Cop Culture: The Impact of Confrontation on the Working Personality of Frontline Gardai

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Cop Culture:
The impact of confrontation on the working personality of frontline gardai

A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Masters Degree (M.A.) in Criminology

By

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September 2016

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the material which is submitted in this thesis, towards the award of the Masters (M.A.) in Criminology, is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part fulfilment of the award named above.

Signature of Candidate _____________________________

(Paul Williams).

Date __________________
Abstract

The unofficial, internal culture of An Garda Siochana is an area where there has been a deficit of academic research and scrutiny despite it being existential to the public discourse on garda reform, especially in recent years. It has been pointed out that the lack of data on the organisational value system of the Irish police is due in part to the nascent state of criminological research in Ireland and a reluctance on the part of the Garda authorities to cooperate in research studies. The primary objective of this study was to explore one aspect of police culture: the impact of working in a confrontational and conflicted environment on individual frontline gardai as seen through the lens of their lived experiences. The responses of the research participants were then analysed and considered in the context of the existing theoretical framework of police occupational culture. A qualitative approach was adopted using the format of semi-structured interviews in order to allow the interviewees greater flexibility and scope in expressing their experiences and perceptions. The data sample group consisted of eight serving members which was evenly divided between gender, rank (garda or sergeant) and geographical location (Northern and Southern Divisions of the Dublin Metropolitan Region). When the data were analysed a number of common cultural themes emerged from the responses of the individual participants which conflated with some of the main characteristics of police culture as identified in the literature including: social isolation/solidarity; ‘gallows humour’ as a coping mechanism for dealing with the stresses of the job; suspiciousness/wariness; cynicism; a desire for action; and an ‘us versus them’ division of the social world.

The principle conclusion of the research is that police culture in An Garda Siochana is formed by the experiences of young officers working in a confrontational environment. It also supports the theory that police forces in modern liberal, capitalist democracies, which face similar societal tensions, also share a range of distinctive cultural characteristics which are universal, stable and lasting. The primary recommendation is that much more comprehensive and expansive research is required in order to gain a greater understanding of the multi-dimensional occupational culture of the Irish police. Such detailed investigation is capable of providing invaluable and more enlightened insights for policy makers and stakeholders involved in the criminal justice sector.
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Chapter One

1. Introduction

1.1 Theoretical context of the study.

A recurring theme within occupational sociology is that workers in diverse occupations develop distinctive ways of perceiving and responding to their environment. An occupational culture is a means for coping with the ‘vicissitudes or uncertainties arising routinely in the course of doing a job’ and provides a context ‘within which emotions are regulated and attuned to work routines’ (Manning, 2007: 865).

Police culture was first conceptualized from early ethnographic studies of routine police work which uncovered a layer of shared informal occupational values and norms operating under a rigid hierarchical organizational structure. Generally invoked by academics as condemnatory rather than explanatory, police occupational culture and sub-cultures are often portrayed as a ‘pervasive, malign and potent’ influence on contemporary policing, particularly in the lower ranks (Waddington, 1999: 287).

It derives from the discovery that the working practices of the police are far removed from legal precepts, and that officers exercise extensive discretion in how they enforce the law in their encounters with the public in conditions of ‘low visibility’ (Goldstein, 1960). Much of the theory suggests that the use of discretion by frontline police officers is influenced by a distinctive culture based on a shared informal belief system. The confrontational nature of modern police work has been identified as one of the factors underpinning police culture and that it lies in the early experiences of ‘rookies’ on patrol and the influence of peers (Goldstein, 1960; Banton, 1964; Skolnick, 1966; Westley, 1970; Holdaway, 1983; Goldsmith, 1990; Chan, 1996; Waddington, 1999; Reiner, 2010).
Yet, despite dominating criminological discourse since the 1960’s, the concept remains amorphous and difficult to define with more recent analysis suggesting that police culture is not primarily negative and that it has been ‘poorly defined’ and ‘of little analytic value’ (Chan, 1996: 110-111).

Robert Reiner (2010) describes how cop culture offers a patterned set of understandings that help officers cope with the uniquely dangerous and unpredictable nature of frontline police work. Elements of the police milieu, including danger, authority, conflict and confrontation, combine to generate distinctive cognitive and behavioral responses in police officers that Jerome Skolnick (1966; 2009) characterizes as the ‘working personality’ which ‘is most highly developed in his constabulary role of the man on the beat’ (2009: 580).

This research project focuses on one aspect of police culture: the impact of conflict and confrontation on frontline police through the lens of the lived experiences of individual gardai.

1.2 Rationale for the research.

The study of criminology and policing in particular, is a relatively nascent academic pursuit in Ireland which has been aptly described as the country’s ‘absentee discipline’ in Crime, Punishment and the Search for Order in Ireland (Kilcommins, O'Donnell, O'Sullivan & Vaughan, 2004). Prior to the book’s publication an academic infrastructure did not exist to sustain and promote empirical criminological research in Ireland, and consequently there was a paucity of data relating to the operational sectors of the criminal process, including the police (Maruna, 2007).
In *Policing Twentieth Century Ireland: A History of An Garda Síochána* (2014) Vicky Conway reveals that the lack of data concerning the organizational value system of the gardai is due in part to the nascent state of criminology and an ‘unwillingness on the part of the police to engage in such research’. She notes: ‘Data of this type could provide an innovative understanding of policing in Ireland, of prevalent cultures, of how social changes have changed the nature of policing, and of the lived experience of policing’ (Conway, 2014: 5–6).

In an effort to bridge the data gap Conway included oral history interviews with 42 retired gardai – 41 men and one woman – who provided frank testimonies of their service experiences in the period 1952–2006. She adopted this methodology because ‘access to serving gardaí is very difficult to secure (indeed, this researcher is unaware of any study of serving gardai by someone external to the organisation)’ (2014: 219). Issues relating to police culture in Ireland became central to the public discourse regarding garda reform following a series of controversies that engulfed the justice sector in 2013/2014.

This research study is grounded in the lack of research of occupational police culture in Ireland. The project was made possible after the researcher gained access to a purposive sample of eight serving frontline members which was evenly divided between ranks – sergeant and garda – genders and frontline units.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the study.

The aim of the study is to explore the impact of working in a confrontational and conflicted environment on individual frontline gardai through the lens of their lived experiences; and the responses are analysed to see if they are absorbed into the wider occupational culture of An Garda Siochana when considered within the existing theoretical framework.
The objective of the research is to provide a starting point for further research of police culture in Ireland which, despite being existential to the discourse regarding garda reform, remains largely uncharted territory.

The research design utilised a qualitative approach to the collection of data using the format of semi-structured interviews which allowed the interviewees greater flexibility and scope to express their views. This approach produced rich data with participants articulating several common themes contained within the theoretical characteristics of the police officer’s working personality.

1.4 Organization of Chapters.

There are five chapters in this dissertation including the Introduction. Chapter Two contains a review of a cross-section of the voluminous international literature on police occupational culture by firstly, defining the role and powers of the public police; and secondly, charting the evolution of policing scholarship in this area since the 1960’s. The Literature Review will also assess the existing (albeit sparse) relevant literature relating to the occupational culture of An Garda Siochana.

Chapter Three outlines and explains the research design and methodology employed in the study. It will discuss the rationale for the research topic; explain the process by which the sample group was selected; and how the data was collected, coded and then analysed. The chapter will also address the ethical issues involved as well as the possible contributions and limitations of the study.

In Chapter Four the aim is two-fold: (i) to present the research findings; and (ii) to integrate the findings by discussing them in the context of the literature. Chapter Five concludes the thesis with a general discussion of the main findings followed by the recommendations.
Chapter Two

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction.

This chapter evaluates the main characteristics of police occupational culture within the existing theoretical framework. In order to contextualise the research the first section of the chapter defines the purpose, role and powers of the public police. The second section contains a description of the genesis and evolution of police scholarship over the past fifty years. It is then followed by a section highlighting the dominant themes of police culture, including an examination of the concept of discretion which is central to any discourse surrounding ‘street cop culture’. The final part of the chapter reviews existing literature within the context of the occupational culture of An Garda Síochána. The chapter ends with a conclusion and overview of the material discussed.

2.2 Defining the Police: the role and powers of frontline officers.

The police are identified primarily ‘as a body of people patrolling public places in blue uniforms, with a broad mandate of crime control, order maintenance and some negotiable social service functions. Anyone living in a modern society has this intuitive notion of what the police are’ (Reiner, 2010:3). The formal state police organisation is the one agency of the state that every citizen feels they are familiar with and will have encountered at some stage in their daily lives. One of the fundamental deterrent roles of the police is that they are one of the ‘most visible and recognisable institutions in modern society’ (Newburn, 2007:598)


Whilst the establishment of formalised state policing arrangements is a historically recent development – coinciding with the establishment of Robert Peel’s London Metropolitan Police in 1829 - its dominant role in contemporary society and popular culture is such that the shared public assumption is that the police have always existed. The public’s obsession with ‘crime, flashing blue lights and wailing sirens’ has made the police ubiquitous in contemporary popular culture, dominating the 24/7 news and entertainment schedules (Emsley, 1991; Ignatieff, 1979; McLaughlin, 2007; Reiner, 2010; Zedner, 2004). The consequence of this cultural omnipresence, Reiner argues, is that modern societies are characterised by ‘police fetishism’ - the ideological assumption that police are a functional prerequisite of social order and all that stands between chaos and anarchy in ‘an uncontrolled war of all against all’ (Reiner, 2003: 259; 2007: 912).

The defining feature of the public police is as the sole institution through which the state ‘claims monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory...to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the right to use violence’ (Weber 1948:78, emphasis in original). The description of the police as officers of the law acknowledges their exclusive, non-negotiable right to exercise a range of coercive powers which supersede an individual’s civil rights, permitting them to search citizens and their property, monitor their movements and deprive them of their liberty. This power is utilized to perform their function of protecting the viability of the state and the security of its citizens – preventing crime, catching offenders and keeping the public peace (Conway, 2010; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Zedner, 2004).

The public police are ‘the most prominent and, arguably, the most powerful actors’ in the criminal justice system (Zedner, 2004:126) and are ‘housed within a specialist, hierarchical, bureaucratic institution whose members are set apart from ‘civilians’ by dint of their uniform, training, and an internal regime of vertical command structures and disciplinary rules and procedures’ (Loader & Mulcahy, 2003:41).
Robert Reiner describes policing as possessing a perpetual ‘Janus face’ (2010: 17) as it deals with conflict; inevitably helping some by controlling others. ‘One side’s reasonable and necessary force is the other’s unjust tyranny’ (ibid: xiii). A constant feature of the occupational culture of the police is coping with violence, or the threat of violence, that hangs over every working day. The police are distinct from other hazardous occupations – where there is a more calculable risk – because officers must confront situations that arise in emergencies where the risk of conflict lies in the uniquely dangerous, unpredictable outcome of encounters with the public (Crank, 2004; Waddington & Wright, 2008; Waddington, 1999).

Formal police organisations are inevitably associated with social complexity and inequality in a rapidly changing society, and within that context the purpose, conduct and efficacy of the police is a constant source of conflict, debate and controversy.

‘Danger is linked to authority, which is inherently part of the police milieu…it is because they represent authority that police officers face danger from those recalcitrant to its exercise’ (Reiner, 2010:119).

In observance of its core objective to protect and serve society the police perform a bewildering miscellany of public service tasks and interventions: traffic control, crime prevention and investigation, social service, order maintenance, public safety, counter-terrorism, the enforcement of Government policies, court orders and injunctions. The one feature that unifies most policing tasks, is that they generally arise in emergencies with the potential of conflict and confrontation, and involve ‘something that ought not to be happening and about which someone had better do something now!’ (Bittner, 1974:30, emphasis in original).
Using empirical research data collected over a four year period from 28 police forces in five countries - UK, Canada, the USA, Japan and Australia - David Bayley (1994; 2009) discovered that frontline police spend the vast majority of their time sorting out problems rather than resorting to their bottom line power to make arrests. He summarised patrol work as being determined ‘almost entirely’ by what the public ask the police to do and that:

‘...contrary to what most people think, the police do not enforce their own conception of order on an unwilling populace...Police interrupt and pacify situations of potential or ongoing conflict...they rarely make arrests, though the threat of doing so always exists’ (Bayley, 2009:575).

The research also confirmed that as little as between seven and ten per cent of police call-outs actually involve crime while the rest can be categorised as calls from people with no one else to turn to. In most cases what is initially reported as a crime to the police often turns out not to be a crime. A regular call-out scenario involved lonely, elderly people reporting burglaries in progress so that the police would come and talk to them for a while. The multitude of diverse encounters inevitably involve society’s most vulnerable elements.

‘By and large the people police deal with are life’s refugees. Uneducated, poor, often unemployed, they are both victims and victimisers. Hapless, befuddled, beaten by circumstances, people like these turn to the police for help they can’t give themselves. There is little the police can do for them except listen, shrug and move on’ (Bayley, 2009:575).

Other international research generally supports the findings that frontline policing mainly involves mundane, non-crime related work which Felson (2002) eloquently summarised: ‘Police work consists of hour upon hour of boredom, interrupted by moments of sheer terror. Some police officers have to wait years for these moments’ (2002: 4). Manning describes how officers work the streets waiting for something to happen. ‘Boredom, risk and excitement oscillate unpredictably’ (2007: 866).
Bittner (1984) defines the experiences of frontline police officers as:

‘...essentially a sequence of adventurous encounters with evil by individual officers or pairs of officers, who are for the most part left to depend on their own strength, courage, and wit in critical situations, interrupted by stretches of banality and boredom’ (1984: 212)

In the vast majority of their diverse interactions with the public the police do not invoke their legal powers, opting instead to exercise their extensive discretionary powers to restore calm and order in their primary role as ‘peace keepers’ or ‘peace officers’. Successful policing requires pragmatism over legal zeal, utilizing the craft of handling trouble without resorting to coercion, most usually by the use of skilful verbal tactics. But underlying all of their difficult and challenging interactions with the public is the police officer’s bottom line power to wield legal sanctions and legitimate force (Banton, 1964; Skolnick, 1966, 2008, 2009; Holdaway, 1983; Bayley, 1994; Chan, 1996; Reiner, 1996, 2003, 2007, 2010; Waddington, 1999; Zedner, 2004).

2.3 The development of police occupational culture theory.

The empirical study of the social, psychological and cultural dimensions of policing was largely inspired by the sociological studies of Michael Banton’s *The Policeman in the Community* (1964) in the UK; and William Westley’s *Violence and the police: A sociological study of law, custom and morality* (1952; 1970) in the USA. Their work represented a breakthrough in post-war police scholarship as the first sociological studies of Anglo-American policing and made a convincing case for why the police should be a legitimate research topic for social scientific research (McLaughlin, 2007).

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1 Westley came to policing through the lens of cultural interpretation, breaking new ground by moving from the traditional narratives of what the police do, to who they are, with particular emphasis on interpretations of how culture frames behaviour. He conducted his research for a doctoral thesis in 1952 which was later published in 1970 (McLaughlin, 2007).
Westley discovered that as an occupational group the police possessed distinctive group customs, attitudes, values and modes of socialisation that influenced their actions. He wrote of how the constant exposure to corruption, immorality and degradation while working in a vortex of ‘anxiety, excitement, fear, and perhaps of madness’ drove police officers to band together, withdraw from the community, build a wall of secrecy, and live by their own rules (Westley, 1970).

Police studies marked a departure from the traditional positivist ‘science of criminology’, which had chosen to exclude the functioning of the police and criminal justice from its intellectual province, prompting new critical criminologies in the 1960s and 70’s that began to see as problematic the structure and functioning of criminal justice agencies, particularly the police.

The epistemological break coincided with the socio-economic, cultural and political transformations that convulsed Western democracies in the 1960’s, precipitating the collapse of the post-war consensual social order bringing an end to an age of deference and conformity in a process of ‘de-subordination’ (McLaughlin, 2007). The process of change widened the gulf between the police and the community, particularly the younger generation who began to express their independence by joining gangs like the mods and rockers.

Dramatic changes in patrolling methods, characterised by the introduction of squad cars and personal radios, rapidly reduced the number of officers on foot patrol which had been the traditional basis for positive social interaction with the public. The new policing philosophy favoured fast cars which transformed it into a glorified fire brigade service where officers patrolled the streets looking for action (Reiner, 2010). Loader and Mulcahy (2003) describe how this change in relationships between the police and the public provided a fertile ground for new studies of police culture because the ‘processes of de-traditionalisation have come to have effects, not only upon the social world that the police are tasked with regulating, but also within the police organization itself’ (2003: 182, original emphasis).
This turbulent period also marked the reputational transformation of the British police from the ‘sacred’ phase, as evoked in Michael Banton’s sociological studies (1964) where the police were perceived as totems of moral superiority; to becoming a ‘profane’ institution following a process of de-sacralisation precipitated by corruption scandals, malpractice cases and allegations of racial discrimination.² Reiner (1992a) suggests that the ‘sacred’ view characterised the ‘consensus’ stage in police research and marked the first of four distinguishable stages that have taken place since: ‘consensus’, ‘controversy’, ‘conflict’ and ‘contradiction’.

The socio-political and economic paradigm shift between the 1960s and 1980’s increased the level of conflict between the police and the public providing yet more fertile ground for academic research. In Britain and the USA the shift to neo-liberal, free-market economic policies – ‘capitalism unleashed’ - under the Governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, precipitated long-term unemployment, social exclusion and inequality whilst expanding a culture of consumer aspirations. The net effect was the unravelling of the traditional processes of social order and increased levels of crime. It also caused the politicisation of crime issues resulting in a shift from ‘penal welfarism’ to the ‘crime complex’ which favours incarceration over rehabilitation. The universal adoption of the neo-liberal agenda also ushered in a new concept of plural policing where the public police is located within a much broader framework of policing involving diverse networks and actors, and the privatisation of core justice functions (Holdaway, 1983; Chan, 1996; Morgan & Newburn, 1997; Garland, 2001; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Zedner, 2004; Jones & Newburn, 2006; McLaughlin, 2007; Mawby, 2008; Newburn, 2013; Newburn & Reiner, 2007; Reiner, 2010).

² Banton first evoked the sacred status of the British police officer within a consensual social order. The sacralisation of the police officer as a moral agent derives from Durkheim’s concept of the existence of a structured power acting as an external constraint over the individual, who is above corruption and conscious about the power he wields for the good of the community. Banton defined the socially sacred as ‘that which is set apart and that which is treated both as intrinsically good and dangerous’ (Banton, 1964: p. 237)
2.4 The ‘working personality’ of the frontline police officer.

Studies of police culture have generally fallen into two competing camps: the traditional characterization of an undifferentiated, monolithic, ‘*one size fits all*’ culture; compared to more recent theories recognizing that police culture is a much more diverse, fluid and changeable phenomenon containing multiple cultures and subcultures associated with differing types of police activity, specialization and managerial ranks in conjunction with the diversification of functions within plural policing. Police organisations develop their own distinctive cultural identity and it is within this structure that multiple cultures and subcultures emerge.

Cultures are influenced by organizational distinctions and variables based on multiple factors such as, for example, geography - urban versus rural; hierarchical divisions – the two-tiered option of management cops versus street cops, or the triple-layered one comprising command, middle-management and the lower echelons; distinctions within the lower ranks – detective versus street cop, or street cop versus community policing officer; distinctions within specialized groups – SWAT team members versus traffic cops. Other variables include differences of outlook within police organisations according to individual variables of personality, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, generation and career trajectory (Skolnick, 1966; Holdaway, 1983; Fielding, 1988; Chan, 1996, 1997; Waddington, 1999, 2008; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Manning, 1977, 2007; Paoline, 2004; Westmarland, 2008; Reiner 1992a; 2010).

Manning, (2007) defines an occupational culture as:

‘...a reduced, selective, and tank-based version of culture that includes history and traditions, etiquette and routines, rules, principles and practices that serve to buffer practitioners from contacts with the public. A kind of lens on the world, it highlights some aspects of the social and physical environment and omits or minimizes others. It generates stories, lore and legends’ (Manning, 2007: 865).
Jerome Skolnick’s classic formulation of the policeman’s ‘working personality’ (1966), which has been central to the discussions on the core police culture, outlines a number of environmental factors that influence the occupational culture. He synthesised earlier sociological research with his own findings to construct a pioneering sketch which referred not to an individual psychological phenomenon but a socially generated culture.

‘Police have a discernable culture flowing from the nature of the job, police behaviour is strongly influenced by the underlying values – and politics – of the community that finances the police department’ (Skolnick, 2008: 39, original emphasis).

This culture emerges in response to a unique combination of facets of the police role: ‘Two principal variables, danger and authority, which should be interpreted in the light of a constant pressure to appear efficient’ (Skolnick, 1966: 44). As the visible embodiment of social authority, police are exposed to danger and in order to cope with these pressures a set of informal rules, rites and recipes evolved and developed.

Skolnick identified suspiciousness as one of three dominant themes within cop culture because, as a consequence of the continuous preoccupation with potential violence and conflict, the front line officer develops a ‘perceptual shorthand’ to identify certain kinds of people as ‘symbolic assailants’. ‘This was an important observation because what officers identify as suspicious people, places, or circumstances determines who gets observed, scrutinized and interrogated by the police’ (Stroshine, Alpert & Dunham, 2008: 315). Other features explained by Skolnick were internal solidarity, coupled with social isolation and conservatism. Suspiciousness renders the officer prone to operate with prejudiced stereotypes while the internal solidarity is created by the shared intense experience of confronting danger and the need to rely on colleagues. The multifarious interactions between the police officer and the public, dealing with violent people or enforcing the road traffic laws – ‘danger and authority’ – combined with the unsociable nature of the job, and a wariness of management, create the conditions of social isolation. Solidarity can also provide a defensive shield for wrong doing while isolation exacerbates prejudices.
When officers divide the world into we-versus-them, the former consists of other police officers while the latter encompasses almost everybody else. Skolnick argues that while members of other occupational groups also develop their own subcultures and worldviews, it is not to the same extent as the police. ‘Set apart from the conventional world, the policeman experiences an exceptionally strong tendency to find his social identity within his occupational milieu’ (Skolnick, 1966:52). Bayley’s research found that police tend to become cynical and suspicious as a consequence of their interactions with the public who ‘lie brazenly’ or ‘tell self-serving, partially true stories’ (2009:574).

According to Zedner (2004) the distinctive characteristics of street cop culture derive from the fact that police work closely together, in dangerous, unpredictable situations and often in conflict with the surrounding community. This engenders an institutionalized sense of isolation and an ‘us-and-them’ attitude to the world outside the police station. It is rooted in a shared knowledge system containing strongly-held beliefs about the nature of policing and those they police.

While culture is generally viewed negatively in police studies Westmarland argues that many commentators allude and yet do not explain or explore it in depth. ‘It is as if culture exists in the background of most discussions of policing and yet only comes to the fore when some misdemeanor or difficulty arises as a cover all explanation or excuse’ (Westmarland, 2008: 253).

Chan described the concept of police culture as a ‘convenient label for a range of negative values, attitudes and practice norms among police officers’ (1996:110). Waddington argues that the convenience lies in its ‘condemnatory potential: the police are to blame for the injustices perpetrated in the name of the criminal justice system’ (1999:293, emphasis in original).
Chan contends that police culture does not exist in a vacuum or is free-standing, but exists for a purpose. It can be viewed as functional to the survival of police officers in an occupation that is dangerous, unpredictable and alienating. The bond of solidarity is a form of reassurance that fellow officers will be there to defend and back up their colleagues when confronted by external threats (Chan, 1996, 1997).

The subcultural concept of ‘canteen culture’, which is also held up as a negative influence on police culture, is yet another tributary branching out from the crowded theoretical milieu. It refers to a system of values and beliefs – gallows humour - expressed by officers while socializing for the purpose of tension release (Reiner, 2010). Waddington (1999) concludes that what is spoken in the canteen or social environment is ‘expressive talk designed to give purpose and meaning to inherently problematic occupational experience’ (1999:287). Paoline (2004) also suggests that changes in the policing profession over recent decades with the recruitment of more females, racial minorities and college-educated officers, has the effect of diluting and eroding some of the more negative features of the monolithic police culture, such as conservatism, sexism and racism.

Reiner’s isolation of some of the main characteristics of police culture has also become a standard means of understanding the term including the following primary attributes: a sense of mission; suspicion; cynicism; isolation/solidarity; conservatism; machismo and pragmatism. There is also a common desire – on the part of younger officers – for action in the face of routine mundane duties. Cultures are complex ensembles of values, attitudes, symbols, rules, recipes and practices, which emerge as people respond in various meaningful ways to their predicament as constituted by the network of relations they find themselves in, which are in turn formed by different more macroscopic levels of structured action and institutions (Reiner, 2010:116-132).
As illustrated in Bayley’s (1994) research police forces around the world share distinctive common experiences and characteristics. And while police culture may vary from place to place and change over time, Reiner suggests that a distinctive culture emerges in modern liberal, capitalist democracies where police face similar basic pressures. Skolnick also observes that culture has certain ‘universal stable and lasting features’ (2008:35).

### 2.4.1 Discretion.

Since in-depth studies began in the 1960’s and 70’s criminologists have insisted that police culture is central to understanding how discretion is used. There is consensus across the literature that the use of discretion by largely unsupervised street cops is seen as a major influencing factor in shaping the pattern of deviance. ‘The lower ranks of the (police) service control their own work situation and such control may well shield highly questionble practices’ (Holdaway, 1979:12).

The use of discretion has been a fundamental principle of policing since Robert Peel’s New Police first began patrolling the streets of London in 1829. The first formal public police were met with intense hostility, suspicion and resistance from across the social divide (Ignatieff, 1979). In order to be effective the police had first to convince the public to accept the code of criminal behaviour and their legitimacy. Discretion was the key to achieving this cultural shift by negotiating a complex, unofficial fluid ‘contract’ where the police defined activities they would turn a blind eye to, and those which they would not (Ignatieff, 1979: 33).

Robert Reiner (2010) observes that the use of discretion and minimal force, which has characterized consensual policing ever since, is done so for ‘principled and pragmatic reasons’ to gain the public’s trust and co-operation. Although the use of discretion can be problematical ‘it is inevitable and necessary, if only for pragmatic reasons of the limited capacity of the criminal justice system’ (2010:19).
Discretion is also necessary as it lubricates the criminal justice system and ensures that justice is discharged. If, as the gate keepers to the criminal justice system, police did not exercise discretion at street level then every misdemeanour would result in prosecution and the criminal law would be seen as overbearing, hugely costly and impracticable. The use of discretion is therefore essential to the fair enforcement of the law (Zedner, 2004:130).

It is therefore inevitable that police discretion is one of the most contentious issues in the criminal process. The principle of discretion rests on the choice to decide what action to take in a given situation; or the decision to take no action at all. Unlike any other organization discretionary power is located primarily with the lowest-ranking employees (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2013). The rank-and-file officer on the street decides if someone is to be treated as ‘criminal’ or ‘innocent’ with all the potentially life-altering consequences that flow from that decision for the individual concerned.

‘In other words, anything that might be inclined to influence behaviour by frontline officers, such as deference to class or beliefs about certain ethnic groups being involved in crime, can create, construct and influence important and fundamental questions about how crime is defined and counted, and who is criminalised’ (Westmarland, 2008: 255).

The recognition that the police do not adhere mechanistically to the rule of law also raised the prospect of discrimination and malpractice. Given the dispersed character of routine police work, which gave it low visibility, discretion was hard to regulate. Various enquiries and reports into the police handling of public disorders and criminal investigations in the UK showed that police discretion was not an equal opportunity phenomenon. It disguised the disproportionate use of police power against certain powerless minorities – ‘police property’ – who were over policed and under-protected (Newburn & Reiner, 2007:915). The most negative manifestation of the use of discretion within a cop culture is to enable misconduct and more serious corruption. This behaviour – ‘bent for job’ or ‘noble cause’ corruption - is protected behind a ‘blue wall of silence’ or ‘blue code’ where officers are reluctant to report wrong-doing by colleagues (Morton, 1993:207 – 213).
2.5 Occupational culture in An Garda Síochána.

The issue of an undefined, unofficial occupational culture within An Garda Síochána was thrust into the political and media discourse on policing after a number of unprecedented controversies engulfed the justice sector in 2013 - 2014. The so-called Whistle-blower scandal, which related to the abuse of the penalty points system and allegations of corruption in the Cavan/Monaghan Division, sparked a veritable bush fire which quickly spread, creating one of the biggest crisis to befall law enforcement in the history of the State. It culminated in the sacking of the Garda Confidential Recipient, Oliver Connolly in February 2014 (Irish Times, February 2014) and the resignations of the Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan in March 2014 (RTE, March 2014) and, in May 2014, that of the Minister for Justice Alan Shatter (BBC, May 2014).

The flames of controversy also engulfed the Department of Justice forcing the transfer of the Secretary General of the Department, Brian Purcell in July 2014 (RTE, July 2014). The combined controversies led to a succession of Government-appointed commissions of investigation and reports on various aspects of police accountability and behaviour. Following decades of resistance the controversies finally pushed the Government to establish the Policing Authority on December 30, 2015, under the provisions of An Garda Síochána (Policing Authority and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015.

The most dramatic evidence of the existence of a corrosive unofficial culture within An Garda Síochana was revealed by the Morris Tribunal which was established by the government to investigate misconduct, negligence and corruption in the Donegal Garda Division. It was a scandal of ‘unparalleled scale, which threatened its [gardai] legitimacy and internal morale’ (Conway, 2014:1). The Tribunal, which began hearing evidence in June 2002, spent 686 days in evidence, spread over six years, scrutinising the conduct, operation and organisation of the Irish police force.
Its origins lay with the garda investigation of the death of a man called Richie Barron in a hit-and-run accident in 1996. Among the matters investigated was the framing of two men for a murder that never occurred; false arrests and confessions forced from prisoners; the orchestration of false bomb finds and the planting of guns and drugs to secure convictions. In a separate case two of the officers at the centre of the investigation were found to have framed a Donegal night club owner for drug dealing which was later certified as a miscarriage of justice (Conway, 2010; 2014: Brady, 2014).

While up to this point in time there had been a dearth of information regarding the internal workings of the gardai, the Morris Tribunal was ‘one of the longest and most thorough inquiries into any police force in modern times’ (Brady, 2014:239). The tribunal produced eight reports containing devastating findings of systemic malpractice, corruption, abuse of power, disregard for procedure, negligent management and supervision, internal bullying, poor promotions and a belief on the part of the offenders that they could do so with impunity. Morris concluded that it was unlikely that such a culture was confined within the boundaries of just one garda division and debunked a ‘rotten apple’ defence by pointing to the complicity of management.

‘The sorry sequence of events ... is an appalling reflection on the standards of integrity, efficiency, management, discipline and trust between the various members and ranks of the Garda Síochána ... Gardaí looked to protect their own interests. The truth was to be buried. The public interest was of no concern’ (Morris Tribunal Report I/3.179, cited by Conway, 2014:190)

Conway (2014) has argued that the inherent disregard for the law and widespread breeches of the garda code of conduct exposed by the Morris enquiry reflected the negative conditions of a cop culture. Conway (2014b) expressed the view that the negative elements of the embedded values and norms of cop culture can be found in An Garda Siochana. But while she argued that this culture was one of the three core areas requiring to be targeted in a root-and-branch reform, she reflected the amorphousness of the concept through her inability to present a coherent methodology for so doing.
'That is difficult, challenging work as this culture is transmitted on a daily basis across police stations and across generations. It takes courageous and dedicated leadership and an acceptance by police of a different outlook on the same job. While many practical changes (such as training, promotions, oversight and governance) can all contribute to changing culture we cannot legislate for a new police culture. This requires a continuous process stemming primarily from strong leadership’ (Presentation by Dr Vicky Conway at consultation seminar on justice reform, Farmleigh House, June 20, 2014.)

In November 2015 the Garda Inspectorate attempted to bridge the gap in research of police culture in Ireland when it published a comprehensive review, Changing Policing in Ireland, in which all aspects of the administration and operation of the Garda Síochana, including structure, organisation, staffing and deployment were assessed. In order to better understand the internal perceptions of garda culture, the Inspectorate conducted qualitative research through focus group workshops and structured interviews with staff at all ranks and grades. This was the first time that such research in this area was conducted within An Garda Síochana. The review acknowledged that ‘there is little available research in relation to garda culture in Ireland’ (Garda Inspectorate Report, 2015: 10).

Positive aspects of culture were described as a ‘can do’ attitude, ‘a sense of duty’, ‘a culture of service’ and ‘a good organisation at heart’. However, the research participants highlighted that the Garda Síochána is an organisation that can’t say no to requests and ‘tries to be all things to all people’. Negative comments on culture were described as ‘insular’, ‘defensive’, ‘not encouraging initiative’, ‘personal loyalty as opposed to organisational loyalty’, ‘a gulf between gardaí and senior managers’, and one where ‘garda staff and some junior ranks do not feel valued’.
Interviewees also spoke of a blame and risk-averse culture, whereby officers were afraid of the repercussions of making mistakes. As a result, more senior management could be concerned with ‘self-preservation’ rather than acting in the best needs of the organisation. Supervisors highlighted how some members were less inclined to engage with the public on the basis that ‘the less interaction, the less confrontation, the better’ (Garda Inspectorate Report, 2015:10–11). The report concluded that the official stated culture of the organisation was not displayed in the ‘real working culture’.

‘...it would appear that the culture as set out in official garda documents is not clearly exhibited in the real working culture. The perceptions noted in previous pages of this part suggest that the Garda Síochána does not support the stated culture fully through structures, performance measurement, operational decisions and priorities nor is it consistently displayed in the way policing services are delivered’ (Garda Inspectorate Report, 2015:177).

Rank-and-file gardai and their immediate supervisory ranks on the frontline have repeatedly highlighted the levels of aggression and conflict they have experienced while enforcing court orders and injunctions against anti-water charge protesters. They have complained of being the victims of a deliberate and sustained level of confrontation and harassment both physically and via social media (Lally, 2015). (For examples of the type of confrontations go to: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=water+protests).

Reactions to these confrontations were reflected in a survey of morale organised by the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors (AGSI) in December 2015. The survey was carried out over a 10 day period with a 27 per cent response rate from the 1,928 sergeants and inspectors. It found that 86 per cent of respondents felt that morale was either ‘low or very low’ (AGSI Morale Survey, 2015).
Cultural indicators included a sense of being under-valued by garda management with no support mechanisms in place to deal with issues of stress and under-resourcing.

‘There is a gulf, a gaping chasm between Management in HQ and the cold face of policing. Lack of support for people on the ground, lack of clear guidance and support around water protests and demonizing of Gardai on social media. There is a lack of support and lack of nurturing and wanting to get the best out of the Gardai on the front line. Mostly there is a complete lack of respect’ (AGSI Morale Survey, Section VI, Members commentary, December 2015).

2.6 Conclusion.

The theoretical framework assessed in this review illustrates how police culture is a constantly evolving, organic phenomenon, occurring naturally when a relatively small group of people are tasked with working in a volatile, confrontational and unpredictable environment. It was not until the 1950’s that the police became the subject of sociological scientific research following the path breaking Anglo-American studies of Michael Banton and William Westley who opened the way to a new world of policing scholarship. The review also highlighted how the concept of a monolithic culture has been replaced by a complex network of occupational cultures and sub-cultures. Officers working on the streets are moulded by their interactions with the public and peers which in turn influences how they exercise their discretion. The existing Irish literature also indicates the existence of the same variables in the occupational culture of An Garda Siochana.
Chapter Three

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction.

This chapter outlines and then explains the research design and methodology employed in this study. It will discuss the rationale for the research topic and explain the process by which the data was collected, coded and then analysed. The chapter will also address the process of sample selection and access, the ethical issues involved, the possible contributions and limitations of the study.

3.2 Aims and Objectives, Research Question.

The main aim of this study is to explore the impact of conflict and confrontation on individual gardai working on the frontline through the lens of their individual lived experiences; and whether the responses are absorbed into the wider occupational culture of An Garda Siochana when considered in the context of the existing theoretical framework.

This was achieved by analysing the data to isolate any similarities or conflations which might suggest a uniform group response capable of being interpreted as a wider cultural response.

The objective of the research is to provide a starting point for further research of police culture in Ireland which, despite being existential to the discourse regarding garda reform, remains uncharted territory.
3.2.1 Issues addressed by the research.

The research question was sourced from the wider literature and used to explore how the individual experiences of confrontation impacts on the shape and form of the garda’s working personality. The individual responses of the research participants were then analysed for the purpose of identifying possible common themes contained in the prevailing literature on police culture.

3.3 Research Design.

The nature of the topic and research questions determined that an exploratory study be carried out utilising a qualitative approach to data collection, using the format of semi-structured interviews which allowed the interviewees greater flexibility and scope to express their lived experiences (Silverman, 2011) and which are expressed in words to reflect feelings, opinions, descriptions and anecdotes (Walliman, 2011). Qualitative data is expressed in words collected by asking/interviewing/observing (May, 2001:121) as opposed to a quantitative approach which requires a more complex methodology.

The qualitative approach uncovers perceptions, attitudes, understandings and meaning in what is presented (Burnett, 2009). The use of an interview to obtain data is a ‘very good way of accessing people’s perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality’ (Punch, 2009:168) while Greenhalgh (2001) describes qualitative research as being interpretative and concerned with interpreting and understanding phenomena through the meanings that people attach to them.

May (2001) states the importance of the design of interview questions is to construct them unambiguously and be clear in their mind what the purpose of the question is, and who it is for, and how the interviewee is intended to interpret it. By using semi-structured interview methods the researcher asked specific questions and was able to seek both clarification and elaboration on the answers given.
The semi-structured interview was chosen as it was assessed by the researcher as being the most effective for this particular study, providing a balance between the standardisation of a structured interview and the variability of the unstructured interview, thus allowing for greater flexibility and a natural flow. The research design was such as to encourage the interviewee to answer questions on their own terms by expressing their views and experiences, and to elaborate further on a topic if they wish (Bell, 1999). The aim was to encourage the interviewees to talk freely and thus avoid normative, ‘official line’ answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) while the questions were ‘carefully thought through so as not to restrict or predetermine the responses but at the same time cover the research concerns’ (2005:135). This allowed the researcher to then pursue further topics that arose with follow up, probing questions.

The dual exigencies of the time available to complete the study, including the time-consuming process of conducting interviews and transcribing the data; and the required size of the dissertation, dictated that the research participant group was based on a small purposive sample of eight serving front line gardai serving in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR). The sample group was evenly divided in terms of rank – sergeants and gardai; geographic location – northern and southern divisions; gender and front line regular units.

3.3.1 Reflective note.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, police occupational culture and sub-cultures are generally invoked by academics as condemnatory rather than explanatory; it is often portrayed as a 'pervasive, malign and potent' influence on contemporary policing, particularly in the lower ranks and their use of extensive discretionary powers (Waddington, 1999). More recent analysis has described this as a convenient label which many commentators use yet do not explain or explore in any great depth (Chan, 1996; Westmarland, 2008) The literature also shows that the confrontational nature of police work is a key factor underpinning police occupational culture and that it lies in the early experiences of young officers on patrol (Skolnick, 1966; Reiner, 2010).
With this in mind the researcher was initially concerned that the research participants, who had been selected with the co-operation of the garda authorities, would fall back on a default defensive position of closing ranks and resorting to official line answers. However, all the participants involved demonstrated a willingness to share their experiences and in the process volunteering refreshingly candid views concerning their working environment and its impact on their cognitive perceptions.

None of the sample group were known to the researcher although the participants were all familiar with the researcher which was an aid in quickly establishing rapport. This interaction produced rich data from which to isolate common themes.

3.4 Access, Data sample and Data collection process.

3.4.1 Access.

On March 14, 2016 the researcher requested clearance and assistance in gaining access to the sample group from the Garda Research Unit in Templemore through initial contact with the analysis service at Garda headquarters in the Phoenix Park (Appendix A) attaching the An Garda Síochána Protocol for External Research request form (Appendix B). The schedule of proposed questions for the research were also emailed on March 18 (Appendix C). On the same date assistance and clearance was confirmed. On April 18 the researcher was contacted by a member of the Research Unit in Templemore and provided with contact details for two designated liaison officers in the Northern and Southern garda divisions. The gate keepers then canvassed their colleagues for potential volunteers within their respective divisions. The research participants were selected from the list by the gate keepers who then provided individual contact details to the researcher.
3.4.2 Data sample.

A sample group of eight frontline officers were selected by the gate keepers which was, as requested, divided evenly between ranks, gender, and geographical location - Northern and Southern Divisions. The location was included to explore its relevance as a potential variable in the research data. The participants were operating in three distinct frontline units: regular shift (three members); Divisional Task Force which had been re-named Burglary Response Units (BRU's) (three members); community policing (two members).

The length of service of the sample group ranged from seven years to 39 years divided as follows: 7 years, 8 years, 9 years, 10 years, 17 years (two officers), 20 years and 39 years.

The sample group was then coded by rank; numerical order in the interview schedule according to rank; gender and division. Therefore G 1 F N denotes: Garda rank; the first garda interviewed in her division; gender; and Northern Division. S 2 M S denotes: Sergeant; second male interviewed in his division; gender and Southern Division.

3.4.3 Data collection.

The process of data collection took place between May and August 2016 and the interviews were conducted in the garda stations where the participants worked. The interviewees had received the schedule of questions in advance of the interview and all of them agreed to have the interviews recorded. On average each interview lasted for an hour – none of the interviews took less than that time - and were recorded on the researcher’s iPhone 6.

Each interview began with the schedule of questions but the researcher found that the interviewees quickly branched out to discuss several aspects of their working culture which invariably led to supplemental questions regarding more specific areas.
The data was later transferred to a password-protected lap top computer. The interviews were then transcribed with each one requiring an average of six hours to complete in order to ensure the accuracy of the content transcribed.

3.5 Ethical issues.

In April 2016 ethical approval was granted by Dr Kevin Lalor, the Head of School and Languages, Law and Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology after receiving a Research Ethics Application form from the researcher (Appendix D). The researcher was also guided by the code of ethics adopted by the British Criminological Society.³

Having gained access to the sample group, the interview process took place between May and August 2016. All interviews were predicated on informed consent with each participant presented with an information sheet which clearly outlined the purpose of the research, the methodology being used, and assurances regarding ethics and confidentiality (Appendix E). At the conclusion of each interview the participant signed a consent form (Appendix F).

As a journalist working in the field of crime for many years the researcher was acutely aware of the importance of guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity to the survey participants. To this end it was emphasised to each one that this was not a journalistic exercise but research for the preparation of a dissertation as part of the MA Criminology course in DIT. The interviews were deleted following transcription and the data was anonymised.

³ ‘Researchers should recognise that they have a responsibility to minimise personal harm to research participants by ensuring that the potential physical, psychological, discomfort or stress to individuals participating in research is minimised by participation in the research. No list of harms can be exhaustive but harms may include: physical harms: including injury, illness, pain; psychological harms: including feelings of worthlessness, distress, guilt anger or fear-related, for example, the disclosure of sensitive or embarrassing information, or learning about a genetic possibility of developing an untreatable disease; devaluation of personal worth: including being humiliated, manipulated or in other ways treated disrespectfully or unjustly. (British Society of Criminology, 2015, section 4i)
3.6 Data analysis.

A thematic approach was utilised in the research analysis without limiting the analysis solely to themes because it is argued that it provides a flexible and useful tool when applied (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has been described as highly inductive and allows the analysis process develop ecologically with additional themes and points of reference emerging from earlier themes (Dawson, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (1995) claim that thematic analysis allows the researcher discover new concepts embedded throughout the interviews conducted.

Each interviewee was given a unique code – for example, G 3 F N – for the dual purposes of providing anonymity to participants and easy access back and forth over the data. The data was coded, interpreted and verified by the researcher in a process of repeatedly moving back and forth reading the data, asking questions from it, taking notes and reviewing the decisions made. The transcripts were used alongside the recorded interviews in order to become fully familiar with the data; identifying themes and subthemes to organise it into categories that allowed the research questions to be explored and addressed (Powell & Renner, 2003). A data analysis grid was used to isolate common themes and the relevant interview excerpts were then placed in corresponding folders.

An integrated approach was utilised in order to combine both emerging and predetermined codes. As this rinsing process continued the researcher could distil down the data, discarding the material that was not relevant and highlighting the material that was. The findings from the data were then considered against the existing literature in this area to establish common themes.
3.7 Contribution of the Study.

The fact that research in this particular area of policing has been practically non-existent in Ireland supports the view that any meaningful study will contribute to a greater understanding of policing. A constant theme among academics has been the reluctance of garda HQ to engage with external researchers. However, in the context of the lack of research this study may prove useful as a starting point for further research into the culture of An Garda Síochána.

3.8 Limitations of the study.

The fact that this research is based on a small purposive sample inevitably means that the findings are neither comprehensive nor definitive. The research question also concerns one narrow aspect of an area that is extremely broad, multifaceted and complex.

3.9 Conclusion.

This chapter has given a detailed account of the research methodology, including the rationale for employing a qualitative approach to data collection, using the format of semi-structured interviews, as the most effective way of achieving the aims and objectives of the study. It also highlighted: how the sample group was selected and access to the group was achieved; how the data collection process was undertaken; the ethical issues involved alongside the limitations and possible contribution of the study.
Chapter Four

4. Research Findings

4.1 Introduction and key themes.

This chapter covers the salient findings gleaned from the research project. As already adverted to above, the research produced a rich, multi-layered seam of data from eight hours of taped interviews and over 160 pages of dialogue transcript. When the data were analysed several common themes emerged from the individual responses of the participants which conflate with the characteristics of police occupational culture as defined in the existing theoretical framework.

Through the lens of the individual lived experiences of the participants, the semi-structured methodological approach made it possible to identify distinctive cognitive responses in the sample group which Skolnick (1966: 2008) characterises as the ‘working personality’ of the officer on the beat working in a uniquely dangerous and volatile environment. In order to achieve a clearer comparative analysis the primary themes in the data have been integrated with the theoretical literature. While the themes are isolated and dealt with individually there were several thematic cross-overs and intersections which become apparent as the chapter is read. The themes identified and discussed in this chapter are: confrontation; social isolation/internal solidarity; cynicism; suspiciousness; discretion; cynicalism; canteen culture; and action. The chapter ends with a conclusion which summarises the main findings.
4.2 Confrontation.

The confrontational nature of modern police work is one of the factors underpinning police culture which lies in the early experiences of ‘rookies’ on patrol and the influence of peers and mentors (Skolnick, 1966; Reiner 2010). Each member of the sample group could recall with clarity the first occasion when they were involved in a threatening or violent situation. In each instance the officers were young recruits with the majority experiencing a confrontational and potentially dangerous incident – normally an assault or threat of assault – in a very short period of time after graduating from Templemore; ranging from between a few weeks and a few months.

A common thread running through the testimonies of the participants was that the original incidents presented as defining moments in their working lives with regard to how it impacted on their working personalities and the development of what Skolnick calls a ‘perceptual shorthand’ for dealing with situations on the ground. Some of the females within the sample group reported how they had found the initial incident upsetting: two of the four officers were assaulted; one was threatened in an armed robbery and the fourth witnessed a colleague being seriously injured in an assault.

Alternatively none of the male respondents said they had been traumatised or upset by similar experiences. However, this reaction should also be considered within the theoretical context that ‘machismo’ is an important ingredient of police culture with males tending to be more reticent about expressing fear/trauma. A number of the male gardai interviewed also referred to the fact that their physical size may have mitigated the effects of their original encounter with violence and confrontation.

One of the male gardai (G1MS) described how his first confrontational experience had been exciting (see paragraph 4.9). However, the same officer revealed that of his earliest experiences on the job, the most challenging and disconcerting experiences were investigating the discovery of dead bodies.
A male sergeant (S4MS) with 17 years’ experience made a similar comparison between confrontation and other duties.

‘Listen, when you have a few years’ service in this job, confrontation is the easiest part of the job. It’s the other things that you cannot be, in any way shape or form, be prepared for ... rape victims, cutting down dead bodies, coming across particularly bad things ... I’ve lost people who I’ve trained with, been at the scene of those things ... confrontation is easy, when you compare them to the emotional toll, confrontation is a piece of piss’ (S4MS).

GIFN was assigned to her first station two weeks when she and her mentor were attacked by a group of men as they tried to seize neglected horses in north Dublin.

‘So after that incident I was aware of my limitations ... I was going to check horses, it was very simple and within minutes I was grabbed by the throat by a traveller ...(now) when I go to every call, Control gives me the gist of what the call is but I’ll never assume that’s the call I’m going into.’ (G1FN).

S1FS is a supervisory sergeant with 17 years’ service attached to a regular unit in the Southern Division. Four months after graduating from Templemore she was punched in the face while making her first ever arrest, that of a male drunk driver. She suffered a badly swollen eye which necessitated her taking time off work to recover. And while she described suffering a total of four ‘bad assaults’ on duty in her career to date, she said the first had the greatest impact.

‘Overall did it have a long term effect on me? No, but it taught me a very valuable lesson in relation to policing. Don’t ever take your eye off a prisoner for one second. And people are capable of doing anything ... That was a really good lesson very, very early on and that was the big lesson that I learnt in relation to that’ (S1FS).

G2MN was in-situ three months in the Northern Division when he and two colleagues were attacked by a group of 15 youths whilst trying to affect an arrest. Even after ten years’ service he could still recall feeling how the few minutes it had taken for assistance to arrive was ‘like an hour or two’.
He estimated that he experiences confrontational or threatening situations ‘at least once every six months’ and has developed a cognitive shorthand for dealing with such unpredictable events.

‘It’s strange really. It (conflict) nearly develops into your personality and the way you weigh up the personalities of people you are working with, and you’ll weigh up all these certain scenarios to try and avoid issues, as we call them in Garda speak, kicking off’ (G2MN).

4.3 Social Isolation/Internal Solidarity.

Zedner (2004) argues that the distinctive characteristics of cop culture derive from the fact that police work closely together, in dangerous, unpredictable situations and often in conflict with the surrounding community. This engenders an institutionalized sense of isolation and an ‘us-and-them’ attitude to the world outside the police station. It is rooted in a shared knowledge system containing strongly-held beliefs about the nature of policing and those they police.

Skolnick (1966) identified three inter-connecting themes within police occupational culture that result from being continually occupied with potential violence and conflict: social isolation, internal solidarity and suspiciousness. Social isolation emerges in response to a unique combination of two principal variables of the police role - danger and authority. It is a product of the unsociable nature of the job and wariness of authority, therefore solidarity and social isolation are mutually reinforcing.

The research participants unanimously expressed the view that working with the public and being in a position to provide social service and protection was a source of job satisfaction. However, a number of themes emerged which support the concept of social isolation. In particular the interviewees expressed strong views that the courts deal leniently with people who assault gardai which, they felt, reflected a wider societal opinion that police officers should accept violence as an inherent consequence of their work. In addition they also complained of a lack of support and empathy from their management when they have been assaulted or have experienced particularly traumatic events.
G1FN spoke of a particular individual living in the district where she works who had accumulated 30 convictions for assaulting and threatening gardai ‘but he hasn’t been in prison for it.’ She also described her experience after being punched in the face while trying to break up a fight outside a nightclub.

‘...I’m injured just get on with it. I still had to try and pull them apart until my partner came over. I got assistance and ended up arresting them and brought them back. But nothing ended up happening to them for punching me in the face ... it’s seen like part of your job, being abused verbally but sometimes physically. It's just seen as part of the job ... I’ve been punched, I’ve been kicked, I’ve been spat at and nothing’s happened. And it’s a serious offence but I don’t think it’s acknowledged as a serious offence through the organisation, through the public ... I was in court one day and I remember I witnessed a member giving evidence and part of his evidence was that the accused verbally abused him ... And the judge said well you should be a bit thick skinned and that was the judge’s response ... So I think it seems that verbal abuse and physical abuse to a certain point is part of the job. I don’t think you get the support from higher ranks that you should get’ (G1FN).

S1FS described violent confrontation as an increasingly regular feature of frontline policing which, in her opinion, appeared to have become more acceptable to society.

‘In my opinion it’s increasing. There is not a month that goes by here that a guard isn’t assaulted in some form or another and that’s just in one district ... It seems to be more the norm and it doesn’t shock anybody when a guard is assaulted...’ (S1FS).

The research participants also reported encountering hostility from the public the nature of which varied depending on social class and geographical location. And while the data revealed that gardai expect as the norm, a degree of hostility in most working class areas, the participants said that they enjoyed a better relationship with working class communities than in more affluent, middle-class neighbourhoods.
S1FS was unequivocal when asked to nominate the social cohort she least liked to work with:

‘More affluent areas, from my own personal point of view, they’re more difficult to police, they’re more difficult to work with, you get more calls and the crime calls would be reduced, and the social aspect or whatever way you would phrase that, that’s increased. So you would say that 80% has got to do with social stuff or stuff that guards have nothing got to do with it and 20% would be crime’ (S1FS).

She was then invited to nominate which social grouping she preferred to work with.

‘Working class, one hundred percent. One hundred percent! Yes, there would be more confrontation and you have more serious things to investigate but I do believe that we are appreciated more and what we do is appreciated more’ (S1FS).

The same sentiment was echoed by G1MS who began his career assigned to a station in a more affluent area of south Dublin.

‘Like from starting off in Rathfarnham you’re kind of looked upon, not by all but a lot of them, as their own kind of personal security you know ... You’d be going to calls and people would be looking at you as if you know nothing, you’re only a guard and you’re here for us ... I remember a chap called once to the hatch and his son’s thousand odd euro bike had been stolen from a shop in the village and he was very upset by this, as you would be, it’s a grand you know, a lot of money. And he said there would be a lot of CCTV and I said, grand perfect. He said when are we going up to view it and I said you won’t be going to view it, it will be me viewing it but I’ll do it whenever I’m next in the car so. Oh what do you mean? I said you can see I’m here on my own, you can see there’s no one else here with me. I just can’t close the station to go up and get your bike, you know. This wasn’t at all satisfactory to him and why wasn’t I doing it quicker and stuff. And I was kind of standing there taking it for a while and then I got a bit pissed off and said I know you’re a bit upset but if your son hadn’t left a thousand euro bike unlocked outside a shop it probably wouldn’t have been stolen. And who was I to say this and who was my supervisor and I told him the details and said, look I’ll investigate it but that’s life. It wasn’t locked. It’s not my fault, it’s not your fault but it’s your son’s fault and the person who stole it’ (G1MS).
G2FS described how some of her colleagues were seriously assaulted when they responded to a disturbance at a house party in what she described as a ‘quiet, middle class area’ of the south city.

‘We responded to a house party in a good area and naively went there thinking this will be fine because this is a grand area and they’re probably about 12. And it turned out to be a lot more serious than that and we got turned on in the house and trapped in the house and one of my colleagues was badly assaulted and I wasn’t assaulted but a lot of my colleagues were ... and then we looked for assistance and we got it pretty quickly, thank God, so what seemed like a long time wasn’t a long time at all and then our backup arrived and they were dispersed pretty quickly ... It was a quiet road quiet, typical suburban cul de sac and that is what I think probably shocked us more than anything. Obviously there are certain areas that you would go into that you would be exercising more caution because you would be expecting a certain type of person where in this place we were expecting it to be more low key’ (G2FS).

G2FS also noted that the suspects for the assault, which left one colleague with a slashed face requiring 20 stitches, were subsequently acquitted. She pointed out how they had hired a well-known and experienced barrister to defend them.

4.3.1 Internal Solidarity.

As mentioned above social isolation and internal solidarity are mutually reinforcing as a consequence of work demands and occupational pressures; the unsociable nature of the work and the perception of the prospect of unpredictable danger in the course of routine encounters with the public on the street (Skolnick, 1966; Chan, 1997; Manning, 2007; Reiner, 2010). The bond of solidarity is seen to be functional to the survival of officers in such a dangerous environment and that it ‘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, and that they will maintain secrecy in the face of external investigations’ (Goldsmith, 1990: 93-94).
The sample group universally agreed that the support of colleagues was important especially in difficult or violent confrontations. However, the data suggests that several years of pay cuts, resource shortages and a lack of recruitment may be undermining internal solidarity within An Garda Siochana. The participants each described how their particular unit or station party had experienced significant drops in personnel numbers which placed even more pressure on individual officers with less colleagues to rely on.

The organizational stagnation had reduced opportunities for personal development and promotion, which in turn, further undermined morale. Individual socio-economic considerations were also cited by the participants as having a knock-on negative effect on solidarity: officers said they were forced, for financial reasons, to live much longer distances from the areas where they worked and they had less disposable income which prevented unit members socializing together.

‘Years ago we all knew each other's families and we socialised together. That’s another side of it, we socialised together. We knew each other very well. We don’t know each other by any means as well as that now. We don’t really socialise together anymore and I don’t necessarily mean going out drinking. We don’t organise a football match or go off doing paint balling or quad biking or any of those smaller things. It’s just not done, you know. And that was such a huge outlet. That was how guards coped with the job they did and we don’t have that now. That safety net has been totally taken out from under there and we don’t have that support. A lot of things would have been ironed out that happened in the day and then they’d go out for the few drinks. Lads would have ironed things out and they would have been resolved and put to bed then. We don’t have that now. It’s said things fester.’ (S1FN).

4.4 Cynicism: Street Cop Culture versus Managerial Culture.

Research of police culture has noted how negative and cynical attitudes characterise the attitudes of lower ranking officers towards their managerial ranks (Skolnick, 1966; Reiner, 1992a, 2010; Crank, 2004; Paoline, 2004). The research participants all reserved their most cynical and negative views for Garda management.
They reported a disconnect with their hierarchy which also reflected the findings of qualitative research on culture which was conducted by the Garda Inspectorate (2015) which reported: ‘a gulf between gardaí and senior managers’; that ‘garda staff and some junior ranks do not feel valued’ and more senior management could be concerned with ‘self-preservation’ rather than acting in the best needs of the organisation (Garda Inspectorate Report, 2015: 10-11). The views expressed also reflected the findings of a morale survey which was published by the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors in December 2015.

The data sample claimed that senior managers were more concerned with promotion and public relations ‘spin’ which tended to involve renaming and rebranding existing units to give the impression of new initiatives being pursued. The participants also spoke of cronyism and favouritism when members sought moves to other units or promotions.

‘…there’s very few things in this job which link up. They (management) will literally issue one directive which is in complete conflict with the directive that they’ve sent out the week before. And unfortunately if you have an issue with something it will go up into Garda headquarters and you will never see it again ... They all want to be, as I say, we’ve all done these degrees where we’ve done strategic management, it’s the big thing, it’s the buzzwords, it’s fantastic words like stakeholders…’ (S2MS).

‘I don’t think the public, you have to be realistic, you’re a guard and not everyone is going to like you and I don’t go around thinking why don’t they like me, it really doesn’t bother me. But it’s the job you feel undervalued by ... Even when the queen came and there were people standing on the M50 for 17 hours and not fed, no toilet breaks do you know? Things like that. But to the public it looked like it all ran very well and it all went great ... But it wasn’t’ (G2FS).
G1FN described how she had been attached to a Divisional Task Force unit until she was seriously injured in a car accident while in the process of responding to a house break-in. As a result she was on sick leave for five months and receiving physiotherapy for 14 months. She said when she returned to work she was placed on light duties and, as a result, was finding it difficult to pay her mortgage because she had lost a number of allowances. She claimed that her concerns were not taken seriously by her management.

‘I’m a nuisance. I’m useless. I have no use. I’m a glorified receptionist now. I was in the patrol car doing my job, in a passenger seat, not driving. I was in a crash through no fault of my own. I got kicked out of the specialised unit I was on and I was put into the regular. Well, I would have been going back to the regular anyway but put back to the regular to work the public office ... I’m a number. Every guard is a number and it’s so stressful. I have my own house and I pay the mortgage on my own. I went to the higher ranks and said that I’m on light duties and I’m worrying about paying my mortgage what do I do? Don’t worry about it...that was it. I still pay the mortgage myself. I still don’t get all my allowances. I’m massively stretched financially but they don’t want to know about that. So people see...people wonder why guards aren’t motivated. What motivation would I have, you know. If anyone in the private sector was treated like that it would be a different story’ (G1FN)

4.5 Suspicion and ‘symbolic assailants’.

Bayley’s research (1994) found that police tend to become cynical and suspicious as a consequence of their interactions with the public who lie and tell self-serving stories. Skolnick also defined suspiciousness as the front line officer’s ‘perceptual shorthand’ for identifying certain kinds of people as ‘symbolic assailants’; persons who use gesture, language and attire that are interpreted by the officer as a prelude to violence. The research participants all agreed that their experiences on the street had made them more suspicious.

‘... working in this job definitely. I can even see myself when walking through the city with my wife and you would see someone coming to you and I might put her on the inside of me without her knowing ... But you become different and you can nearly feel something happening in the air. I might be out for a few drinks with buddies and I’m like right we’re getting out of here or we’re doing this or that. So yes, you do become cuter with life and you do become a lot more suspicious. If you see certain vans or whatever driving around the area and I’d call to the station and say look can you come down and have a look at this one ... yeah definitely more suspicious and my eyes would be open to things ... You can read people a lot better because that’s what you’re doing most of the time ... you’re always reading people and you’re trying to find out what actually happened and get to the bottom of a scenario as quickly as you can ... I suppose it just becomes normal in life to be suspicious of people and be wary and I suppose you can get a little bit cynical as well’ (G2MN).
4.6 Discretion.

As previously discussed the use of discretion by officers on the street is central to any discourse regarding culture. Unlike most other state organizations discretionary power is located primarily with the lowest-ranking employees of the police who ‘control their own work situation’ (Holdaway, 1979:12). Reiner (2010) observes that the police use their discretionary powers and minimal force for ‘principled and pragmatic reasons’ in order to gain the public’s trust and co-operation. In the majority of their diverse interactions with the public the police do not invoke their legal powers but rather opting instead to exercise discretion principally to restore calm in their primary function as ‘peace keepers’ (Banton, 1964; Bayley, 1994).

Zedner (2004) contends that despite being controversial in nature discretion is necessary as it lubricates the criminal justice system and ensures that justice is discharged. If the police did not exercise discretion at street level then every misdemeanour would result in prosecution and the criminal law would become overbearing, hugely costly and impracticable (Zedner, 2004:130).

The research data consistently reflected the importance of discretion in the encounters between the participants and the public for similar pragmatic purposes such as avoiding confrontation, keeping the peace, building community relations or giving the individual offender a chance. All the participants revealed that this process was informed by their experiences of conflict on the job.

G1FN estimated that in the vast majority of encounters with the public on the streets that she and her immediate colleagues opted to exercise discretion instead of their statutory powers of arrest ‘about 70% of the time, if not more, possibly more’ (G1FN).
The research participants defined a number of variables which they said influenced how they exercised discretion, the most commonly expressed of which was what they termed ‘the attitude test’.

‘You know the old saying, the old attitude test kind of does and doesn’t exist. If you go up to a big group discretion works in two ways in that there’s not enough guards to do ideally what you want to do and you kind of use discretion in that way in that I know who Joe Blogs is and someone else … we’ll come back and get them another day (G1MS).

When asked what influenced her use of discretion G2FS explained:

‘Well the attitude test, I think that’s the famous one…It’s basically, personally, don’t lie to me, don’t treat me like a fool … So discretion, if they’re honest with me or some way respectful towards me I will be like, ok, right maybe there’s some way we can overlook that and deal with this or whatever’ (G2FS).

S2MN, a supervisory sergeant with 39 years’ experience, explained his rationale for using discretion instead of his statutory powers.

‘I would see it (discretion) as very important and it depends I suppose on the attitude test. If someone comes up to a checkpoint and say hello and they don’t have tax and they say hello guard and you look around and you chat with them, they’ve good attitude… discretion is important that way and even getting to chat with them, making a link with them’ (S2MN).

The data volunteered by S1FS also concurred with this approach.

‘… when you speak with the person and if the person shows remorse and they have shown awareness that they have done something wrong then I might use my discretion. If a person turns around and they start at you, saying they’ve done nothing wrong in the first place … in those situations sometimes you’d end up, well, you can’t use your discretion there because they’re not admitting to what they’re doing and secondly the fine might teach them a lesson in that instance’ (S1FS).
S4MS, a supervisory sergeant attached to a Divisional Task Force unit divided the public he dealt with as either the ‘90%’ who, he said, were the law-abiding public, and the ‘10 %’ who were not. He said that he used no other criteria such as social class when using his perceptual shorthand on the streets. He also considered the use of discretion as being ‘vital’ in his job.

‘If you go up as you do with every other situation, well in my case every other situation, that person’s interaction will determine if they’re the 90% or the 10% ... but I don’t call it an attitude test. It’s just, are they going to be the 90% or the 10%? The 90% will go bollix and you’ll go, look shit happens you know, you’re not going to do it again. The car’s in good condition, you know, something along those lines. You’re not banging off walls. The 10% will be can you hurry this up I’m in a rush’ (S4MS).

4.6.1 Peace keeping/avoiding confrontation.

Pragmatism in the interests of peace keeping and avoiding confrontation was universally cited by the participants as one of the most important considerations when using discretion in potentially confrontational situations.

When asked if she saw herself as a peace keeper S1FN, a female supervisory sergeant based in the Northern Division responded:

‘Hugely, yeah, hugely ... depending on what the offence is, you have your discretion even with public order offences, you can give people the opportunity to leave, to desist in the behaviour they’re doing and leave. Separate two parties, direct them to go either way and if they return then you’ve power of arrest and different things like that. So you are equipped with those powers, you can draw on those powers to dissolve a situation as opposed to enforcing the law. And it does work and it is effective at times as well’ (S1FN).
The interviewee also described the factors that typically influenced a decision to invoke her statutory powers of arrest in a particular incident.

‘It doesn’t take that long, you can assess it very quickly. Is your approach going to work or am I going to have to be Sergeant XXXXX? As opposed to this person who is coming across and to try and resolve something or respond to this call. Or is this person listening to me? No they’re not. Are they being respectful? No, they’re not. Are there other people at risk here? Is this going to escalate if I don’t act now? That’s probably the biggest thing, you’re weighing it up. Is this going to escalate very quickly if I don’t act? Is this going to get worse? Ok. I need to act now, at this point ... Again, this probably comes from experience. You know sometimes it just pans out that way. You misread something and it just gets out of hand. You talk too long and it’s just gotten out of hand...And then it’s an arrest and its hostile and its maybe pepper spray then and something’s gone too far’ (S1FN).

S2MN said that he mentored younger gardai to use discretion as a means of avoiding unnecessary violent confrontation where possible.

‘The challenge as in when you go to a situation, is to get out of the situation with the least fuss ... And I think it’s a job well done if you come out of an issue whatever it is, if it’s a row or if it’s a domestic dispute or something, if you can solve it at the scene or if you have to arrest somebody, if you can arrest them and it’s not a case of having to drag them out ... that’s what I consider a job well done, say from a conflict situation (S2MN).

4.6.2 Giving offenders a second chance.

The sample group revealed that discretion is also used when giving consideration to the potential fall-out of a criminal conviction for the individual and also for the avoidance of ‘wasting time’ by pursuing a prosecution through the courts.

‘ ... we’re all young, we’ve all done stuff we shouldn’t necessarily have done and that’s why it’s important to join the job after going to college and stuff and have a few life experiences. Like, arresting someone for a certain offence can have a massive impact on the rest of their life and you do have to think of the bigger picture and if they’re not the worst person in the world and we all make mistakes ... but you do need to look at the bigger picture for that person or that person’s family or whatever and then kind of decide on it. It’s very much as well based on the attitude that that person has to you. If they’re a complete gobshite and abusing you and not playing ball at all you’re going to have a lot less sympathy for them as well ... ’ (G1MS).
G2FS described a typical scenario where she would opt not to make an arrest and give the offender the benefit of her discretion.

‘Or even say, if it’s just like a little bag of drugs, if a fella says to me look guard I have enough for a joint on me and I’ll be like that’s grand, fair enough we’ll say nothing about that but if it happens again we’ll have a day out. That’s fine because if they take something out of their pocket because I hate when they say I’ve nothing on me and you have to go through the rigmarole and there it is in their sock and I’m just like, why did you just not tell me about that. A tenner’s worth of grass, wasting time. I think a lot of them are cute enough to know that themselves’ (G2FS).

4.7 Canteen culture.

The subcultural concept of ‘canteen culture’ refers to a system of values and beliefs – gallows humour – expressed by officers while socialising in the canteen or social environment for the purpose of tension release (Reiner, 2010). While it is generally held up as a negative influence on police culture, Waddington (1999) concludes that it is a rhetoric that gives ‘meaning to inherently problematic occupational experience’ and that what officers do in one arena (canteen) is not necessarily or substantially carried over into quite a different arena (the street) (1999:287-302). The research participants unanimously revealed they used gallows humour as a coping mechanism.

‘If my wife was in the room she would be shocked and disgusted. But none of it is intended as it is, again it’s a coping mechanism. It’s when you’re dealing with an extremely stressful situation sometimes to be able to go back to the station and have a crack about it, if you couldn’t do that, if they were ever to stamp that out in this job I think we would have a lot more problems’ (S4MS).

‘It’s like you laugh at ridiculous things that if anybody heard you laugh about or joke about it would be shocking. You know if the general public heard some of the things you laugh and joke about they’d be saying all sorts of stuff about you but it’s the only way sometimes you can cope.’ (G1FN).
‘...it was the first time I’d ever seen a dead body properly ... and I remember that because afterwards I kind of kept it to myself and that was that. But from then on, you know, you do develop the black sense of humour and you do make inappropriate kind of jokes with your colleagues but it’s the only way you kind of can deal with it ... And it’s stuff you never want a victim or an injured party to hear because it would be appalling for a normal person to hear. But if you’re dealing with horrendous stuff like say sexual kind of crimes or even as just basic sudden deaths ... if you don’t go and laugh and joke about it...But you do, you have to have that. I know doctors and paramedics and they all have it as well’ (G1MS).

Another research participant, G2FS, described how her colleagues use social media as a means for sharing gallows humour rather than in a social setting.

‘It’s WhatsApp, you know, these WhatsApp groups? And you could go home and it could be the most stupid and if anyone stole your phone you’d be mortified but it’s just your way of coping with it’ (G2FS).

4.8 Action versus Social Service.

The research findings support international empirical studies such as that conducted by Bayley (1994) which found that frontline police spend the majority of their time sorting out social problems rather than making arrests. The same research also confirmed that as little as between seven and ten per cent of police call-outs actually involve crime while the rest can be categorised as social service or calls from people with no one else to turn to. The literature generally supports the findings that frontline policing consists of ‘hour upon hour of boredom, interrupted by moments of sheer terror’ (Felson, 2002:4).
The participants collectively reflected this hypothesis estimating that on average ten per cent or less of their patrol time is spent in confrontational situations, necessitating action and arrests. The interviewees generally cited two primary reasons for joining An Garda Siochana – the opportunity for action and excitement, and service to the public.

‘... you can have one good car chase or one good riot or one kind of exciting aspect and you’ll live off that for the next 6 months. And when you’re there at two in the morning, bored shitless, you’ll sort of laugh and joke and remember that one good thing that did happen ... I think the whole excitement thing and the adrenalin thing does definitely help you in the job and it definitely helps keep you interested. Mundane stuff would be 75% to 80% ... I would say it’s mundane but it wouldn’t be mundane for the people we’re dealing with ... But then kind of exciting stuff you’re talking maybe 10% to 15% you know ... Like I still remember the first car chase I ever drove in like the back of my hand and it was the most exciting thing I’ve ever done in my life. Now that was 6 or 7 years ago at this stage but as I said it’s what keeps you going at 3 o’clock in the morning bored shitless ... And it’s always the possibility of that good one, always with an ear to the radio hoping that the big one, as we like to call it, comes in’ (G2MS).

The research participants’ collective experience was that, like all other police forces, the gardai perform a bewildering miscellany of diverse public service tasks and interventions.

‘Our job appears to be hugely a social service to the public as opposed to the maintenance of law and order ... Primarily we’re a social service ... that’s the way we see it. So many things are dealt with. I could go days and weeks and different tours and it’s all the social side of things as opposed to bringing somebody to court or following up on charges or summons or dealing with prisoners. Anything I’m doing in the role I’m in is all community related. From the dog, we laugh at this, from the dog pound when you ring them out of hours, when you can’t get an answer it’s ring the guards, ring the guards. Failing all other attempts its ring the guards. So you get the calls about anything and everything. In my current role, I would say as a supervisory sergeant here, dealing directly with crime and criminals would be maybe 10-20%’ (S1FN).
4.9 Findings summary.

Comparative analysis of the research findings by integrating the existing literature, reflects the characteristics of police culture as defined in the literature. The research question concerning the participants’ individual lived experiences of confrontation, and how that impacted on their working personalities, produced rich data which highlighted many of the dominant themes to be found in the study of police culture. It is clear that the participants shared perceptions which were formed by experiences of confrontation and conflict at work. The findings also suggest that the themes of an unofficial culture underline the fact that cop culture is inevitable as it offers a patterned set of understandings that help officers cope with the pressures of conflict and confrontation that they encounter on the street.
Chapter Five

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion.

The primary objective of this study was to explore the impact of working in a confrontational and conflicted environment on individual frontline gardai as seen through the lens of their lived experiences. The individual responses of the research participants were then analysed and considered in the context of the existing theoretical framework of police occupational culture.

The principle conclusion of the research is that police culture in An Garda Siochana is formed by the experiences of young officers working in a confrontational environment. The findings, while limited by the size of the sample group, suggests support for the hypothesis outlined by Skolnick, Reiner and others, that police culture has certain ‘universal stable and lasting features’ and that a distinctive and characteristic culture emerges in modern liberal, capitalist democracies where police forces face similar basic societal tensions.

Several themes found within the theoretical framework around the conceptualisation of police culture were identified from the reactions and cognitions of the research participants. These referred to the individual reactions to conflict and violence and how these reactions impacted on factors such as: social isolation; internal solidarity with peers; reliance on ‘canteen culture’ as a group coping mechanism for dealing with the stresses encountered on the job; suspiciousness/wariness; a sense of mission and vocation; a desire for action; and an ‘us versus them’ division of the social world.
Broadening out from the specific research questions, the participants also reflected aspects of cultural theory by expressing varying degrees of cynicism, dissatisfaction and disconnection with the higher managerial ranks of An Garda Síochána. The interviewees described a prevailing sense of poor morale within the organisation and a perception amongst lower ranks of being under-appreciated, undervalued and disrespected by a cross-section of stakeholders, apart from their own organisational hierarchy, that included Government, the courts, and identifiable cohorts within the communities they serve.

The conditions which exacerbated these perceptions were stated by the respondents to be: poor pay levels and resources; having to deal with increasing workloads but with greatly reduced unit sizes; a lack of opportunities for in-service professional development; an increasingly burdensome internal bureaucracy; a lack of internal movement due to a long-running ban on recruitment; and a skewed promotional system which the respondents alleged was based on cronyism. Significantly most of the participants reported that the resulting stagnation was having a negative effect upon internal solidarity.

Yet, while all of the research participants expressed similar negative sentiments about their working environment, they did so with a degree of resignation and acceptance that it was something they had little control over and therefore accepted the situation as ‘how things are’. Paradoxically however, despite the strength of feelings about aspects of their work, all of the participants expressed a love of the job and a sense of vocation, taking encouragement from positive interactions with the public and the support of colleagues.
5.2 Recommendations.

The fact that this research is based on a small purposive sample inevitably means that the findings presented here are neither comprehensive nor definitive. The research question also concerned one narrow dimension of an area that is extremely broad, multi-dimensional and complex. As already discussed in the Literature Review criminology was, until recent years, a nascent academic discipline in Ireland. And while criminology is now a thriving research sector, there remains a glaring deficit of studies relating to police culture in Ireland despite it being existential to the discourse on garda reform. In the context that a lack of policing research exists in Ireland, this study may be useful as a starting point for further research.

Therefore the primary recommendation that emerges from this study is the requirement for much more extensive research – both qualitative and quantitative - in this area in order to gain a greater understanding of the working culture of the police from the officer on the beat to the office of Commissioner. Such detailed investigation would provide invaluable insights for policy makers and stakeholders involved in the criminal justice sector.

Geographical locations were factored into the selection of the sample group to explore if it reflected any discernible differences in the working environment between the Northern and Southern Divisions. The data demonstrated that location was not a relevant factor within the urban milieu. This illustrates another limitation of the research. It is therefore recommended that any in-depth research of policing culture in Ireland would require a much wider geographical sweep to identify discernible variations in the working personalities of officers working in smaller towns, villages and rural areas in general.
Bibliography/References


Confrontations between gardai and anti-water charge protestors. Accessed 5 December 2015 at: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=water+protests


Appendices

Appendix A. Emails to gate keepers.
Appendix B. AGS External Research Protocol.
Appendix C. Interview schedule.
Appendix D. Application for ethical approval.
Appendix E. Information sheet for research participants.
Appendix F. Consent form.
Appendix G. Sample transcript of research interview.
Appendix A. Emails to Garda gatekeepers.

Paul Williams <d14124438@mydit.ie>

Application for assistance in academic research project.

4 messages

Paul Williams <d14124438@mydit.ie> 14 March 2016 at 16:02
To: gurchand.singh@garda.ie

Dear Sir,

Please find attached the AGS external research protocol document. I am a student of the MA Criminology Degree at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and the research topic I have chosen for my thesis is to explore the effects of regular confrontation in their work on individual gardai - as reflected, for example, in the water charge protests - and whether these lived experiences have any influence on their interactions with the public.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kind regards,
Paul Williams.

Paul Williams AGS External Research Protocol(1).docx

1351K

18 March 2016 at 11:16

Paul Williams <d14124438@mydit.ie>
To: gurchand.singh@garda.ie

Dear Mr Singh,

I have attached the schedule of questions which I hope to put to the research participants. Just so that there is no confusion, this is exclusively a supervised academic project for my MA in Criminology and is completely separate from my work as a journalist.

Thank you for considering my application so quickly,

Kind regards,
Paul Williams.

[Quoted text hidden]

research questions.docx

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Appendix B. AGSExternal Research Protocol.

An Garda Síochána Protocol for External Research

This document is intended to formalise the relationship between An Garda Síochána and any external researcher (student, academic institution, practitioner or agency) carrying out research into or on behalf of An Garda Síochána.

On completion of the research, we ask the researcher to submit to An Garda Síochána a summary report of the research findings for internal publication.

This document is to be completed for external research NOT funded by An Garda Síochána. This includes any individual, academic institution or agency requesting the assistance of An Garda Síochána data, personnel or resources.

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## Part 1: Research Agenda

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<td>a) What is the aim of the research?</td>
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<td>The purpose of the research is to explore the effects of regular hostility/confrontation in the line of duty on individual gardai – as reflected for example during the Water Charges Protests – and whether, as a consequence, it influences how they interact with the public.</td>
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<td>The research sample group would consist of six participants recruited with the assistance of An Garda Síochána. The group would hopefully include a cross section of members at different stages of their careers taking into account age, rank and gender.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) An Garda Síochána Sponsor / Contact</td>
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<td></td>
<td>As part of the initial research process of recruiting participants to have access to an appointed liaison official.</td>
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<td>b) Access to An Garda Síochána Data (Please specify whether aggregated or personal data is required)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This particular research proposal does not require access to Data.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Access to An Garda Síochána staff (Rank, roles, unit, responsibility, quantity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For the purposes of the research it would be preferable to have access to a cross section of members at different stages of their careers who are working with the public on a daily basis and more likely to experience confrontational situations.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
d) Access to An Garda Síochána IT systems (Specific equipment, software or specialist techniques)

This is not required.

e) Access to An Garda Síochána sites

This would only be necessary if the individual participants required the researcher to meet them at a garda station.

f) Is your research funded by the An Garda Síochána

NO.

g) If it is not An Garda Síochána funded, please specify who is the funding body

This is a supervised academic research project which is part of the DIT MA Criminology. There is no funding involved.

f) Any other contributions

Please give details of any timescales or milestones required of the research.
(Please include details of your access to An Garda Síochána resources; security clearance; data collection and analysis; final reporting, publication etc)
It would be preferable to have the interviews completed and collected the research data by the end of May so that transcription of interviews is completed in early June to enable the process of data analysis to begin. The deadline for completion of this research project is September 30.

<table>
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<th>4) Corporate &amp; Strategic Context</th>
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Please give details of the corporate context of the research and its scope with respect to internal or external stakeholders.

a) How does the proposal meet An Garda Síochána strategic priorities?

As community policing is central to An Garda Siochana’s core principles this research may be of assistance in exploring the lived experiences of gardai who find themselves in a threatening/confrontational environment.

b) What are the expected benefits of the research?

To contribute, if possible, to understanding the experiences of confrontation in the work environment on members.

c) Who are the likely audiences for the products of the research?

Members of AGS and DIT criminology students.

d) Any internal / external stakeholders, units, agencies or institutions involved?

No other stakeholders are involved.

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<tr>
<th>5) Next Steps</th>
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Would you be happy to present your findings to an An Garda Síochána-wide audience in an academic seminar?

Yes.
Part 2: Meeting the AGS requirements

(To be read and agreed by the Researcher)

- To assure anonymity and confidentiality, when handling data or other information provided by An Garda Síochána I / we will ensure the requirements of the Data Protection Act are maintained.
- I / we will acknowledge An Garda Síochána as a source of information in any final report.
- I / we will acknowledge those that carried out any original analysis / research or collection of data and declare they have no responsibility for further analysis or interpretation of it.
- I / we will submit a summary report detailing the aims, methods, findings and implications for policing to An Garda Síochána.
- I / we understand that I / we may be invited to present the research findings before an internal An Garda Síochána audience in an academic seminar.
- I / we will give access to the data / information only to persons directly associated with the project. The data will not be used in connection with any other analysis except that outlined in this document.
- I / we will maintain a list of all persons who handle the data / information provided.
- I / we will consult with the An Garda Síochána regarding any media interest in this project.
- I / we will establish whether security clearance is required to undertake the proposed research, and complete any necessary applications relating to this.

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<tr>
<th>Name (Block capitals)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>1: Paul Williams</td>
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Appendix C: Interview schedule.

How long have you served in an AGS and what is your rank?

How do you find working in a job that requires regular contact with the public on so many different levels from the maintenance of law and order to social service?

Can you recall the first time you found yourself in a confrontational or threatening situation in your work?

How did that impact on you personally?

Have there been many occasions when you have been faced with threatening or confrontational behaviour subsequent to that first experience?

Do these lived experiences influence the way you interact with the public while on duty at all?

What do you do that helps you work well where you think the interaction might be confrontational?

Was/is the support of your colleagues important or helpful to you when you experience such confrontational, stressful situations?
Appendix D. Application for Ethical Approval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MA Criminology Research Ethics Application Form (2015-16)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application for ethical approval for research project</td>
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</table>

Title of the proposed project: Reality versus Idealism: How does the confrontational, volatile nature of police work impact on the individual garda in particular, and the occupational culture of the organisation in general?

A. Researcher Details
Surname: Williams  Forename: Paul
E-mail: d14124438@dit.ie

Research Supervisor: Dr Matt Bowden.

B. Sample/Participants
Specify the number and composition of participants taking part in this project and the proposed recruitment process

Between six and eight participants will be taking part in the project. **A request for assistance from An Garda Siochana has been approved and liaison officer has been appointed to aid in the process of recruiting interviewees.**

Are participants under the age of 18 to be included: No ☐

If yes, please fill in the section D below for research involving children and young people under 18 years of age

C. Potential for risk/distress/discomfort arising from study
Do you consider that there is any potential distress/discomfort/risk to the participants arising from the proposed study?

Highly unlikely.

If yes, please provide details and outline the procedures you will take to address such potential risks:

While I do not believe that there is the potential of causing risk to any of the participants, I am fully prepared in the event that an interviewee becomes distressed as a result of relating a particularly disturbing confrontational incident. If this occurs I have appraised myself of the available counselling services available to members of An Garda Siochana. In my professional life I have had considerable experience of listening to, and assisting, people who have been traumatised/distressed/fearful. Also, as a director of the Crime Victims Helpline I have knowledge of how to access a wide range of counselling and support services. I will provide information and if necessary refer any participant who experiences discomfort or distress to these services. All interviewees will be informed that this research is purely based on informed consent and if they so wish for any reason that they can opt out of the interviews and withdraw consent.

D. Research involving children and young people under 18 years of age

Age of participants:

Number of participants:

In what way, if any, does the proposed study benefit the individual participant?

If your study involves working with young children (e.g. under 18 years of age?), please outline how the research instruments have been designed in a child-friendly format.

Has parent's/guardian's consent to be obtained?  

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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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If **Yes**, in what form - verbal, written, witnessed, etc. – will consent be obtained. **Please attach a copy of the relevant forms.**

Will the child's or young person's consent be sought?  

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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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If **Yes**, in what form - verbal, written, witnessed, etc. – will consent be obtained. Please attach a copy of the relevant forms.

### E. Research involving other vulnerable groups over 18 years of age and/or a very sensitive research topic?

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<tr>
<th>Age of participants:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of participants:</td>
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<tr>
<td>In what way, if any, does the proposed study benefit the individual participant?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If your study involves working with vulnerable people and/or very sensitive research topic, please outline how the research instruments have been designed in a user-friendly format.

Please attach relevant documentation.

**Checklist**

**Please ensure the following, if appropriate, are attached:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents to be attached</th>
<th>Tick if attached</th>
<th>Tick if not appropriate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters (to gatekeepers, parents/guardians, participants)</td>
<td>✓ See ‘B’ above and appendix</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consent forms</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Draft Questionnaire(s)/Interview schedule/Observation Sheet</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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Appendix.

2. An Garda Siochana protocol for external research.
3. Research questions.
4. Email exchange with Garda gatekeepers.
5. DIT research ethics form.
Appendix E: Information sheet for research participants.

Purpose/structure of the research project:

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the effects/experiences of hostility/confrontation/threatening work situations on individual gardai working on the front line. This particular project is therefore focused on uniformed members of garda and sergeant rank, equally divided between both ranks and genders.

This research project forms part of the required studies for the completion of the MA Criminology at DIT.

Ethics/Confidentiality.

These interviews are based on voluntary, informed consent and participants have the right to withdraw at any stage.

While the researcher is a journalist specialising in the area of crime for many years, the research participant should be assured that this project is purely an academic exercise to be used ONLY in the preparation of the required MA dissertation.

All participant interviewees are guaranteed confidentiality and the interviews will be fully anonymised. The material will not be made public.

This research is guided by the Code of Ethics of the British Criminological Society.

This research project has already received advanced ethical approval from Prof. Kevin Lalor, the Head of School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences at the Dublin Institute of Technology which runs the MA Criminology.

This research application has also been approved by the Garda Research Review Board.

For the purposes of ensuring accurate data collection the interviews will be recorded on a recording device – in this case an iphone 6 – and later transferred onto a password-protected laptop before being erased from the recording device.
To ensure anonymity all the interviews conducted by this researcher will be coded ie: G 1 or Sgt 1. When the research study is completed the material will be erased from the computer.

Thank you most sincerely for your co-operation,

____________

Paul Williams.

Student email: d14124438@mydit.ie

Phone:
## Appendix F

**CONSENT FORM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher’s Name:</th>
<th>Title:</th>
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<td>(use block capitals) Paul Williams</td>
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<th>Faculty/School/Department:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dublin Institute of Technology</td>
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<th>Title of Study:</th>
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<td>subject/patient/volunteer/informant/interviewee/parent/guardian (delete as necessary)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>3.1 Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and safety implications if applicable?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?</td>
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<td>▶ at any time</td>
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<td>▶ without giving a reason for withdrawing</td>
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<td>▶ without affecting your future relationship with the Institute</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.6 Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
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<th>Signed___________________________ Date __________________</th>
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<tr>
<td>Name in Block Letters __________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Researcher ____________________________ Date</td>
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</table>

**Please note:**

- For persons under 18 years of age the consent of the parents or guardians must be obtained or an explanation given to the Research Ethics Committee and the assent of the child/young person should be obtained to the degree possible dependent on the age of the child/young person. **Please complete the Consent Form (section 4) for Research Involving ‘Less Powerful’ Subjects or Those Under 18 Yrs.**

- In some studies, witnessed consent may be appropriate.

- The researcher concerned must sign the consent form after having explained the project to the subject and after having answered his/her questions about the project.
Appendix G: Interview transcript with G1FN.

PW: You are my first interview, so thank you very much for doing this. Your code is going to be for the benefit of the tape when I get it transcribed will be G1FN. Ok?

G1F: Ok

PW: How long have you been in An Garda Siochana and what’s your rank?

G1F: I joined in 2007, so I’m operational since 2008 and I’ve been a guard since in (Station name). I was on the regular and then I went to Divisional Task Force for 2 years and I did my stint up there and I’m back onto the regular now.

PW: And the regular is the normal shift?

G1F: Yeah.

PW: How do you find working in a job that requires regular contact with the public on so many different levels from the maintenance of law and order to social service?

G1F: That is a big broad question. It kind of, personally my experience is at the moment that social service and dealing with the public as a customer is number one and enforcement of law is coming secondly. You’re more based on helping people and dealing with the public and having a good media perception than actually arresting people and enforcing law and doing the job of what you think a Garda is. Does that make sense?

PW: It does make sense, yeah

G1F: Yeah, as in like you know, everything is about statistics for the news and there’s this many Guards out there and there’s this many checkpoints going on but then if you look at the arrests you’re not getting the opportunity as in Thor checkpoints or Acer checkpoints. This is what my experience was when I was divisional task force and Acer checkpoints and intel and stuff like that was taking precedence over how many arrests you had where before when I joined the job it was all about your arrests and you know, solving crime and taking reports and solving crime and actually doing your job

PW: So, you’re saying there has been a fundamental shift then?

G1F: Yeah. I find since in the 8 years I’ve come out it’s gone from taking reports of crime and investigating crime and arresting people for crime, to statistics, you know. Having so many checkpoints out there that you can report it maybe to the media or that the general public have a different view on guards. It’s a customer service more than law enforcement.

PW: So do you think it’s better?

G1F: No

PW: Do you think it’s worse?

G1F: Yeah, I think our main objective of being law enforcement is gone. I think it’s been overshadowed by being a customer service.

PW: Can you recall the first time you found yourself in a confrontational or threatening situation in your work?
G1F: Yeah. I was only out of Templemore, oh I would have been maybe only 2 weeks, and I’m originally Southside. When I got my station I had to be driven to the north side of the city to show where Santry was, that’s how much of a southsider I was. So I didn’t have any clue of the area at all. We got a call from the council to go down to a local halting site, because they wanted to check out horses that they had there. I was with the senior man in the unit at the time. We went down with council and checked the horses out on the council site and they were seizing the horses. They had to take them because they were in such bad care and within minutes it was just, click of the fingers, it went from me and the senior and the city council people to about 10 travellers running towards us and within seconds it was the senior man, he was shouting at me. He didn’t carry a radio at the time, he was shouting at me get us assistance quick. I didn’t know even where we were, I didn’t know where the halting site was. It was my first time probably out in the car since I got to Santry. I ended up having to throw my radio at him because I couldn’t even understand where we were and within seconds I was being grabbed by the throat by a traveller.

PW: Was it a man or a woman?

G1F: A man

PW: Was he bigger than you?

G1F: Yeah, much bigger. Much bigger, much stronger and I thought to myself, ok I’m in trouble here and the senior man couldn’t help me because he had the same issue as well and all they wanted was the horse’s back. You know the way travellers love the horses and all they wanted was the horse’s back. And I’d say we were probably only waiting 3 or 4 minutes for assistance but it felt like a lifetime. And I remember I was being held by the throat by him and I was holding on to him and I didn’t even think of going for, we’d no pepper spray at the time, I didn’t think of going for me baton because I wasn’t used to carrying a baton. And I was thinking to myself that didn’t even come into my head. And I was there struggling with him. He had me and I had him and it felt like a lifetime. I just remember being pulled back and I didn’t know whether I was being pulled back by another traveller or a guard. And it happened it was assistance coming and they pulled me back and they arrested the traveller but I say it was 3 or 4 minutes but looking at the time it felt like a lifetime. It was really like, it was scary because it was only my first time to, you know, to encounter a traveller or to have any sort of dealings and….

PW: But it was your first time with any kind of confrontational situation?

G1F: Yeah it was my first time that I was out in the public. And I thought ok, this is the first time to leave the station and this is after happening then is this going to be an everyday occurrence. It’s like, and I was just more aware of, I was just more aware of my surroundings and limitations than when you know, you put on the uniform at first and you kind of think, ok I’m a guard and you know that realisation of you still a person comes very quickly.

PW: So that leads me to number 4 really, the fourth question, how did it impact on you personally?

G1F: Yeah, you just, you’re very aware of what dangers you go into and like, that you’re aware, you’re aware of the support you had back then right when I came out. You know, I sound real old when I say it; back then when I came out you could have had two or three cars per station working per day so if you needed assistance like that there was assistance within two to three minutes. Now you’re lucky if you have one car in a district. So if that was to happen today and I was out in a patrol car today, there’s no other car, there might possibly not be another car working in the Santry district or the H district, which is Ballymun, Santry and the airport. So I might have to wait for someone to come from Coolock or Swords or Finglas. You don’t have the same support and same assistance that you used to have. So after that incident I was wary of my limitations. I was aware of the dangers that I’m going into.

PW: It made you aware of your limitations as a human being wearing the uniform?

G1F: Yeah

PW: You as a young person were coming out and, this is if I get it right you felt, I’m a guard and I’m wearing the uniform and the uniform gives me a degree of protection and strength?
G1F: Yeah, not that you feel invincible. You know you’re not invincible but you feel that little bit more...people look at you as that authoritative kind of figure. So you feel that little bit safer maybe? When it comes down to it the uniform doesn’t mean anything. You know they don’t see it as a uniform. They see it as a uniform but they don’t see it as a female uniform. They just see a uniform and they don’t respect the uniform, so it doesn’t make a difference.

PW: So that was your baptism of fire really?

G1F: Yeah, that was the first. I can remember it as if it happened yesterday.

PW: You say that you remember it as if it was yesterday. Has that first experience of conflict impacted on the way you work since?

G1F: You can say that, yeah. Yeah, like you think back to it, you think because it was something so simple. It was something so simple, it was something so simple like we were going to check horses and it’s the same and through me experience it’s that no call you go to...the call you’re given by command and control, is never the call you go to. It’s only when you get there you realise what call you’re going to and that can be something so simple as public order, a theft, a domestic. It can be something that when you read it over the radio it’s nice and innocent but when you get there all hell can break loose in seconds. And I think I’m aware of that since that very first incident. I was going to check horses, it was very simple and within minutes of being there I was grabbed by the throat by a traveller. So I’m like when I go to every call, control gives me the gist of what the call is but I’ll never assume that’s the call I’m going into.

PW: Have there been many occasions when you have been faced with threatening or confrontational behaviour subsequent to that?

G1F: Loads. Loads. But it depends; it depends on what unit you’re working with. You know, I’m public order trained. So, you know I know when I’m going to, when I get a public order call out that there is a very high possibility I’m going to be involved in possibly a riot or a strong or violent situation. I know that if I’m getting the call for public order, I know more than likely something big is going to happen. When I was in the task force I didn’t respond to, you know when you ring 999 about someone’s car is blocking your driveway? When you ring task force you don’t go to those calls, you’re going to robberies, burglaries stuff like that, so you’re going to meet more volatile situations and more volatile people. You know the chance of meeting them in the task force is a lot higher than on the regular here. So it just depends what unit you’re on but yeah I’ve been in some sticky situations.

PW: Are there any that really stand out, apart from that very first?

G1F: I’m trying to think. I’ve been to so many. I was called to a public order in a nightclub down in Coolock, you know simple. Two fellas fighting, pulled them apart and got punched right in the face.

PW: Oh, did you?

G1F: Straight off it, yeah and there’s no repercussions. Nothing happened to them, so it’s not as if....I was on the regular at the time, 2 guys fighting outside a nightclub in a car park...At night time, 2 o’clock, 3 o’clock closing. Got a call for public order, We get these calls all the time from this nightclub, nothing out of the ordinary. Friday or Saturday night you’d always kind of stay close because you know something is going to happen. Drove into the carpark, 2 lads fighting. I was front seat passenger in the car, jumped out while my partner parked the car. I was first over to them, kind of trying to pull them apart, clocked right in the face as it is.

PW: Were you hurt?

G1F: And like that punched in the face? Yeah, you would be hurt. And you didn’t have time to stand and oh God, cry about it. I’m injured just get on about it. I still had to try and pull them apart until my partner came over. I got assistance and ended up arresting them and brought them back. But nothing ended up happening to them for punching me in the face.
PW: Why?

G1F: Because it has to be investigated and like that, it’s seen like, sometimes seen part of your job being abused verbally but sometimes physically. It’s just seen as part of the job.

PW: But it’s a serious offence to assault a member of An Garda Síochána?

G1F: I’ve been punched, I have been kicked. I’ve been spat at and nothing’s happened. And it’s a serious offence but I don’t think it’s acknowledged as a serious offence through the organisation, through the public. I don’t think the public sometimes realise and I don’t think the organisation see it as such a big offence. Like there’s a male that lives in my district and anytime he has any sort of dealings with the guards he will assault a guard and he’s made threats toward guards and I’d say he has 30 charges for assaulting members of An Garda Síochána, he hasn’t been in prison for it. So sometimes I think it’s just something that’s accepted to a certain extent

PW: Does that experience then as a collective, your team mates, people on your unit, bring you all, in one way, tighter together as a group? You know what I mean, that you feel, or do you feel that it’s us against them? Do you agree with that?

G1F: Yeah

PW: But then does that give you any kind of sense of your own status as Gardaí?

G1F: What do you mean as in our own status?

PW: Your status as Gardaí, from what you’ve just described to me, people can come up punch you in the face and having grown now to accept that these assaults are not investigated, these guys are not going to jail, they can threaten guards, they can hit guards. It doesn’t matter because we’re supposed to take it.

G1F: Yes, I see it as part of our job. I was in court one day and I remember I witnessed a member giving evidence and part of his evidence was that the accused verbally abused him, came out with all sort of fantasies and he told the judge. And the judge said well you should be a bit thick skinned and that was the judge's response.

PW: The guard said that to you or the judge said that to you?

G1F: The judge said it to the guard, not to me. I was in the court. You should be thick skinned. So I think it seems that verbal abuse and physical abuse to a certain point is part of the job. I don’t think you get the support from higher ranks that you should get. If you’re assaulted a Sergeant has to investigate it, you know so I think….it’s not that it’s too much work, that’s not a nice way of putting it but I think it is seen as just part of the job though you can cry about every little knock you get.

PW: And can I ask you have you cried?

G1F: Yes, I’ve gone home. I wouldn’t cry here, not in a million years. I have gone home on certain occasions and it mightn’t be the physical violence part that you go home and have a little minute about. You see a lot of stuff in relation to cases you go to and it would affect you and there’s no support there.

PW: And these would be like domestic violence?

G1F: Domestic, you know, suicides. I went to one suicide, kind of off the topic, and the person hung himself out of the attic and I remember going home that night, and it was horrific, and I remember I actually went in and didn’t go upstairs in the house for about a day. Because I just couldn’t pass my attic. I don’t know, I just couldn’t. It was a difficult case and I just remember I couldn’t go upstairs and stayed downstairs for the day. You know, it’s just certain things in the job that take their toll on you.
PW: I suppose that’s question number 6, do these lived experiences influence the way you interact with the public while you’re on duty at all? Has it changed your opinion, being a guard, has it changed your view on the public?

G1F: I’m colder. When I go to things, it’s something that my Dad said to me after about 3 years on the job. He said you’re colder as a person. Not to people but to certain circumstance, you know, certain things wouldn’t phase me but like they used to but I’m friendly to everybody. I am! I treat everybody, regardless if they’re a 90 year old woman who comes to the counter or they’re someone who has 110 previous convictions. I treat everyone the way I would want someone who is dealing with my mother and father to treat them and I will greet everyone the exact same way and then their reaction to me will determine the rest of the conversation, the tone of the conversation. I’m not going to...I don’t differentiate with people. People might find that hard to believe. I’m nice to everybody and it’s their reaction, their attitude, their tone, how they greet me that will determine the rest of the conversation and how I deal with them. Regardless if you’re a witness, or if you’re an injured party, or if you’re a suspect you will be treated the exact same way from the start and then they’ll determine how everything else goes because I can’t just judge everyone I meet straight away. That would make me a bad...that would affect me more, you know that way,? That would...that would change my personality as a person. I can’t have that. I can’t have work changing me as a person.

PW: When your Dad says you’re colder, does he mean that in the context that you’re more hard bitten, that you’re tougher?

G1F: Yeah, I’d be a lot tougher but I think I’m tough enough, but I’d be...he said colder as in...I don’t know. I don’t have as much empathy, I think he meant. To situations, not to people but to situations. You know when you hear of something on the news. You hear something on the news and people go Oh God isn’t that terrible and I’d be like yeah! You know! I wouldn’t be like, oh God the poor person or depends on the situation. I know a good example, people that aren’t in this job would react different to people that are in the job. 100%. We have a different...

PW: Because of your lived experiences?

G1F: Yeah. Yeah, you would. People...I’d see something on the news and someone who’s not a guard would see something on the news and I’d react totally differently to that person just because I’d probably experienced it but a different take on it. So I see it in different ways.

PW: Question number 7. What do you do that helps you work well where you think the interactions might turns nasty or confrontational? Do you have any mechanisms that you use going into a situation?

G1F: And you have to remember you go into a domestic in that house, you’re going in not knowing anything about that house and that person, that’s their home. They know where every knife in that house is, where every weapon in that house and I’m not talking about guns or anything like. They know where the nearest lamp is if they want to hit you with it. They know where everything is. So you have to keep that in mind when you’re going in. I’ll always introduce myself as (first name). I’ll never introduce myself as Garda (surname) because once you put Garda on it you’re putting a label.

PW: So you use that? That’s one of your mechanisms?

G1F: One of my mechanisms.

PW: You introduce yourself by your first name?

G1F: I introduce myself as (first name)...I’m (first name) what can I do for you or whatever. I’m never Garda (surname).

PW: Why? Explain that to me because that’s very interesting.

G1F: Because as Garda, you’re labelling yourself as the authoritative, you know I’m Garda (surname) and people don’t like the word Garda.
PW: So you're expressing your authority then?

G1F: Yes. If you say I’m Garda, I’m Garda such and such. Where I think if you go in and say I’m (first name) you’re just making yourself more, it sounds on the same level? Because you’re going to say to them what’s your name and they’re not going to say Mr or Mrs whatever. They going to say I’m Jim, I’m Bob, I’m whatever, so straight away by taking the Garda out of it I’m putting us on the same level. You’re Bob, I’m (first name) nice to meet you. So straight away you’re on the same level as them.

That’s even with a suspect. So if I’m with a suspect, if I have a suspect in here to interview, when I go in its I’m Jessica because straight away I want to take the I’m the guard, you’re the suspect. I want him to feel comfortable with me, you know I want to try and build rapport with my suspects. When I go in and interview him he’s going to try and talk to me a bit more, he’s going to feel more relaxed with me. It’s going to be more…more open that way. If I’m go to a suspect straight away I’m Garda (name), there’s a barrier so we want to get rid of all the barriers. Same way you go to a sudden death and you meet the family, at that moment that family is never going to forget me because I’ve had to go to ID their loved one. They’ll never forget my face, they’ll never forget me, they’re always remember the guard. So when I go in…I’m (name). I’m the friendly face. You’re after losing your loved one, I’m (name). I’m the friendly face that’s here to help you. It’s really important.

PW: So that strikes me as being your way of coping. It’s your way of dealing with the public. Treat them on an even keel. But what happens then if that turns nasty? Do you become Garda then?

G1F: Yeah but then you have that, your trump card as such. You can start off as (name) and then if you need to become more authoritative or you need to differentiate here, as in I’m a guard I’m taking control here, then you can step up to your Garda but you’re a person when you go in there first. Nine times out of ten you go into a house, you go into a domestic or a public order whatever, and the person that you meet wanting to have a go at someone and want to rant. They just want to let off steam and vent, like the rest of us do...you go in...I’m Jessica, what’s going on, what can I do for you...leave them off. Leave them off and just listen to them...just listen. It might take 2 minutes it might take 10 minutes. Rant away, go for it, let all your steam out and then when they're done say ok well here’s what we can do. So you’re not going in straight away and saying what’s the problem, lalalala and you’re not telling him what’s going to happen. They’re telling you what happened. They’re telling you about the traumatic thing that’s after happening to them and they might go on a spiel...leave them off. Because you’re given them an ear to listen. You’re friendly, you’re on the same level as them and you’re here to listen to them and nine times out of ten that’s all you need. That’s all you need and don’t take it personally, I have done and that’s really important. Don’t take it personally. If this person wants to eff and blind out at them...if you go into someone’s house and the husband and wife are after having a fight or you go somewhere and you know, someone’s window is after being broken in their house, they’re effing and blinding out them. They know you didn’t break the window. They know you’re didn’t cause the argument. Don’t take it personally, just leave the person off. Let them rant. They’re ranting, not at you, just ranting in general. So once you don’t take it personal and once they’re after...

PW: Roughly off the top of your head, and I know this is a supplemental question, what percentage would you say that you use your discretion and don’t arrest?

G1F: Roughly? I’d say about 70% of the time. If not more, possibly more.

PW: And do you see, by virtue of what you’ve just been telling me, again as a supplemental Issue because it’s fascinating. What is your main role then as a Garda? What do you see as your main role as a Garda?

G1F: Now?

PW: Yes

G1F: As compared to when I started, now?
PW: Yeah

G1F: Customer Relations. As in, the majority of people I deal with are witnesses, they’re injured parties, they’re passport forms at the counter, old people coming in to get their pension form signed. Compared to percentage wise...comparing people I deal with every day, just the general public compared to actual suspects...it’s massive like.

PW: **So the majority of your work as a police officer is as a public service?**

G1F: Yeah. That’s what I said to you at the start we’re like social service. We’re customer relation based over law enforcement. So you have to...you can’t...you’re a guard you deal with criminals but most of the time you’re not dealing with criminals. Most of the time you’re dealing with Joe Soap, the normal general public and a lot of people...normal people...not normal people, that’s the wrong word...the majority...

PW: **Ordinary people?**

G1F: Ordinary people, yeah, they don’t have interaction with the guards. Their only interaction with the guards is coming in to get their passport form signed. You know, so why would you treat them like they’re a criminal? Why wouldn’t you be happy and friendly to them and as helpful as you can?

PW: **Would you see yourself as a peacemaker?**

G1F: Yeah that’s a good way. Yeah, that actually the best label to put on it

PW: **So you see yourself as a peace keeper?**

G1F: Yeah, that’s the best...the amount of calls you go to that have absolutely nothing to do with the guards, like absolutely nothing go to do with the guards but the first person people are the guards. Like if someone finds a dog hit by a car in the road they’re going to ring the guards. If someone finds an injured, I had one person ring in one day because she found an injured pigeon. Like, that’s it people just ring the guards straight away because they don’t know who else to ring so you’re a helping service.

PW: **How many on your unit?**

G1F: There is four of us

PW: **Four on your unit?**

G1F: Four on our unit and a Sergeant.

PW: **What should there be on your unit?**

G1F: Usually one and seven, one and eight. A Sergeant and seven, a Sergeant and eight depending on the unit and one of them four is a permanent post person, so he’s not operational. But like that, that member is counted as a resource on your unit but they’re not a resource because they’re on the post. So technically everyday you’d have one and three and that’s if one’s not sick or ones not on leave. I’m currently on light duties, I can’t leave the station because I was involved in a car crash in work last year. So I can’t leave the station.

PW: **And were you injured?**

G1F: I was yeah. I was injured, so I was out of work for 5 months

PW: **What was your injury?**

G1F: Back, neck, shoulder. I’ve lost a certain percentage of movement in my arm and my back so I technically…

PW: **What happened there? Was it a ramming?**
G1F: No, going to an intruders on call. People breaking into a house we were 10 minutes away. Driving to the call we had lights on but no siren because we were so close and didn’t want to frighten the intruder and a car pulled out of a side road and slammed into us. So like that, there’s our unit…

PW: So you were badly injured?

G1F: Yeah, I was out of work for 5 months. So there’s our unit you’ve one and four. One is on the post permanently and I’m stuck in the station. So you’ve 2 guards that go out every day.

PW: I was going to ask you then…that sort of puts my final question sort of in a different place. The support of your colleagues, I was thinking of the big units where everybody bands together and looks after each other. Is the support of your colleagues important for a start and is it helpful to you when you have experienced confrontational and stressful situations?

G1F: There’s 2 different aspects to it. I have a great Sergeant, my Sergeant is brilliant, she is great. She is just brilliant and you could go to her with anything and nothing phases her. So if I went to a call and I was feeling a bit upset or a bit stressed, I know myself personally I could talk to her about it. But I’m very lucky because she’s great. I’m very blessed. I’ve worked with other Sergeants that you couldn’t possibly go speak to them.

PW: Really?

G1F: No you couldn’t, definitely not. The guards have a peer support system but the peer supporters are colleagues. So they could be different people around the station. There’s a list of them. There’s no woman in Santry on the list. Right, fair enough, it doesn’t have to be a woman just because I’m a woman. But the people on the list are senior guards, jack the lad senior guards that you wouldn’t feel comfortable going to and saying I’m emotional about this. It’s like a stigma as well if you go to, you know…And in all my years and everything that has happened to me, I’ve only gotten a call from a peer supporter once. Once in eight years. In eight years I’ve gotten one call from my peer supporter to see if I wanted to talk. Personally I think it should be an external body that has nothing got to do with the station or the guards. It should be an external body that you can go to and talk to because there is stuff that you should probably talk about and you don’t talk about it. I wouldn’t go home to my family, as I said I’ve no guards in my family or anything like that, and I wouldn’t go home…

PW: There’s no one to understand?

G1F: Yeah. And you don’t…it’s one of them things it’s kind of like you deal with it with black humour that, you know, general public wouldn’t get. But like you could go to…

PW: So tell me about the black humour. Is it gallows humour, yeah?

G1F: It’s like you laugh at ridiculous things that if anybody heard you laugh about or joke about it would be shocking. You know the general public heard some of the things you laugh and joke about they’d be saying all sorts of stuff about you but it’s the only way sometimes you can cope. You know, you’re the first to arrive at a vehicle road traffic accident and someone’s dead or missing a limb in a car or like, a lot of people haven’t seen that. You know that way? You know, it’s stuff, some things just don’t leave your mind, like do you know that way? So you can’t go home and say to your other half and oh I went to this vehicle road accident today and when I got there sure his limb was here and this was there He’s going to be going oh my god…And then they would want to molly coddle you and you don’t want to be molly coddled, you just kind of want to talk and then you can’t go, I don’t feel you can’t go to the peer supporter because they’d be looking at you going would you cop on to yourself and get over it like.

PW: So when it comes to support and comfort, so to speak, from your colleagues and understanding, it’s primarily just your skipper you’re talking about?

G1F: Yeah and that’s if you have a good skipper. And other than that you’re left on your own.

PW: So tell me, you know the way they talk…I’m sure you may have heard of it before…about police culture and the guards close the ranks and there’s the blue wall of silence. From what you’re
telling me, that doesn’t seem to exist and that you maybe find that you’re very limited in the number of people you can go to for support?

G1F: Yeah very limited. I’m off on light duties. I was off for five months and I was on light duties. The only person that asks me how I am is my Sergeant. I have to go to the Gardaí doctor I get that but she’s the only one who asks me how I am. I don’t get a phone call from higher ranks to say how are you coping or that you’re back in work. Now you don’t want to be molly coddled. I don’t need a phone call everyday but I was off work for five months and the only message I got was asking me when I was back. When are you coming back? That was the only contact I had when I was off for five months after being in a car crash. In physio fourteen months later and I’m in physio every week and for the five months I was off the only text messages I got and they weren’t phone calls, they were text messages were to ask me when am I back. And I’ve raised issues since I’ve come back, you know, about my care...just about my rehabilitation. And I’ve raised issues to senior ranks which have gone on deaf ears.

PW: When you say about your rehabilitation?

G1F: Yeah as in, like, there were certain measures that were to be taken in order to get me back to light duties and build up my hours and stuff like that. And the advice that was given originally by the Garda doctor was ignored.

PW: How do you mean, the doctor?

G1F: The Garda doctor. He says you’re on light duties, right, and you should go to an office you know and you should be able to kind of ease back into it and I was sent back to the public office. My time wasn’t finished in the task force and I was told I can’t go back to task force because there’s no light duties in task force. So I got kicked out of task force because I was in a crash but through no fault of my own because I wasn’t driving in work and I got sent back to the regular to work the public office

PW: So you feel in a way that you were probably punished for being in an accident?

G1F: I’m a nuisance. I’m useless. I have no use. I’m a glorified receptionist. I was in the patrol car doing my job, in a passenger seat, not driving. I was in a crash through no fault of my own. I got kicked out of the specialised unit I was on and I put into the regular. Well, I would have been going back to the regular anyway but put back to the regular to work the public office.

PW: That’s what you got?

G1F: That’s what I got.

PW: How does that inform your thinking about...everybody has to have a sense of self-worth...

G1F: Yeah I’m a number

PW: You’re a number?

G1F: I’m a number. Every guard is a number and it’s so stressful. I have my own house and I pay mortgage on my own. I went to the higher ranks and said that I’m on light duties and I’m worrying about paying my mortgage, what do I do? Don’t worry about it...that was it. I still pay the mortgage myself. I still don’t get all my allowances. I’m massively stretched financially but they don’t want to know about that. So people see...people wonder why guards aren’t motivated. What motivation would I have, you know. If anyone in the private sector was treated like that it would be a different story.

PW: But what about the band of brothers?

G1F: But you see, they’re asking you to do a job which is a difficult job and they’re not giving you the resources to do it. It’s like asking you build a house and not giving you bricks. It’s not possible. When you see this new armed support unit, it’s coming out now, and that’s great and there’s going to be 55 new members and that’s brilliant. The members are being taken from the regular. So you’re taking them from the first response. It’s not the armed support unit that’s working and going to
get to the call first. You take the Regency that was a uniformed member that turned up there first. That wasn’t an armed member. So you’re depleting numbers on the regular and giving them to a specialised unit to please the media and the public. So that you can stand in front of the public and say, oh well statistically now we have so many more armed guards than this time 2 years ago but you’re not putting out that you have how many uniformed guards less.

**PW:** I’m suddenly understanding now what you said when we started talking at the beginning when you said about statistics. And I was trying to work out is that a better thing or a…

**G1F:** Worse

**PW:** Lesser thing but you’ve more than made it up now. So to summarise what you have said to me, you’re telling me that it’s all about optics then. It’s not really about working with the public. As an organisation it’s optics but on a personal level you seem to really take your role seriously?

**G1F:** I love my job. I loved my job.

**PW:** Do you still love it?

**G1F:** I love it. I absolutely love it.

**PW:** I was listening to you at the kiosk there with some guy coming in and talking about his iPhone. And you helped him. You talked to him and he had a good experience with you.

**G1F:** They say that for every bad experience you have with someone it takes 9 positive encounters to make up for the negative encounter. We were thought that down in Templemore. Every negative experience…We did it in management…organisational management. For every negative it takes 9 positive fixings or something like that to get rid of the negative. So for something so simple at the counter why would you not be helpful? But like that, you know, people wonder why the guards aren’t as motivated. It’s a very challenging, very demanding, very stressful job without the support that should be there. They’re asking you to do a job that you can’t do with the resources they give you.

**PW:** So let’s try to put that into context in terms of, number one, solidarity around you, you’ve one person that you can talk to…a Sergeant?

**G1F:** I’m lucky to have that one person.

**PW:** Number two, you were injured in the line of your duty very seriously and you very obviously feel aggrieved and upset by the way you were treated. And the only thing they wanted to know was when are you coming back to work? And then they took you from a specialised area and moved you to a glorified receptionist as you say. How then can you still remain enthusiastic and love the job?

**G1F:** And you’re forgetting all the pay cuts on top of that. Take your pay cuts on top of all that and then you’re still meant to do the job and stay motivated

**PW:** So you would agree with the Garda Inspectorate report that basically said everything comes down the line and you must do what is given to you to do even if you don’t have the resources or equipment to do it?

**G1F:** It’s not like, and this is going to sound terrible, it’s not the person in the office making all the decisions that has to put out a car, control the district and find the numbers and you know. I remember, this is the best, I remember a few years ago, this is before the task force, a good few years ago and we’d no patrol car. I don’t know whether the car was getting fixed or the car was wrote off and whatever, and I got a bus to a call. It was on the beat. We got a bus. The panic alarm came in for Oscar Traynor road and we were on the Swords Road and a bus went by and I and my colleague jumped on the bus and we got the bus down. Because in order to get on the bus it would take 5 minutes but if we were to walk there it would have taken 20 minutes. We got the bus down, got on the bus and the busman was only delighted to have us on the bus obviously. Of course we didn’t tell him at the time that we’d no patrol car going to the call. We got the bus down.
PW: Wouldn’t it have been easier for you guys to turn around and say there’s no squad car here?

G1F: I’m not going?

PW: I’m just not going. I’ll ramble down and I’ll just radio back to base and say it. That would be reasonable in any other job, why didn’t you say that?

G1F: Because it was my job to get there. Who else is going to go? I was the guard working. I was on the beat. Me and my colleague were the two guards working that were out that day. We were covering the whole Santry district that day. It’s grand for me to turn around and say, I’m not going, I’m not going and the Sergeant would say I’m directing you to go, so I’d say I’m still not going. Well then he’s going to put me on paper up to the Superintendent to say that I disobeyed a direction and then the shit’s going to hit the fan. And rather than me going through the hassle, I just got the bus down. It’s my job, I’m the guard, it’s my job to go down. Now granted when I got down there I got the head eaten off me for taking so long to get there but..

PW: Who?

G1F: The person.

PW: The victim?

G1F: Yeah. I was I know, I’m sorry, short staffed but I got here lalalala

PW: You arrive down and then you get abused by the victim. Did you tell the victim what happened?

G1F: No. I said I’m very sorry, I’m very sorry. I know I took our time. How can I help you but I’m very sorry. I apologise. I apologise when there was no patrol car. I’m not in charge of supplying a patrol car but you know...

PW: But that’s an amazing stretch and you still like the job?

G1F: I know but I always wanted to be a guard. I’ve no guards in the family and I’ve always wanted to be a guard because my mam was really involved in the community when we were kids and I was on the summer project and we had a guard come out to us on the summer project. I was just a kid about 7 or 8 and of course, this guard was the bee's knees, he was great. It was all about the job and ever since then I was going to be a guard. So of course, I became a guard. I’m finding he wasn’t telling us the whole truth but however,

PW: It seems from what you have told me that there has been some kind of shift, something has taken place in the Garda family in a sense that, guards were very close together, they would be very supportive for each other. But it seems that the whole psychology of the job has changed?

G1F: We are to a certain extent, we are close together... You’d be closer to different people. I’m wary of who I’m in the patrol car with. When I was up in task force I had a great partner, it was brilliant and we used to go to all sorts of calls. And I’d go into hell and back with him and I know I’d be ok and he knew the same with me. And we always said that if anything happens and I’d say to him if you end up in a hospital bed, I’d be in the hospital bed beside you. But now it’s come to the stage where with some people you have to be careful because you might end up in the hospital bed and they’ll be standing over you with flowers saying you poor thing. So you need to know that whoever is out with you has your back and because things have changed in the job so much and you don’t have support and there’s not the same motivation and people are kind of thinking well why am I going to put my neck on the line. So where before there wasn’t the pay cuts, there wasn’t the same pressure there was as now, you were more tightly knit. Where now people are becoming a little more selfish and I think that’s ok though as well.

PW: People are just disillusioned or demoralised?
G1F: Yeah, they’re like why would you do it? I think if you ask that question to anybody why would they go out every day with a chance of being assaulted or a chance of being injured for less pay, with no support, without the resources they should have to do a job. Why would they be motivated? And it’s really hard to stay motivated, it really is. But when I’m dealing with people at the counter or out at a call it’s not their fault that my pay has been cut. It’s not their fault that I don’t have the resources even though they like to tell me “I pay your wages” and you would like to ask them for a pay rise but it’s not their fault. Before my accident you could ring me at home anytime day or night and if I was off and someone in work needed me, ring me anytime, day or night. But now when I leave work, I leave work and I’m dealing with it tomorrow. Like when was in task force it was assumed you were kind of on call. If divisionally search or murder, we’d come in for searches and callouts just in relation to anything. If they needed you when they rang you, you came in. Two years my phone was on and if anybody needed me here I came in. Now at the Regency, that happened when I was at home. If I was in task force I would have come in but now when I leave work I leave work and I’ll deal with it tomorrow. And that part of me has died.

PW: The enthusiasm?

G1F: I’m not going to be at home with my family and leave my family to come into work when I’m not getting any thanks or any support and anything for it. I don’t mean that in a financial way because why should I, I’m only a number. Why should I? It’s sad, it’s terrible but that’s one of the biggest differences in me. Before, definitely I would have come in at the drop of a hat, no problem, I’ll be in 20 minutes. I live 20 minutes from here. I’ll be in in 20 minutes, I’ll drop everything. Where now, no I’m at home. If I’m here and not gone, that’s no problem but I won’t be leaving my house to come back into work.

PW: Is the support of your colleagues is it important or helpful?

G1F: It’s vital

PW: It’s vital but it seems to be a limited commodity even from your perspective?

G1F: It’s limited but it is...if my Sergeant asked me to do anything, if she asked me to stand on my head in the corner for a day, I would. If she said to me, we’re really stuck would you work on? No problem! I would literally, no problem. If she asked me to do something, no problem. Because she appreciates it.

PW: Has there been a disconnect? Do you go to socialise with other guards to unwind?

G1F: Not really. I used to when I started, at first you had loads of Garda friends and such. I have a very small close Garda friends but I wouldn’t socialise. We’d go out in the unit here once or twice, I think in the past year we’ve been out twice.

PW: Is that something that has changed? But would you find that when you do get together, would you be cynical about upper ranks?

G1F: We all think the same

PW: What do you all think the same together? Like Sergeants and guards...the frontline people?

G1F: We’re just being shafted. That’s the only way to kind of….

PW: Shafted, why and by whom?

G1F: Shafted in there’s no resources, they don’t care but they want the job done but they won’t help you to do the job. They make this big thing out of the media, the armed support unit, it’s great and the Garda patrols and it’s this and this and this. You’re listening to what they’re saying to the media and the general public and you genuinely think to yourself if they only actually knew. If they only actually knew. Like if you were to sit in our public office for only one day, for one Friday, for one busy Friday. Say if you were to sit in that public office for one day, you would be surprised what comes in, what comes out, the calls that come in and the calls that go out. Essentially there are 3 people doing it and in the middle of all this they change the rosters around. So it’s like…and then they keep throwing
out new rosters to us and the new rosters don’t benefit us. Even like that if they were trying to give us a roster that worked for us like if it was something that worked for us on the ground operational, people that worked the core. If there was something that worked for us you would say well they’re making an effort, they’re after give us this great new roster at least that would be something but everything they seem to do seems to be for their benefit and not for the benefit of...

PW: When you say they and their benefit, are you talking about upper ranks?

G1F: Yeah the organisation.

PW: You’re talking about people above. You wouldn’t be talking about Sergeants or guards? Would you be talking about inspectors?

G1F: I don’t know maybe go to Super. I don’t know about inspectors. Garda and Sergeant are the two hardest ranks that you come across in the guards. Probably not even Sergeant, probably guards.

PW: Would you go for Sergeant?

G1F: I’ve done the exam

PW: Have you?

G1F: I’ve the exam done 3 years and I haven’t reported for interview yet.

PW: You haven’t been called or you...

G1F: No. I haven’t gone forward, I haven’t put myself forward for the interview yet.

PW: Why?

G1F: I don’t feel with 8 years’ service I have enough experience to be in charge of other people as in, there’s people that are getting promoted with 5 years’ service but I think that 8 years’ service if you were to put me over Store St, over 20 people, I’d be in over my head and I wouldn’t be able to benefit them and you wouldn’t be able to rely on me like you would a Sergeant. If only some people who went for Sergeant thought like that we wouldn’t have half the problems we do. No it’s just...I will go for it but in time when it’s right and when I can confidently say I’m ready...I will. But I don’t think I should put myself in over my head (inaudible)

End of interview