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The Blue Wall of Silence: Police Integrity and Corruption

Abstract   This paper explores some data from a recent survey of UK police officers and police support staff. The study used an online survey, employing the use of scenarios, to ask whether it was likely the respondents would report certain misbehaviors. There was also the option of adding free-text responses and comments. In addition to "conventional" questions about bending the rules and accepting cash and valuable goods, some of the scenarios raised questions about inappropriate sexual behavior and the use of illicit drugs. In addition to some quantitative data, the discussion also explores free-text responses in order to consider some of the underlying reasons for this behavior. Questions addressed why respondents would report colleagues' misbehaviors and what methods they would use.

Introduction

The question of how, and perhaps more importantly why, organizations cover up wrongdoings is a complex problem. Organizational silence in public bodies, such as public health services and the police is particularly troubling. Whereas private businesses might claim to have commercial reasons for keeping quiet about certain internal matters, surely public organizations should be more transparent? As organizations such as the police are dedicated to, and funded by, the people they serve, it could be argued that their accountability relies upon truthfulness and transparency. A lack of willingness to be open and honest about wrongdoings, where they occur, is surely part of the responsibility of public office.

This paper explores some data from a recent survey of UK police officers and police support staff. The study used an online survey, employing the use of scenarios, to ask whether it was likely the respondents would report certain misbehaviors. The survey also provided the option of adding free-text responses and comments. In addition to "conventional" questions about bending the rules and accepting cash and valuable goods, some of the scenarios raised questions about inappropriate sexual behavior and the use of illicit drugs. The discussion first focuses on some quantitative results of the survey before considering themes emerging from the free-text responses which capture issues of why the respondents thought they would report colleagues' misbehaviors and the methods they would prefer to use.

Background

Academic interest in police ethics and integrity has a long history in North America (Wesley, 1970; Skolnick, 1966; Elliston and Feldberg, 1985). However, it was not until the mid-1990s that the subject became a particular focus of scholarly research in the UK—exemplified in Kleinig's (1996) seminal work on "the ethics of policing". These themes were subsequently addressed by Alderson (1998: p. 71–72) in his discussion of "principled policing". In this text, Alderson advocated a code of ethics for policing—an idea which was developed by Neyroud and Beckley (2001: p. 47–48). The late 1990s saw the advent of significant public policy research relating to police corruption in police forces in England and Wales. Newburn (1999: p. 8) suggested that—although police corruption is hard to define—practices exist within the police "which whilst they may be considered to be 'deviant' are nonetheless tolerated; they are not perceived as corrupt." In a follow-up report, Newburn (2015: p. 29) made 15 suggestions for reform, which included encouraging the "reporting of misconduct" or what might these days be referred to as "whistle-blowing".

Police corruption can take many forms. Kleinig (1996: p. 166) characterises corruption as involving officers exercising—or failing to exercise—their authority for the primary purpose of private or organizational advantage. "Acquisitive corruption"

is motivated by personal material gain. This form could be manifested in a range of behaviors, from the mundane—such as accepting gifts of food and drink from businesses in an officer's neighborhood—to serious infringements such as collaborating with organized criminals. "Acquisitive corruption" can be seen as involving a different motivation to that involved in "noble cause corruption"—the bending or breaking of rules/laws in order to satisfy an abstract concept of extra-legal justice. Such behavior does not provide any clear material benefit to the officer. Instead, it seems to be motivated by the individual feeling that their actions are justified by perceived deficiencies and limitations of the criminal justice system. An example of "noble cause corruption" is planting a piece of evidence to incriminate a known dangerous criminal who would otherwise escape "justice".

These forms of police misbehavior—acquisitive and noble cause corruption—can both be viewed as being related to, and in some cases facilitated by, the "blue code" or "blue curtain" of silence. This is an informal, unwritten code fostered by police culture that demands loyalty and within-group secrecy (Chin and Wells, 1998 in Skolnick 2002: p. 10). It is said to be perpetuated by an "us and them" attitude, meaning that non-compliance with the code may result in individuals being socially excluded from the group and lack peer support in dangerous situations. This code is posited as perpetuating a range of corrupt and ethically problematic behaviors, through cultural mechanisms which prohibit the reporting of colleagues—and stigmatises individuals that do take the decision to report misdemeanors (Westmarland, 2005).

The primary research discussed in the present paper took the form of a survey administered to a range of policing professionals and aimed to address some of the questions arising from the wider literature on police corruption. We were particularly interested to understand which behaviors officers and policing staff felt to be most problematic; how likely they were to report such issues; and how they would prefer to go about reporting any instances of police corruption or wrongdoing they may encounter. In order to explore these issues, we designed questions based on scenarios that required ethical decisions about reporting colleagues breaking the code of silence. We were keen to establish if respondents' perspectives, views and approaches changed according to whether the scenario involved the categories addressed above (acquisitive corruption, noble cause or blue code). The survey builds on the originally devised by Klockars et al. (2003), which was subsequently developed in various forms by the lead author (Westmarland, 2005; Westmarland and Rowe, 2016).

The power to police

There are few organizations with such wide-ranging powers as the police, both in terms of their ability to control people and behaviors, and their ability to cover up misdemeanors—although they are not unique in this latter regard. These wide-ranging powers have implications for the role of secrecy in police culture and normative professional behaviors. These powers range from being able to deprive individuals of their liberty, in some cases on flimsy evidence of minor wrongdoing. Even if this deprivation of liberty is for a relatively short period of time, it may be very distressing for the individual. The police can level accusations which may harm someone even if they are later proved to be innocent, potentially leading to a "spoiled" reputation for the arrestee. These actions, as the enactment of police powers, are supposedly controlled by rules, laws and regulations, but this relies on the discovery or confession of any wrongdoing by the individual officer.

One reason that the individual officer's wrongdoing might not be discovered is that in the police, the most immediate and wide-ranging powers are located at the level of lower ranking individuals in the organization—the police constable. This is a stark contrast to most organizations, which deprive low status staff of the power to act on their own initiative and make important life-changing decisions. Reiner (2019) has considered this arrangement in relation to Wilson's observation that "discretion increases as one moves down the hierarchy" (Wilson 1968: p. 7, as quoted by Reiner, 2019: p. 170). He notes that "the rank-and-file officer is the primary determinant of policing where it really counts: on the street" (Reiner, 2019: p. 170). Waddington (1999: p. 129) adds to this discourse by suggesting that perhaps "police rules made by superiors serve to insulate them from criticism by pushing responsibility *down* the hierarchy."

Front line officers, in some cases with very little experience of the occupation or life in general, have a great deal of discretion. They can be on patrol in their late teens or early twenties with sole responsibility for highly discretionary choices. Their decisions can have wide-ranging life-changing outcomes. They can decide, for example, whether to arrest and charge a young person caught with a small amount of a recreational but illegal substance. If charged, this offense may remain on the offender's record and affect them for the rest of their life. In some cases, this may affect their future life chances, employment opportunities and potentially create family discordance such as a breakdown of relationship with their parents. Short prison sentences, as the result of minor offenses, have sometimes led to the young person committing suicide—a trend which is sadly on the increase in UK prisons. The Prison and Probation Ombudsman (2019: p. 17) recorded 91 self-inflicted deaths in 2018/19—a 23% increase compared with the previous year.

There are many opportunities to cover up rule breaking due to the way police officers often work alone or in pairs, with very little scrutiny or supervision. Where officers work in pairs, it is often the case that they develop close working partnerships with their "buddy". These trusted partners are said to operate behind the "blue

curtain" of silence in that having had to rely upon each other in dangerous and stressful situations, they have learnt to protect each other from "outsiders". This principle extends to the wider work group or "shift" of officers who again, will have often had to deal with "close calls" such as physical threats or emotionally challenging situations. Dealing with the so called "sad, mad or bad" people the police come across leads to a number of responses, most of which help cultivate a "bonding" effect. A range of emotions such as revulsion at the scene of a death, pity for a victim and abhorrence for a perpetrator's act can all occur in the space of very short period of time in a police officer's line of duty.

The way officers support each other and deal with the sort of emotions they feel in these situations—including fear for their own safety—leads to a feeling of all "being in it together". Protecting each-others' "backs", or watching out for each other's safety, is a way of coping with some of the worst incidents attended by the police—such as tragic deaths, serious road accidents, and cases where they feel powerless to help. Police officers often note an inability to discuss their most distressing work experiences with their husband/wife/partner or friends—noting that "only other officers would understand." This does not only refer to physical threats, or potentially dangerous incidents such as firearms or terrorist attacks, but also loss of face, or control of emotions. A show of emotions such as fear, sadness or anger is not culturally acceptable to be displayed where "outsiders" (non-police) are present as it would be considered "unprofessional" (Westmarland 2001a: p. 151).

These occupational cultural beliefs about keeping things "within the family" are in evidence as a "blue curtain" or code of silence in other aspects of policing. Keeping quiet about receiving "perks" or illicit rest periods are also well documented in the literature describing everyday policing. Beliefs about keeping silent are learnt and transmitted from the beginning of an officer's induction. Due to the system of officers having to begin to learn their trade in the lowest roles as street cops, nearly all senior officers have worked their way up from this position. The glue that holds the whole system together is an understanding that sometimes corners have to be cut and that where the necessity occurs, it should be kept behind the "blue curtain". As police officers believe they know best, in many cases, they use the power of secrecy to bend the rules for the benefit of society.

The need for secrecy

Both the legitimacy and effective operation of the police is premised on the consent of the public. The police therefore must be perceived as free from bribery and corruption. As the police uphold the law, they also have to be seen to abide by these same laws. In this way, the police have a great deal of power but a lot to lose. Given the level of power and discretion the police can wield over the general population, the question "who will guard the guards?" has occupied thinkers since antiquity.

As an organization, the power to police is predicated on the belief that they are accountable to the populace, and in turn this supposes that they are open about their activities. This raises the questions that have preoccupied the second author over the past two decades—"why cover up individual misdemeanors and wrongdoings"? If the police mandate relies upon being seen to be honest and open, why not be transparent about mistakes?

One possible explanation is that disclosure of such mistakes risks tarnishing the virtuous image the organization seeks to project. The police are held in generally high regard by the UK public. A report into "public perceptions of policing in England and Wales" (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire Rescue Services, 2018: p. 12) found that 61% of respondents were satisfied with the police. The same report (p. 40) also found that 52% of respondents felt their local police force to have "a good reputation all or most of the time." Scholars such as Skolnick (2002: p. 8) have suggested that the volatile and unpredictable nature of police work leads to the development of a strong sense of loyalty between officers and a reluctance to report misdemeanors. Trust and loyalty to each other demands in-group secrecy, not only against the "bosses" and supervisors but also "criminals" and "ordinary members of the public". In some cases, they may feel their safety or life depends upon it. One way this culture can be illustrated is the real-life case of an American detective, which was the basis of the film "Dirty Harry." This so-called "maverick" detective would not accept the bribes which were shared among his colleagues and was consequently ostracized by them. When he was shot in the head by someone he was trying to arrest, it is alleged that colleagues did not rush to his aid.

In addition to such cases, there is a wealth of literature on the reasons why officers might keep silent, including Reiner's (2019: p. 171–174) compelling list of seven "characteristics" of police culture. These characteristics provide some valuable insights into the police cultural context within which misconduct—and the reporting of such instances—takes place:

- Sense of mission/action: studies of policing tend to find that officers have a sense of the role as a "worthwhile" vocation, involving a challenging though ultimately rewarding "game of wits and skill" (Reiner 2019: p. 172).
- Cynicism/pessimism: some officers develop a sense of the moral decline of the wider society they police, leading to feelings of despair and pessimism.
- Suspicion: officers frequently develop cognitive tools to help them predict, interpret, and rapidly respond to the communities they encounter. Reiner notes the tendency for the generalizations which are the basis of this suspicion to result in problematic stereotyping of groups based on class, race and gender.
- Isolation/solidarity: there is significant scope for officers to become isolated due to the shift patterns and the stresses associated with the role. Reiner (2019: p. 173) views solidarity as partially caused by this isolation, as well as "the need to be able to rely on colleagues in a tight spot, and a protective armour shielding the force as a whole from public knowledge of infractions."

Many ethnographers, conducting observational studies of policing, have demonstrated the validity of these "rules" of police behavior. From the early studies of the 1960s (Skolnick 1966, Cain 1973, Van Maanen, 1978) to contemporary work in the discipline (Westmarland 2001b, Loftus 2009, Bacon 2016), these characteristics have been apparent. Observers have argued that "insider" status is extremely important to police officer identity and peer approval. One of the most influential US commentators on this topic, Jerome Skolnick, has written most recently in 2002, about the continuing influence of the "blue code" of silence. Having studied police behavior and culture for around forty years, he concludes that:

To fulfil their mandate, police work is done in unpredictable and sometimes violent environments. Given the potential danger of their workplaces coupled with their authority to use force to overcome resistance, police develop a close-knit subculture, with its own demands and expectations. Loyalty to fellow officers is a key feature of the culture of policing, regardless of whether criminality is involved (Skolnick 2002: p. 8).

Although the data presented in the present paper is largely survey-generated, it reinforces Skolnick's argument regarding the ideas of loyalty and a close-knit community. It also illustrates and extends Reiner's characteristics of police culture and the beliefs that encourage internal solidarity—perpetuating the so-called "blue curtain" or "blue code" of silence.

The survey

The survey was distributed electronically to both support staff and officers from the anonymous research force—a large non-metropolitan force which included both rural and urban areas. A total of 1509 responses were recorded. A breakdown of demographic details is provided in Appendix 1. A methodological flaw of the survey was that we failed to ask respondents to state whether they were Police Officers, PSCOs, Specials or support staff. Initially, a drop-down box was considered, but it was decided that providing respondents with a free-text box would allow them to define their own role. In the majority of cases, it was possible to determine whether a respondent was either police or staff based on these answers. However, in the case of 334 individuals this was not possible, with three distinct categories of equivocation: those who skipped the question; those who provided an answer along the sentiment of "I would prefer not to say"; and a few individuals who provided an ambiguous answer—which could fall into either category of police or staff. In retrospect, it would beneficial to have explicitly asked respondents whether they were staff or officers.

In terms of occupational groups of the respondents, Police/Police Community Support Officer (PCSO)/Special Constable (volunteers) accounted for 41% of responses; and support staff 37% (with 22% preferring not to provide an answer). A gender split

of 38% female to 50% male was recorded (with an additional 12% preferring not to provide an answer to this question). In an attempt to contextualise these figures, Table 1 features Home Office (2017) data detailing *"workforce numbers in the 43 police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police."* This dataset captures the headcount of staffing levels as of March 2017, while the main data collection period of the survey took place in the three months from December 2016. The Home Office Figures record that 41.0% of the workforce at this time was female and 59.0% male.

Present Survey

Role	Male		Female		Prefer not to say/blank		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	% role
Police/PCSO/Special	400	64.6%	171	27.6%	48	7.8%	**619**	41.0%
Support Staff	239	43.0%	287	51.6%	30	5.4%	**556**	36.8%
Role not specified	111	33.2%	120	35.9%	103	30.8%	**334**	22.1%
Sub-total	750	49.7%	578	38.3%	181	12.0%	**1,509**	100.0%

44 Forces Combined

Role	Male		Female				Total	
	Count	%	Count	%			Count	% role
Police/PCSO/Special	105,331	68.7%	47,977	31.3%			**153,308**	69.1%
Support Staff	25,601	37.4%	42,851	62.6%			**68,452**	30.9%
Sub-total	130,932	59.0%	90,828	41.0%			**221,760**	100.0%

Table 1   Comparison between research force and 44 Forces in England and Wales

Respondents were presented with instances of rule breaking, corruption, and illegal activity. They were asked to rate—on a 5-point Likert scale—both their perception of seriousness of the scenarios, as well as the likelihood that they would report such behavior if encountered. An additional qualitative feature of the survey was the inclusion of some follow-up questions, which aimed to capture why and how respondents might report the behaviors described. The full phrasing of each scenario is reproduced in Appendix 2, as well as the average seriousness and likelihood of reporting.

Although respondents were asked about behaviors spread across ten distinct scenarios, the focus of the present paper is just two scenarios—due to space limitations. Both scenarios provide insights into the "silence of organizations" debate, as they both involve law breaking, reputational damage, and potentially serious disciplinary action against the officers involved. The first scenario involves a drink driving colleague who is transported home; while the second focuses on the use of excessive force against a suspect. It could be argued that this pair of scenarios involve a higher risk of potential reputational damage compared with many of the

other scenarios. Both these behaviors have undergone something of a cultural re-appraisal in the UK over the last 50 years. Drink driving was once widely regarded as acceptable behavior—and it was not until the Road Safety Act of 1967 that a specific blood-alcohol level was stipulated in UK law. Similarly, the use of excessive force against suspects is now considered to be an unacceptable relic of a bygone age of policing. There is evidence of a growing consensus that both behaviors are morally unacceptable in contemporary British society although we are not claiming that this is why our survey shows differences over the time period described. Furthermore, some of the scenarios describe phenomena that respondents may never have encountered.

The second author has distributed various versions of the survey to different forces over a 14-year period (2003–2017). These shifting cultural norms are detectable in the patterns of responses between the 2003 and 2017 surveys.[1] In each case, there seems to have been a progressive change from possible seriousness and in terms of reporting. For example, "seriousness" in terms of excessive force is at 65.5% in 2003, whereas by 2017 it was 83%. Likeliness to report this behavior has moved up about 20% of the sample, 53% to 73%. Similarly, covering up for a drink driving colleague has gone up in "seriousness" from 66% (in 2003) to 87.6% (in 2017), but likelihood to report has not changed so much in percentage terms. Likeliness to report the officer covering up for the intoxicated driver had only changed by about 10%, at 66% to 77.5%.

These two scenarios are "middle ranking" examples of responses, in other words, fairly serious, sometimes likely to report, increasingly so, and rather ambiguous. The question for the focus of this paper, relating to the secrecy of organizations is whether, as respondents regard these actions and behaviors more serious, and say they are likely to report them, this means they come to light?

In addition to the two scenarios examined above, we also introduced some targeted qualitative questions. Space prohibits a full discussion of these findings, but to illustrate the "silence of organizations" debate, the following section provides an overview of some of the emergent themes of these qualitative questions.

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1   It should be noted that the phrasing of both these scenarios was identical across the three iterations of the survey. However, minor differences of phrasing were used in the follow-up questions in the different iterations. This was largely because the phrasing of the earlier iterations reflected the status of the survey as posed only to officers, while the latest iteration also included support staff. For the precise details of the difference in phrasing, see Appendix 3.

	Excessive Force					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Blank**
2003 Survey (275): Seriousness	1.0%	4.0%	10.5%	17.5%	65.5%	1.8%
2003 Survey (275): Likely to Report	5%	8%	15%	17%	53%	2.2%
2011 Survey (520): Seriousness	0.8%	3.1%	9.0%	21.9%	64.6%	0.58%
2011 Survey (520): Likely to Report	4.2%	6.5%	13.1%	21.2%	54.4%	0.58%
2017 Survey (1,509): Seriousness	0.3%	0.7%	3.4%	11.3%	83.0%	1.26%
2017 Survey (1,509): Likely to Report	1.9%	3.3%	5.2%	14.2%	73.6%	1.72%

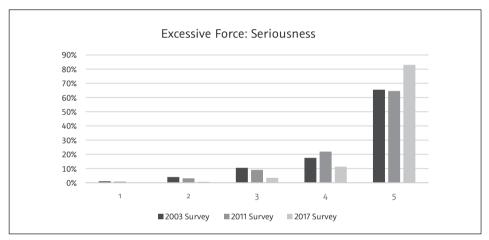**Table 2**   Table 2: Comparison of perceived seriousness of excessive force over time

Table 3   Bar chart of perceived seriousness of excessive force over time
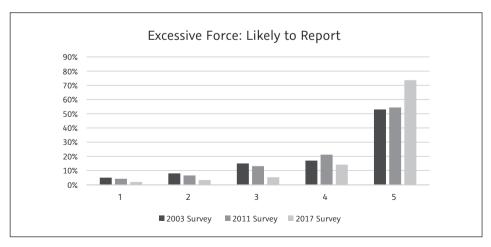

Table 4   Bar chart of likelihood of reporting of excessive force over time

	Intoxicated Driver					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Blank**
2003 Survey (275): Seriousness	1.0%	2.5%	6.5%	22.5%	66.0%	1.45%
2003 Survey (275): Likely to Report	6%	6%	15%	22%	50%	1.45%
2011 Survey (520): Seriousness	0.0%	0.6%	5.0%	14.0%	80.0%	0.38%
2011 Survey (520): Likely to Report	2.5%	4.4%	8.9%	14.4%	69.0%	0.77%
2017 Survey (1,509): Seriousness	0.1%	0.4%	1.6%	9.3%	87.6%	1.06%
2017 Survey (1,509): Likely to Report	1.7%	2.0%	3.8%	13.2%	77.5%	1.86%

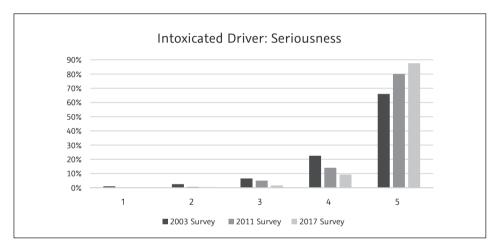**Table 5** Comparison of perceived seriousness of intoxicated driver over time

Table 6 Bar chart of perceived seriousness of intoxicated driver over time
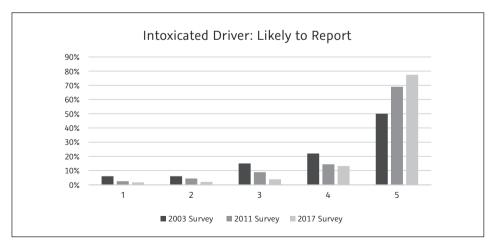

Table 7 Bar chart of likelihood of reporting of intoxicated driver over time

Qualitative dimensions

A new dimension of the most recent iteration of the survey was the addition of some qualitative questions, which it was hoped would shed some light on the deeper meanings, intentions, and thoughts behind the wider answers. Attuned to the risks of overloading respondents, just four targeted questions with qualitative dimensions were included. Two are addressed in the present paper. The first considers a scenario of sexually inappropriate behavior within the office environment, while the second posed a more general question regarding the factors which may be taken into account when deciding whether or not to report an instance of potential misconduct. Two further scenarios which are outside the scope of the present paper involved feelings about the prospect of working with a "whistle-blower", and an open-ended question which gave respondents the opportunity to add any further thoughts, ideas or comments which had occurred to them while undertaking the survey.

In essence, we were keen to capture how serious respondents perceived each scenario to be, and how likely they would be to report such behavior. However, we were also keen to understand why people responded as they did and how they would prefer to report a given issue. Both questions are salient to policing scholarship. Understanding *why* people gave a particular response provides meaningful insights into the reasoning process and the implicit values which underpin police culture. The issue of *how* respondents would prefer to report has direct implications for practice. Specifically, the responses provide insights for the types of formal and informal reporting mechanisms which staff and officers prefer, as well as the nature and extent of reservations about any existing reporting mechanisms. These insights could be used to guide any future redesign of reporting mechanisms—in order to increase the propensity to report misconduct.

Scenario 8: Sexually inappropriate behavior

The first qualitative question was supplementary to Scenario 8—which involved an officer witnessing a male colleague engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior around a female colleague. We asked respondents how they would go about reporting the issue, and gave the multiple choice options of "Make an anonymous report", "Speak to supervisor", as well as "Other (please specify)" in which case respondents were provided with a free-text box to expand upon their answer. It should be noted that for all the questions, respondents could choose multiple options. For example, making an anonymous report, as well as speaking to a supervisor. Therefore, combined totals for each option exceed 100%. It is clear from Table 8, that the preference for the majority of respondents was the relatively informal approach of speaking to a supervisor, with 74% choosing this option. A further 27% said they would ideally make an anonymous report.

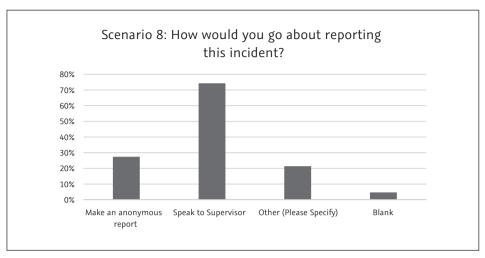## Scenario 8: How would you go about reporting this incident?

Table 8   Bar chart of reporting preferences

In total, 312 people provided a free-text response to this question. Six distinct though overlapping categories emerged, which provide some further insight into the perspective of respondents in relation to how they would prefer to deal with such a scenario. It should be noted that several individuals provided fairly detailed answers which encompassed two (and occasionally three) distinct categories. These

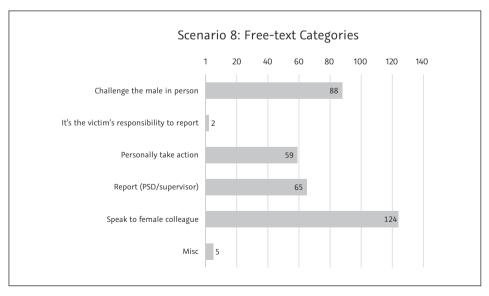## Scenario 8: Free-text Categories

Table 9   Bar chart of reporting preferences—free-text responses

responses have therefore been included in the analysis—bringing the total to 343. The most common free-text response can be summarised as "speak to the female colleague", with 124 individuals picking some variation on this theme. The main reasoning for this response seems to be that—before proceeding with further formal reporting mechanisms—a sensible step might be to establish the wishes and feelings of this individual, and to work out how she would like to handle the situation. Responses which fell under this theme tended to either explicitly or implicitly commit to supporting this colleague in whatever manner she would like to proceed. Several respondents also reasoned that they—as a passing observer—may not have the full picture, and that it was possible that the two colleagues were in a romantic relationship.

The next most common response involved directly "challenging the behavior of the male officer in person"—at the time of witnessing the behavior. This response was selected by 88 individuals. Though not necessarily incompatible with the approach of consulting the female colleague, it can be understood as somewhat contrasting, as it prioritises addressing the situation immediately—rather proceeding tentatively. Further categories can be understood as variants on the approach of challenging the behavior, such as "personally taking action" (with sentiments along the lines of "I would speak to these two people involved"); and "making a formal report to the Professional Standards Department."

Factors which may prevent reporting

The authors were keen to give respondents the opportunity to expand on any of the issues which had occurred to them in considering the various scenarios. Therefore, following the final quantitative scenario, respondents were asked, "What would prevent you/put you off reporting an incident, such as those described above?" Five multiple choice options were provided, in addition to "Other (please specify)." Once again, respondents were able to select any combination of these responses, as well as the option of declining to select any—an option taken by 10% of respondents.

The multiple-choice options provided to respondents can be generally divided into two types: those with personal ramifications for *the person making the report;* and those with personal ramifications for *the subject of the report.* The options "your own reputational damage" and "damage to your own career prospects," were both selected by 23% of respondents. Conversely, the two categories grounded in the personal ramifications for the subject of the report—"the reputational damage to the colleague you report" and "letting down the colleague you report"—were selected by 28% and 18% of respondents respectively. These patterns are consistent with accounts of the police as an organization characterized by a strong sense of institutional affiliation and integration, with individuals operating within this culture exhibiting reluctance to damage this sense of fraternity and their own position within
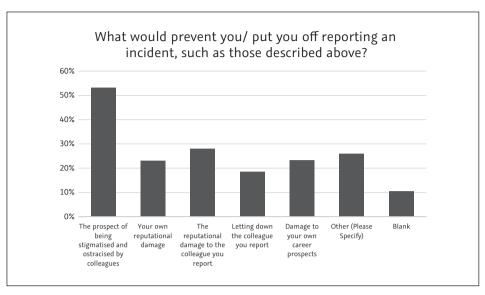
Table 10   Bar chart of factors influencing reporting

the culture. Indeed, it is revealing that the option selected most frequently as a factor was "the prospect of being stigmatised and ostracized by colleagues", with 53% of respondents selecting this response. This option can be interpreted as a synthesis of both concerns, as it implicitly involves the personal ramifications of being stigmatized/ostracized—though as a direct consequence of the implications of breaking the "blue code" of silence. The sense of obligation to comply with the "blue code" on the individual level—where it is felt—could be interpreted as contributing to the mechanism whereby organizational silence is realized on the wider collective level. Though not a theme emerging from our data, a possible explanation for the failure to punish noble cause corruption—which is claimed to be the more prevalent form of misbehavior hidden by the blue code—is that it potentially benefits the organization in subtle ways. Potentially, some aspects of noble cause corruption could be tolerated by the police hierarchy because they recognize that there are certain benefits to "rule bending." These benefits might be thought to include "informal" methods leading to suspects receiving their "just rewards" or minor criminals being "warned" but not prosecuted, as it may not be in the public interest due to scarce resources. Similarly, the blue code may be tolerated in some organizational structures as it encourages enhanced group bonding and effective team working.

A total of 383 individuals (25% of respondents) elected to provide a free-text response to the question of the factors which may put them off reporting an incident of police misconduct (with two individuals providing responses that span two distinct themes). This question elicited a range of responses, with eleven distinct categories. It should be noted that several respondents provided free-text responses

which spanned more than one category. The most common theme to emerge from these free-text responses was the category labelled as "unequivocal" with 160 individuals providing some variation of this theme. This category refers to fairly straightforward statements, with sentiments along the lines of "I would not be deterred", or "I would always report any misconduct without hesitation." In contrast, 24 responses noted the scope for "ambiguity" around a given instance of misconduct—for example, whether the observer knew all the facts and context of the situation, as well as understanding of relevant regulations.
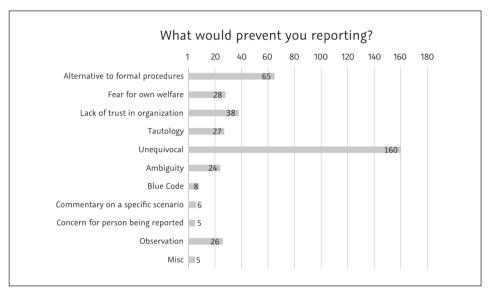
What would prevent you reporting?

Category	Value
Alternative to formal procedures	65
Fear for own welfare	28
Lack of trust in organization	38
Tautology	27
Unequivocal	160
Ambiguity	24
Blue Code	8
Commentary on a specific scenario	6
Concern for person being reported	5
Observation	26
Misc	5

Table 11   Bar chart of factors influencing reporting—free-text responses

The second most common category, captured within the answers of 65 individuals, can be summarized as "alternatives to formal procedures." Many responses which fell under this category noted that an appropriate response to some instances of technical misconduct would be an informal intervention. For example, Scenario 1 was deliberately designed to capture a fairly innocuous and mundane instance of technical misconduct—involving a member of police staff making some extra money by baking cakes for weddings and birthdays. Several people noted that this person may not realize that they first needed to get authorization to undertake this work, and proposed that rather than proceeding directly to a formal report, the proportionate response may be to highlight this requirement to the individual concerned.

Also captured within this theme of "alternatives to formal procedures" was a slightly more subtle argument. Some respondents suggested an equivalency be-

tween police misconduct on the one hand, and deviancy in wider society on the other. These responses sometimes involved respondents citing the subtleties of police work such as proportionate decision making and a recognition that many people technically infringe on rules and regulations at some point in their lives. For example, though unambiguously a formal criminal offense, in many instances officers may consider cautioning a young person for shoplifting on a first offense, rather than entering them into the criminal justice system. In some cases, a similar conception of justice was invoked in relation to police wrongdoing. For example, in Scenario 1—some respondents pondered whether criminalizing the officer described for baking cakes would be the appropriate response; or whether pointing out that this was potentially a breach of regulations would be a more constructive and proportionate intervention.

Discussion

The evidence we have presented in this paper is a relatively small section of a larger project we will be publishing in due course. The larger dataset contains a great deal of qualitative data that space prevented us from exploring here in more depth. The aspects we have tried to highlight from the wider study concentrate on the "secrecy" and "blue code" or curtain-of-silence aspects of our data. To this end, the findings have shown that over time, the "blue code" may have changed in form, but it still exists. As Kutnjak Ivković et al. (2020: p. 102) argue, it is not a matter of if the code persists, but what the code covers and to whom it extends. The next section of this paper will attempt to draw some conclusions on this topic from our findings. Before proceeding with this discussion however, there are a couple of points for clarification: namely, what is the "corruption" that the so-called "blue code" is hiding or keeping secret?

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Kleinig defines two types of police corruption—one type that leads to personal benefit for the officer—"acquisitive corruption"—and another type with no obvious gain—"noble cause corruption." In addition to these two categories, one of the more comprehensive sets of answers to this definitional question is offered by Newburn—who notes that there have been many attempts to "wrestle with the thorny issue of how 'corruption' might be defined" (Newburn 2015: p. 3). He goes on to explain that there are two other main aspects to the sort of corruption commonly found in policing—"individual" abuse of position for personal gain, and actions which result in *"organisational gain"* (ibid: p. 5 italics in original). He argues that Kleinig's (1996: p. 166) definition is more useful as it includes the furtherance of organizational advantage, including 'departmental/divisional advantage'.

Given this wide range of definitions, one of the questions that is often asked about police corruption is not only why it happens but also why police officers, with

little to gain, protect colleagues who misbehave. As upholders and enforcers of the law, surely most officers would consider rule breaking to be worthy of reporting? Our findings suggest that officers and staff feel that the taking of money—as in the theft from the suspect's hidden stash—is outright theft, and should almost always be reported. By way of contrast, what about cases where no monetary advantage is possible—where officers are breaking procedural rules and colleagues keep quiet? If Kleinig's definition is adopted however, breaking rules for organizational advantage, at either local or senior level, would mean that participants would see that "everyone" would benefit and no-one would approve of a whistle-blower.

One of the potential answers to the questions posed here is that police occupational culture and corruption are said to run hand in hand and feed upon each other. Another explanation is that occupational culture and corruption co-exit due to the outcome-led demands of the role. Cockcroft (2013: p. 59) claims that the combination of social solidarity and social isolation that police officers experience leads to a camaraderie that exerts a power over and above that of sanctions or the prospect of sanctions. Camaraderie and team solidarity are fostered by the unpredictability and potential danger of police work and the "rites and rituals" of police cultural characteristics (Reiner 2019). Punch (2009) has argued, with others (see for example Maguire and Norris, 1974), that a culture of pressure for results provides a motivating factor and that corruption is tolerated, difficult to define and multi-faceted (Waddington 1999). As mentioned above, there are potential advantages at an organizational level for this code of silence and aspects of police culture such as camaraderie that are seen as beneficial, although this is not official policy.

As we appreciate, there have been many reasons put forward for police officers covering up or not reporting colleagues' misbehavior in various countries across the world (Klockars 2004, Chan, 1997, Kleinig 1996, Skolnick, 2002). Since the early days of police observational studies in the 1950s, the "blue code" of silence has been discussed as an enduring aspect of police culture. In the 1960s, Skolnick was one of the first US academics to point out that operational discretion—whether or not to charge someone—was accompanied by the assumption that the decision would remain within the occupational group. Skolnick's observations of a police "working personality" based on "danger and authority" (Skolnick 1966, Chap. 3) led to discussions of the role of police culture and Reiner's (2019: p. 171) "core characteristics" of policing. These observations pointed to the existence and nurturing of group solidarity and the bonds secured by the police officers' sense of mission, with policing being expressed as not simply a job but "a way of life with a worthwhile purpose" (Reiner 2019: p. 172). Whilst many aspects of policing may have changed over the past 50 years, some of these rules around the non-reporting of a colleague's misdemeanors, perhaps influenced by group solidarity, remain a potential problem for managers, policy makers and individuals themselves.

In an attempt to add to this ongoing discussion, we have raised a number of key research questions. Our primary aim was to explore whether police officers and support staff regard certain misbehaviors as serious, and whether they would re-

port deviant colleagues. It could be argued that although the "blue code" is not new, it has taken on a new dimension since 2014 in UK policing. Whether or not to blow the whistle is no longer purely based on individual moral reasoning; it is now encoded in statute. This is illustrated by a case in the north of England in 2016 where a Police Sergeant failed to report an officer he was accompanying during a disturbance in a bar. The PC was accused of using excessive force. At a disciplinary hearing for gross misconduct—the outcome of which is usually dismissal if found guilty—he claimed he did not see the other officer hitting the detained suspect six times in the head and the allegations were adjudicated "not proven." The officer who committed the assault was dismissed without notice. The police sergeant resigned and the Police Constable was later reinstated (Shine 2018).

The UK College of Policing's Code of Ethics is not only aimed at police officers "working the streets" however, which Manning (2007: p. 70) argues "produces most of the known public scandals, media amplified incidents and political controversies". Another recent case in the UK revealed how a Chief Constable had lied about how his force-issued mobile phone had been damaged, originally claiming it had been run over by a car. He later confessed, after a whistle-blower contacted the force, that he had hit the device with a golf club in a fit of temper (Shine, 2018a). He then became Chief of another force and has since resigned in the light of other, so far unproven, allegations of improper behavior. The motives to act in ways which may lead to the ending of an officer's career seem difficult to comprehend, although "outbursts of temper" was one of the reasons considered in a recent paper on the "blue code" of silence within the US police by Donner et al. (2017). Using survey data from a multi-agency sample of 1072 police recruits, the authors of that study found that "impulsivity/temper was positively related to the unwillingness to report fellow officers' misconduct."

Our current study supports the findings from various previous ones such as those by Klockars (2003) and others such as Westmarland (2005) and Westmarland and Rowe, (2016). The survey was designed and administered about 3 years after the College of Policing's *Code of Ethics* was published in 2014. This could be significant for future studies because the College's Code contains a much stronger, statutory requirement for officers to report misdemeanors. Adhering to the "blue code" rather than the Code of Ethics could now be regarded as a criminal offense and/or gross misconduct and if proven, may result in dismissal. As mentioned above, cases have already been brought under this new statute in the UK. This will obviously be more relevant in some of the scenarios than others. It seems unlikely for example that the cake baker or party rousers would be sacked. On the other hand, not reporting the theft of a valuable watch or cash taken during a house search might end in dismissal of the offender and the colleague who did not report it.

This has become an issue because around five years ago, the British Home Office created a "College of Policing" with the stated aim of "professionalising" the police. In the UK, there are several professional "Colleges" which act as centers for teaching, information, disciplinary matters, and a focus for the media and other general

enquiries. Long-standing colleges exist for medical professionals and nurses which hold a "register" to which practitioners must subscribe, following suitable training, and can be "stuck off" for disciplinary misadventures. In the UK, the newly formed College of Policing have not insisted on this level of membership as yet, but they have published a Code of Ethics, which presumably, in time will act as a guide to acceptable behavior. The published Code of Ethics (2014) has nine policing principles and 10 standards of professional behavior. At the time of writing—around five years following the introduction of the Code of Ethics—it is perhaps too early to have made a difference. Our study seems to show that over the past twenty years or so, attitudes towards reporting, certainly in terms of drink driving and excessive force, has improved. What has not been addressed however is trust in the organiszation—either in terms of supporting officers who report or the transparency afforded to systems. We might ask however, whether the Code of Ethics overlooks the "blue code", and does nothing to draw back the cultural issues around the curtain of secrecy and suspicion.

Conclusion

We feel that our study has thrown up some interesting findings and a number of anomalies which we would like to explore further in future papers. These findings were fed back to the senior management team of the research force who received them with interest but did not seem particularly surprised by anything we had discovered. In future analyses, we will further explore the perceived seriousness of the staff member accessing the PNC, the likelihood of reporting the officer dating the victim of crime, and the officer who was making potentially unwelcome advances to a co-worker (see Appendix 2). It is difficult to say whether the sample we surveyed represented the research force accurately or police officers and support staff across the UK generally. We also recognize that as many respondents preferred not to clarify the nature of their role, we are unable to infer whether divergent attitudes exist amongst officers and staff. Another reason to be cautious about these findings is that survey results may not represent actions. As Deutscher has argued, there is a difference between "sentiments and acts." "Moral attitudes," he argues, cannot predict what people will do when faced with a particular situation (Deutscher, 1973: p. 41).

As mentioned in our discussion above, the code of silence is often seen as just one negative aspect of police occupational culture. The code is seen as an agreement between individuals, covering up for each other, keeping secrets from the senior officers and the wider organization. The code of silence is therefore blamed for malpractice at lower levels, focussing on issues such as excessive force and front line policing behaviors. We acknowledge that this paper perpetuates this approach by asking individual officers and support staff what they would do in certain circum-

stances and ignores the wider organizational issues. One of the connections we have raised throughout the paper is the link between the advantages of police culture—bonded teams, camaraderie, and group support—and the needs of the organization. In some senses, the blue code of silence is seen as an inevitable outcome where close working and bonds of trust are a key element of getting the job done. If this is the case, one implication is that a certain level of in-group secrecy may have to be tolerated by the organization's chiefs—who in turn may have been inculcated to this way of thinking throughout their career. As part of a rank-based organization with quasi military leanings, police officers and support staff will look to these senior officers as representation of the ethical stance they should take. Consequently, where senior officers are found to be covering up their misbehavior, such as one of the cases reported in our paper (Shine 2018a), the connection between individual secrecy and organizational secrecy is reinforced.

As always, these conclusions raise further questions. Following the analysis of the data, we realized there were some scenarios we could have created around the Code of Ethics and respondents' attitudes towards the new requirement to report colleague's misbehavior or find themselves in disciplinary proceedings. We should also have asked, specifically, whether respondents were police or support staff, and for a more general indication of "role", to avoid a sizable number of respondents refusing this on the grounds—as some claimed—that it risked identifying them. As we think this may be one of the first studies to ask serving police officers and support staff about ethics and the "blue code", we accept that this was an error. Overall, it is difficult to assert whether the College of Policing's new Code of Ethics has made a difference to police whistle-blowing or any aspects of police culture. On the other hand, we feel that our findings throw new light on some interesting and real-life dilemmas facing front line officers in the UK today. We also assert that in some cases, the "blue code" or curtain is still firmly in place, despite attempts to use the threat of a statutory instrument aimed at drawing it back.

Appendix 1: Respondent demographics

Variable	Number	%
Gender		
Female	578	38.30%
Male	750	49.70%
Prefer not to say/blank	181	11.99%
Role		
Police/PCSO/Special	619	41.02%
Support Staff	556	36.85%
Prefer not to say/blank	334	22.13%
Rank of Respondents		
Inspector or above/Staff Equivalent	240	15.90%
PC/Staff Equivalent	936	62.03%
Sgt/Staff Equivalent	294	19.48%
Prefer not to say/blank	39	2.58%
Age of Respondents		
18−25	62	4.11%
26−30	87	5.77%
31−35	181	11.99%
36−40	218	14.45%
41−45	246	16.30%
46−50	292	19.35%
51−55	192	12.72%
56−60	112	7.42%
61−65	39	2.58%
65+	4	0.27%
Under 18	1	0.07%
Blank	75	4.97%
Years Worked in the Police?		
Under 1 Year	79	5.24%
1−5	130	8.61%
6−10	240	15.90%
11−15	395	26.18%
16−20	190	12.59%
21−25	164	10.87%
26−30	173	11.46%
31 and above	90	5.96%
Blank	48	3.18%

Appendix 2: Scenarios and averages

Scenario number	Full Details	Average Seriousness	Average Likelihood of reporting
1	A member of staff is having trouble making ends meet and wants to earn some extra money. This person works Monday to Friday and has weekends off. He has a great skill for cake making and has been asked by a number of friends and family to make cakes for events such as weddings and birthdays.	Not Asked	2.62
2	A police officer is interested in body building but frustrated at her slow progress compared with a gym friend. This friend offers the police officer some tablets which she takes, informing her that they are legal and that she has been using them for some time.	4.02	3.70
3	A member of staff is approached by a close friend with whom he socialises on a regular basis. This friend is worried about her daughter who has started to go out with a local lad. She is concerned that the boyfriend is known as being in abusive relationships previously and has recently noticed her daughter being in an emotional state. The staff member agrees to check on police records to see if the boyfriend is known to the police.	4.80	4.51
4	A police officer purchases a new watch for his partner. However, when they open it, the watch does not fit. They exchange the original at the store for an alternative watch. Upon arriving home, the officer realises that the store assistant has inadvertently placed the old watch in the bag along with the new watch. He decides to keep the second watch.	4.45	3.95
5	A police officer is attending a search warrant. The person whose house is being searched is a suspected high profile organised criminal who is currently detained. During the search the officer finds a large amount of cash in one of the bedroom drawers. He decides that a small amount will not be missed by the suspect, and takes cash equivalent to one day's pay.	4.98	4.94
6	Two police officers on foot patrol surprise someone who is attempting to break into a car. He runs off. They chase the suspect for about two streets before apprehending him by tackling him and wrestling him to the ground. After he is under control, both officers punch him a couple of times in the stomach as punishment for fleeing and resisting.	4.78	4.57
7	A party is taking place in a public bar in the city centre. It is obvious from the posters and banners that this is a police staff retirement party. During the evening as more alcohol is consumed, two colleagues have a disagreement resulting in one pushing the other and having a loud argument whereby they are swearing at each other. Other colleagues intervene and split them up and have to escort one off the premise. There are no injuries to either party.	3.26	2.73
8	Within the office environment, a police officer has witnessed a male colleague behaving inappropriately. This officer has been 'accidently' touching a female colleague's knees and placing an arm around her shoulders whilst making sexually explicit remarks.	4.67	4.45

Scenario number	Full Details	Average Seriousness	Average Likelihood of reporting
9	A police officer enters a romantic relationship with a woman he originally met in a professional capacity, while investigating the burglary of her home. The officer only began seeing this woman in a romantic manner following the conclusion of the court case.	Not Asked	2.32
10	At 2am, a police officer, who is on duty, is driving a patrol car on a deserted road. She sees a vehicle that has been driven off the road and is stuck in a ditch. She approaches the vehicle and observes that the driver is not hurt but is obviously intoxicated. She also finds that the driver is an off-duty police officer. Instead of reporting this accident and offence, she transports the driver home.	4.86	4.66

Appendix 3: Difference in phrasing across survey iterations

Scenario:	Two police officers on foot patrol surprise someone who is attempting to break into a car. He runs off. They chase the suspect for about two streets before apprehending him by tackling him and wrestling him to the ground. After he is under control, both officers punch him a couple of times in the stomach as punishment for fleeing and resisting.

Questions and options

2003	"How serious do YOU consider this behaviour to be?"

	1	2	3	4	5
	(Not at all serious)				(Very serious)

"Do you think YOU would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behaviour?"

	1	2	3	4	5
	(Definitely not)				(Definitely yes)

2011	"How serious do YOU consider this behaviour to be?"

	1	2	3	4	5
	(Not at all serious)				(Very serious)

"If you discovered a police officer behaving in this manner, do you think YOU would report them?"

	1	2	3	4	5
	(Definitely not)				(Definitely yes)

2017	"How serious do you consider the behaviour of these officers to be?"

	1	2	3	4	5
	(Not at all serious)				(Very serious)

"How likely are you to report this behaviour?"

	1	2	3	4	5
	(Unlikely)				(Highly likely)

Scenario:	At 2am, a police officer, who is on duty, is driving a patrol car on a deserted road. She sees a vehicle that has been driven off the road and is stuck in a ditch. She approaches the vehicle and observes that the driver is not hurt but is obviously intoxicated. She also finds that the driver is an off-duty police officer. Instead of reporting this accident and offence, she transports the driver home.

Questions and options

2003 "How serious do YOU consider this behaviour to be?"

1	2	3	4	5
(Not at all serious)				(Very serious)

"Do you think YOU would report a fellow police officer who engaged in this behaviour?"

1	2	3	4	5
(Definitely not)				(Definitely yes)

2011 "How serious do YOU consider this behaviour to be?"

1	2	3	4	5
(Not at all serious)				(Very serious)

"If you discovered a police officer behaving in this manner, do you think YOU would report them?"

1	2	3	4	5
(Definitely not)				(Definitely yes)

2017 "How serious do you consider the behaviour of the officer on duty?"

1	2	3	4	5
(Not at all serious)				(Very serious)

"How likely are you to report this behaviour?"

1	2	3	4	5
(Unlikely)				(Highly likely)

Acknowledgements

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