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**Cops in Crisis?: Ethnographic Insights on a New Era of Politicization, Activism,
Accountability, and Change in Transatlantic Policing**

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Abstract

Against the complex backdrop of a post-modern era, characterized by a renewed emphasis on public accountability, oppositional social and political movements, it has been argued that traditional agents of social control have increasingly begun to experience a sense of disempowerment. Nowhere has this been more apparent than within the context of policing, where the increased influence of the mass media, social media, and newly empowered groups has led to an apparent legitimacy crisis on both sides of the Atlantic. To better understand officers' views, attitudes, and perspectives about the changing landscape of policing, this paper reports on insights from a comparative study involving **participant observation in two counties** in a Southern State in the United States of America and three inner-city areas in Scotland. The observations were paired with in-depth semi-structured interviews with 18 American and 22 Scottish officers. The data suggest that officers on both sides of the Atlantic are hostile towards the increasing influence of new forms of media and digital activism. Many officers also expressed concern for declining public cooperation and perceived there to have been a general diminution of police authority and enforcement tactics. Finally, there was a general feeling of reduced officer self-legitimacy among the participants but an increased awareness of procedural justice and alternative (and more covert) enforcement strategies. The implications from these findings are discussed in terms of changing perceptions of justice, legitimacy, social ideology, and the proposed consequences for rights-based policing in the 21st Century.

Keywords: policing, politicization, activism, accountability, disempowerment, legitimacy

Introduction

Around the Western world there has been an increasing realization in the 21st Century that traditional agents of social control have begun to experience a sense of disempowerment. Nowhere has this been more apparent than within the context of policing, where the growing influence of newly empowered groups has led to continual public concern for police practices on both sides of the Atlantic (Loader & Sparks, 2015). In particular, the emergence of citizen journalism in social media forums and politicization of policing by mass media has placed policing under a growing spotlight (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Loader & Sparks, 2015).

Much of this reporting focuses on policing's history of differential treatment of racial and ethnic minorities, socially disadvantaged groups, and young people (McAra & McVie, 2005; Deuchar, Fallik, & Crichlow, 2018; Fallik, forthcoming). The public's consciousness about issues concerning officer prejudice, discrimination, and brutality has become heightened within the context of increased news/social media consumption in an age of digital activism (Perry, 2009; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Intravia, Wolff, & Piquero, 2018). In turn, Maguire, Nix, and Campbell (2017, p. 739) suggest that police agencies are facing a 'major legitimacy crisis' fueled by a growing 'anti-police sentiment'. This has been characterized by significant decreases in public trust in several international contexts (Lee & McGovern, 2013; Todak, 2017).

To better understand officers' views, attitudes, and perspectives about the changing landscape of policing and the way in which the rising influence of new social movements has impacted officer confidence, motivation and policing strategies, this paper reports insights from a comparative study involving participant observation of officers in two Southern State counties in the United States of America (USA) and three urban areas in Scotland. These observations were paired with in-depth semi-structured interviews with 18 American and 22 Scottish officers to

better contextualize the researcher's field experiences. Prior to getting into the data, however, we first situate the study within the extant literature on law enforcement legitimacy. We examine how recent controversial and high-profile events have influenced police policy and practices in the USA and Scotland. Second, we describe in detail the research methods used to provide a comparative perspective on how these issues impacted officers in our selected geographical locations. Third, insights from our empirical data are presented thematically. Fourth and finally, we discuss the implications from these findings in terms of changing perceptions of justice, legitimacy, social ideology, and the proposed consequences for rights-based policing in the 21st Century.

Literature Review

Controversy, Legitimacy Crisis, and Policy Responses in American Policing

In the USA, the death of Michael Brown at the hands of a white Ferguson (MO) police officer named Darren Wilson in August 2014 came on the heels of a wide range of other publicized killings of unarmed black men across the country (for review, see Deuchar et al., 2018). During the immediate days that followed the incident in Ferguson, however, live coverage of violent confrontations between protesters and the highly militarized local police subsequently went viral on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). **Some believed that** Twitter, in particular, was weaponized for 'digital activism' and has become a powerful tool for challenging perceived racial injustice, particularly among *Black Lives Matters* members.¹ **However, the counter-argument here emerges within the recognized context of police accountability. As Walker and Archbold (2013, p. 8) highlight, a basic principle of a democratic**

¹ It has been estimated that around 56% of the USA population carries video-enabled smartphones and that the use of mobile technology is particularly high among African Americans (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015).

society is that ‘the police are answerable to the public’. Since evidence suggests that police misconduct remains a ‘serious problem in American society’ (Walker & Archbold, 2013, p. 6), both mainstream and social media may play an important role in reframing excessive use of officer force as unacceptable, facilitating police openness, transparency efforts (Stamati et al., 2015) and acting as a form of ‘preventive accountability’ (Bonner, 2009, p. 296).

In this way, social media, as a forum for digital activism against police transgression, may on the one hand undermine law enforcement legitimacy while at the same time bringing a necessarily increased level of visibility and accountability to repressive forces (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). Tyler (1988) linked these two issues, when he proposed that State legitimacy and public trust in law enforcement is best sustained by decision-making and police practices that are **seen** to be procedurally just (see also Deuchar et al., 2018). The literature on procedural justice suggests that members of the general public judge the fairness of the overall law enforcement system on how fair they perceive the process of policing, rather than the outcome of police encounters (for a review, see Nagin & Telep, 2017). When officers are viewed as being respectful, fair and courteous towards local citizens, and where they are seen to explain the basis of their decisions to them, policing will be viewed as more legitimate by the public (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2006). In such cases, local people will be more willing to defer to police authority and comply with the law (Reisig, Wolfe, & Holtfreter, 2011; Jackson et al., 2013). Conversely, where institutions fail to address biased, discriminatory forms of policing then this can undermine public trust and confidence in policing (Bradford, 2016).

The recommendations from the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (commonly known as the Kerner Commission) in the late 1960s included the need to increase the focus on proactive policing and crime prevention, leading to the emerging focus on

community policing across the USA (Deuchar, 2013). However, stifling this agenda has been the central focus on crime and punishment at the centre of American political discourse, whereby politicians have continually attempted to portray themselves as ‘tougher than their counterparts’ and promoted tough law enforcement as a remedy to crime-related problems (Beckett, 1999, p. 3). In turn, the neo-liberal rationality has rapidly replaced community policing whereby communities have come to be seen as problems rather than partners (Murphy, 2007). Within the context of law-and-order politics, state control has broadened as police agencies have militarized and become more technologically advanced. In turn, the use of social media, online and offline protesting, and the rise of so-called ‘sousveillance’ against the backdrop of incidents like Ferguson has led to a ‘cat and mouse’ game where sympathizers seek to ‘evade the reach of the state’ and increase accountability among police agencies (Owen, 2017, p. 694). On the other hand, the State and its allies simultaneously seek to expand their counter-surveillance net in an attempt to regain public support (*ibid*).

These conditions have had a number of perceived consequences (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Loader & Sparks, 2015). Some scholars have claimed, for example, that there is now a ‘war on cops’ and officers are facing increasing levels of hostility (MacDonald, 2016; Maguire et al., 2017). Conversely, others have claimed that the increased influence of social media and online protesting has strengthened police legitimacy by encouraging police openness and accountability (Bonner, 2009; Stamati et al., 2015). Following an apparent launch of a ‘new civil rights movement’ through the momentum gained by the *Black Lives Matters* protestors, President Barack Obama established a Task Force on 21st Century Policing (PTF) in December 2014. In its final report, released in 2015, the PTF (2015, p. 12) recommended that law enforcement agencies should ‘acknowledge the role of policing in past and present injustice and discrimination’. The

authors of the report recommended that law enforcement should embrace a ‘guardian’ (rather than a warrior) mindset, with procedural justice being the ‘guiding principle’ for their interactions with the citizens (PTF, 2015, p. 11).

Some scholars believe that the PTF (2015) has now ‘gone too far, resulting in widespread anti-police sentiment’ (Maguire et al., 2017, p. 740). Some have argued that there has been a ‘Ferguson effect’ whereby the fear of being disciplined, losing their jobs, being prosecuted, or sued is leading officers to ‘hesitate in dangerous situations’ (Maguire et al., 2017, p. 740). In addition, research finds that ‘de-policing’ may also have led to a reduced sense of self-legitimacy, willingness to engage in community partnerships, and fewer arrests and/or citations (Morgan & Pally, 2016; Wolfe & Nix, 2016; Maguire et al., 2017). **On the other hand, some have highlighted that there may be benefits to de-policing, particularly in minority communities, in terms of alleviating the negative effects of aggressive order maintenance and ‘broken windows’ police tactics (Shjarback et al., 2017, p. 43).**

However, there has also been a growth in professionalized police-public relations infrastructures in American policing (and around the wider world) (Lee & McGovern, 2013). Against the backdrop of a growing recognition of the need to ‘foster public confidence and organizational legitimacy through the practice of procedural and distributive justice’, there has been the development of professionalized and centralized public relations units in order to manage ‘police images’ (Lee & McGovern, 2013, p. 105). In particular, law enforcement agencies in the western world are increasingly using social media tools as platforms for managing public opinion, and specifically in an attempt to engage the public in supporting their work (Ruddell & Jones, 2013). For example, Crump (2011, p. 24) has documented the way in which, by providing the public with information such as local crime statistics, police services can

promote ‘community engagement, and support greater public service transparency and accountability’.

Perry (2009) finds that agencies are complementing public relations work with renewed community policing approaches to ameliorate the impact of racialized policing. This has been combined with the increased issuing of body-worn cameras (BWCs) within many police agencies, which is seen as a means of enhancing police accountability (Maskaly et al., 2017). However, some evidence suggests that officer resistance to this new technology has been substantial, among concerns that BWCs can inhibit the use of necessary force (Smykla et al., 2016; for discussion, see Fallik et al., 2018). Further, there has been a documented rise in the use of predictive policing strategies, drawing on the power of ‘big data’ to isolate patterns of crime and inform crime prevention strategies (Ferguson, 2017, p. 265), and drawing on social media intelligence to monitor emerging tensions and potential developing disorder in targeted neighbourhoods (Williams et al., 2013). Together, police leaders clearly hope that these efforts may accelerate citizen perceptions of police as guardians, thereby avoiding the potential of a local event like what happened in Ferguson (Deuchar et al., 2018, p. 13). It has been argued, however, that predictive policing approaches may have Fourth Amendment consequences in terms of their discriminatory effect on low-income areas and communities of color (Ferguson, 2017).

Controversy, Legitimacy Crisis, and Policy Responses in Scottish Policing

In the United Kingdom, policing has also increasingly come under the public radar. Across the country, for example, the use of stop and search (S&S) has drawn considerable political and media attention. The use of this tactic has had a long controversial history in

England and Wales, having been implicated in the 1980s Brixton Riots and Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Delsol & Shiner, 2006). It was also the subject of controversy in relation to its role in exacerbating the public order riots that took place in English towns and cities in the summer of 2011 (Ariza, 2014). Although these incidents drew public attention to the over-use of S&S among ethnic minority young men (Delso & Shiner, 2006), in Scotland (where less than 5% of the overall population is a minority), the recorded flashpoints have occurred more frequently in working-class white communities. Research conducted over a decade has reported that young white men from socially disadvantaged neighborhoods are most frequently targeted for S&S and they feel like the ‘usual suspects’ (McAra & McVie, 2005).

Prior to 2014, the use of S&S in Scotland generally avoided controversy (Murray & Harkin, 2017). However, Murray’s (2014) research revealed that searches were being undertaken at an unprecedented scale in Scotland (i.e., four times higher than in England and Wales and disproportionately on young people in working-class and white communities). The publication of Murray’s work led to ‘extensive media and political attention’, prompting criticism about the use of S&S from the Scottish Human Rights Commission, the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, and the United Nations Human Rights Committee (Murray & Harkin, 2017, p. 885).

Increased attention was symptomatic of a wider escalation in the ‘critical scrutiny’ of Scottish policing following the amalgamation of Scotland’s eight legacy forces into a national force in the spring of 2013. This change occurred as a result of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. The critical interrogation of police policies and practices that had hitherto gone unchallenged did not (as in the USA) come about as a result of ‘mass mobilization of campaigns or grassroots movements’, but emerged against the backdrop of increased

politicization of Scottish policing (Murray & Harkin, 2017, p. 887). As Murray and Harkin (2017, p. 887) highlight, prior to the formation of the national police force in Scotland there was a ‘cool’ climate, whereby policy-making remained ‘within the hands of a small circle of professionals, largely insulated from the more volatile world of public sentiment’. Following the formation of Police Scotland, however, a more ‘heated’ climate emerged where policing issues became debated and contested in the public following critical media coverage (Murray & Harkin, 2017, p. 888).

In Scotland, police have statutory powers to S&S individuals without arrest, charge, or formal caution if there are ‘reasonable grounds to suspect’ that they are in possession of an offensive weapon (Criminal Justice Scotland Act 1980 consolidated by the Criminal Justice Procedure Act 1995), illegal drugs (Misuse of Drugs Act 1971), or that an offence has been, or is about to be, committed (McAra & McVie 2005, p. 10). In addition to statutory searches, until the spring of 2017 officers in Scotland could S&S people on a non-statutory basis, more commonly known as a ‘consensual’ search. Consensual S&S was based on ‘verbal consent’ and there was widespread acceptance that it did not require ‘reasonable suspicion’ (Murray 2014, p. 9). In fact, reasonable suspicion was always required but since officers were generally not legally obliged to justify consensual searches, this requirement was frequently overlooked. Bowling and Philips (2007, p. 939) proffer, however, that where ‘reasonable suspicion’ is absent in S&S, that such encounters may ‘damage the relationship between police and community, and undermine the legitimacy of, and respect for, the police’.

Following widespread scrutiny and consultation with a range of stakeholders and interested parties throughout 2014-15, an Advisory Group on Stop and Search (AGSS) recommended a statutory Code of Practice on Stop and Search that ended consensual S&S when

the Code of Practice came into effect, within the wider context of embedding a greater focus on human rights in policing (AGSS, 2015). (AGSS, 2015). The Code of Practice was unanimously approved by the Scottish Parliament in the spring of 2017 and new officer training on S&S placed an emphasis on statutory powers that are guided by reasonable suspicion (BBC News, 2017). Officers now need to make clear the grounds for searching citizens in their post-incident reports and do so in a way that ensures they avoid biases.

Concurrent with these efforts has been an accelerated focus on engaging with youth and upholding their human rights (Deuchar & Miller 2016). Accordingly, the increasingly ‘heated’ climate surrounding the politicization of Scottish policing in recent years has resulted in unprecedented levels of public scrutiny, legislative reform, and strategic planning (Murray & Harkin, 2017, p. 888). In addition to ensuring that the use of S&S is guided by procedural justice principles and a focus on upholding human rights, the national force has also placed a renewed emphasis on community-oriented policing as a means of fostering public confidence and legitimacy (Lee & McGovern, 2013).

Methodology

Substantively, both sides of the Atlantic have been impacted by contemporary issues in policing, as mass/social media and newly empowered groups have altered the landscape of policing. Though the extant literature examines some aspects of these issues, comparative research that explores officer views, experiences, and reactions is lacking. There is, therefore, an opportunity here for cross-cultural research that explores these issues through a broader lens. To address these issues, we draw together insights from two transatlantic datasets, where insights from participant observation are complemented by those from semi-structured interviews. Although

the vastly differing contextual backdrops of Scotland and the US can be recognized in terms of culture, criminal behaviour patterns and policing styles, the potential that can be derived from this comparison should not be overlooked. King and Wincup (2008) draw attention to the way in which comparative research can enable one system to learn from the success and failures of another. Although comparative approaches in criminology and criminal justice research are still somewhat rare, prior work has demonstrated the benefits that can emerge from cross-national comparative studies that illuminates what Scottish and American police agencies can learn from each other in terms of adapting to new and emerging social and political changes (Deuchar, 2013).

Settings

American data were collected in a Southern State in 2017. Observed and interviewed officers served in two counties comprised of several towns and cities, hereafter and collectively referred to as Sunshine City. There are approximately 1.6 million residents in Sunshine City where the annual median household income is just below \$50,000. Most of the residents in Sunshine City are registered Democratic voters and the racial/ethnic composition mirrors national rates, according to the USA Census Bureau (2017). Crime, in Sunshine City, is lower than national averages across all index crimes, and, in some instances, is half the national rate. Data from the USA were part of a wider empirical study that sought to explore policing of gang violence.

Alternatively, data from Scotland were collected for the purpose of understanding young people's experiences with Force Flexible Policing Units (FFPUs). As part of a British Academy-funded project between 2015 and 2016, data were collected from two inner-city areas and an

inner-town area.² The largest of the observed Scotland jurisdictions, ‘Cityview’ (in the west of Scotland), has a population of just over 600,000 and the highest proportion of recorded crimes in Scotland. The second location, ‘Drycity’ (in the east of Scotland), has a population of just under 500,000 and has the second highest overall crime rate. The third area, ‘Townpark’ (also in the west of Scotland, approximately seven miles west of Cityview), has a population of just under 80,000. Townpark, however, has the seventh highest number of recorded crimes in Scotland and has the highest levels of social and economic deprivation in the country (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2016; Scottish Government, 2017). All of the geographical locations in Scotland were predominantly white. Cityview had the largest percentage of ethnic minority groups – approximately 12% of the population (Scottish Government, 2011).

In addition to differing in population size and crime rates, the American officers were routinely armed with firearms, whereas in Scotland operational officers are generally armed only with a baton and CS spray (Scottish Government, 2004). Though different in a lot of ways, we chose these settings as a result of convenience and opportunism. More specifically, the existing funded projects combined with established academic associations enabled comparative scholarship to emerge naturally. Our interests, however, are not solely based on access but also an interest in comparing and contrasting uniquely defined socio-cultural and policing landscapes. To accomplish this objective, an ethnographic approach was adopted over a three month period in both countries.

Participant Observation

Ethnography has been defined as a form of social research that emphasizes the importance of ‘studying firsthand what people do and say in particular contexts’ (Hammersley,

² Like in the USA, pseudonyms are used to describe the research settings in Scotland.

2006, p. 4). Ethnographers participate in the daily routines of a specific social setting, develop ongoing relations with the people within it while observing closely (Emerson et al., 1995). The ethnographic approach used in this study relied greatly on participant observation, whereby the researcher (who was, in this case, the first author of this paper), adopted the ‘participant-as-observer’ role (Gold, 1958). This involved communicating the research intentions to operational officers and participating alongside them in their daily professional endeavors. This, most often, included the shadowing of police officers and engaging in informal dialogues with them during pre-deployment briefings, rest breaks, and covert surveillance work (Hammersley, 2006). Despite being an outsider in the US context, the researcher quickly found that officers opened up and provided in-depth descriptions and analysis of police work during conversations. Furthermore, previous involvement in police ridealongs in Scotland based on the reputation of earlier research meant that the researcher was able to gain the trust of officers. During observations ‘jottings’ of ‘fragments of action and talk’ were recorded as well as the researcher’s ‘impressions and feelings’. These writings would later be drawn upon to create field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, pp. 31-32).

In total, the researcher spent approximately 250 hours in the field engaged in participant observation across all sites. In Sunshine City, the researcher most often engaged officers who were interested in the detection, prevention, and enforcement of violent crime. Some of this work (around 50 hours’ worth) was done in the field with frontline officers; however, a significant amount of time (approximately 30 hours) was also spent observing the intelligence gathering, organizing, and dissemination of information among senior officers and Detectives. Alternatively, field observations in Scotland were with a FFPU – a team of officers who are deployed to neighborhoods experiencing increased levels of youth disorder and crime. FFPUs

typically stay in a community for 12-24 weeks and are highly visible to the public. They often engage in proactive policing through citizen engagement tactics. Participant observation data in Scotland were based on over 50 engagements with citizens on the streets of Cityview, Drycity, and Townpark, gathered across approximately 170 hours of frontline contact. Following each field observation, the researcher spent many hours writing up full field notes from copious notes he had made while in the field, and these were drawn upon to create a rich data set (Bryman, 2016).

Interviews

Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with a cross-section of frontline officers, their immediate superiors, and wider groups of officers from the same unit and/or department. A loose interview protocol was used in both locations, and the 'semi-structured' approach enabled the researcher to vary the sequence of questions depending on context and to ask supplementary questions in response to what were viewed as significant replies (Bryman, 2016). This provided some structure to the interviews but allowed the interviewee to guide the discussion and emphasize their opinions. Interviews broadly explored officer reactions to media portrayals, political rhetoric, and contemporary society. The protocols also sought to give voice to officers on police-citizen points of conflict, officer perceptions of policy changes, and the impact of law enforcement in recent years. In the USA, this often led to discussions on the use of force, while in Scotland a lot of attention was given to S&S. In this regard, officers were frequently asked to contextualize their responses based on their historical and institutional knowledge. Interviews from both sites were audio recorded and transcribed for ease of data analysis.

Participants were recruited via a snowball sample approach, whereby the observed officers were asked to be interviewed and refer other officers that may be willing to participate in the study. Most invited participants were willing. This referral system was continued until data saturation was reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participants had a range of experience in terms of their length of service and current police ranks. In Sunshine City, interviews were conducted with three executive officers (i.e., Chief or Sheriff), a Lieutenant, four Sergeants, seven Detectives, and three patrol officers. A Superintendent, Chief Inspector, four Inspectors, four Sergeants, and 12 Constables were interviewed in Scotland. Of the 18 American participants, 16 (88.9%) were male and 15 (83.3%) were white. Similarly, most of the 22 Scottish participants were male ($n = 18$, 81.8%) and white ($n = 21$, 95.5%). While pseudonyms are used to describe the research participants, officer ranks are provided for contextual purposes.

Analytical Strategy

We combined the field notes and interview data. In doing so, we sought to explore the extent and ways oppositional social, political, and accountability movements had impacted officer confidence, motivation, and sense of legitimacy in the USA and Scottish contexts. The data were coded manually and a thematic analysis was carried out. First, a conventional content analysis phase was conducted where we immersed ourselves in the data and conceptual themes and sub-themes were identified. Thereafter, a directed content analysis phase was conducted, where emerging overarching themes were interpreted in light of the existing literature on police accountability, social media, policy change and politicization (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). We recognized that the choice to draw upon specific geographical locations shaped the emerging insights and findings from the data to an extent, such that the particular perceptions and practices

of officers captured within the data to some extent reflected the specificities of the geographical and cultural backdrops to their police work. As is the case with all qualitative research, we therefore recognized that no universal generalizations could be made in terms of policing in a wider sense, but rather sought to capture emerging insights that might generate further comparative research of this kind. In the following sections, key insights from these qualitative data are presented.

Findings

Our analysis led us to identify two overarching emerging themes: (1) *Changing values, cultures, and oppositional forces*, and (2) *Policy changes, reduced empowerment, and alternative means of enforcement*. Identified text containing words and phrases, such as ‘community’, ‘influence’, ‘media’, ‘empower’, ‘relationship’, ‘scrutiny’, and ‘enforcement’, were found to greatly inform these themes. The themes are significant in as much as they draw attention to the way in which issues pertaining to public scrutiny and digital activism, along with shifting social and political priorities, had influenced officers’ attitudes towards police work. When facing the pressures of changing values and cultures, American officers in particular lamented a perceived deterioration of values and reduced discipline and respect for authority. The emerging themes are presented in the forthcoming sub-sections.

Changing Values, Cultures, and Oppositional Forces

American officers were strongly of the opinion that community and family values had deteriorated, parenting approaches had weakened, and male role models were now missing in many of the neighborhoods they policed. During interviews, for example, most expressed that

this had led to a reduced level of discipline and a general lack of respect among young people, particularly towards authority figures:

Parents don't want nobody else talking to their child, dealing with their child 'cause then they wanna come over and fight or 'why'd you say this to my child?' or whatever the case which is sad. *(Calvin, Officer: USA)*

Single mothers raising these kids and stuff, no supervision, no male role model in their lives [...] Work ethic is pretty much gone [...] there's no discipline in schools anymore, the teachers can't do anything. There's no male role models at home, [and] everybody hates the police. *(John, Detective: USA)*

Similarly in Scotland, officers believed that there had been a general reduced focus on parental discipline in the home. Officers, for example, felt blamed by parents for harassing young people. This was pronounced among socially disadvantaged communities and among generations of families that promoted anti-police sentiments:

Unfortunately, quite a lot of the time, when I take people home, their parents think that it's our fault that they've done something wrong or, you know, they're never to blame [...]. Bringing them home because you have to sometimes speak to the parents and charge them in front of the parents [...]. The parents [...] just don't seem concerned at all. *(Barry, Constable: Scotland)*

In a lot of areas we've worked, it's generations of people, families who have had extended involvement with the police, so they've heard from their home life [...] 'you don't trust them.' *(Dylan, Constable: Scotland)*

Officers believed in the USA that in the absence of positive family influences, many young boys turned towards celebrities for inspiration. For example, they talked about the influence of rap artists on promoting a gang mentality among youths. This mentality generated expectations for many youths to earn fast money:

As I continue to talk to Lieutenant Samuel about the gang issues in the local communities, he explains to me the way in which many of the young men are influenced by high-profile rap artists, 'It's all about being flash [...]. They are influenced by Chris Brown and Soldier Boy who both claim Bloods but neither of them actually grew up in Los Angeles. They waited until they were multi-millionaires and now claim Blood – so the guys who follow them are also looking to be cool, claiming Blood – they think it can get them lots of money.' (Researcher's American Field Notes)

American officers also referred to the growth of social media among young people.

During many of the interviews, officers talked about youth regularly posting gang violence to social media pages, especially involving guns:

If I see my rival gang member posting with a Glock handgun then I can post with AK47 [...]. I mean, for lack of a better term, I got bigger balls than he's got, or I think I do. Whether that's the case or not, that's the persona that's trying to be portrayed on social media. (*Kevin, Sergeant: USA*)

Officers were clear about the way in which social media had accelerated the expressive process of reputation-building among young men (Storrad & Densley, 2017). It was evident that covert surveillance roles, relying on information technology and potential social media tension monitoring, had become more prominent as a result, against a more generic backdrop of predictive policing (Williams et al., 2013; Ferguson, 2017):

I move over to where Malcolm, one of the officers, is sitting at his computer. He is around 50, has a grey beard, and is dressed in jeans and a t-shirt: as are all the other officers in the office. As he scrolls through various social media pages of ethnic minority young men, he explains 'we get so much information from social media, going undercover – we all have Facebook accounts.' (Researcher's American Field Notes)

The above observation raises questions about the extent to which the use of social media surveillance may lead to Fourth Amendment challenges for young black men in the American communities where we conducted our research, whereby new forms of predictive policing may stimulate further racial discrimination (Ferguson, 2017).

Storrad and Densley's work (2017) illustrates the way in which young men in London, UK, are increasingly being influenced by American gang culture in using 'trap rap' videos for expressive purposes in terms of violent reputation-building, often through the display of weapons and drugs. Our fieldwork and interviews in Scotland, however, found no evidence that this culture had spread there, to date. Some officers did, however, articulate the view that gangster

images from *Grand Theft Auto* and similar types of video games were increasingly influencing young Scottish men's value-base and sense of image. In addition, Scottish officers believed that social media postings from videos collected on smartphone cameras were used by young men to create public impressions of police harassment:

They follow you down the street, talking at you and as soon as you turn round to speak to them, the phones come out [...] and it doesn't show what happened ten minutes before or ten minutes after it. And you could be judged on that. People could make complaints based on it and they're not seeing what's happened before. There's a couple of times I've had people screaming bloody murder and basically [committing] a breach [of the peace], fightin' wi' people – then you go to arrest somebody, the cameras come out, 'what you doing? Why are you speaking to my pal, why are you arresting my pal?' (*Willie, Constable: Scotland*)

Although officers articulated the view that young men's use of smartphones was increasingly undermining their sense of legitimacy, wider research also suggests that many officers believe that the introduction of BWCs may encroach on their discretion (Katz et al., 2014; Smykla et al., 2016). This perhaps reflects a deeper resistance towards openness, transparency and public accountability for fear of repressive forces being exposed (Bonner, 2009; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Stamati et al., 2015). American officers went even further by indicating that there was now a strong culture where police officers were increasingly being demonized. Following the news and social media coverage of incidents like Ferguson, many felt that police legitimacy was increasingly being questioned (Maguire et al., 2017; Todak, 2017; Deuchar et al., 2018):

Ninety-nine percent of the people that are policemen do [things] for the right reasons and don't break the rules. But we want to look at that small 1% with a microscope and make a generalized statement that law enforcement, as a whole, is the problem and that's just not the case [...]. That has to do with the media. (*Kevin, Sergeant: USA*)

Kevin's perspective was one that suggested that police misconduct was in the minority and that policing as a whole was demonized by the media. However, American law enforcement

has a regrettable history of behaviour that contradicts many of the tenants of procedural justice, as evidenced in the racial disparity among use-of-force statistics (Deuchar et al., 2018). Some would argue that the accelerated levels of media attention on officer behaviour in recent years has helped to reframe excessive force as unacceptable and facilitated a culture of ‘preventive accountability’ (Bonner, 2009, p. 296).

Perceptions of societal distrust prompted proactive efforts to reverse the impact of negative imagery through police use of social media to project a positive public message about police work, hence illustrating the growth in professionalized police-public relations infrastructures (Lee & McGovern, 2013):

As I get out of the car, the Sergeant in charge of the deployment immediately greets us and escorts us over to where another group of officers are standing. One of the officers there is responsible for social media engagement and he asks if he can take a photograph of me with the team. ‘We want to put some positive messages out on Twitter. It helps to reassure the public that we are here and there are positive things happening.’
(Researcher’s American Field Notes)

As a result of the perceived societal distrust, officers believed that local citizens (particularly in communities of color) were less inclined to report incidents to the police because witnesses were seen as ‘snitches’. A Lieutenant, for example, stated, “There is a culture [...] on social media and just the media and music, movies, there is a ‘no snitching’ [...] culture [...] the ‘no snitching’ rule” (Samuel, Lieutenant: USA).

There was also a strong feeling in Scotland among officers that young people were much more likely than before to articulate their rights and to resist police authority. Most officers there believed that the national police force had a poor reputation among working-class and socially deprived communities. Our observations suggested that, as a result of a growing anti-police culture, officers were more aware of the risks to their own safety from young men who may openly attack them:

It is Guy Fawkes night and the sound of fireworks being set off is all around us. Barry unlocks the doors of the van and the two other officers jump out. He then immediately locks the doors again as we sit in the stationary van. 'You tend to get paranoid about these doors,' he explains to me, 'last year, some youths in this area opened the doors to the cop cars and were throwing fireworks inside. The police are just hated around here.' (Researcher's Scottish Field Notes)

On other occasions in Scotland, officer interactions on the street became susceptible to aggressive interruptions from bystanders who tried to intervene and defend young men from apparent harassment:

*As the male and female officer begin to question two young men on the high street, I become conscious of a very loud voice shouting across from the other side of the pavement. 'Hey what are you doin' – leave they boys along, leave them alone you b*****s!' I look up and see a man of around 40 years of age coming towards us. He is dressed in a black shirt and black jeans [...]. 'I would advise you to mind your own business and be on your way,' Tracey, the female officer, replies. 'No, I won't – just you leave them alone, ya c***s – leave them alone,' the man continues to shout.* (Researcher's Scottish Field Notes)

While the above scenario may have represented increased resistance and an undermining of police legitimacy to serving officers, it could also be argued that it reflects a heightened public awareness of class-related bias among officers and a determination to challenge discriminatory forms of policing and bring an increased level of visibility and accountability to these repressive forces (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Bradford, 2016).

Drawing these insights together, it seems that the officers on both sides of the Atlantic shared common concerns about the declining moral values associated with local communities, families, and youths. In particular, they were concerned about the apparent lack of respect shown to police authority that was perceived to be markedly different from the subordination shown in the past (Pearson & Sinclair, 2011). American and Scottish officers were united in their condemnation of new forms of media, music, and gaming that were seen as corrupting influences (Loader & Sparks, 2015). In the USA, in particular, participating officers evidently viewed the

online spaces akin to a ‘virtual street corner’, which enabled young men to exaggerate their capacities for lethal violence (Lauger & Densley, 2017, p. 1). In turn, this had changed the nature of their police work toward greater engagement in digital forms of policing (Patton et al., 2017). While the focus on online gang culture and surveillance of social media was not as prominent in Scotland, officers there were clearly hostile towards the increasingly common practice among youths to film police behavior on mobile phones and post videos online for public scrutiny (Todak, 2017). There was also a feeling among both sets of officers that filming police practices had undermined their legitimacy and led to greater resistance to authority. This, in turn, had escalated risks to officers, according to them (Todak, 2017; Deuchar et al., 2018). In reality, these perceptions could arguably represent a **deep resistance towards transparency and public accountability on the part of officers on both sides of the Atlantic.**

Policy Changes, Reduced Sense of Empowerment, and Alternative Means of Enforcement

As alluded to earlier, there was a general feeling among officers that policing had been subject to intense levels of political and media scrutiny in recent years. In light of the apparent rifts between American police and **some communities**, the PTF (2015) placed an emphasis on building and renewing trust between officers and citizens. It recommended that law enforcement ‘embrace a guardian – rather than a warrior – mindset’ (p. 1) and avoid using tactics that ‘unnecessarily stigmatize youth’ (p. 3). Officers described the perceived impact of this political agenda, policy discourse, and accompanying negative media reporting on policing. They generally felt that all of this had deepened the levels of public and professional distrust in law enforcement, created a more lenient focus on criminal justice system processing, and had curbed their enforcement tactics and police powers.

In particular, several officers referred to the way in which policy changes meant that they could no longer use SQF as easily as before. This, they felt, was having a negative impact on crime rates:

We write a lot less tickets than we used to. As far as doing consensual stops with people, some of our guys might be hesitant to do it because they're concerned with, 'am I going to be supported if something goes bad?' (*Emily, Departmental Police Chief: USA*)

Stop and frisk was huge when I first started in this job and I know that those types of contacts are not occurring as frequently [...]. I think it's actually a negative impact on crime in general. I mean, you do have a significantly higher chance of finding bad guys if you're out there doing that, using those tactics [...]. Why would you ever throw a tool away? Or not use a tool if it's needed? (*Kevin, Detective: USA*)

The above comments from officers reflect our earlier discussion on the dominance of law-and-order policing in the US and the way in which a neoliberal rationality has increasingly placed an emphasis on the volume of tactics like SQF as performance measures where community members are viewed as problems and targets (Gordon, 2005; Murphy, 2007; Reiner, 2007). As discussed earlier, in Scotland intense levels of political and media scrutiny of policing have emerged in recent years. Particular focus has also been given to enforcement tactics like S&S, following a period where the use of the tactic had become a performance indicator in the national force (Fyfe, 2016). Following various reviews and improvement plans, a new Code of Practice for S&S was approved by the Scottish Government. This ensured that non-statutory use of S&S by Scottish officers would no longer be used (AGSS, 2015). Officers in our sample articulated their intense frustration about the gradual phasing out of non-statutory searching, which had reduced considerably during the time that our fieldwork took place. They felt that it was increasingly preventing them from effectively detecting weapons, particularly easily concealed knives.

This perception may be interpreted as resistance to a heightened policy awareness of the need for procedural justice and accountability (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015), given that evidence suggests that working class young teenage boys were hitherto the most commonly searched members of communities in Scotland but also had the lowest detection rates (Murray, 2015). In our American sample, the Chief of one of the prominent departments articulated her renewed focus on the use of alternative approaches to coercive use of force whenever possible; but at the same time, she expressed a desire for the officers in her department to avoid any type of hesitation:

We have a lot of additional training and we give the guys a lot of extra tools, alternatives to shooting somebody [...]. 'Maybe you need to step back and handle it more controlled than just going like a bull in a China shop'. [... But] now I'll tell you one of the really, most scary things for me as the Chief here would be to have a guy that second guesses himself though [...]. I don't know how I would handle somebody that hesitated and it ended badly for them because they hesitated thinking 'oh my God, what's going to happen to me if I shoot?' (*Emily, Departmental Chief: USA*)

For many, providing officers with 'alternatives to shooting somebody' would be seen as a hugely positive step that reflects the need to mitigate against police misconduct and enhance police accountability. However, Emily clearly felt that it was important to ensure that officers were still tough enough to avoid hesitation when it came to use of force and continue to engage in aggressive order maintenance (Shjarback et al., 2017). In spite of her support, there was a general feeling among our American participants that a process of de-policing had emerged. We detected, for example, a strong perception that officers had become more reluctant to be proactive due to the perceived anti-police culture that had emerged in the post-Ferguson era:

As we wait for the other officers to come back to the car, I ask Officer Brad about the impact that the Ferguson shooting and the subsequent media coverage has had. 'I think there are quite a lot of guys out there who are getting trigger shy because of the media attention. And that can actually cause more of a risk in some situations, if they hesitate'. (Researcher's American Field Notes)

The issues surrounding the use of force (and particularly *deadly* force) were not as prominent in Scotland, given the general lack of firearms incidents and the fact that mainstream operational officers are generally unarmed. The high profile attention on and revisions to the use of S&S in Scotland, however, made officers want to focus on upholding human rights:

People will use different things like ‘proportionate’, will use things like it needs to be ‘justifiable’, it needs to be ‘lawful’, it needs to be in respect of ‘human rights’. All these things I sum up into one and call it ‘appropriateness.’ (*Scott, Chief Inspector: Scotland*)

Although issues of de-policing were less prominent than in the American context, officers in Scotland also indicated that a degree of uncertainty and hesitation had emerged regarding the use of S&S due to intense concerns about the possibility of being disciplined if things went wrong. One senior officer in Scotland articulated the belief of many when he described how the citizens need to be ‘careful’ of what they ‘wished for’ in terms of disempowering officers: “If you disempower, disengage officers you’re going to get what you’ve asked for, effectively, as a fairly toothless and ineffective security service” (*Josh, Inspector: Scotland*). Josh’s perceptions of officers gradually becoming ‘disempowered’ and ‘toothless’ could be interpreted as an unwillingness to embrace a model of fair, transparent and accountable policing to replace discriminatory, aggressive forms of law enforcement.

In the US, the reduced support for proactive use of enforcement was combined with encouragement to use alternative tactics to reduce crime. During participant observation, we noted the ways in which officers were evidently becoming increasingly conscious of the need to become ‘guardians’ as opposed to ‘warriors’ and to proactively rebuild and repair historically troublesome relationships with young men of color:

On Wednesday evening, I observe the weekly ‘Cops and Kids’ workshop session in Sunshine City, where law enforcement officers come together with juveniles from local communities where crime rates have traditionally been high. There are seven cops around the table and six young men of color who are all in their teenage years along with

parents, social workers, members of the local clergy, and the youth justice system [...]. I notice that one of the young officers gives a 'fist bump' to one of the young men as he arrives in the room and Sergeant Daniel then begins by explaining his fundamental belief in the need for building positive relationships in the community: 'Things like this meeting are the norm for me [and] they should be more integrated into policing' he explains to the young men in the room. 'I think officers need to be more diversified and move towards community outreach. That is definitely the direction we are going in with the new Chief.' As I look around the room, I am encouraged to see the young men looking reasonably comfortable sitting around the table with this many law enforcement officers. (Researcher's American Field Notes)

In Scotland, the phasing out of non-statutory S&S had led many officers to feel that their discretion had been considerably reduced. During informal dialogue in police cars, it became apparent that officers felt that they were now expected to justify every S&S, which led to feelings of disempowerment, reduced confidence, and increased paperwork:

Greg, who is in the driving seat, talks about the discretionary powers that officers have traditionally drawn upon. 'It comes down to this, if there's someone I don't like the look of, I'm going to stop them and that's good policing [...]. It's something in your gut that's hard to explain [...], cops go by instinct [...], and talking to people usually confirms things. But now, with all this added scrutiny [...] you have to think, 'can I talk to this person?' It's even been mentioned in court, 'what powers did you have for talking to my client?' [...] This added scrutiny and bureaucracy undermines a lot of cops' confidence.' (Researcher's Scottish Field Notes)

Although community-oriented approaches have been a traditional feature of policing in Scotland, many officers articulated their dismay over fewer opportunities to engage with local communities for prolonged periods of time due to budget and staff cuts (Johnson, 2017). FFPU officers, however, were clearly trying to have positive interactions with young men. In addition to actively trying to positively engage younger members in the community, our observations also found that some officers in Scotland were finding creative ways to S&S. In the absence of non-statutory options it appeared that officers used subtle/instinctive means of detecting drug use while driving unmarked police car on the streets of Cityview, while also goading young men to pick up potential breach of the peace charges. As a result of the intensifying politicization of

policing on both sides of the Atlantic and the policy changes that have emerged, American and Scottish officers were experiencing feelings of disempowerment, loss of control, and diminution of authority over decision-making (Savage, 2007). The reduced availability of traditional enforcement tactics appeared to be leading to hesitance, confusion, and lower levels of officer self-legitimacy marked by declining confidence in their authority (Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Maguire et al., 2017). In response to policy recommendations, American officers were increasingly aware of their need to demonstrate procedural justice and to enhance police-youth relations in communities of color (Lee & McGovern, 2013). In Scotland, a general reduction in community policing resources was being supplemented by the FFPU's focus on building public relations. On both sides of the Atlantic, however, it was also evident that law enforcement found **alternative, creative ways** to ensure enforcement strategies were still used in this new era of police illegitimacy, accountability, and change (King, 2013). This ranged from using **cunning means of ensuring** legislative powers could be used to conduct S&S among our Scottish sample and drawing upon online surveillance work to detect guns and gang violence in the American sites **and within the context of predictive policing** (Ferguson, 2017).

Discussion

The aim of this comparative study was to explore the challenges of modern policing by employing qualitative analysis of **police officer experiences** in the US and Scotland, along with officer perspectives from in-depth interviews. Despite the relatively small sample of interview participants, which could limit the generalizability of these findings, there are some emerging highlights that are worthy of discussion. Based on the findings, issues pertaining to public scrutiny and digital activism, along with shifting social and political priorities, have influenced

officers' attitudes towards police work. As a result, some respondents also experienced disillusionment and a reduced sense of empowerment. When facing the pressures of changing values and cultures, American officers in particular lamented a perceived deterioration of values and reduced discipline and respect for authority. **It was fairly consistent in these findings that officers perceived that the legitimacy of police was under threat as demonstrated by the behaviours of wayward youth in their respective jurisdictions.**

The Americans along with their Scottish counterparts also expressed disapproval regarding community members' use of cell phones to record and upload videos on the conduct of police officers **that often did not capture the full context of police use-of-force decisions.** This reflects an ongoing debate, in the US and abroad, regarding citizens' rights and the recording of police encounters with residents (Ford, 2017; Potere, 2015), as well as the impact of increasing public scrutiny on officer morale and performance (Deuchar et al., 2018). Although most participants (particularly in the US sites) were not based in regions that experienced the worst conflicts between the police and the community, it is clear that these issues do have a global impact on law enforcement.

Despite obvious historical differences, the comparative perspectives bear some similarities regarding youth violence in working class communities, and the challenges of dealing with **recalcitrant** residents. While most officers agreed that there is a need for police to be accountable to the communities that they serve, there was also concern that public suspicion and hostility, and the unwillingness to cooperate, could undermine the effectiveness of police (Calvert & Bauerlein, 2015). Moreover, there was concern for officer safety during routine encounters with residents and the ability of police to confidently carry out their duties (MacDonald, 2016; Maguire et al., 2017). The issue of respect was highlighted, along with the

role of partisan politics in shaping law enforcement priorities as well as public perceptions. In addition, the findings highlighted the importance of using procedural justice approaches in order to improve legitimacy perceptions, trust and public cooperation.

Broader Implications

The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing signaled the importance of community-oriented police reform. The Task Force created a report with guidelines for increasing legitimacy and building trust between the police and the community. It addressed three broad areas – communities, law enforcement and local government, to encourage partnerships at the neighborhood-level, problem-solving activities, training programs, as well as the allocation of resources for sustaining programs to develop police-community strategies. The implementation of holistic strategies that encourage multi-agency participation could be relevant not just for problematic locales in the US but also in neighborhoods impacted by violent youth gangs in Scotland. Furthermore, public relations initiatives can be carefully tailored in order to discourage the politicisation that often casts a shadow on police reform. If approaches intended to improve police-community relations are interpreted as anti-police measures, this could be counterproductive. Such strategies should therefore be presented as an opportunity to improve the quality of life in communities by building trust and eliciting more cooperation from the public, which will ultimately lead to more favorable policing outcomes in terms of crime reduction and citizens' trust. Furthermore, if citizens are more engaged in the safety of their own communities and are encouraged to be co-producers of public safety this can lead to more effective policing and adherence to law. Activities sponsored by local organizations can also work in concert with police to manage crime risk (Carr, 2003). Such activities can ultimately

achieve much needed trust in police and also provide police with more eyes and ears in the community (Sampson & Morenoff, 2006).

There is therefore a need for procedurally just policies to increase police legitimacy perceptions. When police are perceived to be treating citizens with respect, community members will be more likely to trust and respect police (Meares, 2017; Shjarback, Nix, & Wolfe, 2018). While both the US and Scottish contexts could benefit a great deal from procedurally just policies, one important difference in the American situation is the role and impact of race and cultural differences in perceptions towards criminal justice agencies. There is a racial gap in attitudes towards the police in America that has persisted for decades, as African Americans and Hispanics are less likely to trust police (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009; Stein & Griffith, 2017). Scotland, on the other hand, does not have this issue as the population is relatively homogenous in terms of race. Still, based on prior research, regardless of the racial and ethnic composition of communities, procedurally just policies will improve police-community relations (Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). In addition, strategies designed to enhance police-community relations may have a better chance of success if police make it a priority to understand and respect the cultural norms of their designated communities (Schlosser et al., 2015).

Policies that humanize the experience of policing and provide training for officers to function more as guardians than warriors in the community are also recommended (PTF, 2015). Police can be encouraged to explain what they are doing during encounters with citizens, as well as through intentional forms of public outreach that allow residents to have a voice. The practices recommended by the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice (NIBCTF) are useful in this regard. This initiative, launched by the US Department of Justice in 2015, comprised a partnership between police agencies and academic institutions. Six pilot sites

adopted a curriculum for law enforcement based on the principles of procedural justice, and recent reports show that despite scarce resources, police agencies can change their organizational culture, reduce violent crime and also build legitimacy (NIBCTJ, 2018). Efforts in Scotland to review S&S and ensure that police practice is guided by human rights concerns and procedural fairness principles provide an example of this across the Atlantic (AGSS, 2015). Such reforms reflect the vision of the NIBCT, and should be supported with resources for officer training and development.

Conclusion

Comparing officers' perspectives and experiences across cultural domains, and emphasizing the relevance of these issues to the contextual challenges that they face, presents a promising path for future research. Furthermore, our chosen field research techniques helped to increase knowledge on the attitudes and experiences of police officers in different national contexts. Using an ethnographic approach to study social phenomena often requires the observer to be in close proximity to a natural process, and this can potentially increase authenticity. Alternative approaches that do not rely on positivism are needed in order to make sense of complex phenomena as we take steps towards a global understanding of the factors that shape police perceptions. Developments in contemporary law enforcement have been marred by reports of heavy handed policing in lower income neighborhoods in Scotland (McAra & McVie, 2005; Devlin, 2018), and in many of America's urban centers (Khazan, 2018; Logan, 2018). Some residents also perceive a "blue code of silence" that protects rogue law enforcement officers (Skolnick, 2002; Kutnjak Ivković, & O'Connor S., 2008; Westmarland & Rowe, 2018).

While there are many communities in which attitudes towards police remain favorable (Bradford, Jackson & Stanko, 2009; Ramsey, 2017), there is also a crisis of confidence in police in some geographical and cultural contexts (Tyler & Wakslak, 2004; Stringham, 2016). This crisis is heightened by sensational news reports about police misconduct that “go viral” on social media. Such concerns seem to weigh heavily on the minds of law enforcement officers as they endeavor to define their roles in the midst of politically contentious times. It is clear that the zero-tolerance approaches of the past **characterized by the policing of misdemeanors might have helped a little in reducing disorder in the short term, arising as they did within the context of neoliberal politics and a managerialist approach to policing that often viewed communities through a deficit lens and where tough law enforcement was viewed as a remedy to crime (Beckett, 1999).** However they were also disastrous in terms of their impact on community trust, **whereas community-oriented policing approaches have been found to be an important means of building positive police-resident relationships (Deuchar, 2013).** As we look to the future, building trust in the community could be a key ingredient for ameliorating the crises that many police departments face.

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