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# **Occupational culture in policing reviewed**

## **A comparison of values in the public and private police**

### **Abstract**

Recent years have seen an increasing privatization of the security sector, leading to an intermingling of private and public policing and a possible 'value-shift' for the overall security policy. Systematic comparative research between police and private security values is, however, still lacking. This article intends to help filling this void by giving an overview of literature on values and occupational culture in both sectors. We conclude that culture is mostly approached in a one-sided, stereotypical and negative way. Our recommendation is to integrate the occupational culture research in the broader academic tradition that focuses on organizational culture and climate.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen an increasing **privatization of the security sector**. This tendency of a growing intermingling of private and public enforcement of safety problems is an international trend which has led to a worldwide '**core competencies**' debate that attempts to identify the core tasks of the public police. An important argument in the debate is the assumption that there are clear differences between the private and public security sector in terms of ethics or **values** in general. Values play an essential (although often implicit) role in this type of debate (Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007). After all, both public and private police officers have the authority to use specific means of power that could harm fundamental civil rights. Although the use of these competencies is strongly regulated, some individual discretion is inevitable and ethical use of this discretion is of fundamental importance in a democracy. Much has been written about values in the public police (further referred to as 'the police'), be it with a clear focus on **police occupational culture** (Van Reenen, 1997; Chan, 1996; Prenzler, 1997; Scripture, 1997; Paoline, 2003; Harrison, 1998; Crank, 1997) and **police operational styles** (van der Torre, Muller, Rosenthal, & in 't Veld, 1998; Ponsaers, 2004). In the **private security sector** (further referred to as the 'security sector'), however, hardly any research has been conducted on values or ethics. There is significant research on the privatization and its impact (e.g. Kakalik and Wildhorn, 1971; Forst and Manning, 1999; Jones and Newburn, 1998; Van Oustrive, 1998), but ethics or values have long been neglected as research topics. The limited literature that does exist in this field focuses on the regulation of the private security sector or of specific organizations (South, 1988; Stenning, 2000; Button, 2007a). Only very recently has there been some research on topics like unethical behaviour, risk profiles and organizational culture within the private security sector (Prenzler, 2006; Singh & Kempa, 2007). Surprisingly, despite the significance of this issue, **systematic comparative research** between police values and private security values **is still lacking**. The research in this field is mainly limited to the identification of general social causes of the growth of the private security sector, normative discussions about the desirability of security as a private (in contrast with public) good (Loader, 1997) and possibilities for strengthening the cooperation between public and private actors (Cools and Verbeiren, 2004). Even in the limited research on the comparison between the public and private sector (e.g. Stenning, 2000; Sarre and Prenzler, 2005) the topic of 'values' has been neglected.

We can conclude that there is virtually no research into the differences and similarities between both sectors in terms of values or ethics. This paper intends to help filling this void. In the line of a wide research tradition on public-private sector comparison (see for example: Perry & Rainey, 1988; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000) we aim to give a clear **overview of the literature on values in the police and security sector**, focusing on the **occupational culture** in which these values are expressed.

First, we will attempt to give a clear argumentation why it would, at all, be interesting to make a comparison between both groups in terms of their occupational values and culture. In the second part, the job context of police and security officers is discussed in the light of several comparable vulnerabilities, such as danger and temptations. We believe these occupational characteristics could have an impact on values and basic assumptions in the corresponding sector. Hence, the following part focuses on similarities and differences in occupational (sub)culture in the police and security sector, with an emphasis on the typical (sometimes stereotype) elements of the police and security (sub)culture. Fourth, we will attempt to look further than the caricature and paint a more realistic and veracious picture of values in policing. In the conclusion we stress the need for a more neutral approach of occupational culture research, which now often has a rather negative connotation in both police and security sector research, and we make an appeal for more empirical research on culture in public and private police organizations in non English-speaking parts of the world.

## **2. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE POLICING**

Over the years, the security sector has gone through a **process of privatization**. A (still) growing number of traditional police tasks has been transferred to the private sector. To give only a few examples we refer to surveillance in shopping malls or train stations, patrol in private domains (e.g. factory ground), and public event guarding. In some situations there is an intermingling of public and private police responsibilities, in which it is not clear which professional group should act. Hence, public-private cooperation initiatives are spreading. Despite a rapid (and somewhat uncontrolled?) privatization tendency there are some serious disagreements about the desirability of private security firms doing police work. On the one hand there are those in favour of privatization, who refer to the higher cost-effectiveness of private security firms in relation to police organizations and the idea that police officers should concentrate on 'catching the real gangsters'. Guards could, then, fill the gap by focusing on areas that are neglected by the police. Opponents, on the other hand, raise objections about the 'security for

money' principle and disagree with the idea of private organizations dealing with crime related issues (Loader, 1997).

An interesting question in this respect is whether private security personnel have the **right profile** – in terms of previous education, professional training, managerial supervision, etc. – to handle law enforcement tasks. Are they capable to perform police tasks? And perhaps even more important is the question whether the goals or mission statements of business organizations, which are connected to specific underlying values, are compatible with public law enforcement. The private sector is said to focus solely on efficiency, profit maximization, and narrowly drawn performance goals due to their client-driven mandate (Sklansky, 2007), while the police are believed to go beyond these limited values and address the general public interest. The expanding cooperation between the private security sector and the police could, according to Sklansky (2007), however, lead to a growing feeling of affinity between the two sectors, and could thus facilitate a transfer of norms in either direction, in which he believes it to be more likely that police forces will copy the strategies, rhetoric, and self-conception of the security sector.

All these observations indicate that it is essential to **conduct comparative research** on the underlying values that structure public and private policing. A central question is whether there really is an unbridgeable gap between the police and security sector organizations in terms of goals, professional orientations, values and occupational culture. Despite obvious differences, there are in fact reasons to believe that the occupational cultures of both professional groups are not completely divergent. As will be elaborated in the following parts, we believe similarities in working conditions could result in comparable cultural aspects of the public and private police function.

### **3. POLICING AS A VULNERABLE BUSINESS**

Policing is often considered a vulnerable business. In various senses the occupation is full of hazards, not only for officers in police organizations but also in security firms. We distinguish between two types of vulnerabilities: (1) real physical danger or the risk of psychological harm, and (2) temptations to misuse power. Each type of hazard will be explained and applied on both the police and the security sector.

### 3.1. A job in the 'line of fire'

Many authors emphasize the **extreme dangerousness** of police work. **Police officers** are regularly exposed to risky situations, in which both their physical and psychological well-being are at stake (Skolnick, 1975; Brown, 1981; Kappeler et al., 1998; Reiner, 1985; Sparrow et al., 1990; Van Maanen, 1974; Westley, 1970). Despite mutual variations (mainly depending on work environment and function) the real or symbolical 'line of fire' is a constant reality. According to Reiner (2000: 88), police danger is unique because there is a "*constant threat of sudden attack from another person, not the more calculable risk of physical or environmental hazards*". Others also emphasize the unpredictability of the job in dealing with risky situations and considerable threats of violence (Crank, 1997; Prenzler, 1997; Swanton, 1987). Some go even further and consider the police job "*one of the most dangerous jobs in our society*" (Bartol and Bartol, 2004).

There is an overall belief that danger is not so much of an issue in the **security sector**. General ideas of a night watch in a museum or a guard in a shopping mall do not raise the awareness that private security officers can be confronted with risky situations. However, in the literature several accounts are rendered about verbal abuse, threats of violence, and even actual assaults by the general public (Button, 2007b: 140-149; Rigakos, 2002: 119-120), sometimes comparable to risks in police work. The fact that some guards can dispose of physical tools like guns, batons, handcuffs, and pepper spray (e.g. Mopas and Stenning, 2001) confirms the possible dangerous character of this occupation. Of course, there is a major variation between several groups of security officers in terms of the extent to which the job is dangerous. Night watches and shopping mall guards, on the one hand, do not (always) seem to be dealing with highly dangerous situations, but bouncers (porters in bars and discotheques) and guards of money transports, on the other hand, could be exposed to more serious occupational hazards.

But is that not the same with police officers? The dangerous character of police work should also be **put into perspective**. We agree with Swanton (1987) and Prenzler (1997) who state that police work can indeed be dangerous, but that there are several other occupations with higher death and injury rates. They even mention the fact that the main health risks of police officers are caused by their sedentary lifestyle. While the physical risk is obviously higher in densely populated areas like New York and Paris compared to smaller cities, the day-to-day police job is certainly not always full of action (Monjardet, 1994). In fact, it is often rather "*boring, petty and trivial*" (Reiner, 2000) when you consider for example the dull and time-consuming paperwork.

We can conclude that there are **major variations** in the extent to which the police and the security occupation can be risky for the physical and psychological well-being of personnel members.

### 3.2. A job overwhelmed by temptations

#### 3.2.1. *High discretion combined with low managerial visibility*

A second type of vulnerabilities is the various temptations to which police and security officers are exposed. Central to this issue is the **high amount of discretion** officers in both sectors can dispose of. Discretion can be defined as “*a sphere of autonomy within which one’s decisions are in some degree a matter of personal judgment and assessment*” (Galligan, 1990). While it is often an essential condition for the efficient and effective implementation of rules and policy by street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980; Deutsch, 1985; Lincoln, 1985; Handler, 1986; Bakker & van Waarden, 1999) – like police and security officers – discretionary powers can (and often will) be abused. Both police officers and guards have considerable freedom to make individual decisions (Sherman, 1974; Manzo, 2004). Wilson (1968) states correctly that discretion increases as one moves down the hierarchy. Combined with the **low visibility of their daily work**, which is typical for street-level bureaucrats who are “*spread out in the field*”, and subsequently the low managerial supervision, there is a substantial risk of abuse of powers (Sherman, 1974; Manzo, 2004).

In the **police**, this risk is often believed to be **higher** than in the security sector, because of the exclusive mandate to legitimately use force and coercive power (Muir, 1977; Reiner, 1985; Skolnick, 1975; Van Maanen, 1974; Westley, 1970). The authority given to them could under specific circumstances lead to excessive force, ‘creative’ application of rules, the use of illegal means to obtain legal goals (‘noble cause corruption’), decisions being influenced by other gain than professional judgment and even mere corruption (Sherman, 1974; Roebuck and Barker, 1974; Klockars et al., 2004). Of course, the discretionary powers of police officers and the low managerial supervision are not necessarily causing police misconduct, but they could create opportunities for the individual officer to become corrupt (Johnson and Cox, 2004).

Still, the **powers of security officers** should also **not be underestimated** (Stenning, 2000: 329), although they are of course different. Despite the fact that most guards do not have special legal

competences to use force<sup>1</sup>, they derive considerable power from other sources (Button, 2007b: 10-16). First, they receive rights from the owners of private property. Because they mostly operate in private buildings or domains, they have the right to deny access to 'suspicious' (whatever that means) individuals in important places of public life (e.g. airplanes, soccer stadiums, department stores) and to intrude individual privacy (e.g. random surveillance and searches) (Stenning, 2000). Second, their uniform can provide them with significant power, because it gives them the appearance of authority (Loader, 1997; Stenning and Shearing, 1979). Research led to the conclusion that compliance increases as the perceived authority does (Bushman, 1984). The most important tool of power is, however, their skill to communicate in asking people to cooperate. Most private searches, for instance, occur with consent of the individual being searched (Braun & Lee, 1971). Finally, a strong physical appearance, personal charisma, and physical tools like guns, batons, and handcuffs could complete the picture of a guard with authority (Mopas and Stenning, 2001). If all these tools are combined, the result could be a 'potentially powerful security officer' (Rigakos, 2002). Hence, if they have certain power, they can also abuse their power. The fact that research has been conducted about the possible negative impact of the methods used by the private security sector on basic civil rights (e.g. in Belgium: Van Laethem, Decorte and Bas, 1995), and corruption in security companies (South, 1988) confirms the social relevance of this issue.

Some researchers state that **specific characteristics of the job** could **increase the level of temptation** to abuse the power entrusted to police and security officers. Waddington (1999) states, for example, that because policing is 'dirty work' (Hughes, 1962), police officers routinely violate the normal rules of conduct. At least four difficult working conditions are distinguished in both sectors: wage, status frustration, boredom and the frequent encounter with lawbreakers.

### 3.2.2. *A (not so) rewarding job*

First, the **wage** of police and security officers is often considered to be **inadequate**. In the case of the police, there is in many countries a mismatch between responsibilities and income. Despite potential danger (cf. supra), a demanding work load, erratic hours and shift-work the job is not paid too well

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<sup>1</sup> Some private security officers can, however, dispose of special legal powers, like for example the right to make arrests, to do searches or drug tests, and to carry arms or non-lethal weapons.

(Reiner, 2000). But also in the private security sector, the wage is rather low compared to the long working hours, lack of breaks, poor facilities, the extremes of weather, etc. (Loader, 1997; Button, 2007b). Despite the fact that the wage scales in various countries obviously differ, there is an overall tendency that a job in the public or private security sector is not that rewarding in terms of money. This could lead to temptations, especially in a job where you have access to other people's property (South, 1988).

### 3.2.3. *'Status frustration'*

The second factor, professional status, is somewhat connected to the first. Despite their uniform, authority, and wide discretion (cf. supra), police officers and guards are a regular target of taunt, ridicule, and mocker, which can be illustrated by frequently heard comments like "Go catch the real criminals!" to police officers and "Why would I listen to you; you are not a cop, are you?!" to private guards. They are, however, not only laughed at, but often disliked as well, due to their punitive task-orientation. Nobody likes a parking ticket, or a (body) search in a shopping mall. Combined with a low pay check this lack of public respect could weaken the professional pride of police and security officers leading to '**status frustration**' (Sherman, 1974; Rigakos, 2002), which in turn could be an incentive for excessive authoritative behaviour against the public. Compared to police officers these status issues are often even more problematic for private guards, because their lack of legal authority makes people look down on them (Button, 2007b). Furthermore, in line with the 'stepping stone' theory of policing many applicants in the security sector have ended up there after a long trajectory of failed attempts to join the police (Micucci, 1998; Rigakos, 2002). Because they were considered 'not qualified enough' to be a police officer, they had to content themselves with the job of private guard, in order to escape unemployment (Wakefield, 2003). This is of course not beneficial for the professional pride of security officers, which is an important protective measure against corruption (Newburn, 1999).

### 3.2.4. *The risks of being bored*

A third characteristic of the policing job in the public and private sector, is **boredom**. As stated above, the perceived action-oriented and exciting nature of the police and security job is often overstated. Paperwork and patrolling neighbourhoods where nothing ever happens can be quite boring and seemingly senseless (Reiner, 2000). While police officers mostly (but not always) patrol in teams of two,

the private guard often works solitary in isolation of colleagues, which could be rather lonely and dull (Button, 2007b). According to Barker (1983) boredom can be an important incentive for professional misconduct in police organizations.

### 3.2.5. Contamination by lawbreakers

The final, and perhaps most important, temptation inducing factor is the **frequent encounter with lawbreakers**. Both police and security officers are, more than average citizens, confronted with (or at least highly concentrated on) individuals disturbing peace and order. These contacts with lawbreakers could result in at least two undesirable situations.

First, it **increases temptation for corruption**, because there is sometimes *“little to lose and a lot to gain from bribery and other forms of illegality”* (Kleinig, 1996). Looking the other way is often enough to do criminals a favour, while the risks for the controlling officer are minimal. A second possible consequence is **‘moral cynicism’**, beautifully illustrated by Goldstein (1975: 25) for the police: *“The average officer – especially in large cities – sees the worst side of humanity. He is exposed to a steady diet of wrongdoing. He becomes intimately familiar with the ways people prey on one another. In the course of this intensive exposure he discovers that dishonesty and corruption are not restricted to those the community sees as criminal. He sees many individuals of good reputation engaging in practices equally dishonest and corrupt (...). It is not unusual for him to develop a cynical attitude in which he views corruption as a game in which every person is out to get his share.”* Not only for the police but also among guards, moral cynicism offers the ideal breeding place for excessive suspicion and mistrust, which could in an excessive form result in witch hunts, inappropriate searches and needless display of power.

### 3.3. Vulnerable but not lost

The previous part provides a rather pessimistic view of policing. Of course, this should be put into perspective. There clearly are some vulnerabilities in public and private policing, but the sole presence of opportunities and temptations for misbehaviour does of course **not necessarily lead to corruption or professional misconduct**. To really assess possible integrity risks in organizations it is essential to look further than opportunities for misconduct. Organizational values, internal guidelines, common practices, and professional standards could all be considered **protective factors** and incentives for

ethical behaviour (Harrison, 1998; Newburn, 1999). Some of these aspects are considered to be part of the occupational or organizational culture, which is defined by Schein (1992) as: *“a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those elements”*.

In the following part, we will attempt to make an overview of the literature on **police and private security occupational (sub)culture**. We are especially interested in two of the three levels of culture<sup>2</sup> (Schein, 1992: 151-152): (1) espoused values (e.g. goals and philosophies, attitudes about what is right and wrong in certain situations) and (2) basic underlying assumptions (unconscious beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings of a group). We agree with Westley (1953; 1955) that *“the key to understanding the police is to understand their shared mentality – their subculture – and the key to their shared mentality is the nature of their job”*. Based on the similarities in professional characteristics, elaborated in the previous part, we expect both professional groups to share at least some values and basic assumptions, by which we join in the debate between ‘advocates of the uniqueness of police culture’, on the one hand, and ‘advocates of cultural continuity with other occupations’, on the other hand (Prenzler, 1997: 48; Gaines et al., 1994).

#### **4. CULTURE AND VALUES IN POLICING**

##### 4.1. Research on police and security (sub)culture

There is an impressive body of research on the occupational (sub)culture in **police organizations**. Many academics and practitioners have conducted ethnographic studies, mainly in Anglo-Saxon countries like the US, Australia, Canada and the UK, to analyze, describe and explain police practices (e.g. Wilson, 1968; Muir, 1977; Van Maanen, 1974; Punch, 1979; Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Chan, 1996; Herbert, 1998, etc.). The concept of ‘police (sub)culture’ has been used in a broad variety of senses, leading to confusion about its exact meaning (Chan, 1996; Terrill, Paoline and Manning, 2003). Westley (1970) attempted, for example, to specify the consequences of the police occupation for the officer’s identity or personality. Skolnick (1975) tried to further elaborate this police working personality, which he defined as *“a set of values, attitudes, rules and practices that have an influence on the way police officers perform their job”*. Manning (1989: 360) focused on *“accepted practices, rules and principles of conduct*

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<sup>2</sup> The cultural level of ‘artifacts’ (e.g. language, clothing, rituals...) (Schein, 1992: 151-152) will not be treated in this article.

*that are situationally applied and generalized rationales and beliefs*”, while according to Fielding (1994) cop culture refers to role conception of police officers and the way they see their profession, which can be different from the empirical reality of day-to-day police work. Several other authors listed informal rules or learned problem solutions (Wood, 2004: 34; Skolnick, 1975) – labelled ‘rules of thumb’ (Manning, 1977), ‘recipe rules’ (Ericson, 1982), or ‘scripts for action’ (Shearing, 1995) – that can provide practical guidance for the daily job of police officers. Despite the fact that this ‘overload’ of different approaches of police culture can be quite confusing, it contributed to the rapid development of the police culture research.

Research on **private guards’ (sub)culture** is still in its infancy. Most studies about the private security sector are focused on the question of desirability of police task privatization, first in the English-speaking parts of the world like the United States (e.g. Kakalik & Wildhorn, 1971; Cunningham & Taylor, 1985; Nalla & Newman, 1991; Forst & Manning, 1999) and Great Britain (e.g. McClintock & Wiles, 1972; Jones & Newburn, 1998; Livingstone & Hart, 2003), but since the 1990ies also in Europe (e.g. Hoogenboom, 1991; Ogliaiti, 1993; Nogala, 1995; Van Ostrive, 1998). Topics like occupational culture, values, and integrity have, however, long been neglected in research. Only very recently, the importance to study these issues has been acknowledged, which led to a modest (but still growing) line of research on professional standards, occupational culture, and organizational values within the private security sector (Prenzler, 2006; Singh & Kempa, 2006).

Despite loosely defined and varied meanings of police culture, on the one hand, and the small amount of literature on private guards’ occupational culture, on the other hand, we will attempt to provide a general overview of the characteristics of the alleged (sub)culture in both sectors, based on Schein’s (1992) definition of culture.

#### 4.2. Group loyalty and social isolation

One of the most cited issues in the literature on police culture, is the aspect of **group loyalty among individual officers**. Rules of thumb like ‘don’t give up another cop’ (Reuss-lanni, 1983) and ‘cover yourself and don’t rat on others’ (Chan, 1996) are only illustrations of a deep-rooted solidarity in police organizations. Skolnick (1975: 96) states that, despite the fact that in all occupations a certain degree of inclusiveness and identification can be observed, police show an *“unusually high degree of*

*occupational solidarity*” (see also: Gaines et al. 1994). However, in the security sector some references to a strong occupational interdependency and solidarity – not so different from the police – are made as well (Rigakos, 2002; Button, 2007b). Especially for private guards (as for police officers) who operate in dangerous and unpredictable environments, group loyalty is essential, because incidents can be better dealt with in a solid team than individually (Button, 2007b; Paoline, 2003; Manning, 1995).

In the police, group loyalty encloses two central principles: (1) the **mutual dependability** in dangerous situations and (2) the willingness to **cover up for each other’s mistakes/misconduct** when discovered by internal or external authorities (Prenzler, 1997; Ewin, 1990; Shearing, 1981; Westley, 1970). The second principle is also referred to as the ‘blue wall/code of silence’ (Paoline, 2003; Chan, 1996), or rank-and-file solidarity (Reiner, 2000), and illustrates the highly negative connotation of the ‘police culture’ concept. Despite the fact that we could not find many statements of a code of silence or cover-up culture in the private security sector, we found another interesting similarity with the police. A typical characteristic of both private security and police organizations is the strong (and sometimes even exclusive) identification with officers in the same occupation, mostly at the lowest organizational level. They consider themselves a specific ‘social and occupational group’ (Westley, 1970), sharply separated from the general public (Ewin, 1990). This identification could lead to an **isolated ‘we-versus-them’ attitude** towards ordinary citizens (Terrill, Paoline and Manning, 2003; Kappeler et al., 1998; Sparrow et al., 1990; Waddington, 1999). This attitude is characterized by a high degree of **suspicion** and general mistrust (Button, 2007b; Kappeler et al., 1998; Reiner, 1985; Rubinstein, 1973), in which the police officer or guard is the ‘pariah’ and citizens are the ‘enemies’ (Westley, 1953). Reiner (1978) describes it even more expressively as *“the hard skin of bitterness, seeing all social trends in apocalyptic terms with the police as a beleaguered minority to be overrun by the forces of barbarism”*. This citation makes clear that the ‘rupture’ with the general public is connected to the previously mentioned ‘moral cynicism’ (cf. supra) and is – according to Reiner (2000) – a constant attitude that cannot be readily switched off.

#### 4.3. Fighting crime or defeating competition?

A second widely discussed aspect of the alleged police culture is nicely illustrated by the often cited phrase of **'the thin blue line of policing'**. It refers to the central purpose or rather central mission of police organizations, which should be safeguarding social order and fighting crime (Reiner, 2000; Chan, 1996). It is said that most police officers are strong adherents of the traditional crime fighter image in policing (Klockars, 1985; Sparrow et al., 1990; Brown, 1981; Paoline, 2003). Consequently, ('soft') strategies like community and service-oriented policing are not considered real police work (Terrill, Paoline and Manning, 2003; Chan, 1996), because they are *"cops, not social workers"* (Harrison, 1998). Police officers should, instead, participate in the 'war against crime' (Reiner, 1985: 112), or the 'struggle between good and evil' (Herbert, 1998). In this way, policing is not just a job but a way of life with a worthwhile purpose, more specifically the public good which is completely concentrated on crime reduction (Crank, 1997). This aspect of police culture is, however, based on a **collective delusion** (Waddington, 1999). Research led to the conclusion that police have little impact on crime rates, that the detection level of crime is rather low (Morris and Heal, 1981; Waddington, 1999), and that law enforcement is only a small part of the day-to-day police job (Manning, 1978; Punch, 1979).

The situation of **private guards** is, in this case, quite different. Despite the preference of a large group of guards towards crime fighting – the 'police wannabe' (Micucci, 1998; Button, 2007b; Rigakos, 2002) – private security firms have a **client-driven mandate** (Sklansky, 2007). Due to a highly competitive market, the client who hires private guards has a major impact on the way the job is done. But, besides the client's management and staff, also the security company's management, the tenant (owner of building), the police (as an important partner), and the general public need to be satisfied. This could lead to the problem of **'too many masters'**, which refers to the fact that *"security officers often lead a schizophrenic existence serving several masters with differing agendas and having to please them all"* (Button, 2007b: 135). In some cases these interests can be completely incompatible. While the security firm's management, on the one hand, urges their personnel to only patrol and report possible incidents, and if necessary call the police, the client who hires the security firm (e.g. shop owner), on the other hand, could have the expectation that a private guard should do more than that, for example really interfering in a dangerous conflict. Sometimes shop owners who hire a security firm would also prefer an incident to be handled internally ('private justice'), without interference of the police (because it is

'bad publicity'), which can be contrary to the feelings of justice of security personnel. This problem was recognized in a study about private guards in Canadian shopping malls. One of the interviewed security officers stated that *"the significant challenge facing this mall is that our largest spending group [teenage kids] is the same demographic that has the potential to be the most troublesome"* (Manzo, 2004: 253). Hence, the 'customer is always right' maxim can conflict with general law enforcement principles (e.g. equal treatment, legal security). An important observation is that, according to research in this domain, security officers have, in most cases, a greater loyalty to their site (the client who hires the security firm) than towards their own company (Button, 2007b), which is only logic if you keep in mind the small amount of time they are present in the security firm. This could, however, lead to a situation in which client's preferences are excessively stressed at the expense of security firms' goals. Concluding, police organizations are supposedly more oriented towards the general interest, while private security firms particularly aim at meeting the client's needs (private justice or safety for sale).

The cut-throat competition could also have a second undesirable side effect. Due to the constant pressure of profit maximization, working conditions in security firms are not always suitable for personnel. Besides long working hours and low wages (cf. supra), the **large proportion of part-time and casual staff** (that is obviously cheaper and more flexible than personnel employed on a permanent basis) leads to occupational insecurity and high labour turn-over which is of course not beneficial for the professional image of the security sector (South, 1988; Singh and Kempa, 2007; Button, 2007b).

#### 4.4. Machismo

The next topic is in some way linked to the previous characteristic of the alleged police culture. The crime fighter mentality is constantly nourished by the old-fashioned '**machismo syndrome**' (Reiner, 2000; Fielding, 1994; Crank, 1997). This cult of masculinity in police organizations, in which it is more important to 'act tough' than to 'be tough' (Waddington, 1999), consists of at least four typical aspects that are to some extent comparable to the world of private security.

First, machismo refers to an addiction of police officers to **adrenalin**, a desire for adventure (Herbert, 1998), combined with a pragmatic **action-oriented attitude**, in which outcome outweighs process or 'the end justifies the means' (Prenzler, 1997). Police officers are part of the 'good guys', and the crime control mission allows them to neglect the rights of lawbreakers, because they are the 'bad guys'

(Reiner, 1985). This thrilling image of a police job full of kicks and adrenalin contrasts sharply with the *“mundane reality of everyday policing, which is often boring, messy, trivial and venal”* (Reiner, 2000; cf. supra). In the private security sector literature this aspect of machismo is not so much an issue, and if so maybe only for the specific group of bouncers and bodyguards who are often said to be more attracted to adventure and potentially dangerous situations (South, 1988).

**Aggressiveness** is a second component of machismo (Terrill, Paoline and Manning, 2003). Police officers who consider crime fighting the central mission of policing are more inclined to glorify violence and the use of force because only that is the ‘real job’ (Manning, 1977). This could, in extreme cases, lead to the abuse of police powers or excessive use of force against citizens (Chan, 1996). Herbert (1998) states that not all police men are adrenaline-addicts. He distinguishes between two types of officers. The ‘hard charger’, on the one hand, is an aggressive officer with courage and strength, seeking adrenaline. The ‘station queen’, on the other hand, is rather wary of danger, and takes his refuge inside of the police station to avoid the hazards of the street. In Rigakos’ (2002) ethnographic research among private security officers in Toronto (Intelligarde), he came to the conclusion that aggressive mores were part of the security firm’s subculture, and constantly reinforced by informal ‘on the job’ socialization and storytelling between private guards. South (1988) states that in the UK bouncers and bodyguards in particular have a bad reputation of aggression and impermissible violence.

A third aspect of police machismo is **authoritarian conservatism** (Waddington, 1999). The high degree of conservatism among police officers, in both a political and moral way, is said to be connected to the constant confrontation with *“the bottom layers of the social order”* (Reiner, 2000; Prenzler, 1997). The authoritarian aspect could be influenced by the paramilitary and commando-like management style in many police organizations, which *“stifles consultation and creative problem solving”* (Prenzler, 1997). In the private sector, some accounts have been made of conservatism, but more explicitly linked to xenophobic feelings and racism (Button, 2007b), which is a fourth aspect of the alleged police culture.

Police officers and guards are said to show a **lack of respect towards certain groups in society** (Waddington, 1999). Stereotypes about ethnic minorities, racial prejudices, discriminatory treatment, and the harassment of individuals from a different ethnicity is an often cited problem in police and

security organizations (Chan, 1996; Reiner, 1985; Terrill, Paoline and Manning, 2003; Button, 2007b; South, 1988), according to American and British research. Compared to the general public these officers not always show more racist behaviour, but even a 'normal degree of racism' is problematic in an occupation with considerable power over minorities (Bayley and Mendelsohn, 1968; Reiner, 2000).

There is, however, not only hostility towards immigrants, but sometimes also towards women. **Sexism** (Hanmer, Radford and Stanko, 1989; Reiner, 2000) is a commonly discussed side effect of the machismo syndrome in public policing. Similar women-unfriendly stories are told about the private security sector. The following citations of private guards speak for themselves: "*It's a man's world*", private guarding as "*moving to watch girls go by*", and "*I have been surprised by the female officers and how capable they are*" (Button, 2007b).

## 5. IS IT REALLY THAT BAD?

The chapter above gives an overall picture of **similarities and differences in the occupational culture of police and security officers**. The reviewed literature paints, however, a rather **negative and stereotype picture** of police and private security occupational culture (Prenzler, 1997). It is often considered the biggest obstacle to reforming the police (Dean, 1995; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997; Greene, 2000; Johnson and Cox, 2004), it presumably leads to the violation of citizen rights (Paoline, 2003; Kappeler, Sluder and Alpert, 1998; Skolnick and Fyfe, 1993), and it is generally used as a simplistic and non-sophisticated explanation for everything that is wrong in policing (Dixon, 2000). Hence, the question is raised whether it really is that bad. We believe at least four nuances are necessary. First, because the literature on police culture was mainly developed in the 1960ies and 1970ies it should be brought up-to-date. Second, like every coin has two sides, some seemingly negative characteristics of occupational culture could have a positive function. A third nuance refers to the rather naïve believe that there is only one universal and monolithic occupational culture in both sectors. And finally, because the literature is predominantly originated from English-speaking parts of the world, more research is needed in non Anglo-Saxon countries.

### 5.1. An archaic approach

The first consideration refers only to the literature on **police culture**. It was developed mainly in the 1960ies and 1970ies. In this period, several renowned academics and practitioners conducted

ethnographical research in police organizations (cf. supra), during a time in which sex stereotyping had only started to become an issue, racism was in many countries more common, and the hard approach of crime was the dominant model of policing. **Times have changed**, not only in society (e.g. equal rights for men and women, the social rejection of racism...), but also in the police. Women and coloured people have joined the force, and different crime reduction strategies, like community oriented and intelligence-led policing, have become operative (Reiner, 2000; Chan, 1996; Mastrofski, Worden and Snipes, 1995). Obviously, these developments have not completely exterminated racism, sexism and the aggressive crime-fighter ideal of policing. It is, however, likely that these negative aspects of police culture have at least faded, but **more research is needed** to paint an up-to-date picture.

In the case of the **private security sector**, the situation is different, because this literature is quite recent. The amount of research on private security occupational culture is, however, too limited to draw conclusions about the generality of the results (cf. infra).

## 5.2. The flipside of the coin

Some aspects of police or private security occupational culture that seem to only have negative consequences, for example cynicism and social isolation, are in some situations highly functional. Reiner (2000: 90) considers **cynicism** the 'Janus face of commitment' and **isolation** can be regarded as a means of protection against dangers (real or perceived) and social rejection (Skolnick, 1975; Harisson, 1998). Both are in some way connected to **occupational loyalty**. Rigakos (2002: 119-120) refers to the strong interdependence between private guards "*in the face of immediate or impending dangers*", and Goldsmith (1990: 93) states that "*in an environment perceived as hostile and unpredictable, the police culture offers its members reassurance that the other officers will 'pull their weight' in police work, that they will defend, back up and assist their colleagues when confronted with external threats*". Of course, loyalty among police officers and private guards can lead to immoral behaviour (e.g. the cover-up of corruption) (Ewin, 1990), but it is also a "*protective armour shielding the force as a whole*" (Reiner, 2000: 92).

Specifically for the **private security** sector the client-driven mandate – with its cut-throat competition, cost-reduction human resource strategies, and risk of private justice – also has a highly positive function. The **market orientation** of security firms forces them to **professionalize**. Theoretically speaking, only the best companies will survive in a market with a varied choice of actors. Private security firms that

maintain low professional standards or harm the client will eventually be forced out of business (Swanton, 1993, Davis et al., 2003). The accountability of these companies should, thus, not be underestimated, because, in order to survive, they must constantly work on the development of a positive, reliable and professional image (Livingstone and Hart, 2003: 161; Loader, 1997).

In the **police culture** literature, there is also a **particular line of research with a focus on the positive connotation** of the concept. In the 1970ies, there were already some researchers who tried to understand why certain police officers tend to be more effective and trustworthy than others by identifying factors that made officers excellent (Muir, 1977) or defining 'good police work' in particular situations based on specific cultural aspects of policing (Manning, 1977). More recently, Paoline (2003) referred to the value of police culture in the socialization process of new members. They learn the 'craft of policing' when being acquainted with day-to-day experiences of colleague-officers (Manning, 1995; Van Maanen, 1974). Despite previous statements about police culture as one of the biggest obstacles for police reform (cf. supra), some consider it a positive tool in reforming the police (Crank, 1997; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). Hence, there are conflicting statements about the role and nature of police culture. We believe, however, that these statements suggest complexity rather than contradiction. But we agree with Harrison (1998) who claims that *"(...) the discussion of culture tends to be cast in the light of its potential negative effects. Little has been written about the possible beneficial effects of these same cultural characteristics on the organization"*.

### 5.3. Is there only one occupational culture?

A third nuance deals with the question of the **universality of police and private security culture**. The idea of a universal, superorganic, cohesive, monolithic, homogeneous, unchanging and deterministic culture in both sectors has been **criticized** by many researchers in the field. In the case of **police**, the monolithic approach is regarded as rather simplistic and stereotypical (Scripture, 1997; Harrison, 1998; Reiner, 2000; Paoline, 2003). Waddington (1999) states that *"sub-culture – as a set of shared artefacts – almost disappears entirely"*. Interesting is the comprehensive criticism of Chan (1996) who states that the monolithic and universal approach (1) does not account for internal differentiation, (2) presupposes a passive and automatic socialization process of new police officers, (3) treats the police organization apart from its specific social, political, legal, and organizational context and (4) leaves little scope for

cultural change. But also in the literature on **private policing**, sounds are heard of a segmented (Singh and Kempa, 2007) and context-bound (Manzo, 2004) occupational culture (see also: Micucci, 1998; Button, 2007b).

In order to meet these criticisms, research has been conducted about **possible variations** in police and private security culture. We identified at least three different approaches in which occupational culture is shaped by a particular aspect in the organization, namely rank, organizational context, and individual officer characteristics.

### 5.3.1. Rank

A first source of variation is the officer's **rank**. In terms of **police** ranks, Reuss-Ianni (1983) introduced the two cultures approach. The officers at the lower level of the organization and those at the top are said to have a distinct cultural framework of basic assumptions, and underlying values (Punch, 1983; Prenzler, 1997). The professional culture of 'street cops' is characterized by typical police culture aspects as mutuality, ethnic homogeneity, and lack of external accountability, while the 'management cops' attempt to develop a modern police organization based on scientific rationality, due process accountability, and multicultural sensitivity. In that way, the two culture approach is complimentary to the general police culture literature, in which the (often implicit) focus was mainly on the lower ranks of the organization (Waddington, 1999). Manning (1994) added another rank to the list by stressing the specific role of 'middle managers', who appeared to have a different occupational culture than 'lower participants' and 'top command'. This conclusion was later confirmed by Chan (1996) in New South Wales.

Manzo (2004: 259) explains that in the **private security sector** a similar phenomenon is at work: *"(...) the ways in which officers at different malls construe and perform their jobs appear to have little to do with (...) the ideas of their supervisors (...)"*.

Although the distinction between 'management' and 'lower rank' culture is one way of 'solving' the problem of a naïve monolithic occupational culture approach (Herbert, 1998), it still does not account for the possible influence of organizational and individual factors.

### 5.3.2. *Organizational context*

Paoline (2003) states that “*culture is more of an organizational phenomenon*”, referring to the second source of variation. **Contextual characteristics of the organization** are believed to have an impact on the cultural aspects of the public and private police job. In line with Bourdieu (1985), Chan (1997) explains that cultural practices of policing result from the interplay between both cultural (*habitus*) and structural (*field*) dispositions. This view fits the contingency approach in which the interaction between occupational culture and environment of the organization is stressed (Alderson, 1979; Alpert and Dunham, 1988; Wasserman and Moore, 1988; Greene and Decker, 1989).

There are many examples of this approach in the **police research**. Without going into detail, we refer to (1) the distinction between urban and rural police, in which the former are often more detached from the public than the latter (Cain, 1973; Websdale and Johnson, 1997), (2) the contrast between detectives and other police officers’ culture (Waddington, 1999), and (3) the difference between detectives and patrol officers, on the one hand, versus welfare-oriented groups (e.g. juvenile aid bureaus, child abuse and sexual offences squads, and community policing squads), on the other hand (Prenzler, 1997).

For the security sector, there is practically no research in which **private guards** in different organizational settings (e.g. body guarding, money transport, mall guarding...) are compared in terms of occupational culture. It is, however, likely that there are some essential differences in basic assumptions and work orientation between several groups of guards, due to a completely distinct organizational context.

### 5.3.3. *Individual officer characteristics*

A final source of variation is situated on the **level of the individual officer**. Both police and security officers are said to not passively absorb the occupational culture, but construct their own reality – a distinct worldview which is not always consistent with the ‘official’ goals and objectives of the organization – by the active interpretation of the norms they encounter (Shearing and Ericson, 1991; Chan, 1996; Singh and Kempa, 2007). The reason for this is that “*not all officers see the occupational world through the same lens*” (Paoline, 2003). Occupational socialization is a **creative process**, shaped by the individual mediation of the structural and cultural influences of the occupation (Fielding, 1988; Punch, 1985), the reflexive adaptation of a ‘grab bag of assorted schemas, tools and frames’ to new

and uncertain scenarios (Herbert, 1998: 346), and the selective application of normative orders<sup>3</sup> that both enable and constrain officers (Herbert, 1998). Because not all officers share the same values, attitudes, and norms, this process leads to a 'multiplicity of cultures' (Fielding, 1988: 9).

In the literature on police culture, we can discern **three important theoretical approaches** in which the relationship between individual officer characteristics and cultural diversity is studied: (1) theories on operational styles (the only approach that has also been analyzed for the private security sector), (2) the analysis of the impact of more objective characteristics (like gender and race) on police culture, and (3) the cognitive perspective (Mendias & Kehoe, 2006).

The first approach in this line of literature focuses on **typologies** of police and private security **operational styles**. In line with more general theories on regulatory styles (e.g. Hawkins, 1984; Kagan, 1994) – that deal with policy implementation in particular situations – the central idea is that officers might cope differently with similar occupational strains (Broderick, 1977; Brown, 1981), and thus may develop different styles. Empirical research led to a number of typologies with in each case a limited number of styles that can be applied separately or in combination with each other. The operational style may be constant in various situations or differ depending on the particular context.

For the **police**, Wilson (1968) already developed three types of operational styles, namely the legalistic, watchman and service style. Brown (1981) speaks of the 'service style' as well, next to the 'old-style crime-fighter', the 'clean-beat crime-fighter', and the 'professional style'. The real crime-fighter type and the professional type are also part of Reiner's (1985) typology under the labels 'new centurion', and the 'professional'. Besides these two he speaks of the 'uniform carrier', who is rather cynical, and the 'bobby', who regards police work as an ordinary job. Broderick (1977) makes a different classification, when he refers to the 'enforcer', 'realist', 'idealist', and 'optimist'. There are still other researchers who developed comparable typologies stressing specific aspects of the police job (e.g. Muir, 1977; Jermier et al., 1991; Van der Torre et al., 1998). Despite major differences there is, however, one important commonality in all these approaches. They all attempt to classify officers on the basis of their occupational attitudes and characteristics, and determine in what way these differ from the traditional

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<sup>3</sup> Normative orders are sets of rules and practices oriented around a central value, which together provide guidelines and justifications for actions of members of the group. Herbert (1998) distinguishes between six normative orders: law, bureaucratic control, adventure/machismo, safety, competence, and morality.

conception of police culture. A specific strand in this literature is **vignette research** in which police officers are asked which action they would take in one or more specific situations (vignettes) and which values are the most important in selecting an option (for example: ideal of enforcing the law, keeping the peace, required procedure and ensuring due process, offender accepts responsibility) (Mendias & Kehoe, 2006; Klockars et al., 2004). When the respondents are confronted with different vignettes (situations) the common conclusion is that actions and occupational styles differ in various situations. A similar line of research has been developed in the **private security** literature. As in the case of police agencies, private security firms are also not as homogeneous as sometimes presumed. These organizations can be segmented and divided into various groups or individuals with a distinct worldview and operational style (Singh and Kempa, 2007). At least three types of private security officers are distinguished. First, an important type of guard is the one who aspired after the job of police officer but was not considered qualified enough (cf. supra), often labelled the 'police wannabe' (Micucci, 1998; Button, 2007b; Rigakos, 2002). A second interesting type is the guard who does not necessarily want to be a cop, but acts like one, like for example the 'crime fighter' (Micucci, 1998), or the 'para-police officer' (McLeod, 2002). A final type is the 'night-watchman' (McLeod, 2002), which resembles to the image of a calm and easy-going guarding job in a museum. More than in the police styles literature these operational styles seem caricatural types of private guards. Still, an individual security officer can be characterized by more than one style, even though one style is often dominant. To conclude, we agree with Button (2007b) who states that, despite some tentative analyses of private security operational styles or models of private guards, much more research on this topic is needed.

A second approach in this line of research focuses on other, more **objective individual officer characteristics** that could have an impact on occupational culture. This strand has only been developed in the police culture literature. The most cited officer characteristics are gender (e.g. Martin, 1979; Fielding, 1994) and race (e.g. Holdaway, 1996 and 1997). While in the past most police officers were white men, now women and individuals from other ethnicities have joined the force. This gender and race mix obviously has an impact on cultural aspects in police organizations (for example the fading of the traditional, masculine crime fighter image). Sklansky (2007) stresses the role of gender and race in police culture: *"(...) like minority officers and female officers, will help to fragment the police subculture and to build identity-based bridges to groups outside of law enforcement"*. Other important factors that

are believed to have an impact on cultural and values are age, socioeconomic background, level of experience, and even height (Mendias & Kehoe, 2006).

The third approach emphasizes the **officer's cognition** as an explanation for the existence of multiple cultures within a police organization. This perspective is also not developed in the private security literature. The central idea is that police culture is not passively transferred to newcomers in police organizations. They are not 'cultural dopes' (Garfinkel, 1967) who unconsciously absorb organizational values and norms. It involves "*reflexive work of active agents working to match prior understandings with current realities*" (Herbert, 1998: 350). In this sense, police culture consists of schemas, incomplete (and sometimes even contradictory) rules, and models of good and bad conduct, which are filtered and selectively applied in a particular context (Shearing and Ericson, 1991; Reiner, 2000). This is comparable to what is labelled by Swidler (1986) as a 'toolkit', a collection of world views that individuals in an organization use in different ways in different times on different places.

#### 5.4. Lack of research

The literature on police and private security occupational culture is **predominantly originated from English-speaking parts of the world**. In the case of **police culture** most research has been conducted in the US (e.g. Wilson, 1968; Skolnick, 1975; Muir, 1977; Crank, 1997; Harrison, 1998; Waddington, 1999; Terrill, Paoline and Manning, 2003; Micucci and Gomme, 2005; Garcia, 2005), Great Britain (e.g. Skolnick, 1975; Brown, 1981; McConville and Shepherd, 1992; Holdaway, 1996; Scripture, 1997; Waddington, 1999; Newburg, 1999; Reiner, 2000), and Australia (e.g. White and Alder, 1994; Finanne, 1994; Chan, 1996; Prenzler, 1997). In other parts of the world, the topic has hardly been studied. We can only give a few examples of non Anglo-Saxon literature on police culture, e.g. in the Netherlands (Punch, 1979), France (Monjardet, 1994), Japan (Ames, 1981; Bayley, 1991), China (Jiao, 2001), and South Africa (Brogden and Shearing, 1993). Despite some indications of similar characteristics of police culture in non English-speaking parts of the world (e.g. Waddington, 1999), the emphasis is on several major differences in the mission of police organizations, the education of individual officers, stringency of regulation, and the dangerousness of the police job (Skolnick, 1975; Monjardet, 1994; Harrison, 1998; Button, 2007a). Hence, **more research is needed in non Anglo-Saxon countries**.

The same is true for the **private security** literature. The research in the field of occupational culture of private guards is mainly concentrated on English-speaking countries like Great Britain (South 1988; Noaks, 2000; Button, 2002; Monaghan, 2002; Wakefield, 2003), the US (Rigakos, 2002), Canada (Manzo, 2004), and Australia (Prenzler, 2006). There is a complete lack of research in other parts of the world. But also in Anglo-Saxon countries the literature is rather limited. Most research on the private security sector focuses upon the privatization of police tasks, the official representation of purposes and activities of private security firms, and governmental regulation of the guarding sector (Singh and Kempa, 2007; Sarre, 2004; Prenzler, 2004). Despite a still growing attention for the day-to-day job of private security officers, the occupational culture remains an under-researched topic. There is clearly a need for more detailed analysis and explanation of the actual practices, basic assumptions, underlying values and informal rules among private guards across a range of contexts. We agree with Manzo (2004) that *"(...) police work – lived police work – has been a topic of sociological and criminological study for decades. It is time to consider private security in the same way"*.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

On the basis of a literature review, this paper attempts to provide an overall picture of **similarities and differences in the values of police and private security officers** and the occupational culture in which these values are expressed. The most important cultural resemblances are, on the one hand, group loyalty in the sense of a we-versus-them attitude and suspicion towards the general public, and, on the other hand, machismo, which is illustrated by their action-oriented attitude, their lack of respect to certain groups in society and conservatism. An essential difference is the fact that most private security officers – except for some specific groups of guards – are not so much adherent to the crime fighter idea (or mission) of policing, which is an important characteristic of police culture ('the thin blue line'). Instead, the private guarding sector has to deal with the problem of too many masters, whose expectations should all be met, due to a fierce market competition.

There are, however, at least three major limitations of the traditional police and private security culture research. First, there is only a very limited amount of literature on police culture in non English-speaking parts of the world, leading to a predominantly **Anglo-Saxon approach** of this type of research. Research on private security occupational culture is, even in English-speaking countries, extremely limited. More studies of the day-to-day job of private guards in Anglo-Saxon countries and abroad should

be conducted to develop a more complete picture of the occupational culture in this still growing sector. The situation is, however, more problematic than this. More in particular, there is the observation that in both sectors (sub)culture is mostly **approached in a one-sided, stereotypical and negative way**. The occupational culture in both sectors is often considered one of the biggest obstacle for reform. Despite the fact that there are already some researchers who stress the positive consequences of specific cultural aspects in policing, a more neutral approach is needed in this type of research. Third, there is often a rather **naïve belief in the universal, cohesive, and monolithic nature of professional culture** in both sectors. However, research led to the conclusion that cultural aspects are influenced by rank, organizational context and individual officer characteristics, leading to a multiplicity of cultures. These three observations bring us to the conclusion that more research is needed, to develop more fully integrated theories about the diversity of police and private security occupational culture in a more neutral way. An interesting suggestion for further research would be the **integration of police and private security culture research** in the broader academic tradition that focuses on **organizational culture and climate** (e.g. Douglas 1978; Schein, 1992; Ashkanasy, Wilderom & Peterson).

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