

## **Challenged bodies: identities at the front line (2017)**

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### Introduction

In this paper we explore how police officers in a post-conflict context construct their individual and collective identities as good professionals in narratives of bodily encounters with others. The paper treats experiences of bodily involvement in the world of one's work as occasions for identity work. We specifically focus on the construction of an identity as a 'good professional', with an emphasis on 'good' as 'ethical'. Our paper thus aims to bring together concerns around ethics, identity construction, embodiment and inter-subjectivity in an exploration of ethical identity construction.

Policing is an interesting context in which to explore this question. What constitutes a 'good' police officer and a 'good' police force is inextricably entangled with the physical performance of police work. A high proportion of police work is performed interactively, with and on the bodies of others, be they members of the public or fellow police officers. The region where the research was conducted has been subject to significant sectarian violence in the past, some of which is ongoing and poses physical danger to police officers. Recent and ongoing socio-political change has included police reform with a change of name and symbolism and greater political oversight. Public order work continues to present a higher proportion of policing than in other police forces but 'normal' policing (community policing, crime prevention, etc.) is now more significant than in the past. These characteristics pose particular challenges for the (re-)construction and maintenance of individual and collective professional identity.

### Theoretical framework

Following Diprose (2002) we build on the assumption that identity is performed through the body; that embodiment, inter-subjectivity and performance are central to identity work. In this theoretical framework we draw on notions of the centrality of the body in human perception, knowledge and identity (particularly Merleau-Ponty) and of the construction of the self as performance (particularly Goffman), as well as the literature on the constructed and relational nature of identity processes and identity work (as also summarised in the call for papers for this sub-theme). In the interest of brevity, we limit ourselves to a few key theoretical observations that guide our approach to the empirical analysis.

Firstly, we follow a poststructuralist reading of identity (e.g. Brown, 2015; Coupland and Brown, 2012; Clarke et al, 2009; Ford et al, 2008) where identity is not approached as something given and routed in some internal essence but is constructed through an inter-relational and co-productive social endeavour (Watson, 2008; Beech, 2008). Policing work is characterised by varied social encounters with others outside the organisation (members of the public encountered in routine situations, such as on the beat, victims of crime, perpetrators of crime, etc.) and increasingly takes

place in a context of intense public and political scrutiny in the wake of police scandals, reduced budgets and perceived heightened threats to public safety. In the particular context of the police force studied here, police reform has meant heightened external scrutiny, both formalised through various political governance structures and informal through media and other external interest. What constitutes the good police officer is thus co-constructed between individual police officers, the discourses prevailing in their organisation and the wider societal discourses around policing. A research question that follows is how individuals working in the police then construct themselves as good police officers in conjunction with and against others inside and outside the organisation and in the context of organisational and societal discourses of good policing.

Secondly, the body is seen as central to identity. Merleau-Ponty is often considered as the thinker who has paid the most attention to the significance of the body in relation to the self, to the world, and to others (Reynolds, n.d.). His central argument is that a sense of the self and the world is constructed primarily through pre-cognitive body-perception and body-action. In addition, our bodily actions and perceptions are largely habitual; learnt through imitation and responsiveness to others within an environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; also see Taylor, 2005; Reynolds, n.d.). The key point here is that, for Merleau-Ponty, human subjectivity does not reside in some kind of disembodied, mental realm but in the subject-body of everyday existence. This can be applied to a sense of ethics and ethical selves. Pullen and Rhodes (2015) criticise prevailing conceptualisation of organisational ethics as focusing on rationalised notions and processes of ethical decision making and organisational codes of ethics, “[forgetting] the value of affectual relations, care, compassion or any other forms of feeling that are experienced pre-reflexively through the body” (ibid: 160). There is a normative hope expressed in many of the few extant studies into an embodied ethics at work that a focus on embodiment might provide a more caring, authentic antidote to dominant, hierarchical and oppressive ways of constructing organisations and ethics (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Knights, 2015; Clarke and Knights, 2016). However, bodies can be used to reinforce hierarchical and managerial constructions of organisation (Villadsen and Meier Sørensen, 2015). Our paper thus makes no prior assumptions that bodily constructions of the good police officer are necessarily non-hierarchical, non-oppressive or indeed ethically ‘better’ than rationalised, non-embodied constructions. Rather, we take a step back to ask *how* participants construct their sense of a good professional in their narratives of bodily encounters with others, aiming for thick descriptions rather than normative assessments.

Thirdly, identity formation is by necessity inter-subjective and interactive. It can only occur in our bodies’ interaction with others and with the world. Here, as well as in its insistence on the primacy of the body-subject, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology echoes the tenets of the pragmatist philosophy of William James and John Dewey (Groe, 2008; Shusterman, 2005; Field, n.d.). The inescapably relational nature of identity has also been stressed by Coupland and Brown (2012), Jenkins, (2008) and Diprose (2002). It is through the shared experience of the body in the world, with others, that we can empathise with and give to others (Diprose, 2002; Groe, 2008). While much of the literature has focused on the role of societal and organisational discourses shaping identity work (e.g. Beech, 2008; Brown and Coupland, 2012; Watson, 2008), concrete relations and encounters with individual others are clearly equally (if not more) important to building a sense of one’s own identity (e.g. Clarke et al, 2009; Watson, 2008). How one behaves (and sees oneself as behaving) in concrete situations involving others builds up a sense of self. This leads to our core research question for this paper, i.e. how police officers, particularly those at the ‘frontline’ of policing, i.e.

constables, sergeant and inspectors, reflect on encounters with members of the public and fellow officers to construct a sense of identity as good police officers.

Finally, identity is performed. Here we follow Goffman's (1959) insights into the way in which individuals perform their identity on a day to day basis in front of varying audiences and in conjunction with varying teams. Goffman (1959) provides an underpinning for the assertion that a combination of drama, interaction and self-narration allows individuals to legitimise their ideal identities (Down and Reveley, 2009; Bardon et al, 2015). Of particular relevance to our analysis are the concepts of team performance and the idea that individuals not only perform with their teams but also for other team members. Furthermore, routines and performances that might first have been put on for extraneous reasons, will – over time and with repeat performance – be incorporated into the 'real' self and become authentic. Here, Goffman's argument somewhat parallels Merleau-Ponty's notion of the habit forming characteristics of repeated body-action.

## Methodology

We follow the example of other research taking a socially-constructed, discursive and narrated approach to identity (Brown, 2015; Coupland and Brown, 2012; Clarke et al., 2009; Down and Reveley, 2009) based on interview data. The research project started with the main aim of understanding participants' identifications with a Code of Ethics and had not originally included a deliberate focus on embodiment. In order to gain an in-depth picture of participants' ethical identifications, we included a range of broad questions on the nature of their work and their ideas of a good police officer. We particularly encouraged participants to tell us stories about how they had dealt with situations they had found particularly challenging in their work. Many of the narratives that were thus produced included – sometimes very vivid – accounts of bodily encounters with others. During our initial analysis it became clear that these narratives of encountering the *other* in bodily, everyday work situations were important in terms of participants' accounts of their self-identities as good police officers. This led us to focus explicitly on these narratives as one important focus in the further analysis.

Data was collected through 37 individual, semi-structured interviews with police officers and members of staff in one particular European police force. Due to the nature of the organisation, sample selection and recruitment of participants had to go through gatekeepers in the organisation, in this case two relatively senior, active police officers and one member of staff who was not a police officer. We met with these gatekeepers in advance of starting data collection to discuss the need for a purposive sampling strategy and the importance of maximising the variety of participants in terms of age, length of service, hierarchical position, role in the organization (e.g. detective, close protection unit, staff member, etc.), gender, and membership of the two dominant community groups. The gatekeepers then arranged for us to interview participants who met these requirements for variety as far as possible. The final sample was somewhat skewed towards long serving, lower ranking frontline officers but we also interview several officers in the next two ranks up, several detectives, and several non-officer members of staff, including two high ranking compliance officers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the narratives of bodily encounters with others that are of interest in this paper all came from actual police officers, rather than other members of staff. In this sense, the sample represented in this paper consists of proto-typical rather than extreme cases.

All interviews were conducted at police premises in the course of one week in March 2015. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were audio recorded (with 2 exceptions) and transcribed. We used a fairly loose, semi-structured interview schedule, which included questions on participants' motivations to join the police, their experiences of police work in the particular post-conflict context in which this police force operates, their notions of what constitutes a good police officer, critical incidents of (ethically) challenging situations they had experiences, and their views with regards to the Code of Ethics.

We used NVivo to aid our analysis of the narratives provided by participants, following a template analysis, as described by King (2004). In the initial coding we identified all narratives within the interviews that related to police officers physically encountering others in their work. Sometimes these narratives were small stories with beginning, middle and end but often they were what might be call micro-narratives, little snippets of a story involving a work situation with others. Often the *others* in these narratives were members of the public but in a number of instances they were fellow police officers. As a next step in the analysis we looked for recurrent themes in these narratives. The themes we identified related to such overarching categories as challenges to the body itself ('vulnerability', 'danger/hostility', 'suffering' and conceptions of ethical conduct, virtues or values (as 'bravery', 'impartiality', 'protecting the vulnerable'). In a further step of analysis we considered the language used in the narratives, paying attention to verbs that expressed bodily action (e.g. looking, running, hitting, etc.), language to describe physical attributes (such a physical appearance, sex, etc.), words relating to the staging or the performance itself (the scene, the protagonists), and the use of pronouns where it is suggestive of how the narrators see the relation between themselves and *others* in the particular narrative.

As a final consideration in this methodology section it is worth reflecting briefly on the notion of 'performance' in relation to these narratives and the limitations of our research approach. The narratives we are analysing are all, in some way, about 'performing' the 'good' police officer, usually both ethically and professionally 'good'. They tend to describe a 'scene', performed on some kind of 'stage' by the narrator and at least one other protagonist. However, these are post-hoc narrations of events. They may narrate single events that have happened in a form relatively close to what is being narrated or they may be a narrative of an 'idealised' event, composed by the narrator from various parts of his/her own experience and the stories of others (e.g. other police officers). In either case, we as researchers of this particular study have access to these events only through the post-hoc narration of the research participants in the course of the research interviews. In addition, the interviews themselves should be seen as a performance, in this case involving both the interviewee and the interviewer, occasionally glimpsed by an audience consisting of other police officers and staff, as well as the other researcher present on the premises. What we are analysing in this paper are research participants' stories about 'performances' of the 'good' police officer, stories that are themselves part of a 'performance' of a research interview. Less than perfect recall of real life events, the 'literary' licence of 'story telling' and the (possibly less than fully conscious) desire for a presentation of self that is both socially acceptable and congruent with their own self-image by the research participants separates us as a researchers from the narrated events and we need to be careful to recognise and acknowledge this throughout our analysis and its subsequent narration in this paper.

## Performing the 'good' police officer through one's body

In this section we discuss several excerpts from interviews that focus on inter-subjective, bodily performances of the identity of a good police officer. We explore how bodily encounters with others provided occasions for the interviewees to consider their (self)-image of a good police officer.

### Encountering the public

Participants told numerous stories of physical encounters with members of the public in the course of their work. In a number of cases, participants used such narratives to illustrate what it meant for them to be a good police officer. In these narratives, members of the public were most often characterised as vulnerable or antagonistic in some form, sometimes both at the same time. The following excerpt, from an interview with a female police officer, illustrates a number of themes that run through the narratives.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*If we were called out to somebody who had been really badly beaten or stabbed or something and we were trying to keep the scene for forensic evidence, so when we arrive in my mind as a police officer I don't look at this person, this person might be a member of a group that is plotting to kill me. I look at this person, this person is in real danger here, he's been stabbed, maybe his head has been stamped on and it's my job now to secure evidence so that I can find out who's done this and also to try and get him medical help.*

One theme here is that of vulnerability, danger/hostility and protection: the vulnerable body of the victim, who needs protecting and attending to because he has been badly injured in an attack; but also the vulnerable body of the police officer herself, who is stepping into a potentially hostile situation where she herself could be hurt. We could even read the setting itself as vulnerable, a crime scene that needs to be secured for further investigation.

Another, related theme is bravery. Although the participant argues that she did not consider the potential danger to herself while in the situation, she clearly does so on retelling the story. So stepping into that situation – onto the stage of this particular performance we might say – requires some disregard for her own safety, physical bravery.

Impartiality is another theme. Being a good police officer means attending to all victims of crime, regardless of their membership of a particular sectarian or criminal group. The victim is first and foremost a victim and the fact that he may also be a member of a potentially hostile group, who under other circumstances might even pose a danger to the police officer, is irrelevant in carrying out her duties.

We can make a number of observations about bodily performance of identity based on this short excerpt. One observation regards the response to the body of the other. The participant uses language that seems in line with Merleau-Ponty's assertion of the primacy of body-perception. She *looks* at this person (as a vulnerable victim of crime) and it seems to be that *looking* that draws her in, that compels her to protect and help the victim, the *other* who is calling out to her if we were to use Levinas's (1969) language. At the same time, she *does not look* at that person (as a potential terrorist), she is impartial, she treats all victims of violence the same. So she focuses on the *other*

who needs her help, who is calling out to her, which requires that she does not look at the *other* who is a potential danger to herself.

She is also looking at the scene in order to establish what needs to be done: physically securing the scene so that forensic evidence can be collected, calling medical help for the injured victim. Although she doesn't say this explicitly here she seems to be talking about a performance of duty that is to some extent habitual or routinized. She will have had training in how to behave at a crime scene and will potentially have performed the same routinized behaviour numerous times before.

The excerpt also allows us to make some observations about the entanglement of individual and collective identity. The participant starts out by using the pronoun *we*, thereby constructing a collective identity, either with other police officers attending the same crime scene or perhaps conjuring a typical scenario that would apply for most of the police force. But then she switches to *I*, suggesting that she is now perhaps more vividly recalling an incident in which she was actually involved but also saying something about her own understanding of herself as a good, professional police officer. Her sense of her own performance as a good police officer is presented as congruent with her sense of how any good police officer would perform.

From this short excerpt we can gain a surprisingly vivid idea of this participant's idea of her own self-identity as a good police officer: she is impartial, concerned to protect vulnerable others, brave in the face of potential danger to her own body and able to carry out her duty in a professional, routinized manner even in a setting that poses potential difficulties and even threats.

Other narratives add to the themes of vulnerability, hostility / danger, protection and bravery by providing notions of gendered identity performance; body performance designed to protect the vulnerable and deter the hostile; and the disruption to a self-image of a good police officer if body-habits seen as desirable break down.

#### Protecting the vulnerable, dealing with aggression

The next two excerpts pick up the themes of encounters with variously vulnerable or aggressive members of the public, in stories of how police officers use their bodies to protect those that are vulnerable and deter those that are aggressive.

##### **Excerpt 2**

*[...] some people can become very aggressive and very agitated and it's only at that stage that a police officer ... somebody out in the street might behave in a certain way, [...] my role as a police officer, if somebody gets to the stage where they're becoming quite aggressive then I become a barrier very quickly and I have to identify myself as a police officer.*

##### **Excerpt 3**

*I'm very old fashioned in this, you know if you're at home in the middle of a domestic, your husband's got you cowering in the corner, do you want to see a 5' 5", 8 stone policewoman coming in thinking 'what am I going to do here' or would you like to see someone like me coming through the door and finishing it there and then for you.*

These two narratives pick up the themes of a vulnerable other who needs protecting against an aggressive other. The first excerpt is from an interview with a male officer working in the personal protection unit and the potentially vulnerable other would be a politician, diplomat, judge or similar

who they are protecting. The second excerpt describes a common policing situation, that of dealing with domestic violence, and is from an interview with a long-serving, tall and muscular male officer.

What is interesting about these narratives, in addition to echoing the familiar themes of vulnerability and danger/hostility, is how in both cases participants describe using their own body – their own appearance and manner in Goffman's terms – in their performance of good policing. Also noteworthy seems that these are descriptions of very male performances, explicitly so in Excerpt 3 but also implicit in Excerpt 2. By describing the performance of their own bodies in a potentially conflictive situation, these two participants are constructing a highly gendered identity of a good police officer as someone who is strong, tall, fit and male, able to calm down a potentially conflictive situation through his mere, physical presence.

In both these excerpts, participants again use embodied language, in this case less evidently of body-perception and more explicitly of body-action. In Excerpt 2 the participant describes his own body as a physical barrier between a vulnerable and an aggressive other, the body is used as a tool. The same seems implied in Excerpt 3, where we may easily imagine the police officer standing between the aggressive and the vulnerable party to the domestic incident. In addition, the participant here describes the vulnerable victim as *cowering* before the aggression of her husband. We may assume that words were also spoken (or perhaps shouted) in these instances, and that the police officer would also have attempted to calm the aggressor down by talking to them, while at the same time perhaps talking soothingly to reassure the victim. In fact, Excerpt 4 below alludes to verbal responses used by police officers to diffuse a potentially hostile situation. However, in the two excerpts above, the participants are foregrounding physical action over words, giving a stronger sense of body-action as part of the performance of a good police officer.

Like in Excerpt 1 we are getting a sense of how individual and collective identities are interwoven. In Excerpt 2 the participant moves between *a police officer* and *I* several times, using these terms nearly interchangeably. He is creating a congruence between his own individual professional identity and the collective identity of police officers in general, suggesting that the description of his behaviour is how any police officer in his situation would behave. Here, all police officers in this kind of situation are seen as the same. In Excerpt 3, on the other hand, the participant presents police officers as not all the same and thus ruptures collective identity. A physically tall and strong, male police officer is presented as being more suited to the job of protecting the vulnerable victim of crime than a - smaller and more slightly built - female officer would be. A male body makes a better police officer than a female body. This suggests a sense of a collective identity of strong, physically intimidating police officers from which females – and perhaps smaller and less physically strong males – are excluded. Belonging to and exclusion from a collective identity are thus constructed in terms of body-appearance and body-action.

Excerpts 2 and 3 narrate a front-stage scene, where the participant is cast in the role of the lead protagonist, the hero of the scene, whose action vis-à-vis the other actors (the aggressor and the (potential) victim) we are invited to see as saving the situation, as in *becoming a barrier* or *finishing it for you there and then*. We may also note how, in Excerpt 3, the participant uses the second tense singular, *you*, thus casting the (female) researcher as an active member of the audience, inviting her to imagine herself in the role of the (female) victim. This seems designed to blur the front-stage of the actual domestic incident with the back-stage of the research interview, which not only makes

the narrative more vivid but affirms the role of hero that the participant has assigned to himself here.

The next two excerpts pick up the theme of dealing with members of the public that are perceived to be aggressive.

**Excerpt 4**

*If somebody is nasty and aggressive with you, the normal human reaction would be to be defensive and aggressive back, but certainly as a police officer you have to be quite controlled all the time, you have to know when to up your vocal, that's really your basic communication or your facial expressions and sometimes that can diffuse a situation by being assertive and firm.*

In the above narrative, the participant describes the body-actions that characterise a good police officer in tense situations with hostile others. Here the participant is focusing on the bodily manner which is most likely to lead to a successful performance in such situations, including voice, facial expressions and – probably – body language. From this excerpt we may perhaps also extrapolate a sense of learned bodily habits. If the normal reaction is defensiveness and aggression then the good police officer has to learn body control and a habitual response that uses different body strategies.

In this excerpt the good police officer emerges as someone who not only has learned to control certain bodily impulses but is able to deploy a number of body-actions in a performance designed to deflate a conflictive situation. We note how this body-control is depicted as something that is common to the collective identity of good police officers by the use of the generic *you* to mean any person in that particular role and situation, thus turning the narrator into any good police officer, identifying his own identity with that of the collective.

So far, we have looked at narratives that maintain and re-affirm the narrator's identity as a good police officer. By contrast, the next narrative is of a hostile public order situation where the positive self-image of a police officer in control of his/her body-actions is disrupted.

**Excerpt 5**

*The public came out and they got bored waiting so they decided to try and antagonize us and it was, 'I can't believe we are even here and this guy who's spitting at me and kicking my shield and calling me absolutely every name in his vocabulary that he can find to throw at me [...] somebody in the middle of ranks of police officers shouted charge which wasn't the done thing. It's not even a formal order, but everybody because they were so pent up exploded out the blocks and drove this crowd back. There was no violence but they were just pushed back down the street, but I remember the guy in front he thought that his days were numbered [...] I mean I didn't hit him or anything, I just pushed him back down the street. It was just like a champagne cork going off.*

This is a story of a violent encounter with others, where perhaps instinctive body-actions took over and led to an escalation of a tense situation rather than its containment. The participant offers this up as a story where things went wrong, where his sense of individual and collective professional identity were challenged. This is another narrative (like Excerpt 1) where the participant uses



language that seems to foreground body-perception. The antagonistic other is *spitting* and *kicking*, he is *throwing* abusive language at the participant. The reaction is also described in vividly physical terms, as *exploding*, *pushing*, (not) *hitting*, and again in terms of a kind of explosion as a champagne cork violently coming out of its bottle. In the middle of all this chaos, vividly described through the use of verbs denoting aggression and violence, good policing practice is (temporarily) lost. This is too much, or at least the wrong kind of, physical encounter with the other. The narrative produces a sort of violent alter ego of the normally calm, good police officer.

The sense of disorder is reinforced by the multiple protagonists in this narrative. On the one hand there are *the public*, *they*, an anonymous collective out of which aggression arises. The anonymous mass then becomes a single hostile other, *this guy*, *he*, who is the aggressor at first and then becomes the one at the receiving end of the participant's own aggression, as in *the guy in front* who is being pushed back by the narrator. On the other hand are the police officers deployed to guard and contain the demonstration, of whom the narrator is one. He uses the first person singular, *I*, throughout, interspersing it with the occasional *us* and *we*. So he is talking about his own body-actions, which are similar to those of the concrete collective of police officers deployed on that occasion. *We* is not meant to include all police officers here, it is no generic collective but a concrete collective of those there on that day. The break-down of body control thus applies to the narrator himself and other police officers present on that occasion but not to the collective of police officers in general. Unlike the other narratives we have examined so far, this one is also in the past tense, describing a remembered concrete situation, whereas the previous four narratives are in the present tense and could apply to an individual remembered incident but could just as well be an amalgam of real and imagined situations, designed to give an image of how things are (and should be) in general. The past tense in Excerpt 5 signals a single incident, marking it as an exception rather than the norm, and simultaneously temporally distances the narrator from the incident. More generally applicable and temporally proximate narratives of 'good' policing as norm thus contrast with a singular, temporally distant depiction of 'bad' policing as exception.

### Performing with colleagues

In the previous sub-section we have focused on encounters with the *other* outside the participants' organisation, members of the public. We now turn our attention to narratives involving *others* inside the same organisation, building a picture of the inter-subjective performance of identity in conjunction with colleagues. The following interview excerpt is a vivid example of bodily danger and harm, solidarity with colleagues in the face of hostile others, that seems to build a sense of collective identity for the participant:

#### **Excerpt 6**

*There's something up on the wall about the 300 odd police officers killed [during the conflict]. There's one guy [John], he died in 1987, when he was 17. [John\*] was my Scout leader, I was in the Scouts in those days and I knew [John] was in the police and he knew my father was in the police and that would be my first direct influence of somebody who I had known personally was killed in the police. [John] was blown up, I didn't go to his funeral, and that was my first introduction as a police officer. And you'll see the very last man on that page is a guy called [Pete\*] and that night [he] was injured I was standing beside [Pete] and another saved me, he was a full time reserve, [Mike\*], and that one blast bomb, a piece of copper ended up in [Pete's] face underneath his eye*

*and he dropped beside me and [Mike] got all the shrapnel into his knee. I wasn't touched and poor [Pete] lost his life three weeks later in hospital and [Mike] ended up, he couldn't cope with the post-traumatic stress. He left the police and he was the last police officer who died and to be standing beside [Pete] as [a fellow officer from the same side of the community] [...], they're the sort of things you have to deal with, that was a colleague, he's a human being.*

(\*All names altered)

This narrative picks up again on the themes of vulnerability and bravery in the face of external hostility/danger but in terms of a different inter-subjectivity. Here the focus is not on the encounter with members of the public and instead on the relationship with fellow officers and the danger that officers face together, standing together and protecting each other in the face of violence from others. Standing together in the face of danger was a recurrent narrative, serving to construct a collective identity supported by a strong sense of belonging and of comradeship and rooted in a heroic, physical image of police work. Due to the conflict that had characterised the past of the area in which this police force operates, public order policing and the dangers that entails to police officers was foremost in many participant's idea of what police work consisted of. Protecting one's comrades and being killed or severely injured in the line of duty may be read as a narrative of the ultimate, most extreme body performance of a good police officer and a good police force, characterised by bravery and solidarity.

A noticeable feature of the narrative in Excerpt 6 is its highly personalised nature. The narrator uses *I* throughout, emphasising his personal involvement in the story, his personal presence at some of the events he is narrating, as well as perhaps the physical danger to him personally and his good luck of escaping physically unharmed. However, the narrative does not seem to be mainly about the danger to himself and his narrow escape from injury but rather about the bravery and personal suffering and sacrifice of comrades, who he talks about by name throughout. It is one of very few narratives we collected through our interviews that makes extensive use of first names and makes it very personal. This is also, again, a very male narrative, a story of a time when this particular police force employed very few women and the experience was one of male bonding in the face of a common enemy (the violent demonstrators in this case). The next narrative is of the bodily experience of a female officer working to become a part of this male-dominated collective identity.

#### **Excerpt 7**

*I was the first female [stationed in a particular rural police post] and you're going in there thinking right people are going to be looking at you and there's, you feel pressure and a lot of it is self-imposed actually. Like I have to be better, but you don't, you just have to be. [...] we were working [...] like a joint military police base, so the military always went out on foot patrols [...] and I can remember the first time I was detailed and they did 12 hours, the military did 12 hour foot patrols. The first time I was detailed for this my Sergeant says [...] 'I'll find somebody else if you don't want to do it', he was trying to be nice [...]. I said no I'm going to go out and I remember the first time I went out, 12 hours, and I had my rucksack and I didn't go to the toilet, I didn't drink because I was out with 12 soldiers, all male, [...] and I thought I'm not going under the ferns. [...] And I came back after the 12 hours and one of the soldiers actually said to me, 'you're the first [police] officer that stayed out with us for the full 12 hours, most of your*

*colleagues end up coming out for a maximum 8 hours'. And I went 'right, does that make me look a bit silly now?' Cause the next morning I woke up and [...] my face was peppered with bites [...]. So it is memorable for so many reasons. [...] But actually it was good cos all my male colleagues they went 'flip she stayed out for the full 12 hours, there's soldiers on base going 'she's the first officer that we've had for police that has actually stayed out'.*

Here, the participant tells a vivid story of one of the harder and less pleasant bodily aspects of her work. The story was meant to be slightly funny and at the same time conveyed considerable pride in having herself proven to be physically stronger than most of her male colleagues, not just being one of the boys but being better than the typical male fellow officer. The story was produced in response to a question from the researcher about what it was like to be a female officer in a male-dominated profession and organisation. Here she constructs her identity as not just a 'good' police officer but one that is 'better' in terms of physical endurance, an area where male officers could perhaps find it easiest to construct themselves as superior and better suited to police work than women (and we have some interview passages where male participants were indeed expressing their sense that female officers were a problem because they were less physically strong – Excerpt 3 above is an example). Although the participant says she put the pressure on herself to be better than other (male) officers and there is no actual need for this, this is a story of a less comfortable belonging to a collective identity, one that has to be fought for by demonstrating bodily endurance.

This narrative also has a strong performative aspect. The outdoor 'stage' is quite vividly described, with additional description of the forest setting in the sentences we cut to make the overall length of the excerpt more manageable, with woods, ferns and plenty of biting insects. On this stage the narrator is performing for several audiences: herself (perhaps most importantly), the members of the army with whom she is out on patrol and in front of whom she doesn't want to appear weak (and who she also doesn't want to stare at her in the intimate situation of a toilet break), and her fellow police officers, particularly her sergeant, to whom she wants to prove that she is at least as tough as they are, if not more so. In telling the story during the research interview, she is also performing for the (female) researcher, who she may want to impress at some level but with whom she may also wish to create a level of female solidarity in terms of talking about the pressure women put themselves under in order to fit in with a male environment.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of this data set is ongoing but some points of discussion and tentative conclusions regarding an embodied performance of an ethical professional self are offered here.

From a theoretical point of view, it seems evident from our analysis that participants construct a sense of individual and collective identity as 'good' police officers through narratives of embodied inter-subjective performance. They develop a sense of self through recounting bodily performance in relation to members of the public that may need to be protected but whose hostility may also need to be deterred and contained. Their sense of collective self in particular also resides in stories about shared physical danger and bodily solidarity with fellow officers.

Participants are constructing stories about their embodied performances with others, echoing Down and Reveley's (2009) interweaving of self-narration and dramaturgical performance in a somewhat different manner from that paper.

These narratives were told in the context of research interviews that the participants knew to be concerned with policing ethics (although we asked few explicit questions about their sense of ethics or ethical practice). Although they do not articulate an explicit account of ethics, they give us a view of the participants' implicit conceptions of ethical practice. Firstly, they construct the good police officer in terms of a series of virtues: bravery, justice (impartiality), strength and perseverance. Secondly, they express an ethics of care: care for the victim of crime who needs to be protected by the body of the police officer, care for fellow officers with whom one stands shoulder to shoulder – both physically and metaphorically.

From a theory perspective, our paper offers insights into the links of embodiment, performance and narratives in constructing the good organisation and the good professional. From a practical perspective, achieving good professional practice may be as much about schooling tacit body-action patterns as it is about conceptual understanding of decision making rules and best practice. Learning by imitating the body-actions of experience fellow officers may be an important way in which new recruits are inducted into an identity of a good police officer and a good police force.

Our findings may be echoed in other similar settings, for example the military, fire brigades, search and rescue teams, ambulance services or similar. Close attention to narratives of bodily performance of identity may also bring empirical and theoretical rewards in other, less overtly physical occupations.

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#### Literature to consider

- Cunliffe, A., & Coupland, C. (2012). From hero to villain to hero: Making experience sensible through embodied narrative sensemaking. *Human Relations*, 65(1), 63-88.