

‘Who do You Think You’re Talking to?!’: A Reflexive Account of Ethnographic Research in the Police

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Abstract

Reflexivity has become a prominent feature of ethnographic research and prompted an increasing awareness of researcher bias and influence in data reporting. This bias is often seen as a weakness in research that must be overcome. However, a growing body of literature, that uses autoethnographic methods, seeks to redress this and suggest that bias and personal biography should be embraced and used to inform research findings. In light of this, this paper seeks to use elements of autoethnographic analysis to explore how my own gendered identity became implicated in my research and became integral to my understanding of the role of gender in my research. The impact of researcher subjectivity on validity is also explored and how research should not claim universal ‘truths’ but can present an accurate and believable picture of an organisation.

This paper also highlights the particular challenges of conducting ethnography within the U.K. Police Service and how a gendered methodology can be used to develop strategies to mitigate these challenges. Using my experiences of observing and interacting with Neighbourhood Police officers, I focus on how gendered organisational cultures must be anticipated and negotiated in order to gain the greatest insights. The overtly masculine culture of Policing meant that I was required to mimic the behaviour of the Officers and give a very masculine gender performance. This is seen as to key to assimilating into policing culture and gaining acceptance, despite the difficulties that I had adopting a hegemonically masculine persona.

Key words: Reflexivity, Gendered Culture, Gender Performance, Autoethnography, Police,

Introduction

The 'reflexive ethnographer' has been the subject of a great deal of study in recent years, focusing on the influence researchers have in constructing, analysing and interpreting the research subject and setting (Hardy and Clegg, 1997, Hardy et al. 2001 and Choi, 2006). The use of reflexive practices has become a growing feature of many different research disciplines but still remains most prominent in research that seeks to understand how reality is constructed during research (Alvesson et al. 2008). However, other authors have taken reflexivity a step further and turned the reflexive lens on themselves (Bruni, 2006, Ortiz, 2005, Roberts and Sanders, 2005) and examined how it is important for researchers to be aware of gender and impression management when conducting their fieldwork.

The term 'reflexivity' has been used to describe a number of actions and processes. 'Here investigators seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographical situatedness, their personal investments in their research, various biases they bring to their work, their surprises and "undoings" in the process of the research endeavour, the ways in which their choices of literary troupes lend rhetorical force to the research report, and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view' (Gergen and Gergen, 2000). As a result of the multiple interpretations of reflexivity, Alvesson et al. (2008) expound the idea of 'reflexivities' in research, locating different actions in reflexive categories.

Although four types of reflexivity are discussed, I wish to concentrate on the understanding of reflexivity as Multi-Voicing Practices. Multi-voicing practices relate to the authorial identity of the researcher and their relation to the 'other' or research participants. Crucially this entails the researcher becoming part of the research project, acknowledging that they are constructed in the field as much as the participants are. It also requires the researcher to make plain their authorial identity, any biases they may have that could influence their findings and the choices they have made to ensure that their research is meaningful. This idea of 'self-reflexivity' requires researchers to separate the self from a moment of existence and objectify what they are feeling in the exploration of causal relationships, an experience that is both difficult and disconcerting (Cunliffe, 2003). Research which focuses on multi-voicing practices is often reported by making the researchers integral to the analysis and research becomes an exercise in 'story-telling' rather than 'truth-telling', where multiple voices and stories can be interwoven to form 'narratives of meaning-making constructed and enacted within various discourses' (ibid. 2003, p. 994). As a result of this, research methods like autoethnography and reflexive ethnography have become popular.

The Value of the Researcher Voice

Traditionally, researchers have been encouraged to distance themselves and their own 'self' from their research in the name of objectivity and reliability (Ellis, 1999). However, a post-structuralist methodology would argue that self-perception plays an important part in the interpretation of meaning but that this sense of self is the result

of competing subjectivities. In the absence of a single and fixed identity, a researcher must engage with new ways constructing knowledge that don't presuppose an objectivity within the researcher that does not exist. Denzin (1997) suggests that 'humans are always already tangled up...in a secondhand world of meanings and have no direct access to reality' (p. 246). So, with the growing importance of reflexivity and new ways of approaching research being developed, the incorporation of a researcher's own biography and feelings is becoming a more common feature of contemporary research.

Autoethnography was defined by Ellis and Bochner (2000) as 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (p. 733). Reed-Danahay (1997), as quoted by Humphreys (2005) elaborates on this by suggesting that autoethnography is 'a form of self-narrative that places self within a social context. It is both a method and a text...It can also be done by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs' (p. 9). From these understandings it is possible to see that adopting autoethnography in a research project means the blurring of the self-other relationship in research.

When approaching the issue of whether a researcher should attempt try to eliminate all biases from interfering with observations and analysis and develop 'valid' theories and knowledge, proponents of autoethnographical analysis approach the issue by asserting that definitions of 'validity' can vary (Ellis, 1999). Drawing valid interpretations can be difficult, especially when this has to done in conjunction with an understanding that there is no reality out there that can be discovered and described using rigorous research methods (Mason, 2002). In light of this, autoethnographers do not seek to present a single truth, for no such thing exists, but instead seek to present a verisimilitude, an appearance of the real so that readers can experience some of what the researcher felt and that the interpretation they present is 'lifelike, believable and possible' (Ellis, 1999 p. 674).

Using my experiences of research in the Police service, I hope to illustrate the legitimacy of researcher experience as a topic of study and the importance reflexivity in the research process. I will draw on elements of autoethnographic reporting and analysis (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) to enhance the way in which we can understand the researcher as part of the project and how we don't simply "bring the self to the field" rather "create the self in the field" (Reinharz, 1997 p. 3). Ensuring that the research was a success required me to be able to understand how my gender/masculinity/sexuality were implicated in the research setting and how they needed be managed to allow me to gain access to the everyday lives and experiences of neighbourhood police officers.

Reflexivity and Ethics

Conducting an ethnography brings with it a great deal of ethical complexity. For an ethnographer consideration of ethics should not stop with the ethical approval of the institutions involved in the research (termed procedural ethics by Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) but must be ongoing. Ethnographers must consider ethics in practice, or 'microethics', which are the ethical issues that arise during research as a result of

the complex interactions between researcher and participant. This consideration is best practiced when done in conjunction with reflexive practice.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest that the link between research ethics and reflexivity is rarely made, that reflexivity is primarily seen as a tool for ensuring rigour in research but that a fuller account of reflexivity can lead to better research. They suggest that reflexivity can be used to ensure that researchers are prepared for the micro-ethical issues involved in fieldwork, something which seems particularly appropriate for ethnographers.

Reflexivity and ethical practice means first acknowledging that ethical issues don't stop after the requirements of procedural ethics have been satisfied, that the researcher must be constantly aware of micro-ethical concerns (Ellis, 2007). Further to this, researchers must develop a sensitivity to the ethically important moments of research and develop strategies to respond and deal with these occurrences when they present themselves, perhaps even pre-empting them (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Whilst adopting a reflexive stance does not give a prescriptive method by which to deal with these ethically important moments, it does mean that researchers will be more prepared for them when they arise and understand their importance. It also means that there will be an appreciation of the impact that the researcher's presence can have on the participant's working lives before fieldwork has even begun, allowing them to plan their responses to any situations they can anticipate, although it is unlikely that all ethical situations can be foreseen. Pre-empting as many potential ethical situations as possible is important as the decisions made in response to them are difficult and only become more difficult when made in the spur of the moment.

Again, acting reflexively doesn't indicate to researchers how they should act or what decisions they should make but it does have a number of ethical functions. Reflecting on how research may impact upon its participants and how best to respond to any ethical situations that may arise will allow researchers to develop the skills to respond appropriately. Whilst in the field, reflexivity will make it easier for researchers to identify ethically important moments and in response develop actions that are ethically apt (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Research and Gender Reflexivity in Practice

Ortiz (2005) examined the role that gender construction can play in research whilst conducting longitudinal interviews of the wives of professional athletes. He found that in order to gain acceptance into the wives' exclusive world, he was required to adopt a gender performance that wasn't reminiscent of the 'wrong', hegemonic masculinity associated with their husbands. This prompted Ortiz to adopt a performance he defined as 'muted masculinity', where he consciously altered his speech, appearance and behaviour in order to appear less threatening and encourage a more collaborative research relationship with the wives. In a similar vein, Mazzei and O'Brien (2009) stress the importance of accentuating relevant similarities between researcher and participant. This meant highlighting gendered characteristics that they had in common, such as encouraging conversation about 'partners, weight, family responsibilities, and the like' (p. 369), allowing relationships to form more quickly and deeply.

The strategic deployment of gendered scripts in this way facilitated the researcher's entry into the worlds of their participants and illustrates the importance of acknowledging how gender is implicit in all research projects. Westmarland (2001) and Miller (1999), in their ethnographies of community Police teams found that they were required to not only be very aware of the impact of their own gender but also deploy different gendered tactics to gather data. Westmarland (2001) during the course of her research found herself in Police Vehicles whilst male officers commented on female passers-by and goaded her about her marital status. She was unable to object to this behaviour for fear of being labelled 'sensitive' and seen only as a 'woman' and so joined in with their jokes, essentially mimicking their gender performances.

Research Context: Changes in the Police Service

The Police Service has long been used as one of the stereotypical examples of a 'masculine organisational culture' which prized officers who were 'brave, suspicious, aloof, objective, cynical, physically intimidating, and willing to use force and even brutality' (Miller, 1999 p. 3). This masculine culture not only occurs because of the disproportionate number of men within the organization but also because of the nature of the occupation itself and the inherent power relationships involved in policing. Waddington suggests that policing can be described as a 'cult of masculinity, for the exercise of coercive authority is not something that just anybody can do. It is traditionally the preserve of 'real men' who are willing and able to fight. Confronting physical threat is widely regarded as 'tough' work and as such work is traditionally associated with masculinity' (Waddington, 1999 p. 298). In light of this, previous work investigating police officers found that any characteristic that could be seen as feminine was marginalised and confined to administrative police staff, as not to dilute the macho image of the police officer. Success and acceptance from officers within the Police Service is entirely dependant on an individual's ability to display these behaviours in both a professional capacity and through their gender performances (Westmarland, 2001).

However, the recent introduction of New Public Management ideals and collaborative governance within the police service has created some incongruities between the traditional image of the Police Service and the modern ideals of customer service, partnership working and accountability that are desired today. These ideals were developed and formalised with the introduction of Neighbourhood Policing. Neighbourhood policing and its derivatives (Neighbourhood Management and Citizen Focus) represent the British Governments latest attempt at changing the way in which the Police function. It places greater emphasis on providing local communities with greater access to dedicated local officers, greater influence over policing priorities through increased public consultation and engagement, working in partnership with communities and local service providers to solve problems, and greater levels of victim satisfaction achieved through sustainable solutions and the collection of victim satisfaction data (Home Office website, 2009).

Whilst neighbourhood policing should bring with it a new focus for police officers and a new way of working, there is debate over the extent to which the hegemonic

masculinity of the old Police 'force' has been replaced by new thinking, innovations and new voices (Davies and Thomas, 2005). Due to the nature of their role in the Police Service, Neighbourhood Police officers are required to use different skills to other policing specialisms. Communication, networking and interpersonal skills are all deemed extremely important to the successful operation of Neighbourhood Policing but, at the same time, can also be described as 'feminine' and at odds with the masculine nature of traditional images of policing.

My Research

The focus of my research was to examine whether Police officers were adapting their gender performances in light of the new ways of working described below, to assess whether the greater emphasis on customer service and other feminising influences had any impact upon the gendered organisational culture in British Policing or whether the traditional discourses of policing were being reproduced regardless. Conducting long-term observation of the Police officers was intended to give me an insight into these areas and highlight any unanticipated features of gender performance in the Police. This paper focuses on my experiences of conducting ethnographic research in three different neighbourhood policing teams in a large British Police constabulary.

The teams I observed were located in different stations, spread across the constabulary's area. I spent one month with each of the neighbourhood teams, working similar shifts and shadowing the officers as they went about their day to day duties. In total I spent 40 days based in Police stations and a further 15 days observing the training of new PCSOs in a Police training facility. Observing the gender performances given in policing required me to be present at all times during their working day. This ranged from attending the morning briefing with senior officers, walking the beat with PCSOs, having lunch in the Canteen with the other officers to patrolling the twilight streets in Panda cars. Due to their fluctuating work rotas I tended to follow a nine to five working pattern, which allowed me to be present whilst a number of 'shifts' were present in the station and increase the amount of time I spent with officers engaged in activities other than computer based paperwork. I also tried to spend time working into the night, partly because it was usually the most exciting time to be an observer but also as it allowed me to see the stereotypical aspects of policing in action and gave me invaluable insight into how different environments can impact upon gender performance. During my time I witnessed a range of occurrences including the comforting of victims of crime, issuing warnings to teenagers engaged in anti-social behaviour and the arrest of a number of individuals for crimes ranging from driving offences to assault and public order offences. My presence at these times allowed me to observe the workings of the Police that the public aren't privy to; their private conversations and views, their in-jokes, their attitudes towards criminals and towards victims and each other.

Making Reflexive Decisions before Beginning

In light of the work of Guillemin and Gillam (2004), before beginning my fieldwork I considered the potential 'micro-ethical' situations that I may face during my

fieldwork. Given the nature of my research and its focus on gender and the gendered culture of policing, it seemed likely that I would be particularly sensitive to ethical issues involving gender. These considerations principally centered on how I should present my own gender performance whilst conducting my fieldwork, on how much my performance should reflect my own views and how much it should be manipulated in order to assimilate into policing culture. I also reflected on how I would react if I was present at any situation where I felt that discourses of sexism, misogyny or homophobia were present, whether I would question these occurrences or allow them to play out as they would do if I wasn't there.

Having read a great deal of literature surrounding ethnography, I found that many authors suggest that in order to gain access to the richest data that researchers should attempt to assimilate into their surroundings and try to connect with their participants and gain their acceptance (Mazzei and O'Brien, 2005). I was also informed by research surrounding homosociality in organizations, which suggested that the best way to seek acceptance from a large group of males (although not exclusively male, a high proportion of the officers in the teams were male) was to mimic their behaviours and the gender performances of the hegemonically masculine, as they are the institutional powerbrokers of the organisation and dictate who is accepted and who is excluded (Gregory, 2009).

Having taken these points on board, I felt that in order to gain the most from my time in the police service that I should attempt to, where possible, emulate the behaviour of the police officers, join in their jokes and conversations, adopt the same body language as them and outwardly prescribe to their views of the world and society. I anticipated before, based on the stereotypical view of policing that can be seen in the media and on the work of other ethnographers, that this would mean adopting a very masculine persona. Essentialist understandings of gender would suggest that this should be easy for a male researcher, that mobilising a masculine gender performance should be a fairly straightforward process. Indeed, many of the articles written about gender and research methods rely on stereotypical understandings of the way men and women act and how the sexes relate to each other (Williams and Heikes, 1993). Assumptions based on these understandings of gender suggest that male participants are more likely to reveal more of their true feelings when being interviewed by a woman. However, more sophisticated understandings of gender may suggest that the gender performance a researcher gives can have a bigger impact upon the researcher/participant relationship than biological sex.

In addition to this, I reflected on how I would react if faced with situations that could be considered to be espousing discriminatory or prejudice views. Whilst this may include any number of viewpoints, be they related to race or disability, I believed that those related to gender and sexuality could emerge as the most prominent, given it was the focus of my research. In order to maintain good relations with the Officers and gain as accurate and natural a picture of Policing culture as possible, I decided that if I witnessed any sexist or homophobic exchanges then I wouldn't object or question what was said. I felt that objecting may cause the Officers to become very aware of how they behave and talk when being observed for fear of being portrayed as misogynistic and bigoted. The importance of this decision would become clear during my time in the Police service.

Assimilating into Police Culture

As stated above, prior to beginning my time in the Police Service, my primary understanding of policing culture came from two sources, popular culture depictions on television and film and the academic descriptions of other researchers experiences with the Police. Whilst the former deals in stereotypes and cliché and the later takes a more objective and analytical point of view, they both present very similar pictures of what it's like to work in the Police Service and my experience found nothing to alter this.

As discussed earlier the culture of Policing is a highly masculine one, where the gender performances are some of the closest to the hegemonic ideal that can be observed in modern society. These gender performances weren't solely limited to the male Officers but were also present in the female Officers. Like their male counterparts, female Officers displayed masculine attributes that were seen as key to being an effective Police officer, such as confidence, cynicism, rationality and emotional detachment. The female officers were just as likely to tease their male colleagues, use the crude language associated with homosocial masculine cultures and confidently challenge any member of the public that they believe are not showing them the proper respect. During my time with the Police, I witnessed a middle aged female PC, who was out of full uniform and not immediately recognisable as a PC, challenge a much larger male teenager who muttered something and tried to push past her whilst leaving the Police station not realising she was a Police officer. She responded by standing in front of the man and shouting "Who do you think you're talking to?!" in the teenager's face. The teenager was shocked by this and begrudgingly apologised before being escorted back inside the station by a male PC to be given another 'talking to'.

This sort of masculine behaviour was a common occurrence and numerous other examples could be given here to illustrate the ubiquity of masculine gender performances and why they are important if an individual wants to be accepted. As a result of this, conducting an ethnography in this kind of environment posed a number of problems. Is it possible for a researcher to alter their gender performance enough to integrate into a highly gendered culture? How far should a researcher go to try and assimilate into an organisational culture? How far are researchers subject to the organisational discourses they are observing?

Whilst researching in the Police service I found that the best way to gain acceptance into their working culture was to adopt a highly masculine gender performance and mimic the behaviour of the Police officers. By achieving this acceptance I hoped that I would be able to gain a better understanding of the Officers and their lives, instead of the superficial, measured responses that respondents can often give to researchers they are unfamiliar with. I sensed that being researched was of particular concern to some officers, who questioned my motivations and the impartiality of my study on a number of occasions. I would suggest that this was as a result of the many recent undercover investigations looking at institutionalised racism in the Police Service and a general feeling amongst officers that only the mistakes and questionable behaviour of the Police is highlighted, leaving the general public unaware of their successes.

Unlike Ortiz (2005), deciding what sort of gender performance to give was a fairly straight-forward process. The binary assumptions that underpin understandings of gender within the Police service made it fairly obvious what would be expected of me in order to 'fit in' at the station. Being a man I was subject to the hegemonic assumptions about masculinity and the impact these have on the attitudes of the Officers towards male and female behaviour. These assumptions were projected onto me on arrival and throughout my time with the Police, I was only required to ensure that my behaviour did not contradict how they expected me, or more accurately men, to act.

In light of this, I was required to address my own gender performance. Whilst being male gave me some advantage when entering a heavily male dominated environment, I anticipated that my distinctly un-hegemonically masculine performance would have to be manipulated to aid my acceptance into Policing culture. On a day to day basis this required a constant awareness of how I behaved, the language I used and how I reacted to the other Police officers. This meant avoiding becoming involved in conversations that revolved around 'feminine' subjects and participating in 'masculine' exchanges, laughing and taking part in the in-jokes of the Neighbourhood office and ensuring that my clothes and body language would be seen as 'masculine' as possible.

The 'canteen culture' described by Fielding (1995) was still very evident and was omnipresent despite my presence. This meant that conversations often revolved around drinking, sport and computer games. Sometimes it was impossible to avoid situations which required a certain degree of masculinity to fit in. For example, during a Friday night shift patrolling in a Police van a meal break was taken in the home of one of the male Police officers. During this break the two male Officers, a female PCSO and I sat for 45 minutes and watched the second half of an international under-21s rugby match between Wales and England. Having previously revealed that I was English, I was required to engage in a debate about why the English rugby team was superior to the Welsh team using the meagre amount of rugby knowledge in my possession. This resulted in me making some very general statements about the English rugby team and then encouraging the other Officers to continue giving their opinions and demonstrating their encyclopaedic knowledge of rugby.

It could be argued that during the course of my field work that I placed too much emphasis on 'fitting in' and that my research would not have suffered if I hadn't tried so hard to emulate the behaviour of the Officers. However, some conversations that I took part in would lead me to disagree. Whilst gathered together prior to a morning briefing, a number of the male officers were discussing a computer game that they all had been playing as I busied myself sorting through some papers that I had just been given. Suddenly one of the male PCs asked whether I had a games console and played the game they were discussing, being preoccupied and unprepared to take part in this discussion, I answered "no" with a slight twinge of derision reflecting my dislike of computer games. I could visibly read the reactions of the Officers as they interpreted my response as a slight against them and their love of computer games, possibly inferring that I believed they were only for children. Realising my mistake, I attempted to repair any damage caused by suggesting that my student income meant that I couldn't afford a games console. By drawing on the discourses of being 'a student' (that of not benefiting society at large and subsisting on limited funds) I

hoped that I could restore the power relationship between me and the Officers (Katila and Merilainen, 2002). By portraying myself in this way I believe that my comment was no longer seen as a challenge to their lifestyle and masculinity.

Sexuality in Research

As suggested by other researchers (Bruni, 2006 Ward, 2003 and Croteau, 1996), an often overlooked feature of academic research is the impact of sexuality and the tendency of organisation research to 'lapse into heterosexual blindness' (Bruni, 2006 p. 314). In an attempt to avoid this, researchers must address how sexuality informs and shapes research methodology. In light of this, a crucial aspect of the masculine canteen culture that was evident from the start of my time there was the notion of presumptive heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is an integral part of hegemonic masculinity and any gender performance that subverts the expected sex-gender-sexuality continuum risks alienating the performer from other heterosexual men and women (Butler, 2000).

As a male researcher I was presumed to be heterosexual by the officers I was observing and I chose not to correct them, even though this was not the case. I consciously chose not to make my sexuality known or defined in order not to upset the organisational routine of the Police stations I visited. I felt that introducing external issues of sexuality into the culture of policing and into interactions I had with officers would increase the destabilising and altering affect that the presence of an observer can have on a social setting. In addition to this, I also felt that to observe the culture of policing properly I should examine the heterosexual discourses that present themselves and feared that my homosexuality, if known, could become a barrier to this.

The results of this decision were evident from early on as I was gradually included in the male Police officers discussions about women, in much the same way as Westmarland (2001) was during her ethnography of the Police. It wasn't uncommon for male Police officers to comment on the attractiveness or unattractiveness of the women they encountered. This was a regular occurrence during briefings, where mug shots of criminals were projected onto a large screen eliciting gasps of horror and insults. Whilst patrolling in panda cars, women were referred to as 'monsters', 'stunners' and 'mingers' amongst other things. This important part of the officer's gender performance may have been unknown to me had they been aware of my sexuality and known that I was unlikely to join in as fully as they were given the opportunity.

An additional and unexpected side-effect of allowing Officer to presume my heterosexuality was that they felt able to make fairly controversial opinions that I doubt they would have made otherwise. During my time with the Police I witnessed three exchanges which I would categorise as homophobic, the most serious of which involved a male Police officer recounting how he had been unable to converse with a man he had pulled over because he had a 'camp' voice and had to return to his panda car to hide his amusement. This story was told for laughs to his colleagues in a meeting room and was greeted by laughs from some and concern from others who recognised their potential to cause offence. Whilst these instances were very isolated

and are not representative of the attitude of the Police service as a whole, they do provide illuminating insights into the gender performance and attitudes towards sexuality of some of the officers I observed. Again, I am sure that this story would have not been told had the officer known that I was gay and therefore, my decision to not reveal my sexuality allowed me to gain insights that would not have been possible otherwise.

Whilst recounting this incident and the rationale behind not disclosing my sexuality to another PhD student who was researching the experiences of gay Policemen, they suggested that by not disclosing my sexuality I was not giving the officers a chance to demonstrate how accepting they are of homosexuality and had I made my sexuality known my research would have had a very different emphasis and could have show how Policing culture had changed. While I don't dispute that my research may have changed, I do dispute that it would have demonstrated an acceptance of homosexuality. The artificiality of my presence in the station would mean that it would be highly unlikely that they would be anything but accepting and this may not reflect the real attitudes towards homosexuality in the Police service, to which I make no universal claims.

The Desire for Recognition

The longer I spent with the Police service the more accustomed I became to the environment I was researching until I eventually began to unconsciously adopt the gendered culture of the organisation. As already described, at the beginning of my field work I purposefully attempted to mimic and replicate the overtly masculine behaviour of the officers but the longer I spent with them the less it felt like a research tactic. I began to make comments and behave in ways that I had never done prior to beginning my research.

I first noticed this during a night-time patrol in a panda car with a male and a female PC. Whilst patrolling a deserted scrap yard we all noticed and laughed at a car that had been lifted on top of a large metal container and was precariously close to the edge and looked in danger of falling. Without thinking I remarked "must have been a woman driver" which, whilst neither clever or witty made the male officer chuckle and nod in agreement. The moment I said this I caught myself and questioned why I had said it. I don't consider myself to be sexist and couldn't recall making any similar remarks before, especially to people that I'd only known for a short time and only in a professional capacity and so this remark seemed strange. In addition to this, I found that I was beginning to talk more like the officers, using very similar language and gradually beginning to imitate their frequent use of profanity. Again, this was normally something that I would rarely do in the professional capacity and in the company of relative strangers.

Whilst reflecting on these changes, I realised that I was behaving as a result of the same organisational discourses that encourage masculine behaviour in all Police officers. The presence of and pressure of maintaining homosociality with other officers means that officers are required to behave in a very masculine way or face being socially ostracised and 'othered' at work. As Butler asserts 'it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable

beings' (Butler 2004, p. 2) and, in the case of the Police service, it is only through a masculine performance that anyone can be 'recognised'. As such, I believe that I was trying to achieve the same gendered recognition from the officers and, in order to do this, I began to adopt the dominant social norms and performances of the organisation. I wanted to be accepted and liked by these people for reasons that were entirely separate from my desire to gain rich and detailed data. A similar phenomenon was observed by Ellis (2007), who found it highly distressing when her participants objected to their depiction in her research because of her desire to maintain good relations with people who she considered friends. This could be interpreted as exhibiting her desire to remain 'recognised' and part of a community in which she spent a great deal of time.

I highlight this behaviour to illustrate how vigilant researchers must be when conducting ethnography and examine how their gender performance can change and begin to conflict with their goals as a researcher. Whilst purposefully altering gender performance can aid in the collection of data, when it becomes an unconscious reflection of the discourses of power in the organisation then it has the potential to do the opposite. Concern over acceptance may distract from the critical observation of research participants and result in data that does not attempt to understand the root of gendered behaviour and its wider impact but is more concerned with its description. Also, although researchers can never be truly 'objective' in their observation and understanding of gender in an organisation, they must also remember that they are not a conventional part of this organisation and that they must balance their insider/outsider status and interrogate the assumptions they make about the social world which they are inhabiting.

Reflections on my Research

Having explored the gendered issues that arose before and during my research, it is important to reflect on gendered issues after the research has been completed to examine the voracity of the decisions made whilst in the field. Whilst I understood that gender was always going to be a highly influential factor in my research, the importance of gender performance couldn't be overestimated. As hoped, I found that emulating the behaviour of the police allowed me to observe them in as naturalistic a setting as possible and I believe that my data would not have been greatly altered had I conducted covert research. On entering a station, curiosity generally gave way to familiarity and for the most part the Officers seemed to forget that I was there observing them. I believe that this is an indication that I had been as accepted as I could expect, being an outsider and I attribute this in no small part to the gendered scripts I mobilised.

However, as expected and anticipated in my reflexive questions prior to entering the Police service, being male was not enough to guarantee acceptance from the Officers I was observing. Without giving a highly masculine performance that emulated that of the Officers it would not have been possible to gain data of the same depth and richness, thus limiting the range and impact of the resultant findings. This has far reaching implications for future ethnographic research in the Police. Men entering the Service to conduct ethnographic research, or any qualitative research for that matter, who are unable to give a hegemonically masculine performance will have great difficulty assimilating into Policing culture and collecting data of value. This may

mean that it is harder for some openly gay researchers to study the police, given hegemonic masculinity's direct opposition to homosexuality.

For women, giving the required performance would be even more difficult, not because of a biological predilection towards 'feminine' characteristics but because they will be required to display their masculine credentials far more overtly than a male researcher. As stated before, the officers made many stereotypical assumptions about me because I was male and I was only required to avoid contradicting these assumptions. However, given that female researchers will have 'feminine' characteristics projected upon them by officers, they will have to strive to contradict them and present a highly masculine façade without alienating anyone. Women who act in an overtly masculine way can often be seen as threatening by men and labelled 'lesbians' (Blinde and Taub, 1992) or 'bitches' (Prokos and Padavic, 2002), something which is unlikely to facilitate their acceptance in the research setting.

Conclusions

This paper has endeavoured to highlight how conducting ethnography in a highly gendered organisation, like the Police service, presents numerous challenges for researchers. Attempting to enter into a masculine culture can be very daunting especially for researchers who are unfamiliar with this sort of environment and negotiating an organisation like this can be an exhausting and tense experience. Policing culture is often very overtly masculine and, whilst not openly discriminatory, ruled by hegemonic discourses which do not encourage gender or sexual diversity. Interactions and conversations continually reflect this and can feel alienating to researchers that do not conform to gender norms of Policing. The long history of investigative journalism has also left its mark on the Police service and many officers were initially suspicious of my research and reluctant to voice their opinions on sensitive issues, increasing the need to quickly establish a rapport with participants.

These are all issues that researchers must contend with when conducting research in a masculine culture. Given that the nature of male homosociality means that in order to assimilate and gain acceptance from participants, a researcher must be able and willing to behave in line with the culturally prescribed norms. This can be difficult and researchers that fail to 'fit in' can very quickly find themselves on the periphery of the setting and unable to collect data with the depth and richness that is desired. In addition to this, failing to reproduce or attempting to resist these discourses has the potential to disturb the power relations in the organisation and reduce the insight researchers have into the setting (Katila and Merilainen, 2002).

However, by engaging with the literature and theories of reflexivity, a researcher can develop strategies to aid their integration into a gendered culture and quickly establish relationships with their research participants. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest, reflexivity encourages us to anticipate the ethical and methodological situations that we may encounter, allowing us to be more prepared and determine the best way to react should they occur. Reflexivity, in this sense, was invaluable in my research. It allowed me to consider what the methodological issues I would encounter would be and plan how I would respond. This process proved to be especially important when considering how sexuality would be implicated in my research, as my

decision not to reveal my sexuality led to interesting insights into some of the officer's attitudes towards homosexuality.

By reflexively engaging with gender and the idea of gender performance researchers can also mobilise their subjectivities to enhance their research and benefit from better relationships with their participants. In a similar vein to Ortiz (2005) and Mazzei and O'Brien (2009) who both highlight the importance of emphasising certain gendered characteristics in order to facilitate research, by engaging with gender and the idea of gender performance researchers can mobilise their subjectivities to enhance their research and benefit from better rapport with their participants. Giving a gender performance that mimicked the behaviour of the neighbourhood officers was key to the success of my fieldwork, allowing officers to relate to me more easily, and provided me with insights into the Police service that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

What these strategies make clear is that researching any organisation, especially those that are so overtly gendered, requires a methodology that is also gendered. By conducting my ethnography in a reflexive and gendered way, I am attempting to demonstrate that researcher gender plays an integral part in our understanding and interpretation of a research setting and that explicit measures must be taken to reflect this. It is hoped that this paper can contribute to the growing body of literature that seeks to demonstrate the legitimacy of examining the experience of the researcher and the important findings that can be taken from this. Integral to the use of autoethnographic methods is the acknowledging of how we are implicated in research. What I have presented here is a highly personal and subjective account of my experiences researching the Police service. I do not present it as 'truth' or 'fact', as in my view none can really exist, but as my interpretation of an organisation and would suggest that a different researcher may have a very different reading of the same setting. My interpretation has been heavily influenced by the way in which my own gender, sense of masculinity and sexuality were mobilised and required to emulate the hegemonic norm. Other researchers may find that less identity work is required to assimilate into the Police service and, as a result, they may find that the culture is not as divisive and masculine as I experienced. In light of this, I still hope to have put forward a description of the Police and what it is like to research them that is, as Ellis (1999) suggested, 'lifelike, believable and possible' (p. 674).

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