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# Putting their Bodies on the Line: Police Culture and Gendered Physicality

Louise Westmarland\*

**Abstract** This paper looks at the way police officers talk about their bodies and reveals their beliefs about their colleagues' abilities based on size, strength, and gender. It attempts to bring the study of 'the body' into the arena of police culture. Assumptions around front line policing being constantly fraught with danger, and requiring a strong, fit, and capable body are analysed by drawing upon data from an extensive period of ethnographic fieldwork. The officers' highly sexualized and gendered notions of the body are discussed throughout the paper in terms of police culture. Their beliefs about force and strength—actual or imagined—and the ways in which the appearance of the body is important are analysed in terms of gendered policing. The way this is influenced by beliefs about bodies and occupational culture in policing more generally is examined in the light of certain tasks and activities.

## Introduction

*A female police chief told a junior colleague she was 'silly, vain and frivolous' for getting a 'boob job', before exposing her own breasts and saying 'look at these' during a Women in Policing conference. She said Ms Jackson's credibility was 'zero', warned she would miss out on promotion and claimed the officer was a 'laughing stock' among senior male colleagues, the panel sitting at Greater Manchester Police HQ heard.*

*To prove her point, Ms Sutcliffe opened the front of her dress and said: 'Look at these—look at these. These are the*

*breasts of someone who has had three children. I know they're ugly but I don't feel the need to pump myself with silicone to get self-esteem.'*

*In the hour-long exchange, Ms Sutcliffe went on to say: 'Sarah, it doesn't matter how hard you work now because you will always just be known as the girl who had the tit job.'*

*The haranguing concluded when Ms Sutcliffe told her colleague she was no longer going to support a further promotion for her (Finnigan, 2016).*

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Blue uniform policing is the embodiment of state power because on occasions it involves enforcing the law using an officer's physical strength and authority. As the success or failure of this process is observed by colleagues and often retold in the police canteen (Waddington, 1999), physical ability is an important marker of competence. The use of coercive authority, with or without the use of physical force, according to Klockers (1985, p. 17), is at the core of the police role. This makes the body extremely significant in terms of size, strength, and appearance. Police cultural beliefs about physical and mental toughness are important because respect from colleagues is dependent upon sufficient arrests, and more significantly, certain types of arrest. High status arrests involve physical force, danger, and courage and the retelling of the circumstances of the catch or fight confers additional kudos upon the participants. Whether action-seeking or generally conflict avoiding, every officer has to be prepared to put their body on the line in this way at some point in their career.

Given the importance of physical capital in policing it is surprising that few studies have considered how the size, shape, and appearance are of significance in police culture. The focus upon the body as an area of academic study has been growing in popularity over the past 20 years and draws upon theories which consider 'the human self as an embodied agent' (Turner, 1996, p. 6). This has led to studies of embodiment, gendered roles, and identities being developed to explain the 'lived experience' of men and women in some occupations such as door security work (Monaghan, 2002), medicine (Cassell, 1996), and nursing (Halford et al., 1997). These theories suggest that the body is a representation of the self and that the 'shape and image of their external body' (Turner, 1996, p. 23) sends messages about the person themselves, including their value and competency. It is generally acknowledged that gender plays an important part in the evaluation of bodily identity and worth, with women's bodies being 'under the constant critical surveillance of others' (Davis, 1996, p.

115). As the quote from the disciplinary case reported in the press at the beginning of this paper suggests, women in policing may feel subject to additional scrutiny in terms of their sexual attractiveness rather than for their other capabilities.

This paper will examine these aspects of the body in police culture by examining three main aspects of potential interest. The first is the way that cultural rules around decency and dignity are linked to the gendered body, such as what can be allowed to be seen and touched. Second, the issue of skills and competencies is examined in terms of the way status is conferred via the body. The third concern is the way that some bodies are seen as 'suitable' for some forms of police work, whereas others are not. Finally, the paper looks at the way the police work with bodies, such as the 'contained' body in the case of suspects, or some cases the deceased or diseased body.

The discussion that follows considers the difficulties and ambiguities of physically capturing and detaining suspects due to the problematic nature of conceptions surrounding the gendered body. Some of this is associated with gendered bodies and beliefs about force and strength, but there are also other important cultural aspects of policing that emerge. These issues include the searching and guarding of the 'body' when it is in custody, issues of decency and the 'appropriately' gendered body to look at physically intimate injuries, to interview children and to take statements from the victims of sexual assault. It will be argued throughout this paper that while some actions associated with the enactment of policing use of the body as an operational tool more overtly than others, in few situations is it irrelevant. The central argument of this discussion is that the commonly agreed elements of police culture such as danger, mission, and group loyalty, can be analysed with reference to what has been, so far, the 'absent' body.

### 'The body' and policing

Previous studies have considered the significance of bodily force and strength in terms of women's

emerging role in policing since the 1970s when Sex Discrimination UK legislation meant that men and women in the police were carrying out supposedly identical roles (see Heidensohn, 1992, 1994; Anderson et al., 1993; Jones, 1986; Westmarland, 2001). These authors have argued that parity in the police for women has still not been achieved partly because sexual identity categorizes the work the officer will be allocated and symbolizes its potential expertise. Women 'instinctively' know about children and will be 'naturally' more sympathetic when dealing with victims of sexual assault because they 'know how it feels'. While it is impossible for the body to be unsexed, or to work in an ungendered environment, 'the body' is often the central focus in police work. This shifts the focus from looking exclusively at sex or gender as an explanation for segregated roles and traditional assumptions about force and strength, to a more general explanation of the use of the body in policing.

Reflecting on 'the body' or more specifically 'embodiment' now seems an interesting proposition to elicit more subtle nuances from the original data about police culture. From the discussion which follows, as well as other studies conducted on gender and policing, it might be supposed that patrol work is divided along strict demarcation lines associated with bodily sex type. While it is true to say that a significant number of activities associated with police duties could be labelled traditionally 'masculine' or 'feminine' in practice they can, and are, carried out by an officer of either gender. As Butler has suggested, gender, as opposed to biological sex, is a social construction imposed through discourse (1990, pp. 329–39) meaning that gendered identities and occupations are connected in ways we tend to take for granted. This implies that 'sex' refers to the physical attributes at birth, but gender is the result of social expectations and behaviours. As Monaghan's study of nightclub and pub security work with the 'sometimes shocking doings of gendered, relational, working bodies' (2002, p. 504), shows, the significance of body size and physical attributes are important in some jobs. Similarly, bodies are important in police

culture because the streets are often viewed as a male preserve, and gender is a significant part of police occupational beliefs about heroic cops protecting vulnerable victims. Herbert argues that 'hard chargers' who make what appear to be aggressive style arrests are revered in police cultural terms much more than the 'effeminate', denigrated 'station queen'. '(M)asculinist ideology is expressed and celebrated' (2001, p. 56).

Deeper analysis of police culture and the body might suggest some ambiguities around the way the concepts of male and female are categorized so neatly by Herbert. Malcolm Young translates such concepts into the 'homologous binaries' of police culture (1991, p. 209). These binaries allow police officers to confirm their beliefs about 'them and us', or 'good and evil' which reinforce in-group identity and solidarity. According to Young however these well-established categories were challenged by young women officers who came to work in the CID in the 1970s and failed to follow the 'rules', wearing modern fashionable clothes, make-up, and jewellery. As these women were very successful in their roles, carrying out dangerous undercover work around drugs and organized crime, they caused disquiet among the existing, largely male, workforce. As the evidence in the following sections illustrate, displaying courage or 'bottle' may determine peer respect aside from considerations linked to gender, body size, or strength. Police practices and cultures illustrate the messy ambiguity of gendered bodies and sexualities because the boundaries of what is acceptable are open to interpretation. As Butler has suggested, 'what is feminine and what is masculine can be altered ... and they are more malleable than previously thought' (2004, p. 61). This is complicated for the police however, as the processing of the body is complicated by it being 'sexed' or of a 'different' gender it causes problems in two ways: first, with regard to decency and allegations of sexual harassment, and second, due to beliefs within the organization about skills and competencies being related to gender, such as in

cases of sexual assault. As the following examples from the fieldwork illustrate, there are no bodies that are ungendered and no arenas of social life that are unembodied (Morgan, 1993), but being male or female in certain situations cannot fully explain police cultural beliefs about the body.

## Methods: researching police bodies

The evidence supporting this paper draws upon a previous ethnographic study published originally as a more general examination of gender and police culture (Author date). Some of the data analysed in this paper have already been used in those discussions, but is reanalysed here in terms of the 'lived' body, its symbolism, use, and control. As Heaton (2004), Mauthner et al. (1998) and Atkinson (1992) suggest, re-reading qualitative data such as field notes after some time elapsed can be an enlightening experience. Rather than explaining the demarcation between certain types of tasks purely in terms of gender, this paper aims to use secondary analysis (and primary analysis of unused data) to focus upon police cultural conceptions of the body. Bodily capital, as distinct from male/female dichotomies are examined to explore developments in the field of the sociology of the body that have emerged since the collection of the original data. 'Embodiment' now tends to refer to a process by which people regard themselves as inhabiting the 'lived body' or to describe the 'human self as an embodied agent' (Turner, 1996, p. 6). It indicates the ways in which mind and body combine to make up a person's identity—but as Fourcade and others have argued, the 'things that feel natural to us are not natural at all. They are the result of processes of socialization, inculcation, and training' (2010, p. 569). Just as 'sex' and 'gender' are confused in general discourse, the practices of policing seem to muddle what is socially constructed and assumed to be biologically given; decency and dignity are

confused with skill and competency. The following analyses begin to tease out some of these distinctions, and later in the paper some of the ambiguities of the body being regarded as an important yet commonplace entity are explored.

As a sample of observations of police cultural beliefs and activities, the data analysed here were collected by way of access to two contrasting UK police forces with approximately six months spent with each. Although the study was largely ethnographic, more formalized interviews and focus group discussions added to extensive unrestricted fieldwork in each site over a period of around 18 months in total. Most of the fieldwork was carried out during weekend night and evening shifts. These experiences were then used reflectively during the interviews and focus groups, where experiences of the researcher were drawn upon to inform and facilitate the group discussions. These focus groups are analysed more fully in the volume that was published initially from this study (see Westmarland, 2001, p. 73–78). Approximately 35 officers took part in the six discussion groups, roughly equally numbers of men and women, and 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted with officers from all ranks. About 50% of these interview were conducted with senior, usually 'headquarters' staff, broken down into a ratio of around one-third women and two-thirds men, as this was the available sample and representative of the workforce at this level, with 450 h (or the equivalent of approximately 4 months full-time patrol work) of field observations conducted. The fieldwork from which the paper is drawn was the first full-scale ethnography of policing in the UK focusing on gender. It involved accompanying male and female officers on patrol, seeing all aspects of their work, including some specialist departments which were staffed mainly by either men or women as 'gendered specialists'. These included 'male' departments such as the 'cars, guns, and horses', and the 'cardigan squad' (Heidensohn, 2008) where sexual offences and child protection work took place. As a woman ethnographer the remarks by female officers about their bodily issues—such as the way they were treated by male colleagues,

was regarded empathically, using an experience-based and embodied approach (Fourcade, 2010, p. 571).

## Results

The results of the wider ethnographic study suggested that being a woman in the police has certain distinct disadvantages. In particular, inhabiting or possessing a body classed as female leads to assumptions about capabilities surrounding, as might be expected, the care of children, even though many young women officers have not yet had time to have families due to shift work patterns and being young in service (Home Office, 2006). Conversely, male officers, with more years of experience and with partners and children were considered 'unsuitable' for some tasks as the evidence below illustrates. More specifically the possession of the female body imbues the status of 'gendered specialist' (Westmarland 2001, p. 17–45) in cases of sexual or physical assault. One of these assumptions is that due to some link between emotions and the body, women officers are more empathetic when dealing with victims of rape and other sexual and physical assaults. Women complainants will 'naturally' be more comfortable talking to another woman about their problems at the police station enquiry desk, and as the discussion later in this paper will show, any removal of clothing, or touching the body, even extraneous parts such as arms or legs, is classed as 'women's work'.

Some assumptions about the fit, young, male body of the 'typical' police officer also raise contradictions in the light of the demands of police life. The lack of exercise during normal everyday patrol work (once any foot patrols have been dispensed with as a probationer) brings into question normative beliefs about gender and the body and its suitability for certain tasks. In the past, police officers had no contractual obligation to maintain levels of physical fitness, other than in terms of basic health requirements. On duty their physical exercise might consist of getting in and out of the police car, with a

very occasional burst of activity to chase a suspect on foot. Added to this, officers often complain that shift work encourages irregular diet, the indulgence in fast food, unhealthy late night snacks, and a culture where there is usually someone ready to go drinking after work. Gendered cultural beliefs around the suitability of certain bodies for policing tasks ignores individual attributes—a woman officer might be extremely fit, a body builder or martial arts expert, a male officer might be small or physically weak. While ageing or overweight cops of either sex might appear incapable of catching or restraining suspects, 'masculinity', in police cultural terms, and perhaps in wider society, may confer some physical status that will be apparent in the discussion of the evidence in this paper.

### Finding 1: decency and dignity

Despite an apparently blasé attitude towards many aspects of life that most people would find disturbing, in police cultural terms the body is often a sexualized, gendered 'problem' because of concerns about touching skin, certain body parts, or viewing nudity. In general, street searches conducted by patrol officers are often just 'pat downs' of outer clothing, the turning out of pockets, or looking in bags. Guns and weapons, stolen goods, and illegal drugs are the potential items of interest. Here, there is no difficulty—male or female officers will conduct this sort of search with suspects of either sex. One female officer explained that she was quite happy to search the pockets and outer clothing of a male suspect, even though her patrol partner was alarmed, saying:

I searched a male out on the street and my colleague was horrified. I said, 'Well I can do it' and he was 'ooh-no-ooh.'  
(female PC).

Naturally, where nudity is involved, such as during a strip searches, with the touching or viewing of unclothed skin, decency makes the gendered body a special concern. Searching female suspects requires finding women officers to call back to the

station—commonly in the case of shop theft—or to interview women who have been assaulted. In some patrol areas, this was very inconvenient as there may be only one woman on each shift who could be working some distance away. In busy subdivisions, she will have her own list of calls waiting in the central control room computer to complete, and to divert from these can be irritating. In one case, two women were needed for a search, as the senior officer remarked, after helping a less experienced colleague:

That shoplifter was messing Mandy about, saying she wouldn't take her clothes off. Now I usually allow them some dignity, you know, take your top off, then put it back on so that they're not standing there completely naked, but in her case I went in there and said 'RIGHT. . . .' (and made her strip naked) (female PC).

During the fieldwork there were several situations where the immediate arrest of a woman was taking place, without the opportunity to find female officers to assist. In these cases male officers often appeared uncomfortable dealing with women offenders if it meant touching their body, even when fully clothed, although a woman researcher was therefore present, as a quasi chaperone, particularly when accompanying young girls arrested for shoplifting.

On one occasion, following the arrest of an older female suspect who had been physically restrained and fairly brusquely thrown into the police van, a male officer expressed relief that he had happened to have a woman officer with him. When asked why, he said:

I don't like arresting women—don't like it at all  
Int Why not?  
It's the handling of them, I don't like laying my hands on women in an arrest

Int Are you worried about them making an allegation?  
Partly, but it just doesn't seem right somehow (acting male inspector)

In another case, a woman had been assaulted and had a bruise on her knee that supposedly needed a female officer to come from her normal patrol duties to inspect it and take a statement. The officer who was called to attend the case was sarcastic about her male colleagues' motives, claiming that they had not wanted to take the witness's statement and had refused to look at the bruise as a means of avoiding low status work.

A bruise on her knee—I mean—it's not exactly *intimate* is it? (female PC).

One of the women officers remarked that male colleagues could easily deal with these cases and she was annoyed at being manipulated, made to do 'rubbish', under the excuse of 'decency', saying;

They adjust things to suit. Not major things, but like 'there's a woman to lock up so you'll have to go with him'. Well, does someone come with me when there's men to lock up? They can't go and lock a woman up without there being a policewoman present. (female PC).

Another woman officer explained this point regarding status in more detail when recounting the hostility she had been faced with when she first joined an all-male CID.

It was my first job (in CID) and I had to go and lock this bloke up for handling (stolen goods). I asked 'Is anyone free to come and help me bring this lad in?' but no-one looked up—they all kept their heads buried in their paperwork. So off I went, made the arrest and on the way back to the station I said to him 'Have you ever been in trouble with the

police before?’ and he says ‘Oh yes, I’ve just done 8 years for setting my mother in law on fire.’ So after that I got a bit more respect from the lads. (female PC).

Another woman PC complained that a recently posted sign in the reception area of the police station was causing her some annoyance. The notice indicated that a ‘woman officer would be available to talk to complainants attending the enquiry desk’. As the only woman officer on her shift said she was constantly being called back to the office to deal with things she described as ‘nothing—things men could easily deal with’. A group discussion between three female officers of the way sex crimes are regarded as women’s work by some male officers is reproduced below:

Officer 1: I get annoyed about this—I worked with a DC who had a problem with going to talk to a rape victim and he would direct one of us to do that. (Interviewer—maybe the victim asks for/would prefer a woman officer?)

Officer 2: No—a (sex crime) job comes in and they say ‘Aaah, where’s the policewoman?’

Officer 1: That’s right.

Officer 3: Men get embarrassed. No training or experience. They don’t know how to deal with it.

They think *we* do.

Problems with nudity and decency can also occur in custody suites where women are being kept in the cells as the officer in charge is likely to be male. As the body of the suspect may need to become unclothed, and as all areas are now covered by closed circuit television camera, this causes special difficulties for the people monitoring the screens. As the custody officer explained

If there’s anything requiring the removal of clothes, I get a woman officer

in to watch over the prisoner (male inspector).

This also includes finding areas she can undress, use the lavatory, and shower in corners that are not covered by the cameras, or by switching them off or by trusting male custody staff not to watch the screens, all of which causes security problems for the remainder of the building. The male officer quoted above said that if a woman he was guarding needed to use the toilet, have a shower or be searched, he would request a woman officer to come and supervise the procedure. Women custody officers monitoring men have the same problems and on one occasion during the fieldwork, a female custody sergeant was on duty when a male prisoner pressed the buzzer to be let out of his cell. After she unlocked the cell door and he went into the lavatory, she responded to a question about worries of allegations being made against her:

Well, no, not with you standing there, but if I was on my own I would call for another officer to be present (female sergeant).

It is clear that the reluctance to touch, view, or search bodies that may lead to allegations is a concern of officers of both sexes. The increasing regulation of the body in law and the codification by organizations of ‘sexual’ contact marks individual workers as ‘perpetrators’ or ‘victims’ due to an increasing tendency of ‘moral authoritarianism’ to identify ‘problems’ requiring action (Phoenix and Oerton, 2005, p. 191). It also seems that ambiguities surrounding what is ‘decent’ and appropriate is governed by a complicated set of police cultural rules. As the evidence later in this paper illustrates, the viewing of a dead body is different to that of a living person and the surveillance of police colleagues’ bodies is a legitimate matter of discussion for all members of the shift. These apparently contradictory attitudes towards the naked body are confusing because it seems that there is a commonplace acceptance of the body and its functions



which can be contrasted with the embarrassment of naming the parts of the body. Similarly, worries about viewing or touching bodies inappropriately, even when clothed seem to raise a number of questions about police cultural rules and concerns.

### Finding 2: bodily skills and competencies

The concerns expressed regarding decency in the preceding section may tend to emphasize the significance of the gendered body, but there are other bodily concerns that are of equal importance. One of these is the ability to fight or grapple with an arrestee in order to control them physically, which is central to peer credibility in occupational culture. This applies universally to women, men, special constables, and to some extent researchers and general bystanders. Officers often complain that ‘members of the public’ just stand by when they could usefully stop suspects who are running away, although women officers commented that male bystanders would intervene more willingly for them where they could see the fight was unequal. Unwillingness to get physically involved was occasionally forgiven in older, experienced, and well respected officers, detectives in their court suits, temporarily office bound workers with injuries and pregnant female colleagues. Peer respect is not just about being prepared and able to struggle with, and subdue, the unwilling ‘customer’, it is also about running and trying to catch suspects, even when the prospect seems unlikely. This is about having ‘guts’ and being able to intimidate—telling people what to do and managing the confrontation when they ask ‘Oh yes—and who’s going to make me?’ This is an essential practical and cultural skill because once the officer demands that someone should, for example, leave the premises of a pub or club, it is very difficult to back down or retreat and save face.

In putting their often ill protected bodies on the line of course, officers are injured and in some cases fatally shot or stabbed. An example of serious bodily injury during the fieldwork occurred when

a male police officer was calling for urgent assistance, and arriving at the scene, the responding crew bus came to a halt beside him on the pavement as his legs buckled and he fell to the ground clutching his stomach saying ‘Help me’. He had been stabbed by two men he had been chasing and as they had realized he was going to catch them, they turned and attacked him. As one of his close colleagues explained:

He’s been too fast for his own good—they’ll have thought he was a slow old cop—didn’t realise he was a club runner—keeps himself fit (male sergeant).

The injured officer looked as if he was in his late forties, not particularly fit or strong, and was rushed to hospital for immediate surgery and later recovered. Officers from a wide vicinity across the city heard of the attack as the evening progressed, and came to help search for the attackers. Members of all available teams were deployed to the search, and in the hours following the attack the police helicopter was launched, several dog teams were called out and officers from far and wide called in to do fingertip searches of local streets and gardens. Their injured colleague was regarded as a hero and members of the shift were shocked and angry. This was not only because he had chased a couple of car thieves and almost caught them single handed, but as colleagues explained ‘he was one of ours’. After the police helicopter left the search area one of the officers was upset that they hadn’t stayed longer, complaining that they must have been unfeeling and callously indifferent. The officer’s injuries were to the ‘body’ of the shift, apparently an insult, challenge, and wound to all, illustrated by the efforts that were put into finding the attackers who had escaped, but were caught later due to ‘intensive police intelligence gathering’ John Crank argues that the same sort of phenomenon can be observed at police funerals, especially where an officer has died as a result of injuries sustained on duty. The massed

ranks of police, some of whom may have known the officer, but many others who may have never met, ‘... emphasize the oneness that the occupation embodies ... death becomes a sacrament ... all officers share the blood of the slain officer’ (2015, p. 361).

Examining the body as a feature of policing highlights how the reluctant and volatile body must be physically controlled because officers have to see themselves as winning the battle, if not the war. This is not just about straightforward ‘brawn’ or muscle however, because different aspects of the body, such as an older officer who can run due to training and practice, or a ‘small’ bodied officer with martial arts skills illustrate the importance of ‘the body’ in the sense that it can be moulded, constructed, and changed. In public order situations, commonly pub fights and closing time disputes around the streets of towns and cities, the public protagonists are drunk and hostile. Some officers are more confident and competent in threatening situations such as this, and sometimes this is related to body size and the perception of the physical capabilities of an individual or group of officers. During the fieldwork there was an officer who often made reference to being a ‘small, angry man’, as he explained:

Take me for instance—if I go into a pub and tell someone to leave, they might turn round and say, ‘Ye’s not gonna make me’, but I always say, ‘No, but *he* will (points to a large member of the shift), and if that’s not enough there’s plenty more of our mates back at the nick’ (male sergeant).

In another case, with reference to body size, a female officer was regarded as lacking in occupational credibility, partly because she was having trouble fitting into her uniform, as one of her colleagues explained;

I mean she is fat, bordering on the obese. She’s regarded as a joke—

she’s got no operational capability in terms of uniform work (male inspector).

On another occasion during the fieldwork, on night on duty in the city centre, an aggressive and volatile drunk was causing trouble and arriving with a crew consisting of a large (obese) male officer and a small woman officer it was clear he was not going to come along quietly. After assessing the situation, the male officer threw his keys across to his female colleague (as he had been driving) and she was told to ‘drive like hell’ as he used his body weight to keep their prisoner suppressed in the back of the police van, who in his drunken state kept asking us all to ‘suck his cock’ repeatedly until we arrived at the station. Here, the obese male officer, unlike the woman mentioned above with ‘no operational capability’, has useful body weight. This was employed again on arrival at the station because the officers have to use a perspex riot shield to get the now violent and excited drunk into the cells, having removed his shoes and belt.

Conversely, a lack of body weight, combined with gender is often viewed as a disadvantage in the police. Following a busy night of public order arrests a young, light weight woman officer had arrested a male suspect and was handcuffed to him in the back of the patrol car and he had started to try to escape. Later she was teased by a colleague who announced to the shift that she had been ‘fighting’. She replied indignantly:

I wasn’t fighting—he started it—I was just defending myself (female PC).

Later another male colleague confided that ‘She’s good is Lucy—prepared to get stuck in’ (Male PC). Another mentioned a small woman officer who was a martial arts expert—‘She was a black belt—you always felt safe with *her*’. Aside from gender the body is seen as being ‘competent’ if it can run, fight or, most importantly carry out the ‘product’ of policing, namely, an arrest. This is not necessarily gender specific, but interchangeable,

although body weight or size was often commented upon by male officers when they described their beliefs and worries about the capabilities of female officers. Similarly, one of the women officers said that she would 'rather have fifty men round me' in a disturbance because 'I think sometimes you need brute force' (female PC). It seems that from this point of view, to be violent or have the capacity or to use the body as 'physical capital' (Shilling, 2003) or to threaten forceful resolution of any situation, is to 'be a man'. As Hollway suggests, '(V)iolence is often seen as (and indeed used as) the inevitable backstop: "If we/they don't get our/their way, we/they could be violent"', and as Hearn argues, 'Policing has itself always been gendered . . . one set of men work against, and sometimes with, another set of men' (1992, p. 133).

### Finding 3: suitable bodies

During the fieldwork any officer who seemed unwilling to take part in physical activities such as running, chasing, or grappling with suspects would be called a 'jelly back'. Even a slight hesitation in being first out of the crew bus at a potentially violent situation could lead to an allegation of cowardice or reputational slur. It could be argued that an occupational culture which emphasizes the need to produce quantifiable results and 'confront the threat of sudden attack from another person' (Reiner, 2010, p. 119) will be especially focused on the outward appearance of the body and its perceived competency. Rather than gender alone, it seems that police culture is especially attendant to way that bodies appear to be capable of physical coercion, aside from its gendered symbolism. As police officers' uniformed bodies are used as the signifier of the legitimate power to stop and detain suspects and the means by which the arrest is effected, even in nonviolent situations, how the body 'fits' the uniform is of special relevance to individual status and sense of self. They have to be prepared to put their bodies in the 'firing line' whether or not their capabilities match the task, to maintain peer respect. This is illustrated in the earlier

study from which this paper is drawn there were little difference between arrest rates for men and women, even for high status, violent, and potentially dangerous situations (see Westmarland, 2001, pp. 113–114).

In many cases during the research focusing on the specialist departments male officers were observed choosing to do 'outside' work concerned with 'cars, guns and horses' (Westmarland 2001 Chapter 5) while women care for the private domain of violated bodies. Women officers are given training in sexual offences, become 'gendered experts', and then find it classed as 'their' work. Even where they work in specialisms technically described as CID, they are part of what Heidensohn reports as being called the 'cardigan squad' (2008, p. 658) attending to abused children simply because they inhabit the body described as 'female' and will therefore be less threatening, more empathetic, and ultimately 'suitable' for this arena. One woman officer reported that her male colleagues teased for talking about 'Mum and the kids' in a case she was dealing with, telling her she sounded like a social worker and that he'd said:

It'll be different when you're in the CID, you'll have to stop talking like that (female PC).

It is perhaps because female police bodies carry with them less danger or suspicion of perverted interest that they are seen as suitable for sexual assault cases such as child abuse. One of the women working in a child protection unit said that in one particular case of abuse a male colleague 'wouldn't be suitable to talk to that little girl' and another woman officer claimed that:

. . . they're frightened of the work, they get upset with it, the men; they want to kill the perpetrators (female PC).

This 'safe', bodily 'clean' worker aspect of women officers is in contrast to the 'tough', dirty, or 'outside' bodies of men. One of the supervisors from a

motorbike team said, in response to what they were looking for at interviews for new members of the squad said;

Black fingernails. We're looking for people with dirt and grease under their nails—we all have it because we're always messing about with stuff (shows his own nails). You can't get them clean, but not many women are interested in taking engines to bits all weekend (male sergeant).

Although some tests of competence are about physical characteristics and strength, others are more often about courage rather than physiognomy. The gendered body is not so significant here because tests may involve 'bottle' but not necessarily great strength, although as I M Young argues, the way women learn to use their bodies in physical situations is different and disadvantaging (2005, pp. 32–3) and Bartky argues that their body language is 'a language of subordination' (2003, p. 35). As well courage to face physical risk from immediate danger the ability and willingness to endure bodily discomfort is considered an important in police culture. Tests are set that require a certain type of 'bravado' or 'guts' or as Doran and Chan describe it, the 'balls' (2003, p. 278) to do the job. Perhaps becoming irritated with these constant requirements to rise to male tests and standards, women choose to absent themselves from certain duties or teams most associated with macho bodies. As Moi observes, 'it can be annoying and painful to be interpellated as a sexed body when one is immersed in a project that has nothing to do with one's sex' (2005, p. 202). In his reply as to why there so few women on his firearms squad a male officer replied:

Well, you've seen for yourself today, it's cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey and there's no facilities (male PC).

Having a suitably sexed body in the police Armed Response Unit is not just about displaying 'male'

validated courage but also about enduring cold weather and primitive toilet facilities. The reply that the officer above makes refers to a culturally validated 'toughness' code in policing. Regarding the care of the body, as the firing range was outdoors and the toilets in the temporary buildings were frozen solid (although still relatively functional). The male officers regarded this as off putting for women, but not for men, for whom it presumably would not matter as they are less fussy about the niceties of comfort and personal care. The body and its functions, particularly the needs of the female body, were the focus of why there were few women in the squad, rather than potentially dangerous work of the firearms team. It was not about having the mental strength to face life-threatening situations where the officer might be shot, or even having the bottle to shoot to kill (and live with your decision afterwards), but about cold, dirty, and difficult conditions and being prepared to use frozen lavatories. Similarly, when the officer in charge of the mounted branch was asked why he thought his department had only one women officer, considering that horse riding is sport or recreation popular with women he replied:

Oh, yes, but this isn't like riding out on a Sunday afternoon you know. People get a very mistaken image of the work of the Branch. They think we're just out trotting about in the nice weather, but they come to us for a two week attachment, get wet and cold and mucky, and they realise this is a *hard, physical job* (male PC).

Once again male cultural constructions of what is suitable body work reflect traditional 'masculine' characteristics, to tough it out and endure the outdoor life. His view was that the male body, would endure the pain of cold or wet weather, and be 'hard' enough for duties associated with horse riding. Nice weather and 'trotting about' imply safe, pampered aspects of a pastime, where

grooms prepare and care for the horses, rather than hard physical ‘mucking in’ (or out), although the non-police personnel employed as grooms to carry out these roles were all women. Despite this, for the police officers quoted above, bodily courage is about surviving constant discomfort and lack of ease, rather than necessarily anything to do with situations causing fear and gender is significant, but not in the traditional sense of police cultural constructions of being able to quell rioters or pub fights, or force and strength. The body, although it may be symbolized by gendered constructions of what it is to be male or female, is the determinant of what can be endured. As Herbert argues, the ‘appellation of hard chargers is unlikely to be earned by female officers. Indeed, female officers are regularly dismissed by male officers for allegedly lacking the physical capability for “real” police work’ (2001, p. 59).

Despite these apparent divisions of labour as based on the ‘suitability’ of each gendered body for particular tasks or roles, during the fieldwork there was evidence of a general willingness to talk about the body. In particular the bodies of suspects, perpetrators, and victims of crime were of interest, as were the young, nubile, and often intoxicated bodies of the young women the male officers spent time observing while on patrol downtown during weekend evening shifts. During down time on patrol and periods congregating in the police station, the bodies of co-workers were also a topic of interest and regular conversation. This is possibly because bodies and their surveillance, identification, and suspiciousness are an important part of daily police work. Police culture seems to imbue a mutual ownership of the body of the shift, and the individual bodies of each officer were often compared and contrasted. The discussions of physical appearance included the losing or gaining of weight, hairstyles, new shoes or boots, and so on. These changes in appearance were completely acceptable discussion topics and not necessarily complimentary. In some cases where the comments

would become too ‘personal’ officers who were subjected to this would say ‘I am *here*, you know’ as if the comments were so cutting as to be the sort of casual criticism one might make in their absence. Women’s bodies were a particular, although not the exclusive topic of interest, partly as they would be in the minority and therefore easier targets, often junior, and their bodies and hair styles and colours would change more than the men’s. As the quote at the beginning of this paper suggests, women’s bodies in particular are viewed in a sexualized way, open to discussion and constant surveillance by the wider, often male, majority.

For both sexes, changes in appearance, especially body size and the ability to fit into an existing uniform (as opposed to having to order a bigger pair of trousers, e.g.) was a topic of discussion. This was made obvious because everyone would receive their uniforms back from the dry cleaners’ hanging on a communal rail to claim, and comments upon widening girths would be shouted to the assembled shift as they searched for their own items. A woman officer whose pregnancy and was beginning to make her waistbands too tight confided to me, after a group of male officers had been remarking on her ‘bump’, ‘Once you’re pregnant, it’s as if everyone around here owns your body’ (female sergeant).

It is possible that the comfort with which officers discuss each others’ bodies is a result of their frequent exposure to various aspects of the corporeality they encounter in the course of their duties. This includes a requirement to check whether any injuries have been sustained when they are called to ‘sudden deaths’ indicating that there might be suspicious circumstances to consider. This sometimes involves visiting the hospital mortuary to check the body, by turning it over to make sure there are no stab or bullet wounds, lacerations, or bruises. At the mortuary the officers I accompanied donned rubber gloves and asked the attendant if it was alright to go ahead and look for injuries and he replied: ‘Oh yes—no problem, you’re the experts’ (male mortuary attendant).

The easy manner that officers have to display when they are confronted with dead bodies and the relatives and friends of the deceased is managed through a series of rehearsals that are conducted throughout an officers' career. An example during the fieldwork was a call to the police that someone had died suddenly and we arrived at the same time as the ambulance crew. A woman had called to say that her partner appeared to have collapsed and was unconscious, and so we went upstairs to view the naked corpse lying in bed, which was starting to develop liver marks, and declared past help by the paramedics. As this happened on a Sunday there was some difficulty finding a doctor to certify death and so the body could not be moved. A further complication was added when it was discovered that the victim had not died in his own bed, but in that of a woman with whom he had been having a long-term extra marital relationship.

We were kept waiting at the house 'guarding' the body, but upon returning to the station once the doctor had been, several hours later, most of the shift of officers had remained at the police station, waiting to hear the story from their colleague who attended the death. They were intrigued about the playing out of the wife/mistress scenario of course, but were also interested to find out what had happened to the man, speculating about the cause of death, how long he had been dead, and the indications of time of death. Assembled officers wanted to know, as we had seen the body, if it was 'stiff' (did he have an erection); did he die while they were actually 'doing it' (having sex); was he reported to have made some expressive noises as he died (as part of an 'ultimate' orgasm); and whether his lover had attempted to revive him by giving mouth to mouth (or other parts of the body) resuscitation. These were all well rehearsed and previously played-out jokes that the discovery of a body in any sort of sexually interesting situation will evoke, and not delivered or received with embarrassment.

## Discussion

Attempts to separate the significance of gender and the body are problematic and these tensions are played out constantly in terms of power relations and culture in policing. Gendered police roles and attitudes are bound up with embodied power, patriarchy, and machismo (Westmarland, 2001, Chapter 5). This includes the searching, arrest, and control of the living body and exercising authority over the deceased body. Throughout this paper, the aim has been to use examples of such instances to create new ways to theorize police culture through a framework of embodiment. This is because of the central importance placed upon the body which is reproduced, and in turn reproduces, the gendered and embodied nature of police culture. In addition to power, sexualities and the bodily manifestation of desire and attractiveness are issues central to police field/habitus in the sense that bodies of women colleagues and public passers by are observed and admired or denigrated (see Westmarland 2001, Chapter 5, for a fuller discussion) and police culture is constructed around danger, authority, and the potential for using force (Reiner, 2010, pp. 119–20). Where sex and power combine, they represent a form of 'hegemonic masculinity' associated with aggressive and competitive action and overtly heterosexual displays (Fielding, 1994, p. 47). As the body is a site of identification for gender, strength, sexual desire, and attractiveness, and police work involves much 'physical labour' it would seem to be an important aspect of police culture.

It is well documented by studies which have examined police culture and competence such as Holdaway (1983), Smith and Gray (1983), and Fielding (1994), that tests of 'manhood' relating to arrests lead to peer admiration. In the USA, Miller describes how community officers are dubbed the 'pansy police' (1999, pp. 70–1) to indicate that it is not viewed as a ('proper', heterosexual) 'man's job' (1999). Where arrests are classified as dangerous or requiring athleticism, it is apparent

that there are important judgments being made about the body as agents capable of physical intervention. The body is therefore significant in ways that are in addition to, and in some cases outside of, gendered considerations. Everyday police work is concerned with the body, but only rarely involves force and strength. Once arrested, bodies are monitored for illegal drugs, checked, searched, contained, preserved for evidence, photographed, fingerprinted, and DNA samples are removed. Whether suspects or the violated, in life or in death, during physical apprehension or arrest, the body is regarded as the jurisdiction of the police and it is viewed with varying amounts of respect and revulsion. Deceased bodies are guarded until a doctor decides they are physically dead, arrested bodies are handcuffed, processed, and contained, fed and watered at predetermined intervals. The drugged body needs to be intimately searched in case illicit substances are still present, the thieving body is strip searched and the intoxicated body is watched and monitored. Violated bodies need special codified procedures in order to preserve the evidence they might hold or contain.

Collegiate respect in police culture is partly about the ability to win the fight on the streets or in the cells, or at least be prepared to try. This may involve using various techniques to enact the threat of physical force. As Cockcroft argues, 'the notion of danger remains so embedded within the collective psyche of the police . . . that they are all made aware of the part that danger will play in their occupational lives' (2013, p. 57). The body and its capabilities in terms of weight, strength, or ability to run becomes a marker of competence in managing that danger. In a study of gender and police leadership, Silvestri remarks that senior policewomen she interviewed felt that they no longer had to 'demonstrate muscle on the streets as part of their jobs' (2003, p. 132) but at street level certain physical attributes, gendered conceptions, and learned skills seem to affect who might be assigned to which duties or tasks. Alternatively,

in some situations the officer who is 'first on the scene' might not be regarded as an ideal candidate in terms of body weight or expertise but it is beyond the control of the system to hand pick who will attend each call. The 'small', 'light-weight', or otherwise unsuitable officer will have to adapt, attempt to carry out the task in hand, or retreat in such situations. Perhaps a more sophisticated reading of the body in police culture might move towards regarding the body as a collection of skills, competence, and appearance, but, as it is argued here, not one which is solely dependent on gender.

One of the reasons that the body may have been ignored in favour of a concentration on gender in policing is that aside from general patrol work many of the tasks that officers carry out when they choose to specialize in departments such as child and family protection are sexually segregated.

As Heidensohn argues, this reflects the history of the introduction of women into the police, first as volunteers and later as sworn officers, from 1915, as the 'work was distinctively specialised, directed at women and juveniles' (2008, p. 647). During World War II women increased their presence in the police but still in this limited sphere, and until the Sex Discrimination Act in the mid-1970s were still in separate departments, albeit under a male managerial hierarchy. The effect on modern patrol work, according to Heidensohn, is that women are seen as being vulnerable due to their weight meaning they have to prove their 'bottle' or their 'manhood' (Heidensohn 1992, p. 143).

Empirical evidence from field observations of the reality of 'the lived body' (Moi, 2005, p. 42) in policing presented here suggests that the 'problem of the body in social life' (Turner, 1992, p. 31) is one that should be central to analyses of police cultures. This is shown in various ways throughout the paper, including sexual bravado and making jokes about the body, which have been well documented in the past, in cases where unpleasant physical or emotional experiences happen. This does not

always seem to prepare officers for the sexual incidents or bodily encounters in the course of patrol work such as a drugs officer who only had childlike terms for genitals (Westmarland, 2001, p. 83), another who was embarrassed by descriptions of a flasher who was masturbating (Westmarland, 2001, p.164), and the officer who did not feel comfortable touching a woman arrestee, mentioned above. Despite these discomfort zones, physical and sexual aspects of the body and its boundaries and gendered 'decencies' are central to police cultural understandings, roles, and routines where references to the body are constantly made. Malcolm Young explored the unsettling effect of women officers when they first joined the CID in the 1970s because they were no longer restricted by their uniforms. Their informal clothes and hairstyles made them 'attractive' and 'other' (1991) with their breasts and nipples being visible under their cheese-cloth shirts. Although it is much more commonplace to find women in the CID now, it seems that there is little doubt that the body is linked to complicated rules and boundaries due to traditional cop cultural beliefs about sexuality and gendered bodies as the press report at the beginning of this paper suggests.

In the CID women officers have now become 'gendered experts' who can talk 'sympathetically' to those victimized by sexual assault because they inhabit or 'possess' the correct body. When asked why this might be, during the fieldwork male officers explained that they thought this was innate or 'natural' knowledge, in that women would 'know how it feels to be raped' or as a woman CID officer claimed, to have problems with accepting that oral sex is 'normal' and always enjoyable. More generally, as Malcolm Young notes, in the sexually charged, physically attentive cultural environment colleagues' bodies are depersonalized by making remarks about their attractiveness (or otherwise) and suspects or 'scumbags' are dehumanized by reference to their 'dirty' bodies in comparison to the 'clean' innocence of victims (Young, 1991, p. 111). This is also evident where cop cultural assumptions

encourage distinctions between the 'fit' and capable body of the police officer with the weakling 'scroate' wrongdoer (Westmarland, 2001, p.128).

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to provide some insight into the connections between the body and police culture and explain the value of using the body as a topic of cop cultural relevance and sociological interest. The preceding discussions of physicality, force, and strength and the variable abilities of men and women are not surprising in terms of what is known about police cultures. It is obvious that dignity and decency require certain rules and practices and that 'naturally' occurring gendered differences lead to beliefs about bodily competencies and abilities. Although these differences can be negated by circumstances—older men not being fit or women being body builders, in general stereotypical attitudes towards men and women's work can be observed. What it is more complicated is that the body is a determinant of capabilities that do not require force or strength and in situations where decency is not an issue. This includes, in 'male' police roles, 'bottle' or courage being required but not necessarily linked to physical strength, but also cover the use and care of the body more generally and the importance of physical capital. The distinction between 'bottle' and physical strength is a fine distinction to make, but it is partly concerned with endurance of unpleasant or physically draining work. It also concerns the body as an 'unfinished project' (Shilling, 2003) in the sense that it can be worked upon, moulded, and changed.

Relationships between masculinity, violence, and crime, as Jefferson's analysis of Connell's argument about 'hegemonic masculinity' and its 'complicit' and 'marginalized' types (2002, p. 66) are further complicated by the gendered body in the police. Some forms of masculinity attribute higher status to certain departments, with community relations being seen as less 'macho' than the CID for



instance. Using the body as an explanation of why these indoor/outdoor and public/private roles persist in police culture may add more weight to the discussion than a simple male/female dichotomy could provide. In policing, assumptions about embodied expertise include the ability to care for children due to being able to give birth (although not having actually done so) or being a useful street fighter due to a type of cultural capital to which only men have access (Hobbs et al., 2003). Police cultural assumptions about gendered anatomy are not only about the ability to use force resulting in peer-reviewed competence, although as noted earlier, policing demands physical bodywork on the streets that involves danger and threats of violence. Despite the contradictions raised by understandings of the increasing malleability of the body due to training and fitness regimes, and the 'challenging of gender boundaries' (Howson, 2005, p. 59) where women can be martial arts experts or body builders, police culture tends to view men as having superior ways of using their weight and displaying endurance. Bodies are the determinant of competence, not only where physical force is actually required, such as in fights and struggles where police have to put 'hands on' suspects to make an arrest, but also in a myriad of other situations. The gendered female body is seen to have competencies around the treatment of women victims of physical and sexual assaults as they can supposedly empathize and inspect the injuries which makes women officers more versatile as 'body experts' in cases of such violations. On the other hand, this may restrict and categorize women in ways that restricts their potential role in policing. This focus on the body does not imply that gender is unimportant, but that analyses of the body may improve the lived experiences of women in the police, and potentially their career prospects. In this way it is hoped that this paper may suggest new ways of opening up debates about commonly held cultural assumptions about the roles of men and women in the police.

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