Chapter 2

THE PROBLEM OF LOYALTY IN GREEDY INSTITUTIONS

Abby Peterson* and Sara Uhnoo*
Department of Sociology and Work Science
University of Gothenburg

ABSTRACT

Loyalty is commonly regarded as a virtue, by many social theorists as a lost virtue in an increasingly individualized world. We argue that loyalty is not altogether lost, rather loyalty is institutionally demanded and enforced in certain working life enclaves, amongst others, the police force. In these enclaves, demands for total commitment and exclusive loyalty pose inherent dilemmas that generate problems for both the working environment and the services that the organisation is obligated to deliver. In this chapter we interrogate how ethnicity interfaces with the police culture and organisational structure in a major Swedish police force. We focus on the role that loyalty plays in defining how ethnicity interacts with mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion at the administrative level of the organisation as well as with the structures of rank-and-file police culture. The police authorities, perceived as ‘greedy

* Abby Peterson, Professor in Sociology, Department of Sociology and Work Science, University of Gothenburg, Box 720, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden, Abby.peterson@socav.gu.se.

# Sara Uhnoo, Phd. Sociology, Department of Sociology and Work Science, University of Gothenburg, Box 720, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. Sara.uhnoo@socav.gu.se.
institutions’, demand and enforce exclusive loyalty. We argue that ethnic minority officers are rigorously tested as regards their loyalty to their fellow officers and to the police organization, and the demands made on their undivided loyalty and the misgivings as to their unstinting loyalty act as barriers to inclusion in the organization. We conclude that loyalty must be moderated if a police force is to work effectively in the best interests of society, or, to put it another way, the greed of greedy institutions must be controlled.

**Keywords:** Ethnic minority police officers, greedy institutions, loyalty, police culture, Sweden

**Funding:** This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council for Working Life and Social Research (grant number 2009-0011)

**INTRODUCTION**

Loyalty is commonly regarded as a virtue, by many social theorists as a lost virtue in an increasingly individualized world. We argue that loyalty is not altogether lost, rather loyalty is institutionally demanded and enforced in certain working life enclaves, amongst others, the police force. In these enclaves, demands for total commitment and exclusive loyalty pose inherent dilemmas that generate problems for both the working environment and the services that the organisation is obligated to deliver. In this chapter we will interrogate how ethnicity interfaces with the police culture in a major Swedish police force.1 We address the role horizontal relations of loyalty plays in defining how ethnicity interacts with mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion in the structures of rank-and-file police culture, but also vertical relations of loyalty at the administrative supervisory levels, in particular police security officers’ screening of new recruits and the culture of retaliation against ‘whistleblowers’.

Within the Anglo-American sphere of policing, there has been a concerted drive to recruit minority officers in order to better reflect the populations they are policing (for the United Kingdom see Cashmore 2002; Foster *et al.* 2005; McLaughlin 2007; and Walklate 2000; for the situation in Denmark see Vikkelsø-Slot 2012; in Norway see Egge *et al.* 2008; and for Europe see van

---

1 This chapter further develops an article published in the European Journal of Criminology (vol.9 no. 4, 2012).
Ewijk 2011). Sweden is no exception and the police authorities have instigated various programmes to encourage ethnic minority officers to apply to the police academies. While these programmes have met with only limited success and ethnic Swedish officers still heavily dominate the police force in Sweden, the ambition is to increase the numbers of ethnic minorities within the force. Loftus (2008) emphasizes the pressures the police forces in Britain are under to manage the questions of diversity in new ways, which has resulted in Britain, as in Sweden, in a top-down drive to produce cultural change and enforce tolerance towards minorities within the police force and non-discriminatory treatment of ethnic minorities among the citizenry (see Marks 2000; Holdaway 1997). Despite the top-down directives of police management and their obligatory police ethics programmes, we have found that ethnic minority officers in Sweden are still often met with suspicion, as well as subtle forms of exclusion and discrimination (Uhnoo and Peterson 2011; Peterson and Uhnoo 2012). In particular, we found that their ‘loyalty’ to their group and the police organisation was put under doubt (cf. Politidirektoriatet 2005 regarding the situation in Norway). Much in line with Bethan Loftus’ research, we found that ethnic minority officers risk repositioning as ‘outsiders’ within (Loftus 2008: 769).

Brown (1988) succinctly describes how loyalty toward colleagues protects those who share in the police culture from strains and hazards of their working environment, such as potential on-the-job dangers and the unique coercive powers officers possess, and from the strains and hazards of their organisational environments, that is, their ambiguous role as crime fighters, service providers and order maintainers and the potential punitive scrutiny of their superiors.

The police culture demands of a patrolman unstinting loyalty to fellow officers, and he receives, in return, protection and honor: a place to assuage real and imagined wrongs inflicted by a (presumably) hostile public; safety from aggressive administrators and supervisors; and the emotional support required to perform a difficult task. (Brown 1988: 83)

As a reward for ‘unstinting loyalty’ police officers are offered protection, honour and emotional support. When doubts are cast as to officers’ unstinting loyalty they are a priori excluded from this support net.

Paoline (2003: 203-4) depicts the traditional occupational police culture as ‘widely shared attitudes, values, and norms, which serve to manage strains created by the nature of police work and the punitive practices of police
Abby Peterson and Sara Uhnoo

management and supervisors’. He subsequently emphasizes that the cultural mandate of loyalty is a function of both the occupational and organizational environments. Officers must depend on one another. Hence the norm of loyalty to the peer group is a powerful imperative. Loyalty is the underlying codex for the police culture. We will argue in this chapter that ethnic minority officers are rigorously tested horizontally as to their loyalty to their fellow officers as well as vertically as to their loyalty to the police organisation and the demands made on their unstinting loyalty and the misgivings as to their unflagging loyalty act as barriers for inclusion in the organisation. The horizontal and vertical relations of power that maintain and enforce loyalty are intricately interrelated in the “greedy institution”.

**Theoretical Framework**

**The Police As a Greedy Institution**

Lewis Coser (1974) developed a conceptual framework for understanding institutional demands of ‘total commitment’ in his classic work, *Greedy Institutions*. While individuals in today’s differentiated society move from one sphere of life to another and each sphere is relatively limited in the claims that it can make on the individual’s loyalty and commitment, some modern institutions are ‘greedy’:

Yet the modern world, just like the world of tradition, also continues to spawn organisations and groups which, in contradistinction to the prevailing principle, make total claims on members and which attempt to encompass within their circle the whole personality. These might be called greedy institutions, insofar as they seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and they attempt to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their demands on the person are omnivorous (Coser 1974: 4).

In this chapter we argue that police organisations possess the characteristics Coser identifies as typical for greedy institutions. For an institution to fit Coser’s framework, members’ involvements must interfere with and take precedence over participation and loyalties to other groups and organisations (Segel 1986). Our research question is then how the structural mechanisms of the police organisation and especially the police culture strive to harness the ‘total commitment’ of police officers. Coser shows that in contrast to the ‘total institution’ identified by Goffman, ‘greedy institutions,
though they may in some cases utilize the device of physical isolation, tend to rely mainly on non-physical mechanisms to separate the insider from the outsider and to erect symbolic boundaries between them’ (Coser 1974: 6). We maintain that the police culture provides the non-physical mechanisms that separate the insiders—police colleagues—from the outsiders—the citizenry that might make claims that conflict with their demands as to loyalty. Coser considers greedy institutions to be based on voluntary compliance; we will return to the notion of voluntary compliance later in the text.

**Police Culture**

Extensive research has distinguished the components of police culture. It can be understood as ‘a set of shared informal norms, beliefs and values that underpins and informs police outlooks’ and behaviour towards the citizenry they police as well as their fellow officers (Loftus 2008: 757). Paoline (2003), who has organised this research, provides a coherent analytical framework. He argues that police culture comes in part from the occupational environment, which consists of the officers’ relationship to the citizenry. He has found that the two most highly cited elements of this working environment are the presence or potential for danger; officers’ preoccupation with the danger and violence which surrounds them and the unique coercive powers and authority they possess over citizens (see also Skolnick 1966). Further, police culture comes from an organisational environment characterised by two key elements: punitive supervisory oversight and the ambiguity of the police role. Both of these elements, just as the elements included in police officers occupational environment, create stress and anxiety. The way in which police officers then cope with these strains and hazards are, according to Paoline (2003), found in the prescriptions of the police culture. He identifies two widely cited coping mechanisms for helping officers regulate the occupational environment: suspiciousness and maintaining the edge. He also identifies two coping mechanisms for protecting them in their organisational environment: ‘lay-low’ or ‘cover-your-ass’ and a strict adherence to the crime fighter image thereby eliminating the ambiguity of their multiple roles. These mechanisms prescribed by the police culture work to minimize stress and anxiety, which is created by these environments, and guides both their attitudes and behaviours. Paoline (2003) points out that the coping mechanisms of the police culture are transmitted through a socialization process across occupational generations, first in the academy and later throughout the officers’ tenure as an officer. Van Maanen (1975:215) succinctly described this socialization process: ‘The police culture can be viewed as moulding the attitudes—with numbing regularity—of
virtually all who enter’. In a greedy institution, which Boldt (1970) would define as a tight society, expectations on the individual members are imposed and received, as opposed to proposed and interpreted, subsequently there is more emphasis on behavioural and attitudinal conformity (see also Merton 1949 and 1959). Paoline continues:

The problems officers confront in their occupational and organisational environments, as well as the coping mechanisms prescribed by the police culture, produces two defining outcomes of the police culture: *social isolation* and *group loyalty* (Paoline 2003: 203).

Social isolation, a product of police officers’ occupational environment, tends to separate police from ‘non-police’ creating a ‘we versus they’ attitude toward citizenry. This separation between police officers and the citizenry, which is a structural feature of greedy institutions (Laub-Coser 1984: 222), strengthens the bonds between police officers and makes possible strong group loyalty (see also Savitz 1970: 694; van Maanen 1975: 218). Subsequently, the defining outcomes of the police culture – social isolation and group loyalty – are intimately intertwined. Social isolation generates intense group loyalty and group loyalty counteracts social isolation.

**The Nature of Loyalty within the Police**

According to Ewin (1990: 2), loyalty ‘plays a very important part in our moral lives, and it will play an important part in a police force in enabling significant virtues to flourish’. Loyal officers do not perceive the tasks of their office as simply an externally-imposed job but as integral to their personal responsibility. Further, loyalty will matter to a group such as the police more than it matters to most. ‘If one is to go out in the company of a partner to face considerable dangers, for example, one needs to know that that partner will treat one’s interest as his or her own, that his or her courage will come into play when one is threatened’ (Ewin 1990: 3). Quite simply without ties of loyalty and trust between fellow officers, police work would be much harder to do. In this sense loyalty is a ‘good thing’ and an integral factor in good police work as it produces a high degree of teamwork. Nevertheless, loyalty within the police is a double-edged sword. Richards (2010) illustrates this with situations of misplaced, misguided or divided loyalty. He refers misplaced loyalty to officers turning a ‘blind eye’ to police misconduct, misguided loyalty when the duty of upholding the law comes second to the officers’ loyalty to their supervisors, and divided loyalty that may ‘arise in all manner
of situations, and involve police officers who, either through choice or
circumstance, find themselves members of groups that, even if not originally
in rivalry, become so’ (Richards 2010: 236). Loyalty appears to lend itself
readily to excesses, ‘such as chauvinistic loyalties leading to unjust
discrimination against people who are not in the group and to insensitivity to
the feelings and legitimate interests of those people’ (Ewin 1990: 41). Savitz
(1970: 699) maintains that on the one hand police perceive the citizenry as
capricious, uncooperative and unreliable. On the other hand they tend to
perceive the police force as a bureaucratic structure, which does not properly
protect its own. Therefore, latent structures develop which place the highest
premium on loyalty among fellow officers. The shield of secrecy is the
personal and conscious concealment of information not only from the public
but also from supervisory and administrative levels within the organisation.
The dark side of this shield is that it protects officers guilty of misconduct and
corruption. Adherence to the principles of secrecy and the unwritten code of
conduct assures mutual aid, meaning, and the expectation of maximum
assistance from everyone to anyone in trouble. Loyalty has a utilitarian
function within police society and its emotive base in personal interactions of
its members (Lodge 1978: 240). Individuals bring their histories to their
loyalties (Fletcher 1993). Loyalty is associated with a feeling of ‘we-ness’ and
its intensity varies according to the spatial distance between the individual and
the group, the interaction frequency of group members, to the functional needs
of group members, and in the case of police, mutual support and protection
from punitive supervisors (Roseneau 1967: 414). One becomes loyal to an
organisation, to a group, or both through the membership process, but more
importantly, as a result of identification with the group (Fletcher 1993: 66).
Entry into the group and subsequent identification with the group is partly
mediated by the characteristics of the group. Costa and Kahn (2003) argue that
diversity in the group, and ethnic diversity, in particular, can make high levels
of identification and participation in the group more difficult and weaken the
sense of loyalty among members. Feelings of loyalty are most readily achieved
in homogeneous groups among like-minded members. Group loyalty requires

---

2 While the police culture demands loyalty it does grant autonomy (Brown 1988: 85). Loyalty to
the organisation and the group does allow a degree of individualism and tolerates
differences, for example, the different styles of policing distinguished by amongst others
vary in intensity among officers, there is no reason to question that officers are no longer
loyal to one another. Rather, there appears to be some boundaries to a cultural
fragmentation of police culture. The question remains as to what differences are tolerated
and what differences are not.
interactions with fellow members, but commitment to interacting with fellow members varies with the group’s ethnic composition (Costa and Kahn 2003: 540). The Swedish police force, while it has become more gender equal, is still ethnically highly homogeneous (Uhnoo and Peterson 2011). On the one hand, the ethnic homogeneity of the Swedish police obstructs the entry of ethnic minority officers within the group, i.e. they are met with more suspicion by the police organisation and by their fellow officers (Uhnoo and Peterson 2011; Peterson and Uhnoo 2012). And on the other hand, ethnic minority officers have more difficulty in identifying with the other group members, the ethnic Swedish majority.

Richards (2010: 232) argues that ‘police services are disciplined organisations, and loyalty works upwards, downwards, and sideways’. In this chapter both horizontal loyalty (between fellow officers) and vertical loyalty (organizational commitment) are analysed.

Background and Data

In early autumn 2010 Swedish Radio aired a critical programme on ‘racism within the police’. Police employees within the Västra Götaland Police District, with ethnic minority backgrounds, testified in the programme anonymously as to widespread discrimination and abusive jargon directed to ethnic minorities. This was a clear case of external whistleblowing, whereby employees of the Police District directly alerted media journalists as to the unsatisfactory situation for ethnic minorities employed in the district. In the wake of the ensuing media debate the Police Commander of Västra Göta’s Police District appointed an external inquiry into the situation for the District’s ethnic minority employees. The authors were contacted to conduct the evaluation, and this chapter draws on the data collected for this larger research project (Uhnoo and Peterson 2011).

We interviewed subjects recruited through the Police District’s internal website. We explained the purpose of the inquiry and encouraged police employees with ethnic minority backgrounds to participate. We emphasized that the evaluation would be used to better the situation of ethnic minority police employees. We guaranteed their anonymity and invited participants to read the report prior to its release. Twenty officers contacted us and agreed to participate; eleven men and nine women of whom seven were civilian police employees and thirteen were sworn officers. This chapter is based on data collected from the sworn officers, five women and eight men. The officers had
The Problem of Loyalty in Greedy Institutions

varying number of years on the force and varying positions within the force. All of the interviewees had an ethnic minority background, for instance, born in a non-Scandinavian country within or outside of Europe, born in Sweden with one or both parents from non-Scandinavian countries within or outside of Europe, or adopted.³

We recognise that our sample is relatively small but would suggest that it is large enough for our analytical purposes given the small number of sworn officers with ethnic minority backgrounds on the force. In 2009 14.6 per cent of the civilian employees had ethnic minority backgrounds and only 4.6 per cent of the sworn officers. This is in a region where 38 per cent of the population in the urban centre have ethnic minority backgrounds.

What is interesting in regards to our discussion in this chapter was that the overwhelming majority of the interviewees agreed to participate in the study in order to provide what they felt was a more accurate picture of the situation for ethnic minority officers in their police district and thereby to counteract the accusations of racism and discrimination expressed in the media.

While they were not uncritical, they above all wanted to provide us with a more nuanced perspective than what had been aired in the radio programme. In a sense they more or less agreed to participate in the inquiry out of loyalty to their colleagues and the police organisation, which they felt had been unjustly treated. We note that the sample may be biased to the extent that more critical ethnic minority officers are under-represented.

Loyalty Enforced and Monitored

The greedy institution that is police culture demands the total commitment and the exclusive loyalty of its members.

In this chapter, we argue that the police culture, together with the greedy character of the police organisation, provides the mechanisms whereby the Swedish police force we studied could demand, enforce and monitor the loyalty of ethnic minority officers. Coser (1974) further argues that greedy institutions need to constantly monitor and test members to prove their

³ The interviewees chose the place of the interview and the semi-structured interviews varied between one and three hours in length. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. According to the contract agreement with the Police District, the authorities ‘owned’ the evaluation report and the authors ‘owned’ the raw data, which could be used for further research. The interview excerpts in the chapter have been translated by the authors and certain personal details have been omitted to ensure anonymity.
‘worthiness’. But the police is greedier towards some members than towards others.

I think that more is demanded of them (police with ethnic minority backgrounds) than of a Swedish officer, they are tested a little more ... Can I trust him or her? They have to prove that they can be trusted so they wouldn’t snitch, tell their family or their ethnic groups. What ties does he have to his family or ethnic group? So they are more mistrustful of them than ordinary Swedish colleagues. (male police inspector with 30 years on the force, Eastern European)

These trials are underpinned by the prevailing power relations within the Swedish police force that place a priori ethnic minority officers under suspicion as to their individual loyalty. Ethnic minority police officers are constantly tested as to their loyalty, both horizontally to their fellow officers and vertically to the wider police organisation.

Horizontal Relations of Loyalty

It is especially the rank-and-file police culture that enforces the loyalty of minority officers and subjects them to everyday trials of their worthiness, that is, their attachment to their fellow ethnic Swedish officers.

Total Personality and Group Submission

The police culture effectively isolates police officers from sources of identity outside the police organisation (Reiner 2000 and Loftus 2010). ‘Being insulated from competing relationships, and from competing anchors for their social identity, these selected status occupants find their identity anchored in the symbolic universe of the restricted role set of the greedy institution’ (Coser 1974: 7-8).

An insulated institution can begin to take over the ‘total personality’ of the members (cf. Puddephatt 2008: 166). However, some ethnic minority officers experience their insulation from competing relationships as difficult; whatever they do they cannot entirely ‘fit in’ with what they perceive is the social identity of their Swedish colleagues.

I can adapt to the Swedish culture, but maybe not to a 100 per cent. I always feel like I just don’t fit in. Maybe I don’t have the same interests, I don’t have a house, Volvo and dog. I maybe have other interests. And maybe
since before I joined the police I had some friends that are sort of our clients so to say. So I am always under suspicion… So I feel pressed, like I am torn in two directions. I have lost quite a lot of friends because I am a police now. But you have to fit in, in the police, otherwise it is damn tough. (policeman, 6 years on the force, former Yugoslavia)

Another interviewee discussed the suspicion that ethnic minority officers are met with and coupled this suspicion with what she perceived as their lack of integration in Swedish society. She awards a priori ethnic minority officers an outsider status that is at odds with a full-fledged belonging to the Swedish Police Force.

They (ethnic minority officers) aren’t really fully accepted. … they still live a little isolated. And I think that what is demanded is that they are more integrated in Swedish society and they aren’t really. So you think what does he really have for bonds to his family and his ethnicity? So they have it tough. (Policewoman, ten years on the force, Eastern European)

Policing is often regarded by officers as a vocation or calling. Reiner (2000: 4) explains that ‘policing is conceived as the preservation of a valued way of life, and the protection of the weak against the predatory’. Police officers see themselves as ‘the thin blue line’ that stand between chaos and order. This crime fighter identity serves as a powerful imagery, which separates police from those outside the police.

It provides a unique sense of exclusiveness, at the same time as it entails honour in the role of a police officer. ‘Greedy institutions are always exclusive’ (Coser 1974: 8). However, when officers submit to the exclusiveness of the greedy institution they are offered a degree of upward career mobility and, most importantly, they are offered an enhancement of their egos, which is a consequence of a sense of being needed (Laub-Coser 1984: 221; see also Richards 2012: 233). Hughes (1965: 3) writes that particular professions, such as police forces, “are dependent upon a close solidarity, upon its members constituting in some measure a group apart, with an ethos of its own … a deep and lifelong commitment”. In order for ethnic minority officers to assume the privileged identity as a crime fighter he or she must commit their ‘total personality’ in Coser’s terms to the prevailing social identity of their ethnic majority colleagues. The ‘blue’ police officer identity in the Swedish police is a Swedish ethnic identity, which allows little leeway for retaining ethnic minority loyalties, or a sense of identity with ethnic minority family and friends, that is, those ‘outside’ the police force.
Trials of Worthiness

The police group or unit is the ‘greediest level’ in the organisation. Police officers are especially tested as to their loyalty to the group and their closest fellow officers. ‘This strong feeling of our collective, it protects us. We protect each other, we don’t rat on each other’ (police woman with 10 years on the force, Eastern Europe). It is at this level that ethnic minority officers are most rigorously tested as to their loyalty. At this level in the organisation the police code of secrecy is enforced, offering protection from the prying eyes and ears of superiors. Can colleagues be trusted not to rat on you?

As soon as you go to your group chief and talk about someone else in the group, it is just not allowed, the culture does not allow it. You can’t report on a fellow officer, things are not that open. You would be seen as a complainer and rat. It is seen as disloyal to talk about someone else. Police are in general damn hard to criticize. (male police inspector with more than 20 years on the force, Eastern European)

Cashmore (2001) argues that ethnic minority officers who encounter racism on the job, from careless remarks to outright racist slurs, tend to later contextualize and reinterpret these actions on the part of ethnic majority officers as a ‘test’, a kind of trial. They can meet deliberate and occasionally even coordinated attempts to ‘test’ ethnic minority colleagues in order to prove their loyalty to the group. If they pass the ‘test(s)’ they hope to be assured backup in a dangerous situation. Police talk conveys the common-sense elements of police culture and as such is a vital source of information for the socialization of officers; it provides cues for how officers interact with the citizenry and their fellow officers (Loftus 2008 and 2010; Shearing and Ericson 1991).4

You can get it (discriminatory language and slurs) out in the open here in a safe environment. We all have confidence and trust in one another. It’s

---

4 Researchers have found that women police experience intense pressure to ‘prove themselves’, and in order to gain the acceptance of their male colleagues and inclusion in the prevailing police culture, they tended to adopt the norms, values and behaviour of the culture (Martin 1980; Young 1991). Loftus (2008: 772) extends this adaption by women to the white, heterosexual male bias of police culture to include the ethnic minority officers in her study. She found among many of the ethnic minority officers, that they embraced comparable perspectives on being a ‘bobby’ to those of their white colleagues. Her findings resonate with research focused on officer attitudes, few statistical differences were noted for ethnic minorities (or women) (Paoline et al., 2000). While our study of ethnic minority Swedish officers dovetails to a degree with this research, we did find attitudes among these officers that were at odds with those of their colleagues. In particular many tended to take offence at the way their ethnic Swedish colleagues talked about ethnic minorities.
important to have that bond as a team. (male officer cited in Loftus 2008: 764)

How then do Swedish officers talk about ethnic minorities? We found that banter, jokes and casual remarks that abound among the police to be heavily laden with discriminatory language and slurs. This was a taken-for-granted element within what Waddington (1999) has called ‘canteen talk’. Ethnic minority officers could be confronted with offensive jokes about their ethnicity, but were seldom directly confronted with outright discriminatory language. However, ethnic minorities among the citizenry were routinely referred to in discriminatory and abusive language. This was an element in the Swedish police culture that ethnic minority officers were expected to accept. Further, they were tested as to their acceptance of the prevailing perspective of ethnic minorities as ‘police clients’.

My sergeant kids around a lot, the language is pretty offensive if you know what I mean. He tested me a little when I came to the unit to see what I went for. But I kid around a lot too so he understood pretty quickly that we were on the same wavelength, so he just continued along with his jargon. He knows that he can kid around with me and I won’t take it badly. (Policewoman, three years on the force, adopted)

To find acceptance in the group the officer must be prepared to accept the prevailing police culture’s jargon, which is heavily laced with abusive language regarding ethnic minorities. Even if many of the officers we interviewed expressed that they found the prejudices and ethnic jokes ‘tiresome’, ‘course and dumb’, ‘unprofessional’, ‘irritating’ or ‘embarrassing’, they had to devise survival strategies.

It has happened to me that someone has poked fun at me, at my workplace. Colleagues have joked about my [ethnic] background: ‘now you had better hold on to your wallet for now a [his ethnic group] is coming’. I haven’t let it offend me even if I don’t think that it is such a funny joke. But I still think that it isn’t harassment, it’s just that they want to joke around with you and they do it pretty awkwardly. So I don’t take it badly. (Policeman, 10 years on the force, Eastern European)

5 In contrast with Britain, racist language is discouraged but there are no direct official sanctions against the use of racist language.
A policewoman said that after engaging in banter with colleagues she was left with a bitter aftertaste. Nevertheless, she felt that ethnic minority officers had to find ways to cope with the prejudices and abusive language, which routinely fill the air. It is their ethnic Swedish colleagues that set the tone and content of the jargon they are expected to tolerate and even take part in. In short, many expressed that in order to survive in the force they have to join in and even be prepared to make fun of themselves—‘you can’t take it personally’

According to Holdaway (1993: 31), loyalty to colleagues prevents a questioning of the acceptability of racial jokes and banter. However, as Cashmore (2001) points out, this enforced acceptance of racist abusive language, and ethnic minority officers’ perception or reinterpretation of racist abusive language, acts as a deterrent to challenging racism in police work and contributes towards its continuation.

The most discriminatory and abusive language is aired within the ‘safe’ confines of the group. ‘What we say to each other stays with us’. ‘What we say in the confines of our “metal bubbles” is between us’ (Uhnoo 2013). The police code of secrecy protects the use of an abusive jargon. And officers, including ethnic minority officers, have to be trusted that they will protect these spaces, what Loftus (2008) called ‘white spaces’. Protected from supervisory eyes and ears, officers could vent steam that often took the form of racist and ethnic discriminatory talk. In our study we found that ethnic minority officers are also zealously defensive of these protected spaces. They also defended the need for spaces in which us could vent frustrations over encounters with a hostile them.

The test of their loyalty, their worthiness to be a part of the group, is the degree to which they can identify with their colleagues’ prejudices and abusive language. Conversely this is an inquiry into the degree that they have cut ties with their ethnic minority identities. Even as police identify themselves very strongly as police and as a group sharply separate from the general public, they tend to make even sharper distinctions between themselves and parts of the citizenry they perceive as problematic, that is ‘police clients’. Swedish society is wrought with deep social and economic divisions separating the ‘insiders’ from the ‘outsiders’, which is reflected in the police culture. In Sweden today the ‘outsiders’ are increasingly found among ethnic minorities living in the social and economically depressed urban housing estates where police ‘presence’ is heavy. The police mandate is to police the symptoms of disadvantage, which makes the ethnic minority residuum increasingly
marginalized through the institution of policing (Loftus 2010; Reiner 2000). One of our interviewees expressed the situation succinctly.

You can’t close your eyes to the fact there are a lot of immigrant men that are committing crime. But at the same time you know, we get the same information as everyone else and all research says, that it is more of a social problem. You just have to look. Where are you on the wage ladder and where do you live? That is a much stronger factor than nationality. (Policeman with over 20 years on the force, Eastern European)

The paradox lies in the fact that deeply rooted within the rank-and-file Swedish police culture there is a perception of ethnic minorities as comprising a dangerous criminal class—an ethnicized ‘underclass’ (Crowther 2000: 155)—which it is the basic mandate of the police to control and contain. When the ethnicized underclass other (ethnic minority officers), i.e. the hostile them, enters into the midst of us ‘insiders’ within the police force, they become internal ‘outsiders’ (Holdaway 1993: 21). Their ‘worthiness’ as crime fighters maintaining the ‘thin blue line between order and chaos’, where order means Swedishness and chaos the dangers posed by ethnic minority under-classes, is then questioned as to its structural credibility.

Conflicts of Loyalty

Institutions that we define as potentially greedy have different intensities of greediness (Laub-Coser 2012: 222). Since loyalty is dependent on relationships, and relationships are constantly shifting and might be of different strengths, loyalty admits to degrees (Richards 2010:226). This implies that a police officer may be more or less loyal to the police. Despite this, loyalty is often conceived as exclusive. That is, when individuals express loyalty toward some individual, organisation, or group, they may forsake other loyalties by default.

Loyalty, by definition, generates partiality, an identification with the objects of one’s loyalty rather than with its competitors. Fletcher (1993) argues that there are always three parties, A, B and C in a matrix of loyalty. ‘A can be loyal to B only if there is a third party C … who stands as a potential competitor to B, the object of loyalty. The competitor is always lurking in the wings” (Fletcher 1993:4). This conception of the notion of loyalty as exclusive undergirds the potential conflicts of loyalty that can arise.

Ethnic minority officers can feel that members from their ethnic group wait in the wings, ready to make a demand on their shared ethnicity in
Abby Peterson and Sara Uhnoo

opposition to the police. Richards (2010: 236) discusses ‘the acute discomfort of divided loyalties’ that may ‘arise in all manner of situations, and involve police officers who, either through choice or circumstance, find themselves members of groups that, even if not originally in rivalry, become so’. Ethnic Swedish officers can in turn have misgivings that in a given situation with a specific ethnic group a fellow officer sharing this ethnic minority background can betray their loyalty to the police group.

There are some groups with very strong internal bands with their landsmen and I think that it is more difficult for them to work as police. Their landsmen demand that they help them. [A colleague] has told me that he is sometimes seen as a traitor. They expect favours. It is the same thing when we have brought in individuals from their ethnic group. Then their relatives call this guy and try to fish for information. It is just their tradition. They take it for granted, that is what they do in their homeland, that is how they help each other. (police inspector with 30 years on the force, Eastern Europe)

This conflict of loyalty is based on normative expectations of exclusive loyalty to the police but also on normative expectations of other groups (ethnic communities) claiming the same exclusive loyalty from the minority police officers. The young police rookie from the Middle East discussed the conflict of loyalty he is faced with:

There is loyalty to my colleagues and loyalty to my employer, those are different kinds of loyalty. One feels split between the two sides. Your family expects things from you and your police colleagues maybe expect other things from you. And the police expect that in that kind of conflict of loyalty you will be on your family’s side, so you are automatically put under suspicion.

Another officer we interviewed expressed a similar conflict of interests. He preferred to socialize with ‘his’ people rather than with his colleagues on the force with whom he felt he had little in common. However, he found himself now in rather a bind. If he socialized with ‘his’ people, his police colleagues would question his loyalty to them and the force; but his friends, among ‘his’ people, might in turn question his loyalty to them. This officer found himself in an unenviable position within a tension-filled matrix of loyalty relations.

Situations of conflicting loyalties are not just a problem for this particular group of police officers, but also a potential dilemma for all police officers.
All police officers are expected to handle situations of conflicting loyalties professionally. However, in the case of ethnic minority police it becomes a source of suspicion and exclusion, based on a stereotypical normative conviction that ethnic minority groups demand loyalty in their confrontations with the police authorities. These kinds of conflicts of loyalty, whether these are actually experienced by the minority police officers or, as is more often the case, their fellow officers suspect that ethnic minority officers will be caught in conflicts of loyalty, are mechanisms which position ethnic minority officers as ‘outsiders’ within. Conflicts of loyalty, both real and imagined, exclude ethnic minority officers from full inclusion in the police community (cf. Politidirektoriatet 2005; Egge et al. 2008).

**Vertical Relations of Loyalty**

Two types of mechanisms to enforce and monitor vertical relations of loyalty are found within the police organisation: screening new recruits and a culture of retaliation against whistleblowers.

*Screening New Recruits*

Coser (1974: 6) writes that “greedy institutions are characterized by the fact that they exercise pressures on component individuals to weaken their ties, or not to form any ties, with other institutions or persons that might make claims that conflict with their own demands”. The police officers we interviewed expressed their strong sense of ‘we’ in contrast with the ‘them’ outside of the police force.

> We have an extremely strong esprit de corps, which is very positive, but even in a way negative. A ‘we’ and ‘them’, we are those employed by the police authorities and them are *everyone* else outside” (policewoman with more than 20 years on the force, Eastern European; her emphasis).  

This esprit de corps, a characteristic of the working environment, is the underlying mechanism within the police culture that isolates officers from their surrounding environment. However, we found that the police authority can more directly make demands upon new recruits to cut off contact with individuals or groups that they fear may make conflicting demands on their personnel. To a large degree this is the result of the police authority’s security staff’s demands on new recruits. Ethnic minority officers are subject not only
to the exclusionary practices embedded in the police culture of the lower ranks, but even exclusionary procedures and directives from the top-levels of the police organisation (McLaughlin 2007).

The official explanation for the more rigorous screening of ethnic minorities is that they pose potential security risks (see also Politidirektoriatet 2005 for a similar argument). However, why are minority police officers and civilians with a minority background considered security risks?

This unsupported conclusion is based on normative expectations regarding loyalty dilemmas, minority officers are considered as potential objects to blackmail from an imagined ethnic community outside the police. In the police district under study an extensive network of ‘organized criminals’ in the area was used as an argument for applying higher security demands on persons from minority groups seeking civilian employment within the police.

The police authorities in Sweden can enforce loyalty among new recruits. The following vignette illustrates this function of the police security screening. We interviewed a young rookie from the Middle East who had been confronted with the ‘problem’ that he had helped the son of close family friends seek help for his drug abuse and related criminal behaviour. His connection with the young man caught the attention of the police authorities where he was based during his training. He was informed by his superiors (the director of personnel and the chief of security) that he must break all contact with the young man, which he did, but not without expressing his dissatisfaction with their accusations of relations with criminals. He was then informed that he would never get a position in that police district. ‘Colleagues will never be able to trust you when you enter a duty room, you will just be met with silence. No one will believe you. No one will trust you’. He felt that he was a priori ‘as one of our clients’. In Sweden, very often ethnic minorities are perceived as potential police ‘clients’.

He interpreted the situation as a question of his loyalty as it led to a chain of accusations that tested for possible rivals. When his training at the academy was completed and he applied for his trainee position in three different police districts he was made aware that these accusations had been forwarded to even these districts. However, his educational records were delayed and the police district where he was accepted began investigating the accusations first prior to placing him in a unit. The security checks at this district are unusually

---

6 This is a similar procedure to what is called the “phone jacket” in the USA. An officer who has been questioned as to his loyalty, who has been made internal complaints, etc., will have these accusations follow him when he or she attempts to apply to the police within another state (Johnson 2005: 81).
rigorous, which is an explanation as to the low number of police with ethnic minority backgrounds. He was finally allowed to complete his trainee period and is now employed in this district. However, he feels that the demands made on him to prove his loyalty to the police authorities, which meant leaving family and friends on the other side of Sweden, was costly. ‘You have to understand the sacrifices that I have had to make’. He points out that in his case the police authorities became directly involved in his private life, making demands as with whom he could socialize with. ‘I had to give up my previous life, without question’.

He is convinced that police rookies with ethnic minority backgrounds, and particularly Muslim backgrounds, are met with mistrust and are tested as to their loyalty far harder than their Swedish colleagues. ‘There is an enormous uncertainty when it comes to Muslims, the whole thing around terrorism which leads to suspicion and extra hard security inspections. Why do they even let us in the Academy’? Further he is unsure as to how he can prove himself and his loyalty to the police aside from the fact that he has left his family and friends. ‘What do I have to prove? How are you going to begin to trust me’? And while he has successfully completed his trainee period this mistrust in his loyalty continues to haunt him. The police district’s security chiefs have informed him that if he applied for a position within the police authority that involved a higher security clearance he would not get it. ‘It’s OK if I work as an ordinary patrol officer or sit with investigations. That will work. But if I have ambitions to set my sights a little higher up then I can more or less forget it’.

A Culture of Retaliation against Whistleblowers

The police authorities are one type of organization that makes whistleblowing—to ‘go public with information about corruption, fraud and abuse in their own organization’ (Johnson 2005:74)—very difficult. Whistleblowing ‘threatens the solidarity and sense of oneness of police who feel victimized by a critical media, an intolerant general public, and a demanding police administration’ (Rothwell and Baldwin 2007: 611). Paoline (2003: 203-4) defines the punitive practices of police management and supervisors as one part of the traditional occupational police culture and

---

7 Among the police rookies in this district in 2009 only 3.9 per cent had an ethnic minority background in contrast to the national average of 7.4 per cent. As the district is a major urban area with a high percentage of ethnic minorities in the population and hence should be an attractive employer for ethnic minority officers, this situation is probably a result of the degree of rigorousness in the security clearances for prospective officers.
identifies a coping mechanism for protecting police officers in their organisational environment: ‘lay-low’ or ‘cover-your-ass’.

According to Chan (2003), new police recruits are quickly socialised into a culture of not telling, and discover that whistleblowing is often extremely unadvisable. Whistleblowers within the police are subject to dire consequences — harsh retaliation, not only from supervisors but also from peers, as for example, personal complaints, a hostile work environment, ostracism, no cover, demotions, undesirable job assignments, unwanted transfers, closed doors for promotion and terminations (Skolnick 2002; Johnson 2005; Cancino and Enriques 2004). ‘Rats are scorned, shunned, excluded, condemned, harassed, and almost invariably, cast out. No back-up for them’ (Bouza 1990: 50).

Whistleblowing to media, so-called external whistleblowing, appears to be the most sanctioned form of criticizing the police organisation. These officers and civilian employees would appear to be most vulnerable to retaliatory sanction. However, even internal whistleblowing is discouraged by the police culture’s ‘blue code’ of silence (Skolnick 2002).

A number of the interviewees in our study commented on the closed nature of the police; they regard their organisation as unsupportive of critical voices. Fear of retaliation was one of the main reasons why officers conformed to the norms of police culture and why they remained loyal to the police organisation. Rumours about ‘difficult’ employees spread across the department and most often result in unwanted transfers. Particularly one unit is mentioned in the interview as a ‘dumping ground’ for ‘problem’ officers.

What we hear is that the department isn’t at all open for critique. You have to think twice about what you say and to who you say things … at the moment it is one of the supervisors in CID that has been transferred, he was said to have become uncomfortable for the organisation and the brass just transfer him out in the cold. … the message we get is that it isn’t a good idea to criticize. We see that those that have been ‘difficult’ just disappear to (a particular unit); we joke a little that the troublemakers end up there. (Rookie woman, Eastern Europe)

Another considers the police organisation archaic and undemocratic, pervaded with negative sanctions against critical voices:

I honestly feel that the force is large and when it comes to governing it feels like it is based on a hierarchy from the 1800s. What I mean is that if you say the wrong thing to the wrong person and go past your supervisor, you
The greedy institution’s demands of exclusive and unstinting loyalty lead to an inherent problem within police authorities, which is not unique, we argue, to Swedish police forces. Loyalty must be moderated if a police force can effectively work in the best interests of society, or to put it another way, the greed of greedy institutions must be controlled. The assumptions about conflicts of loyalty particular to minority officers, based on normative and stereotypical expectations about ethnic groups, needs to be problematized and discussed in order not to exclude minority officers from full inclusion in the police community (cf Politidirektoriatet 2005; Uhnoo and Peterson 2012). However, it is also important to strengthen individual minority officer’s preparedness and capacity to handle perceived ‘real’ situations of loyalty conflicts (cf Vikkelsø-Slot 2012).
Nathanson (1993), among others, argues that loyalty need not be seen as mutually exclusive. Loyalty need not be considered as an ‘all or nothing’ concept in that there are degrees of loyalty and that being loyal is not necessarily coupled with uncritical support or unquestioning obedience. Loyalty can be, and should be, tempered. Byers and Powers (1997) point out, for example, that police loyalty to a law enforcement organisation need not mean that the officer(s) is simultaneously disloyal to the best interests of society. However, the perceived exclusiveness of loyalty underlies the unwritten police code, which is a cornerstone in police culture. Under this code it is impermissible to criticize other police, in particular, if the criticism is aired to ‘outsiders’. According to van Maanen (1975: 221), ‘Thou shall not rat on a fellow officer’ (van Maanen 1975: 221). Ewin (1990) points out that the code exaggerates the need for, and the benefits derived from, mutual loyalty and support. Distorted the code not only reduces but makes almost impossible apprehension and punishment as a deterrent to police misconduct.

Loyalty has the potential of producing moral dilemmas given its conceptual ambiguity, and despite its function in fostering professional relationships. For example, loyalty to people can come in conflict with loyalty to principles. Loyalty to some people can come in conflict with loyalty to others. Sorting out a clash of loyalties is not a matter of purely cold, rational calculation, but is a matter of emotional commitment. Ewin (1990: 37) points out that there are several possible objects of loyalty for police officers in the context of their work. Police officers might be loyal to their partner personally or to their group or to the police force or to a police code of ethics or to the government or to the community the police force exists to serve. Conflicts of loyalty can arise from these different possible demands, and it is not particularly clear how they should be resolved. The issue is not an easy one when, for example, loyalty to a fellow police officer guilty of misconduct collides with one’s loyalty to the ethical principles governing police work. Or when loyalty to one’s group collides with loyalties to the community when the officers in that group treat the community they exist to serve in discriminatory ways. This suggests that loyalty, while it must be present within the police organisation, must be controlled in order to make sure that it has the proper objects.

A control of loyalty within the police organisation suggests that in Hirschman’s (1970) terms ‘voice’ must be given in order to change a

---

8 See Savitz (1970: 695) for a discussion on the function of secrecy as a shield against the attacks of outsiders.
perceived unacceptable state of affairs. When one’s loyalties are found to be misplaced because of misconduct by the object of loyalty the individual has one of two choices.

The individual can exit the group or organisation (either by leaving the force, requesting transfer from the group, or symbolically by simply ‘shutting up and putting up’) or the individual can give voice to his or her disappointment with the group or organisation in order to correct the situation of perceived misconduct on the part of the object of loyalty (they can voice their dissatisfaction with the actions of an individual or group) (Hirschman 1970).

The dilemma faced by a police organisation is to find ways that will open up for critical voices. Changes within the police culture, which today in Sweden cultivates racist language and discriminatory practices towards ethnic minorities, cannot be accomplished by directives alone. Shearing (1995) argues that change can only be effected by the creation of ‘new stories’, which can undermine the prevailing police culture and its underlying attitudes towards ethnic minorities and behaviour towards these groups in the field. These contradictory ‘stories’ which have been thus far silenced, can be told—given voice—by ethnic minority officers. However, these challenges to the dominant police culture from within are difficult to voice by isolated individuals. According to Marks (2000: 560), such challenges are particularly effective when collectively organised. The situation in Sweden, with so few ethnic minorities on the force and with a strong police union insensitive to their conditions, is at this time far removed from collective strategies that can take on the strategy of collective voice.

The horizontal relations of power within the rank-and-file police culture, together with the vertical relations of power within the police organization, demand the unstinting loyalty of ethnic minority officers and thereby effectively block critical and constructive voices from being heard. Subsequently, the inherent vulnerability of ethnic minority officers’ situation remains unaddressed and police misconduct in interactions with ethnic minority citizenry is allowed to perpetuate. Ethnic minority officers are shrouded in a cloud of suspicion, working in an atmosphere of mistrust. Only voice can dissipate this cloud of suspicion and constructively tackle the problems of discriminatory and abusive conduct towards ethnic minorities that we found in our study of the situation of ethnic minority officers in a major Swedish police force and the concomitant misconduct reported in officers’ interactions with the ethnic minority citizenry.
REFERENCES


