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## The impact of the cessation of blogs within the UK police blogosphere

### Abstract

This article investigates the concept of influence within a group of police work-bloggers. During the period studied (2007–2013) three influential police bloggers, well-known within the small and tightly-knit UK police blogosphere, abruptly ended their blogging activity. Their cessation stimulated others to re-consider their own blogging and led to several bloggers ceasing to blog for fear of being outed and disciplined or because they had been warned by superiors. This can be seen as part of a wider phenomenon as increasing blog surveillance has resulted in a reduction of work-related blogs. The study shows that work-blogging cessation is influenced by the activities or perceived activities of bloggers' peers and that, while internal factors were influential in the creation of new work-blogs, external factors – in particular, fear of consequences for their career – were the predominant influences on their cessation.

### Introduction

This article reports on one aspect of a study that has tracked the blogs and blogging habits of a group of 64 British police officers over a period of six years<sup>1</sup>. The blogs in the study were all non-official, informal blogs rather than official publications of any police force or policing authority. The research identifies a small group of influential bloggers within the wider group and investigates their influence on their fellow police bloggers and, in particular, what happened when these bloggers cease to blog.

Richard Horton, who wrote the blog *Nightjack*, was forced to cease blogging in 2009 when he was outed by a *Times* journalist. His superiors in the police force ordered him to cease blogging and to delete his blog. His experience was similar to that of an earlier police blogger who wrote under the pen name PC David Copperfield and who ceased blogging in 2007 after outing himself in a television programme. In March 2013 another influential police blogger, *Inspector Gadget*, announced that he too was ceasing to blog. All three of these bloggers were cited as influences in encouraging the police bloggers in our sample to start a blog and were frequently mentioned in the

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<sup>1</sup> The authors of this paper wish to acknowledge Anne O'Neill for her valuable contribution to the collection and analysis of the original data.

blogs of others and, in the case of *Inspector Gadget*, listed in their blogrolls. It was therefore clear that they were influential in encouraging others to start blogging. We therefore sought to investigate whether they were also influential when they ceased blogging.

This article thus focuses on three main questions: whether our sample of police bloggers were influenced by other police bloggers in their decision to start blogging; if so, who these influential bloggers were; and whether they influenced others when they ceased to blog, either out of choice or because of pressure from their employer.

Researchers such as Richards (2008) have argued that work-blogging might be seen as an act of employee resistance. Through their blogs, employees are able to express conflict and disagreement with management policies that they may not be able to make clear elsewhere. In addition, Schoneboom (2007) argues that work-blogs provide a community in which oppositional identities can be sustained and nurtured. This might be particularly pertinent to the UK police blogosphere given that other forms of resistance, such as strikes, are not a viable form of protest available to police officers. Our wider research project investigating police blogging in the UK has certainly found venting frustrations about management and the politics of policing to be an important motivation for our sample of police bloggers (Burnett et al, 2012). Therefore, if such blogs can offer a new venue for employee resistance, it is important to ask why such blogs cease and whether this cessation impacts on other work-bloggers.

### **The risks of work-blogging**

For all bloggers there can be friction between the act of blogging itself and its reception in the public sphere, and this can be exacerbated if the blogger is posting about their work circumstances. As Schoneboom (2011) points out, over the last few years, increased blog surveillance and searchability has resulted in many bloggers taking down work-related blogs or making work a less obvious theme for fear of detection. Raper (2011) notes that junior academics in the sciences who blog might find that their employer considers their blogging to be a waste of time or even a liability. High-profile cases of bloggers sacked for blogging at or about their place of employment include Ellen Simonetti, whose blog *Queen of the Sky* featuring photographs of her in her air-hostess uniform led to her dismissal from Delta Air Lines; Jessica Cutler, sacked from her secretarial job in a senator's office after she was outed as the sex-blogger *Washingtonienne*; Joe Gordon, who was sacked by UK

bookseller Waterstone's after he used the term 'Bastardstone's' and joked about his 'Evil Boss' in his blog *The Woolamaloo Gazette* (Barker, 2005; Schoneboom, 2011); and Colby Buzzell, a National Guard in the US military whose blog aimed to offer a different story about the war in Iraq to that carried by the mainstream media. When his superiors discovered his blog *My War* it was immediately closed down and Buzzell was confined to barracks, although he later published the blog as the book (or blook) *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*, which won the 2006 Blooker Prize (Pedersen, 2010; Wall, 2010). It should also be noted that the *Urban Dictionary* definition of the term 'dooiced' states that it was coined to describe the fate of early blogger Heather B. Armstrong, sacked in 2002 for blogging satirically about her workplace and co-workers in her blog *Dooce*.

Thus blogging about one's place of employment can come with a higher risk than blogging about one's hobby or family life. Many work-bloggers try to retain their anonymity and, once they are outed to their employer, may come under pressure to cease blogging. The media coverage of the fates of such bloggers has raised awareness within the blogosphere of the penalties that may be imposed if employers become aware – and disapprove – of blogging. For police bloggers in particular this concern was brought home to them in 2009 when the anonymous author of the blog *NightJack* was outed by a *Times* journalist as Detective Constable Richard Horton of the Lancashire Constabulary (Gibb, 2009). The *NightJack* blog described Horton's experiences on the front line, but also included his views on social and political issues. In April 2009 it was awarded the Orwell Prize for political writing. However, despite Horton seeking a legal injunction to stop the newspaper revealing his name in 2009, Mr Justice Eady ruled that the blogger could have no reasonable expectation of anonymity because 'blogging is essentially a public rather than a private activity'. Although Horton changed details such as the names of people and places as he posted, once his identity was known it became possible for the actual cases he was writing about to be identified. He was issued with a written warning by his superiors and his blog was deleted. The story garnered attention in both the mainstream media and the blogosphere, both during the trial in 2009 and later in 2012 when the Leveson Inquiry revealed that *The Times* established Horton's identity through hacking his private email account. Schoneboom (2011) notes that the persistence of police blogging in the face of such examples of disciplinary action demonstrates a continuing commitment to writing in the public domain. She also notes that the interconnectedness of such blogs suggests a tacit form of solidarity. The aim of this article is to interrogate this solidarity and to ask how far the cessation

of influential blogs such as Horton's impacted on others within the small and closely-knit UK police blogosphere.

Whilst there has been much research into what motivates someone to start blogging (see Nardi et al, 2004; Baker and Moore, 2008; Guadagno et al, 2008; Pedersen, 2010; Zhou, 2011), there is only a limited amount of literature on the cessation of blogging. As Miura and Yamashita (2007) point out, a large number of those who try blogging make only one or a few entries in their blog and then stop posting. However, there is limited research into the de-motivations of those bloggers who stop blogging after several months, or even several years of blogging.

One reason for this lack of research into cessation is of course that it is sometimes difficult to identify a particular moment when a blogger ceases to blog. It is more usual for there to be a tailing-off of blogging over a period of months or even years rather than a specific moment when a blogger announces that they have ceased to blog. Concomitantly, it is comparatively rare for a blogger to definitely announce that they are leaving the blogosphere. One example of such an announcement occurred in 2007 when the well-known technology blogger Kathy Sierra announced that, not only was she suspending the blog that she co-authored, *Creating Passionate Users*, but that she was cancelling speaking engagements and was scared to leave her home after threats of suffocation, rape and hanging were posted online (Valenti, 2007; Stavrositu and Shyam Sundar, 2013). Nakashima (2007) notes that repeated harassment can make women reluctant to participate online. Similarly, Pedersen (2010) found examples of women bloggers who stopped blogging, or at least made their blogs private, after feeling threatened by readers' comments, and one blogger who had to close down her blog after it was used in evidence against her at a divorce settlement hearing. However, it should be noted that such intimidation may be felt by both sexes. Kim (2007, quoted Cammaerts, 2008) discussed the case of two Korean bloggers who ceased blogging for a short while because of hostile comments and online intimidation campaigns on their blogs.

Unlike the situation with Sierra, whose decision to stop blogging was covered by the world's media and sparked debate about a blogging code of conduct, it can be difficult to identify when a blog has ceased. There is some suggestion in the literature that some blog cessations might be better described as suspensions. Nardi et al (2004) discussed the phenomenon of 'blog burnout', where a blogger stops blogging for a time because they have nothing more to say, but suggested that this might be a temporary pause rather than leaving the blogosphere for ever. The two Korean bloggers discussed by Kim (2007) stopped blogging for short periods of time and

then recommenced, one having switched blog-hosting services and the other having made changes to the way in which they engaged with comments from readers. However, other bloggers may stop blogging simply because they have completed what they set out to do. For example, in her study of infertility bloggers Ratliff (2009) notes that one influential blogger, who used the name Getupgrl, decided to stop blogging when her baby was born in July 2005. Interestingly, Getupgrl also removed the archives of her blog *Chez Miscarriage* from public view, giving her reason for this action as repeated copyright infringement, for example a reader copying images from the blog, putting them on T-shirts and selling them (Ratliff, 2009).

Other researchers have covered blog cessation among students who have been required to blog as part of their course. Andergassen et al (2009) suggested that students who stop blogging after the course requirement has ended mainly do so because of external factors such as concerns about privacy, a lack of interaction with others once the class had ended, or software problems. Their findings agreed with an earlier project by Walker (2005), who found that the majority of students (80%) stopped blogging when the semester was over, although the other 20% of the students continued to blog.

The motivations of work-bloggers can simply be to document the reality of the jobs they do (Richards, 2008). However, other work-bloggers want to make their readers think or even to change their behaviour. For example, McClellan (2004) reported that the author of *Diary of a Fast Food Life* wished to encourage his readers to think about their own behaviour when dealing with service-industry staff. Other common themes that have been identified in work-blogs include exposing management stupidity (McClellan, 2004) and the release of work-related frustration (Richards, 2008). Richards and Kosmala (2013) argue that work-blogging can benefit the blogger by providing a venue for the expression of work-related cynicism, which can give an employee a sense of control and attachment to their own community at the same time as allowing them to distance themselves from corporate cultural initiatives. Richards (2008) and Schoneboom (2011) have suggested that work-blogs might also be a place where employee resistance might be found, locating work-blogging within debates relating to labour process. The need to let off steam about work-related issues might be particularly important for those working in the emergency services who, by the very nature of the job, are limited in their ability to discuss their work in the outside world (Burnett et al, 2012). Research into the use of storytelling in the emergency services suggests that stories can provide a psychological outlet for

emergency-service workers (Tangherlini, 2000) – and many blog posts take the form of such storytelling.

Work-bloggers may also blog in order to influence or educate both insiders and outsiders to the profession (Richards, 2008). This touches on the knowledge-sharing aspects of this medium of communication. Ojala (2005) argues that there are two important aspects of blogging that make it particularly useful for knowledge sharing: a blog's community and its archives. She suggests that blogs are an inexpensive way in which an organisation can encourage employees to share knowledge. Williams and Jacobs (2004) agree that informal systems like blogs can be easier to implement and maintain than formal knowledge-management systems. Again looking at the literature on storytelling within the emergency services, Tangherlini (2000) suggests that police officers and other members of the emergency services recount stories to each other to warn or educate others about situations they have come across while Ward and Sbarcea (2001) suggest that there has been an increase in the use of stories as carriers of knowledge in organizations in recent years. Even the dismissal of work-bloggers may have positive benefits, with Schoneboom (2011) arguing that the firing of the Waterstone's blogger Joe Gordon enabled Gordon to use his blog to promote his union and attract sympathetic media coverage, although this was only a short-term and limited phenomenon that ceased when Gordon took a job with another employer.

The academic study of police use of the internet and social media is in its infancy (see Heverin & Zach, 2010; Crump, 2011; McGovern & Lee, 2012; and Bartlett *et al*, 2013). The police have been slow to engage in and make full use of the internet and social media to engage with their publics (Crump, 2011). They have adopted a cautious approach despite the launch of an ambitious national police agenda led by the Association of Chief Police Officers to promote its use to engage groups previously uninvolved in discussion of local policing. Crump (2011) analyses the police use of one particular platform, Twitter, including the structure of networks and the content of the messages, and argues that the constraints of police culture have meant that Twitter has been used cautiously to reinforce existing means of communication. Heverin and Zach (2010) found a similar culture in the US where some police forces have adopted the technology and others resisted it.

In the UK, the police hierarchy and the former police authorities' attitudes towards social media in general are similar in that social media in the police service is considered a pariah activity. Digital media is seen as a potentially risky activity for

police officers (ACPO/NPIA, 2010; ACPO, 2013). Indeed, the ACPO briefing document / guideline lays out the official policies in relation to the subject. Breaches of digital media can be regarded as gross misconduct under the disciplinary codes. The British police have been slow to engage in its uptake and thus, initially, robust policies and procedures were not put in place to safeguard individual officers. Although there is now a generic Home Office approved policy on the police use of social media our research indicates that it is a matter of personal choice (ACPO, 2013). Some progressive forces and enterprising officers have made good use of social networking, but, as is the case with blogging, it can be considered career suicide to engage in it, especially if there is a controversy whereby the individual officer is criticised by the public. Many officers have been counseled by senior ranks not to engage in the use of social media.

Much has been written about the police and the development of a cynical attitude, particularly amongst front-line officers who patrol the streets (Neiderhoffer, 1974 & Lotz, 1977). However, much of the work is based in a US policing context. Cynicism is said to peak at mid-career and is a mechanism for coping with stress. It is associated with police canteen culture (Waddington, 1999) and dark humour. In the police canteen officers relax and tell stories about their working day, and often these stories are exaggerated, apocryphal stories, particularly non-politically correct stories. These stories entertain and educate as well as help form individualized policing identities. The strength of police canteen culture varies from force to force, but although it can be cruel it is nevertheless a necessary venting mechanism. Canteen culture is often viewed as a malign and potent force, but it is also a means of creative expressionism (Waddington, 1999). There are few such venting mechanisms left open to the police officer and we argue that blogging offers a valuable contemporary alternative. Many UK forces have an intranet-based forum where officers are encouraged to blog internally as a method of venting, but these are unpopular because there is a perception that they are monitored by senior management.

### **Focusing on the UK police blogosphere**

A representative sample of 64 British police blogs was identified using a combination of searching blog directories and through the blogrolls of other police blogs. Since the archives of the blogs were equally as important in determining motivations for ceasing to blog, the sample was not restricted to current blogs, although blogs with only one entry were excluded. The earliest blog in the sample was started in July

2005 and the latest in April 2011. Following the methodology of Herring et al (2004a and 2004b) and Pedersen (2010), blogs in languages other than English were excluded from the sample, as were photo and audio blogs with little text. The blogs selected were all written by someone who identified themselves as serving in the British police force. The initial and final posts of the blogs were then analysed to identify motivations for starting to blog and motivations for ceasing to blog, if relevant, in particular noting any references to other blogs. A thematic analysis of motivations was undertaken based on previous research by Pedersen (2010), whose book on the subject categorized blogging motivations and also analysed such motivations within international and gendered contexts. In addition, an analytical template was developed and applied to the data. This was developed from themes that emerged from the relevant literature (mostly in relation to motivations for starting blogs) and using coding categories derived from the data itself. The template also identifies whether the factors affecting blogging were internal, external or a mix of both. In addition, the blogrolls of the blogs were analysed to establish connections both within and without the police blogosphere and a cluster map produced using Issue Crawler (an online software tool for locating and visualising networks) to identify influential bloggers within the police blogosphere. This led to the identification of a small group of influential police bloggers, including PC David Copperfield, *NightJack* and *Inspector Gadget*. Any posts relating to the cessation of the blogs of these three bloggers were then analysed to ascertain whether or not their cessation of blogging was influential on other police bloggers.

The research was carried out in the summer 2011 with a follow-up study undertaken in spring 2013 after the cessation of the *Inspector Gadget* blog. Whilst previous researchers in the area of work-blogging have used surveys and interviews with bloggers (for example see Richards, 2008 or Schoneboom, 2007), it was decided that an approach focused primarily on an analysis of blog posts would enable the team to access the responses of bloggers to the cessation of other blogs at the time they occurred rather than retrospectively. It was also felt that this approach would enable a larger sample of police bloggers, given the concerns about anonymity of many of these bloggers. This approach also enabled us to use data from blogs that had now ceased. However, a research blog was also established by the project team and all bloggers studied were contacted and invited to contribute to the study through the blog. The existence of the blog helped to establish the credentials of the research team within the blogosphere and also assisted in promoting the research and its results, and some bloggers did contact the team via this blog or through email to

comment on the project. A draft of the final article was later sent to some of these bloggers in order to verify our conclusions. As far as the limitations of the study are concerned, the size of the sample size and its focus on a particular profession means that our findings may not be generally applicable to the wider work-blogging community.

While it was not possible to identify the rank of the majority of the police bloggers, 28 offered enough information in the 'About Me' section of the blog or in the blog name for the following ranks to be identified: ten constables (including detective constables), six sergeants, three inspectors, three special constables, two retired from the force, one mounted police, one probationer, one dog handler and one dog (presumably written by his handler!). In addition, three bloggers were identified as female and two bloggers identified themselves as being from ethnic minorities. This over-abundance of male bloggers is interesting. Fletcher (1999) argues that the police use of storytelling is embedded in masculine forms of storytelling practices and that accomplished police storytellers are primarily men, with women officers having trouble casting themselves in the role of organizational storyteller in such a masculine environment as the police force. Perhaps women are also discouraged from such storytelling by the gendered division in policing (Silvestri, 2007).

The lifespan of the blogs in the sample varied from under a year (18 blogs) to over five years (5 blogs). Some blogs were updated every few days while others had more infrequent posts. By September 2011 17 blogs of the original 64 identified were still current. By May 2013 only ten blogs showed any posts in the preceding five months and only five blogs had any posts in the last month.

For readers unfamiliar with the context of UK policing and the organisational structure of UK police forces it may be helpful to provide some background context. At the time of writing, policing in the UK is undergoing a period of rapid change, particularly given the context of crisis, austerity and job cuts. There is no such entity as the UK Police Service. In England and Wales there are 43 individual police forces, each with their own Chief Constable. In addition there are the British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, and the Ministry of Defence Police. Prior to April 2013 there were eight Scottish Police Forces who now form one entity – PoliceScotland. In Northern Ireland there is one Police Service – The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Each Police Force has a hierarchical rank structure. In descending order of seniority these are Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable, Assistant Chief Constable, Chief Superintendent, Superintendent, Chief Inspector, Inspector, Sergeant and finally, last but not least, Constable. However, theoretically at least, the

police is a meritocracy because each officer, irrespective of their rank, holds the Office of Constable. The first three senior ranks are represented by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPOS). The two Superintendent ranks are represented by the Superintendents Association and the remainder by the Police Federation. All the ranks above Constable are considered to be promoted ranks and thus management, although in police culture the Inspecting and Superintending ranks are considered to be middle-management positions. This is important background information in the context of this paper because Sergeants and above are expected to lead by example. Thus blogging and the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter are considered to be professionally dangerous with the potential to bring the Police Service into disrepute by blurring the boundaries between personal and professional behaviours. Culturally and organisationally, the police in the UK are organised along similar lines in that Constables have a distinctive culture and mindset separate from promoted ranks. Sergeants are considered to have a separate culture too and it is not until one becomes an Inspector that one is in a senior-management position. It is generally considered acceptable for a career Police Constable to be cynical and engage in anti-establishment practices such as desistance. Thus for a Sergeant or Inspector to engage in blogging is quite remarkable and would be viewed by senior management as being akin to organisational treason.

### **Were police bloggers influenced by others in their decision to start blogging?**

The majority of the police bloggers studied stated their motivations for starting to blog, usually at some point early in the blog's life. There was frequently more than one reason involved and five bloggers in fact gave multiple reasons.<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 below gives a broad representation of these.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on motivations for starting a police blog see Pedersen, S., Burnett, S., Smith, R. and O'Neill, A. (2012). Motivations for police blogging and how fear of being 'outed' can force a blogger to cease. *Selected Papers of Internet Research* <http://spir.aoir.org/index.php/spir/article/view/9>

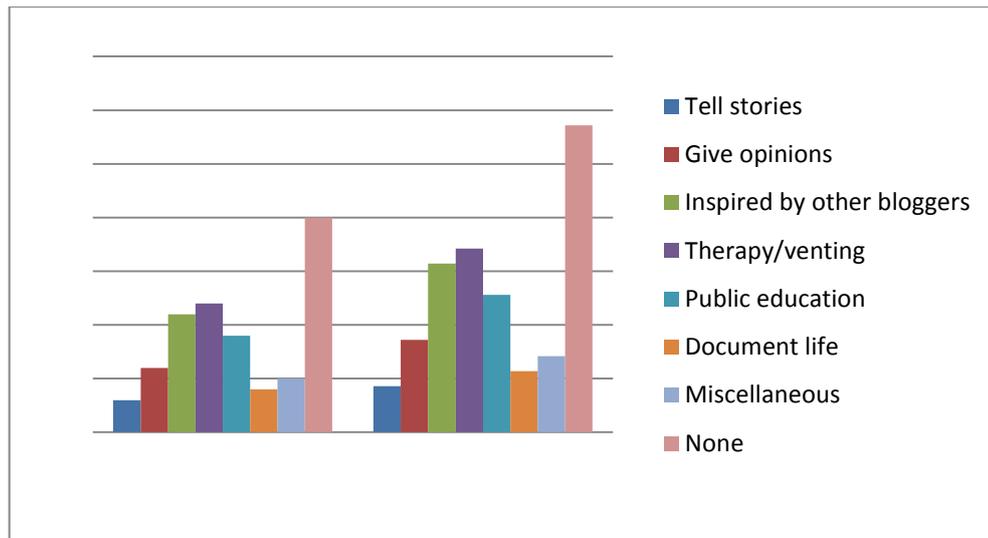


Figure 1 – Stated Motivations for Starting a Blog

As can be seen from Figure 1, the second most frequently stated motivation for starting a police blog was encouragement from other bloggers and a wish to join the community of police bloggers. The police bloggers in our sample quite often mentioned other police bloggers as having inspired their own blogging, and several stated that they started blogging after being readers of other police blogs and finding that they had more to say than could be put into a comment on someone else's blog. This emphasizes the strong community links in this area of blogging, as seen from the following quotes:

Having for some time now, lurked, posted and like most others been inspired by *Coppersblog* and other excellent Police bloggers I have overcome my self-induced lethargy to offer my own rambling views on Metropolitan Life and ... er stuff... (*Tales from the Metropolis*, 4 November 2006).

I've been a regular on other blogs, I've seen people writing about what irks them, what motivates them, what makes them happy/sad etc and I've decided that I want a bite of the cherry. (*kKop's blog*, 28 October 2009)

While some new bloggers simply stated that they were inspired by reading other police blogs, others mentioned specific blogs or bloggers by name. Four bloggers specifically mentioned being inspired by PC David Copperfield's *The Policeman's Blog*, two mentioned *Inspector Gadget*, and there were also individual mentions for *PC Bloggs*, *Semper Fi*, *Coppersblog* and *Police Locker Room*. In addition, several bloggers stated that they aimed to fill a gap that they had discerned in the police blogosphere, for example as a woman police officer, a sergeant, a Scottish police officer or a black police officer.

One of the earliest police bloggers, Stuart Davidson blogged under the *nom de plume* PC David Copperfield and also authored the book *Wasting Police Time*, which

was published in 2006 by Monday Books, who specialise in turning popular blogs into book form, and serialised in the *Daily Mail* newspaper. Davidson 'outed' himself on a BBC *Panorama* television programme in September 2007. The programme focused on his criticism of the bureaucracy and administration of current policing methods. Davidson announced in the programme that he was leaving the UK and had taken a position with the police force in Edmonton, Canada, and would thus be ceasing to blog.

It should be noted that, even in their first posts, several police bloggers voiced concerns that what they were doing would not be approved of by the authorities. One blogger noted that he had seen several police blogs that he enjoyed reading suddenly disappear: 'So welcome to my small rebellion against authority, as it seems Official (i.e. high level) police attitude to blogging is a touch too 1984 for my liking' (*Sergeant Simon*) while another noted that by joining the blogosphere he was putting his pension on the line.

Further evidence of the influence of other police bloggers comes from an analysis of their blogrolls (see Figure 2), which again shows a strong community between UK police bloggers. It should be noted that the analysis was undertaken in the summer of 2011, four years after PC David Copperfield stopped blogging and two years after the cessation and removal of the *NightJack* blog and therefore it could not be expected to find reference to these blogs in blogrolls. The most frequently listed blog was *Inspector Gadget*, with nearly 50 mentions, followed by *PC Bloggs* with just over 40 mentions.

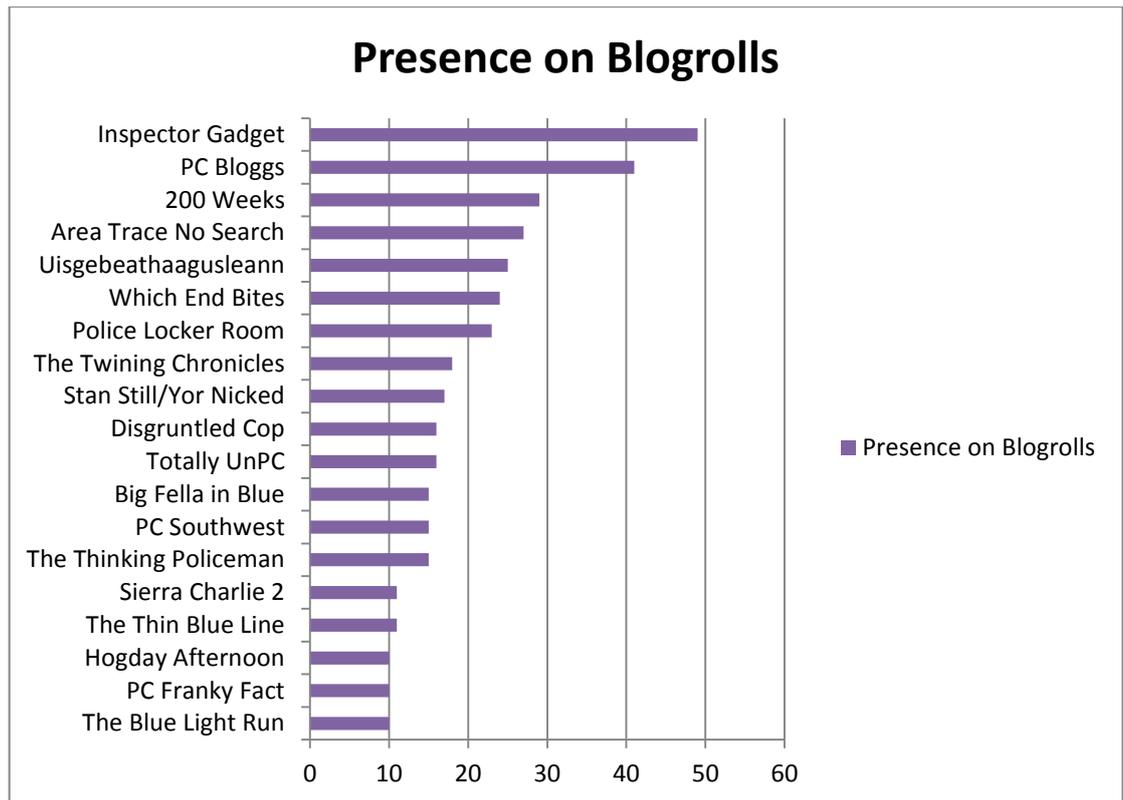
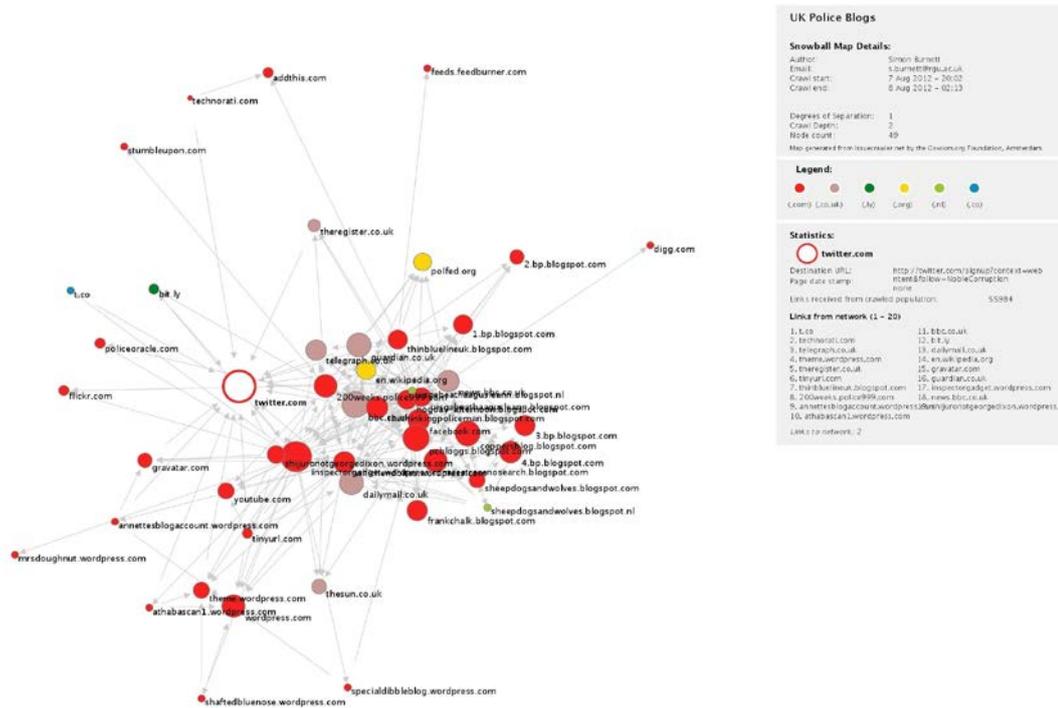


Figure 2: Presence of other police blogs on UK police blogrolls

Like David Copperfield, *Inspector Gadget* and *PC Bloggs* have also published a “blook” – a book made of their blog – with Monday Books. ‘PC Elle Bloggs’ was one of the only female bloggers in the sample and published her blook under the title *Diary of an On-Call Girl*, an obvious reference to another blog-come-blook *Diary of a London Call Girl* by Belle de Jour, later made into the television series *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*. Having a book published is mentioned in jest by some bloggers – indeed *Disgruntled Cop* specifically says of his blogging habits:

Incidentally, I am fully aware that I do not update these pages on even near the same frequency as some of the more established blogs. My reluctance in doing so is the fact that I am NOT looking for a book deal – I don't have that much interest in policing to write loads on it.” (9 January 2008)

Further evidence of a tightly-knit community between the UK police bloggers comes from a cluster map that displays the relationships (out-links) between the blogs in the sample. The size of each node indicates the number of in-links. As can be seen from Figure 3, influential blogs in the centre of the cluster (i.e. those blogs which are most linked) include *200 Weeks*, *Inspector Gadget*, *The Thin Blue Line* and *PC Bloggs*.



A post from October 2008 from *200 Weeks* offers an interesting insight into the way in which readers follow links from blog to blog:

When I log in I can see a list of links from other sites where people have clicked a link somewhere else and ended up here. It will be no surprise that I get most visitors from Inspector Gadget and (the original police blog) David Copperfield's. Then comes Planet Police and NightJack.  
*(200weeks.police999.com October 20, 2008)*

Having undertaken these analyses it was possible to identify a small group of influential bloggers within the UK police blog community over the past decade: PC David Copperfield's *The Policeman's Blog*, *NightJack*, *Inspector Gadget*, *200 Weeks* and *PC Bloggs*. These blogs were frequently mentioned by other bloggers as influencing them in deciding to start a blog and were frequently listed in blogrolls or discussed in blog posts. In addition, most had had at least some media coverage and the majority had books published by Monday Books, who had obviously also identified these blogs as popular. Such media coverage would of course have increased the readership of the blogs, thus increasing their profile within the police-blogging community.

All in this group of bloggers had attempted to stay anonymous. However, it became obvious that media attention might also lead to attempts to 'out' the bloggers, which

had happened to Stuart Davidson (PC David Copperfield) and Richard Horton (*NightJack*). It should also be noted that, as of summer 2013, none of these bloggers was still posting on a regular basis. Elle Bloggs had last posted in December 2012 and *200 Weeks* in January 2013, *Inspector Gadget* had quit blogging in March 2013 while *NightJack* had been forced to stop blogging in 2009 and David Copperfield in 2007. This led to our next question: if these bloggers were influential in encouraging other police bloggers to start blogging, would their cessation also lead to other bloggers ceasing?

### Were police bloggers influenced in their decision to cease blogging?

As part of the wider project, we analysed those blogs in our sample that had ceased blogging to ascertain reasons for this action. Of those that had stopped posting, 28 bloggers simply stopped and offered no reason. However, 19 bloggers gave reasons for stopping blogging. The range of reasons given is shown in Figure 4 below.

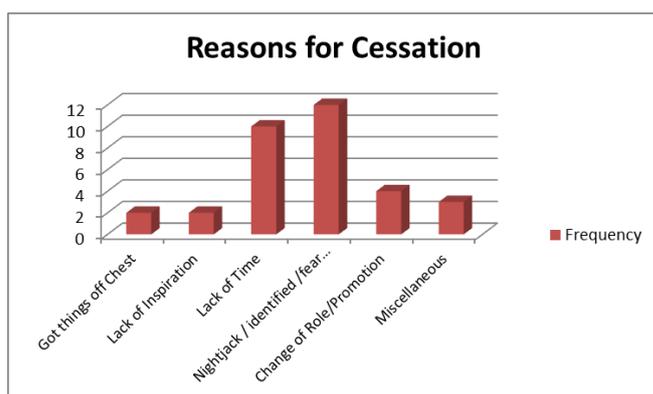


Figure 4 – Stated Reasons for Ceasing to Blog

One frequently cited reason for ceasing to blog was simply lack of time (nine bloggers), and this might also be related to the five bloggers who stopped blogging because of a promotion or change in role. *Disgruntled Cop* found that he was better valued when he moved roles, which led to him being less disgruntled and ceasing to blog. However, a decision to stop blogging once promoted might also be linked to the most common reason given for stopping posting and cited by twelve bloggers – the fear of being identified and disciplined or actually being told to stop. This was partly as a result of the highly-publicised case of *NightJack*, which several bloggers mentioned, and in at least three cases because this had already happened to the blogger.

Well the time has finally arrived, just unexpectedly. I was invited to see top brass today in their office and presented with their opinion about my blog. It seems the blog needs to end completely now. (*Semper Fi*, 4 December 2006)

Thus concern about the consequences of being a police blogger was the most frequently given reason for bloggers in our sample to cease blogging. We then wished to investigate whether such concern became heightened when very high-profile and influential bloggers ceased blogging. In order to investigate this, all bloggers' posts made during the months when PC David Copperfield, *NightJack* and *Inspector Gadget* ceased blogging were analysed.

32 of the bloggers in the sample were blogging in September 2007 when Stuart Davidson outed himself as PC David Copperfield and ceased blogging. However, only ten of our sample discussed the case. The majority of these posts celebrated Davidson's blog and the *Panorama* television programme, agreeing with the points that he had made, and wishing him well in Canada. The post from *PC Franky Frank* is a good example of the general tenor of posts:

So.....Now we know.

Watched the show. The truth was spoken. Will anything change?

I doubt it.

I'm green with envy as to where he's heading.

Enjoy yourself DC.

Take care and watch out for bears. (*PC Franky Fact*, 18 September 2007)

There was also some mention of how influential Davidson had been in the police blogosphere, with *200 Weeks* noting that he had been 'the inspiration behind me starting my blog!' (18 September 2007). Since Davidson had outed himself, rather than being outed by the media as would happen to *NightJack* in 2009, there was only a limited amount of concern about other bloggers' anonymity. In fact, PC Elle Bloggs had also been interviewed (anonymously) by *Panorama* and used the media discussion about the event to promote her own book. Like the blogger quoted above, several bloggers stated that they understood his reasons for leaving and wished that they too were moving abroad. Thus the majority of the posts focused on the *Panorama* programme and Davidson's decision to move abroad rather than his blog cessation. However, there were a few bloggers that noted their concerns about the risk inherent in writing their blogs:

But there is an inherent risk in writing these blogs. I started because of someone else I knew who wrote a police blog (a good one at that), but got found out and got hauled in front of the Chief. There can be real discipline brought against officers writing these things.... So where from here? Two things, I guess. One, to carry on on here, posting now and then about what I see. I'll be the first to admit I don't post about half what I see for fear of being recognised by a colleague. How Stuart Copperfield-Davidson managed for 3 years I don't know (but am impressed). (*Sergeant Simon*, 18 September 2007)

Two years later the case was very different because *NightJack's* author was outed by the press against his wishes and then pressured by his superiors to stop blogging. Fifteen of the sample commented directly on the case. This was the majority of the sample blogging at that time – because of the nature of the sample, some bloggers had already ceased to blog and others did not start until a later date. Of those in the sample actually blogging at that time, only two bloggers failed to comment on the *NightJack* case. It is clear from their posts that the *NightJack* case has caused bloggers to question whether or not they should continue to blog and that some had decided to stop.

The Times decided for whatever reason to expose NightJack's real identity. After a written warning, the deletion of his blog and now a lost case in the high court, NJ has been well and truly burned by the media and I've no doubt his career prospects are going to be extremely limited for some time, and I have no intention of putting myself on offer for that one now that a judge has ruled on it. (*Sheepdogs and Wolves* 17 June 2009).

*Sheepdogs and Wolves* was written by a blogger calling himself Met County Mouny and he ceased to blog after this post. Another blogger in the sample, *CSI:UK*, also posted on 22 June 2009 that because 'I have a mortgage, a Xbox 360 addiction and the overwhelming need to keep my job, I have decided to cease blogging on the world of CSI'. Their decisions to stop blogging and the names of four other police bloggers who decided to quit as a direct result of the *NightJack* case were discussed in the blog posts of several other police bloggers as they tried to decide whether or not to continue. The issues they wrestled with were not just related to how their employers might react. One blogger was concerned about being outed because 'the right wing have had some interest in my blog' (*The Twining Chronicles*, 18 June 2009). Another was concerned about the impact on his wife and young family. There was evidence of plenty of black humour about the situation, with one blogger, who had been diagnosed with mental-health problems some years previously, deciding that he could 'always go the same way again if I'm "outed"' (*Disgruntled Constable*, 25 June 2009) and another admitting to the world that he was in fact Batman.

Another begged his readers 'If you have an inkling who I am from any posts keep schtum. If I'm going to be outed in a copper shocker expose I want it to be for being over the side with Cheryl Cole' (*Stressedoutcop*, 19 June 2009). Several took a break from blogging after June 2009 or changed the way in which they posted or responded to comments. *200 Weeks* (who had retired from the force by this time) announced that he would never purchase *The Sunday Times* again and also wrote 'If there are any Times journalists reading this, please note I am no longer a police officer'. It is also clear from their posts that many of the bloggers were responding to anxious messages from their readers – there were thanks for their concern and apologies if the blogger had been presumed to have quit because they had not blogged for some time.

Interestingly, it should also be noted that three new police bloggers started to blog in the two months after the *NightJack* case. Although none of these new bloggers made any reference to *NightJack* in their opening posts it is evident that his fate had not put them off blogging and perhaps the publicity around his case had raised their awareness of the possibilities of blogs.

Of the 64 blogs in the original sample, only ten were still active by the time of *Inspector Gadget's* cessation in March 2013, seven of whom commented directly on Gadget's decision to stop blogging. Unlike the forced cessation of *NightJack* or PC David Copperfield, Inspector Gadget's reasons to cease blogging were less clear. Although his publishers stated that he was retiring from the police force rather than being forced to suspend his blog, Gadget's last post was made up of his favourite quotes and the lyrics from "Knives Out" by Radiohead and two days later he removed the entire contents of the blog from the Internet. Thus much of the commentary about his cessation, both in the blogosphere and the mainstream media, related to questions of whether he had retired or been forced to stop blogging.

Again, other bloggers in the sample used Gadget's cessation to debate their own approach to blogging and whether they should continue, with one asking 'Is this the end of police blogging as we know it?' (*Shijuro not George Dixon*) and *Officer Dibble* remarking that it 'seems a little lonelier out there already...' One blogger did not post again after noting *Gadget's* demise apart from one post in April merely copying a letter from the director of a charity he had supported in the past. A second blogger, who did not comment on *Gadget* at the time, announced the cessation of his blog in June 2013:

Furthermore in my force there seems to be a witch hunt for bloggers & social media users who are bringing the service into disrepute. A close friend of mine

is currently under investigation for misconduct for having the audacity to mention he was at work whilst on Facebook. He was reported by another Facebook 'friend' apparently. Go figure (*Blue Light Run*, 28 June 2013)

This quote is interesting since it is the first mention of other types of social media outside the blogosphere, such as Facebook, suggesting that by this point police officers who were disgruntled with their lot were turning to other types of social media to express their dissatisfaction.

Thus we can see that, while the cessation and (self-)outing of Stuart Davidson caused little concern amongst our sample in 2007, the forcible outing and cessation of *NightJack* was greeted with much more disquiet and led to at least six police bloggers shutting down their blogs. By 2013 only ten of our original sample were still blogging – itself an interesting finding – but even though Inspector Gadget was not outed and appears to have stopped blogging because he was retiring from the force it still caused those left to question their safety and again several bloggers ceased to blog at this point. In an email to the research team, one blogger stated: “It is clear that senior officers with UK forces actively discourage the practice, for fear that the truth may actually be brought to the surface. Officers fear that their career progress will be halted or even worse.”

In relation to the influencing factors affecting both the starting and cessation of blogs, it is interesting to note that internal factors can be seen to influence the creation of new blogs, whereas external factors are the predominant influence on their cessation. While this research is still at the stage of theoretical formulation based on the results of the empirical research, it does suggest that there may be considerable work still to do in relation to theory building, drawing on prior relevant theory such as power dynamics.

## **Conclusions**

Our study aimed to investigate whether or not there was an influential group of 'A-list' police bloggers within the UK police blogosphere and whether they influenced others to start blogging. Once we identified a small group of influential bloggers we discovered that three of these had stopped blogging in dramatic circumstances that ensured plenty of on- and off-line media coverage. We therefore also needed to ask whether their blog cessation caused other police bloggers to consider the future of their own blog.

We were able to identify a small group of five influential police bloggers: PC David Copperfield's *The Policeman's Blog*, *NightJack*, *Inspector Gadget*, *200 Weeks* and *PC Bloggs*. These bloggers were frequently mentioned by other police bloggers as inspirations for starting their own blog, and those that were still extant during the project were frequently linked to and mentioned in blogrolls.

Of these five bloggers, none is currently (summer 2013) blogging and three – PC David Copperfield, *NightJack* and *Inspector Gadget* – have removed their archives from the Internet. All of these three ceased to blog overnight and there was controversy associated with their blog cessation.

It seems clear that this controversy caused those in our sample of police bloggers to consider their own situation. This was particularly the case after the forced outing and cessation of *NightJack*, which caused at least six police bloggers to decide to cease their blogs. At least one of our sample was told to do this by his superiors, and, as we have outlined above, UK police authorities in general take a very cautious approach to the use of social media. While there is no evidence that *Inspector Gadget* suffered the same fate as *NightJack*, and it was generally accepted by the blogosphere that he had retired, the removal of his blog also caused concern in the small number of our sample that was still blogging and it seems that at least two out of these ten stopped blogging as a direct result. While the focus of comments on the cessation of PC David Copperfield's blog in 2007 was more on the wider media attention given to his complaints about bureaucracy and his decision to emigrate, the atmosphere in the police blogosphere had darkened by the time *Inspector Gadget* retired, mainly because of the *NightJack* case, and thus his blog cessation was seen as another example of how the authorities were trying to clamp down on unofficial police use of social media.

The fact that only five bloggers in our sample of 64 were still blogging in summer 2013 is an interesting one in its own right. There has been little research into the average life of a blog and so it is not possible to state that this is an unusually small number of blogs. However, the fact that such a high proportion of our sample stated that they were ceasing to blog because of fears of how their employers would react if they were 'outed' is of note. Schoneboom (2011) has suggested that increased blog surveillance and searchability has resulted in many bloggers taking down work-related blogs. This definitely seems to be the situation in the UK police blogosphere. Given that this is such a small and tightly-knit community, even one blogger quitting because of pressure from above may cause the others to re-consider their own commitment to blogging. Between 2007 and 2013 at least twelve of our sample

stated that they were ceasing to blog because of fears of being outed or because they had been warned to do so by their superiors. Add these twelve to the three cases we have discussed in detail in this paper and a picture begins to emerge of a small and diminishing community feeding each other's concerns and trying to learn from the fate of others.

It is clear from this research that (certainly within the UK policing blogosphere) blogging cessation is indeed influenced by the activities or perceived activities of bloggers' peers. The high-profile cases of *Inspector Gadget* and *Nightjack* have both acted, in their own way, to raise awareness across the blogosphere of the professional implications of unofficial blogging by police officers. Yet despite these cases, new unofficial police blogs are still appearing. The media coverage of the sacking of the Waterstone's blogger, Joe Gordon, garnered sympathetic coverage and raised awareness of union activities in the bookselling sector (Schoneboom, 2011). In a similar manner, media coverage of police bloggers seems to have raised awareness of the existence of the UK police blogosphere and even encouraged others to join it. The blogs themselves appear to have a relatively limited lifespan for a variety of reasons, and while many of our original sample of bloggers are no longer active, the UK police blogosphere itself remains intact, if reduced in scale. As we have previously suggested, official UK police guidelines for blogging are still a rarity, and if and when these are more broadly introduced, it remains to be seen how they will further impact the activities of this group.

As Schoneboom (2011) points out, the interconnectedness of the UK police blogosphere suggests a tacit form of solidarity between these work-bloggers. Not only do their blogs offer a place where they can express resistance to those in authority above them (as discussed by Richards, 2008), but they can offer and receive support from others in similar positions. It may also be seen as an extension of the police 'canteen culture', where stories are told to educate and entertain and cynicism and anger at management and bureaucracy are vented (Waddington, 1999). Because of this interconnectedness, when influential bloggers cease to blog because of pressure from their superiors, this has a knock-on effect on other bloggers, who may cease themselves purely from a fear that similar problems may happen to them. In addition, our findings suggest that, for our sample at least, while internal factors were influential in the creation of new work-blogs, external factors were the predominant influence on their cessation, which suggests that there may well be further research to conduct in this area in relation to the concept of power dynamics.

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## Analytical Template

An analytical template was developed from themes that emerged from the relevant literature (mostly in relation to motivations for starting blogs) and using coding categories derived from the data itself (Miles and Huberman, 1994) .

Theme	Sub-theme	Influence	Related Literature
Motivations for blogging		Internal / External	Nardi et al (2004); Baker and Moore (2008); Guadagno et al (2008); Pedersen (2010); Zhou (2011); (Richards, 2008).
	Tell stories	Internal	Richards (2008); Richards and Kosmala (2013).
	Give opinions	Internal	McClellan (2004); Tangherlini (2000).
	Inspired by other bloggers	External	Schoneboom (2007).
	Therapy/venting	Internal	Burnett et al (2012); Richards (2008); McClellan (2004); Richards and Kosmala (2013); Tangherlini (2000).
	Public Education	Internal	McClellan (2004); Tangherlini (2000).
	Document Life	Internal	Richards (2008); Richards and Kosmala (2013).
	Miscellaneous	Internal / External	Ojala (2005).
Motivations for cessation			
	Getting things off chest	Internal	Barker (2005).

	Lack of inspiration	Internal	Miura and Yamashita (2007); Nardi et al (2004).
	Lack of time	External	Ratliff (2009).
	Nightjack/identified/fear	External	Schoneboom (2007); Valenti (2007); Stavrositu and Shyam Sundar (2013); Nakashima (2007); Pedersen (2010); Cammaerts (2008).
	Change of role/promotion	External	Ratliff (2009); Walker (2005).
	Miscellaneous	Internal / External	Raper (2011); Ratliff (2009); Andergassen et al (2009).

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