Accountability processes and group dynamics: a SIDE perspective on the policing of an anti-capitalist riot

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Abstract

This paper reports a study of public order policing during a major ‘anti-capitalist’ riot. Officers were observed in the control room at New Scotland Yard throughout the event and the two senior Commanders were interviewed. The analysis demonstrates both the importance and the complexity of accountability concerns in determining police decisions. Officers are simultaneously accountable to multiple audiences which place different and sometimes contradictory demands upon them. Moreover officers in different positions may be subject to different accountability concerns. These lead to different action preferences that can create intra-organizational conflict. For instance, senior commanders were reluctant to use tactics that the general public and other external audiences might view as escalating the conflict or endangering the safety of protestors. In contrast, junior officers were less concerned with external audiences and supported these tactics as necessary to protect police safety. The theoretical significance of these findings is framed in terms of the SIDE model (Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995).

Key words: Accountability, group dynamics, SIDE, riot, policing

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Introduction
This paper reports a study of command level policing of the ‘J18 riots’ which occurred in London on June 18th 1999. At the time, J18 was the largest ‘anti-capitalist’ event ever to take place in Britain. A number of marches converged on the City of London, the financial heart of the capital, in order to protest against the institutions to be found there. Sporadic violence during the marches turned into sustained conflict in the City. The violence continued through the afternoon and into the evening as the crowds moved back towards the West End of London. There was substantial damage to person and to property. This led to considerable controversy over the way in which the events were policed. Two days later, an article in the ‘Sunday Times’ newspaper expressed the level of concern which the event had evoked: “innocent people were hurt on Friday and millions of pounds worth of damage was done after a day of mayhem... Why were the police not prepared to disperse the rioters once they had assembled – with tear gas and water cannon if necessary” (Sunday Times, 20th June 1999, p. 20).

Our study, which is principally based on participant observation of the police command operation in the public order control centre at New Scotland Yard (popularly known in the police as ‘GT’ due to its radio call sign), speaks to these questions. It’s aim is to elucidate the factors which shape public order decisions: what determines whether the police are more or less interventionist; whether they use tactics such as dispersal and whether they deploy tactics and technologies such as riot shields, batons and horse mounted units?

We argue that these questions cannot be answered without taking account of the social psychological context in which the police operate as an institutional group – by which we mean a group in which there are formal criteria for membership and for progress within the group hierarchy, and where there are formal procedures for determining both whether these criteria have been met and how to proceed if they have not (see, for instance, Berger & Luckman, 1966). In particular, we focus on the ways that police
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perceptions and practices are shaped by their concerns regarding the various audiences who scrutinize their activities and who have the power to impose sanctions and rewards upon both individual officers (which can range from reprimand to dismissal) and the institution as a whole (Reiner & Spencer, 1993).

We refer to these perceptions and practices as ‘accountability concerns’ and we suggest that a full understanding of how these affected policing decisions during J18 requires, first, an analysis of the full range of audiences to which the police are accountable; second, an analysis of the differing demands imposed by these different audiences along with how the police deal with contradictory demands; and, third, an analysis of how different sections of the police may be subject to different accountability concerns, how this may lead to different action preferences and hence to intra-group tensions.

Our focus on such accountability issues is rooted in the SIDE model (Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects: Klein, Spears & Reicher, 2007; Postmes, Spears, Lea & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995) which was developed to integrate insights from the social identity and self-presentational traditions. On the one hand, SIDE adopts the fundamental premise of social identity theorizing, namely that group behaviour is underpinned by a psychological shift from personal identity to social identity and that, once a given social identity is salient, people seek to act on the basis of the associated group norms, values and beliefs (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1982; Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994). However, SIDE also suggests that, although the cognitive salience of social identity might instigate the desire to act in terms of group understandings, we need usable power in order to translate instigations into actions – especially where such actions would elicit resistance from others. Hence there will be a strategic dimension to group behaviour as members present themselves to others in order to either gain their support or else avoid their opposition.

This is where the other side of SIDE comes in, drawing on a long tradition in social psychology (much of it inspired by Goffman’s seminal 1959 study of ‘The presentation of self in everyday life’) which addresses how our behaviour is affected by a concern with the evaluations and reactions of others. This includes work on the closely interlinked phenomena of self-presentation (Gordon, 1996; Jones & Pittman,
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1982), impression management (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980) and reputation management (Emler, 1990). Such approaches pay considerable attention to when, why and how the self is presented to others, but, as Emler & Reicher (1995) have noted, they tend to take the nature of this self for granted. Or rather, to be more precise, they tend to presuppose that we present a personal self for the sake of our individual benefit. So, just as SIDE qualifies traditional social identity theorizing through its insistence that one considers the strategic and presentational side of group behaviour, so SIDE also qualifies traditional self-presentational theorizing through its insistence that one considers motives and benefits relating to the collective self.

In the beginning, SIDE was specifically concerned with when and how group members alter their actions in order to avoid the punitive exercise of outgroup power (Reicher & Levine, 1994a,b; Reicher et al., 1995). More recently, a body of predominantly experimental work has developed which addresses a much wider range of group-level strategic phenomena. This work on the strategic dimension of SIDE (recently reviewed by Klein, Spears & Reicher, 2006) addresses the impact of a broad range of audiences, both ingroup and outgroup. It shows how these audiences invoke a broad variety of identity related motives such as securing one’s position within the group, securing support for ones actions from fellow group members, securing the position of the group as a whole and avoiding opposition or even repression from the outgroup. The work also shows how strategic considerations impact on a wide range of seemingly cognitive phenomena such as stereotyping, ingroup bias, and even expressed levels of social identification.

In sum, SIDE has put the issue of accountability on the agenda in an increasing number of areas within group psychology. Careful experimental study has teased apart the way in which different audiences invoke different motives and affect different phenomena. However, as with any method, a strength in one domain co-exists with limitations elsewhere. There are three limitations in particular which we wish to highlight. First, the very fact of separating out the effects of different audiences means that there is an absence of work which examines what happens when group members are simultaneously accountable to multiple audiences and how they deal with the different – sometimes even contradictory – demands from different audiences.
Second, the research has generally used undifferentiated and informal laboratory groups which lack structure or hierarchy. What happens, though, in structured groups where different members are in different positions? Are there differences in their accountability as a function of position and, if so, how does this impact on the functioning of the group as a whole?

Third, the use of informal laboratory groups has a further consequence. On the whole, there are no formal criteria for membership of these groups, these criteria are not formally policed and there are no procedures for governing progress through the group structure. In psychological experiments on group processes people generally make a free choice to identify as a woman, as a science student, as an inductive thinker, or whatever, and thereby become equivalent to all others. Others might question their membership or impose sanctions for what they do as members, but there are limited ways in which audiences can shape their fate. By contrast in a structured formal institutional group, the scrutiny of others decides whether you get to join the group, it can lead to your dismissal at any point and it can facilitate or impede your ability to climb the institutional ladder. In short, there are many more levers for scrutineers to pull and hence the importance of accountability is far more pervasive. To put it the other way round, despite the impressive results obtained to date, experimental studies may systematically underplay the importance of accountability in group life.

It should be clear, then, that if there is reason to suppose that SIDE provides a framework for understanding how accountability influences the actions of police officers, there is equal reason to suppose that the study of a multiply accountable, differentiated and institutionalized group such as the police provides a basis for extending SIDE. This supposition is strengthened by findings from previous empirical studies that we have conducted into senior police public order decision making (Cronin, 2001, Cronin & Reicher, 2006).

Cronin & Reicher (2006) was based on an exercise in which senior officers discussed a scenario in which they had to police an anti-fascist demonstration. In line with SIDE, these officers expressed a strong sense of police identity, and, in line with core group values, they were inclined to dominate and control the crowd (for similar findings, see Drury, Stott & Farsides, 2003; Stott, 2003; Stott & Reicher, 1998). However, their ability to do so was constrained by accountability to others which operated in complex
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ways. As we have suggested, this complexity derived (1) from the fact that officers were simultaneously concerned with a broad range of audiences, both within the police (junior officers, senior officers, potential internal inquiries) and outside the police (e.g. local communities, local and national politicians, media) and (2) the fact that these different audiences placed different – and sometimes directly contradictory – demands upon them.

In addition to these findings, there was suggestive evidence pointing to different accountability concerns for officers at different points in the hierarchy and that these differences were seen to generate tensions within the police. Notably, senior officers are far more accountable than are junior officers to external audiences such as politicians, the public and the press. Consequently those in senior positions are hesitant about intervening against the crowd until it can clearly be shown that the police are responding to violence rather than provoking it. They even talked of ‘acceptable damage’: the need for these audiences to see that police officers are getting hurt in order to justify interventionist tactics. By contrast, these senior officers suggested that junior officers are far less exposed to these forms of scrutiny. For junior officers there is no amount of acceptable damage. It is the fact that their Commanders are allowing them to be hurt at all which is unacceptable.

Clearly any conclusions in this latter regard must be provisional. Notably, the perceptions of junior officers were reported indirectly by senior officers. Hence, while police commanders may consider that differences in accountability exist between different ranks and that they are the source of tensions, this study does not have the data to establish that this is actually the case. What is more, even the evidence about senior officer perceptions concerning public order policing is limited by the fact that it derives from a hypothetical exercise rather than a real event – and this is true in relation to all the conclusions, not just those about accountability differences.

The present study addresses both of these limitations. First, our main analysis was conducted during a major event. We recorded what was said and what was done by a variety of officers in the Metropolitan Police Control Centre. Second, in addition to the Commanders themselves, the Control Centre housed a considerable number of junior officers who serve a variety of functions such as operating the various
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technologies; gathering, recording and transmitting incoming information; and so on. Hence we were able to collect data directly from officers at both senior and junior levels in the police as it relates to all three of our concerns.

To reiterate, the concerns shaping this project are:

*First*, to investigate the range of audiences with which senior police officers are concerned and the nature of the accountability concerns associated with each.

*Second*, to examine how senior officers balance differing accountability concerns and resolve contradictory concerns when making decisions.

*Third*, to investigate differences between Commanders and junior officers in terms of accountability concerns and action preferences, and to examine the effects of these differences upon senior-junior officer relations.

**Analytic framework**

**Data collection**

**a) Observational data**

The present study formed part of a wider program of research into public order decision making by senior officers (Cronin, 2001; Cronin & Reicher, 2006) which included studies of both training events (see above) and of a wide variety of observed crowd control events both before and after J18. These included a number of observations within the police command centre at Scotland Yard (codenamed GT). GT consists of a number of clusters of desks (called pods) each dedicated to a specialist function (command, intelligence, traffic etc.) and each equipped with a range of communications technologies, notably screens displaying images from remote controlled surveillance cameras. There is also a large video wall which can be seen by all in the command centre.

For this study, the two authors/researchers observed events in GT from before the start until the end of ‘J18’ – that is from 7.30am until 9.30pm on June 18th 1999. One of the researchers sat with the officers in the Gold Command Pod (Gold is the senior commander for the event in charge or overall strategy, and there may be one or more Silver commanders as Gold’s deputies who are in charge of tactics, along with a series of Bronze Commanders in charge of the delivery of tactics in different sectors of an
The core group consisted of three officers: Gold himself (who had the rank of Commander), his staff officer (an Inspector) and the pod controller (another inspector). In addition many officers came and went during the day, so that the typical number at any given moment in time was roughly five.

The other researcher sat with the officers in the Intelligence Pod. Once again, there was a fair degree of coming and going during the day. However the core group consisted of three junior officers (constables and a sergeant) who received incoming information and passed it on to two more senior officers (an inspector and chief inspector) who then made decisions as to what to pass through to the Gold Command Pod. The choice of these two pods was partly related to the wider research project within which this study was located and which aimed, amongst other things, to address the processing of information at different phases of the policing process – from intelligence gathering to intelligence filtering to the use of intelligence in command decisions. This issue is not central to the concerns of this paper. However, of more relevance here, the choice of pods meant that we covered a wide spectrum of ranks from Commander (very senior) to constable (the most junior).

Despite these separate locations, the researchers did move around GT during the day and - especially during coffee, meal and rest breaks - had informal conversations with a wide range of officers at all levels, from the Assistant Commissioner who visited GT, through public order advisors from Scotland Yard’s specialist public order section CO11, to constables serving a variety of functions in the overall operation.

Both of the researchers had tape recorders (and permission to record) along with notebooks. In order not to disrupt the flow of interaction, the recorders were not used to record actual conversations or to take notes during events. Rather, written notes were taken contemporaneously, with an effort to be as accurate as possible about the language that was used. Where the amount of material made writing impractical, the researcher would move aside and discretely record notes on tape.

Despite these precautions, there was no sense that officers were concerned about our presence or self-censored in our company. In large part, this can be put down to the fact that the first author had previously been an MPS police officer with considerable
experience of public order policing both as a junior officer and, more recently, as a specialist in CO11 (the Public Order branch of Scotland Yard). While he had left the police for academia, he was still personally known and trusted by most of those in GT. By association, this trust extended to the second author as well.

However, while the researchers were trusted as insiders, the fact that one had never been in the police service and the other had left a few years previously, meant that they were in a position to ask questions and seek clarifications without this seeming strange or compromising their position. After all, the mark of being an ‘insider’ is sharing in collective understandings and hence to ask about them can disrupt ones position and make one seem like an outsider. In this sense, it is arguable that our ‘insider-outsider’ status affords us an ideal combination of non-reactivity and inquisitiveness where pure insider status may compromise the latter and pure outsider status may compromise the former or indeed, deny us access entirely (for more on issues of researcher-participant relations, see Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; for an example of the importance of ‘insider-outsider’ status in researching potentially sensitive subjects, see Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

b) Interview data

Our original intention was to interview both the silver and gold Commanders immediately before and after J18. However, for practical reasons, Gold was too busy for a pre-event interview and we only were able to interview him two weeks after the event. Silver was interviewed the week before and the week after J18. These interviews were intended (a) to address the general approach of these officers to public order policing and their specific expectations of the J18; (b) to assess how they evaluated the outcome of J18 and the policing operation in overall terms; (c) to see how they perceived the issues and outcomes surrounding particular incidents in the day; (d) to explore their reasons for particular decisions and the bases of disagreements about how to proceed. Consequently, the interviews were largely unstructured. They started with very general questions about anticipations (pre-event) and assessments (post-event) and then probed with more specific questions as a function of what had (or hadn’t) been said. The interviews lasted roughly one hour each and were all tape-recorded and then transcribed.
**Analytic procedure**

The taped notes from both researchers were transcribed and the written notes were transferred to a word processing package. These data formed the basis for our main analysis. They were complemented by the interview material which was also transcribed. This material was primarily intended to provide explicit commentary on the assumptions and understandings that fed into decision making but which were not articulated at the time. It also provided an opportunity to confirm our analytic understanding with the participants themselves.

Our analytic method was similar to that we have used in other observational studies of collective events from both a crowd and a police perspective (e.g. Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2000; Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000; Stott, Huchison & Drury, 2001; X & Y, 2006). It was largely based upon thematic analysis (Kellehear, 1993), the aim of which is to investigate certain pre-defined themes in the data (here, the nature, resolution and consequence of accountability concerns) but which is open as to the exact forms that they will take.

Accordingly, and in line with our analytic concerns the procedure started off with one general theme (accountability) and three sub-themes: relevant audiences and accountability concerns related to that audience; balancing and resolution of multiple accountability concerns; differences between officers in accountability concerns and consequences for relations between these officers. In a first stage of analysis, all the texts were read line by line and instances were assigned to the sub-themes, but with the additional possibility of creating new sub-themes relating to the overall topic of accountability if they arose. In a second stage, analysis was conducted within each of the sub-themes. All relevant instances were re-read and sub categories were identified. This was an iterative process which involved multiple readings of the material until further readings produced no further analytic refinements. Some of these categories corresponded to prior expectations and some emerged from the data itself. For instance, within the third of our sub-themes, there was evidence, as expected of different accountability concerns between senior and junior officers leading to tensions between them. However there were similar, but unexpected differences and tensions between officers in the Metropolitan Police Service and those in the City of London Police Service.
In order to check the validity of our analytic conclusions, we employed three main procedures. First, both researchers initially analysed the entire data set separately and only once this was done did we meet to combine the analysis. In this way we could check to see if we independently reached the same conclusions. In any cases of difference, the two researchers met to discuss their interpretations and data was only included in the analysis where consensus could be reached. Second, once we had completed our preliminary analysis we presented it to a variety of police audiences which included (a) the Commanders for J18, (b) a general audience of senior and junior MPS officers, and (c) a presentation to a national audience of public order trained officers at the National Police Training College. Our aim was to see whether they accepted our analysis as based on a reasonable description of their behaviour and a reasonable interpretation of the grounds for their behaviour. Third, we compared our findings here with the findings in other studies that formed part of our general research program in order to examine whether there was coherence in the general analysis of public order policing.

The events

a) Organisation prior to J18

Most of London is controlled by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). However the financial district – the City of London – has its own City of London Police Service (CLPS). The events of J18 straddled the two areas. Hence the policing was shared between the MPS and the CLPS who were operating from different command centres – the CLPS used their own control room with the City.

Protocols had been agreed in advance concerning the coordination of officers on the ground. Thus, if protestors moved from, say, the MPS district into the CLPS district they would be accompanied by MPS officers until City officers were ready to take over. The MPS officers would then leave unless their help was requested by City. During the events themselves, the two control rooms were in constant contact and the events in the City could be seen on the screens in GT. Moreover there was an MPS liaison officer who was located in the CLPS control room and who reported back to GT. As we shall show in the analysis, the relationship between the two police services became a critical topic in the policing of the event.
b) The events of J18
‘J18’, also referred to as a ‘Carnival against Capitalism’, was in fact an amalgam of many events with no single overall organiser. The advance police information was that an umbrella organisation called ‘Reclaim the Streets’ (RTS) expected some 10,000 - 12,000 supporters from thirty five different groups to attend the carnival and to organise a series of activities. These varied from the Movement against Monarchy (MAM) protesting for a ‘Royal Free Zone’, through Critical Mass Cycling (CMC) who had planned a mass cycle ride to oppose the use of motor vehicles in London, to a group protesting against the militarisation of space. The police were expecting events to start with the mass cycle ride at 7.30am and finish with a demonstration at the Guildhall where the Duke of Edinburgh was scheduled to speak at 7pm. However the main events of the day were a series of demonstrations with different starting points that would converge on symbolic targets in the City of London. The police had an idea of possible targets but no firm information as to what they would be.

In the event, the day unfolded as follows (for locations, see map):

(1) After 8.10am there were a series of minor incidents such as triggering bank alarms in the City of London and entry into financial buildings. The first substantial events occurred at 11am when 50 cyclists blocked the road at the junction of Bishopsgate and Liverpool Street and there was a demonstration outside the McDonalds restaurant in Farringdon.

(2) From about midday protestors started gathering at Liverpool station (map point A) and the crowd grew until it was several thousand strong. At about 1.30pm, some demonstrators put on their masks coloured either red, green and gold, and the crowd split into three separate marches heading towards the City of London. At around the same time a sound system began at the junction of Warbruck St. and Cannon St. and, shortly after, a vehicle was locked and abandoned in Upper Thames St.

(3) Just before 2pm reports came in of crowds growing within the City and of some demonstrators entering buildings in the area. There was more active conflict at London
Wall (map point B) where bottles and cans were thrown at police officers. Demonstrators also climbed on police vehicles and threw paint on their windscreens. They broke into some of the vehicles and began to throw out police kit bags and riot shields. As the police tried to drive away, a protestor was seen to fall and become trapped under one of the carriers. A number of PSUs, police horses and other police units were ordered to assist. Shortly after they arrived, the demonstrator was carried out from under the van, appearing to be injured.

(4) Shortly after 4pm a crowd gathered around the London International Foreign Futures Exchange (LIFFE) building in the City (map point C). This is a centre of foreign investment banking services and had been identified by the police in advance as a possible target. At one point, a small group of MPS riot officers found themselves isolated and under attack from a crowd several hundred strong. The officers tried to drive the crowd back, but one officer fell and was surrounded by crowd members. Just as he seemed - to police observers - to be in danger of serious injury, reinforcements rescued him. After this, the police retreated to a safe distance. In the light of escalating conflict, police cordons were erected on Upper Thames St. west of the junction with Dowgate Hill and riot police sought to push the crowd back in a westwards direction.

(5) Around the same time there were reports of staff being blocked in the LIFFE building and the Stock Exchange. Some protestors broke into the LIFFE building and caused damage both to the building itself and to computer systems within it. They began to be involved in conflict with the staff. The police responded by trying to drive the crowd from the vicinity of the building. This led to escalating conflict with crowd members. Conflict in and around these building continued for a long time. Injuries were sustained by both officers and crowd members. There were also attacks on properties such as a Mercedes dealership on Upper Thames St..

(6) At around 5pm the police moved the protestors out from the City into the MPS area. Crowd members were pushed across Southwark and Blackfriars bridges into police cordons which then filtered the crowd onto the Embankment (map point D). At about 6.30pm a crowd of approximately one thousand moved from here towards Ludgate Circus and Fleet St.. There was damage to shops along the way and to the McDonalds restaurant in Charing Cross.

(7) By 8pm, most of the remaining protestors were in Trafalgar Square (map point E) surrounded by a police cordon. There were minor skirmishes with the police and some
attempts to block traffic. However over time the crowd slowly dispersed and by about 10pm very few were left.

(8) Overall, the event led to considerable damage to person and property. A Sunday Times report (20th June 1999, p.5) reported 40 injuries, including six police officers and £2 million worth of damage.

Analysis

The salience of accountability issues to senior Commanders – and to the Gold Commander in particular – was apparent throughout the events of J18. Gold was constantly aware of the danger that the police would be accused of provoking violence through their actions. Hence, whenever there was any information concerning actual or potential harm to protestors, he instantly demanded details as to what had happened and who was responsible so that he could deal with any possible criticisms of the police operation. For instance, when a report came in during the evening about a protestors taken to hospital with severe head injuries allegedly caused by a police baton, Gold expressed severe concern about officers “leaping about” and ordered restraint. He was equally concerned earlier in the day when informed of a protestors who had fallen under a reversing police van (see ‘The events of J18’, point 3). At 2.22pm he was told “Person under City carrier”. He responded “Is it a City or Met carrier”. In other words, the issue for him was who was accountable and therefore who was open to blame for any injuries: if City Police caused the damage then the Metropolitan Police could not be held to account for it. It is also worth noting that, when Met officers mentioned this event subsequently on the day, they gradually adopted a consensual formulation which implicitly avoided accountability by deflecting it doubly onto others: “the City have run over a protestor with a Kent carrier”.

In the following sections of the analysis we consider more closely the sources and direction of this concern with accountability, the way multiple and conflicting accountability concerns are resolved, and the intra-group differences and tensions arising from the issue of accountability.

Sources and direction of accountability concerns
For the sake of clarity, we can divide the audiences which give rise to accountability concerns into those who are external to the police and those which are internal to the police. Let us start with the former.

**External accountability:** Our respondents mention three different external audiences which concern them, and all three were mentioned by the Silver Commander in his pre-event interview. The first relates to the local community where events take place. In his own words:

1. “has everything gone alright on the day if Mrs. So and so who lives at No. 3 The Avenue couldn’t get her car out of the drive and do what she wanted to do?”

Concerns to minimise community disruption generally imply increased control of the crowd. If the police want to ensure access for local residents it obviously means stopping the crowd from occupying the roads around them for as long as they like. It should be mentioned, however, that there is no explicit mention of local residents during J18 itself mainly because very few people live in the City of London where most events occurred. By contrast there is very great concern with city workers and, more particularly with the unfortunately named ‘city fathers’, a term used to denote those who control the financial institutions themselves. This is a topic that we shall illustrate and consider further in the third section of our analysis.

The second external audience was invoked by the Silver Commander when he was asked about the ways in which the police plan for events. He replied:

2. *You have then got to have a very well structured and strong process to make sure that you are taking the risk assessment issues right the way through the operation. Because you are looking at the end of the day a public inquiry, coroner’s inquest, that’s the worst case scenario. And if you are standing in front of a public inquiry and you are trying to justify decisions you have made a long way back.*

He then went on to say that current decisions can still be affected by inquiries which happened a decade before, such as the inquiry into the deaths at the Hillsborough
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football ground in 1989. The importance of Hillsborough is that it was an instance where police concerns with crowd violence led police to stop football supporters spilling from the terraces onto the pitch and therefore contributed to the crushing and the deaths that occurred. It was crucial in refocusing concern towards the issue of crowd safety (Taylor, 1990). It illustrates the fact that a sense of accountability in terms of public inquiries invokes a need to take crowd interests into account and thereby limits the controls that can be placed upon them.

A concern with public inquiries was clearly apparent right from the first incident on the day of J18, albeit in a somewhat subtle form. Thus, at about 8.10 in the morning, two protestors climbed up Tower Bridge and unfurled a big banner reading ‘Life Before Profit’. Gold was told of this, and in response he asked: “when you play the video back what obstruction do you have? The video is disclosable”. That is, he was concerned with information that could potentially be demanded as evidence for an inquiry. Consequently, it was necessary to be able to show that the banner was a sufficient public nuisance or danger to justify the risk of using specialist climbing teams to bring the protestors and their banner down. The point made here is not simply about that officers make decisions in the light of their potential accountability in a public inquiry, but also that this accountability depends upon the nature of surveillance and hence the visibility of police actions to the audience.

The third external audience was mentioned by Silver during a discussion about the importance of specific locations. When asked if there would be certain sites he would accord particular protection, he responded without hesitation: “Palace of Westminster, No. 10 [Downing Street], Buckingham Palace and the Royal Palaces”. When we went on to ask if that was due to constraints placed on him, he in turn responded:

3. “Yes. I think they are probably seen as if there was, if we failed to protect those symbolic locations we would be seen to have failed to protect London. It is at that level. Oxford Street can have all its windows smashed and a riot in Oxford Street, but demonstrators in the grounds of Buck Pal trying to break the windows would have totally different connotation. Those are the political aspects of it.”
This concern with political scrutiny of police actions, and its links to police deployments, was the one that became most apparent as J18 unfolded. The notion of ‘dying in the ditch’ (which implies undertaking an action, whatever the cost to police officers might be) was invoked whenever crowd members approached the symbolic locations outlined by Silver. For instance, at about 7pm as a large group of protestors were approaching Trafalgar Square and passed near to the Mall (which leads to Buckingham Palace), the following interchange took place between two Chief Inspectors:

4. CI1: *Don’t let them into the Mall in large numbers*
   
   CI2: *Is that a ditch job?*
   
   CI1: *Well we are near to the ditch…*
   
   CI2: *… and digging*

The implication here for the degree of intervention is more mixed. Certainly in this specific example, political pressure implies the highest degree of intervention. If the symbols of the State are threatened, the police must confront the crowd no matter what the consequences. By contrast, at other times and in other places, politicians may put pressure on the police to avoid conflict and to guarantee the rights of protest. For instance, one medium ranking officer, an inspector, complained that, had the police impeded crowd members from approaching the LIFFE building and violence had escalated as a result, then there would be political complaints of police brutality. He mentioned this just before 8pm while explaining why the police were unwilling to clear Trafalgar Square of protestors but were rather waiting for them to drift away.

**Internal accountability:** During J18, the internal audience with which commanders were predominantly concerned was constituted of junior officers – and, more specifically, those on the ground who are in direct contact with crowd members. This was something that was of almost constant importance throughout the day.

The concern can be encapsulated in a dilemma about ‘kitting up’ – the term which is used for the act of changing from everyday uniforms into riot gear, including helmets, visors and shields. The problem is that, although ‘kitting up’ may decrease the likelihood of any officer being injured by crowd violence, it may also inflame the
crowd and increase the overall level of violence. Conversely, removing kit may reduce the overall level of violence but increase the chances of individual officers getting hurt. As Silver put it during his post-event interview, referring to events towards the end of the day around Trafalgar Square (see ‘The events of J18’, point 8):

5. (You) get very great tensions between removing kitted officers and officers seeing officer safety issues in taking away people whom are protected in front of a potentially disorderly crowd because they have been disorderly elsewhere. We were trying to achieve that balance of getting rid of the protected officers and putting officers in normal kit onto the Square.

Silver went on to explain why it is so important for Commanders to pay attention to the feelings of junior officers. If they do not, then the junior officers might start ignoring the Commanders:

6. If individual officers are doing their own thing or in pairs then you have lost it. They are on their own agendas, which is extremely narrow: looking for the person who has thrown a brick at them half an hour ago. (Good management) is keeping a PSU under very strict control. Once officers have drawn their sticks or asps the chances of them putting them away are very very slim”.

The danger of losing control over junior officers (what one Inspector somewhat graphically described during one bout of conflict in J18 as the “dog on a leash problem”) was not only related to what has happened to them personally, but also to what had happened to other police officers, to what they believed had happened to the police or even to what they anticipated from the crowd. Moreover, it did not just relate to physical attacks but also to symbolic attacks. Thus, just as the Gold Commander was concerned with information about damage to protestors which could lead to external criticism, so he was equally concerned with managing information about damage or danger to the police which could lead to internal dissent and loss of control over his own officers.

At the point where police officers were coming under attack near London Wall (see ‘The events of J18’, point 3) and junior officers in the control room were getting
visibly and audibly angry and frustrated, Gold remained relaxed and calm. He indicated that situation was under control saying clearly at one point “No problem, bijou event”. Moreover, when, around this time, he received the specific information that some demonstrators had broken into a police van and were carrying away police helmets and shields, he was particularly concerned lest this be seen by front line officers as an act which asserted protestor power over the police and mocked their symbols of authority. He immediately acted to pre-empt such a perception, telling Silver:

7. “Don’t take a negative message from this, they are not trophies. We have to bore them into submission. Get the message across to the Bronzes”.

Equally, after the conflict outside the LIFFE exchange and the skirmishes which occurred as police moved the crowd towards central London (‘The events of J18’, points 6 and 7), Gold was concerned about the spread of rumours concerning the extent of injuries to the police which could inflame junior officers. He therefore instructed his subordinates to:

8. “find out injuries to officers to tell bronzes so we can tell troops: ‘not 19,000 injured, two – and they are hobbling around wanting to be out there’”.

This constant attention to the actual or potential reaction of junior officers reflects the fact that Commanders are well aware that their strategies can be easily undermined – and hence their decisions rendered meaningless - without the full compliance of those on the ground. Junior officers therefore constitute a strong pressure towards early and strong intervention against the crowd. As we have seen, this pressure becomes particularly acute when the police come under attack.

**Dealing with multiple accountability concerns**

Thus far, we have shown that the Commanders during J18 were subject simultaneously to accountability pressures from multiple sources, both external and internal to the police. We have also shown that different audiences pressured the police to behave in different, often directly opposed ways. A decision to intervene might be applauded by City workers and by junior officers, but subject them to
accusations of provocation or even brutality from politicians and from a possible public inquiry. Do Commanders have any way of resolving these contradictory pressures, and, if not, how might they be resolved?

**Resolving accountability pressures**: From the material already presented, we can see two strategies which serve, if not to remove, then at least to attenuate such contradictions. One involves the strategic deployment of information. Above, we concentrated on how, during the day, Commanders communicated the non-threatening nature of events to the internal audience of junior officers. However, Commanders paid equal attention to their communications with external audiences. A key aspect of police planning for J18 was the development of a media strategy and, in his post event interview, Gold singled this out as one of the positive outcomes from the event. As he put it: “The fact that we had press officers available tended to negate any huge amount of negativity”.

The way that this worked was apparent at various points during the events. Thus, when a protestor fell under a police van at London Wall (see ‘The events of J18’, point 3) the intelligence cell police immediately convened with the press officer to discuss, first, how to stop exaggerated rumours of injury to crowd members and, second, how to counter charges of police responsibility. Throughout the day they rapidly responded to any rumours or press enquiries about crowd members being hurt, even if the police were not involved. Thus, early in the evening as the crowd were being dispersed out of the City, a story circulated amongst journalists and crowd members about two crowd members being killed by concrete blocks pushed out of buildings. This elicited immediate rebuttals from the Command Centre. The police were concerned to portray the event as peaceful and the crowd experience as positive.

So, if one aspect of communications involved downplaying the crowd as perpetrator of violence to the internal audience, the other involved downplaying of the crowd as victim of violence to external audiences. Thus the demand of the former audience for intervention and the demand of the latter audience to curb intervention could both be diminished - and the gap between the two sets of demands could consequently be minimised.
There are, of course, limits to the extent that one can use information to shape the ways that audiences perceive social reality and hence make demands upon Commanders. This is especially true for junior officers who directly experience events. To tell them that the police are not being attacked when sticks and stones are landing upon them will scarcely be credible. Hence, as a second means of attenuating contradictory demands from internal and external audiences, Commanders will employ tactics that directly affect the reality that is experienced by junior officers.

One example of this was illustrated in extract 5 above. That is, Commanders will carefully balance the number of officers in riot gear versus ordinary uniform. In this way they can selectively withdraw riot police so as to avoid antagonising the crowd while also keeping those in ordinary uniform at a distance from those who might attack them. In this way, the demand for intervention can be curbed. Alternatively, where officers cannot be shielded and where some form of intervention occurs, tactical devices can be used to ensure that it is controlled in such a way as to avoid political, public or media censure. Silver described just such an occasion during a different crowd event which also happened in Trafalgar Square:

9. “The decision to clear the Square took a long time coming because of other factors. Lots of policemen standing there getting stuff thrown at them – getting more and more wound up. If, at that point, I had said ‘clear the Square’ you would have had a lot of very wound up police officers charging into a number of demonstrators. We would have had some very serious injuries. So I used horses in front of the police officers so the police officers didn’t engage the demonstrators for a long time”.

**Balancing accountability pressures:** For all the tactical sophistication of police Commanders, there will be times where the contradictory pressure from different audiences cannot be avoided. At such times, a decision must be made as to how to balance the different demands and reach a decision.

The first point to be made is that the nature of this balance is not just a matter of audiences but also of time and place. That is to say, the same audience may place different demands on the police as a function of when and where events occur. Time
and again in interviews and during the event, Commanders repeated the need to defend the sites of Government and State. When Silver was asked, in his pre-event interview, what would be a negative outcome to J18 he responded ‘Buckingham Palace getting sacked’. And then he instantly qualified himself ‘No it won’t’ and laughed nervously. Even to consider failure to protect such sites was dangerous. By contrast, the police would not exert themselves to protect other sites. Silver used an extreme contrast to emphasise this point: “we are not going to ‘die in a ditch’ over sound systems, buckets or lorry loads of sand [used to block roads]”.

This example takes us onto our next point. For if it shows that the balance of accountability pressures will be different according to where events occur, the notion that the police will ‘die in the ditch’ to defend royal and government buildings also shows that, ultimately, for the Commanders we studied, the political will prevail over all countervailing pressures.

As Silver made explicit after the event, the Metropolitan Police formally report to the Home Secretary (a British term for a post often referred to as the Minister of the Interior in other countries) and that is reflected in their core priorities. The Home Secretary has the ability to affect both the institution and its staff. Although other audiences may have a number of ways to bring about consequences for the Met, they are principally indirect and indeed may operate through the Home Secretary (for instance the media and community pressures may operate on the government to operate on the Met). Insofar as accountability relates to the ability of an audience to bring about consequences for the actor (individual or collective) it follows that the audience that can exert the greatest consequences should be, and indeed is, accorded the greatest weight. But it also follows that if others in the police stand in a different relation to the Home Secretary and if other audiences can bring about greater consequences for them, then the way they will resolve accountability dilemmas - and hence their priorities in any given situation - may also differ.

**Differences in accountability and intra-group relations**

**Senior-junior officer differences**: Throughout our analysis, and particularly in our consideration of internal accountability, it has been clear that senior and junior officers differ in the ways that they believe crowds should be treated. Junior officers are eager
to intervene against any aggressive acts by crowd members, they frequently chafe at
the restrictions placed upon them by their commanders and they sometimes intervene
despite such restrictions.

Thus far, however, most of our evidence has been taken from the perspective of senior
officers. Occasionally we have quoted junior officers, but even then we have not
explicitly analysed the interactions between junior and senior officers around specific
incidents. The presence of officers of different ranks who spent the day together in the
Intelligence Pod allowed us to observe such interactions. We shall concentrate on a set
of interchanges which occurred during the events near London Wall at around 2pm
(‘The events of J18’ point 3).

During this period, small groups of police tried to contain large groups of
demonstrators and, while reinforcements were available in the vicinity, they were not
ordered to intervene. This was a deliberate decision: the Gold Commander withdrew
officers in order to diffuse conflict with the crowd. However the police constables in
the Intelligence Pod felt that the crowd should be confronted. They grew increasingly
frustrated with events and increasingly angry that the failure to deploy the reserve.
Comments such as “this is ridiculous!”, “how did we get into this”, and “frustrating,
so frustrating” were directed openly towards their senior officers.

Perhaps the clearest contrast came at the point when demonstrators started to clamber
over one police carrier. “We should not allow that..., in other countries they would
have water cannon” said one PC. The carrier then started to drive away from the
crowd with one protestor still clinging to the windscreen. The PCs in the Intelligence
Pod were clearly pleased, and unconcerned at any danger to the protestor. Indeed they
felt that he deserved any injuries that he might incur. “I’d run him over”, one said. By
contrast, one of the senior Intelligence officers responded with alarm in his voice:
“hang on – we might!”. As the carrier accelerated, the protestor fell to the ground. All
the PCs cheered in unison. The two senior officers gasped with concern.

Clearly, junior officers are less tolerant of crowds in comparison to their commanders
because they are more likely to be victims of crowd aggression. This was
acknowledged by the Gold Commander in his post-event interview. He observed that
the “*folks at the front end*” are less willing to abandon protective riot gear in order to improve relations with the crowd. This is: “*for obvious and quite understandable reasons because they are close to it and you are not so close to it*”.

However, this is not the whole story, for Commanders are not insensitive to the fate of their fellow officers. Quite the opposite. This was clear from their reactions whenever officers came under threat – notably at the point where a fallen officer was nearly enveloped by the crowd near the LIFFE building (see ‘The events of J18’, point 4). As this incident began to unfold on the video wall in J18 a hush fell over the entire room. Commanders and constables alike watched with grave concern. As crowd members converged on the officer there was a shared sharp intake of breath. As he was rescued by fellow officers there was a shared cheer of relief.

The difference between senior and junior officers, then, is not that the former are less concerned with police injuries, but rather that they are more concerned with the consequences of injuries to demonstrators. This is due to the fact that they were more likely to be held to account for them by the media, by subsequent inquiries and by the Home Secretary. Indeed as this incident was going on, the Home Office was on the phone to GT in order to enquire about what the police were doing. Junior Officers, by contrast, do not find themselves (literally) answering to government ministries.

That is the significance of the interchange in the Intelligence Pod. The event under discussion does not involve any danger to front line police officers but only to a protestor. Therefore the differences between the reaction of senior and junior officers cannot be put down to differential experiences of personal danger, differential personal knowledge of those subjected to danger or even differential identification with those experiencing danger. These differences can, however, be put down to different accountability concerns.

The immediate priority of the senior officers and of the Metropolitan Police Press Officer who was also present, was how any crowd injuries would be reported and how to manage that information so as to avoid blame. None of the Constables showed any such concern. This was even clearer a few minutes later when, in a separate incident, another protestor fell underneath a police carrier. We referred to this incident earlier,
and we reported how the immediate response of the Gold Commander concerned accountability for the incident: “Is it a City or Met carrier?”. This was mirrored in the Intelligence Pod where a senior officer referred to the event as a public relations “nightmare”. The response was to call in both press and legal advisors. By contrast, the PCs showed no interest in these conversations and simply watched the video screens.

This evidence, then, corroborates previous findings suggesting tensions between senior and junior officers. It also sustains the claim that these differences flow from different levels of accountability to external audiences. However the clearest evidence of the link between accountability differences and intra-group tensions did not concern the senior-junior officer relationship. Rather, it arose unexpectedly out of tensions between the two police services involved in J18: the Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police. This tension was one of the major themes of the whole event.

**Metropolitan Police Service – City of London Police Service differences:** Tensions between the MPS and the CLPS were apparent from our first moment in GT to our last. Our first field note read:

10. “*Relations between city and Met, easy agreement on strategy, possible disagreement on tactics? This relates to economic accountability considerations of the city, which are ‘non negotiable’. In the event of trouble, the city institutions may well move out of the city. For the city police, the institutions are their main constituency. It may be difficult to balance rights of the city institutions with groups/public demonstrating. City police have therefore a different balance to the Met and this may provide a route of possible differences.*”.

And when, at the end of the day, Gold summed up events, his first point was: “*A sense that the tactics of the City and the Met didn’t complement one another*”.

This difference of accountability between the two police services (City being primarily accountable to the ‘City fathers’ who control the financial institutions and the Met having to balance this against accountability to politicians and the wider public) led to
key strategic and tactical differences between them. Most significantly, the City Institutions held the same place for the CLPS as did State Institutions for the MPS. Their defence was ‘non-negotiable’. Hence, unlike the MPS, the CLPS are not prepared to tolerate the presence of crowds blocking, let alone attacking, these financial institutions. Above, we quoted Silver explaining how Met priorities flow from their accountability to the Home Secretary. To put that quote in fuller context, he gives a detailed account, in his post-event assessment, of how the differences between MPS and CLPS accountability were reflected in different priorities, strategies and tactics:

11. “The problem is that we have a political position because the city and the met are accountable to different groups. I think perhaps different agendas and priorities between the city fathers have the future of the city very much in their minds. Whereas if you look at issues for London as a whole the Met Gold reporting to the Home secretary the issues are not quite so narrow. They are more public order issues as opposed to specific city issues. My feeling is the City wanted to get rid of the problem as quickly as possible. Whereas the Met strategy was let them go where they want to and we will facilitate everything around them and we want come into confrontation unless we are forced into it.”

These issues affected the entire operation. However they became particularly acute at the point when crowd members converged on the LIFFE building (see ‘The events of J18’ points 5 and 6). For Metropolitan Police officers the level of crowd disorder was tolerable and their preferred tactic, as the Met Gold explained at 4.00 pm, would have been to isolate the crowd and contain them where they were. By contrast, the City police would not allow such disruption to a City institution. They were particularly concerned that traders were being disrupted in their work and unable to leave freely. Hence the CLPS Commanders were determined to drive crowd members away from the building and ultimately out of the City. This brought the police into active confrontation with crowd members and led to the most intense periods of conflict during the entire day. With ironic understatement, a Metropolitan police Press officer observed the “interesting tactic” of pushing the crowd back and commented that it was “causing a few raised eyebrows here [in GT]”. In his post event interview, Silver was more explicit:
12. As the Met Silver I was responding to decisions made by another Silver of which I had no control. And my preferred options were not followed because he had different priorities to me. If I had taken my preferred options I would have gone for a different dispersal. I would have done things a different way because I had different priorities to him. His priority was to clear the City of demonstrators, especially from outside the Futures Exchange. My priority was to get the demonstrators to where they wanted to go and then contain them at the location they wanted to be at. There was a divergence of strategies there, which caused obvious difficulties.

This strategic divergence led to a certain degree of tension between City and Metropolitan police Commanders. This was particularly manifest in informal comments made both in the pods and in the rest room of GT. City commanders were described as letting things go “badly wrong”, as “leaving themselves no room for manoeuvre”. This was explained in terms of “City inexperience”. It was commonly agreed that “this wouldn’t have happened in the Met”.

Although the fact that we were in the Metropolitan Police control room meant that we could not observe the City perspective or record direct interactions between City and Metropolitan Police officers, there were a number of fraught phone conversations between the two control rooms at around this time and disagreements about the deployment of officers – especially those Met PSU’s which had been ‘loaned’ to City and placed under their control. Moreover, one Met Chief Superintendent reported that the commanders of these PSU’s had made many complaints about senior City officers. In sum, there is a strong link from accountability differences to differences of tactics and from differences of tactics to intra-group tensions between the MPS and the CLPS.

**Discussion**

The aims of this analysis were, first, to examine the range and impact of accountability pressures upon Command level public order police officers; second to investigate the ways in which these officers deal with dilemmas arising from contradictory accountability concerns; third, to see whether different officers have a different set of
accountability concerns and whether this led to intra group tensions. In each case, the analysis both confirms the importance of accountability to decision making and extends the understanding derived from our previous work (Cronin, 2001; Cronin & Reicher, 2006).

In terms of the range of accountability pressures, we do find a series of relevant audiences, both internal and external. These overlap with those enumerated by Cronin and Reicher (2006), but are not identical. Thus, we find less evidence for concern with the judgements of fellow senior officers and (potential) internal enquiries. Conversely, we find evidence for concern with the judgement of additional external audiences such as the City fathers (i.e. leaders of financial institutions) in the case of the City of London City Police Service. Despite these differences, it remains the case in both studies that there are times when different audiences will exert pressure for different and even contradictory actions. Notably, junior officers will press for intervention at times when political and public audiences would punish intervention. In this study of an actual event Commanders are faced with multiple accountability pressures which lead to dilemmas of accountability.

The evidence from J18 confirms the finding that the resolution of these dilemmas will depend upon the precise context insofar as the balance between different accountability pressures is itself a function of context. Cronin & Reicher (2006) particularly emphasized the importance of temporal context – that is, the phase of an event. Thus in pre-conflict phases there may be a delicate trade off between the pressure from junior officers to take action against crowd members and the pressure from politicians and the public to safeguard liberties and avoid provoking conflict. However where conflict has become generalised, junior officers, politicians and the public are more likely to become aligned in demanding firm interventions to stop violence. In the present study the emphasis was more on spatial than temporal context. Thus, audiences who might otherwise oppose interventionist tactics would insist on them around certain sites: financial institutions for the CLPS and state/governmental institutions for the MPS. Correspondingly, the overall balance of accountability would shift towards intervention around these sites.
This study developed our understanding of how Commanders deal with accountability dilemmas in two further ways. First, it showed some ways in which these officers will seek to attenuate the opposition between demands from different audiences. These include (a) communications strategies which portray social reality in such a way as to lessen the demand for intervention from junior officers while lessening the opposition to police interventions from political and media sources, and (b) the use of tactics which alter the social reality for junior officers, either removing them from the attacks which make them want to intervene against the crowd or else making it physically difficult for them to get at crowd members. Second, the study suggested that, when contradictions remain, Commanders will be more responsive to those audiences which are most able to impose sanctions on themselves and their organization. For the MPS it was the Home Secretary. For the CLPS it was the ‘city fathers’.

This takes us to our third issue. As we expected there was direct evidence that senior and junior officers had different accountability concerns – senior officers being more accountable to external audiences such as politicians and the media. In some cases this took very direct forms such as the Home Office phoning up GT to quiz Commanders about what they were doing. These concerns led to different sets of priorities and hence to some tension as junior officers felt that not enough was being done to intervene against the crowd.

In addition, there were unexpected differences between the accountability concerns of the MPS and the CLPS which, in turn, led to tensions between these two police services. These differences point to the fact that there may be many dimensions of difference within the police which are associated with different forms of accountability, different priorities for action and intra-group tensions. The fact that, in this study, we have gone from one dimension (rank) to two (rank and police service) does not mean that we need stop there. There may be further dimensions that are of equal or even greater relevance in certain contexts (gender, ethnicity etc.) and which require further exploration. The one thing that we can state with confidence is that, just as one cannot fully understand the dynamics of crowd action if one regards the crowd as a single homogenous category (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2000; Reicher, 2001) so one cannot understand the dynamics of crowd policing if one treats the police as homogenous and ignores intra-group disputes.
Additionally, it is worth noting that it is in the context of these intra-group disputes that accountability issues are at their most explicit. Accountability is a constant and critical factor in policing decisions, and the more it can be taken for granted that everyone will be attuned to this factor, the less it may need to be spoken about openly. However, when the taken for granted is disrupted due to the different accountability considerations held by others, then one’s own considerations need to be openly articulated. Because of this, the evidence concerning junior-senior officer tensions, and even more so, CLPS-MPS tensions, provides the clearest indication of just how critical accountability – and, more precisely, the balance of differing accountability pressures - is to the decision making of Commanders.

Before going on to consider the wider implications of these findings both at a theoretical and a practical level, it is first necessary to address an evident and major caveat to our claims. That is, how can the reader rely on the validity of our interpretations given that, both in the recording and the analysis of data, our theoretical orientation may have conditioned what we found? In response, one important starting point is to stress that, when we conducted this study, we were not only interested in issues of accountability. It was just one factor of interest to us amongst many, and we were interested in – and sought to code – all the factors relevant to police decision making. These included the role of police theories about crowd psychology and the nature of the police intelligence gathering systems. The centrality of accountability did not reflect an a priori orientation but rather was an emergent product of the analysis itself.

Further, as we outlined in the ‘analytic procedure’ for this study, we employed three forms of triangulation in order to assess the validity of our findings concerning the precise nature of accountability processes. First, the two authors coded the data independently. Both came to the same conclusions in all respects except one. This concerned the strategies used by officers to attenuate accountability dilemmas. Initially, only one of the coders noted these strategies, but consensus between both was rapidly achieved when the matter was discussed. Second, we presented our findings to a variety of police audiences, including senior and junior officers, participants and non-participants in J18. In all cases, officers concurred with our
interpretations, they found our overall analysis convincing and revealing. That is, while they had not always been reflexively aware of how accountability affected their decisions, once it was described, they accepted that such factors are of importance and that they do work in the ways we suggest. Third, we compared our findings here with findings elsewhere – most obviously to Cronin and Reicher (2006) which we have invoked throughout the analysis. For all the differences which we have highlighted, the core similarities - and the fact that the limits of the one study are addressed by the strengths of the other – lend confidence to our conclusions.

To be more explicit, the advantage of Cronin & Reicher’s (2006) training study is that participants are both required to and had the time to articulate the reasoning behind their acts. Hence it provided explicit evidence concerning considerations that might otherwise remain hidden. Conversely, the very fact of having time and of articulating ones reasoning constitute two of many possible dimensions of artificiality in such a study. How can we be sure that these leisurely reflections correspond to the tense and rapidly moving events of a real riot? It is precisely such realities which are addressed by the present observational study. We were able to observe in vivo how people discussed events and responded to them. The downside, of course, is that we cannot be sure that they articulated everything that they were thinking. Even if, as we have just argued, intra-group tensions gave rise to clearer accounts of accountability concerns than we had expected, that still doesn’t mean that talk and thought coincide entirely. However the reality of the observational study compensates for the artificiality of the training study while the explicitness of the training study compensates for the possible silences of the observational study. Each study covers the weaknesses of the other and in combination they are stronger than the sum of the two in isolation.

Of course, this does not mean that there are no remaining weaknesses shared by both studies. Most obviously, while we are able, in a live event, to see the multiple forms of accountability that impinge on officers, we cannot make definitive claims about the impact of any given audience, nor are we able to demonstrate conclusive causal relationships between accountability differences, different priorities and intra-group tensions. That is the realm of experimental study. But the need for such further work is not a weakness of the present study. Indeed another form of validation for this (as with any) research comes through the generation of specific hypothesis that generate future
enquiry. Based on our analysis, however, we can be confident (a) that accountability is critical to public order policing, (b) that different officers balance different accountability concerns depending upon time and place, and (c) that differences in the ways that officers balances their different concerns can lead to intra-group tensions and conflicts.

For the present, though, we can be confident in claiming, at the least, that accountability is critical to policing, that what matters is the specific balance of accountability concerns at any given place and time, and that that there is a link between differences in the accountability balance and intragroup relations.

What lessons, practical and theoretical, should we therefore draw from J18 for future research? Practically, there are implications for both society in general and the police in particular. In order for society to control the way in which its institutions work, it is not enough to define policies and procedures, it is also necessary to consider structures of accountability which involve all relevant ‘stakeholders’ as directly as possible. And for those structures of accountability to work, it is necessary to develop forms of surveillance which make all relevant information available to view or disclosable if necessary. In order for institutions such as the police to work efficiently, it is necessary to be fully aware of accountability issues – and particularly to consider any intra-group differences in accountability which compromise the smooth coordination of action. In this way potential disagreements could be anticipated and addressed through agreed protocols.

Theoretically, the study reinforces, broadens and deepens our appreciation of the importance of accountability to group behaviour. Although the focus, in this paper, has been specifically upon the dynamics of accountability, it is important to remind ourselves that we are dealing with a setting where participants, including Commanders, were behaving in a collective and not an individual capacity. They were dressed in police uniform, they were sited in a policing facility, and they were acting on the basis of their professional position – all powerful antecedents of social identity salience (Reicher & Levine, 1994a,b; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987).
As evidence of this, officers characteristically spoke in collective terms, referring to ‘we’ in addition to or even instead of ‘I’ (see, for instance extracts 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9 above). There is also evidence that they perceived and evaluated others in terms of their group membership. Even if senior officers showed concern for demonstrators due to the possible political fallout, they still shared the generalised negative outgroup perceptions with junior officers - thus, the senior intelligence officer dealing with the incident involving a protestors who had fallen under a police van (see ‘The events of J18’, point c), portrayed demonstrators in general as hard, uncaring and violent. As he put it: “The Group on London Wall don’t give a stuff about injured woman. They are looking for an excuse to kick it off [i.e. initiate conflict]”). Moreover, there is evidence, as in Cronin and Reicher (2006), that, irrespective of rank, officers subscribed to a shared set of collective values centred around control and order. Silver made clear that the major command priority during J18 was ‘containment’ of the crowd.

The reasons why officers responded to accountability pressures had less to do with seeking the approval of others or achieving personal gain than with a series of group-level motives which correspond broadly to those listed by Klein et al. (2007): protecting ones position in the group (at the extreme, ensuring that one was not ejected from the police); protecting the standing of the group in terms of police reputation, funding and freedom from restrictions; mobilizing fellow group members to achieve group goals (specifically, ensuring that junior officers deliver the overall policing strategy). Both in their self-descriptions and in their motives, our respondents took for granted a shared social identification as police officers and their strategic considerations were linked to the associated collective interest. Even if there are sometimes tensions with other officers, they remain encompassed within this collective ‘we’ and it is for that reason that we feel justified in referring to these tensions as ‘intra-group’ throughout our analysis.

If our findings lend strength to the SIDE model, they also confirm our contention that there are three ways in which SIDE needs to be developed. First, the emphasis should change from analysing the constraints arising from single audiences to addressing the differing constraints that derive simultaneously from multiple audiences and hence to the resultant dilemmas of accountability. Second, there needs to a focus on the ways in which group members deal with dilemmas of accountability. Third, there needs to be a
broader analysis of the consequences of accountability concerns. Hitherto the emphasis has been on perceptions and actions. Here we show that accountability can provide a novel way of understanding the conditions of collective consensus and conflict. As we have argued, the disagreements between different police officers do not flow from value or attitude differences. At a cognitive level, there is a shared sense of identity. It is at the level of accountability that differences and disagreements arise.

At a broader level, this work provides more evidence of just how important accountability is to group behaviour, the complex ways in which accountability operates, and how far-reaching its effects are. We live in a world of increasing surveillance and where surveillance has far-reaching consequences for ourselves and our groups. For groups in general, and institutional groups in particular, accountability is central to our experience and deserves closer attention from those interested in any and all aspects of group processes.
Notes and acknowledgements

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2. We would like to thank the Metropolitan Police for granting access for this study, to the officers in GT during J18 for being so open and generous with their time, and to the Public Order Branch of New Scotland Yard for facilitating the overall research program.
References


Figure 1. Schematic map of the events of J-18
Accountability and group dynamics

**Key**

- **A - E**: Point referred to in text
- **Major Road (and road number)**
- **Landmark**

Towards Trafalgar Square (point E)