

# “TOUGH, LOYAL, REPUTABLE”: D/DISCOURSES AND SUBCULTURES IN VOCATIONAL POLICE TRAINING

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## **Abstract**

A critical examination of police training (i.e., vocational knowledge and skills to fulfil police operations) raises concerns about its doctrinal intent and value versus its educative intent and value, and questions its capacity to meet the demands of policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Police training acts as a formally sanctioned vehicle for police culture, subcultures, and D/discourses but this is complicated by (a) the predominance of pedagogical training practices that support a trainer-centred approach and standardised lecture format for training, (b) a focus on law enforcement at the cost of higher-order conceptual skills, (c) police management education with a subculture resistant to theoretical analysis and critical reflection, and a set of unconscious and unchallengeable assumptions regarding police work, conduct, and leadership, and (d) debates about the relevance of a traditional (i.e., command and control) versus a contemporary (i.e., community policing) model of policing. This paper provides an overview of research into the ‘discourse-practice’ framework of policing in a vocational police training context with recruits. The research distinguishes the dominant subcultures and prevailing D/discourses (words, tools, beliefs, thinking styles), and analyses the impact of these on individuals’ identity, subjectivity, agency, learning, and ‘membership’ within the policing community. A backdrop to this research is the agenda amongst Australian and New Zealand police services for policing to become a profession.

**Keywords:** Vocational police training, D/discourses, subcultures.

## **Introduction**

The demands on policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century require that police training (i.e., vocational knowledge and skills to fulfil police operations) *and* police education (i.e., conceptual skills for theoretical and analytical learning) are capable of meeting a range of complex and diverse expectations (Kratcoski 2004). Policing is more demanding. It ‘requires the ability to exercise sound judgment and technical knowledge in a broad range of complex situations’ (Lanyon 2007:107; Murray 2005; Rowe 2008). Kratcoski’s (2004) review of Australian and international police training found that the training concentrates on rudimentary aspects of law enforcement, at the cost of the higher-order conceptual skills.

Juxtaposed with this context is an agenda amongst Australian and New Zealand police jurisdictions for policing to become a profession. This raises questions about the efficacy of police training and education not only to meet the requirements of dynamic practice, but the

aspirant intention of policing to become a profession. Lanyon (2007:107) argues that policing needs to move away from its 'artisan status' to that of a profession in order to meet 'the current and future sophisticated demands and expectations'. In response, a number of police jurisdictions have initiated partnerships with universities to provide higher education pathways. These pathways vary amongst jurisdictions and the efficacy of them in integrating the vocational police training with higher education, and enhancing policing practice, is as yet unclear. Underscoring all of this is the need for 'radical restructuring' of police organisations (Lanyon 2007:107), clarity about the nature and scope of policing (Lanyon 2007; Murray 2005; Rowe 2008), the preferred model of policing, and what constitutes a body of knowledge for policing (Lewis 2007; Murray 2005).

This paper provides an overview of research that focused specifically on police vocational training for recruits. The research identified and analysed the dominant subcultures and prevailing D/discourses.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Police culture**

Shearing and Ericson (1991:487) define police culture as 'figurative logic' whereby culture is not literal. Instead, it is symbolic, rhetorical, and metaphorical: it is the product of oral communication (narratives, 'war stories') which explains and justifies action. These conceptions of police culture resonate with the notion of D/discourses as particular 'ways of talking' and 'ways of seeing' that are resistant to challenge and change (Fairclough 1995:41).

The literature review of police culture reveals a range of common characteristics that are inherently interrelated, dynamic and need to be viewed as products and resources of D/discourses. These characteristics can be more easily understood in terms of three subcultures I have named for ease of explanation: *family-relationships*, *command and control*, and "real" police work.

### **Subcultures**

The heart of the *family-relationships* subculture is that peers represent the 'family' and the organisation the 'parent' (Bonifacio 1991). Whilst 'parent' and 'family' provide a common understanding and identity, they are also supportive *and* punitive (Bonifacio 1991; Fielding 1994; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Prenzler 1998; Reiner 1992, cited in Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999b). Family-relationships are built upon the perception of and ability to be capable and reliable which necessitates the need to be or be seen to be "perfect" (Bonifacio 1991; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Manning 1978, cited in Chan 1997; Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999b).

The *command and control* subculture, with its paramilitary ethos and the organisation's strict hierarchical command structure (Bonifacio 1991; Heidensohn 1992; Cain 2002; Fleming & Lafferty 2003; Palmer 1994; Panzarella 2003; Waddington 1999a & 1999b), simultaneously underscores and complicates the *family-relationships* subculture. Waddington (1999a:301) describes the police organisation as a 'punishment-centred bureaucracy' where poor behaviour is readily noted and punished, but where good behaviour is often unacknowledged. The paramilitary model has been criticised for maintaining the status of police managers and stifling independent thinking and innovative practice (Cowper 2000; Panzarella 2003).

Finally, the “*real*” *police work* subculture is grounded in operational policing. This is supported by a ‘sense of mission’ (Reiner 2000:89) and political and legal sanctions to control society (Manning 1977). The ‘cult of masculinity’, combined with the emphasis on fighting crime, provides further justification for the application of authority and the maintenance of reputation and status (Dick & Cassell 2004; Frewin & Tuffin 1998; Reiner 2000; Martin & Jurik 1996; Waddington 1999a & 1999b). The need to maintain assertive control requires quick and decisive action which means thinking (reflectively or critically) could be judged as a weakness (Bonifacio 1991).

### **Police training**

The literature on police vocational training reveals the predominance of pedagogical training methods over andragogical (adult learning) methods and questions the doctrinal versus educative intent and value of these methods (Birzer 2003; Birzer & Tannehill 2001; McCoy 2006; Marenin 2004). Such methods and the lack of integrated curricula do not guarantee the development of skills in decision making, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Birzer & Tannehill 2001, Ortmeier 1997, cited in McCoy 2006; Marenin 2004; White 2006).

Police instructors are ‘...primarily law enforcement practitioners and not educators’ (McCoy 2006:88). McCoy (2006) stresses the need for police trainers to develop a professional training standpoint and to engage in reflective practice. ‘Experience alone does not make a person a professional adult educator...’ (Elias & Merriam 1995, cited in McCoy 2006:89), and the ability to reflect upon her or his practice and experience is imperative. Vickers’s (2000:508) and Adlam’s (2002) critiques of police management education found a set of unchallengeable assumptions about police work and conduct which repressed ‘learning through reflection and critique’.

### **Nature of policing**

In attempting to define the nature and scope of policing, four dimensions are identified, but the boundaries appear to be blurred. The dimensions are (1) fighting and preventing crime, (2) the legitimate, state-sanctioned use of force, (3) the provision of a public service and maintenance of public order, and (4) ‘administrative and procedural’ functions in response to the requirements and systems of accountability (Rowe 2008:8-13).

### **Model of policing**

Integral to the nature of policing and training is the model of policing, Lewis (2007:149) draws on Murray’s (2002 & 2005) work in comparing the key features of these two models. A traditional model frames ‘policing as a craft/trade’ whereas the contemporary model defines it ‘as a profession’. An ‘authoritarian approach to policing’ is adopted in the traditional model as opposed to the contemporary model’s ‘problem-solving’ approach. Historically, policing has been characterised by a ‘quasi military management style’ which is antithetical to a ‘democratic management style’ of the contemporary model. ‘[E]mphasis on physical attributes’ underscores the traditional model of policing, whereas the contemporary model has an ‘emphasis on intelligence’, or the thoughts that underscore action. Finally, the traditional model is characterised by an ‘insular and defensive culture’, unlike the ‘open and consultative culture’ of the contemporary model.

### **Theoretical framework and methodology**

A deconstructive/post-structural approach and assumptions were applied to this research. (Connole 1993). It therefore aimed to challenge that which is taken-for-granted by

investigating the construction and interpretation of knowledge, “truth”, and social realities, and the deconstruction of these through the lens of the prevailing D/discourse. While trainers might believe their ‘discourse-practice’ framework is based on ‘true statements’ (Cherryholmes 1988:34), from a deconstructive/post-structural perspective, ‘truth is discursive’, and discourses are situated in history and are influenced by power (Cherryholmes 1988:34). According to Foucault (cited in Cherryholmes 1988:34-35), truth is represented by:  
 ...the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true...the means by which it is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

Gee’s (2005:7) definition of discourse as the correlation between ‘language-in-use’ (little “d” discourse) and other elements (big “D” discourse) such as symbols, tools, values, beliefs, and thinking styles best captures the intent of this research. This definition is explained further by Gee (2004:40-41) as:

...a way of using not just words, but words, deeds, objects, tools, and so forth to enact a certain sort of socially situated identity, and...cultural models (taken-for-granted stories)...to construct certain sorts of situated meanings.

The repertory grid technique is situated within the constructionist paradigm (Cassell & Walsh 2004; Fransella & Bannister 1977). The grid is a type of ‘structured interview’ that assigns mathematical values to people’s personal constructs (Fransella & Bannister 1977:4). Various character and personality attributes and gender, relating to a range of policing functions and roles, were provided to the participants. The grid interview (Cassell & Walsh 2004; Dick & Jankowicz 2001; Fransella & Bannister 1977) facilitated access to trainers’ and trainees’ inner-most beliefs about themselves and others, either as police officers and police trainers, or in the case of the trainees as their anticipated ‘police self’ (Conti 2006:227), and the expectations of the ‘discourse-practice’ (Cherryholmes 1988:1) framework of policing. Data from the questionnaires and interviews were analysed using grounded theory and a discourse analytic framework respectively. The latter involved the examination of the data using Fairclough’s (1995:98) ‘situational’, ‘institutional’ and ‘societal’ dimensions of discourse analysis, and Gee’s (2005) discourse analytic process investigating: meaning creation through language, roles, values, thinking styles; identity formation; distribution of power, status and gender; and the value and meaning attributed to people, objects, activities.

Fourteen police trainees (six females, eight males) and nine trainers (four females, five males) participated in the repertory grid interviews. In addition, 54 questionnaires were completed by 46 trainees (15 females and 29 males, the majority in the 19 to 25 years age group) and eight trainers (three females and five males, the majority in the 36-45 years age group).

## Findings and Discussion

The most common personality and character attributes and gender (elements within the grid interview), were classified according to the three D/discourses identified from the questionnaire data.

**Table 1 - Elements**

<i>Warrior D/discourse</i>	<i>Tough-love family D/discourse</i>	<i>Perfect self D/discourse</i>
Element 1 – <i>tough</i>	Element 4 – <i>compliant</i>	Element 12 – <i>reputable</i>
Element 2 – <i>authoritative</i>	Element 9 – <i>accepted</i>	Element 13 – <i>sensitive</i>

Element 3 – <i>willing to exercise power</i>	Element 10 – <i>different</i>	Element 14 – <i>tolerant</i>
Element 5 – <i>strong</i>	Element 11 – <i>loyal</i>	Element 15 – <i>logical</i>
Element 6 – <i>willing to use force</i>	Element 17 – <i>conforms</i>	Element 16 – <i>assertive</i>
Element 7 – <i>female</i>		Element 18 – <i>self-control</i>
Element 8 – <i>male</i>		

The analysis of the data from the interviews revealed the predominant D/discourse across the three groups was that of the *Warrior*, closely followed by the D/discourses of *Tough-love family* and *Perfect self*.

## D/discourses

### **Warrior D/discourse**

<i>Female</i>	“Males are always believed to be the stronger and tougher sex”
<i>Male</i>	“At some stage throughout the course ALL the females have been emotional (i.e. upset, crying, etc) and no males have”
<i>Male</i>	Police culture is conveyed through “war stories”
<i>Female</i>	“Putting your body on the line”
<i>Male</i>	“Being tough, strong and aggressive”

Gender and the body as a political object (Foucault 1977; Westmarland 2001) are at the heart of the “*Warrior D/discourse*”. Whilst many types of masculinity can exist simultaneously, one type can dominate (Hearn & Collinson 2006) and become “culturally exalted” (Connell 1995:110). This is certainly evident within this D/discourse. Underscoring this D/discourse are the “*command and control*” and ““*real*” *police work*” subcultures. The former is founded on the paramilitary ethos and strict hierarchical command structure (Bonifacio 1991; Heidensohn 1992; Cain 2002; Fleming & Lafferty 2003; Kappeler, Sluder & Alpert 2001; Palmer 1994; Panzarella 2003; Waddington 1999a), which represent a ‘punishment-centred bureaucracy’ (Waddington 1999b:301). The “*real*” *police work* subculture signifies: ‘crime-fighting’ and a ‘sense of mission’ (Reiner 2000:89); state power and the legitimate use of force; physical strength, power and ability to take control; and authority and compliance (Silvestri 2003; Westmarland 2001). A consequence of the *Warrior D/discourse* is that gender becomes a powerful resource, a ‘rationale’ and an ‘outcome’ (West & Zimmerman 1987:126) for both females and males. The representation of policing as an essentially masculine occupation through D/discourse and images permits gender and other differences to be constructed and maintained (Brown & Heidensohn 2000; Garcia 2003; Silvestri 2003; Westmarland 2001). The policewoman therefore represents the ‘ultimate oxymoron’ (Brown & Heidensohn 2000, cited in Silvestri 2003:31).

In the grid interview, element 8 – “male” was positively correlated and ranked highly by the trainers in three constructs – *admire*, *instructor*, and *ideal police officer*, with “female” ranked low. In the questionnaires, each participant group perceived differences (trainers – 62.5 per cent, trainees – 59 per cent and 46 per cent) between how males and females experienced police training. Gender differences relating to physical ability, levels of aggression, academic ability, and personality attributes such as an authoritative manner, were commonly identified by both the trainers and the trainees.

### **Tough-love family D/discourse**

<i>Male</i>	“It’s like a private club to be joined at some time”
<i>Male</i>	“Team, loyalty, strength, unity” versus “Look after mates, gossip, and bitchiness”
<i>Female</i>	“Supportive (common work goals) and provides peer networks” versus “Misguided

loyalty and suppression of individual initiative”  
*Female* “It’s a huge gossip factory – if you don’t hear your own name, you must be doing OK”

The *Tough-love family D/discourse* is about internal relationships, conformity, membership, and identification. It coalesces with the *family-relationships* subculture characterised by solidarity, a common identity provided by peers (family) and the organisation (parent) (Bonifacio 1991; Fielding 1994; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Prenzler 1998; Reiner 1992, cited in Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999b), and tempered by support *and* punishment (Bonifacio 1991). The *Tough-love family D/discourse* is both a product and resource of the dominant culture, the power relations inherent within it and, hence, circumscribes individuals’ subjectivity and agency. It is about membership and acceptance within an organisation, occupation, and a peer group, and how one is “Othered” by others (Hall 2004). “Othering” can be understood as a consequence of a number of D/discourses that construct difference and enact “Othering” based around a number of factors such as gender, sexuality, commitment to the family (peers) and the parent (organisation), and lack of conformity.

***Perfect self D/discourse***

*Male* “It’s *us* (police) versus *them* (general public)”  
*Female* “Supportive, understanding and a sense of belonging” versus “insular, us and them mentality, and elitist”  
*Male* “It is important to look and act professional.”  
*Male* “The public want to be comforted by us when they are hurt, but they want more so to be reassured by our actions – that we have things under control at an incident. Our strength makes them feel safe.”  
*Male* “We know right from wrong... and we act with honesty and integrity.”  
*Male* “Must not allow the public to get under your skin and change your course of action.”

Image, discipline, separateness, the ability to handle self (Westmarland 2001), and a sense of superiority underlie the ‘*Perfect self D/discourse*’ and combine with the “*real*” *police work* and the *family-relationships* subcultures. The *family-relationships* subculture is built upon the need to be or be seen to be perfect (Bonifacio 1991; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999a & 1999b). This supports the “*real*” *police work* subculture which is grounded in operational policing and political and legal sanctions to control society (Manning 1977). The *Perfect self D/discourse* and complementary subcultures support the development of particular thinking styles that maintain culture, D/discourses, and power and gender relations. Central to this D/discourse is an élitist identity. Adlam (2002:27-28) refers to the ‘socio-biological élitist rationality’, built on the notions of legitimate power and authority (Silvestri 2003), the belief that police ‘know best’ (Adlam:27-28), and an obligation to ‘look the part’ (Frewin & Tuffin 1998:178-181). The élitist identity and maintenance of image and reputation bring into play the ‘we/they [police/public] paradox’ (Perez 1997, cited in Garcia 2005:68), and exemplifies an organisation’s capacity to construct a particular stance towards outsiders (Fairclough 1995:52).

In comparing the characteristics and functions of the subcultures and D/discourses with traditional and contemporary models of policing, outlined previously, they appear to be positioned predominantly within the traditional model.

**Police training and its function**

Police training is focused predominantly on law enforcement (Kratcoski 2004) which reflects the aspirant intent of policing (Foster 2003), maintains the status quo, and positions training

in a traditional, technical framework (White 2006). Webster (2006:5) argues that when pedagogies are viewed as a set of ‘mechanical skills’, a means rather than an outcome, learning is at best ‘trivialised’, at worst, never evaluated, taken-for-granted, and overlooked. The focus is instead on how effectively trainees can acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes to achieve certain behavioural learning outcomes and to demonstrate conformity. Pedagogies are not ideologically neutral; they can be used to regulate behaviour, actions, and practices. This is especially marked in settings where students are perceived ‘as objects’ of value to those in authority (Freire 1970/2000, cited in Webster 2006: 6). In this context, a police trainee is a paid employee and that status essentially ‘buys off’ a trainee’s ‘rights to choose how she or he should be treated’ (White 2006: 393). The trainee is paid to learn and is an ‘object’ of value to the organisation.

Various authors (Birzer 2003; Birzer & Tannehill 2001; McCoy 2006; Marenin 2004; White 2006) are unanimous in recommending a move from traditional pedagogical approaches in police training to andragogical methods with integrated and holistic curricula, and the adoption of professional practice requirements for police trainers (McCoy 2006).

## Conclusion

The findings of this research are set in a somewhat complex context with an agenda amongst Australian and New Zealand police jurisdictions for policing to become a profession, debates about the nature and scope of policing, and the preferred model of policing. While deliberations about these critical areas continue, the purpose, design and delivery of police training and education varies amongst police jurisdictions.

The three prevailing D/discourses in police vocational training corroborate critical aspects evident in the literature in terms of police culture, subcultures, the traditional model of policing, and training practices. The research shows that the D/discourse of the *Warrior* predominates in police training closely followed by the D/discourses of *Tough-love family* and *Perfect self*.

Critically, the *Warrior* D/discourse influences both internal and external relationships and interactions, and therefore the enactment of the other two D/discourses. The trainers’ and trainees’ personal constructs in relation to gender and the body as a political object (Foucault 1977; Westmarland 2001) reveal the strength of the *Warrior* D/discourse. This is complicated by pedagogical practices that reflect doctrinal values rather than educative values. Membership, conformity, competence, and being the ‘perfect’ police trainee are manifestations of the *Tough-love family* D/discourse and determined by the *Warrior* D/discourse. Similarly, the need to establish status and a reputable guise are manifestations of the *Perfect self* D/discourse imposed by the D/discourse of the *Warrior*.

The functions and consequences of the D/discourses are the acquisition of a specified identity and membership within the policing family. The manifestations, functions, and consequences of the three D/discourses coalesce to establish and maintain a powerful and challenging context within which identities are formed and augur a challenging context for change. The words of two trainees reflect the challenges that the culture, subcultures, environment, and these D/discourses present to the trainees:

*Female*            “Policing is the strongest, most pervasive culture I have come across.”  
*Male*              “I try to fit in and I think I do fit in... most of the time.”

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