The umbilical cord had been cut off from the placenta and I had that wrapped in a little bit of newspaper in my pocket to take into the station to prove as evidence”

(Metropolitan Police Officer, served 1936-1967, PC, Sergeant)

“We found half a child this side of the Northumberland pub and the other half was on the other side of the Northumberland pub...cut in two. I went back and had a meal... but that's how hard you get. Don't get me wrong, I was cut up but you've got to put a brave face on...you might go home and cry your eyes out later but, at the time, you cannot be seen to be weak...you've gotta do the job”

(Metropolitan Police Officer, served 1952-1978, PC, Aide to CID, CID)



Introducing the ‘Symbolic’ Victim

- Skolnick (1994) – the ‘symbolic assailant’
- The ‘Symbolic victim’?
 - Unambiguous victimhood
 - Strikes to the heart of the values of the police

The Child Victim

Negates 'Distancing strategies' (Innes, 2002)

'Moral Purity' (Innes, 2002)

Innocence, premature death and the 'totality' of victimisation (Ursano and McCarroll, 1990)

Identification with victim far greater (Ursano and McCarroll, 1990)

Society's failure to protect (Maney and Kedem, 1982)

Greater stress (Henry, 1995)

Exploring Distancing Strategies

“When we turned up at the scene it’s a bloody nightmare. The victim’s high, the suspects high even the fucking dog is high. And you’ll never guess what the dog’s called...Bob”
(Innes, 2002, p.73)

“She is still warm , but *rigor mortis* is beginning to set into the arms and legs, I wrap the blanket around her again, and go out to my colleague. When I leave the room I am gripped by panic about whether she’s really dead. That night at home, I can’t sleep a wink. Can’t forget the dead child. See it in front of me. Remember the house, the room, and different people’s reactions to it all”.

Karlsson and
Christianson (2003, p.424)

Organizational Components of Investigative Methodology (Innes 2002)

Administrative-Management Structures

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Conceptual Knowledge Structures

External Pressures

- 'Temporal' pressures
- 'Financial' pressures
- 'Reputational' pressures (see also Skolnick)

Recap...

The concept of 'the child' has a resonance that cuts through moral ambiguity of policing.

It also has an emotional impact, and has a symbolic value within the 'conceptual knowledge' structures of the police

The 'moral purity' predisposes the public favourably to the work of the police

This may be countered by the convergence
of external pressures



Tensions

Burnout

V

Palliative effects of culture

Stress drivers

V

Pragmatism

Psychology of survival

V

Morality of the Police

In conclusion...

Particular emotional stresses of child homicide cases

Impact of stress on decision-making

Self-preservation set against a morally unambiguous context

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