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Public confidence in policing: A neo-Durkheimian perspective

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Abstract

Public confidence in policing has received much attention in recent years, but few studies outside of the US have examined the sociological and social-psychological processes that underpin trust and support. This study, conducted in a rural English location, finds that trust and confidence in the police is shaped not by sentiments about risk and crime, but by evaluations of the values and morals that underpin community life. Furthermore, to garner public confidence the police must be seen first to typify group morals and values and second to treat the public with dignity and fairness. All these findings are consistent with the perspective that people are *Durkheimian* in their attitudes towards crime, policing and punishment – a perspective developed here in this paper.

Key words

Public confidence in policing; fear of crime; neo-Durkheimian perspective

A recent study found that fear of crime was driven by a particular form of social perception (Jackson, 2004). People judged a range of things in their community as hostile to social order, and by linking such symbols of breakdown with the threat of victimisation, people used 'crime' as a *neo-Durkheimian* marker of moral structure. The fear of crime emerged as a lay seismograph of social organisation and control, expressing and distilling a whole set of evaluative activity.

This paper continues the neo-Durkheimian theme. It analyses the same data reported in Jackson (2004). But the focus now includes trust and confidence in the police. The study presented here finds that public confidence in policing is driven not by worries about falling victim of crime but by concerns about social cohesion. Crime and disorder challenge the moral structure of society and people look to agents of social control to channel group outrage, defend group values, and re-establish moral norms. The public loses confidence in the activities of the police when community values and norms are seen to be deteriorating, not when they worry about their own safety. This study, together with Jackson (2004), consequently finds that fear of crime and public confidence in policing are both driven by lay diagnoses of social and moral order.

The study also shows that people judge whether the police are *representatives* of community values and morals (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003a). To the extent that the police are felt by members of the public to represent these values (actively defending community morals felt to be under threat), the public has confidence in police effectiveness. Moreover, the study demonstrates that procedural justice is a significant driver of identification with the police: one way that the police communicate the values they espouse is through the dignity and fairness with which they treat people (e.g. Sunshine & Tyler, 2003b; Tyler & Huo, 2002).

Overall, this paper contributes to a surprisingly thin British research literature on public confidence in policing. It also contributes to current debates about the role of the police. The research finds that people judge the police in ways that are less about 'fear' and the threat of crime, and more about moral order and social stability (see Girling et al., 2000). Moreover, in this rural community at least, the police are not seen as *just another public service*: residents want them to typify and defend the value structure of their community, as well as treat the public with fairness and dignity. This finding is consistent with the work of Garland (1990), Loader (1997) and Loader & Mulcahy (2003), as well as research on lay attitudes towards crime and punishment (Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003a).

There are four sections to the article. The first outlines evidence on a neo-Durkheimian perspective to public attitudes about crime and punishment. The second introduces the topic of public confidence in policing. The third presents the data. The fourth draws implications for both neo-Durkheimian analyses of public sentiment and policing policy.

A neo-Durkheimian sociology of deviance

Rock (1998) offers a Popperian treatment of recent Durkheimian approaches to deviance and social control: he presents the argument for such treatments of rules and the boundary-defining work of institutions of social control; he provides a particularly strong and eloquent account; he then systematically questions their foundations.

The neo-Durkheimian sociology of deviance, he argues, has its roots in the 1960s and 1970s. The thesis was this.

'The very symbolic boundaries of a society were thought to emerge in the policing of deviance, their features taking form in the dialectic between law-enforcers and lawbreakers, insiders and outsiders, us and them. Deviants provided the symbolic contrasts and antitheses that disclosed the form and structure of society, capitalists defining communists; radicals defining moderates; the poor defining the rich; the disreputable defining the respectable; and homosexuals defining heterosexuals' (Rock, 1998: 586).

Theorists believed crime, deviance and control ‘ . . . convey[ed] important symbolic representations of the cultural, ideological and social order which they themselves help to generate and sustain’ (p. 588). Law courts are a case in point: they ‘...define rules, trace boundaries and express public abhorrence of deviation’ (p. 589). Courts thus define boundaries of what is acceptable and respectable, and what is not.

Yet one can marshal the example of the law courts to refute the thesis. For Rock (p. 592): ‘ . . . [the neo-Durkheimian sociology of deviance] is attractive and plausible but, unfortunately, it also appears to rest on rather flimsy conceptual and empirical foundations.’ Mundane justice is just that: mundane. It operates within ‘an artfully-contrived and neat legal facsimile . . . [that] is designed to impose a clarity and order which can usefully dispel conceptual and moral confusion’ (p. 594). The neo-Durkheimian perspective is: ‘ . . . At best [a] radical idealization with only a problematic correspondence to the ambiguities, anomalies, flux, contradictions, heterogeneity and uncertainties of what might be called a wider cultural and symbolic reality of rules and rule-observance.’ (p.594).

An intriguing debate, to be sure. But the contention of this paper is not that institutions function and shape society in ways consistent with Durkheim’s theory. Rather, it is that *public perceptions* of crime, punishment and policing can be partly explained by neo-Durkheimian theory. The argument is that crime is seen by a variety of publics to reveal the structure and edges of society, to demarcate the respectable from the disrespectable, to communicate the strength of social bonds and the regulation of values, morals and norms. Public concerns about crime are therefore wrapped up in concerns about community cohesion, in people’s sense of place (Girling, et al., 2000), in what seems to threaten the ‘moral architecture’ of their community (Garland, 2001a: 749).

Moreover, the argument is that public confidence in policing is shaped by lay evaluations of cohesion and moral consensus. The public look to the police to defend and reassert the moral structure when that structure is felt to be under threat (Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Girling et al., 2000). Symbolic concerns about social order may be just as important in driving public confidence in policing as worries about falling victim of crime (Loader, 1997; Garland, 1990). People may look to the police to typify and represent community values (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003a).

Before presenting the findings, let us first outline existing evidence for a neo-Durkheimian analysis of public opinion on crime.

Public perception of crime: A neo-Durkheimian perspective

Two puzzles have dominated criminological debate on the fear of crime. On the one hand, fear is, at best, only moderately related to statistical estimates of the risk of crime. On the other hand, disorder and incivilities invoke anxieties about crime. Some say fear is based on a misunderstanding of the reality of crime. Others say that fear is a response to disorderly aspects of the social world. Nearly all agree it has a major impact on individuals and communities.¹

Bridging social and individual levels of analysis, Jackson (2004) investigated experiential and expressive aspects of fear. The psychological edge was seen in vulnerability and subjective threat appraisal explaining why some people worried about personal crime, while others did not.² The

¹ Recent research has raised the possibility that standard research tools actually exaggerate the fear of crime problem, in the sense that worry about crime may be less frequent than commonly thought (Farrall et al. 1997; Farrall & Gadd, 2004; see Farrall, 2004 and Hough, 2004a). Moreover, some people’s responses to risk may be better characterised as *functional fear* so arguably does not constitute a social problem (Jackson, 2006a) – respondents report being worried about crime, but careful probing reveals that worry for them is more of a problem-solving activity than something that eats into their well-being – a risk management strategy or natural defense against crime. These individuals take precautions against crime, feel less at risk, worry less frequently as result – and crucially, do not believe their quality of life is damaged.

² The study found that people worried about crime if they felt it was likely, the impact would be serious and they had little control over its occurrence. A personal sense of vulnerability may thus be at the heart of fear (cf.

sociological edge was seen in risk perception being shaped by everyday evaluations of social order and control. In this quiet, relatively crime-free rural area, people attached a threat of crime to certain individuals, behaviours, and social conditions.

But not everyone saw problems of disorder and cohesion; not everyone linked disorder and young people hanging around with crime. Harcourt (2001) reminds us that categories of order and disorder are not fixed and natural, but are products of historical, social and cultural processes. Jackson (2004) found that wider social values shaped the social meaning of disorder and its links to community aspects. Respondents who held more authoritarian views about law and order, who were concerned about a long-term deterioration of community, were more likely to perceive disorder in their environment. People with these values were more likely to link these physical cues to problems of social cohesion and the incidence and threat of crime.

These findings accord with some important qualitative work (Girling et al., 2000; Innes, 2004a; Tulloch et al. 1998; Evans et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 1996) and echo Stuart Hall's claim that crime reflects and refracts a range of anxieties and conflicts. They are consistent with the idea that fear of crime is displayed not as a singular fear but as a comprehensive pattern of interpretation of the surrounding social world – a way of seeing and a way of feeling.³ Crime may serve as a vivid marker of the breakdown of social organisation and moral norms; things seen to be hostile to social order then become associated with crime. As Durkheim points out, crime acts as a proxy for the status of society's underlying moral order and social organisation. Emotions about crime partly arise as a desire to re-establish rules and behaviour that underpin social organisation, and censure those who violate the rules (see Elster, 2004: 155). 'Crime may be one of those forms of "danger on the borders" which gives form to a community's sense of itself . . .' (Girling et al., 2000: 16)

This expressive and symbolically charged aspect of fear of crime – where fear discloses concerns about social stability and breakdown – may remind some of the work of Tyler & Boeckmann (1997). Studying public support for the *Three Strikes and You're Out* initiative in California, which, passed in 1994, mandated life in prison for those convicted of three crimes, Tyler & Boeckmann contrasted an instrumental model – where public concern is rooted in judgements about the severity of the crime problem, anxieties about falling victim, and the sense of ineffectiveness of the CJS – with a symbolic model, rooted in the moral consequence of rule-breaking behaviour. The symbolic model suggests that rule-breaking are an affront to shared values and norms, and people wish to punish in part because punishment reasserts community commitment to those values. Tyler & Boeckmann (1997: 240) explain:

'This approach focuses on the "symbolic" meaning of rule breaking. It links reactions to rule breaking to concerns about social conditions and to judgments about cohesiveness, that is, to public concerns about the nature and strength of social bonds within the family, the community, and society. In other words, it suggests that people want to punish rule breakers because rule-breaking behavior poses a threat to the moral cohesion of society and because punishment reasserts social values and the obligation to obey social rules.'

Support for the *Three Strikes and You're Out* initiative was most strongly linked to judgements about social conditions and to underlying social values. Concerns about crime and the

Killias, 1990, Warr, 1987). For further thoughts on the psychology of risk please see Jackson (2006b) and Jackson et al. (2006).

³ The paper also speculated that for some people fear of crime is purely expressive. There is early evidence that people say they are worried about crime in a survey context yet have not recently worried about falling victim (Farrall & Gadd, 2004; Jackson et al., in press; Farrall et al., 2006). These people may use the language of 'worry' and 'crime' to express a whole host of concerns and anxieties about crime and things connected with crime (Girling et al. 2000; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Taylor, 1995; Evans et al. 1996), in the absence of concrete worries about safety and vulnerability.

courts had very little influence on punitiveness. The authors concluded:

‘...surface concerns about the crime problem and/or the legal system do not seem to be the central preoccupations of the public and do not drive their policy judgements . . . People are not motivated primarily by their concerns about tangible risks. This finding accords with the findings of the “symbolic politics” literature, which have demonstrated that personal concerns and fears have little impact on policy judgements in a variety of arenas.’ (Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997: 240).

Thus, citizens express punitive attitudes not because they fear for their own safety, but because they are concerned about the moral structure of society. Punishment reaffirms the authority of society’s moral structure, and legal authorities channel group outrage and represent the group’s moral values. When social cohesion is believed to be waning, people look for a stronger response from legal authorities.

Public confidence in policing

The legitimacy of the police is currently attracting considerable interest in policy circles and the social sciences (Hough, 2003, 2004b, 2006; Tyler, 2006; Reiner, 2006). Hough (2003: 146-147) puts the problem thus: ‘ . . . the police function depends critically on the authority that the police can command, rather than the force that they can deploy as a last resort.’ A police force that fails to secure public trust and establish its legitimacy simply does not function effectively (Hough & Roberts, 2004). Legitimacy can rest on fair procedures and fair outcomes (Tyler, 2004, Hough, 2006) or on the belief that the criminal justice system defends and expresses foundational values. Legitimacy may even have a more tenuous basis, being ‘ . . . fraught and constantly subject to negotiation and definition, given the intimate relationship between policing, conflict and, ultimately, violence’ (Reiner, 2006: 4).

In Britain, *public confidence in policing* has become a short-hand for trust, legitimacy and consent, and there is considerable evidence that such public confidence has been falling steadily over the past few decades. For example the British Crime Survey shows a steady decrease in the proportion of respondents who judge their local police to be doing a very good or fairly good job, dropping from 90% in 1982 to 75% in the financial year 2002/2003 (Nicholas & Walker, 2004). Public support and cooperation may suffer as a result (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003b).

Reiner (1992, 2000) provides the most influential thesis on the historical trajectory of police legitimacy in Britain. According to his analysis, the police have gone from the ‘sacred’ (a Golden image of a ordered and settled England where the police held iconic status) to the ‘profane’ (yet another public service). Where once the police occupied an iconic and identity-bearing status of British life, public confidence is now ‘ . . . tentative and brittle . . . to be renegotiated case by case’ (Reiner, 2000: 162).

A number of explanations for changes in the legitimacy of the police have been proposed (e.g. Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Hough, 2003; Lowe, 2002; Reiner, 2000). First, the past few decades have seen massive changes in society. Consider transformations in the political economy. The 1970s and early 1980s saw soaring inflation, rising unemployment and increasing levels of industrial and social conflict. The police were often called upon in particular moments of discord: recall the miners’ strikes for instance (McCabe et al. 1988). Tense and troubled relations have also developed between the police and particular communities which are often structurally excluded. Consider also changing values and expectations – less deference to authority perhaps springs first to mind. Society has also become more diverse, producing a greater variety of expectations from different communities (Lowe, 2002): how, in an increasingly individualistic and pluralistic society, can the police hope to operate as an ‘effective symbol of a unitary order’ (Reiner, 1992: 779)?

Second, the police service itself has changed. From a parochial and local set of police forces to a complex bureaucratic organisation, the public may see the police as less visible and accessible than they once were (Hough, 2003). Equally, a series of scandals have shaped public attitudes

towards the fairness and integrity of the police: well-publicised cases of corruption and abuse of rights over the years have surely damaged their reputation (Reiner, 2000; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003).

Third, crime has increased since the Second World War (only decreasing from the mid 1990s onwards). The public hold the police partly to account for this, with crime moving from a problem that afflicted the poor to become a daily consideration for many (Garland, 2001b). Liberal sensibilities about the seriousness of crime as a problem were dented in the 1970s as victimisation became a prominent fact for the middle-classes. Increasing direct and indirect experience, the mass media raising the salience of crime and ‘institutionalising’ public concern, and the growing visibility of signs of crime—in the form of physical incivilities, such as vandalism, and social incivilities, such as groups of intimidating youths hanging around in the street—all helped to bring crime and the risk of victimisation into people’s everyday lives. As Garland (p. 153) puts it: ‘ . . . rising crime rates ceased to be a statistical abstraction and took on a vivid personal meaning in popular consciousness and individual psychology.’

These analyses are unmistakeably influential within British criminology, providing a range of perspectives on public confidence and legitimacy. Yet few studies have contributed by empirically testing why public confidence differs between groups and changes over time. Large-scale research is needed that goes beyond asking people to tick the ‘police are doing a good job’ or ‘police are doing a bad job’ box (see Loader & Mulcahy, 2003: 35). We need work that strives for causal explanations, that accounts for the phenomenon *in action* (Goldthorpe, 2000), that identifies the generative processes that underpin trust and confidence.

Popular sentiments towards policing

There are a number of theoretical and qualitative studies on the cultural significance of policing that theoretically informed quantitative research can build upon. Garland’s (1990) work on the role of punishment in society is the most sustained and successful resuscitation of Durkheimian themes in recent criminological scholarship. It was also the point of departure for Loader (1997) and Loader & Mulcahy’s (2003) analysis of the cultural significance and emotional appeal of the police. Loader (1997: 7) argues:

‘ . . . policing in contemporary western societies comprises for the most part a bureaucratic, professionalized and goal-directed set of practices. But this does not mean that it is not also shaped and legitimated by various structures of social belief and affect. Policing like punishment is embroiled in, and animated by, a set of cultural mentalities and sensibilities. Policing too communicates meaning and plays its part in the creation of culture. And just as with punishment, the way we police, represent policing to ourselves, and position it within an overall sense of order, makes a difference to both the construction of individual subjectivities, and the quality and character of social relations.’

According to this perspective, lay dispositions disclose policing as a ‘*category of thought and affect*’ (Loader & Mulcahy, 2001: 39, italics in original) that is not only linked to narratives of social change but also to ‘the viability of the state and the security of its citizens’ (p. 39). The cultural category of ‘the police’ speaks to anxiety and hope, conflict and order, and the authority and social control that binds social life. Echoes here of the qualitative and ethnographic study of Girling et al. (2000) which found that sentiments towards policing were based less on fear of crime and more on people’s sense of place and the things hostile to the social order of that locale.

Such work sketches out the beginnings of a cultural sociology that stresses the meaning of crime and policing. It reminds us that public confidence may be intertwined with more fundamental concerns about order and disorder, about the values and morals that underpin social life.

The study

Testing a neo-Durkheimian analysis of public confidence in policing

This study tests and compares an instrumental and a neo-Durkheimian model of public confidence in policing on a sample drawn from a rural part of England. The *instrumental model* predicts that fear of crime erodes trust and confidence in the police. When people are worried about becoming a victim of crime, confidence suffers because people look to the police for protection. If people are anxious about crime, they will judge the police as ineffective in dealing with crime and engaging with the community.

The *neo-Durkheimian model* expects the correlation between fear of crime and public confidence to decrease once concerns about social cohesion and order are statistically controlled for. In other words, individuals are more satisfied with the police response not when they fear for their own safety, but when they believe that their community is morally deteriorating (Girling *et al.*, 2000). This model proposes that the police are viewed as prototypical representatives and authorities of the community so individuals look to the police to strengthen moral structures. It follows that when signs of social breakdown are evident, the police will be judged to be ineffective at dealing with crime. As Lofthouse (1996: 44) argues: ‘the police are not just the simple protectors of the community, they are constantly and actively engaged in the construction and reconstruction of the *moral and social order*’ (emphasis added).

The model also predicts that moral identification with the police is important (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003a). Social identity approaches suggest that people use their membership in groups to define themselves and assess their self-worth (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Hogg, 2002; Turner, 1999; Turner and Onorato, 1997). Authorities should also be prototypical of the group, reflecting its values (Hogg, 2001; Hogg and Reid, 2001; Hogg and van Knippenberg, 2003). Therefore, public satisfaction with the police is driven by individual judgements about whether the police embody community values and morals.

However, there is a complication. Social identity theory predicts that the more someone identifies with their group (e.g. one’s community) the more the prototypicality of the authority of that group (e.g. the police) is important (e.g. Hogg, 2001). Hogg (2001: 189) argues that: ‘As group membership becomes more salient, and members identify more strongly with the group, prototypicality becomes an increasingly influential basis for leadership perceptions.’ To address this hypothesis we test two interaction effects. First, we predict that as identification with the community increases, the importance of identification with the police is expected to increase (i.e. the association between identification and attitudes towards the effectiveness of the police increases).

Second, as identification with the community increases, it is predicted that the importance of concerns about social cohesion will decrease. Individuals derive their identity and seek status relevant information from group membership. A high status group member will likely be less concerned with the prototypicality of group authorities and therefore issues of cohesion and disorder will not be paramount. However, those expressing lower levels of identification with the community will be more attune with the prototypicality of group authorities and will therefore likely be more sensitive to social order and breakdown.

Finally, consistent with the findings in Sunshine & Tyler (2003a), it is predicted that identification with the police will be associated with perceptions of procedural justice or the belief that the police treat people with respect, dignity, and fairness. If legal authorities gain cooperation by embodying the ethical and moral values of the group, how do they show that they have such values? One answer is by treating the public fairly and with dignity. Rooted in social identity theory, Lind and Tyler (1988) argue that group leaders, rules, norms, and values symbolically represent the group, and provide identity relevant information to the individuals associated with the group. The manner in which group members are treated by their leaders communicates information to that individual about their status within the group. Rules governing group behavior and norms guiding authority conduct are indicative of the group’s fundamental definitions of correct behavior for its members. In the context of law enforcement, Lind and Tyler’s (1988) relational model of authority suggests that individuals evaluate the *manner* in which the police exercise their authority as central to the impact

on opinion of the police because it reflects on an individual's social status and personal identity. Fair treatment is of intrinsic importance to people and this information is gleaned from how authorities treat subordinates. In other words, authorities communicate that they represent normative group values by the manner in which they exercise their authority.

Method

Sample

Data are from a single-contact mail survey of a randomly drawn sample of residents of seven sets of towns and villages within a predominantly rural area in the North-East of England. According to the 2001 Census, Tynedale has a population of 58,808. The vast majority was white (99.3% compared to 90.9% across England). There was an equal gender mix (49% male, 51% female). There was also a significantly lower incidence of crime and disorder compared to the North East as a whole and to England and Wales more widely (as testified by police figures relating to the period of April 2000 to March 2001).

In 2001, questionnaires were sent to 5,906 named individuals drawn from the 2001 Electoral Roll. Because of an arrangement with Royal Mail, those that could not be delivered (e.g. where the residents had moved) were returned to sender. There were 223 of these returns. A total of 1,023 completed questionnaires were received, leaving the response rate at 18.0%.⁴

This low response rate has implications for generalisability. Of course, when considering the impact, one begins by comparing known quantities of the sample and population. The socio-demographic breakdown of the sample was close to that of the population of the area according to Census data, albeit with a slight bias towards females and older individuals. But moreover, one worries about the representativeness of a sample particularly when one is estimating basic population attributes such as means or proportions. Relationships between constructs, as well as the measurement models in these structural equation models, are arguably less susceptible to low response rates. Following this logic, the study's findings—based on the estimation of measurement and structural elements of a number of models—may have greater validity than other studies that have low response rates but do not focus so heavily on relationships between variables.⁵

Details of the measures of fear of crime and environmental perceptions (social and physical) can be found in Jackson (2004) and Jackson (2005). It is important to note that the survey employed a split ballot: a random half received a version of the questionnaire that fielded questions about attitudes towards social change, law and order and authoritarianism (reported on in Jackson, 2004); the other half received a version of the questionnaire that fielded questions about attitudes towards the police (reported on here).

A range of individuals were sampled, many of whom had different perceptions of the same environment. By and large this design is rare in studies of the fear of crime and public confidence in policing. Most studies sample across cities, regions or countries and do not analyze how different perceptions of the same environment play out. These differing perceptions were explained by recourse to social-psychological and sociological processes.

Measures

⁴ 462 (45.2%) were male and 528 (51.6%) were female, and 33 (3.2%) respondents did not state their gender. There was consequently a slight bias towards females compared to Tynedale as a whole. The age distribution was somewhat skewed towards older people (M 55.46, SD 15.63, skewness -.13, kurtosis -.67). Of those who indicated their age (40 respondents refused), just over half were aged 55 or above (54.7%), and only around one-tenth were between 18 and 34 (10.9%). According to the 2001 Census, this compares to the region as a whole, where 40.5% are aged 55 or above, and 18.9% aged between 18 and 34.

⁵ See Jackson (2004) for a fuller discussion of the implications of the low response rate.

Table 1 provides the wording of the indicators of the following theoretical constructs:

- 1 satisfaction with police engagement in the local community;
- 2 satisfaction with police effectiveness in dealing with crime;
- 3 extent to which the police are seen to treat people fairly and respectfully; and,
- 4 social identification – a judgement by the respondent of perceived similarity between their values and those of local police officers.

Table 1 also provides the valid per cent of respondents who were satisfied with each particular aspect of local policing, or who agreed with the attitude statements that regarded the police. A breakdown for each item across gender and age groups is presented. But before we discuss these top-line findings, a word or two about scaling.

INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) allows the *a priori* theoretical specification of a model of the latent construct(s) and indicators, and the empirical assessment of this model. Table 2 shows that, for the measures of attitudes toward the police, each set of indicators adequately scaled in a one-factor model. Appropriate items measured the (a) satisfaction with community engagement, (b) satisfaction with dealing with crime, (c) extent to which the police are seen to people fairly and respectfully, and (d) identification with the police. Each of the latent variables and relevant sets of indicators was empirically distinct – for instance, satisfaction with community engagement was not the same as satisfaction with dealing with crime, even if they were somewhat correlated.⁶

INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

Results

Top-line findings

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the measures of attitudes towards the police. The biggest concern of respondents was the extent to which the police patrol on foot in the local community. Just over half the sample was dissatisfied with the way the police engaged in this activity. Around one-quarter was dissatisfied with how the police got to know the community or made themselves available to the public. By contrast, only one-in-ten was dissatisfied with how the police met with schools and community groups. Males were slightly more likely to be dissatisfied about each of these issues, as were younger respondents. Those aged between 16-24 judged the police significantly more negatively on each measure than older respondents.⁷

Street crime was not an issue that provoked many negative evaluations of police actions: only 7% were dissatisfied with how the police dealt with this form of crime. By contrast, between 17% and 20% of respondents were dissatisfied with how the police dealt with anti-social behaviour, drink driving and burglary. Again, males were more likely to evaluate the police negatively, as were younger respondents.

Most people felt that the police were fair and respectful in their dealings with the public. Only 7% of respondents felt this was not the case. A slightly higher proportion opined that the police did not clearly explain the reasons for their actions. Again, males were more likely to lack confidence in police integrity and fairness. There was also a tendency for 16-24 year olds to lack confidence compared with older age groups.

⁶ For details of the successful validation of the fear of crime measures in this survey, see Jackson (2005).

⁷ It is notable that this is predominantly the population whom the police control. One should not forget that the police intimidate as well as reassure.

This pattern across gender and age groups was also evident in the extent to which people identified with police officers (e.g. felt they shared values and views, and thought the police officers would respect them). The vast majority of respondents identified with police officers, but between one-in-five and one-in-four of those aged 16-24 felt that officers had different values and views to themselves.

The instrumental model: Fear of crime and public confidence in the police

Figure 1 summarises the results of a test of the instrumental model using structural equation modelling. Most of this framework replicated the model presented and tested in Jackson (2004). The instrumental model stated that environmental perceptions shaped beliefs about crime and risk perceptions, and these risk perceptions in turn shaped worries about crime. Here, the associations between worry about crime and two aspects of police attitudes were assessed. The first was dissatisfaction with police effectiveness in cutting crime, the second dissatisfaction with police effectiveness in engaging with the local community. The instrumental model predicted that worrying about falling victim of crime was associated with feelings of dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the police in dealing with crime and in engaging with the community.

The fit of the model was good according to approximate-fit indices (RMSEA=.052, CFI=.982), but not according to tests of exact fit (χ^2 1521, 604 df, $p < .001$), although a relative Chi Square statistic of 2.5 is an acceptable fit according to Kline (1998). A moderate proportion of the variance of 'worry about crime' was accounted for (36.2%) by perceptions of disorder, feelings of control over the risk of victimisation, and estimates of the likelihood of victimisation (Figure 1). However, only 4.6% of the variance of dissatisfaction with police effectiveness in cutting crime was explained by worry about crime ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$): people who worried were more likely to be dissatisfied by the police response to crime than people who did not worry. Equally, 4.0% of the variance of dissatisfaction with police effectiveness in engaging with the community was explained by worry about crime ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$): people who worried were more likely to be dissatisfied by police engagement than people who did not worry.

INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

The neo-Durkheimian model: Stage one

Worrying about crime had a small but significant effect on public confidence in policing therefore, with confidence defined as attitudes towards police effectiveness. But did beliefs about crime, perceptions of incivilities, and perceptions of social cohesion play a bigger role in predicting public confidence in policing? Moreover, was fear of crime *and* public confidence a function of concerns about social order? In other words, once one took into account the association between environmental perceptions and police attitudes, was the association involving fear of crime and public confidence spurious?

This hypothesis can be tested using structural equation modelling but for simplicity's sake let us consider the results of multiple regression modelling. Table 3 shows the parameter estimates of two models, where the response variable was each type of public confidence and the explanatory variables were: (a) worry about crime; (b) beliefs about crime rates; (c) perceptions of incivilities; and, (d) perceptions of social cohesion. Using exploratory factor analysis an index was created for each, where the factor scores from one-factor solutions were saved to create single variables (see Table 2 for results using CFA).

INSERT TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE

Holding constant other variables, worry about crime was no longer a statistically significant predictor of dissatisfaction with police effectiveness (dealing with crime $\beta = .09$, $p = .068$; engaging with the community $\beta = .07$, $p = .053$). Only the perception of social cohesion was associated with

dissatisfaction (dealing with crime $\beta=.37, \rho<.005$, engaging with the community $\beta=.25, \rho<.005$).

This meant that instrumental worries about personal safety were not, in fact, the driver of public confidence in policing. Feeling that one's local community lacked cohesion, social trust and informal social control was much more important. Consistent with a neo-Durkheimian analysis, concerns about social order went to the core of how people evaluated the police. This public did not feel let down by the police because they felt vulnerable to victimisation. They felt let down because cohesion was low and they looked to the police to defend community morals and values that the public felt to be in flux. This accords with Tyler & Boeckmann's (1997) finding that attitudes towards punishment in California were driven not by instrumental concerns about physical security, but by symbolic concerns about social cohesion and moral consensus.

The neo-Durkheimian model: Stage two

This was an intriguing finding. But there was more. We examined two other public judgements: (a) the extent to which people identified with the values and morals of police officers; and (b) whether the police were seen to treat individuals with dignity and fairness. We hypothesised that judgements about procedural justice (do the police treat people fairly?) had a strong influence on social identification with the police. We simplified the model by dropping out all variables apart from perceptions of social cohesion. Figure 2 presents the model at hand.

INSERT FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE

Again, the model fitted the data, at least according to approximate-fit indices (RMSEA=.049, CFI=.990). While the Chi-Square measure was not sufficient to indicate exact fit ($\chi^2 552, 236$ df, $\rho<.001$), a relative Chi-Square statistic of 2.3 was acceptable according to Kline (1998).

Dissatisfaction with police effectiveness (both in cutting crime and in engaging with the local community) was associated with (a) not identifying with the police, (b) feeling that the police do not treat people with fairness and dignity, and (c) judging there to be problems of social cohesion and trust in the community. The biggest single factor was procedural justice – the partial regression coefficient was .35 ($\rho<.05$) for each of the response variables. Yet social identification also played an important role ($\beta=.26, \rho<.05$ for each of the response variables), as did concerns about social cohesion (for effectiveness in cutting crime $\beta=.25, \rho<.05$; for effectiveness in engaging with the community $\beta=.15, \rho<.05$). Together, these explanatory variables accounted for 39.7% and 34.9% of the variance of the respective measures of public confidence in policing.

Also striking was the powerful correlation between public judgements about the fairness with which the police deal with the public and social identification with the police. More than half of the variance of social identification (60.0%) was accounted for by the variance of attitudes towards procedural fairness ($\beta=.77, \rho<.05$).

This analysis showed a strong influence of identification with police values on satisfaction with police effectiveness. We lean on social-psychological theory here to make sense of this finding. Social identity theory (and work on the appraisal of authority) predicts that people judge the authority of a group largely on the basis of whether they embody the values and morals of that group. This was consistent with our data: we found that the public wanted to identify with the morals and values that the police embody, and wanted the police to actively express the morals and values of their community (see Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Community identification: Some interaction effects

Finally, we examined the role of community identification by assessing two interaction effects. Respondents were asked how much they identified with their community. Table 4 presents the parameter estimates of the model just tested, but this time estimated on three groups: those with low, medium and high identification with their community. We hypothesised that as identification with the community increased, so the importance of social identification increased, and equally, so the

importance of concerns about social cohesion decreased.

INSERT TABLE FOUR ABOUT HERE

The results showed some support for both hypotheses, particularly in the contrast between low and high identification. For those respondents with low levels of identification with the community, social identification with the police and concerns about cohesion had moderate effects (β s ranged from .41 to .48). Contrast this with the results for those respondents with high levels of identification: concerns about social cohesion had a smaller effect (β s .11 and .18) whereas social identification with the police had a bigger effect (β s .60 and .63).

As Hogg (2001) predicted, those with strong connections to a group judged the authorities of that group on the extent to which they are prototypical representatives. Equally, because they felt embedded in the local community, they were less sensitive to concerns about social cohesion. By contrast, those with low identification with the community were more likely to have low confidence because of their concerns about cohesion, not because of their lack of identification with the police.

Discussion

This paper contributes to a rather thin research literature on the processes that underpin public confidence in policing. The study investigated the impact of fear of crime and environmental perception on trust and confidence. It also investigated the roles of identification with the values of the police (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003) and attitudes towards the procedural justice of the police (Tyler, 2004). These factors were organised within a neo-Durkheimian framework that drew upon a social-identity approach to authority (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

In combination with Jackson (2004), this study found that fear of crime and public confidence in policing were both rooted in a particular form of social perception: each was associated with lay evaluations of social order and cohesion. Additionally, these lay evaluations were shaped by wider values and political attitudes regarding social change (Jackson, 2004). Moreover, respondents looked to the police to defend community values when they believed the moral structure to be under threat (not when they worried for their own safety). The public wanted the police to be strong representatives of their community and to defend the moral structure when it was seen to be under attack. Of special importance was how authorities communicated to citizens that they both embody community values and seek to strengthen them. It was suggested that this is achieved when officers treat the public fairly and with dignity (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003b). To our knowledge, this is the first evidence on a connection between perceived police fairness and public confidence in policing in the UK (see Hough, 2006).

For this rural community, the old-fashioned idea British 'bobby' – resonant of a more ordered community, a symbol of benign authority and broader cultural significance – may still have purchase therefore (see Girling et al. 2000; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003). The police were judged on the basis of which they exemplified and defended the moral structure of the community. Yet the importance of police prototypicality depended on the degree to which people identified with their community. Consistent with social identity approaches (Hogg, 2001), as identification with the community increased, so people judged police authority on the extent to which the police represented the values of the group. Conversely, as identification with the community increased, so the importance of perceptions of social cohesion and order decreased.

But how specific was this result to a rural area with low levels of crime, disorder and fear-of-crime? In areas with more crime and more incivility, will public confidence be driven instead driven by fear-of-crime and disorder? Work by Girling et al. (2000) shows the situated nature of public perceptions of crime. How will this account fare in large urban conurbations for example?

Some of the findings presented here replicate a study of New York City residents (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003), suggesting generalization may be possible. Though that study did not consider social perception and fear of crime, it did find a strong effect of moral identification. If the current study

were to be replicated in an urban environment, fear of crime and perceptions of anti-social behaviour may well play larger roles. Moreover, moral identification with the police may be more complicated in areas of social and ethnic pluralism. In more atomised localities, identification may be a weak factor because fewer people share values and individuals have lower levels of identification with their community: they will thus care less about threats to the values of that group. But these are all empirical questions of course. The next step is to test certain aspects of the *neo-Durkheimian* model on data from the British Crime Survey or other sources.

Conclusions

[Perhaps] people think about policing and private security in ways that have less to do with ‘risk’ and ‘fear of crime’ and more to do with a sense of place – their *own* place, or *other* places – and with concern for that place’s “moral architecture”, its social status, and its distinctive “security aesthetic”.

(Garland, 2001: 749, in a review of Girling et al. 2000).

Current policing policy seeks to decrease fear of crime and increase public confidence in policing. Partly this reflects the rising importance of ‘reassurance’, particularly with the emergence of the ‘reassurance gap’ between falling crime rates and public perceptions that crime is rising (see Innes, 2004b; Millie and Herrington, 2005). This is evidenced by the Home Office including measures of reassurance in its Police Performance Assessment Framework or the inclusion of reassurance as the primary objective in the National Policing Plan 2003-2006, which emphasizes increased contact and visibility of the police (Dalglish and Myhill, 2004).

‘Neighbourhood policing’ is the buzz-phrase for delivering reassurance and developing a more citizen-focused police service. By 2008 the government intends that every area in England will have neighbourhood policing teams in place. The aim of these teams is to provide a more visible and accessible police force, to increase police-resident contact, and to identify and tackle ‘signal crimes’ in partnership with the local community (Innes, 2004a, 2004b). As the Chief Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police Service put it, neighbourhood policing tries to counteract the ‘degradation of communal life’. Anti-social behaviour and incivilities not only damage people’s quality-of-life, they also present subjective environmental cues for the incidence of crime and the possibility of victimisation. By tackling the day-to-day nuisance issues that the local community identify as the things that make them feel insecure, the police hope to reduce fear-of-crime and improve public confidence.

But this study found that disorder did not influence public confidence in policing. Nor did fear-of-crime, once one controlled for concerns about social cohesion. Instead, worries about crime and confidence in policing were both shaped by judgements about cohesion, trust and moral consensus. In consequence, engaging in narrow fear of crime reduction measures may not, in and of itself, improve public confidence. As Girling et al. (2000) found, people thought about policing in ways that had little to do with ‘risk’ and ‘fear of crime.’ Moreover, they thought about policing in ways less to do with disorder and more to do with the values and norms that sustain social life. Most importantly, they looked to the police to be representative of community values and exercise their powers fairly.

In this rural community, police strategies to reduce disorder may improve public confidence in policing. But not, we suspect, because disorder drives confidence. Rather, doing so might persuade members of the public that the police shares their concerns, that the police are a strong and active symbol of the morals and values that underpin community life. This can be achieved by exercising authority in a manner perceived to be fair (e.g. affording citizens with respect and dignity) and by re-engaging as an active, visible and accessible part of community life.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics

| Question | Valid percentage who were dissatisfied [with police activities] or disagreed with the statements [regarding fairness or identification with the police] | | | | | | |
|--|---|------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| | Total | Male | Female | 16-24 | 25-39 | 40-59 | 60+ |
| From what you know or have heard, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with how the police in this area do each of the following: [Very satisfied; fairly satisfied; neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; fairly dissatisfied; very dissatisfied] | | | | | | | |
| Getting to know the community? | 27% | 33% | 23% | 50% | 27% | 26% | 28% |
| Meeting with schools and community groups? | 11% | 12% | 10% | 13% | 13% | 13% | 9% |
| Making themselves available to the public? | 24% | 26% | 23% | 38% | 25% | 25% | 22% |
| Police on the beat/patrols on foot? | 53% | 56% | 52% | 69% | 58% | 50% | 56% |
| Dealing with mugging and street crime? | 7% | 10% | 6% | 19% | 6% | 8% | 6% |
| Dealing with burglary? | 17% | 22% | 13% | 31% | 14% | 18% | 16% |
| Dealing with anti-social behaviour? | 20% | 24% | 17% | 44% | 22% | 24% | 12% |
| Dealing with drink driving? | 18% | 18% | 18% | 38% | 28% | 17% | 13% |
| How much do you agree or disagree that the police in your area: [Strongly agree; somewhat agree; neither agree nor disagree; somewhat disagree; strongly disagree] | | | | | | | |
| Clearly explain the reasons for their actions? | 11% | 18% | 5% | 33% | 10% | 14% | 5% |
| Treat people with dignity and respect? | 7% | 9% | 6% | 27% | 13% | 6% | 4% |
| Treat people fairly? | 7% | 11% | 5% | 33% | 10% | 8% | 4% |
| Respect people's rights? | 7% | 10% | 5% | 33% | 10% | 7% | 4% |
| To the best of your ability, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: [Strongly agree; somewhat agree; neither agree nor disagree; somewhat disagree; strongly disagree] | | | | | | | |
| I imagine that the values of most of the police officers who work in my neighbourhood are very similar to my own. | 6% | 10% | 4% | 20% | 5% | 8% | 4% |
| If I talked to police officers who work in my neighbourhood, I would find they have similar views to my own on many issues. | 7% | 12% | 3% | 27% | 5% | 8% | 5% |
| If most of the police officers who work in my neighbourhood knew me, I imagine they would respect my views. | 3% | 7% | 1% | 7% | 0% | 6% | 1% |

Table 2. Fit statistics for confirmatory factor analyses of public attitudes toward the police

| One factor solution for each attitude | χ^2 | df | p | CFI | RMSEA | Range of factor loadings | Range of indicator R ² s |
|---|----------|----|------|-------|-------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Satisfaction with police engagement in the local community | 14.281 | 2 | .001 | .998 | .104 | .72 - .84 | .51 - .71 |
| Satisfaction with police effectiveness in dealing with crime | 11.513 | 2 | .003 | .998 | .092 | .66 - .84 | .43 - .71 |
| Extent to which the police are seen to treat public fairly and respectfully | 4.142 | 2 | .126 | 1.000 | .044 | .82 - .97 | .67 - .94 |
| Social identification: degree of perceived similarity between the values of respondents and local police officers | 2.612 | 1 | .106 | .999 | .053 | .80 - .93 | .64 - .86 |

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares multiple regression model for:
 (I) satisfaction with police engagement in the community; and,
 (II) satisfaction with effectiveness at dealing with crime

| Variables | B | Std. Error | p |
|--|----------|-------------------|----------|
| Model I: response variable – police effectiveness at dealing with crime | | | |
| (Constant) | -.019 | | |
| Worry about crime | .092 | .068 | .181 |
| Beliefs about the prevalence of crime | .032 | .067 | .638 |
| Perceptions of incivilities | .070 | .064 | .274 |
| Perceptions of social cohesion | .367 | .063 | <.0005 |
| Model II: response variable – police engagement in the community | | | |
| (Constant) | .032 | | |
| Worry about crime | .073 | .053 | .171 |
| Beliefs about the prevalence of crime | .078 | .065 | .229 |
| Perceptions of incivilities | .076 | .064 | .230 |
| Perceptions of social cohesion | .252 | .060 | <.0005 |

Model I: $R^2=0.191$

Model II: $R^2=0.090$

Table 4. regression coefficients for three structural equation models:
 low identification with the community; medium identification; and high identification

| Variables | <i>B</i> for low identification | <i>B</i> for medium identification | <i>B</i> for high identification |
|--|--|---|---|
| Response variable I: satisfaction with police effectiveness in cutting crime | | | |
| Social identification | .43* | .51* | .60* |
| Perceptions of social cohesion, trust, and informal social control | .48* | .41* | .11* |
| Response variable II: satisfaction with police effectiveness in engaging with the community | | | |
| Social identification | .48* | .41* | .63* |
| Perceptions of social cohesion, trust, and informal social control | .41* | .29* | .18* |

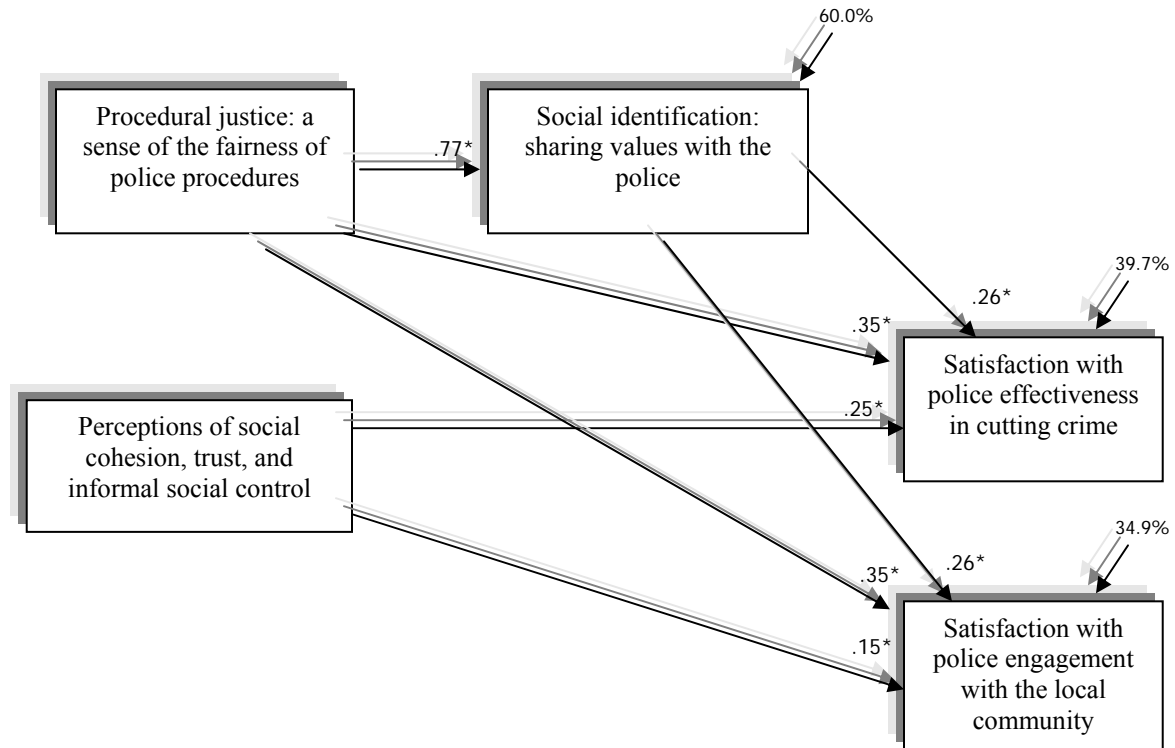
* significant, $p < .05$

Figure 1. Fear of crime and public confidence in policing
 Standardized regression weights are provided.
 The measurement portion of the model is absent for visual ease.



Standardized coefficients
 Chi-square=1521 (604 df); $p < .001$
 RMSEA=.052; CFI=.982
 * significant, $p < .05$

Figure 2. Final model of public confidence in policing
 Standardized regression weights are provided.
 The measurement portion of the model is absent for visual ease.



Standardized coefficients
 Chi-square=552 (236 df); $p < .001$
 RMSEA=.049; CFI=.990
 * significant, $p < .05$