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Robocop - the Depersonalisation of Police Officers and their Emotions: A Diary Study of Emotional Labor and Burnout in Front Line British Police Officers

Abstract

Policing has long been recognized as an emotionally distressing and stressful occupation, and recent years have seen a marked increase in psychological illness within the police service of Britain. Research into the emotional labor of police officers and its psychological consequences is limited and has predominately engaged quantitative methodologies. This paper takes a mixed methods approach, exploring emotional labor and the relationship with burnout within a large police force in the north of England. The use of audio diary provides in-depth exploration of feeling and display rules operating within the police service. Narrative analysis of thirty-eight audio diary entries and a focus group is integrated with results from the Maslach and Jackson Burnout Inventory. Findings indicated depersonalisation as a requirement of feeling and display rules, a strategy also used as a form of coping, as well as experienced as an aspect of burnout. Emotional suppression went beyond interactions with members of the public, continuing into peer and family relationships, with many officers never expressing their true emotions. This presents an important opportunity for the police service of England and Wales to better understand and respond to the emotional pressures and coping mechanisms that officer's experience within their lives.

Key Words

Emotional Labor, Police, Diary, Depersonalisation, Burnout.

1. Introduction

Policing is a stressful and distressing occupation with both physical and psychological consequences (Rees and Smith, 2008; Schaible and Six, 2016). The maladaptive coping strategies employed by officers and the outcomes for the individual, their families and communities is widely documented in the academic literature (Adams and Buck, 2010; Lennie, 2018). However, recent increases in stress-related sickness absence within British police forces and the increased awareness around stress-related mental ill-health, raises questions as to what can be done to support officers towards positive coping (Lazarus, 1999; Robertson and Cooper, 2013; Ford, 2018). With figures showing that 1 in 5 British police officers have symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and one third of this number unaware of their ill-health, this study provides a timely and much needed context to these figures (Miller and Burchell, 2019). The objective of this study is to explore the impact that emotional expression and suppression, via emotional labor, can have on the psychological wellbeing of police officers and potential coping strategies.

In this paper we examine lived experience through emotional narrative, taking a longitudinal approach to draw out the interplay between emotional labor and elements of emotional distancing and depersonalisation; both as chosen coping tools and as detrimental psychological consequences. From this perspective we explore the relationship between emotional labor and burnout within police officers. Moving away from reductionism and oversimplification of emotions, we utilize a mixed-methods approach including audio dairies and focus groups alongside measures of burnout. Taking this approach, we unpack the complexities between emotion, behaviour and psychological health, whilst at the same time retaining the integrity of the individual voice.

2 Emotions and Police Work

Studying UK police officers, Rees and Smith (2008) identified a traumatic circle of silence within policing. The expression of emotion is severely restricted within police culture: on a daily basis police officers engage with emotionally demanding work and are required to display the appropriate emotions in response (Gelderen, et al, 2007; Schiabe and Six, 2016). Moreover, organizational culture restricts the processing of trauma through the demand for the continual suppression of emotions beyond the organization and into the family home (Rees and Smith, 2008; Adams and Buck, 2010). This is despite research identifying that early treatment of the psychological response to trauma reduces the complexity and debilitating nature of post trauma symptoms (Heffren and Hausdorf, 2016). Social support, particularly from supervisors and peers, has been found to moderate Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following traumatic and stressful incidents: the more positive the attitude towards expressing emotion, the weaker the relationship between trauma and PTSD (Stephens and Long, 1999 & 2000).

Research into policing has consistently identified the detrimental consequences on psychological health, particularly burnout (Bakker and Heuven, 2006; Bhowmick and Mulla, 2016; Schaibel and Six, 2016). In 1979, Maslach and Jackson developed their Burnout Inventory through studying New York police officers and their families, a study partially replicated by the research of Hawkins (2001). From this study, three elements of burnout were identified: Emotional Exhaustion (EE) - feeling emotionally spent, Depersonalisation (DP) - feeling emotionally detached from oneself and others, and Diminished Personal Accomplishment (PA) - a sense of low personal efficacy. Research has established the link between emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion to be stronger within police officers (Kenworthy et al., 2014).

Changing Police Culture.

Policing has experienced a changing landscape over the last 20 years, moving away from law and order and police forces to the commodification of policing and an emphasis on consumerism and police service provision (Loader, 1999; Westmarland, 2016). Whilst still required to uphold the law, there is an expectation for the police to be customer-orientated and to meet public expectations, resulting in a rise in managerialism, and a focus on targets and professionalization (Westmarland, 2016, Stafford, 2016). This tension has led to officers alternating between the need to be ‘nicer than nice’ and ‘tougher than tough’: simultaneously being expected to show compassion to the victims of crime that they are seeking to protect, and suppress authentic emotions whilst dealing with conflict and aggression (Pogrebin and Poole, 1991; Martin, 1999; Bakker and Heuven, 2006; Guy et al., 2008). This position has become exacerbated in the recent years of austerity with officers under increasing pressure to meet targets whilst delivering a compassionate customer service with limited resources and time. Indeed, officers themselves are feeling increasingly compromised and vulnerable as they are held accountable for a service they have little control over delivering (Brown and Woolfenden, 2011; Dehaghani and Newman, 2017; Dehaghani, 2019). This tension in the organisational culture and the impact on officers can be seen through the emotion labor they perform as they attempt to meet the many demands made of them, whilst maintaining their own personal and professional integrity.

Emotional Labor research is aligned with feminist theory and the gendered nature of work, where ‘soft skills’ involving emotions, caring, communication or human service work are often uncompensated and undervalued (Steinberg and Figart, 1999). This reflects the typical machismo police culture born out of a working role that is traditionally grounded in violence, danger and authority. This would seem an enduring culture that has resisted organisational change, maintaining a masculine ethos, steeped in a sense of mission, action and thrill seeking (Martin, 1999; Reiner, 2010; Loftus, 2010; Bacon, 2014). A position which has been recently reinforced by the British Coalition Government who sort to strip back policing

to a crime-fighting agenda, in the name of reform and austerity (Reiner, 2010; Bacon, 2014). However, this image of the officer who is action orientated and in control of their emotions leads to officers repressing emotions which are viewed as weaknesses and threats to their careers (Waters and Ussery, 2007).

Hochschild (1983) identified psychological consequences to emotional labor, such as emotional dissonance and burnout, leading workers to become 'robotic, detached, and un-empathetic' (Albrecht and Zemke, 1985 cited in Wharton, 1999:162). So potentially devastating is emotional labor that this 'dark side of emotional labor' has been claimed to 'violate basic human rights' (Grandey et al., 2015:781).

Existing research into the psychological impact of emotional labor in police officers is limited; little has been conducted within the United Kingdom with the most recent studies examining civilian call handlers (Stafford, 2016; Lumsden and Black, 2018). Although providing a different context and subculture than front line policing, they do raise the importance of the police/public relationship and the role of empathy, and the impact of targets on this relationship. However, the majority of studies have employed quantitative methods, focusing on different elements of emotional labor and utilizing a range of different measures (Zapf, 2002; Chapman, 2009; Bhowmick and Mulla, 2016). In this paper, we explore the different elements of emotion work and explore their interplay in contributing to health damaging outcomes.

2.2 Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is the employment of emotional intelligence in the work setting; being aware of and manipulating one's own emotional state and that of others, in order to obtain a desired response (Hochschild, 2003; Guy et al., 2012). This is carried out as a requirement of work; 'and can be a matter of survival rather than personal choice' (Grandey et al., 2015:770). Hochschild identified 'Feeling Rules'

as both formal and informal expectations and standards which regulate the employee emotional experience. They are usually implied and hidden within metaphors contained within organizational culture (Hochschild, 2003; Reilly and Weiss, 2015). Feeling rules generate emotional inauthenticity, creating a juxtaposition between ‘what I do feel’ and ‘what I should feel’ (Hochschild, 1983:57). Further research has focused on the requirement of outer expression through the concept of ‘display rules’ (Diefendorff et al., 2011). Feeling and display rules often require the expression of one emotion, whilst suppressing an alternate, though authentic emotion.

Feeling and display rules may be complied with through surface and deep acting. Surface acting occurs where emotional expression is modified and controlled but not consistent with internal authentic emotions (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Williams, 2013). Through surface acting employees work to manage visible emotion which can be observed by others, to ensure that it is appropriate to the required feeling (Pogrebin and Poole, 1991; Adams and Buck, 2010). Deep acting is where employees attempt to feel internally the correct emotion, so they *become* the required emotional state (Williams, 2013; Bhowmick and Mulla, 2016). This is a cognitive change in order to feel the appropriate emotion, creating a balance between felt and required emotion, prior to expression (Gelderen et al., 2014). Deep acting requires a higher level of effort. Indeed, actively evoking emotion through images and thoughts and has been linked with emotional exhaustion (Kruml and Geddes (1998) cited in Zapf (2002)).

2.3 The Consequences of Emotion Work.

Existing research into the relationship between surface acting, deep acting, and psychological health outcomes in policing is conflicted. In one set of studies, deep acting has been found to lead to increased diminished personal accomplishment (PA), with surface acting leading to emotional exhaustion (EE) and depersonalisation (DP) (Bakker and Heuven, 2006; Bhowmick and Mulla, 2016). Baaker and Heuven (2006) suggest that when officers suppress negative emotion, but successfully deal with an aggressive

situation, they may experience positive emotions. Such findings conflict with research conducted by others (Schaible and Six, 2016; Schaible and Gecas, 2010 and Adams and Buck, 2010), who found that deep acting negative emotions had negative consequences, that surface acting was beneficial, with surface acting assisting officers in the successful execution of their duty - reducing the negative impact of emotional suppression. The complexity of emotional labor within police work and the breadth of measures employed to study emotion work and outcomes, impedes the understanding and comparison of research in the field. This is indicative of research into emotions at work, which typically seeks to isolate emotional experience from context and individual lived experience (Briner, 1999). We seek to build on existing research (which takes a reductionist approach) via an exploration of the contextualization and in-depth lived experience, in order to unpack the ambiguous findings of existing research.

Turning towards the complexity in conceptualizing burnout elements, the extant literature indicates that officers not only experience depersonalisation as an element of burnout, and as a response to or outcome of emotional labor, but that they may also employ distancing behaviours as an intended coping mechanism, though the processes underpinning this are unclear (Pogrebin and Poole, 1991; Bakker and Heuven, 2006; Daus and Brown, 2012). We argue that the relationship between emotional labor as a response to feeling and display rules within police culture has underexplored relationships with elements of burnout and emotional suppression. We suggest that a methodology that enables access to the process and context dependent factors can further illuminate the interplay between exposure to emotion work, responses and psychological outcomes.

3 Methodology

Taking a mixed method approach, this study draws an inference of social mechanisms whilst employing an empirical understanding of burnout, therefore differentiating this study from the extant literature

(Zachariadis et al., 2013; Bhaskar, 2014; Sutton, 2018). Integrating the results of both qualitative and quantitative methods allows a balanced and rounded review of the phenomena being explored and has been used effectively in exploring strategies for managing authenticity at work (Johnson et al., 2007; Sutton, 2018). In order to move away from a reductionist view of emotions that in itself may depersonalize the lived experience of participants, this study seeks to capture emotional appraising of the “person-environment relationship” (Lazarus, 2006:12), using audio diaries to capture the emotional narrative of participants engaged in emotional labor, and a focus group to explore perceptions and experience of emotion work whilst in a group setting.

Audio diaries have been used successfully to access the everyday, situated experiences of emotion work in other professions, such as nursing (Cottingham et al, 2018) and are a particularly useful method of data collection for emotion work studies for several reasons. First, audio diaries are well suited to studies seeking to understand causal within-person changes and processes (Bolger et al, 2003). Second, they provide a greater level of freedom and control for participants in constructing their narrative than traditional methods such as interviews, which require an immediate response to an interviewer’s questions (Monrouxe, 2009). In the audio diary, the participant has control over when and how they tell their story, which provides access to richer cognitive processing (Crozier and Cassell, 2016). Third, audio diaries are valuable in harnessing the cognitive and affective process underpinning experience and emotion over time which more closely reflects the process-oriented nature of the phenomena (Crozier and Cassell, 2016). These processes can include self-reflexivity as an integral component of emotion work (Cottingham et al, 2018). Finally, the process of recording entries dealing with stressful experiences may aid coping in participants through the deconstruction and processing of events (Crozier and Cassell, 2016), which has a positive ethical impact: providing respondents with reciprocal benefits for their participation in the research (Tracy, 2010).

These qualitative methods were used alongside Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI), a validated quantitative method for measuring the individual burnout of participants (Maslach et al., 1986). Results from the MBI were compared against themes identified from the audio diary and focus group data, and probable relationships highlighted.

3.1 Participants

Approval was obtained from the host organisation, and academic ethical procedures complied with. Purposive sampling was undertaken via an advert circulated to all staff within a large metropolitan police force in the north of England. Participation was sought from police officers, inspector and below, who had face-to-face contact with the public. There was a small element of snowballing where colleagues introduced each other to the study.

Seven police officers were recruited to the study comprising: 2 Detective Constables, 2 Detective Sergeants, 3 Uniform Constables and 2 Uniform Sergeants, of whom there were four females and three males. This group represented: front line response policing, child protection, offender management, custody, sexual offences unit, and divisional CID. Data collection took place between May and August 2016. In total participants provided 38 diary entries, accumulating just over 400 minutes of recordings, with an average entry length of 12 minutes. Not all participants kept to the agreed timescales of 2 audio diaries per week for 4 weeks, and only 1 participant completed the full 8 entries requested. 6 participants volunteered for the focus group, four of whom also contributed to the audio diaries, this group comprised two male and four females, representing divisional CID, offender management, sexual offences unit, and front line response policing (Table 1).

Insert Table 1: Participant Details about here.

3.2 Procedure

Participants began by completing the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) which is recognized as a leading measure of burnout (Maslach et al., 1996). Reported reliabilities for the three subscales are 0.90 for emotional exhaustion, 0.76 depersonalisation, and 0.76 for personal accomplishment (Iwanicki and Schwab, 1981). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale from 0 (Never) to 6 (Every day) with each score summed and coded according to the MBI grading of high, moderate or low (Maslach and Jackson, 1996).

Prompt sheets were provided, asking general questions around emotional experience and the emotional labor construct. Participants recorded entries on a smart phone application, allowing them to email the recording direct to the researcher, with participant number as identifier. Participants were free to select which incidents to discuss and were prompted to appraise their emotions at the time of the incident, and to consider what emotions they may have communicated externally. Seeking a continuing and developing picture, participants were asked how they felt returning to their organizational work environment, whether they shared their feelings, what emotions they shared, and with whom (Lazarus, 1999).

3.3 Analysis

Taking an idiographic approach, individual diaries and the focus group recording were transcribed, and narrative analysis was undertaken. Line by line coding was carried out to identify personal experience of emotions but also perception and engagement with social structures (Lazarus, 2006; Kleres, 2010). Subsequently, a thematic review of the dissected narrative was carried out and compared against identified themes, articulated as initial codes that were drawn from the existing literature (Spencer et al., 2014). The themes from the idiographic templates were integrated and analysed from a nomothetic perspective and

commonality of themes specific to the group as a whole were considered, employing an iterative process scanning the selected narrative (Dunn, 1994).

4 Results

First, we present an overview of narrative themes (emotional experience and suppression, surface and deep acting, and depersonalisation) and then discuss each in greater detail relative to participant burnout scores, highlighting potential relationships between concepts. This is followed by detailed discussion of our thematic analysis across each area of the conceptual model, including deeper analysis of conventions such as narrative devices.

In the main, participants chose to speak about incidents of violence or threat of violence, offences involving children, or lack of support within the organisation. All participants articulated high levels of distress at some point. However, they also reported a perception of rules around emotional expression as an unofficial performance measure, with emotional display seen as an indicator of poor performance and an inability to 'do the job', reflecting the enduring masculine policing culture. Therefore, participants suppressed authentic emotions, particularly fear and sadness, out of concern that they would be viewed as incompetent. This emotional suppression continued into the family home, although this was framed as a desire to protect loved ones from the experiences that participants were exposed to within their work.

Participants were aware that they acted some emotions on the surface, whilst suppressing their authentic emotions; generally, this was expressed as 'professionalism' reflecting the findings of Martin (1999). Participants discussed surface acting humour whilst feeling distressed and using anger as a form of emotional release. Deep acting was not often articulated, though participants did report deep acting anger to exclude and overcome fear. Participants also deep acted compassion by empathizing with victims and relating experiences to their own life situations.

Depersonalisation was perceived as a way of coping, a behaviour learnt through senior colleagues and organizational culture. This extended to a form of ‘self-depersonalisation’ where participants sought to distance themselves from their own emotions. Overall, participants felt that they were viewed by the public and the organization as robots, and that they themselves became robots in order to cope with the situations that they faced at work.

Table 2 summarizes the relationships between participants’ burnout levels (MBI results), each emotion they reported, and which emotions were suppressed, surface acted, and deep acted, as well as whether participants consciously or unconsciously used depersonalisation as a coping mechanism. Each of these themes is discussed in detail below.

[Table 2 near here]

All but one of the participants displayed an element of burnout. The exception, P4, consistently stated that although she suppressed emotions with members of the public, she was regularly able to talk about her authentic emotions with colleagues, supervisors, and her husband (a serving officer). This may indicate that burnout is more likely where emotional suppression continues beyond the public arena. In support of this, participants who emotionally suppressed fear with colleagues generally suffered higher levels of emotional exhaustion and those who deep acted compassion and suppressed fear and sadness generally had a lower level of personal achievement. Reflecting the findings of Schiavle and Gecas (2010), participants who deep acted compassion suffered high levels of depersonalizing burnout. We articulate these findings through our conceptual framework at Figure 1.

[Figure one near here]

4.1 Experienced Emotions

All participants talked about experiencing distress. Lazarus (1999) describes distress as an outcome of being overly compassionate and becoming overwhelmed with other's suffering; impairing the ability to help. This is demonstrated by P1 when describing separating a mother from her very ill baby:

It was just an absolutely heart breaking situation...I really struggled not to get emotional with her...I was the person that was stopping her seeing her poorly child overnight...it was very difficult to sort of watch her get upset and emotional, I was in floods of tears.

Similarly, P2 expresses an almost debilitating level of distress when attending a woman contemplating jumping off a bridge:

I was frightened that I would say the wrong thing and make things worse...she was on the verge of jumping and I found it really distressing...I felt completely helpless...there was nothing that I could do to help...as time went on I felt panicked and shaky and tearful...

Participants dealt with more negative than positive emotions. This assists our understanding as to how emotional labor plays out in the sphere of police work, particularly when combined with the emotional labor strategies adopted (Diefendorff et al, 2011; and Pisaniello et al, 2012).

Participants articulated experiencing multiple and conflicting emotions internally, whilst attempting to display neutral expressions outwardly, all within one incident. P3 describes executing a warrant at the home of a suspected child sex offender and engaging with the unsuspecting partner:

Just seeing how distressed and traumatized she was... and you realize that you are shattering her whole life up, just which is a bit bizarre when you have gone to work and it is a normal day...you have your own personal feelings about the situation towards the suspect, and your sort of disdain for them...you do almost feel guilt, because of what you are doing...it's very difficult to sort of express how you truly feel, because you have this sort of need to be professional.

This complexity was also highlighted by Bakker and Heuven (2006) who identified the need for police officers to develop a talent for switching from internal and compassionate understanding to negative emotional suppression and an outward neutral display. However, this neutral expression, or 'professionalism' can also be seen as an outward manifestation of the need to be 'customer-focused', rather than simply enforcing the law.

4.2 Feeling Rules

Participants were prompted to consider their perception of display and feeling rules, addressing the rules that operated within the public arena and those that existed with colleagues, out of the public eye. As previously established by Frewin et al. (2006) participants within the study acknowledged that there was a public expectation that officers would not display an emotional response within their work. These rules reflect the move to police customer service focus:

(Public) expectations are that that is how the police act, that you remain professional and part of that is being slightly detached. (P3)

This expectation stretches to participants' perceptions of other professionals, as described by P6 on identifying a body at a natural death:

The nurse invites us straight round the back and this chap is lying on the bed, obviously dead, you know, no warning, no nothing, so obviously, you know, you see a lot of dead bodies and that, I remember thinking you could have told me, you know, I've just drove his car for god's sake, but there you go...you have to hide it really.

4.3 Performance and Weakness

It appears that feeling rules have translated into organizational performance measures. Reflecting the findings of Pogrebin and Poole (1991), participants often spoke of how displaying emotion was considered a sign of weakness, of not being able to cope, and not being suitable as a police officer. P6 articulates how emotional suppression is an expectation:

You can't let it upset you, you shouldn't let it upset you and if it does upset you, you are in the wrong job and that is very important: you are not allowed to get upset by stuff like this, and that is just the way that it is.

Illustrative of this assertion, P1 declined to join the focus group, not wishing to discuss her feelings in front of other officers. This came as a result of colleague's reactions towards her when she expressed her distress in speaking to a mother who had recently lost a child. Consequently, P1 no longer feels she can express her true emotions with her colleagues:

I think that it is fairly obvious that there is certain rules that you have to follow by as a police officer, when it comes to emotions... is that you can't show weakness and you can't display your emotions at their extremes...I'm often concerned that people are judging me.

P2 articulated a *macho culture* which was agreed by the focus group:

There is a culture in [organization] where you are expected to be macho and tough and able to deal with anything that is put in front of you and then be able to move on and do all the written work and be professional and stay late and get everything down, even though your head might be done in seeing something that is quite traumatic, whether it is for the first time or the fiftieth time, and there is a real expectation from supervisors that you will just do it and if you don't or if you if you are emotional or over emotional or you know, showing any kind of emotion, they see that as a sign of weakness.

This is in line with the extant literature which identifies a prevailing machismo culture that identifies police work as action, excitement, and a sense of mission (Reiner, 2010; Bacon, 2014). Therefore it makes sense that any emotional display (traditionally associated with a feminine outlook) would highlight an officer as not fit for role, or fitting the accepted mould of ‘police officer’ (Martin, 1999; Brown and Woolfenden, 2011).

4.4 Surface Acting

The findings of this study contrast with those of Schailble and Six (2016), who identified that officers who surface act positive emotion and suppress negative emotion had a greater Diminished Personal Accomplishment (PA). Though the officers in this study did articulate surface acting only one participant displayed high PA whilst others displayed either low or moderate PA. However, participants talked mainly about displaying a neutral and non-emotional image that was “professional, I tried to come across as calm and competent”. (P4)

The emotion that I deliberately chose to show in front of the mother was calmness, reasonableness, reassuring, that was the only way that I could deal, do this role, what I was trying to hide was my sort of disgust with her. (P6)

Participants also talked about engaging in surface acting with colleagues. Again, presenting the required emotion to suit the rules of the situation, with anger and happiness-joy being displayed:

I think we fake joviality, definitely. (F4)

P2 recalled an incident where she and her colleague were attacked and assaulted; both were in fear of their lives. Going off duty in the locker room they were the focus of colleagues’ jokes;

Speaking to colleagues after, and even listening to the colleague I was with at the time the whole thing was just considered to be a laugh, it was joked about and laughed off...I didn’t feel comfortable admitting that I was really scared during the incident and ended up joining in with the

bravado of everybody else...I felt quite emotional, but chose not to show that due to the bravado between everybody else who was there, I laughed it off too, when really I was pretty scared about what had happened.

Unlike the findings of Lumsden and Black (2018), it would seem that laughter does not always serve to create a community of coping, but actually seeks to alienate those officers whom may be feeling distressed by events. This increases the need for emotional suppression, and reduces help seeking behaviour. This highlights how the data collection method exposed the cognitive processes behind emotional display, identifying compliance with feeling rules and inner authentic emotions that would otherwise not be captured by traditional observation methods (Monrouxe, 2009; Reiner, 2010; Crozier and Cassell, 2016). This demonstrates how the machismo police culture prevents the expression of authentic emotions, even when engaging what would be presumed to be 'canteen-culture' (Waddington, 1999; Bacon, 2014).

Indeed, the need to engage with machismo behaviour supports the acceptance of anger as a permissible emotion to display, employed in lieu of other (feminine) emotional expressions:

It is almost like anger and aggression are accepted, and we turn everything else into that, so that we can let it out, and it can be a bit negative. Like if you are feeling sad, you turn it into anger or aggression to let it out, because you don't want to say that you are feeling sad or whatever it is that is getting you down, but anger and aggression is quite tolerated I think. (F4)

4.5 Deep Acting

All audio diary participants engaged in deep acting but only in relation to two emotions. The first emotion officers sought to engage on a deep and internal level was anger; echoing the belief that anger is

permissible. However, deep acting anger is an attempt to exclude fear as an authentic experienced emotion;

We thought: put the door in, and you could just see the adrenaline go...they are big lads that I manage on response and they get the door in and it was just like: ROAR, we're the police, RAAAGGH, and tazers were out and you know, I am like: Jesus Christ, there is no one even here, do you know what I mean and they are ready for this fight... you are almost preparing yourself to deal with and it is easy to deal with if you are angry. (F4)

Here, it is articulated how officers create a perceived or imagined threat behind the door to evoke feelings of anger and aggression (hurt or be hurt), echoing Hochschild's discussion of Stanislavski's (cited in Hochschild, 1983) concept of *if*, where the actor seeks to evoke the emotion as if the situation was occurring at that time, in reality. Once again this reflects the machismo in the culture that would otherwise see fear as a weakness, and anger a move towards action.

A similar process is employed by P5 as he is making his way to a pub fight, single crewed:

I bottle up the fear, I think that probably leads to increased adrenaline, the more that I tell myself that I am not scared the more that I feel a bit pumped up...I spend the next four or five minutes getting to the job thinking about how I wasn't scared.... what I had to do was show that I was confident...I think at this point the fear must have got the better of me and I showed some aggression.

The second emotion officers sought to engage with via deep acting was compassion. Deep acting compassion seems more available to officers when they relate incidents to their personal circumstances:

I felt really upset for them, especially thinking of my own kids, and the following day celebrating Christmas (P2).

4.6 Emotional Suppression

Emotional suppression was discussed by all participants, mainly feelings of fear and sadness, with members of the public, colleagues, and supervisors. Five out of seven of the audio participants talked about suppressing fear, displaying an alternative emotion whilst still experiencing fear internally. Four spoke about suppressing anxiety, particularly with supervisors at, or prior, to an incident. This echoes the findings of Frewin et al. (2006), who found that fear did not appear in police vocabulary.

When the focus group were asked which emotions they suppressed they responded unanimously that fear was never discussed. When asked whether they ever disclosed fear to each other the answer was a resolute 'no' accompanied by laughter. Again, this was linked to a perception of performance in the role:

It's just the face, the embarrassment thing: you can't cope, you're not good enough. (F6)

This was echoed in the audio diary study by P2:

I felt scared... I felt out of control and totally helpless with regards to not being able to help this person, a fear of being scared to, even if the opportunity arose... I'd say I probably held back from showing how I really felt at the scene, I didn't want anyone to see that I was panicked obviously.

Participants demonstrated an awareness that this was not a natural reaction to their environment and expressed concerns about its potential damage, exemplified here by P7:

You've got to try and deal with that and take control of the situation, even though actually you're quite scared, in you know, normal everyday life you'd turn around and run away from that... how do you deal with that? How do you process it mentally?

Participants discussed anticipating negative outcomes of situations, but feeling unable to communicate this, particularly with supervisors. This inability to openly express emotions with supervisors leads them to feeling vulnerable when unable to provide the protection to the public they feel

is needed, reflecting the work of Dehaghani (2019). Participant 6 expresses anxiety at being hampered from protecting a domestic violence victim, and not supported by his supervisor:

I try to stay calm and professional and this is what I am, and inside, I will be honest, I am scared, because we all read about these kind of DV victims in the papers being failed by police and I am living one here, I am living it.

Less commonly discussed, but still significant to the officers, was the suppression of compassion. P7 described how she had experienced and suppressed compassion and pity for an abused child in hospital:

The baby was on its own and it was very poorly, and I remember thinking, feeling really sad and really lost, like I wanted to mother that child and stay with it and not want to go home and just sit with the child, but obviously you can't portray that to your colleagues and the other professionals that are there.

Emotional suppression extends beyond the public arena and into the police station, as P7 continues:

I remember going back to the police station and not really speaking for about three hours...I didn't really speak to anyone, which is unlike me... all I can describe it as really is anxiety and stress, and feeling under total pressure but not feeling like could tell anyone about that...and you kind of feel isolated a little bit... although my supervisor noticed that I was quiet, because she mentioned it but never said: are you okay? Never said: are you alright, do you need any support, how do you feel about it? So I think it is quite interesting that you have got supervision that do notice a change in your behaviour, do notice a change in your emotional state, however, probably know why it is, but don't even acknowledge it.

Participants talked about not having time to process emotions whilst at work, and for some emotional suppression extended beyond work parameters:

...and you just do it and you don't even register what you have seen or been to, and when you do it is later on, it is when you get home, it is when you start having your tea or trying to get to sleep that, that image and those feelings obviously come back and start to haunt you. (F4)

Often participants never talked about how they felt: P5 reported never before having discussed his feelings after dealing with the death of a baby in distressing circumstances:

I got changed and I got into my car and drove home, and if I am honest I think that was when it hit me, I cried most of the way home, got into bed, took me a long time to kinda get to sleep...I never once mentioned that I had cried, I never once mentioned how I felt and got on with it, I didn't even speak with my family, how it had affected me.

P6 demonstrates how this suppression can cause friction within families:

When I get home and my wife wanted to chat and I didn't want to talk, I just wanted to put my head in a book or watch telly, it did cause a little bit of friction, when I woke up the next day 'cause she thought that I was ignoring her, which I wasn't.

Maslach and Jackson (1979) established in their original burnout study that officers experienced guilt when disclosing their true feelings to their loved ones; worrying about the burden they placed upon them. This reaction was also present in the current study, highlighting another aspect of emotional suppression: the belief that the burden of policing is their responsibility alone:

I was so upset by the situation I had to speak to my other half, which I never do actually, because he's not a cop and I don't think that it is fair to impose that sort of pain on him. (P1)

4.7 The Complexities of Depersonalisation, Emotional Distancing and Performance

Previous studies have considered the directional relationship between depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion as constructs of burnout, exploring the extent to which depersonalisation is employed as a

coping mechanism (Golembiewski and Kim, 1990; Taris et al., 2005; Schaible et al., 2010). Within this study, depersonalisation plays a part in most participants' working lives, though some cite more conscious awareness of it than others. The findings indicate that participants who are aware of how and when they depersonalize and acknowledge this as a way of coping or an accepted working practice, appear to suffer low emotional exhaustion.

I think you have been doing it that long that you are suppressing these emotions all the time you become hardened to what you are seeing and you are thinking: I should be, if I was a normal person I would be crying now looking at this.. you just get hardened to it, it is a horrible thing to be...I don't think you have a choice, I think you have got to be hardened to it because if you are not... you fall apart. (F6)

P4 talks of using emotional distancing as a coping mechanism, in the sense of seeing police work as a task:

With most things there is a process that you have to do, so like you say you turn up to a hanging or a death or any sort of job and you know that what you do is this and, you know, you go through the procedure and then you just leave, and I find that that kind of helps me a bit as I just look at it as a as a task that just needs to be done and then just move on to the next thing... it is all part of my thing that I daren't even go there because I would end up seriously ill in a hospital somewhere.

Officers who articulated depersonalisation *and* reflected upon it had lower depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion scores. In contrast, those who did not articulate depersonalisation or emotional distancing through the audio diary (or spoke of very little) nevertheless had high depersonalisation and high emotional exhaustion MBI scores.

4.8 Self-Depersonalisation or Emotional Distancing?

Often participants distanced themselves from their own personal experiences, narrating in the third person. Several participants regularly slipped into the second person, indicating a notion of distance, whether temporally or personally. What is somewhat unclear is whether the use of “you” is an affectation for “I, the narrator” (homodiegetic) and a defensive tool for appearance’s sake, or in creating a sense of inclusivity i.e. really meaning “we, the police” (a heterodiegetic shared experience) (Fludernik, 1994);

I think that leads to stress because you build that up and you become cynical of people. (P5)

This use of language could be a response to the perceived performance requirements; compliance with the feeling rules or an outcome of cultural conditioning. However as identified by Nook et al. (2017) linguistic distancing can be a form of emotional processing and coping - if the opportunity to construct a narrative is provided.

This point is further contextualized where numerous participants refer to themselves as robots. For example, after viewing and categorizing over 2000 indecent images and videos of children P4 reflected:

People think that just because you are in the police for some reason that you can view this and it doesn't have any effect on you and it does... I read this article about some police officers who had been to a puppy farm, they had gone in the puppy farm and the puppies had been kept in terrible conditions, and there was this overwhelming stench obviously of faeces and everything at this puppy farm, and the article said even the police officers eyes watered...and I thought well that just sums it up - we are like robots that go into things and sort them out...

A point echoed by P5:

Police officers put on this front; this act and when it comes to dealing with people, emotionally we switch off and we are, we become robots...

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study presents a compelling picture of police work as involving strong feeling and display rules requiring officers to suppress their authentic emotions and engage in surface and deep acting, along with the use of depersonalisation or emotional distancing as coping strategies. The method enlisted has captured inner cognitive processing that the extant literature has struggled to identify through more traditional ethnographic or quantitative study. Indeed, this study takes the police culture literature some way down the road of understanding what lies in the ‘gap between talk and action’ (Waddington, 1999:289), which has remained elusive to researchers and considered ‘in need of reform’ (Bacon, 2014:108). We suggest, through this study, that perhaps the missing element to understanding police culture is emotional processing.

Participants perceived emotional display to be viewed as a weakness and a sign of poor performance, potentially impacting promotion prospects and perceptions of role fitness. This is in line with the masculine culture prevalent within policing (Pogrebin and Poole, 1991; Fewin et al., 2006; Chapman, 2009; Reiner, 2010). This was articulated as a perspective of both the public and the organization, although this is in opposition to the findings of Stafford (2016) who found that empathetic responses were actually valued by the public. Nevertheless, participants chose to display a calm, professional and neutral image, rather than the distress often experienced (Bakker and Heuven, 2006). As identified by Niven et al. (2003) suppression of emotion can exacerbate the negative effects related to physical and non-physical aggression from organizational outsiders.

Similarly identified by Adams and Buck (2010), emotional suppression went beyond interactions with members of the public and continued into relationships with peers and supervisors, and in most occasions at home with families. Echoing the literature, the results indicated that those participants who suppressed fear with colleagues suffered a higher level of emotional exhaustion (Bakker and Heuven,

2006; Adams and Buck, 2010). This clearly has implications for individuals and the organization, as police officers feel that the rules governing feeling and display of emotion prevent them from expressing any form of distress or seeking support. This also adds to Dehaghani's (2019) work on vulnerability, which is exacerbated in this study by the inability to communicate concerns effectively to supervisors.

In the main, participants surface acted professional detachment and it was in these instances that they displayed a higher level of personal achievement (Schiabale and Six, 2016). This is logical as the expression of emotion is perceived as a negative performance indicator; officers who are able to present a calm, detached image, despite what they feel internally, will feel that they are performing well in the eyes of their peers and supervisors. Again, this is in line with the machismo culture and in delivering customer service (Reiner, 2010; Westmarland, 2016).

Surface acting anger presents as a challenge not only for the individual but also for the organization. The action consequence for anger is aggression (Lazarus and Chohen-Charash, 2001). It is already identified that employees suffering with stress are more likely to engage in aggressive workplace behaviour (CIPD, 2015). Having anger as an acceptable emotion within an organization is likely to increase conflict in an already stressful environment, yet this approach appears deeply woven within accepted practice and the traditional masculine culture. However, the knowledge obtained here assists in the dilemma raised by Westmarland (2016) who identified the difficulty in understanding the inner motivation for individual officer behaviour and this relationship with police culture. It may well be that the 'alternative cop culture code' (Westmarland, 2016:366) that acts as a more powerful governance than the organisations ethical code, is actually fear, and a fear of displaying emotion – allowing for the expression of aggression. This is an important finding, particularly for the police service and understanding complaints of police use of force.

This study found that those officers who deep acted compassion were relating the situations of others to their own personal circumstances and suffered high levels of depersonalizing burnout. This is potentially a sign of ‘too much compassion’ which leads to distress (Lazarus,1999:246; Schiabe and Gecas, 2010). It is clear from the findings that engaging with negative emotions at a deep level is detrimental to officers’ wellbeing, but it is difficult to separate this level of deep acting from the accompanying suppression of fear and sadness. Further work is required to understand how deep acting, particularly when officers relate traumatic circumstances to that of themselves and families, impacts on burnout and emotional distress.

The single participant who did not suppress her emotions with colleagues displayed no signs of burnout. This ability to express authentic feelings allowed her to process emotions, preventing burnout despite initial emotional suppression with members of the public. This therapeutic effect of emotional disclosure reflects the psychological literature that argues for the use of emotional narrative as a way for individuals to process traumatic events (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999; Nook et al., 2017). Also, the apparent coping of the female participant raises the question of what role gender plays in emotional expression and processing within the police culture. A point that is worthy of further exploration, particularly in light of the predicted increase of female police officers, which may support a way in improving police emotional resilience (Brown and Woolfenden, 2011).

However, these results indicate that emotional dissonance may not in itself directly link to emotional exhaustion where it is not sustained over time or continued through into work or social environment. If police officers are provided an opportunity to express their true emotions within a supportive environment, this appears to counteract the initial emotional dissonance (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 2001).

One significant finding of this study is that officers deliberately choose emotional distancing and depersonalisation as a form of coping and are cognizant of engaging this strategy. We add weight to the argument that depersonalisation in police work is a complex phenomenon (Aaron, 2000; Bakker and Heuven, 2006). Previously, depersonalisation has been thought to be an outcome of the distressing work police officers engage, but it appears that officers actively and consciously depersonalize the people and situations they deal with to avoid negative and distressing levels of emotion, especially by employing emotional distancing. However, it is possible that this usage as an intended adaptive coping strategy may also manifest as a maladaptive coping mechanism and lead to burnout if not accompanied by the opportunity to express and process emotional experiences (Golembiewski and Kim, 1990; Bakker et al., 2000; Taris et al, 2005). This finding further legitimizes the qualitative methods employed which allowed participants to express this discursively.

We note the complexities in the interrelatedness of these constructs where the notion of emotional distancing and depersonalisation are seen as coping tools that, though deemed helpful to participants at the time, can translate into detrimental health outcomes if not coupled with an environment that permits emotional disclosure and support-seeking. These complexities highlight the need for change in police culture towards an environment fostering emotional support. Currently, much of the emotion work undertaken is considered as a function of deeply embedded organizational culture norms. We position this robotic idealized image as damaging to both the individual and the organization, where the socialization of this as a function of performance is wholly unsustainable. Indeed, in seeking to suppress emotion, in the longer term, psychological health impacts will threaten performance in a way that being able to display one's authentic emotions in the first place would protect (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 2001).

Furthermore, we note the complexities in the labelling of emotional constructs where elements of burnout are often intertwined in participants' reflections and in our coding of them. We signpost the power of narrative in harnessing such complexities and suggest that the context-dependent nature of the stories told is insightful in positioning emotion events and responses to them.

This study demonstrates the importance of providing the opportunity for the police service to understand the emotional pressures and coping mechanisms officers employ in their daily work (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 2001). We suggest that support mechanisms to underpin changes in organizational culture are encouraged in order to optimize opportunities for emotional disclosure and the psychological benefits this can bring to the individual and organization.

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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

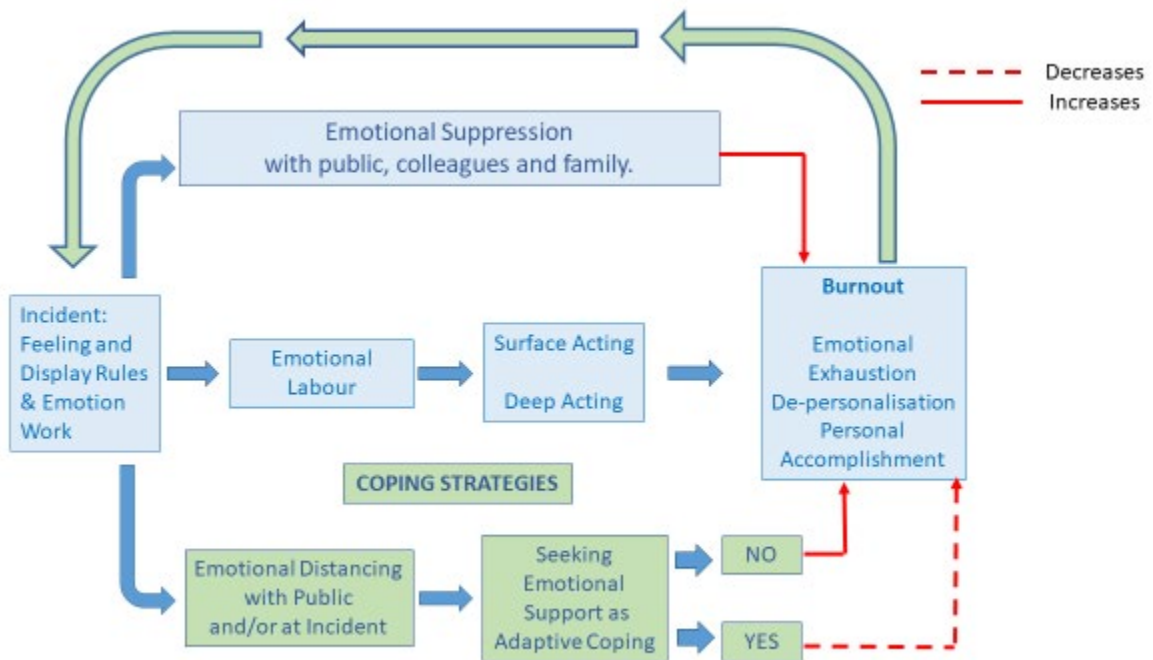


Table 1: Participant Details

P = Audio Diary Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7		
No. of Diary Entries	6	5	2	6	5	7	7		
F = Focus Group Participant		F6	F2	F3			F5	F1	F4
Uniform / Detective	D	U	D	D	U	U	U	D	D
Male / Female	F	F	M	F	M	M	F	M	F

Table 2: Maslach Burnout Inventory Results and Narrative Themes.

P=Audio Diary Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7		
F=Focus Group Participant		F6	F2	F3			F5	F1	F4
Burnout scores (MBI)¹									
Emotional Exhaustion	H	L	H	L	L	M	H	H	H
Depersonalisation	H	H	H	L	H	M	M	H	M
Personal Accomplishment	L	M	L	H	H	M	L	M	M
Emotions²:									
Fear	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fright		X			X		X		
Frustration	X		X	X	X	X			
Shame	X	X			X				
Compassion	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Anxiety	X	X					X	X	
Depression					X	X			
Anguish	X	X		X	X				
Contempt	X	X	X	X			X		
Guilt	X		X				X		
Anger	X	X		X	X		X	X	
Disgust	X			X			X		
Sadness		X		X			X	X	
Pity	X		X				X		

Embarrassment	X	X				X		
Indignation	X		X	X		X		
Happiness-Joy		X	X				X	X X
Distress	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Emotional Suppression:

Fear/Anxiety	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Sadness/ Compassion/ Pity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X X
With Colleagues	X	X	X		X	X	X	X X
Outside Organization	X					X	X	

Surface Acting:

Empathy	X	X		X				X
Professional Emotional Detachment		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Happiness-Joy with Colleagues		X	X				X	X X
Anger		X				X	X	

Deep Acting:

Anger to hide Fear					X		X	
Compassion	X	X	X		X	X	X	X

Depersonalisation

Conscious Coping		X	X		X			X
Conscious Awareness				X		X		
Unconscious	X						X	X

Notes:

¹ MBI scores rated as H (High), M (Medium) and L (Low) as prescribed by Maslach and Jackson, 1996.

² Presence of theme for each participant indicated by X

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