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Beyond allegations: The lived experiences of serving police officers who have undergone internal misconduct investigations

By

Tracy E Lavis

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This portfolio is dedicated to all those who strive to keep us safe, who don't hesitate to run towards danger when the rest of us may flee. May their unseen journeys be understood and their voices echo in these pages.

Fortes fortuna adiuvat
Pliny the Elder 'Fortune Favours the Brave'

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PREFACE

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This portfolio presents three pieces of work that embody the intersection of two paths in my professional development: my established role as a qualified forensic psychologist specialising in trauma within policing, and my ongoing training in counselling psychology. These works were conducted as a component of a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City St Georges, University of London. In the first part of this preface, I will outline the journey that has brought about these pieces of work. In the following section, I will outline the various components of this portfolio and discuss the themes that link and run through these pieces of work.

The idea for this study began to take shape as I worked with police officers grappling with the pressures and repercussions of internal misconduct investigations. I observed that the stress and anxiety experienced by these officers was palpable, and it troubled me to see a lack of comprehensive support systems in place to address their needs. I was particularly concerned to discover that many support provisions, including charity care, often exclude officers under misconduct investigation due to the prolonged and resource-intensive nature of their needs. This leaves officers without crucial support during an exceptionally stressful period. These observations from numerous therapy sessions and conversations drove my determination to explore this under-researched area.

To fully appreciate the significance of this study, it is essential to understand the context in which these officers operate on a daily basis. Throughout my career, I have had the privilege and opportunity to observe and hear firsthand about the extraordinary challenges that police officers encounter regularly. This exposure has profoundly influenced both my understanding and respect of their profession. These officers navigate a reality that many individuals can scarcely imagine, dealing with decomposing bodies, responding to horrific car crashes, and confronting armed drug dealers. I have heard accounts from officers who have administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) when ambulances are delayed, hoping their interventions making the critical difference between life and death. They speak of holding the hands of the dying, staying with them in their last moments as strangers offering them comfort and deep compassion. They have also recounted the sombre task of collecting dismembered human remains from railway tracks following suicides, piecing together the tragic final moments of individuals and identifying body parts in mass critical incidents.

In addition to navigating high-pressure scenarios, officers are consistently involved in the maintenance of public order, which includes managing large-scale events and resolving volatile disputes. They fulfil a vital role in public safety, providing protection to vulnerable individuals and communities. One of the most emotionally taxing responsibilities they encounter is the delivery of death messages, a task that necessitates profound empathy as they inform families of the loss of their loved ones.

In stark contrast, these same officers have recounted experiences of mediating neighbourhood disputes concerning issues such as stolen rhubarb or complaints

regarding a neighbour's cockerel crowing excessively early in the morning. They provide support to anxious parents whose children are engaging in self-harm behind locked doors and safeguard vulnerable individuals from exploitation.

What profoundly influences my research is the acknowledgment that these officers are fundamentally human beings, just like the rest of us. They are not merely professionals in a uniform; rather, they are individuals with complex personal lives. These officers are parents nurturing children, adult children providing care for aging parents, partners supporting each other, and friends who provide comfort following challenging shifts. They have families who worry about them, loved ones who rely on them, and personal aspirations that extend beyond their professional identities. In their work, they're called upon to be protectors, investigators, mediators, social workers, and, at times, untrained mental health professionals. After responding to life-altering emergencies, they often find themselves grabbing quick meals on the go or eating in their vehicles, with insufficient time for proper breaks – such are the diverse demands of their roles. Following each intervention, whether it is lifesaving or seemingly inconsequential, they are confronted with extensive documentation, frequently grappling with outdated IT systems that are prone to failure, before ultimately returning home to navigate the everyday joys and challenges of their personal lives.

This juxtaposition of the grave and the routine establishes a distinctive psychological landscape. It is within this backdrop - where officers oscillate between life-altering events and mundane irritations - that we must examine their experience of internal

misconduct investigations and its potential impact upon their well-being and professional identity.

The acknowledgment of our shared humanity serves as a vital link between my work with police officers and the broader discipline of counselling psychology. Just as I explore the psychological impacts on officers facing internal misconduct investigations, I also engage with clients such as Sally (a pseudonym), an NHS patient who I worked with while working in a Highly Specialised Psychology Service. Although Sally's experiences of trauma and systemic challenges differ in context, they exhibit common themes of human vulnerability and resilience that resonate with those of police officers. This connection highlights the universality of human experiences and emphasises the necessity of employing empathetic, context-sensitive approaches in psychological support, irrespective of the specific population being addressed.

My research is motivated by the need to understand and assist individuals who, despite encountering exceptional challenges, exhibit the same humanity and vulnerability as those they serve to protect. This perspective aligns closely with the core principles of counselling psychology, which underscore the importance of understanding each person's distinct experiences within the context of their broader life circumstances.

This portfolio, which includes a research thesis, a clinical case study, and a publishable paper, explores these complex dynamics. The research thesis serves as the cornerstone of this work, employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the lived experiences of police officers who are subjected to misconduct investigations. This

focus was prompted by my observations of the evolving landscape of policing, characterised by increasing societal pressures and heightened public scrutiny in recent years.

The climate surrounding British policing has undergone significant transformation, especially following high-profile incidents that have diminished public trust. Events such as the murder of George Floyd in the United States and the crimes of Wayne Couzens in the UK have intensified public scrutiny of police conduct. My professional interactions with officers reveal the profound impact of this evolving climate on their psychological well-being. Officers often express feeling caught between their commitment to public service and a sense of being misunderstood or unfairly judged by society. Even when facing minor complaints, some officers feel compelled to distance themselves from notorious cases, saying things like "I'm not Wayne Couzens." This collective guilt and heightened public pressure create a significant psychological burden that many officers struggle to manage.

The first section presents a primary research study [PART A] which explores the lived experiences of police officers who have been through an internal misconduct investigation. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the study identified several significant themes, including the psychological effects of extended internal misconduct investigations, the impact on professional identity, and the officers' perceptions of the support available to them, or the absence thereof, throughout these processes. This section aims to provide a deeper understanding of these experiences and inform the development of more effective support systems within policing

organisations whilst giving a voice to those who feel unheard. The common thread here is the impact of trauma and the need for institutional support to foster resilience.

The second section is a detail client case study presented in PART B, which offers a contrast to the experiences of police officers. It centres on my engagement with Sally whose narrative, characterised by complex trauma stemming from early attachment disruptions and exposure to gender-based violence, parallels in numerous respects, the systemic challenges encountered by the police officers participating in my research. Sally's experiences of abandonment by her father during childhood and the traumatic witnessing of a male relative pushing her mother down the stairs at her grandmother's deathbed formed the backdrop of our therapeutic journey. Using Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT), we worked together to address the profound impacts of these experiences. This case study illustrates the therapeutic process and highlights the importance of good spirit, trust, and humour in forging effective therapeutic relationships. The commonality with the first section lies in the exploration of personal trauma and the critical role of supportive relationships in healing and building resilience.

The final section of this portfolio is a publishable paper [PART C] intended for The Police Journal: Policy and Practice. This paper distils the key findings from my research into a format suitable for publication, aiming to reach a wider audience of practitioners, policymakers, and academics. It is based on one of the five principal themes identified in my Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research, which examines the experiences of officers concerning organisational betrayal and procedural injustice in completed internal misconduct investigations. By highlighting the serious issues

identified in my research, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the support needs of police officers undergoing misconduct investigations and to advocate for systemic changes that prioritise their well-being. This section ties back to the overall theme by emphasising the need for systemic support, organisational emotional intelligence, and the dissemination of knowledge to foster resilience across different settings.

Several integrative themes emerge throughout this portfolio, with relevance extending far beyond the specific context of policing. A key finding is that sources of psychological distress often differ from common perceptions. While acute traumatic events are recognised contributors, my research highlights the significant impact of less obvious factors, such as organisational processes and systemic pressures, on individual well-being. This underscores the crucial interplay between societal systems and personal resilience across diverse life situations. The portfolio demonstrates the need for interventions that address both individual and systemic challenges, emphasising the vital role of perceived support - whether from institutions, communities, or in therapy - in fostering resilience and recovery. These insights are applicable to a wide range of counselling situations, informing a more comprehensive approach to psychological support that recognises the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader societal contexts.

Throughout this work, I have sought to blend the systematic methodologies of forensic psychology with the more reflective principles of counselling psychology. This integration offers a unique lens through which to view complex psychological issues,

merging thorough analysis with empathetic understanding. It facilitates a more comprehensive approach to trauma and resilience, considering both the individual's internal processes and the external systemic factors that influence their experiences.

The journey of creating this thesis has been one of collaboration and learning. The insights and experiences shared by my research participants and clients have been invaluable in shaping this work. I am deeply grateful to all the police officers and clients who have trusted me with their stories and allowed me to share in their journeys. Their contributions have been instrumental in highlighting the complex interplay between professional challenges, personal trauma, and the critical importance of support systems.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues and peers in the field of policing and mental health, whose insights and feedback have enriched this study and whose wisdom, worldly experience, guidance and support have been invaluable in shaping this research. Their expertise and encouragement have been invaluable throughout this process.

This thesis is dedicated to all police officers who face the daunting challenge of internal misconduct investigations. It is my hope that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of their experiences and inform, as a minimum, the development of more effective support systems within policing organisations. By shedding light on the psychological and emotional impacts of internal misconduct investigations, I aim to advocate for a policing culture that prioritises the well-being and resilience of its officers.

PART A: RESEARCH PROJECT

ABSTRACT

Title: Beyond allegations: The lived experiences of serving police officers who have undergone internal misconduct investigations:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The policing profession in the UK is facing significant challenges, with recent Home Office reports indicating increasing numbers of officers leaving the service and the Police Federation's national survey highlighting widespread low morale. Within this broader context, internal misconduct investigations represent a significant, often stressful experience for officers. This study explores the lived experiences of eight police officers who have undergone such investigations. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand how officers experienced the investigative processes and how they made sense of these emotionally charged events

The inductive analysis identified five Group Experiential Themes: Psychological and Emotional Upheaval; Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability; Perceived Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice; Social Isolation and Relational Strain; and Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration. The findings illustrate the polarised nature of officers' experiences: some participants felt indispensable as they continued working yet simultaneously feared dismissal. Officers often used metaphors - such as "sinking ship" or "crashing off a cliff" - to convey the intensity of their emotional and existential struggles, highlighting the difficulty in expressing their complex feelings through conventional language.

The study also uncovered officers' deep emotional distress, long-term psychological consequences, and challenges to their professional identity. Many participants reported feelings of organisational betrayal and perceived a lack of fairness and support, which exacerbated feelings of isolation and relational strain, both within the organisation and in their personal lives. Additionally, previously unexplored moral and existential dilemmas emerged, as officers navigated profound questions about their integrity, purpose, and disillusionment with the policing profession.

These findings provide valuable insights into the diverse ways police officers experience internal misconduct investigations. While the study does not seek to generalise, it highlights the profound emotional and existential toll these processes can take. The research emphasises the importance of understanding each officer's individual experience in context, revealing how systemic factors and personal vulnerability intersect to influence their well-being and professional identity.

By focusing on these lived experiences, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the often-overlooked personal and emotional dimensions of misconduct investigations. The findings may inform the development of more empathetic support systems and interventions within police organisations, encouraging a culture that prioritises the well-being and resilience of officers during and after misconduct investigations.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"I didn't get the chance to actually have my say and tell the truth. Maybe I put too much store in the truth, but I've never got that opportunity. It should have been professional, and it wasn't. It should have been honest, and it was dishonest."
(Chris 1398-1403)

"I was going to hang myself because... uhm... what's the point? I'm... I'm gonna lose my job. Everyone's telling me I'm gonna lose my job. Uhm... this is the only thing I've got... I love the police. I love helping people. There's no other role for me that I want to do in life. Uhm... what's the point in being here? I'm no good at... I've obviously done something wrong. Uhm... so I started writing like uhm... it wasn't a suicide note. It was more about what I've done in my life sort of thing."
(Greg 437-446)

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The lived experiences of police officers during internal misconduct investigations are complex and emotionally charged. While these investigations are crucial for maintaining public trust and accountability, they can profoundly affect the officers' psychological well-being and professional identities. The opening quotes from Chris and Greg illustrate the deeply personal and potentially devastating impact of these processes on some officers.

Recent events underscore the urgency of understanding this phenomenon. The tragic deaths of two serving Norfolk Police officers, PC Richard Dennis and PC Martin Scott, in 2023 highlight the potential severe consequences of the pressures faced by officers under investigation (Moore, 2023). These incidents serve as a stark reminder of the

human cost associated with misconduct investigations and emphasise the need for a deeper understanding of officers' lived experiences during these challenging periods.

This study aims to explore how police officers make sense of their experiences of undergoing internal misconduct investigations. By adopting an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA), I seek to understand the subjective meanings and personal significance that officers attribute to these experiences (Smith et al., 2022). IPA, rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, is particularly suited to exploring complex, significant, and emotionally charged experiences such as these.

The central research question guiding this study is: How do police officers make sense of their experiences of undergoing internal misconduct investigations? This question aligns with IPA's focus on sense-making and lived experience. It seeks to explore the personal and emotional landscapes officers navigate during these investigations, uncovering the subjective realities central to IPA's approach.

By focusing on officers' interpretations and meaning-making processes, I aim to contribute to academic understanding of how internal misconduct investigations are experienced. This research is positioned at the intersection of organisational practices, psychological well-being, and professional identity, offering a unique perspective on a critical aspect of policing that has received limited attention in existing literature.

This research does not seek to evaluate the process of internal misconduct investigations themselves. Rather, it gives voice to the officers' experiences of the

process, regardless of the outcome of their actual investigation, potentially offering insights that could enrich our understanding of the human dimension of these processes within the policing profession. To fully appreciate the significance of these personal experiences, it is essential to understand the broader landscape in which they occur.

The following section provides an overview of the background and context surrounding police misconduct investigations in the UK, including the investigative processes, recent statistics and trends, and the broader challenges facing the policing profession.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Police misconduct investigations in the UK are primarily conducted through two main pathways: the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and internal investigations led by police forces. Recent Home Office data (2024b) reveals that, as of March 31, 2024, there were approximately 153,000 police officers and special constables serving across England and Wales. A significant number of these officers have been subject to misconduct complaints, with over 42,000 identifiable officers involved in such complaints in the year ending March 31, 2023. These complaints resulted in more than 120,000 recorded allegations (Home Office, 2023; IOPC, 2024). This volume underscores the potential complexities of managing misconduct across multiple forces in England and Wales.

Furthermore, recent statistics from the Home Office report reveal consistently high outcomes where misconduct was found to be proven in formal proceedings. For

instance, of the officers referred to misconduct meetings (less formal proceedings) in the year ending March 31, 2023, misconduct was proven in 79% of cases. In misconduct hearings (used for more serious allegations), a total of 87% of cases were found proven, comprising 78% for gross misconduct and 9% for misconduct (Home Office, 2024). In accelerated hearings (fast-tracked for serious cases), gross misconduct was established in 99% of cases. While the objective of these proceedings is to uphold professional standards, the consistently high percentages highlight the potential for misconduct to be proven against officers referred to formal misconduct proceedings.

The scope of misconduct within police forces is broad, encompassing breaches of professionalism, integrity violations, failure to follow lawful orders, improper use of force, and discriminatory conduct. These actions are evaluated against the standards set in the Police (Conduct) Regulations (Home Office., 2020a, 2024c), which outline the expectations for police conduct and provide a framework for assessing breaches. Depending on the severity of the breach, officers may face disciplinary actions ranging from warnings to dismissal (College of Policing, 2023).

Internal misconduct investigations in UK policing typically follow a formal yet often opaque process. The investigation usually begins when a complaint is made or when conduct concerns are identified internally. Once an allegation is recorded, the Professional Standards Department (PSD) makes an initial assessment to determine the appropriate course of action.

A notable aspect of this initial phase is that preliminary inquiries can sometimes be conducted without the officer's knowledge. This means that evidence gathering and

witness interviews may occur before the officer is formally notified of the investigation, creating a situation where officers can be subject to scrutiny without their awareness. This practice, while operationally justified in certain circumstances to prevent interference with evidence, adds another layer of opacity to the process from the officer's perspective.

Following this assessment, an investigating officer, usually from PSD, is appointed to gather evidence. The suspected officer should be served a notice informing them that they are under investigation and provide details of the allegations. This evidence collection may involve interviewing witnesses, reviewing documentation, examining body-worn camera footage, and questioning the officer under investigation. During this phase, the officer may be placed on restricted duties, or in more serious cases, suspended pending the outcome.

The investigative process is governed by the Police (Conduct) Regulations (Home Office, 2020), which outline the procedures and timeframes. However, despite these formal guidelines, the process often remains implicit and non-transparent to the officers under investigation. Many officers report limited understanding of investigation timelines, decision-making criteria, or even the specific allegations against them in the early stages.

Upon completion of evidence gathering, the investigator produces a report with recommendations. The process at this stage appears to involve considerable professional discretion, with individual PSD investigators potentially drawing different conclusions from similar evidence based on their experience, interpretation, and

personal judgment. While formal policies indicate that the Professional Standards Department oversees these processes, in practice, the implementation of outcomes for less serious matters often involves significant input from the officer's direct line manager or supervisors. This layered decision-making can lead to variations in how similar cases are handled across different teams or departments, as both the initial recommendations and subsequent interpretation may differ depending on individual investigator approaches and local leadership styles. Potential outcomes range from no further actions to referral to formal proceedings. For less serious matters, this might involve management action or a misconduct meeting. More serious allegations may lead to a misconduct hearing, which can result in sanctions ranging from written warnings to dismissal without notice.

Throughout this process, the implicit nature of decision-making and the limited transparency often create significant uncertainty for officers. Information is frequently compartmentalised, with officers reporting that they received updates on a 'need-to-know' basis only. This opacity can be particularly challenging for officers who must continue their professional duties, if not suspended, while navigating an investigation process that may fundamentally threaten their career and identity.

The entire process, from allegation to resolution, can extend for months or even years in complex cases, creating prolonged periods of uncertainty for the officers involved. This extended timeline, combined with the procedural opacity, may contribute significantly to the psychological impact of misconduct investigations on serving officers.

An additional layer of complexity in the misconduct investigation process emerges when examining the application of evidence disclosure standards. While police officers, in their daily duties, routinely operate under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (CPIA) guidelines, which mandate comprehensive disclosure of both inculpatory and exculpatory evidence in criminal proceedings, these same rigorous standards may not be uniformly applied in internal misconduct investigations. Notably, the Crown Prosecution Service Disclosure Manual explicitly acknowledges that Professional Standards Departments (PSDs) maintain 'final responsibility for the value judgment on whether information relating to the misconduct of police officers should be revealed,' (Crown Prosecution Service, n.d., Disclosure Manual: Chapter 18). This fundamental inconsistency creates a notable asymmetry, where officers under investigation experience a fundamentally different evidentiary framework than the one they themselves must adhere to in their professional practice. This divergence in procedural safeguards raises important questions about information access, defence preparation, and appeal mechanisms that may significantly impact officers' perceptions of procedural justice within their own organisations.

The broader context of policing also influences officers' experiences. High-profile cases and cultural reflections, such as Baroness Casey's (2023) review into the Metropolitan Police, have highlighted systemic issues within UK policing. This increased scrutiny likely shapes how officers perceive and experience misconduct investigations, even in non-criminal cases.

Officers undergoing these investigations often face what Hamer et al. (2019) term 'Double Jeopardy' – a dual process in which they may be subject to both public judicial scrutiny and internal professional standards investigations. This dual pressure can significantly impact an officer's lived experience, potentially intensifying emotional and psychological strain.

Mental health challenges within the policing profession add significant complexity to the experiences of UK police officers, particularly those undergoing misconduct investigations. Recent studies highlight elevated risks of PTSD, depression, and suicide among this population. Research indicates that UK police officers have a higher prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression compared to the general population (Foley et al., 2024; Syed et al., 2020). Krishnan et al. (2022) also emphasised the ongoing issue of suicide within policing, calling for more effective mental health interventions. Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) shows that between 2019 and 2023, the average suicide rate among police officers was higher than the national average. The added stress of misconduct investigations may contribute to or exacerbate existing mental health challenges, with the process often perceived as a significant source of emotional and psychological strain. These findings stress the need for comprehensive mental health support and early intervention strategies within the police service, especially for officers facing the additional stress of misconduct investigations.

This study focuses on completed internal misconduct investigations, which, although often less publicised than criminal cases, can have profound implications for the officers

involved. While many of these investigations focus on breaches of professional standards, some may uncover evidence that leads to criminal charges. Recent reforms, aimed at increasing fairness and support within the disciplinary system (Home Office., 2024c), have further shaped the evolving landscape of these investigations, making this a timely area of research.

1.3 IPA RATIONALE
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This study uses Smith et. al.'s (2022) approach to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its methodology - chosen for its alignment with the research question and the complex experiences under investigation. The central question guiding this research is: How do police officers make sense of their experiences of undergoing internal misconduct investigations?

IPA's idiographic focus is ideal for capturing the unique and deeply personal experiences of officers during misconduct investigations, offering insights that extend beyond statistical data. The double hermeneutic in this study will involve a two-stage interpretation process, encouraging ongoing reflexivity throughout the research process. IPA's emphasis on individual lived experiences is particularly valuable for understanding misconduct investigations, as it allows for a nuanced exploration of how officers interpret and make meaning of these potentially career-altering events.

1.4 RESEARCHERS PERSPECTIVE

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This study is informed by my professional experience as a forensic psychologist specialising in police mental health, coupled with my ongoing doctoral research in counselling psychology. This dual perspective provides valuable context but also necessitates careful reflexivity throughout the research process. In my clinical practice, I've observed patterns of psychological distress among officers undergoing misconduct investigations, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, fear, embitterment, and moral injury. This background motivates my research and shapes my approach to the study, balancing my professional insights with a commitment to prioritising participants' voices. My clinical experience, combined with my counselling psychology training, aligns closely with IPA's emphasis on interpretation and reflexivity, allowing me to engage deeply with officers' narratives while maintaining awareness of my own preconceptions and biases. This dual lens potentially enriches the analysis by offering both a systemic understanding of police mental health issues and a nuanced appreciation of individual lived experiences.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

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This study addresses a critical, under-examined aspect of policing: the lived experiences of officers undergoing internal misconduct investigations. By providing a deeper understanding of these personal experiences, the study could directly influence the development of more effective support systems for officers and guide policy reforms that prioritise mental health within the policing profession. The idiographic focus of IPA allows this study to offer deep, nuanced insights into individual officers' experiences,

potentially informing approaches that balance organisational needs with individual experiences.

Moreover, this research fills a significant gap in the current literature, which has largely focused on aspects such as organisational betrayal in policing (Brennan & Cole, 2024), the concept of independence in police complaints investigations (Savage, 2013), or analyses of officers' self-reported reasons for misconduct (Cubitt & Judges, 2018), rather than the in-depth exploration of the experiences of misconduct investigations. While existing studies have provided valuable insights into the nature and prevalence of misconduct investigations, there is a dearth of research specifically exploring the lived experiences of officers undergoing these processes. By engaging with the personal experiences of these officers, this study seeks to illuminate a perspective that has been largely overlooked in the discourse on police accountability and officer wellbeing. The insights gained from this exploration may offer a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of officers undergoing misconduct investigations.

While the primary aim of this IPA study is to deeply understand individual experiences rather than to generalise, the findings might potentially inform discussions around support mechanisms during investigations. They could also contribute to reflections on existing policies and their impact on officer wellbeing. Additionally, the study may provide valuable insights that could enrich awareness training programmes for investigators, officers involved in the investigative process, police leaders, occupational health departments, and counselling psychologists working with this population.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research may enhance our understanding of how officers construct meaning from their experiences of misconduct investigations, potentially contributing to broader psychological theories about professional identity and emotional resilience in high-stress occupations.

It is important to note that, in keeping with the IPA approach, these potential practical and theoretical implications are secondary to the primary goal of deeply understanding the participants' lived experiences. The strength of this study lies in its idiographic focus and the rich, detailed analysis it offers. Any recommendations or insights that emerge will be grounded in the participants' narratives and the interpretative process, rather than predetermined outcomes.

This study may also open avenues for future research, potentially inspiring more targeted investigations into specific aspects of officers' experiences or comparative studies across different policing contexts.

By considering these personal narratives, this study has the potential to contribute to a more nuanced dialogue about police accountability and officer wellbeing. It may help bridge the gap between procedural necessities and the lived realities of those undergoing investigations, potentially informing approaches that balance organisational needs with individual experiences. Ultimately, this research seeks to give voice to a perspective often overlooked in discussions of police misconduct investigations.

1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE
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This thesis is structured to provide a comprehensive exploration of the research question:

Chapter 1 (Introduction): Outlines the research context, rationale, and aims.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review): Examines existing research on police misconduct investigations and officer wellbeing.

Chapter 3 (Methodology): Details the IPA approach and research methods employed.

Chapter 4 (Findings): Presents the themes emerging from the analysis of participant interviews.

Chapter 5 (Discussion and Conclusion): Interprets the findings in relation to existing literature, explores their implications, summarises key findings, discusses limitations, and suggests areas for future research.

This structure guides the reader through the research process, from the initial context to the final conclusions and implications of the study.

The following chapter will build upon this foundation, providing a comprehensive review of the existing literature on police misconduct investigations, officer wellbeing, and related psychological impacts. This review will further contextualise the current study and highlight the specific gaps in knowledge that this research aims to address.

CHAPTER TWO: CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, UK policing has undergone significant reforms, with an increasing focus on accountability and the enforcement of professional standards. While these changes aim to enhance policing practices and public trust, they have also introduced new challenges for officers, particularly in the realm of internal misconduct investigations (Heaton & Tong, 2023; Home Office, 2024a). This review explores the limited existing research on how officers experience and navigate internal misconduct investigations within the context of these reforms.

Given the scarcity of research specifically addressing officers' lived experiences of internal misconduct investigations, this review draws on a broader range of studies that explore interconnected domains. These include law enforcement stress, mental health challenges within policing, organisational factors, leadership influences, public perceptions, and ethical decision-making. While these studies may not focus directly on misconduct investigations, they provide valuable insights into the pressures and challenges faced by officers in comparable contexts. By synthesising this knowledge, the review aims to contextualise the need for further exploration into officers' experiences during these investigations, addressing the central question: How do police officers experience an internal misconduct investigation?

The review is structured thematically. It begins by critically analysing the broader context of policing, followed by an evaluation of existing research on the mental health impacts associated with misconduct investigations. Organisational factors, such as perceptions of justice, fairness, and support systems, are critically examined alongside the role of identity, culture, and leadership in shaping officers' experiences. Finally, it engages with the literature on moral injury and ethical decision-making within the context of policing.

Throughout, this review critically engages with the methodologies, findings, and limitations of key studies, identifying gaps in the existing knowledge while synthesising what is known about officers' experiences. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that may shape these experiences, while recognising areas that have been underexplored in the current body of research.

This review provides a foundation for understanding the complex dynamics officers may face during misconduct investigations. It contextualises how various factors - such as organisational culture, professional identity and leadership - may intersect in officers' real-world experiences. While the review aims to inform understanding of the UK policing context, it necessarily draws on a range of studies from various jurisdictions due to the limited research available specifically on UK police misconduct investigations. This broader approach offers insights that may have relevance for understanding similar processes in other contexts involving internal investigations. However, it's important to note that the specific regulatory and cultural nuances of UK policing may affect the direct applicability of some findings from other settings to the UK context.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the landscape of UK policing continues to evolve. Recent developments in policies, practices, and societal expectations may affect how internal misconduct investigations are conducted and experienced (Home Office., 2024c). This evolving context highlights the importance of remaining engaged with ongoing research in this area to better understand its impact on officers.

While methodological critique is provided for key empirical studies directly relevant to officers' experiences of misconduct investigations, not all studies reviewed in this chapter undergo detailed methodological appraisal. This deliberate approach enables a more comprehensive exploration of the theoretical and contextual landscape, incorporating diverse scholarship that contributes valuable conceptual frameworks and indirect insights. It should be noted that when drawing on international research, particularly from the United States, there exist significant differences in complaint handling processes, organisational structures, and cultural contexts that distinguish UK policing from other jurisdictions. Such an approach acknowledges that understanding the complex phenomenon of misconduct investigations requires drawing on multiple knowledge domains, with awareness that findings from different national policing models may not directly transfer to the UK context. This integrative strategy creates a richer foundation for interpreting the findings of the current study while maintaining critical engagement with the most directly relevant empirical research.

2.2 CONTEXT OF POLICING AND MISCONDUCT INVESTIGATIONS
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In UK policing, misconduct can involve a broad range of behaviours, from breaches of professionalism to serious violations of conduct (College of Policing, 2023). Misconduct investigations, however, begin with an allegation of misconduct, which may or may not be substantiated following a formal inquiry. This study focuses specifically on officers' experiences of these investigations, regardless of the nature or severity of the alleged misconduct.

While this review draws on international policing literature, the forthcoming study will focus specifically on UK policing. In many jurisdictions, approaches to misconduct investigations in policing have evolved over time. There appears to be a general trend towards more reform-oriented processes, often characterised by intentions of greater transparency and procedural fairness. These changes may reflect broader shifts in public sector management and a growing recognition of the complex factors contributing to professional misconduct. In the UK context, Savage (2013), in his examination of policing, highlighted a trend toward reform, emphasising the increasing importance of independent oversight in police accountability systems.

While Savage's work highlights the specific trajectory of UK policing, similar trends have been observed in other areas, suggesting the broader relevance of these reforms in police accountability and misconduct investigations. This shift toward reform-oriented investigations may reflect an increasing recognition of the complex interplay between systemic, organisational, and individual factors in instances of misconduct. As policing faces greater public scrutiny, evolving social expectations and politicisation, it is

possible that the process of misconduct investigations have become even more complex. This changing landscape underscores the importance of examining how officers themselves perceive and experience these investigations, particularly given the potential psychological impact on those involved in them.

Cubitt and Judges (2018) provide a qualitative analysis of misconduct in New South Wales Police in Australia, offering crucial insights into the factors influencing police misconduct from the perspective of officers who commit it. Their study, which analysed 100 Show Cause Notice (SCN) responses from officers being considered for dismissal, revealed patterns in self-reported causes of misconduct. These included work-related stressors, health issues (particularly mental health concerns like PTSD), financial problems, and relationship issues.

The strength of Cubitt and Judges' (2018) work lies in its unique data source and qualitative approach, providing valuable insights into the self-reported causes of serious misconduct. Their analysis of officers' own narratives offers a foundation for understanding the complex factors that may contribute to misconduct. However, as their study focused on officers already facing potential dismissal, it does not capture the experiences of officers during the investigative process itself, nor does it include those facing less severe allegations. This limitation highlights a significant gap in the literature: the lived experiences of officers undergoing misconduct investigations across a spectrum of severity. There is a clear need for research that explores how officers perceive, navigate, and are impacted by the investigative process itself, regardless of the outcome. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the

psychological and professional implications of misconduct investigations, potentially informing more effective and supportive investigative practices.

Expanding on this contextual understanding, Hough et al. (2018) examined cases of alleged misconduct involving chief officers and staff in England and Wales. Their qualitative study, which involved interviews with key stakeholders and investigators in chief officer misconduct cases since April 2008, explored the nature of misconduct cases, the context in which alleged unethical behaviour took place, and factors that may have contributed to misconduct. Hough et al. found that the ethical climate of a police force was a key determinant of chief officer misconduct. They emphasised the importance of ethical leadership in shaping the ethical culture of both senior command teams and their forces, though they did not directly measure the association between leadership practices and misconduct levels.

The work of Hough et al. (2018) provides valuable insights into the role of organisational culture in shaping ethical behaviour. However, their focus on senior officers' perspectives and the views of investigators leaves a significant gap in understanding how rank-and-file officers experience and perceive misconduct investigations. This limitation highlights the need for research that explores the lived experiences of officers at all levels who undergo misconduct investigations. Such studies would provide a more holistic view of how organisational factors, including leadership and ethical climate, influence not only the occurrence of misconduct but also how investigations are experienced by those subjected to them. This broader perspective is crucial for developing a

comprehensive understanding of the psychological impact of misconduct investigations and for informing more effective and supportive investigative practices across all levels of policing.

When considered together, the studies by Cubitt and Judges (2018) and Hough et al. (2018) paint a complex picture of police misconduct. While Cubitt and Judges highlight the self-reported factors influencing misconduct among Australian officers facing dismissal, such as work-related stressors and health issues, Hough et al. emphasise the importance of organisational culture and leadership in shaping ethical behaviour in UK policing. This juxtaposition suggests that misconduct investigations must be understood not just as individual incidents, but as phenomena deeply embedded in the broader context of policing structures and cultures, potentially spanning different national contexts.

These studies raise questions about how officers in different roles experience misconduct investigations. For example, front-line officers may face unique stressors, while ethical leadership could shape perceptions of fairness in these processes. These studies reveal a gap in understanding how officers personally experience misconduct investigations. Research is needed to explore the lived experiences of officers, considering how rank, role, and organisational culture shape their perceptions.

As I move forward in this review, it becomes clear that understanding officers' experiences during misconduct investigations requires a multifaceted approach. It necessitates consideration of not only the individual psychological impacts but also the

broader organisational and cultural contexts in which these investigations occur. This complex interplay sets the stage for our exploration of more specific aspects of officers' experiences, including mental health impacts, organisational justice, and ethical decision-making.

2.3 MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF POLICING
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While policing is inherently stressful, the specific impact of misconduct investigations on officers' mental health remains understudied.

Brewin et al. (2022) found high rates of PTSD and Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (cPTSD) among UK police officers, but did not specifically examine the impact of misconduct investigations. Their cross-sectional survey revealed a one-month prevalence of 12.6% of surveyed officers met the criteria for cPTSD, and 8.0% for PTSD - rates significantly higher than in the general population.

Brewin et al.'s (2022) findings challenge common assumptions about risk factors for trauma-related disorders in policing. While exposure to traumatic incidents was associated with PTSD and cPTSD as expected, their study also revealed that experiences of humiliation and sexual harassment were significant predictors of these conditions. This highlights the potential impact of non-operational stressors on officers' mental health. Additionally, their findings on gender vulnerability in trauma exposure were noteworthy, revealing that both PTSD and cPTSD were more common in male officers. This contrasts with typical findings in general population studies where women usually

report higher rates of PTSD. These insights are crucial when considering the potential psychological impact of various policing experiences, including misconduct investigations. They suggest that traditional support systems may need re-evaluation to address both non-operational stressors and gender-specific vulnerabilities more effectively in the policing context.

While Brewin et al.'s study provides valuable insights into the prevalence and risk factors for PTSD and cPTSD in policing, it does not specifically address the mental health impact of misconduct investigations. Given that such investigations could potentially involve experiences of humiliation or stress comparable to those identified as risk factors in Brewin et al.'s study, there is a clear need for research that explores the specific psychological impact of these processes on officers. This gap underscores the importance of qualitative, in-depth studies that can capture the nuanced experiences of officers undergoing misconduct investigations and their potential mental health implications.

Building on Brewin's (2022) understanding of trauma in policing, Violanti et al. (2017) provided a comprehensive review of various stressors in policing and their impacts on officers' mental and physical health, including aspects of work-family conflict. Their study highlighted how the unique stressors of police work - such as shift work, exposure to violence, and organisational pressures - can significantly impact officers' family lives and overall well-being. While not specifically focused on misconduct investigations, their findings are relevant in understanding how the stress of such investigations might permeate officers' personal lives, potentially straining relationships and support

systems. While these findings are from the US, UK policing likely shares similar stressors. However, differences in healthcare systems and organisational structures may influence how these issues manifest in the UK context.

The comprehensive nature of Violanti et al.'s (2017) review provides a valuable framework for understanding the potential far-reaching impacts of misconduct investigations on serving police officers. While their study did not specifically address these investigations, it suggests that the stress of such processes could compound existing occupational stressors, potentially exacerbating impacts on officers' mental health and personal lives. This highlights the importance of considering misconduct investigations not in isolation, but as part of a complex web of stressors affecting police officers. Future research, particularly qualitative studies, could explore how officers navigate the unique challenges of misconduct investigations within this broader landscape of occupational stress, potentially revealing coping strategies and resilience factors specific to these situations.

Soomro and Yanos (2019) highlight the presence of mental health stigma in policing, noting that the police culture values toughness and self-reliance while viewing seeking outside help with distrust and suspicion. Their US study emphasises the centrality of peer relationships in police culture, where officers rely on colleagues in dangerous situations. While these close peer bonds can potentially provide emotional validation and a shared sense of coping, the authors note that the same culture that fosters these relationships can paradoxically inhibit help-seeking. Their research underscores the significance of social support networks within the policing profession, even as it

illustrates how these networks are shaped by cultural norms that may discourage formal help-seeking for mental health concerns.

Krishnan et al. (2022), in their systematic review of risk factors for police suicide, identified several significant factors contributing to suicidal behaviour among police officers across various countries. Their research underscores the severe psychological toll that policing can take, highlighting the need for robust support systems and interventions. The review identified five superordinate risk factors: problematic substance use close to or at the time of death; presence of depression and previous suicide attempts; differences in trauma response; exposure to excessive and prolonged job-related stress, including dissatisfaction; and absence of a stable intimate relationship. Krishnan et al. found that these factors, when taken in isolation, each incrementally contributed to suicide risk, but when found to be comorbid, appeared to markedly increase the likelihood of completed suicide. While this study did not specifically examine misconduct investigations, its findings on occupational stress and other risk factors raise important questions about how such investigations might impact officers' mental health. The potential relationship between misconduct investigations and the risk factors identified by Krishnan et al. remains unexplored, representing a gap in our understanding of officers' psychological wellbeing during these processes.

The psychological impact of misconduct investigations is further illuminated by Gordons' (2023) quantitative study on stress, suicidal ideation, and instances of police misconduct among US officers. Gordon's work revealed that suicidal ideation can mediate the relationship between occupational stress and certain forms of police

misconduct, particularly verbal abuse. Importantly, the study found that stress, especially from organisational sources such as bureaucratic pressures and lack of support, was significantly related to both suicidal ideation and misconduct. These findings align with and extend Krishnan et al.'s (2022) work, suggesting a complex interplay between stress, mental health, and behavioural outcomes. This interrelationship highlights the potential for misconduct investigations to not only intersect with psychological distress but also to potentially exacerbate existing stressors and behavioural issues.

While these studies predominantly focus on the challenges, it's important to note that not all officers experience severe mental health issues. Hesketh et al. (2017) suggest that many officers develop resilience and effective coping mechanisms over time. Their research indicates that higher-ranking officers (Inspectors and above) were significantly more likely to contribute discretionary effort, which could be interpreted as a form of resilience developed through experience. The study also found that factors such as feeling in control of one's work, having good job conditions, and job security were positively associated with discretionary effort. However, the specific impact of misconduct investigations on these coping strategies and discretionary effort remains unexplored. This gap highlights the need for research that examines how officers' developed resilience and coping strategies interact with the experience of undergoing a misconduct investigation, particularly across different ranks and levels of experience.

The mental health of police officers undergoing misconduct investigations represents a complex and understudied area at the intersection of occupational stress,

organisational culture, and psychological resilience. Recent research has illuminated various aspects of this issue, but significant gaps remain in our understanding of how misconduct investigations specifically impact officers' mental health trajectories.

Papazoglou et al. (2020) introduced the concept of moral injury in policing, which offers a valuable framework for understanding the psychological impact of misconduct investigations. Moral injury occurs when officers perpetrate, fail to prevent, or witness acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs. In the context of misconduct investigations, officers may experience moral injury if they perceive the investigation as unjust or if it forces them to confront actions that conflict with their moral code. This concept aligns with Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED) described by Linden et al. (2009), characterised by feelings of injustice and bitterness following perceived unfair life events. PTED could be particularly relevant in understanding officers' psychological responses to investigations they view as unwarranted or disproportionate.

Edwards and Kotera (2021) highlighted the pervasive stigma surrounding mental health issues in UK policing. Their qualitative study revealed that the police culture of masculinity and emotional self-control creates significant barriers to help-seeking. Officers reported fears that disclosing mental health concerns would be seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence. During misconduct investigations, these barriers may be heightened as officers feel additional pressure to appear resilient and fear that seeking support could be perceived as an admission of guilt.

This stigma is compounded by organisational factors. Crowe et al. (2022) found that while many agencies offer mental health resources, officers often lack trust in these services or fear career repercussions from using them. Their study highlighted a preference among officers for peer support programmes over professional mental health services, suggesting a need for culturally competent interventions that align with police values.

Hesketh and Cooper (2023) provided valuable insights into the organisational perspective on officer wellbeing in UK police forces. Their research on the National Police Wellbeing Service (NPWS) showed that while many forces have implemented mental health support programmes, the effectiveness of these programmes during high-stress periods like misconduct investigations remains unclear. They emphasised the need for evidence-based interventions that address both individual resilience and organisational culture. Importantly, Hesketh and Cooper's work on discretionary effort suggests that officers experiencing mental health challenges or undergoing stressful processes (like misconduct investigations) may significantly reduce their workplace engagement. This could have broader implications for police effectiveness and community relations.

When comparing the UK context to international findings, similarities emerge. Papazoglou et al.'s (2020) study of North American police forces found comparable rates of PTSD and similar barriers to seeking help, suggesting these issues transcend national boundaries. However, the specific impact of misconduct investigations may vary due to differences in regulatory frameworks and cultural contexts.

A significant gap in the current literature is the lack of longitudinal studies tracking officers' mental health before, during, and after misconduct investigations. Additionally, more research is needed on how organisational factors, such as the perceived fairness of the investigative process and the availability of support services, influence mental health outcomes. Hesketh and Cooper's (2023) work on creating the optimal working environment in policing could be extended to examine how these principles might be applied during misconduct investigations to mitigate negative mental health impacts.

In conclusion, while we have a growing understanding of the mental health challenges inherent in policing, there remains a significant gap in our knowledge about how these challenges manifest and evolve during misconduct investigations. The potential for such investigations to exacerbate existing mental health vulnerabilities, create new psychological stressors and interact with barriers to help-seeking behaviour, suggests a complex and potentially harmful psychological landscape for officers who find themselves under investigation. Future research should aim to bridge this gap, providing evidence-based recommendations for supporting officer mental health throughout the misconduct investigation process while maintaining the integrity and necessity of these procedures.

2.4 ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMICS: JUSTICE, SUPPORT AND OFFICER WELLBEING

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Organisational factors play a crucial role in shaping officers' experiences during misconduct investigations. Brennan and Cole (2024) found that perceptions of unfair treatment during disciplinary processes were strong predictors of feelings of betrayal, which in turn led to increased cynicism and decreased job satisfaction. This highlights the importance of procedural justice in misconduct investigations.

Brennan and Cole (2024) provide a critical examination of organisational betrayal in policing, offering valuable insights into how perceptions of unfair treatment can lead to long-lasting feelings of embitterment and reduced job satisfaction. Their study, which employed a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and in-depth interviews with UK police officers, found that perceptions of unfair treatment during disciplinary processes were strong predictors of feelings of betrayal. Officers who felt betrayed by their organisation reported higher levels of cynicism, decreased job satisfaction, and increased thoughts about leaving the force.

The strength of Brennan and Cole's (2024) work lies in its direct relevance to misconduct investigations and its exploration of the long-term psychological impacts of perceived organisational injustice. However, the study's reliance on retrospective accounts may limit our understanding of how these perceptions of betrayal develop and evolve during the investigation process itself. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs that track officers' perceptions at different stages of the investigation process.

Within the theme of organisational justice, Wolfe and Piquero (2011) examined the relationship between perceived organisational justice and officers' likelihood of engaging in misconduct, and 'code of silence' attitudes as predictors of misconduct. Their quantitative analysis, using structural equation modelling, revealed a significant relationship between justice perceptions and misconduct outcomes. These officers, from the US, who perceived their organisation as just were less likely to engage in misconduct or support the 'code of silence'. While this study provides robust statistical evidence, its quantitative approach may not capture the full complexity of officers' experiences, particularly the nuanced ways in which perceived justice influences decision-making during high-stress situations like misconduct investigations. Although the UK and US have different policing structures, the authors discuss that the concept of organisational justice likely applies in other national contexts. UK-specific research is needed to understand nuances in how it operates within the more centralised UK policing system.

The findings of Brennan and Cole (2024) and Wolfe and Piquero (2011) converge on the critical role of perceived organisational justice in shaping officers' attitudes and behaviours. While Wolfe and Piquero's US-based study provides robust statistical evidence, its applicability to the UK context requires careful consideration. The more centralised structure of UK policing may influence how organisational justice operates within individual forces. Brennan and Cole's UK-focused study offers a more directly relevant perspective, highlighting how perceptions of unfair treatment can lead to long-lasting feelings of embitterment among British officers. This UK-specific research is

crucial for understanding the nuances of how organisational justice functions within the British policing system, particularly during misconduct investigations.

The concept of procedural justice in complaint systems, as explored by Schulenberg et al. (2017) in the Canadian context, offers further insights into how organisational processes can impact officers' experiences. Their mixed-methods study found that perceptions of procedural fairness significantly influence officers' views of organisational legitimacy. Officers who believed complaint processes were fair and transparent were more likely to view their organisation positively, even when outcomes were unfavourable. However, the study's focus on external complaint processes may limit its direct applicability to internal misconduct investigations.

Brown et al. (2020) contribute to this discussion by exploring the role of procedural justice and organisational support in a UK police force. Their cross-sectional study suggested that procedural justice, mediated by perceived organisational support, can reduce emotional exhaustion and increase discretionary effort among police officers and staff. While not specifically focused on misconduct investigations, these insights raise important questions about how fair procedures and organisational support might influence officer well-being and behaviour during challenging periods.

Cartwright and Roach (2020) provide crucial insights into the prevalence and trends of psychological ill-health in UK policing, which is particularly relevant when considering the potential impact of misconduct investigations. Their quantitative analysis of sickness absence data from 20 UK police services, representing approximately 57% of

all UK police employees, revealed that absences due to psychological ill-health and stress nearly doubled over a ten-year period, from 4.72% to 8.82%.

Notably, Cartwright and Roach found that stress accounted for 56.40% of these absences, followed by anxiety and depression. While their study doesn't specifically address misconduct investigations, it highlights the already heightened levels of stress and psychological vulnerability within policing. This context is crucial when considering how officers might experience the additional stress of a misconduct investigation.

Furthermore, Cartwright and Roach's finding that 39% of officers who took one period of absence due to mental ill-health went on to take additional periods raises important questions about the long-term psychological impact of stressful experiences in policing. This could be particularly relevant when considering the potential for misconduct investigations to contribute to or exacerbate existing mental health challenges in addition to financial costs due to absence and ill health.

However, it's important to note that while this study provides valuable context, it doesn't offer direct insights into officers' subjective experiences during misconduct investigations. The use of sickness absence data, while objective, doesn't capture the nuanced psychological processes that officers might undergo during an investigation. This limitation underscores the need for qualitative research that explores officers' lived experiences during these challenging periods.

The findings of Cartwright and Roach (2020) highlight the importance of considering the broader context of psychological health in policing when examining the impact of misconduct investigations. Their work suggests that officers may already be managing

significant psychological stressors, which could influence how they experience and cope with the additional stress of an investigation. This underscores the need for research that explores how officers navigate these investigations within the context of existing occupational stressors and mental health challenges.

The barriers to accessing organisational support, particularly mental health resources, are highlighted in the work of Edwards and Kotera (2021) (as also discussed in Section 2.3). Their qualitative study of UK police officers revealed that stigma, fears of career repercussions, and lack of confidence in the confidentiality of support services often prevent officers from seeking help. These barriers may be particularly pronounced during misconduct investigations, where officers might fear that seeking support could be perceived as an admission of guilt. From an officer's perspective, this creates a challenging dilemma: needing support but fearing the consequences of seeking it.

Crowe et al. (2020) further expand on this theme, identifying a significant gap between the availability of support services and officers' willingness to access them in the UK. Their mixed-methods study found that while many police organisations have implemented mental health support programmes, officers often perceive these as inadequate or potentially detrimental to their careers. This disconnect between organisational intentions and officer perceptions could be particularly problematic during the high-stress period of a misconduct investigation. Officers interviewed in the study expressed a desire for more confidential, external support options that wouldn't be linked to their professional records.

While much of the existing research focuses on the availability and perception of support services, recent studies have begun to explore the economic implications of such programmes. McCrone et al. (2024) conducted an economic evaluation of a psychological surveillance programme in UK policing, providing insights into the financial viability of interventions aimed at supporting officer well-being. Their study of the Emergency Services Trauma Intervention Programme (ESTIP) found a significant return on investment, with productivity gains offsetting the costs of the programme. Their findings suggest that organisational investment in officer well-being can yield economic benefits, which may have implications for how police forces approach support during misconduct investigations.

Studies have begun to explore the broader implications of such programmes. The concept of trauma-informed approaches (SAMHSA, 2014) offers potential insights for addressing organisational challenges in policing. These approaches emphasise creating environments of safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment, which could be relevant to misconduct investigation processes. However, the application of trauma-informed principles in policing contexts, particularly during misconduct investigations, remains largely unexplored. This gap in the literature points to a need for research that examines how these principles might be integrated into misconduct investigative processes while maintaining necessary standards of accountability. Such research could potentially inform strategies to mitigate the potential for negative psychological impacts of investigations, while ensuring the integrity of the investigative process representing a novel approach that merits further exploration. For instance, ensuring clear communication throughout the investigation process could enhance feelings of

procedural justice, while providing access to confidential support services might address some of the barriers to help-seeking identified by Edwards and Kotera (2021). However, the practical implementation of such approaches within the constraints of formal investigative procedures remains a challenge that future research should address.

In synthesising these findings, a complex picture emerges of the organisational factors influencing officers' experiences during misconduct investigations. The literature consistently points to the crucial role of perceived organisational justice and effective support systems. However, the barriers to accessing support and the potential for organisational processes to be perceived as betrayal highlight the complexity of this issue. The economic perspective offered by McCrone et al. (2024) adds another dimension, suggesting that investment in officer well-being could produce tangible benefits for police organisations.

Future research should focus on how these organisational factors interact with individual officer experiences throughout the misconduct investigation process, paying particular attention to the unique aspects of the UK policing context. This includes exploring the application of trauma-informed principles to investigative processes, conducting longitudinal studies on officers' perceptions, and examining how the 'code of silence' might influence behaviours during investigations. By addressing these gaps, researchers and police organisations can work towards developing more effective, just, and supportive processes for handling misconduct investigations, ultimately benefiting both individual officers and the broader police service.

2.5 INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND ROLE IDENTITY IN POLICING
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The professional identity of police officers and the organisational culture within which they operate are crucial factors in understanding their experiences. These aspects are particularly relevant to misconduct investigations, as such processes may challenge an officer's sense of self and their relationship with the broader police culture. This section examines the literature on these interrelated concepts, exploring their potential relevance to misconduct investigations. Misconduct investigations may particularly challenge an officer's professional identity, potentially leading to a 'spoiled identity' as described by Bullock and Garland (2018).

Bullock and Garland (2018) offer insights into the concept of 'spoiled identity' within policing. Their qualitative study, involving 59 semi-structured interviews with English officers, explored how organisational changes can lead to significant identity loss and professional stigma. Using thematic analysis, the authors found that officers experienced a profound sense of disorientation and loss when their professional identity was challenged by organisational restructuring. While this study did not specifically examine misconduct investigations, it highlights the potential for organisational processes to significantly impact officers' sense of professional self, which may be relevant to understanding the experience of being under investigation.

Westmarland and Conway (2020) explore the complexities of police culture, particularly focusing on the 'blue code of silence'. This 'code' refers to an unwritten rule among police officers not to report on a colleague's errors, misconduct, or crimes. Their mixed-

methods study, involving an online survey with respondents including police officers, PCSOs, and support staff in the UK, examined how officers navigate ethical dilemmas and the pressures to maintain solidarity with colleagues. Through quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation of open-ended responses, they found that many officers felt conflicted between their moral judgments and the expectation to support their colleagues, often leading to ethical compromises. This study's strength lies in its large sample size and the use of realistic scenarios to probe ethical decision-making. However, the use of hypothetical situations may not fully capture the nuances of real-world ethical dilemmas. Nonetheless, this study illuminates the strong sense of camaraderie within police culture and the ethical tensions that can arise from it, which could be particularly pertinent during misconduct investigations. These findings align with earlier research in the US context by Wolfe and Piquero (2011), who found that officers' perceptions of organisational justice were related to their adherence to the 'code of silence', suggesting this phenomenon is not unique to UK policing. This 'code of silence' could be particularly relevant during misconduct investigations, potentially influencing officers' willingness to report misconduct or cooperate with investigations.

Paoline and Gau (2020a; 2020b) provide valuable insights into police culture and job satisfaction among officers. Paoline (2020) offers a comprehensive review of police culture literature, developing a conceptual model that explains its causes, prescriptions, and outcomes. He discusses police culture as both a protective factor and a potential barrier to reform. Both papers highlight the complexity of police culture and its impacts on officers' experiences and behaviours. Paoline (2020) argues that the collective nature of culture helps buffer the strains that officers face daily, while Paoline and Gau (2020)

find that factors such as supervisor support and officers' perceptions of their ability to help people significantly influence job satisfaction. These insights into police culture and job satisfaction raise important questions about how misconduct investigations might impact an officer's sense of professional identity and job satisfaction.

These works collectively suggest that while police culture can provide support and solidarity, it may also present challenges. For instance, Paoline (2020) notes that some researchers have found culture can endorse violations of citizen rights or resist accountability efforts. Meanwhile, Paoline and Gau (2020) emphasise the importance of intrinsic motivations, such as helping people, in maintaining officer satisfaction across varying levels of overall job contentment. It's important to note that these studies primarily focus on American policing. While the concepts may be applicable in other contexts, such as the UK's national policing structure, further research would be needed to understand how these findings translate to different policing systems.

Demirkol and Nalla (2020) contribute to this discussion through their quantitative analysis of factors influencing job satisfaction among 1,970 Turkish police officers. Using structural equation modelling, they found that organisational support, work-life balance, and career development opportunities significantly influence officers' job satisfaction. While their study context differs from the UK, limiting direct comparability, their work underscores the importance of organisational factors in shaping officers' professional experiences and satisfaction. This could be relevant to understanding how misconduct investigations, which may affect these aspects of professional life, impact officers' overall job satisfaction and sense of belonging within the organisation. This international

perspective, along with Paoline and Gau's (2020) work in the US, suggests that while specific cultural contexts may vary, the importance of organisational support for officer wellbeing may be a more universal phenomenon.

When considering these studies collectively, several key themes emerge. First, there's a clear indication that police officers' professional identities are closely tied to their organisational context and can be significantly impacted by organisational processes. Second, the strong sense of camaraderie within police culture, while often protective, can also create ethical tensions. Finally, organisational support plays a crucial role in officers' job satisfaction and wellbeing. These themes suggest that misconduct investigations, as significant organisational processes that may challenge both individual identity and group norms, could have profound effects on officers' experiences and wellbeing.

However, these studies also highlight significant gaps in our understanding of how these factors specifically interact with the experience of misconduct investigations. The existing literature tends to focus on general aspects of police culture and identity, with limited attention to how these factors might be relevant during misconduct investigations.

There is a notable lack of research examining how officers' sense of professional identity and relationship with police culture might be affected by misconduct investigations. The potential impact of such investigations on an officer's relationship with colleagues, sense of belonging within the organisation, and overall job satisfaction remains largely

unexplored. Moreover, while Paoline's (2020) work suggests that police culture can be protective, we don't know how or if this protective function operates during the specific stress of a misconduct investigation.

Future research could benefit from more targeted exploration of how officers' professional identities might be impacted by misconduct investigations. Studies examining how the protective aspects of police culture, as described by Paoline (2020), operate in the context of misconduct investigations could provide valuable insights. Additionally, research into how the ethical tensions identified by Westmarland and Conway (2020) manifest during misconduct investigations could enhance our understanding of officers' experiences. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in officers' perceptions of their professional identity and organisational culture before, during, and after misconduct investigations would be particularly valuable.

In conclusion, while the existing literature provides a foundation for understanding police culture and professional identity, there remains a significant gap in our knowledge about how these factors specifically relate to the experience of misconduct investigations. This gap underscores the need for research that directly engages with the lived experiences of officers undergoing these investigations, exploring how they navigate the complex interplay between personal identity, professional norms, and organisational culture in these specific circumstances.

2.6 LEADERSHIP AND COPING MECHANISMS IN POLICING
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Leadership and resilience in policing have evolved significantly, reflecting changing societal expectations and growing recognition of the profession's psychological demands (Hesketh & Cooper, 2023; Hesketh & Tehrani, 2024). These concepts may be particularly crucial during misconduct investigations, which can be highly stressful and potentially career-altering experiences for officers.

Hesketh and Tehrani (2024) offer valuable insights into resilience interventions for emergency service responders, focusing on UK policing. Their Emergency Services Trauma Intervention Programme (ESTIP) aims to protect the psychological well-being of employees responding to traumatic incidents. They emphasise trauma-informed approaches and outline four levels of organisational trauma awareness. While this framework wasn't developed specifically for misconduct investigations, its principles could potentially be adapted to support officers during these processes. However, their practitioner-based perspective, while providing practical insights, lacks empirical data and doesn't directly address the context of misconduct investigations.

Hesketh and Cooper (2023) provided a comprehensive exploration of transformational leadership in promoting officer resilience, finding that leaders demonstrating empathy, clear communication, and consistent support were more effective in fostering team resilience. Their study drew on the theoretical framework of transformational leadership, which emphasises inspiring and motivating followers to exceed expected performance. They found that leaders demonstrating empathy, clear communication, and consistent

support were more effective in fostering team resilience. This approach contrasts with more traditional, transactional leadership styles often associated with hierarchical police structures. Their findings suggest that transformational leadership practices could be particularly beneficial in helping officers navigate stressful situations, potentially including misconduct investigations. The study's strength lies in its nuanced understanding of how leadership styles can influence officer well-being and performance in challenging circumstances. This transformational leadership approach could be especially relevant during misconduct investigations, where clear communication and empathetic support may be crucial for officer wellbeing. While this study provides valuable insights, it doesn't directly address how transformational leadership might be applied in the specific context of misconduct investigations.

Both studies highlight the importance of organisational support and leadership in officer well-being, but neither directly examines these factors in the context of misconduct investigations. This gap underscores the need for research exploring how leadership practices and resilience interventions might influence officers' experiences during investigations. The current study aims to address this gap by examining officers' lived experiences, potentially shedding light on how these organisational factors interact with the unique stressors of misconduct investigations.

Further contributing to our understanding of officer wellbeing, Hesketh et al. (2017) examined the role of job security and organisational support in promoting resilience and maintaining discretionary effort among police officers. Their study emphasised the importance of stable working conditions and effective organisational support in

preserving officers' wellbeing and engagement. These findings are particularly relevant to misconduct investigations, where perceptions of job security and organisational support may be significantly challenged.

When considered collectively, these studies suggest that effective leadership and resilience-building strategies can play a significant role in supporting officers through challenging periods. However, they also highlight a significant gap in our understanding of how these factors specifically operate in the context of misconduct investigations.

While these UK-based findings provide valuable insights, their applicability to other national contexts may vary due to differences in policing structures and practices. Future research could benefit from cross-cultural comparisons to identify both universal and context-specific aspects of leadership and resilience in policing.

The practical implications of these findings for understanding officers' experiences during misconduct investigations are potentially significant. Supportive, transformational leadership practices could potentially mitigate some of the stress associated with investigations. For example, leaders could ensure clear, transparent communication throughout the investigation process, provide emotional support to the officer under investigation, and maintain a fair and unbiased approach. Similarly, resilience-building programmes might equip officers with coping strategies that could be valuable during the investigation process, such as stress management techniques or peer support networks. However, it's crucial to note that while these approaches may be

beneficial, they should not be seen as a substitute for addressing any systemic issues within misconduct investigation procedures.

From the perspective of different stakeholders, these findings suggest that not only officers, but also investigators and supervisors, might benefit from leadership training and resilience-building programmes. This could potentially lead to more supportive and less stressful investigation processes. For instance, investigators trained in transformational leadership might conduct interviews in a more empathetic manner, while still maintaining the integrity of the investigation. However, it's important to consider the ethical implications of such interventions. There's a risk that resilience training could be used to shift responsibility for wellbeing onto individual officers, potentially neglecting necessary systemic changes.

Interestingly, while most studies in this field highlight the positive impacts of supportive leadership and resilience training, it's worth noting that some research has found conflicting results. For example, some studies have suggested that certain aspects of police culture, such as the emphasis on emotional control, may actually conflict with some principles of transformational leadership (Hesketh and Cooper, 2023). This highlights the complexity of applying leadership theories in the specific context of policing and underscores the need for nuanced, context-specific research.

While Hesketh and Cooper's (2023) work on transformational leadership in policing provides valuable insights, its applicability to misconduct investigations remains unexplored. Future research could benefit from examining how leadership practices

might need to adapt during different stages of misconduct investigations to support officers effectively. Longitudinal studies tracking the effectiveness of leadership and resilience interventions throughout the investigation process would be particularly informative.

In conclusion, while the existing literature provides a strong foundation for understanding the importance of leadership and resilience in policing, there remains a significant gap in our knowledge about their specific influence during misconduct investigations. Future research should examine how leadership practices and resilience interventions shape officers' experiences during these processes, potentially informing more supportive and effective investigation procedures.

2.7 MORAL STRESS AND ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING IN POLICING
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The concepts of moral injury and ethical decision-making are crucial for understanding the psychological and ethical challenges officers may face during misconduct investigations. This section examines the literature on these interrelated concepts, exploring their potential relevance to officers' experiences during investigations.

Papazoglou et al. (2020) introduced the concept of moral injury within the context of policing, drawing from research originally developed in military settings. Their theoretical study aimed to develop a conceptual framework for understanding moral injury in policing, defined as the psychological distress that results from actions, or the lack thereof, which violate one's moral or ethical code. The authors argue that police officers,

like soldiers, are at risk of experiencing moral injury due to the high-stress nature of their work, exposure to violence and corruption, and the ethical dilemmas that arise within a policing culture that may prioritise loyalty and cohesion over individual moral considerations.

Papazoglou et al. suggest that moral injury in policing can manifest in various ways, including feelings of guilt, shame, anxiety, and a loss of trust in oneself or the organisation. The strength of Papazoglou et al.'s work lies in its application of an established concept to the specific context of policing, offering a new lens through which to view officers' psychological experiences. However, the study's theoretical nature is a limitation, as it lacks empirical data to support its claims. This gap underscores the need for empirical research to explore how moral injury manifests in real-world policing scenarios, particularly during misconduct investigations. While this concept was developed in the US context, the potential for moral injury in UK policing warrants exploration, particularly given the UK's distinct regulatory framework and public expectations of police conduct. The concept of moral injury may interact significantly with police culture, potentially exacerbating feelings of isolation or betrayal during misconduct investigations. For instance, the strong sense of camaraderie in policing might intensify the moral injury when an officer feels unfairly treated by the organisation they've committed to serving.

Lawson et al. (2022) expand on this theme by examining the relationship between occupational stress, perceptions of organisational justice, and attitudes towards misconduct. Their study introduces the concept of 'noble cause corruption', where

officers justify unethical actions by believing they serve a greater moral purpose, such as ensuring public safety. Using a correlational research design with a diverse sample of law enforcement officers in the United States, Lawson et al. employed hypothetical scenarios to explore officers' attitudes towards potential misconduct.   Lawson et al. found that officers experiencing higher levels of stress were more likely to express attitudes justifying potentially unethical behaviours, particularly when they perceived a lack of fairness within their organisation.

While these findings do not directly address officers' experiences during misconduct investigations, they may have implications for understanding the psychological context in which such investigations occur. The study suggests that occupational stress and perceptions of organisational injustice could potentially influence officers' ethical reasoning. However, we must be cautious in extrapolating from attitudes towards hypothetical scenarios to actual behaviour during investigations. In the context of misconduct investigations, this suggests that the process itself, if perceived as stressful or unfair, might impact an officer's moral reasoning and decision-making during the investigation.

The limitations of Lawson et al.'s study are important to consider. The use of hypothetical scenarios and self-reported attitudes may not fully capture the complexities of real-world ethical decision-making. Furthermore, the study's correlational design limits our ability to infer causal relationships between stress, perceived injustice, and ethical attitudes. While these findings from the US context offer valuable insights, their

applicability to the UK policing system, with its distinct regulatory framework and organisational structure, requires careful consideration.

Despite these limitations, Lawson et al.'s work contributes to our understanding of the factors that may shape officers' ethical perspectives. It highlights the potential influence of organisational climate on ethical reasoning, which could be relevant when considering the broader context of misconduct investigations. However, direct research examining these factors within the specific context of actual misconduct investigations is needed to draw more definitive conclusions.

Carter (2021) further contributes to this discussion by exploring how organisational injustice can lead to a distinct form of moral injury in disciplinary processes. Through a mixed-methods study involving surveys and interviews with police officers who had undergone disciplinary procedures, Carter found that perceptions of unfair treatment during these processes were strongly associated with symptoms of moral injury, including feelings of betrayal, violation of moral beliefs, and loss of trust in the organisation.

Carter's work is particularly pertinent to understanding officers' experiences during misconduct investigations, as it directly examines the psychological impact of disciplinary processes. The study suggests that the way in which misconduct investigations are conducted could have profound implications for officers' psychological wellbeing and their relationship with the police organisation. However, Carter's focus on disciplinary processes in general, rather than misconduct

investigations specifically, indicates a need for more targeted research in this area. While UK-specific research on ethical decision-making in policing is limited, Westmarland and Conway's (2020) study on the 'blue code of silence' provides some insight into the ethical dilemmas faced by UK officers. However, their work does not directly address misconduct investigations, highlighting a significant gap in UK-based research.

These studies highlight the complex ethical landscape that officers must navigate, particularly during misconduct investigations. They suggest that such investigations have the potential to cause significant psychological distress, not only due to the stress of the process itself but also because of the moral and ethical challenges they may present.

However, these studies also reveal significant gaps in our understanding. While they provide valuable theoretical frameworks and insights into related processes, there is a lack of research directly examining how moral injury and ethical decision-making manifest during misconduct investigations. Furthermore, the existing literature tends to focus on the negative aspects of these experiences, with limited exploration of potential positive outcomes or growth that might occur through navigating these ethical challenges.

Future research should explore how officers navigate moral and ethical dilemmas during misconduct investigations, including longitudinal studies and research on minimising moral injury while maintaining accountability. The potential long-term impacts of moral

injury resulting from misconduct investigations warrant further exploration. These might include challenges in returning to duty, long-term career impacts, or changes in an officer's relationship with the policing profession.

In conclusion, while the existing literature provides a strong foundation for understanding moral injury and ethical decision-making in policing, there remains a significant gap in our knowledge about how these factors specifically manifest and influence officers' experiences during misconduct investigations. This gap underscores the need for research that directly examines the moral and ethical dimensions of these investigations, exploring how officers navigate these challenges and the potential short- and long-term impacts on their psychological wellbeing and professional identity.

2.8 SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH RATIONALE

This review has explored interconnected topics relevant to police officers' experiences of internal misconduct investigations. While existing research provides insights into various aspects of policing, significant gaps remain in our understanding of officers' lived experiences during these investigations, particularly in the UK.

The literature reveals a complex landscape of psychological challenges in policing, including high rates of PTSD and cPTSD among UK officers (Brewin et al., 2022), potentially impacting officers undergoing misconduct investigations. Organisational factors, particularly perceptions of justice and fairness, significantly shape officers' attitudes and behaviours (Wolfe and Piquero, 2011; Schulenberg et al., 2017)

The potential impact of misconduct investigations on officers' professional identity and their relationship with police culture emerges as a significant theme. Bullock and Garland's (2018) exploration of 'spoiled identity' and Westmarland and Conway's (2020) examination of the 'blue code of silence' highlight the complex interplay between individual and cultural factors in shaping officers' experiences.

While leadership, resilience, and moral injury have been identified as crucial factors in policing (Hesketh and Cooper, 2023; Papazoglou et al., 2020), their specific relevance to misconduct investigations remains unexplored.

Despite these insights, crucial knowledge gaps persist. We lack understanding of how psychological, organisational, and cultural factors interact and evolve throughout misconduct investigations. Current literature often treats these as singular events, overlooking their dynamic nature. There's a notable absence of in-depth, qualitative research on officers' subjective experiences, especially in the UK context, with temporal aspects remaining unexplored.

These gaps highlight the need for research that directly examines the lived experiences of UK police officers who have undergone misconduct investigations. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) presents itself as a particularly suitable methodology for this exploration. IPA's focus on individual, subjective experiences aligns well with the need to understand officers' personal perspectives, allowing for a detailed examination of how officers experience the experience of being under internal misconduct

investigation. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of each participant's unique experience while also facilitating the identification of shared themes.

This research approach is especially relevant to counselling psychology, as it seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals facing significant professional and personal challenges. By prioritising officers' own accounts and perspectives, this study aims to provide unique insights into how officers navigate and make sense of these experiences over time, enriching our understanding of the human dimension of policing and internal misconduct investigations.

As a practitioner psychologist and researcher, I believe it's crucial to foreground the voices of officers themselves, allowing their personal accounts and perspectives to shape our understanding. This approach aligns with my professional values and the growing recognition in qualitative research of the importance of hearing directly from those who have lived through the experiences under study. By employing IPA to explore officers' lived experiences of misconduct investigations, this study aims to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon.

In conclusion, while the current literature provides a valuable foundation for understanding various aspects of policing and organisational processes, there remains a significant gap in our knowledge about the lived experiences of officers undergoing internal misconduct investigations in the UK context. Addressing this gap through in-depth, qualitative research has the potential to contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this important aspect of policing. This could pave the way for

future research to explore how different factors might interact throughout the investigative process, potentially informing policy and practice in ways that could support both organisational integrity and officer wellbeing.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodological approach for a qualitative study exploring how serving police officers make sense of their experiences of internal misconduct investigations in England and Wales. Employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this research aims to give voice to officers' lived experiences, offering insights into an under-explored aspect of policing. Positioned at the intersection of organisational practices, psychological well-being, and professional identity, this study seeks to enrich our understanding of the human dimension of misconduct investigations within the policing profession, regardless of the outcome of individual cases.

The chapter is structured to provide a comprehensive account of the methodological decisions and processes, demonstrating the rigour and trustworthiness of the research while staying true to the idiographic focus of IPA. It begins by situating the study within existing literature, then details the research design, data collection and analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and reflections on the researcher's position. The chapter concludes with a discussion of quality measures, reflexivity, and limitations of the study.

3.2 SITUATING THE STUDY IN THE LITERATURE

This study's methodological approach is informed by recent trends in policing research, which increasingly recognise the value of qualitative methods in capturing officers'

complex experiences (Hough et al., 2018). While quantitative studies dominate police misconduct research (e.g., Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), there is a growing need to explore officers' lived experiences, particularly during misconduct investigations.

The choice of IPA aligns with the increasing recognition of the need to understand subjective experiences in policing. Recent studies, such as those exploring moral injury (Papazoglou et al., 2020) and ethical dilemmas like the 'blue code of silence' (Westmarland & Conway, 2020), have begun to highlight the psychological complexities faced by officers. These studies often focus on broader organisational issues and do not delve into the personal narratives that IPA can uncover. By focusing on the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of individual officers, this study aims to offer a richer, more nuanced exploration of how misconduct investigations impact professional identity and psychological well-being.

My focus on internal misconduct investigations builds on exploratory work by Hough et al. (2018), who interviewed police leaders and policymakers. An IPA approach aims to complement this by focusing on the lived experiences of officers themselves. The use of semi-structured interviews, supported by studies like Edwards and Kotera (2021) on mental health stigma in policing, allows for rich, detailed accounts of professional experiences.

In response to the broader recognition of challenges related to mental health and coping strategies among police officers (Crowe et al., 2022; Hesketh & Tehrani, 2024), this study employs IPA to explore these issues specifically within the context of internal misconduct investigations. While existing research has identified significant barriers to

mental health support and has explored resilience-building strategies, there remains a gap in understanding how these challenges manifest during misconduct investigations. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a deeper, more contextualised understanding of officers' experiences through the lens of IPA

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

3.3.1 RATIONALE FOR QUALITATIVE APPROACH

This study employs a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of police officers who have undergone internal misconduct investigations in England and Wales. The research question guiding this study is: "How do police officers make sense of their experiences of undergoing internal misconduct investigations?" This question, with its focus on lived experience and meaning making, naturally aligns with the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2022).

The choice of a qualitative approach, specifically IPA, was driven by several interconnected factors. Firstly, the complex and deeply personal nature of undergoing a misconduct investigation calls for a method that can capture nuanced, subjective experiences (Willig, 2013). Quantitative methods, with their focus on measurement and generalisation, would be ill-suited to exploring the rich, contextual data I seek to understand. The qualitative approach allows for a deeper exploration of the officers' personal narratives and the meanings they attribute to their experiences.

Secondly, IPA, with its roots in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, provides a robust framework for examining these experiences (Smith et al., 2022). The phenomenological foundation enables us to focus on the lived experience of officers, exploring how they perceive and make sense of these investigations within their professional and personal contexts. The hermeneutic element acknowledges the interpretative nature of this process, recognising that as a researcher, I am making sense of the participants making sense of their experiences – the double hermeneutic central to IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This dual layer of interpretation allows for a rich, nuanced understanding of the officers' experiences.

Furthermore, the idiographic focus of IPA aligns perfectly with my aim to understand individual officers' experiences in depth. As Smith et al. (2022) argue, the particular can illuminate the universal. By examining each case in detail before moving to more general claims, I honour the unique voice of each officer while also identifying patterns across experiences. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of individual narratives while still providing insights that may have broader implications for understanding police officers' experiences of misconduct investigations.

While IPA was identified as the most suitable approach for this study, other qualitative methodologies were carefully considered. Narrative Analysis, for instance, was a strong contender due to its strength in exploring how individuals construct and make sense of their experiences over time. However, it was ultimately deemed less suitable as it may have limited our ability to identify shared experiential themes across participants, a

crucial element for understanding the commonalities in how officers interpret misconduct investigations.

Grounded Theory was also considered but was deemed less appropriate, as my goal was not to develop a new theoretical model but to explore the lived experiences and individual meaning-making processes of the officers. Similarly, Thematic Analysis, while flexible, lacks the specific phenomenological and interpretative focus that IPA provides, making it less suited to the depth of exploration required in this study.

In conclusion, IPA's idiographic focus and double hermeneutic process (Smith and Osborn 2015) enables interpretation of individual experiences and broader patterns, making it the most appropriate methodology for addressing the research question. This approach allows us to delve deeply into the personal experiences of officers while also identifying shared themes that may have wider implications for understanding the impact of misconduct investigations on police officers.

3.3.2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS
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Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is grounded in three key philosophical approaches: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. These underpinnings are crucial for understanding the strengths and limitations of the methodology, and how they inform this study of officers' experiences of misconduct investigations.

3.3.2.1 PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology, the cornerstone of IPA, focuses on how individuals experience and make sense of their world. Edmund Husserl, a key figure in phenomenology, introduced the concept of "bracketing" (1927), which involves setting aside preconceptions to focus on participants' experiences as they are lived. In this study, bracketing was applied during interviews by consciously setting aside my expectations about how officers might respond emotionally to investigations, allowing unanticipated themes, such as feelings of professional isolation, to emerge more clearly.

Phenomenology in IPA draws on the works of several major philosophers, each contributing unique perspectives that informed this study's approach. Husserl's (1927) idea of bracketing, or epoché, emphasises focusing purely on how phenomena appear to consciousness, striving to set aside everyday assumptions. In this study, this meant putting aside preconceived notions about police misconduct investigations to fully engage with the officers' lived experiences. As Larkin et al. (2006) noted, complete bracketing is never fully achievable. IPA acknowledges the researcher's inevitable role in interpretation, recognising our own perspectives inevitably influence how we understand and interpret participants' experiences - a point that connects to the double hermeneutic discussed later.

Building on Husserl's work, Heidegger's (1962) concept of "being-in-the-world" (Dasein) stresses we cannot separate ourselves from our contexts. This concept is particularly relevant in understanding how officers' experiences of misconduct investigations are deeply intertwined with their roles, relationships, and the broader organisational culture of policing. For instance, an officer's experience of an investigation might be profoundly

shaped by their position within the police hierarchy or their relationships with colleagues.

Merleau-Ponty's (1962) focus on embodiment further enriches the phenomenological approach in IPA. His work highlights how physical experiences can shape one's perception of events. In the context of this study, the physical manifestations of stress, such as sleeplessness or physical tension, are integral to understanding the lived experience of being under investigation. This perspective allows for a more holistic understanding of the officers' experiences, encompassing both psychological and physical dimensions.

Sartre's (1943) exploration of how individuals are continuously shaped by their interactions with others adds another layer to our phenomenological approach. His work encourages us to consider how an officer's sense of self and professional identity might be reshaped during the investigation process, particularly under the scrutiny of others. This concept is especially pertinent in understanding the dynamic nature of officers' experiences throughout the investigation process.

These phenomenological concepts have been applied in various IPA studies, demonstrating their relevance and utility in understanding lived experiences. For example, Eatough and Smith (2017) show how attention to embodied experience can enrich understanding of emotional phenomena, a focus that is particularly relevant to this study of officers' emotional responses to investigations.

By integrating these phenomenological perspectives, this study aims to provide a rich, nuanced understanding of officers' lived experiences of misconduct investigations. This

approach allows us to explore not just the events of the investigations, but how officers perceive, interpret, and make meaning from these experiences within their unique personal and professional contexts.

3.3.2.2 HERMENEUTICS

Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, is central to IPA because it emphasises how individuals make sense of their experiences. The "double hermeneutic" is a key aspect of this approach, where the researcher interprets how participants interpret their own experiences. In this study, when an officer described feeling "betrayed" by their institution, I engaged in a double hermeneutic process by interpreting this feeling not only from the officer's perspective but also through my understanding of institutional dynamics, leading to a more nuanced interpretation of their experience.

The foundation of hermeneutics in IPA draws on several influential figures, each contributing unique perspectives that informed this study's approach. Schleiermacher's (1998) concept of dual interpretation, emphasising both grammatical and psychological aspects, aligns closely with the analysis in this study. This approach guided me to consider not only what officers say about their experiences but also how they say it - their choice of words, tone, and non-verbal cues - providing a richer understanding of their narratives.

Building on this, Heidegger's (1962) interpretative phenomenology argues that all description inherently involves interpretation. This perspective reminds us that our backgrounds inevitably influence our understanding. As a researcher with experience in police psychology, I must continually reflect on how my prior experience shapes my

interpretations of officers' accounts, a practice that was crucial throughout the analysis process.

Gadamer's (1975) 'Fusion of Horizons' concept further enriches the hermeneutic approach in IPA. Gadamer proposed that understanding occurs when the researcher's perspective meets and fuses with that of the participant. This dynamic process reflects the hermeneutic circle, where understanding of the whole is informed by understanding of the parts, and vice versa. In the context of this study, this concept guided the iterative process of moving between individual accounts and the broader dataset, deepening the interpretation at each stage.

Central to IPA, and as described by Smith and Osborn (2015), is the double hermeneutic. This involves a two-stage interpretative process where the researcher makes sense of the participant's sense-making. In this study, interpreting how officers understand their experiences of misconduct investigations involved acknowledging my active role in the meaning-making process. This approach allowed for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the officers' experiences, while also maintaining awareness of my own influence on the interpretation.

3.3.2.3 IDIOGRAPHY

Idiography contrasts with nomothetic approaches, which seek to establish general laws or principles across large samples. Instead, IPA's idiographic focus, as highlighted by Smith et al. (2022), allows us to explore how specific officers, with their unique backgrounds and experience, make sense of misconduct investigations, while also

identifying patterns across cases. This approach provides a deep understanding of individual experiences while still enabling the identification of shared themes.

These philosophical foundations - phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography - directly inform my research approach. The phenomenological aspect guides my interview process, encouraging officers to describe their lived experiences of misconduct investigations. The hermeneutic element informs my analytical process, as I interpret officers' accounts while remaining aware of my own preconceptions. The idiographic focus shapes my sampling strategy and my commitment to in-depth analysis of each case before looking for shared themes.

3.3.3 INTEGRATION OF IPA PRINCIPLES IN THIS STUDY

These three philosophical strands – phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography – integrate in IPA to create a methodology that is simultaneously deeply attentive to individual experience, interpretative, and capable of identifying shared themes across cases.

In practice, this integration guides my research in several ways. Firstly, my data collection process reflects the phenomenological focus of IPA. The semi-structured interviews are designed to elicit rich, detailed accounts of lived experience, allowing participants to describe their experiences of misconduct investigations in their own words and from their own perspectives.

Secondly, the analysis phase employs a hermeneutic approach. This involves a dynamic process of moving between parts and whole, participant accounts and my

interpretations, and individual cases and the entire dataset. This iterative process allows for a deep engagement with the data, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in the participants' accounts while also acknowledging the researcher's role in making sense of these experiences.

Finally, in the presentation of findings, I strive to balance the idiographic focus of IPA with the need to identify shared themes. This involves presenting both the particular (idiosyncratic experiences of individual officers) and the shared (themes that resonate across multiple accounts). By doing so, I aim to honour the unique voice of each participant while also drawing out insights that may have broader implications for understanding officers' experiences of misconduct investigations.

By grounding my research in these philosophical approaches, I aim to produce a rich, nuanced understanding of officers' lived experiences of misconduct investigations. This philosophical foundation guides my methodological choices, analytical process, and interpretation of findings, ensuring a coherent and rigorous approach to addressing the research question. It allows us to explore not just what happens during misconduct investigations, but how officers interpret and make meaning from these events within their personal and professional contexts, providing insights that might not be accessible through other methodological approaches.

3.3.4 EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL STANCE
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This study adopts a critical realist ontology and a phenomenological-interpretative epistemology grounded in constructionism. These philosophical frameworks guide my exploration of police officers' experiences during internal misconduct investigations.

Critical realism, as developed by Bhaskar, (1975), recognises that reality exists independently of perception but is interpreted through socio-cultural lenses. In this study, this stance allows for acknowledging the tangible effects of misconduct investigations on officers, such as emotional distress and shifts in identity, while recognising these effects are shaped by individual and institutional contexts.

The phenomenological-interpretative epistemology guiding this study emphasises understanding how officers subjectively interpret their experiences, aligning with constructionism's view that knowledge is co-constructed within social and cultural contexts (Crotty, 1998). This perspective underpins the use of IPA, which is designed to explore the nuanced ways in which participants make sense of their lived experiences.

This philosophical stance informs my methodological choices, particularly my use of IPA. IPA's focus on lived experience and meaning making aligns with my critical realist ontology and constructionist epistemology. It allows the exploration of both the 'real' experiences of officers and how they are interpreted and given meaning within their specific contexts.

By adopting this stance, I acknowledge that while I aim to understand the 'reality' of officers' experiences, my understanding is inevitably shaped by my own interpretative frameworks and the co-constructed nature of knowledge produced through the research process. This recognition underpins my commitment to reflexivity throughout the research process, as I continually examine how my own position and assumptions might influence my interpretations of participants' accounts.

3.4 RESEARCHER'S POSITION AND REFLEXIVITY

With over 22 years of experience working with UK police officers, my insider knowledge of policing culture has been both an asset and a potential bias in this study. This familiarity fostered rapport with participants, leading to richer data collection, but also required careful reflexive practices to mitigate the influence of my preconceptions (Finlay, 2008).

Reflexivity was upheld throughout the research, following Finlay (2008) and Smith et al. (2022). I kept a journal and engaged in supervision to manage my influence on the research, ensuring my interpretations were grounded in the participants' data rather than shaped by my preconceptions. For example, a key moment of reflexivity involved re-examining my initial interpretation of a participant's use of the term "betrayal," leading to a more nuanced understanding that better reflected the participant's lived reality.

The reflexive practices employed throughout the study shaped both the coding process and the final interpretation of key themes. By continuously reflecting on my position and its influence on the analysis, I ensured the final themes were a genuine representation of the participants' experiences, rather than being unduly shaped by my pre-existing beliefs.

Maintaining clear boundaries was essential given my dual role as researcher and psychologist (Bourke, 2014). I clarified my role to participants and maintained the research focus in our interactions. My insider perspective provided valuable insights but risked assuming shared understanding. To address this, I sought clarification on terms

and processes to ensure participants' perspectives were accurately represented (Smith et al., 2022).

This study acknowledges that complete bias elimination is impossible, particularly in an interpretative framework like IPA (Smith et al., 2022). However, through reflexive practices like journaling and supervision, I aimed to minimise the impact of my background on the findings, while still leveraging my experience to provide a credible account of police officers' experiences of internal misconduct investigations.

3.5 PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

Sample and Recruitment

In line with IPA's idiographic focus, the study employed purposive sampling to recruit a small, homogeneous group of participants (Smith et al., 2022). The final sample consisted of eight serving police officers who had undergone completed internal misconduct investigations within the past six years. This sample size is appropriate for IPA research at the doctoral level, allowing for in-depth analysis of each case while also enabling the identification of convergence and divergence across cases (Smith et al., 2022).

Given the sensitive nature of the study and the high risk of participant identification, demographic information has been carefully limited to protect confidentiality. The sample consisted of eight white male officers between 25-55 years old, with 10-25 years of service. Specific details such as exact ages, ranks, job roles, family circumstances, and work locations have been intentionally omitted to prevent any possibility of

identification. Furthermore, any references to experiences or circumstances that could risk identifying an officer have been redacted from transcripts and other research materials.

To ensure a focused and ethical approach to participant selection, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. The inclusion criteria were: 1) Serving police officers in England or Wales; 2) Completed internal misconduct investigation within the past six years; 3) Investigation concluded at least six months prior to the interview. Exclusion criteria were: 1) Officers with current direct professional connections to the researcher or those with whom the researcher had recent clinical relationships; 2) Officers currently under investigation or investigated in the last six months; 3) Officers currently receiving treatment for mental health difficulties.

A snowball sampling strategy was employed, an approach suited to reaching hidden or hard-to-reach populations (Noy, 2008). This strategy was chosen due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential reluctance of officers to come forward. It allowed me to build trust within the police community and reach officers who might otherwise have been hesitant to participate, while also helping to reduce the risk of coercion or perceived obligation.

In IPA, the concept of data saturation is complex. Smith et al. (2022) indicate that IPA prioritises depth over breadth. By the eighth interview, no new themes emerged, suggesting a level of thematic saturation appropriate for a doctoral-level IPA study.

[Refer to Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Flyer for additional details]

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

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Semi-structured interviews, lasting 60 to 90 minutes, were the primary method of data collection, aligning with IPA's focus on rich, detailed personal accounts (Smith et al., 2022). The flexible interview schedule, developed in collaboration with the research supervisor, was designed to cover several key areas of the officers' experiences. These areas included the officer's journey before, during, and after the investigation, exploring how the process unfolded and its aftermath. The interviews also delved into the impact of the investigation on the officer's professional identity and relationships, seeking to understand how their sense of self as a police officer and their connections with colleagues might have been affected. Furthermore, the schedule incorporated questions about the emotional and psychological responses officers experienced throughout the investigation process, aiming to capture the full range of their internal experiences. Lastly, the interviews explored the coping strategies and sense-making processes officers employed to navigate this challenging period, providing insight into their resilience and adaptation mechanisms.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide these conversations, allowing for flexibility while ensuring all key areas were addressed (see Appendix A for interview schedule).

Interviews were conducted in private locations to ensure confidentiality and participant comfort. Open-ended questions, such as 'How do you understand or make sense of what

happened to you during the investigation?' encouraged participants to lead the conversation towards aspects they felt were most significant.

All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Field notes, defined in this study as contemporaneous written observations made during interviews, were employed to capture non-verbal communications, emotional responses, and contextual elements that audio recordings alone could not document. These notes included observations of facial expressions, body language, shifts in posture, tone of voice, moments of emotional intensity, environmental factors, and my own immediate reflections on the interactional dynamics. This approach to detailed observational notetaking aligns with my professional practice as a forensic psychologist, where documenting non-verbal communications and contextual elements is standard practice for capturing the full scope of an individual's experience.

The rationale for including field notes was threefold: first, to record embodied aspects of participants' experiences that would be lost in audio recording alone (such as when Ben visibly tensed while describing feeling like he was "crashing off a cliff"); second, to document the emotional atmosphere of the interview space; and third, to provide contextual anchors that would help reconnect with the lived moment during later analysis. While this practice is not explicitly outlined in all IPA guidelines, it enhances the phenomenological commitment to understanding lived experience in its fullest sensory and emotional dimensions.

At the beginning of each interview, I explicitly discussed my intention to take notes and invited participants to view these notes at any time, ensuring transparency. Participants generally responded positively to note-taking, with many seeming to appreciate the attentiveness it demonstrated to their accounts. By maintaining a balance between note-taking and active listening, I was able to document important non-verbal data while preserving rapport and emotional attunement throughout the interviews. These notes proved particularly valuable during analysis, enriching my interpretation of participants' lived experiences beyond what transcripts alone could provide.

Challenges included participant hesitancy and emotional responses, addressed through active listening, offering breaks, and reminding participants of their right to pause or stop the interview. My professional experience working with police helped me navigate these sensitive moments, allowing me to support them while fulfilling my research role.

[Refer to Appendix C: Sample Transcript Excerpt]

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS
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The analytical process followed the updated Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach outlined by Smith et al. (2022). This iterative and inductive process involved deep engagement with participants' accounts through the researcher's interpretative framework, guided by the study's research questions to ensure coherence between questions, methodology, and findings.

The analysis proceeded through several key stages, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the data:

Familiarisation with Data: This initial stage involved reading and re-reading each transcript alongside the corresponding audio recordings. This process was critical for immersing myself in the data, allowing initial insights and patterns to emerge naturally. Observations were recorded in a reflective diary, essential for guiding later stages of analysis by capturing evolving thoughts and biases.

Initial Coding: In-vivo coding was employed to capture key phrases and terminology directly from participants. This approach was chosen because it preserves the participants' voices and highlights the personal significance of their narratives. Personal experiential statements (PES) were identified to encapsulate the essence of each participant's experience, forming the foundation for deeper thematic analysis.

Theme Development: From the identified PES, personal experiential themes (PETs) were developed, reflecting unique aspects of each officer's experience. These themes were then grouped into broader group experiential themes (GETs) to capture common experiences across participants. This process involved moving between individual accounts and the broader dataset, aligning with the hermeneutic circle principle.

Double Hermeneutic Analysis: A double hermeneutic process was employed, where I interpreted participants' sense-making while continuously reflecting on my own interpretative role (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This dual-layered interpretation was essential for capturing the nuanced complexities of the officers' experiences.

Consistency Checks and Verification: To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the emerging themes, consistency checks were conducted by revisiting transcripts and comparing the themes with the original PES. This iterative process of refinement helped

in validating the themes and ensuring they were firmly grounded in the participants' narratives.

Engagement with the Hermeneutic Circle: Throughout the analysis, I engaged with the hermeneutic circle, moving between individual PES and broader GET to refine interpretations. This iterative process was crucial for deepening the understanding of how officers' experiences were constructed and interpreted within their specific contexts.

Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and Polarised Themes

Group Experiential Themes (GETs) allowed for a sophisticated understanding of shared experiences while maintaining IPA's idiographic focus. Attention was paid to polarised themes, which highlighted contradictory or oppositional experiences within participants' narratives, such as simultaneous trust in and disillusionment with their institution. These polarised themes were essential in capturing the complex realities of the participants' professional lives, providing insight into the conflicting emotions and perceptions that can coexist in response to misconduct investigations (Smith et al., 2009). For instance, several participants expressed feelings of both loyalty to their institution and a deep sense of betrayal, reflecting the tension between personal values and institutional actions.

Reflexivity was integral to the entire analytical process. I maintained a reflective journal to document analytical decisions, emerging thoughts, and potential biases. Regular supervision sessions were also held to challenge my interpretations and ensure they remained grounded in the data rather than influenced by preconceptions. Peer debriefing

sessions provided additional perspectives, further enhancing the credibility of the analysis.

The final analysis stage involved organising the GETs into a narrative of participants' shared experiences, supported by verbatim extracts to ensure the findings accurately reflected their realities (Smith et al., 2022).

[Refer to Appendix D: Sample Analysis Process]

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was obtained from City, University of London Ethics Committee (approval code: ETH2223-0361). Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, several key ethical measures were implemented:

Informed Consent: Participants received detailed study information and provided written consent after ample consideration time. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasised, ensuring it was independent of their professional role. Potential risks and benefits were clearly communicated.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All identifying information was anonymised during transcription, with pseudonyms used in reporting. Data was stored on encrypted devices, with participant identifiers stored separately from interview data. The limits of confidentiality were explained, particularly regarding disclosure of serious misconduct.

Participant Wellbeing: A protocol was established to address potential distress, including offering breaks, having a clear procedure for pausing or terminating interviews if necessary, and providing contact information for support services. Post-interview debriefing was conducted to ensure participants' emotional wellbeing.

Dual Roles: Clear boundaries were maintained between my research role and previous professional roles, explicitly discussed with participants to prevent role confusion and potential conflicts of interest.

Right to Withdraw: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, up until the point of data analysis. The process for data withdrawal was clearly explained.

Data Management: Procedures for secure data storage, access, and destruction were implemented in compliance with data protection regulations.

[Refer to Appendix E: Ethical Approval Documentation]
[Refer to Appendix F: Participant Debrief Sheet]
[Refer to Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet]
[Refer to Appendix H: Consent Form]

3.9 QUALITY AND VALIDITY
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This study adhered to Yardley's (2000, 2017) guidelines for qualitative research quality. Yardley's original framework (2000) introduced four key criteria for assessing qualitative research, which were later refined and expanded upon (Yardley, 2017). These criteria, which guided the design and execution of this study, include:

Sensitivity to Context: Maintained through a comprehensive literature review on police misconduct investigations and awareness of the socio-cultural setting of policing in England and Wales. This contextual understanding informed data collection and analysis, ensuring officers' perspectives were interpreted within their specific professional contexts.

Commitment and Rigour: Demonstrated through sustained engagement with the topic of internal police investigations. Each officer's case was thoroughly analysed before cross-case comparisons. Regular supervision and peer review sessions challenged and refined interpretations, particularly in understanding the nuanced experiences of officers undergoing misconduct investigations.

Transparency and Coherence: Ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail of analytical decisions throughout the research process. A clear narrative links the research question on officers' experiences of misconduct investigations with methodological choices, demonstrating coherence throughout the study.

Impact and Importance: Highlighted by the study's focus on an under-researched area - officers' lived experiences of internal misconduct investigations - which has significant implications for policy and practice in policing, potentially informing how such investigations are conducted and how officers are supported through the process.

The analysis explored convergence and divergence between officers' experiences to capture both shared and unique aspects of undergoing misconduct investigations. This

approach provides a robust foundation for understanding this critical aspect of policing from the officers' perspective.

These measures collectively ensure the study's findings on police officers' experiences of misconduct investigations are credible, transferable, and grounded in rigorous qualitative methodology. This approach offers valuable insights into this critical aspect of policing from the officers' perspective.

3.10 CONCLUSION
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This chapter has outlined the IPA-informed research design, demonstrating how the methodological choices align with the central research question: "How do police officers make sense of their experiences of undergoing internal misconduct investigations?" The study's methodology, grounded in the principles of IPA, is designed to delve beyond the factual occurrences of misconduct investigations, focusing crucially on how officers subjectively experience, interpret, and attribute meaning to these events within their personal and professional contexts.

While acknowledging the limitations inherent in this approach, particularly in terms of generalisability, the depth and richness of the data provide valuable insights that extend beyond the immediate context of this study. The emphasis on reflexivity and cultural specificity ensures that interpretations are grounded in the participants' realities, contributing to both theoretical discourse and practical policing considerations.

As we move to the analysis chapter, these methodological foundations will guide the interpretation of participants' narratives, offering a detailed exploration of how individual experiences are situated within the broader context of policing in England and Wales. By rigorously applying IPA methods, this study aims to elucidate the complexities of how police officers make sense of misconduct investigations, potentially influencing future policing policy and practices.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents five major themes derived from an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the lived experiences of serving police officers who have undergone misconduct investigations by their own organisation. These themes aim to provide an in-depth insight into the complex and often profound impact of such investigations on officers' emotional, psychological, and professional lives.

Each theme is accompanied by a metaphorical phrase, an amalgamation of participants' descriptions and the researcher's interpretations, designed to evoke a more visceral sense of the officers' experiences. This approach honours the frequent use of metaphors by officers in this study, who often employed figurative language when conventional words seemed inadequate to describe their extreme experiences. Special attention is paid to these metaphors, which often function as what Smith (2011) refers to as 'gems' - particularly poignant expressions that offer distinctive insights into the lived experiences of participants. Smith argues these 'gems' can serve as a key to understanding the essence of an experience, often encapsulating complex emotions or situations in a single, vivid image.

While all participants expressed experiences reflective of the major themes, it's important to note that some subthemes may not apply universally to all. The five themes identified can be seen in Table 1:

Psychological and Emotional Upheaval	Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability	Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice	Social Isolation and Relational Strain	Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration
"Riding the Emotional Storm"	*"Unmoored in Familiar Waters"*	*"Shadows of Doubt in the Thin Blue Line"*	*"Alone in a Sea of Blue"*	*"Reforging the Badge of Honour"*
Emotional and Psychological Turmoil *'From Shock Waves to Emotional Quicksand'*	Loss of Professional Role and Self-Concept *'Adrift in a Sea of Uncertainty'*	Erosion of Trust in Leadership and Colleagues *'Fractures in the Police Family'*	Professional Ostracism and Personal Relationship Challenges *'Fractured Bonds: From Collegial Ties to Family Ties'*	Moral Dissonance and Embitterment *'The Tarnished Shield'*
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress *'The Lingering Storm: Mind, Body and Spirit Under Siege'*	Fear of Job Loss and Financial Insecurity *'Walking the Tightrope of Career Peril'*	Systemic Failings in Investigative Processes and Communication *'Navigating a Labyrinth of Opacity'*	Navigating Communication Restrictions and Support Networks *'Whispers in the Dark: Finding Lifelines Amidst Silence'*	Resilience and Existential Recalibration *'Rising From the Ashes of Disillusionment'*
	Navigating Professional Challenges and Reintegration *'Charting a Course Through Stormy Seas'*			

Table 1: Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and Sub-Themes

As mentioned in previous chapters, the phenomenon under investigation through this research was the lived experience of police officers undergoing misconduct investigations. These themes collectively describe a journey that begins with the shock of being placed under investigation and progresses through stages of emotional turmoil, professional uncertainty, social isolation, and ultimately, a recalibration of one's identity and purpose within the police force.

This journey, whilst not necessarily linear, regularly seems to begin with the psychological upheaval of 'riding the emotional storm', where officers appear to find themselves suddenly thrust into a state of shock and uncertainty. As they grapple with this new reality, many experience a profound crisis of professional identity, feeling

'unmoored in familiar waters' as they navigate the potential threats to their careers and livelihoods.

The process often appeared to lead to a sense of betrayal and injustice, casting 'shadows of doubt' on their relationship with the organisation and supervisors they once trusted implicitly. This disillusionment is frequently accompanied by experiences of social isolation, leaving officers feeling 'alone in a sea of blue' as they navigate strained relationships with colleagues and loved ones.

Finally, as officers attempt to make sense of their experiences, many seem to undergo a process of 'reforging the badge of honour'[1], grappling with moral injury and working to recalibrate their sense of purpose and identity within the police force.

Each participant remarked on the all-encompassing nature of this journey, describing it as an unwished-for transformative experience that fundamentally altered their perception of themselves, their profession, and their place within the police organisation. Many emphasised the importance of the ability to find meaning in their experiences as crucial factors in navigating this challenging process.

Through these themes and the careful analysis of participants' metaphorical 'gems', this chapter aims to provide a nuanced, empathetic understanding of the lived experiences

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[1] This metaphor draws on imagery sometimes associated with American policing culture but resonated strongly with UK participants' experiences of rebuilding professional identity following misconduct investigations.

of officers under investigation, shedding light on an often-overlooked aspect of police work and its profound impact on those who serve.

While these themes are presented sequentially for clarity, it is important to note that the officers' experiences are often non-linear and interconnected. To illustrate this complexity, Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of how these themes interact and overlap in the lived experiences of the officers.
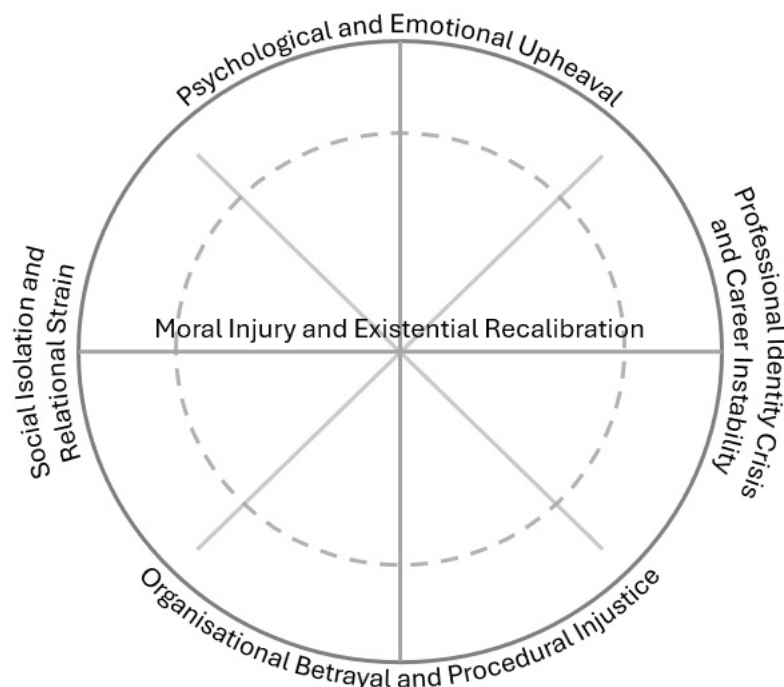
Figure 1: Non-linear Theme Interconnection Diagram

This diagram represents the five main themes as interconnected elements within a circular space. The themes are positioned around the circle, with "Moral Injury and Recalibration" at the centre, suggesting its pervasive nature throughout the experience. The lines connecting the themes illustrate their interrelationships, while the circular arrangement emphasises the non-linear nature of the experience.

The outer circle represents the overall experience of misconduct investigations, while the inner dashed circle suggests the fluctuating intensity of experiences. This visual representation aims to help readers understand the complex, interconnected nature of officers' experiences without imposing a strict linear narrative.

As we explore each theme in detail, it is crucial to keep in mind this interconnected nature of the officers' experiences. While presented separately, these themes often overlap and interact in the lived realities of the participants, creating a rich and complex tapestry of experiences that this analysis aims to unravel and understand.

4.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL UPHEAVAL
'RIDING THE EMOTIONAL STORM'
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The theme 'Riding the Emotional Storm' captures the psychological and emotional upheaval some officers face during misconduct investigations. The metaphor illustrates the turbulent and unpredictable nature of their emotions, often swept up in waves of shock, fear, and uncertainty. The intensity and impact of the storm varies amongst participants, emphasising the idiographic, fluctuating nature of their emotional responses.

The culture of policing, emphasising resilience and stoicism, may impact how officers experience and express emotions, influencing the internal processing and external expression of psychological distress.

This theme highlights the convergence and divergence in officers' experiences in this study, revealing a tension between the immediate and lasting effects of the investigation.

This polarisation reflects the complex and contradictory nature of their emotional journeys

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4.2.1 Emotional and Psychological Turmoil
'From Shock Waves to Emotional Quicksand'

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This subtheme illustrates the initial impact and evolving emotional experiences of officers in this study undergoing misconduct investigations. The 'shock waves to emotional quicksand' metaphor illustrates the officers' emotional progression, from sudden shock to a sinking feeling of instability, reflecting the idiographic nature of their responses.

Ben describes his initial reaction to finding out he was under investigation:

> ... and then, all of a sudden, it was just like crashing off a cliff again... and I just could not believe that... that they'd done that to me the first day back.... (Ben, 156-159)

Ben's metaphor of "*crashing off a cliff*" powerfully illustrates his visceral experience, conveying both psychological distress and a physical sensation of freefall and loss of control. Ben's focus on the suddenness and repetition ("*again*") hints at past trauma incidents in his career. During our interview, Ben's demeanour tensed as he recalled this moment, with his body language reflecting the tension in his words, he explains:

> And then they just took the rug from under me again... and I literally just packed my stuff up and I said uhm... I'll be at home, and I got in my car, and I drove home and just broke down at home (Ben, 176-179)

The metaphor "*rug pulled from under me*" captures the sense of instability in his professional life. The phrase "*broke down at home*" indicates the emotional impact was

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delayed until he was in a safe, private space, highlighting the conflict between professional composure and personal distress. This delayed reaction provides insight into how some officers navigate their emotional responses in a professional setting.

Participants had varied reactions to this abrupt shift, as seen in Dave's and Ben's contrasting accounts:

> He told us that he'd got some forms to serve on behalf of professional standards. Uhm...and...and I do remember now I..I..I started laughing at him because I didn't...I genuinely didn't believe, especially when he said gross misconduct uhm. That you can lose your job uhm...I...I just started laughing because I thought it was a wind up and then obviously saw his face and realised it wasn't (Dave, 93-101)

Dave's shift from ironic laughter to shock highlights the cognitive dissonance some officers experience. His struggle to articulate (*'I..I..I'*) reflects the jarring shift from disbelief to realisation. Dave's observation of the other person's face seems to signify a moment of rapid recalibration of his understanding of his situation.

Ben and Dave's contrasting reactions illustrate a key divergence in officers' experiences. Ben seemed to feel immediate devastation, while Dave's disbelieving laughter shows how differently individuals might process the initial shock of an investigation. Despite their differences, both reactions may reflect cognitive conflict, as each officer struggles to reconcile being under investigation with their self-image.

Andy describes the overwhelming emotional impact of when he found out:

> When I was told... panic, fear, horror...you know...all the nasty negative emotions. Everything you don't want to experience in life...every emotion you don't want to experience...that hit me...and it just, it just, I just felt like my whole world was getting...[gulps]...collapse (Andy, 923-929)

Andy's staccato listing of emotions (*panic, fear, horror*) indicates a rapid onset of overwhelming feelings, culminating in his sense of collapse. The metaphor of his "*whole world*" collapsing indicates that the investigation may have jeopardised both his professional identity and his sense of being-in-the-world.

As I reflected on these contrasting reactions, I was struck by how quickly some officers' sense of professional stability can be shattered. My professional background made me aware of the potential for such experiences to trigger a crisis of identity, prompting me to explore this aspect further in subsequent interviews.

As the shock of being informed about the misconduct investigation subsides, some officers experience ongoing anxiety and uncertainty, seemingly caught between the desire to regain control and feelings of helplessness.

Harry's account captures this enduring distress:

> You begin to feel trapped and lost. That everything is coming to an end. That you haven't got a chance to defend yourself knowing that your job or your time is...is basically coming...coming to an end...just a weird feeling, not knowing, what could happen...just left dangling basically (Harry, 553-560)

Harry's repetition of "*coming to an end*" appears to emphasise the finality of his situation, suggesting a loss of agency. The metaphor "*left dangling*" vividly illustrates his helplessness and uncertainty, as the investigation seems to alter his sense of control and future.

Harry's and Andy's accounts share themes of overwhelming emotional impact and loss of control but differ in expression. Harry uses spatial metaphors like "*trapped*" and "*dangling,*" while Andy describes a visceral experience of panic and collapse. This

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divergence highlights how individual officers may articulate similar emotions in distinctly personal ways.

Felix underscores the widespread nature of uncertainty:

> ...shit scared...and because, you don't...you know, you...you just don't know what it's about...what?!...have you been accused of something you haven't done? Uhm...er...you...you just don't know what it is. It's...it's a completely unknown...so (Felix, 71-77)

Felix's repeated '*you don't know*' highlights his uncertainty, and the use of '*shit scared*' conveys the intensity of his fear. His rhetorical question ["*have you been accused of something you haven't done?*"] reveals the cognitive struggle to reconcile his self-perception with the possibility of misconduct.

4.2.2 MANIFESTATIONS AND LASTING DISTRESS
'The Lingering Storm: Mind, Body, and Spirit Under Siege'
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This subtheme explores the physical and cognitive manifestations of psychological distress experienced by officers in this study. The metaphor "the lingering storm: mind, body, and spirit under siege" is used to illustrate what appears to be the enduring and pervasive nature of the officers' psychological distress, highlighting how the initial shock of the investigation evolves into ongoing physical, cognitive, and emotional turmoil that continues to affect them over time.

Participants reported lasting impacts on their mental well-being, with emotional upheaval often seeming to manifest physically. Sleep disturbances emerged as a common theme, though experiences and impacts differed amongst individuals.

Andy describes his sleep issues:

> I wasn't sleeping very well...my emotions were up and down...I...I kept having nightmares and I just remember sitting in bed and like doing that [gestured putting arm bent over head] and going to sleep...I don't know why...but that used to settle me to an extent (Andy, 557-562)

Andy's uncertainty about why a self-soothing gesture calmed him ("*I don't know why*") indicates a gap between his conscious thoughts and his body's response to stress. This complexity deepens our understanding of stress reactions, emphasising the link between distress and subconscious coping strategies some officers employ to deal with it.

Cognitive difficulties seemed to significantly challenge those with poor sleep, hindering their ability to understand their situation:

> It was lack of sleep; I think. It's almost like delirious. I...I...I just could not get it out of my head...and couldn't understand how I'd been through that process. That's...that's not me. I'm a policeman...you know...God. You know...that's...that's not me (Ben, 537-540)

While Ben's account reveals the cognitive strain and identity crisis brought on by the investigation, his description of feeling "*almost like delirious*" and his repeated assertion "*that's not me*", reveals a profound cognitive discord. The experience of the investigation challenges his identity as a police officer, causing a state of confusion and disorientation. His repetitive speech seems to mirror the circular, intrusive thoughts he struggles with while unable to reconcile his self-image with the reality of the investigation.

Sleep disturbances were a common theme across several accounts, but their manifestations and impacts varied: Andy's experience focuses on nightmares and self-

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soothing behaviours, while Ben highlights the cognitive effects of sleep deprivation. This difference underscores the need to recognise how similar symptoms may be interpreted differently by individuals.

Greg remembered arriving at work for a meeting whilst under investigation. He described the intense stress he felt during what should have been a routine work meeting:

> ...pulled up to the police station, heart rate in the sky, sweating, panicking, thinking PSD are coming to get me again. What have I done now. Uhm...you know...I remember walking to my locker room during this period, shaking because I was thinking they're going to be waiting for me and this is it, every day that I go to work. It does grind you down (Greg, 910-917)

Greg's metaphor "*heart rate in the sky*" symbolises his intense physical reaction, with symptoms like an elevated heart rate, sweating, and shaking, depicting a body in fight-or-flight mode. His fear of PSD "*coming to get me again*" shows hypervigilance, a typical trauma response. The phrase "*It does grind you down'* suggests that constant physical arousal may be cumulative, gradually weakening the officer's resilience.

Hypervigilance significantly impacts many officers. Chris describes anticipating PSD behind a door, highlighting this state of alertness:

> You know, whenever somebody uhm...you know says...can we just go and have a quiet word...I think...who's waiting behind the door...and look behind the door. I'd go in and look behind the door...it's just...it's just there all the time...uhm...I don't feel it should be (Chris, 1216-1222)

Chris's habit of checking behind doors at work during the investigation indicates a deep-seated sense of threat that has become part of his being. The repetition in his speech ("*it's just...it's just there all the time*") highlights his enduring emotional state and suggests he found this recollection challenging. His final statement, "*I don't feel it should be,*" shows

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awareness of his atypical behaviour and an internal struggle between instinct and rational understanding, indicating that his perception of the environment may have been fundamentally altered by his experiences.

Hypervigilance is a shared experience among some officers, yet its expression varies. Chris exhibits physical behaviours like checking behind doors, while both Chris and Greg experience anticipatory anxiety about encountering PSD. These differences highlight how the lasting effects of investigations may vary based on individual experiences and contexts.

For some, the investigation process took a profound and lasting emotional toll, as shown by Chris's feeling of emotional evisceration:

> So, I hid my feelings... but it absolutely tore me apart, and it tore me apart inside...
> but... just ripped apart basically, just ripped apart (Chris, 525-530)

The phrases "*tore me apart*" and "*ripped apart*" emphasise the violent, destructive nature of the emotional experience, indicating deep internal fragmentation. This contrast between concealing feelings and being "*ripped apart*" reveals the tension between external composure and internal struggles.

Ed uses a metaphor to convey the enduring impact:

> Somebody said...it's just like uhm...fish and chip paper. So, like...at the time...at the time, it's just there. It's like, obviously, the fresh news and you're reading it, but in the end, when people have finished with it, it'll just get thrown in the bin...and I guess over time and a long period that...that happens to a degree, but not totally because it's...it's always there, even if it's always there just with you (Ed, 621-628)

Although the investigation may fade from others' memories like discarded newspapers, it seems to remain a constant, albeit faded, presence for this officer. Ed's reflection,

'*always there...*', highlights the lasting impact of this experience for him. The phrases "*at the time*" and "*always there*" emphasise how this past event can influence his present.

As the investigation continues, some officers experience psychological impacts that lead to existential crises, depression, and suicidal thoughts:

> I would say I was depressed. How I didn't have any...didn't have any suicidal thoughts, which I think is really good, but I did go through stages where I kind of thought, what is the point...obviously my partner's out at work and I just felt that I was now pointless...uhm...I'm not going to do the job that I really wanted to do (Harry, 146-155)

Harry's account seems to illustrate existential questioning stemming from his profound experiences. His feelings of pointlessness indicate existential concerns, while the contrast between his lack of suicidal thoughts and his search for purpose highlights the complexity of his emotional experiences. Recognising the absence of suicidal thoughts as a positive reflects his awareness of the seriousness of his emotional state and his struggle to find positives in his circumstances.

Some officers reported suicidal thoughts whilst awaiting updates on their investigation, underscoring the potentially severe psychological toll of the process for them. Ben's candid admission is especially poignant:

> I won't lie and say that I didn't think of suicide because I did... in fact several times throughout the whole process. I did. I thought it because that was the easier option... for me (Ben, 216-219)

> Uhm...[sounding and appearing choked]... I think...partly I didn't want to get talked out of it. Partly embarrassment. Because if that's how you're going to deal with it, my friend [name] who I was with when this whole thing started...he said...if you do something stupid...I'm not coming to your funeral (Ben, 786-792)

Ben's admission of suicidal thoughts, kept private, reveals his deep despair during the investigation. His repeated "*I did*" indicates a struggle to articulate this painful truth, while "*I won't lie*" may show his desire for honesty and authenticity in recounting this experience, perhaps reflecting a broader theme of truth and integrity that runs counter to his feelings of being mistrusted during his investigation. His view of suicide as "*the easier option*" highlights the overwhelming nature of the investigation process, suggesting it may be harder to endure than the prospect of ending his life. His reluctance to share these feelings, partly due to embarrassment, emphasises the stigma surrounding mental health in policing and the added burden on stressed officers.

His physical appearance of emotion [appearing choked] seemed to reveal his struggle talking about this experience. It was tangible between us, I felt his discomfort in my own throat. His friend's harsh response ("*I'm not coming to your funeral*") seemed to validate why Ben may not have told anyone and the complex dynamics surrounding suicidal thoughts, worsening feelings of isolation.

Greg similarly described reaching a profound despair that drove him to plan his own suicide:

> So, I planned it. So, I wrote my letter, uhm...and I...there was a thing in the bedroom that I was sleeping in at the time, uhm...like a support for the roof and I thought, well, if I can hang my...that'll take my weight (Greg, 426-430)
>
> I was going to hang myself because...uhm...what's the point? I'm...I'm gonna lose my job. Everyone's telling me I'm gonna lose my job...uhm...this is the only thing I've got...I love the police. I love helping people. There's no other role for me that I want to do in life...uhm...what's the point in being here? (Greg, 437-442)

Greg's detailed suicide plan emphasis his serious intent and feelings of despair involved in considering such a drastic action. The repetition of "*what's the point*" appears to show

his feeling of purposelessness stemming from the investigation, which may have threatened his career and fundamental purpose in life. His account suggests the threat to his identity as a police officer may have triggered an existential crisis.

Suicidal thoughts represented a critical convergence point for some officers, revealing a level of psychological distress investigations may cause. However, responses diverged: Harry describes his experience as depression and loss of purpose, Ben feels shame and the need to hide, while Greg focuses on detailed planning. These differences highlight the personal nature of psychological distress and the varied ways in which individuals might attempt to make sense of these experiences.

I found the accounts of suicidal ideation presented in these interviews to be particularly challenging to hear. These segments were arguably the most emotionally taxing aspects of these interviews, as I grappled maintaining my researcher role. I experienced a sense of being triggered, both as an emotional human being and a psychologist who works with police officers, encountering sadly familiar narratives of despair that resonated deeply with my professional experiences. This intersection of personal and professional perspectives momentarily blurred my ability to maintain emotional detachment.

SUMMARY

This theme reveals the profound emotional impact of misconduct investigations on officers. Participants described a journey from initial shock to enduring psychological distress, often using vivid metaphors to articulate their experiences. The analysis revealed a polarisation between external composure and internal turmoil, highlighting the tension between professional stoicism and intense emotional responses. Officers'

accounts suggest that investigations can fundamentally alter their sense of self and professional identity, leaving them in a state of prolonged uncertainty and vulnerability.

4.3 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS AND CAREER INSTABILITY
UNMOORED IN FAMILIAR WATERS
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This theme explores how investigations impact officers' professional identity and career stability. The metaphor 'unmoored in familiar waters' captures the disorientation as their once-secure professional environment becomes destabilised. The trajectory of the professional identity crisis appears to develop throughout the course of the investigation, from initial shock to a pervasive sense of instability. Officers' accounts suggest a journey that starts with disorientation, advances through feelings of fear, and frequently culminates in a redefined relationship with their profession.

4.3.1 LOSS OF PROFESSIONAL ROLE AND SELF-CONCEPT
Adrift in a Sea of Uncertainty
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This subtheme explores the destabilisation of officers' professional identity and sense of purpose. The metaphor "adrift in a sea of uncertainty" conveys feelings of being lost and directionless as their professional roles become destabilised, reflecting their disconnection from identity and purpose. It seems that many officers may be mourning the loss of themselves, as their deep identification with being a police officer means the investigation threatens not just their job but a core part of who they are.

Andy's account captures the immediate aftermath of being served investigation papers:

> To join the police was my aspiration...thought I was safe and secure doing my job. Doing the best I can helping people and all of a sudden one day it was served. I was served papers and told this one...this one could lose you your job...and then...your all...all...all...no...all your security and your plans...you know...go out of the window because you think you are going to lose everything...so yeah...not the best (Andy, 50-59)

Andy's disjointed speech may reflect both cognitive and emotional distress, symbolising his difficulty in processing the situation and expressing intense emotions. His metaphor of plans being thrown '*out of the window'* seems to illustrate a disruption in his perception of the future, compelling him to fundamentally reevaluate his identity as an officer.

Harry's account, in contrast, reflects a more advanced stage in which the initial shock has seemingly transformed into a profound contemplation of loss:

> It just felt like it was taking a part of you away, uhm...that sounds weird saying that, I've only been in the job [X] years within the roles that it just felt like them papers are served, and it was like, well, we'll take this part of your life away. It's hard to explain what I mean by that. You know, you say, you lose a piece of your heart when someone passes away. It was kind of that being taken away from you (Harry, 274-282)

Harry's metaphor, of "*losing a piece of [his] heart*," seems to reveal the profound emotional impact, indicating the process jeopardises not only his employment but part of his very being. By likening this experience to the loss of a loved one, Harry effectively communicates an intense sense of grief that is both intensely personal and emotionally devastating. This goes beyond a professional challenge; it speaks to a loss that feels fundamental, as though something irreplaceable has been taken from him. The idea that he has lost a '*piece of [his] heart*" implies that he might fear this change is permanent, and even if he remains in his position, the impact on his identity may be lasting and irreversible.

In the cultural context of policing, where emotional expression is often suppressed, Harry's metaphor challenges expectations of stoicism. His account cuts through the procedural nature of investigations, giving voice to the profound emotional and experiential toll this process seems to have taken on him. His account reflects a deeply personal loss, offering insight into how investigations may undermine an officer's sense of self.

While both Andy and Harry express a deep sense of loss, their experiences differ in terms of timing. Andy's story centres on the abrupt disruption of future plans, while Harry's account indicates a more immediate, personal loss of identity. This divergence highlights the idiosyncratic nature of how officers experience and make sense of the impact of investigations on their professional identity.

Chris's narrative reflects another aspect of this experience:

> I was isolated. They put me into...uhm, into a room at the top of the station. It was with a team and...and I was doing some fetching and carrying documents, really. So, it was not really a very worthwhile task" (Chris, 363-301)

> "It felt like I was being shuffled away into the dark corner somewhere uhm...never to...uhm...be seeing the light of [force name] like my name can be forgotten"(Chris, 1110-1112)

His account conveys feelings of marginalisation and isolation through spatial metaphors that seem to highlight the psychological and professional effects of the ongoing investigation. His description of being "*shuffled away into the dark corner*" evokes a sense of being cast aside, possibly reinforcing his feelings of invisibility and anxiety about

professional erasure within the organisation. The contrast between the "*dark corner*" and
" *the light*" suggests a shift in his status – from valued to forgotten and overlooked.

Chris's account of being placed "*at the top of the station*" and assigned "*fetching and carrying*"
tasks seems to emphasise his perceived professional dislocation. The phrase "*not really
a very worthwhile task*" suggests Chris's diminishing sense of purpose, as the meaningful
work he once associated with his professional identity is replaced by trivial duties,
shifting his role from one of significance to one that feels isolated and diminished.

His feeling of being "*forgotten*" may have significant psychological effects, worsening his
feelings of worthlessness and highlighting the essential human need for
acknowledgment and connection. In policing, where group identity and camaraderie are
integral to an individual's professional identity, the experience of isolation and erasure
may be particularly detrimental. While these accounts share the theme of lost
professional identity, they differ in how this loss is experienced. Andy's emphasises
shock, Harry focuses on emotional impact, and Chris highlights isolation.

Analysing these accounts prompted me to reevaluate my understanding of professional
identity in policing. It became apparent the formal nature of investigations may be
overlooking these personal and emotional experiences of officers, who, while grappling
with the initial shock and loss, shift their focus to more concrete concerns about job
security and financial stability

4.3.2 FEAR OF JOB LOSS AND FINANCIAL INSECURITY
Walking the Tightrope of Career Peril

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This subtheme explores officers' anxiety about job security and financial stability during investigations. The metaphor "walking the tightrope of career peril" reflects the precarious balance officers feel as they navigate the fear of career loss and financial ruin.

Andy's account illustrates this anxiety:

> I'd assumed the worst. I assumed I was going to be sacked, lose my pension ... I'd have to work until I'm 80...I'm going to have this crappy job I don't want because I love being a police officer, but I'd lose my job that I love because of this (Andy, 1282-1287)

Andy's tendency toward catastrophic thinking seems to be indicative of his fear regarding the potential loss of both his professional identity and lifestyle. His repetition of "*assumed*" underscore his anticipation of negative outcomes, potentially serving as a mechanism for emotional self-preservation. This account illustrates how Andy's sense of self seems closely linked to his role in policing, suggesting that the investigation threatens more than his job. His fear of being forced into "*this crappy job*" implies that losing his position could result in a life without meaning. This potential future symbolises a fear of identity erosion, as losing his profession may strip away a core part of who he is.

While Andy's concerns focus on potential long-term career implications, Felix's account focuses on more immediate issues:

> At the end of the day, I've got a wife and kids and a mortgage and all the rest of it. Uhm...we didn't at the time have a mortgage, but I had rent to pay. Uhm...and...and, at the time, I was the significant earner in the house, so am I going to lose my job? It all on my mind (Felix, 155-161)

Felix's listing of his responsibilities seems to make the abstract threat and uncertainty associated with job loss tangible and more concrete. This highlights the profound connection between his financial stability and his professional role. The emphasis on daily survival highlights a shift in Felix's priorities from career aspirations to financial security as a result of the investigation. His rhetorical question, '*am I going to lose my job?*" indicates that Felix is engaging in a double hermeneutic; he is not only reflecting on his own circumstances but also contemplating how his job insecurity may be perceived by others, including family members and colleagues. He appears to experience a profound sense of financial and familial responsibility as the primary earner. This situation suggests an ongoing internal dialogue and anxiety that seem to exacerbate the perceived threat to his sense of duty as a provider in the face of an uncertain future.

Greg's account captures his intense fear as the investigation continues:

> I said, look, I'm just...I'm worried I'm gonna lose my job. I was like, I'll take a final written warning, I'll just take it now, I don't care. I just wanna keep the job because then I can restart building back up. I'll just sign whatever, I don't care anymore. I just wanted this to stop (Greg, 938-943)

Greg's account seems to reflect the psychological toll of the investigation, with job security appears to overshadow his concerns about fairness and justice. His readiness to "*sign whatever*" for job security shows desperation, as he appears willing to accept unjust consequences in exchange for stability. This shift in priorities may indicate that the fear of job loss has potentially eclipsed his aspiration for a just resolution.

The statement "*I just wanted this to stop*" illustrates Greg's emotional fatigue, indicating the investigation process appears to have become intolerable, to the point where its conclusion seems more important than the outcome itself. This situation may suggest that prolonged stress has driven him to a breaking point, where the attainment of job security provides a psychological lifeline amidst the prevailing chaos. His desire to "*restart building back up*" reflects a need for immediate relief and a deeper wish for renewal or a 'rebirth' to rebuild his life and career after uncertainty is removed. Greg's experience suggests that prolonged uncertainty may lead officers to compromise their sense of justice for immediate relief and the hope of a fresh start.

These accounts highlight job insecurity with Andy expressing concerns regarding the long-term implications for his identity and future, while Felix concentrates on the immediate financial pressures he faces. Greg's sense of desperation illustrates his willingness to tolerate injustice in exchange for job security. Officers face the challenge of balancing their professional duties with the emotional toll of investigations. Alongside fears of job loss, they strive to maintain their competence and identity under scrutiny. Each officer navigates the difficulties of returning to work or adapting to new roles in their own way.

4.3.3 Navigating Professional Challenges and Reintegration
Charting a Course Through Stormy Seas
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This subtheme reflects the ongoing challenges some officers appear to face as they resume professional roles whilst still under investigation. The metaphor suggests the

turbulent and uncertain nature of their experiences, highlighting the ongoing battle to uphold professional competence and identity amidst scrutiny and self-doubt.

Felix captures this mindset upon returning to active duty whilst still under investigation:

> You know you're under investigation. So, you...you've always got that hanging over you and uhm...you're always second guessing yourself still from...from the day that you get told...uhm...and you're always thinking oh, you know...when you go to a job and you...and you...you might have to use force on somebody, you're always thinking -- shit...you know, I've gotta...I've gotta really make sure I don't do anything stupid here, or don't do this...and yes you should always be thinking along those lines anyway, but more so when you've got that hanging over you (Felix 216-227)

Felix's metaphor of the investigation as "*hanging over you*" effectively encapsulates the pervasive anxiety he experiences, which remains an inescapable presence even during routine professional activities. The repetition of the term "*always*" emphasises the unyielding nature of his self-doubt, indicating it may infiltrate all his actions, especially in high-stakes scenarios such as the application of force.

Felix's increased self-awareness, particularly in situations that necessitate rapid decision-making, seem to indicate the impact the experience of being under investigation has had on his mindset. His need to "*really make sure*" he doesn't make a mistake suggests a hypervigilance stemming from both his professional training and an amplified fear of further scrutiny. This suggests the investigation may have altered Felix's perception of his professional environment, turning routine decisions into moments of heightened self-surveillance and caution.

Greg, after moving to a new team during his ongoing investigation, emphasises similar struggles:

> I've moved to a load of new people. They're all going, 'oh, why's he come here? What's he done'? Because this is a new load of people, so they don't know, so they're obviously -- 'he's on the naughty step' sort of thing and again, the whole cycle starts again of 'don't touch him he's a leper, don't touch him. He's going out, he's going down, he's a sinking ship'   (Greg, 459-466)

Greg's "*sinking ship*" metaphor suggests a loss of control and stability in his professional identity. The imagery of a sinking ship evokes a profound sense of helplessness and impending doom, which may symbolise Greg's perception that his career or reputation is at risk. The "*naughty step*" metaphor, typically used for disciplining children, may signify feelings of humiliation or infantilisation, suggesting Greg is feeling unjustly punished or marginalised. Greg's interpretation of his colleagues' thoughts exemplifies a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith et al., 2022), as he seeks to understand their perceptions of him, adding depth to his experience of wanting integration.

These metaphors suggest a shift in how Greg and others perceive changes in their roles and identities within the organisation, moving from respected professionals to feeling contaminated, diminished, or punished. My experience as a psychologist has heightened my awareness of the potential psychological consequences of such social ostracism during investigations. This awareness has motivated me to explore the relational dimensions of officers' experiences more thoroughly in this study.

Numerous participants reported the difficulties they experienced in reconciling the necessity of maintaining work responsibilities with the emotional burden of ongoing investigations, as articulated by Dave.:

> I was back for a few days before I broke down in tears. Uhm...my line manager said one of her biggest regrets was getting me back to work because she knew afterwards it wasn't the right thing to do...uhm (Dave, 266-273)

Dave's account seems to underscore the significant emotional strain he experienced upon resuming work while still under investigation. His breakdown suggests he may not have been emotionally ready to return to work. His line manager's regret indicates a possible misjudgement in bringing him back too soon, potentially validating Dave's emotional response. This uncertainty may have contributed to Dave's emotional collapse, as he felt torn between professional obligations and emotional vulnerability.

Dave's experience may indicate a deeper need for support, both then and in retrospect. His reflection on the decision to return suggests that external pressures left him feeling vulnerable and compelled to continue despite his emotional state. This experience appears to highlight the disparity between his lived reality and the organisation's approach, emphasising the significance of emotional understanding in these contexts.

While these accounts converge on the theme of persistent challenges in the workplace, they diverge in how those challenges manifest. Felix appears to be consumed by persistent self-doubt, Greg contends with the social stigma associated with being under investigation, and Dave's experience underscores the emotional toll of striving to maintain a sense of normalcy despite significant internal strain.

Despite being exonerated of any misconduct, the repercussions of the investigation continued to affect Andy's capacity to perform basic tasks at work, as he articulates:

> I would just turn my computer on petrified I didn't want to look at anything in case anyone accused me of doing anything wrong...and then I just sat there (Andy, 1000-1030)

Andy's use of the term "*petrified*" indicates a deep fear that he associates with routine tasks. Even after being cleared of any wrongdoing, the psychological ramifications of the investigation may persist. His fear of using the computer, once a simple task, now reflects a deeper anxiety about scrutiny or accusations. This suggests that the investigation may have altered his relationship with work and reshaped his sense of competence and security in his professional environment. The ongoing fear, despite a 'no case to answer' outcome, underscores the lasting impact of investigations, leading to self-doubt and hypervigilance that may disrupt daily functioning.

This theme reveals the profound emotional impact of misconduct investigations on some officers. Participants described a journey from initial shock to enduring psychological distress, often using vivid metaphors to articulate their experiences. The analysis revealed a polarisation between external composure and internal turmoil, highlighting the tension between professional stoicism and intense emotional responses. Officers' accounts suggest that investigations can fundamentally alter their sense of self and professional identity, leaving them in a state of prolonged uncertainty and vulnerability.

4.4 ORGANISATIONAL BETRAYAL AND PROCEDURAL JUSTICE
Shadows of Doubt in the Thin Blue Line
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This theme explores the experiences of officers involved in this study, emphasising their feelings of betrayal and perceived injustice during misconduct investigations. The

metaphor 'Shadows of Doubt in the Thin Blue Line' reflects the creeping mistrust within the institution, where solidarity diminishes under internal scrutiny. The "shadows" symbolise the increasing doubt that erodes officers' confidence in organisational integrity, while the "thin blue line" represents their professional commitment. As these investigations progress, the experiences of our participants seem to transition from initial shock to profound disillusionment.

4.4.1 Erosion of Trust in Leadership and Colleagues
Fractures in the Police Family
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This subtheme examines the decline of trust in leadership and among colleagues that seems to occur during misconduct investigations. The metaphor "fractures" effectively illustrates the gradual disintegration of relationships within what officers previously perceived as a unified "police family." Their accounts describe a transition in which confidence in the organisation evolves from initial disbelief and shock to a deeper sense of betrayal.

Dave's experience serves as a pertinent illustration of this transition, employing a compelling metaphor to convey his feelings of abandonment:

> The organisation will back and support people...until...it gets to a point where it's uncomfortable to and then they'll drop you like a stone [long pause]...uhm... and I still feel like that now (Dave, 385-393)

The expression "*dropped like a stone*" conveys a profound and abrupt sensation of being abandoned when support is no longer deemed convenient. Other participants similarly articulated how organisational changes have eroded their trust. Like Andy and Greg,

Dave's emotional turmoil seems to persist, indicating the profound impact that the investigation has had on his confidence in leadership.

Dave appears to report conflicting signals from the organisation throughout his investigation:

> On the one hand...they spent...a considerable amount of money to try and get us sacked, and on the other hand, they were ringing me up and asking me to come back to work because they were short stra...short staffed (Dave, 429-433)

The tension between the perceived organisational efforts to dismiss him and its requests for his return highlights the conflicting signals some officers may experience. For Dave, this may have fostered mistrust, as it suggests unpredictable shifts in the organisation's priorities, leaving him uncertain about where he stood.

Many participants in this study expressed discomfort regarding abrupt transition from trust to suspicion, as Andy's recalls:

> I always thought they'd look after me. You know...no...you know...they'll trust me but now it's not...it's...what you've done something to a baddie...ok...they said this...but yeah, I didn't...well uhm...prove it...it's you know...you know...it's not a matter of we believe you...our standpoint is we'll believe you unless we can prove it otherwise...our stand point is we trust you over them. But now if you speak to most coppers half the time, they believe the organisation will believe the complaint first...they believe...the PSD...they believe the complaint (Andy, 1858-1872)

Andy's fragmented discourse suggests an emotional struggle in his transition from trust to suspicion. This experience mirrors that of Dave and Greg, indicating that his relationship with the organisation has shifted from one characterised by a sense of protection to one defined by scrutiny and distrust. Andy's phrase "*look after me*" may indicate that he previously viewed the organisation as fulfilling a protective, almost

parental role. However, his account indicates a shift in this perception, leading to feelings of abandonment during a time of need.

His reference to "*most coppers*" indicates that he thinks this disillusionment may be shared by other officers. By using the present tense, Andy suggests that this unsettling reality may be ingrained within police culture. His prior understanding - that "*they'll trust me*" - appears to have been replaced with the burden of needing to "*prove it.*" The repeated emphasis on "*believe*" may highlight how central trust once was to his professional identity.

The Professional Standards Department (PSD) appears to play a significant role in Andy's experience. The perception that the PSD favours complainants seems to mirror the wider experiences of procedural injustice reported by most participants in this study. The reflections of Andy, similar to those of Dave, indicate a significant shift in organisational trust away from officers, resulting in feelings of neglect and lack of support. Although the investigation has concluded, Andy's discourse continues to convey a lingering sense of loss, particularly regarding the perception that the organisation no longer trust him. His frequent pauses and hesitations may signify the emotional toll of processing this vulnerability and absence of support.

Dave, Andy, and Greg describe a gradual erosion of trust, which collectively reflects a fracture within the "police family." Their accounts indicate a disillusionment that reshapes their relationship with the force, casting doubt on their apparently once-solid professional identity.

Harry's account seems to reflect this dynamic:

> I remember having a phone call and I was next to [family name], and he asked me 'who was that on the phone?', and I said it's my inspector, and he was like, why's he telling you to find another job and all of this? He was just...he was even gob smacked with it and that it was coming from a supervisor (Harry, 448-454)

Harry's family's presence during the call seems to have intensified the emotional weight of the moment, transforming what might have been a private disappointment into a more public form of perceived betrayal. The phrase "*gob smacked*" suggests that even those outside work, like his family, shared in Harry's shock, possibly validating his feelings of disbelief.

His description that the undermining remarks came "*from a supervisor*" appears to deepen Harry's vulnerability. The involvement of family appeared to heighten the perceived betrayal. This experience could have reshaped not only how Harry viewed his professional standing but also how he was perceived by his family, adding another layer of emotional complexity to the event.

During the interview, Harry's face flushed as he recounted this moment. This subtle change in his expression seemed to convey the lingering emotional intensity. I considered probing further but held back to avoid causing discomfort. This interaction highlights the interpretative nature of research, shaped by both the participant's narrative and the researcher's decisions.

Greg's account suggests that experiences with supervisors were not all negative:

> I can't criticise the supervision I got as my welfare officer on the new shift because they were brilliant and they probably kept me going, but the ones that were my original supervisors, absolutely did not speak to me (Greg, 325-329)

Greg's experience highlights the inconsistent support from supervisors, reflecting the broader theme of polarisation described by Dave and Andy, where officers perceive different levels of support based on individual supervisors. His "*brilliant*" welfare officer seems to have "*kept me going*" and helped sustain his resilience, while silence from his original supervisors likely increased his isolation.

Feeling isolated and excluded during an investigation may affect some officers' sense of belonging, as captured by Ben:

> I sort of likened it to a school of fish...the police are all swimming in the same direction...and as soon as you're on that naughty step...for want of a better expression...you're the one fish that's swimming the other way. And that's...I felt the whole raft of, wow...everything and everybody is against me here... (Ben 326-332)

Ben's "*school of fish*" metaphor indicates his separation from peers. The contrast between his colleagues swimming in unison and Ben's solitary swim in the opposite direction suggests his shift from feeling connected to feeling like an outsider. The image of his solitary swim suggests both isolation and a shift in identity. This mirrors Greg's account of physical and social dislocation during his shift transition. Both officers describe a sense of separation from colleagues, possibly intensifying the emotional toll of the investigation.

The term "*naughty step*" appears to evoke a sense of childish punishment, suggesting Ben may have experienced a reduction in his professional status. His comment "*everything and everybody is against me*" may reflect his sense of isolation from colleagues.

Greg's shift change indicates the isolation he experienced:

> I'm now moving shifts as well, so I've got moved to another shift...and so I got moved to [location name]. Now I wasn't allowed to speak to anybody on my shift. So, they said you're not to speak to anybody'. So, I well... I don't know, I'm in the poli...I've been...I've moved here, I haven't got anyone else. They're the only people I know... and they were like...well, you're not...you...you can't speak to them' (Greg, 171-179)

Greg's fragmented speech, particularly his repetition of "*moved*," may indicate his struggle to adapt to the enforced dislocation during the investigation. His experience of being both physically moved and socially isolated resonates with Ben's description of feeling like the "*one fish swimming the other way*." Officers appear to feel removed from their former group. The transfer to a new location, shift pattern, and restrictions on colleague communication, may have intensified his sense of social isolation, leaving him feeling physically present but socially absent. His phrase "*I haven't got anyone else*" indicates vulnerability, showing he was cut off from familiar support systems when he needed them most.

The directive to avoid communication with colleagues likely contributes to Greg's isolation. His recollection of being prohibited from speaking to anyone during his shift suggests a broader experience of disconnection that disrupted collegial relationships integral to a sense of belonging. This enforced silence may have challenged his professional identity, further separating from the group, leaving a lasting emotional impact, even after the process ended.

This subtheme illustrates a deep sense of isolation that appears to arise during internal misconduct investigations. Officers Ben and Greg demonstrate how the process can lead to social and professional isolation, both conveying their sense of exclusion using vivid metaphors of physical and social dislocation. While Ben's 'naughty step' metaphor highlights his perceived loss of professional status, Greg's experience of both shift and team changes underscores his vulnerability in losing supportive bonds he once relied on.

This erosion of trust and belonging within the "police family" appears to have long-term emotional impacts. The organisational practice of restricting communication could signal a systemic issue, increasing alienation and weakening the bonds of loyalty and camaraderie. This potential fracturing of trust raises questions about balancing accountability with support in the investigative process.

4.4.2 Systemic Failings in Investigative Processes and Communication
Navigating a Labyrinth of Opacity
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This subtheme explores officers' perceptions of systemic failings within investigative processes, with a focus on communication breakdowns and procedural inconsistencies. Officers' experiences suggest they were navigating a complex and often opaque system, where the lack of clarity left them feeling disempowered. The metaphor of "navigating a labyrinth" encapsulates their struggle to understand procedures that seemed deliberately unclear, leading to heightened frustration and mistrust.

Chris's experience highlights the confusion and lack of transparency reported by many officers in their investigations:

> I had an email from an inspector at [X] one day to say come and see me in my office. No idea why...there was nothing else about that at all. Hadn't got a clue. Went to see him....He didn't speak to me and said come with me and walked through [location] into an office in the old building. Hidden behind the door, there were two professional standards officers (Chris, 92-102)

His repeated phrases '*no idea why*' and '*hadn't got a clue'* indicate sudden confusion and loss of control in an increasingly obscure process.   His workplace, once a structured environment, became a space of uncertainty. Being led without explanation through the building further emphasises his lack of control, as though he was navigating a process that seemed deliberately obscure.

The image of the officers "*hidden behind the door*" may symbolise the hidden nature of the investigation itself, possibly reflecting a broader theme of opacity in the internal misconduct investigative process, where officers may be caught off guard, contributing to feelings of mistrust and vulnerability. The unannounced presence of these PSD officers appeared to heighten his disempowerment, suggesting the system may not be designed to be transparent, but to disorient and destabilise.

His account contributes to a shared narrative in our participants where they recall experiences of sudden and unexplained actions by Professional Standards Department (PSD) they perceive as intentional efforts to undermine officers' sense of security, trust, and control. This feeling of being caught off guard or misled appears to represent a deeper psychological impact on officers, reflecting a breakdown of trust in the organisation and its investigative processes.

Chris later shares a moment that illustrates his perception of bias within the process:

> There was disclosure from PSD officers ohm...and there was a PSD inspector uhm...and investigator in PSD, after about 12 to 18 months...that said...we've reviewed this case...there is no...there's no evidence at all to support any of these allegations...and the inspector had written back...and I've got it written down still...'I don't care, go away and find something' (Chris, 850-859)

Chris's account of the PSD inspector instructing the investigator to "*go away and find something*" despite his conviction of the lack of evidence seems to have marked a critical turning point in his relationship with the misconduct investigation. His disillusionment appears to crystallise in this moment, where the investigation seemed to persist despite his belief in the absence of proof. This phrase "*go away and find something*" likely intensified his perception the process was biased, driven not by truth but by a need to confirm guilt.

His repetition of "*I've got it written down still*" suggests that this moment left a lasting emotional imprint, possibly symbolising his growing mistrust in a system that seemed to be working against him. Holding onto this written record looks to have provided him with tangible evidence of what he viewed as the unfairness of the process.

The continuation of the investigation despite exculpatory evidence echoes the experiences of other participants, such as Felix and Harry, who also felt trapped in a process that appeared to prioritise outcomes over fairness. Chris's experience, like theirs, highlights the emotional toll of navigating a system that seemed to disregard its own principles, leaving officers feeling powerless and disillusioned.

In reflecting on this moment, Chris seems to underscore the systemic issues that he feels may underpin the investigative process. The perceived persistence of his

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investigation, despite a lack of evidence, might indicate a breakdown in the fairness he once trusted, further eroding his professional identity and sense of justice.

Harry's experience of navigating the process reflects his deep sense of disempowerment and confusion:

> Obviously not knowing the ins and outs of the procedures, uhm...I thought I'll be going to this hearing. Uhm...they've charged me for things that they haven't really got anything to...listening to, I just thought I'd go to this hearing and...and they'd get rid of me because I've got nothing, no leg to stand on with what's been said yet, or what evidence is there? (Harry, 474-481)

Harry's fragmented speech may reflect the confusion and anxiety he may have felt as he tried to make sense of an unfamiliar and complex investigative process. His use of the phrase "*no leg to stand on*" might indicate a deep-seated fear of helplessness, as though he perceived the system as impenetrable and beyond his control. The expectation of being "*got rid of*" despite a perceived lack of evidence could suggest that Harry felt the process was not one of impartial judgment but rather one where the outcome was predetermined. It seems the opacity of the procedures heightened his sense of vulnerability and disempowerment. Harry's narrative, with its hesitations and pauses, may mirror the inner turmoil and lack of agency he experienced, leaving him struggling to understand or influence the outcome. This experience of feeling trapped in an inscrutable system resonates with other participants' accounts of similar disempowerment, suggesting a broader theme of alienation during these investigations.

Chris expresses the fear and uncertainty that accompanied the investigation:

> That's the worst thing, isn't it? If you're accused of something that you haven't done, it's a nightmare...how do I prove that I haven't done it? And then you're thinking, well, what if they don't believe me? And then you're thinking, well, what if they do believe me, but they still want to get rid of me anyway? (Chris, 121-126)

Chris's internal dialogue, as he grapples with the fear of being falsely accused, could suggest the profound psychological toll of the investigation. His use of the word "*nightmare*" might capture the surreal and inescapable nature of his experience, where he felt trapped in a system that appeared to operate against him. The repetition of "*what if*" could reflect his spiralling anxiety, not just about proving his innocence, but about the unsettling prospect that even being believed might not be enough to secure his future. This emotional tension may reflect the perceived imbalance of power that officers, like Chris, often describe - where proving their innocence may feel futile in a system, they feel has already undermined their trust. The fear of possible arbitrary dismissal, even in the absence of guilt, appears to amplify the sense of helplessness, as if innocence alone offers no security.

Felix's recounting highlights a moment where he felt threatened by the power dynamics at play:

> The officer from PSD, who was uh...who made a point of telling me that he was a retired detective from the [large urban force] and, you know, how much experience he had...and uhm...and then he uh...he made this veiled threat about my pension. Uhm...and basically said, you know that all...all he wanted was the truth and that if I...if I was truthful with him, uh...he wouldn't take my pension, uhm...uh...which I found funny because I'm not in the pension (Felix, 300-320)

Felix's description of this experience suggests he may have felt both coerced and manipulated by the investigator's implied threat about his pension. The investigating officer's reference to his own career as a retired detective from a "*large urban force*" appears to be a deliberate attempt to assert authority and legitimacy, potentially reinforcing a power imbalance in this situation. Felix's use of the term "*veiled threat*" implies a sense of intimidation, where he may have felt pressured to comply.   As a

researcher this prompted me to reflect on the possible reason for the investigator's casual mention of his extensive career which for Felix seemed like an attempt to wield his authority in a way that heightened Felix's sense of powerlessness, suggesting a dynamic where investigators may manipulate the power structure to their advantage.

Felix's humorous response about not even being part of the pension scheme, while light on the surface, seems to mask a deeper emotional conflict which I felt was presented with a tone of mockery. His irony could be interpreted as a coping mechanism, potentially allowing him to regain a small sense of control or deflect the discomfort of the situation.

This experience, and the way Felix recounted it, closely aligns with accounts from other participants such as Chris and Harry, who also described experiences where they felt pressured or manipulated by the investigation process. The shared perception of power imbalance, where investigators seemed to hold all the cards, emerges as a thread between their experiences. Felix's sense the process was less about uncovering the truth and more about securing compliance reflects a broader pattern of disillusionment, where officers appear to feel the system is designed to undermine them rather than offer fairness.

Reflecting on this moment, I found Felix's use of humour particularly striking. It left me wondering whether humour was a way for him to distance himself from the emotional weight of the interaction, allowing him to gain a small victory in an otherwise intimidating situation. This left me wondering about the long-term emotional effects of these

investigations and whether humour serves as a way for participants to protect themselves from further emotional harm and possibly masking an even deeper emotional toll.

Felix continues to describe the sense of uncertainty and pressure during his investigation:

> It's difficult because you don't know at the time what exactly it is you've been accused of, fully. Uhm...and, uh...there's a fine line that you've got to walk between, uh...doing what you're obliged to do under law and uhm...being obstinate and being seen to prevent them from doing what they want to do   (Felix, 545-551)

Felix's metaphor of "*walking a fine line*" may capture the perceived precariousness of his position during the investigation. His uncertainty about both the nature of the accusations and the extent of his obligations might reflect a deep sense of disempowerment, as though he were navigating a process where the rules were unclear and constantly shifting. The phrase "*fine line*" suggests that Felix felt he was under intense scrutiny, with any misstep potentially being misinterpreted as resistance or defiance.

This experience may align with those of other participants, such as Chris and Harry, who similarly seemed to struggle with the opacity of the investigative process. Felix's uncertainty about what he was accused of left him in a state of confusion, unsure of how to respond or defend himself. His concern about being seen as "*obstructive*" seems to highlight the anxiety officers may face, where even cooperation might lead to negative outcomes.

Felix's body language during this part of the interview appeared to reflect his inner tension. He leaned forward slightly, his hands tightly clasped together, which might suggest the physical manifestation of his anxiety. This posture, combined with his fragmented speech, seemed to illustrate how deeply this sense of uncertainty and vulnerability affected him. The pressure he described appeared to leave him in a state of heightened alertness, as though he were constantly balancing on the edge of a misstep.

Felix's experience may reflect a broader feeling of powerlessness that other officers shared. Navigating blurred boundaries between compliance and self-protection may have contributed to his heightened sense of vulnerability. It appears the investigation process may have felt designed to catch some officers off guard, leaving them emotionally and cognitively burdened by the challenge of balancing rules and avoiding misinterpretation.

Felix's account captures his growing frustration with what he perceives as inconsistencies in the investigative standards applied to him:

> When you've got people who are saying things that are designed to threaten you into saying what they want you to say, you know, if you did that in a PACE interview, it'd be thrown out of court. If...if you did that uhm...with a solicitor present, you know...you know, they'd stop the interview because it would be non-compliant. Uhm...and yet they...they seem to live by a completely different set of rules to everybody else   (Felix, 660-661)

Felix's comparison to PACE interviews seems to reveal a profound frustration with the investigative standards applied to him. As an officer himself, Felix is bound by legal protocols that demand his strict adherence to fairness and compliance, yet during his own internal investigation, he seems to have felt these principles were disregarded by PSD investigators. His words, "*a completely different set of rules*," hint at a perceived double

standard, as though the PSD investigators were not held to the same level of accountability that he is required to meet. This contrast likely intensified Felix's sense of injustice, as he felt judged by standards that those conducting his misconduct investigation did not seem to follow. His repetition of "*you know*" suggests that Felix is grappling with the disconnect between his expectations of fairness and the reality he faced, where the rules seemed selectively applied, deepening his sense of vulnerability. The phrase "*everybody else*" could imply a feeling of isolation, where Felix perceives himself and his colleagues as bound by one set of rules, while misconduct investigators operate under another, more lenient framework.

The fragmented speech and repeated pauses suggest Felix's difficulty in fully processing the gap between the fairness he expected and the reality he experienced. His reference to how "*a solicitor would stop the interview*" evokes a sense of powerlessness during the investigation, as though he was caught in a process where the usual safeguards no longer applied. This disparity likely intensified his feelings of vulnerability, as the professional standards he must continue to uphold seem to have been inconsistently applied when he was under investigation.

When sharing these particular accounts, Felix's body language – upright and crossing his arms - seemed to act as a physical barrier, as if shielding himself from the memory. His posture suggested discomfort and a need to protect himself, perhaps reflecting the emotional strain of revisiting a process where he felt he had no control.

The broader pattern of perceived bias resonates with the experiences of other participants, such as Chris, who also described feeling powerless during investigations where outcomes appeared predetermined. Felix's account highlights a recurring theme: the emotional and psychological toll of navigating a system that felt inconsistent and unaccountable. His frustration may reflect a deeper disillusionment with the way investigative standards seemed to shift, creating an environment where trust in the process - and the system more broadly - was profoundly shaken.

Harry's perception of the investigative process reveals his feeling the system was skewed from the start:

> I think that that is their agenda is to prove that someone's done something wrong, whereas it's 'we're evidence gatherers and we should...uhm...I'm proving whether they've done something, or they haven't'...but they're entirely focused on they've...they've done something wrong, so we'll...we'll keep prodding (Harry, 944-952)

Harry's reference to the investigators having an "*agenda*" suggests that he believed the process was not just biased, but deliberately focused on proving guilt from the outset. His repetition of "*they've done something wrong*" and the phrase "*keep prodding*" conveys a sense of continuous pressure, as though the investigation was designed to confirm guilt rather than neutrally gather evidence. This language suggests that Harry felt targeted by the process, with the investigators' "*focus*" on proving wrongdoing overshadowing principles of fairness.

The mention of "*agenda*" hints at a deeper perception the investigation was deliberate and pre-planned to achieve a guilty outcome regardless of the evidence, leaving Harry feeling

scrutinised through the lens of assumed guilt. This perception aligns with Felix's experience of feeling the rules were selectively applied and with Chris's frustration over the predetermined nature of his own investigation. For Harry, the repeated emphasis on "*prodding*" may reflect a growing sense of emotional weariness, as though the investigation was an ongoing pressure designed to break down his defence.

These reflections might hint at a broader cultural tendency within the organisation towards a more accusatory investigative approach. Harry's account suggests that this process may not be unique to his experience but instead reflects a pattern observed by others. His feelings of being targeted might point to a view of an organisational environment where the emphasis on uncovering wrongdoing can overshadow impartial fact-finding.

The fragmented speech and pauses in Harry's account, particularly the hesitations around "*uhm*" and the repetition of key phrases, suggest that he struggled to articulate this sense of being cornered by a process that felt deliberately stacked against him. His perception of an "*agenda*" reveals a deeper mistrust, not just in the investigative team, but in the entire system, as though the broader culture within the organisation itself was working against him.

Andy's experience highlights the communication breakdown that often characterised his experience of interactions with PSD:

> I know some people in PSD, I used to work with them and like some of them are bloody nice and they're working on proper nasty people...but I just don't...if they cared why don't they ring you? Why don't they just email you? 'Listen...I'm

investigating you I know, but I'm just letting you know I'll update you...I'll keep you updated'. Uhm...but yeah...but yeah... it is what it is (Andy, 2079-2086)

Andy's account appears to reflect the growing tension between his past professional experiences with PSD officers before they worked in PSD and the lack of communication from investigators that he encountered during his own investigation. His statement "*I used to work with them*" suggests familiarity with PSD staff in a capacity outside of being under investigation. This background seems to inform his frustration, as he knows the difficult work PSD does in handling "*proper nasty people*." Yet, in his own experience, Andy seems to have encountered a breakdown in communication that contrasts with his expectations. This dissonance may have intensified his feelings of neglect, as though PSD was not applying the same professional standards to his case. His use of rhetorical questions, like ("*why don't they ring you?")* suggesting his bewilderment and disappointment. These simple expectations seem to highlight his growing frustration, where the absence of updates seems to feel like a failure of decency. His sense of exclusion appears to contrast with his earlier respect for PSD's role, potentially leaving him feeling let down by a process that seemed to lack transparency.

 The phrase "*it is what it is*" indicates a resigned acceptance of the situation, suggesting a feeling of powerlessness in dealing with systemic issues. This resignation hints at a possible change in Andy's perspective, where he has had to adapt his expectations and come to terms with a reality that may not meet his standards of fairness or professionalism.

Chris reflects on how his experience under investigation fundamentally changed his approach to future encounters with the process, revealing a sense of growing mistrust and self-protection:

> I have said that since then that if ever...they tell me I'm in an investigation...I will completely shut down...I will not help them...I will not assist in any way shape or form...I will not voluntarily be spoken to...uhm...they will have to arrest me. If I'm arrested, I'm protected...I'm protected by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. We need to have a similar process for an investigation into police...as PACE is to any other suspect in the crime (Chris, 1373-1382)

Chris's statement, "*I will not help them...I will not assist...I will not voluntarily be spoken to*," appears to underscore what seems to be a significant shift in his attitude toward the investigative process. This repetition could reflect the emotional intensity of his decision to protect himself. The comparison Chris makes between PACE protections for suspects and the lack of similar protections for officers under investigation appears to reflect his disillusionment with the investigative process and a desire for fairer treatment.

Felix expresses his frustration with what he perceives as selective enforcement of investigative standards:

> Uhm...and uh...and yet, you know, when you go to them with people who are actually doing things wrong, who are actually people who shouldn't be in the job, they don't do anything (Felix 528-531)

Felix's account seems to capture a significant level of frustration, particularly around what he perceives as selective enforcement of investigative standards within the PSD. His repeated use of the word "*actually*" might suggest a disconnect between what he believes the PSD is meant to uphold and what he observes in practice. This repetition

may emphasise his disbelief and frustration that, in his experience, clear instances of wrongdoing are seemingly ignored.

Felix's reflection on "*people who shouldn't be in the job*" could point to a deeper concern about fairness, where he, as an officer, might feel bound by professional standards that he perceives aren't consistently applied. This sense of inconsistency may have led Felix to question the integrity of the investigative process. His account could indicate that, over time, his trust in the system has been eroded, leaving him uncertain about whether the rules he is required to follow are being applied equally to everyone.

This perceived inconsistency in enforcement might resonate with other participants' experiences, particularly Chris's sense that investigations are often predetermined and Harry's feeling of being scrutinised unfairly. Like Felix, they seemed to describe situations where the investigative process did not appear neutral, creating feelings of disillusionment and mistrust. For Felix, this frustration may contribute to an ongoing struggle to reconcile his personal values of fairness and professionalism with the actions (or perceived inaction) of the organisation he serves.

Summary

This theme explores the erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues that officers in this study appear to experience during internal misconduct investigations. Participants described feeling betrayed by an organisation they once trusted implicitly, leading to a sense of disillusionment and cynicism. My interpretation of their accounts revealed what appeared to be systemic issues in investigative processes and communication, with

officers feeling trapped in an opaque and often unfair system. This theme highlights the tension between officers' expectations of justice and their lived experiences of the internal misconduct investigative process.

4.5 SOCIAL ISOLATION AND RELATIONAL STRAIN
ALONE IN A SEA OF BLUE
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This theme explores the officers' experiences of social and relational disruption during misconduct investigations. The metaphor "Alone in a Sea of Blue" captures the sense that, despite being surrounded by fellow officers ("blue"), some of them feel completely isolated. The sea represents the vastness of this isolation, while the blue evokes the uniformity and solidarity of the police force, now fractured. These officers navigate this emotional turbulence alone, with once-close professional and personal ties now distant.

4.5.1 Professional Ostracism and Personal Relationship Challenges
Fractured Bonds: From Collegial Ties to Family Ties
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This subtheme delves into the officers' perceptions of isolation, both within the professional sphere and in their personal lives. The metaphor "Fractured Bonds" reflects how officers' previously strong ties to their colleagues and families appear to break down under the strain of these investigations. There is a pervasive sense that relationships - once a source of support - become fragile, leaving officers feeling isolated and vulnerable. Their sense of belonging and camaraderie seems to be replaced with abandonment and disconnection.

Greg's account reveals how he felt the investigation process fundamentally altered his relationships, both professionally and personally:

> I went into my shell, didn't speak to anyone. Uhm... everyone was really different around me because they knew something was happening around me, so no one really wanted to talk to me because then obviously...you...I felt like a leper (Greg, 308-313)

This quote captures Greg's immediate experience of isolation, where he perceives himself as a social outcast, comparing himself to a "*leper*." The metaphor suggests Greg sees his situation as toxic, creating both social isolation and internalised shame that reinforces his silence. This self-imposed withdrawal may represent a defence mechanism, though it could also intensify his alienation as he refrains from seeking the support he might need.

Greg further reflects on his experience of the impact of this isolation, describing his growing sense of despair:

> No one wants to be anywhere near you because they don't want to go down on your...because you're... you're a sinking ship and they don't want to touch you because they don't want to be dragged along with you (Greg, 315-316)

The "*sinking ship*" metaphor illustrates the more entrenched nature of Greg's isolation as his sense of hopelessness deepens. Unlike the "*leper*" metaphor, which focuses on immediate feelings of exclusion, the "*sinking ship*" evokes the long-term abandonment Greg perceives. His belief that others would be '*dragged along'* underscores how he feels beyond saving, marking a shift from self-imposed isolation to deeper resignation. This progression - from initial withdrawal to feeling like he is irredeemably sinking - suggests Greg's emotional journey through the investigation is one of increasing despair.

As I reflected on this, I was reminded of the strong camaraderie that exists within police culture, often referred to as a 'police family'. The image of a sinking ship, however, suggests that this sense of familial support can quickly disintegrate when officers face personal or professional crises. This distancing may not be intentional, but rooted in a culture where distancing from perceived failure is a form of self-preservation. My reflection here is coloured by my knowledge of how this 'family' can sometimes ostracise its own, reinforcing feelings of betrayal and abandonment, something I've observed in other high-pressure organisations.

Greg's experience reflects how celebrated traits in policing - resilience, toughness, and self-reliance - might prevent officers from seeking support when their well-being is at risk. His shift from being part of the professional community to feeling like an outsider resonates deeply with how some officers experience a sense of abandonment. This mirrors Dave's experience, where the impact of the investigation extends into personal relationships:

> It was the most stressful time of my life...uhm...Definitely my partner's a [job role]... got a distinctive surname... so [partner] having to go and uhm... explain to [boss] that there was gonna be a press article and I would be named in it... even if I had done anything wrong... it wouldn't have been her fault... why...why should she have... have that (Dave, 348-355)

It seems here the investigation might be blurring professional and personal boundaries, leaving some officers to bear the emotional consequences of how their cases impact those around them. Dave's questioning of "*why*" suggests a feeling of unfairness, indicating his emotional struggle to come to terms with the broader repercussions, particularly on his partner's professional life.

Dave further explains how this strain impacted his marital relationship:

> You feel guilty because you know...you know...you know that they're not sleeping because they're worried about it...uhm...Yes it definitely put a...a...a strain and pressure on my relationship with my wife (Dave, 192-195)

The repetition of '*you know*' emphasises Dave's awareness of the impact on loved ones, highlighting his emotional burden of guilt. This emphasises the lived experience of relational strain, where officers may recognise their role in causing distress to their partners.

Dave's experience of the investigation can also be likened to an overwhelming emotional ordeal:

> Living hell, really. Yeah, it's the fact that...er...it's kind of shame. People will say no smoke without fire...must be...there must be more to it than what a lot of people would...uhm...And I actually remember...uhm...one colleague ring me up and say 'Oh, so and so is saying that you've been suspended'...and I hadn't been suspended. I was just off sick... (Dave, 360-376)

Dave's description of the investigation as a '*living hell*' reveals his emotional distress and a significant change in his reality. The misconduct investigation has turned his world into something unrecognisable and torturous. His attempts to correct misinformation about his suspension status show a desire to maintain some control over his narrative and identity. Managing his reputation amid rumours adds to his burden revealing complex social dynamics. The phrase "*no smoke without fire*" reflects the presumption of guilt faced by officers under investigation. Dave's transparency ("*I've got nothing to hide*") contrasts with the secretive nature of the rumour mill, showing his struggle to maintain his integrity despite social ostracism.

This complex dynamic of shame and social ostracism exemplifies the pressure officers feel during misconduct investigations. Dave's desire for transparency contrasts sharply with the secretive rumours that seems to trap him in a loop where his integrity is undermined despite efforts to explain.

Reflecting on this, I am reminded of how police culture often values resilience, yet this expectation can sometimes prevent officers from seeking the support they need. Dave's attempts to correct rumours about his suspension reflect a deeper struggle - not only to survive the investigation itself but to manage the damaging narratives that circulate among colleagues. As a psychologist with experience in policing environments, I can see how these investigations may leave officers feeling abandoned by a system that is supposed to protect them.

Harry's experience of his inspector advising him to "*throw in the towel*" extends this theme of relational breakdown into the professional sphere, but its effects permeate his personal life too:

> I felt unwanted... so many times, he told myself that there were plenty of jobs out there uhm... and he told my partner as well – why didn't I just throw in the towel and... give up? Uhm... just heartbreaking, uhm... I thought... I thought I got on with the inspector (Harry, 427-436)

Harry's repeated use of "*I thought*" seems to convey his re-evaluation of his relationship with his inspector, suggesting the emotional distress this caused him. This perceived betrayal seems to affect Harry's sense of belonging, both professionally and personally, intensifying the isolation he feels.

Harry feared his relationship could be affected by the investigation outcome:

> I've lost this…uhm…would it affect then my relationship with my partner because I was in the process of moving house? Would…how would that kind of weigh on her? (Harry, 488-491)

Harry's anxiety shows how investigations may have the potential to disrupt present and future plans, adding pressure on relationships. Officers' experiences of family strain vary, while Dave and Harry express concern about the toll on their marriages, others may not face the same level of strain, depending on their personal support systems. This divergence shows that strong relationships can help some officers better cope with the stress and isolation caused by the investigation.

This sense of isolation also appears in Greg's personal life, where he chooses not to share his struggles:

> No, I didn't tell my GP… I didn't even tell my family because I thought they'd be ashamed, yeah…mental…uhm…and they've got enough stuff going on (Greg, 365-369)

Here, Greg's internal conflict becomes evident. His reluctance to open up to his family or seek help from a professional could be seen as a way to shield them from the shame and burden he perceives. This self-imposed isolation might suggest a need to protect his loved ones from the emotional fallout of his situation, but it potentially reinforces his own loneliness. The phrase "*they've got enough stuff going on*" may reflect Greg's belief that his struggles would only add to their stress, suggesting a complex dynamic where his silence may be both self-protective and protective of others. This could suggest a complex dynamic where shame leads to isolation, and isolation intensifies the emotional toll. His use of the term "*mental*" reflects his struggle to make sense of his own reactions, which seem irrational to him even as he experiences them.

Greg's narrative appears to reflect a broader theme of self-imposed isolation as a form of self-protection. This theme resonates across participants, where feelings of shame or fear of judgment lead some officers to withdraw from both professional and personal relationships.

This perception of shame and avoidance seems to be echoed in Harry's experience, where professional gossip and judgment continue to haunt him:

> People are judging like that uh... you're probably aware with police, rumours spread around really quickly, so from what happened, to the incident, stories in the station were completely different. Uhm... and they were obviously tying me in with bad people.... It starts to make you feel kind of...doubt the results that you've got when it's over a year old and that... that rumour or feel from officers are still...still taking place (Harry, 388-412)

Harry's account shows the persistence of rumours and how social judgment lingers long after the incident. The rumours seem to act as a form of social imprisonment, preventing him from moving forward. It appears the constant whispers and judgments from colleagues cause Harry to question the validity of the investigation's outcome. His repeated reference to being tied "*with bad people*" could suggest a growing sense of moral contamination, where his association with wrongdoing becomes difficult to shake off, even in his own mind.

When I reflect on Harry's account of the persistence of rumours it makes me think about the broader issue of how narratives in policing environments can shape officers' experiences. Gossip and judgment in policing seem to perpetuate social exclusion long after the investigation ends. Reflecting on this, I wonder how these informal networks of communication contribute to the stigmatisation of officers under investigation.

While Greg retreats inward and imposes isolation on himself, Harry's narrative suggests that external judgment reinforces his isolation. In Harry's case, the judgment from colleagues appears to prolong his emotional stasis, while Greg isolates himself to avoid such judgment. This divergence reflects different responses to the same experience of professional ostracism - one self-imposed and the other externally enforced.

4.5.2 Navigating Communication Restrictions and Support Networks
Whispers in the Dark: Finding Lifelines Amidst Silence
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This subtheme explores how some officers attempt to navigate the restrictions placed upon them during investigations and the search for support during their investigations. The metaphor "Whispers in the Dark" captures the fragility and scarcity of the support they receive, as though these lifelines are faint, hard to grasp, and come only in brief, fleeting moments. In the midst of institutional silence, officers seem to seek out any form of connection, often finding informal networks to be the only sources of support.

Felix's experience highlights the absence of formal support:

> No. Well, only... only in the form of a Fed Rep, no counselling or welfare
> (Felix, 594-599)

Felix's short, matter-of-fact response suggests a resigned acceptance of the lack of institutional support. His minimal reliance on formal support systems might reflect a broader cultural norm within the police, where emotional resilience and stoicism are often prized.   The absence of counselling or welfare during such a distressing time

appears to reinforce the idea that officers are expected to endure the process largely on their own.

However, Felix's relationship with his wife provided a crucial counterbalance to this institutional absence:

> I don't think it affected my relationships at home because uhm... my wife didn't doubt me or...or what I was saying, so there was no issues there (Felix, 496-499)

This brief moment of personal support contrasts with the isolation described by many other participants, suggesting that close personal relationships can act as a protective buffer against the emotional toll of the investigation. Felix's wife's trust alleviated some of the pressure, showing how external support systems vary. This support contrasts with the isolation others describe, showing that not all officers experience the same level of isolation. It highlights the importance of recognising moments of resilience.

These challenges contrast with Dave's experience, where informal support seems to play a more significant role:

> Erm... I think the... the positives were I had another officer that was going through the same thing with me. So, I had him. Uh... I had a wife and children uhm... that was supportive... uhm... and the vast amount of colleagues that were sending texts, visiting me, line managers, character references...uhm... so there were the... they were the positives, I think really... uhm   (Dave, 569-575)

Dave's account of his experience suggests that, while institutional support was lacking, informal networks provided a crucial lifeline, reflecting the importance of these during times of crisis. With institutional support lacking, Dave finds solace in another officer's shared experience and his family. The "whispers" of connection – texts, visits, and character references – seem to have provided him with vital emotional sustenance,

acting as a counterbalance to the isolation of the investigation amidst the silence of institutional support.

While Felix and Dave's experiences diverge in their sources of support, there appears to be a converging theme of how crucial informal support becomes during these investigations. Both officers seem to navigate a landscape where formal structures may fail them, but informal networks, however faint, act as lifelines.

While many participants engaged in coping and seeking support, their approaches varied significantly, showing a divergence in experiences. Some officers, such as Greg and Harry, felt isolated from support, while others, like Andy, showed resilience:

> I love the job I do; I love the people I work with...I enjoy...uhm...I enjoy the people I work with and I'm not going to let the bad...this incident impact on me and also it offers me a lifestyle. You know...it offers me good money...I'm on a pension...I'm not going to let...an organisation or people within an organisation impact on that you know. I don't want to cut my nose off to spite my face... (Andy, 2065-2076)

Andy's repeated '*love*' and '*enjoy*' reflect his strong professional identity that helps him cope. His pragmatic approach shows how some officers may attempt to maintain their sense of self and purpose. By using the idiom "*cut my nose off to spite my face*" he reveals a pragmatic approach to coping, prioritising long-term benefits over short-term emotional reactions. This cognitive reframing reflects an adaptive coping mechanism, highlighting how officers might navigate institutional challenges to preserve their identity and purpose.

Summary

The interpretation of the experiences suggests that internal misconduct investigations may lead to profound social isolation and strain on personal relationships. Officers described feeling ostracised by colleagues and struggling to maintain personal relationships under the weight of being under investigation for misconduct. The analysis indicates how communication restrictions and the stigma associated with being under investigation might leave some officers feeling deeply alone, even when surrounded by colleagues. This theme underscores the far-reaching social and relational impacts of misconduct investigations beyond the professional sphere.

4.6 MORAL INJURY AND EXISTENTIAL RECALIBRATION
Reforging the Badge of Honour
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This theme explores the moral and existential challenges officers may encounter during misconduct investigations. These challenges seem to create polarised subthemes: moral injury, disillusionment, and embitterment on one side, and the effort to realign professional identity and values on the other. The tension observed in participants' narratives may reflect how officers attempt to reconcile their ethical beliefs with their professional realities.

The metaphor "Reforging the Badge of Honour" aims to capture how officers rebuild their professional identity after perceived moral and emotional conflicts. Moral injury, in this context, refers to the psychological distress officers experience when their ethical beliefs are violated during misconduct investigations. The officers in this study seem to

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reflect similar experiences, grappling with expectations of justice and fairness, which they feel are undermined by organisational forces.

The moral dissonance they describe might result from the clash between rigid institutional expectations and the emotional complexity of their lived experiences. Moral dissonance refers to the internal conflict officers may experience when their personal values are at odds with the professional actions or situations they encounter. This dissonance may be compounded by feelings of embitterment, which can emerge from prolonged frustration and perceived injustices. Hierarchical structures that discourage vulnerability may heighten these feelings, making it difficult for officers to express emotional distress without fear of professional consequences. However, the various ways participants seem to recalibrate their identities reflect a nuanced, non-linear process that demonstrates the complexity of their lived experiences.

4.6.1 Moral Dissonance and Embitterment
The Tarnished Shield

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This subtheme reveal the internal conflict some officers face when their personal values collide with professional experiences, often leading to a sense of disillusionment and, in some cases, bitterness. The metaphor 'The Tarnished Shield'[2] could be interpreted as reflecting how officers' once-honoured sense of duty and morality may become compromised over time, resulting in moral dissonance or even embitterment.

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[2] While 'shield' as a symbol for police identity has roots in American policing vernacular (where badges are often shield-shaped), this metaphor effectively captures UK officers' experiences of perceived damage to their professional standing and integrity.

Harry's account captures the tension between self-preservation and ethical duty:

> I could have, but if I made that complaint, would it then make me another target for anything else that did come up? Was I best just keeping my head down...leave them [PSD] alone and just get on with it because I just didn't know what the potential repercussion could be if I did raise some sort of complaint for...about PSD (Harry, 709-718)

Harry's hesitation and decision to "*keep his head down*" might be understood as indicative of the organisational culture in which complaints or challenges to authority are often viewed with suspicion. From a psychological standpoint, Harry's linguistic choice of "*keeping my head down*" may suggest a defensive posture, a position that could convey both vulnerability and self-preservation. This seemed to have been reinforced with how I observed Harry's body language during this part of his account – he appeared more closed off, tense, and guarded. This may also have reflected a reluctance to challenge the authority of PSD.

Harry's reluctance to speak out could also point to how he perceives the power dynamics within the institution. It seems that Harry might view his role as needing to remain submissive or compliant in order to survive professionally, which may give rise to moral discord as his sense of right and wrong conflicts with this necessity.

As someone who works with officers in hierarchical systems, I have observed the psychological toll of these structures can be significant. The fear of reprisal, often deeply embedded in police culture, may prevent individuals like Harry from expressing vulnerability or raising ethical concerns, forcing them into self-preservation at the expense of their moral compass.

In Andy's account, the complexity of trust within the organisation seems to come to the fore:

> *Everyone I speak to involved with PSD mistrust the PSD, not the person, I don't think trust the organisation. We trust the...there are certain people in it...you know...I trust supervisors and stuff like that but it's really weird, you can trust people who form the organisation but the organisation itself – I don't trust (Andy, 1851-1856)*

Here, Andy seems to express a dichotomy in trust, differentiating between trust in individuals and the institution. His fragmented speech reflects his struggle to articulate this contradiction, suggesting the deep-seated tension between his personal relationships and the broader institutional mistrust. Andy's verbal pauses may hint at the conflicting emotions he experiences, highlighting how officers may often compartmentalise trust as a survival mechanism.

Andy's dichotomy between trust in individuals and mistrust of the institution may reflect a broader sentiment echoed by both Harry and Felix. While Andy differentiates between the personal and the institutional, Harry and Felix express frustration with how PSD operates, particularly in its investigative processes. The shared theme is institutional mistrust, but the individual expressions vary. Andy navigates it cautiously, Felix with overt disbelief, and Harry through reluctant compliance to survive professionally.

As I listened to Harry, Andy, and Bens' accounts, their fragmented speech and verbal hesitations stood out to me. These pauses seemed to reflect the deep internal conflict they were navigating. I also observed how their body language appeared tense and guarded, particularly when discussing their trust or distrust of the institution, reinforcing

the emotional toll these experiences have taken on them. I found myself wondering whether my own presence and professional background may have influenced their guarded speech and hesitations. Given my familiarity with hierarchical systems, I may have unconsciously been attuned to subtle cues of distrust and defensiveness in their body language, which seemed to mirror the internal conflict they described.

Ben's account appears to reflect a more internalised form of moral conflict, suggesting that unresolved conflict between his values and professional experiences may have resulted in a deep bitterness:

> All-consuming...literally for...for two years, yeah...all-consuming...[name] said to try to sleep at night...but I'd be up three, four times a night...just sitting and...just...just how has that happened? What...why has that happened to me? Really, really quite [long pause]...bitter towards the whole process and the whole thing (Ben, 525-531)

Ben's repeated use of '*all-consuming*' seems to convey the extent to which his emotional experience has permeated both his professional and personal life. His fragmented speech may reflect cognitive overload, as he grapples with the unresolved conflict between his personal values and the institutional process. The repetitive nature of both Ben's language and his account of his experience could be understood as a symptom of rumination, where intrusive thoughts about the injustice he faced seem to prevent him from moving forward. His bitterness appears to reflect both a personal sense of betrayal and frustration. His inability to make sense of how such a situation happened to him might signify an internal moral dissonance, where he struggles to reconcile his expectations of fairness with what actually occurred.

The participants' narratives demonstrate polarised coping mechanisms: Ben's internalisation of distress contrasts sharply with Harry and Andy's outward negotiation with the system. Harry appears to choose strategic self-preservation, while Andy's recalibration involves mistrust yet cautious adaptation. Ben, on the other hand, embodies the more internal emotional cost of dissonance, where his bitterness becomes "*all-consuming.*" This polarisation shows how moral injury can manifest differently in both internal rumination and external self-preservation.

Felix's account adds further depth to the frustration and perceived incompetence of the investigative process:

> The interview just showed the level of incompetence of...of these people uhm...which beggar's belief really. You know, as a response bobby, we are constantly criticised for the quality of our investigations...and there's...uhm...how we're not doing this right...PSD cannot investigate to save their life (Felix, 352-362)

Felix's tone of disbelief underscores the tension between the expectations placed on front-line officers and the perceived failures of PSD. His repeated use of "*uhm*" and "*you know*" reflects his struggle to articulate his frustration, which mirrors a deeper sense of disillusionment with the organisation. The verbal pauses may indicate his difficulty reconciling his belief in professional standards with the reality he perceives within the investigative process.

Dave's account echoes similar disillusionment with the organisational priorities:

> I think I was very unlucky. Uhm...I don't think it was personal against me. I think it was the organisation looking after their own reputation...uhm...do I think officers...now...have similar experiences? Yes...uhm...do I honestly think there's been any...improvement? Probably not...if I'm honest (Dave, 600-606)

Dave's reflection seems to capture a deep-seated scepticism about organisational priorities, suggesting that reputation management might overshadow officers' welfare. His pauses ("*uhm*") might indicate a reluctance to fully express his cynicism, while his use of "if I'm honest" may reveal a sense of resignation rather than anger. This might reflect a shift from moral dissonance to a more settled, if embittered, acceptance of organisational flaws.

4.6.2 Resilience and Existential Recalibration
Rising From the Ashes of Disillusionment

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Despite the challenges and disillusionment many officers face during misconduct investigations, some describe processes of existential recalibration - a re-evaluation of their values, priorities, and identity. The metaphor 'Rising from the Ashes of Disillusionment' aims to capture how officers attempt to rebuild their sense of self, where personal growth emerges out of the emotional and moral challenges they have faced.

Andy's recalibration reflects a more cautious approach to his work:

> More guarded...more...more...more...I do stuff...not because I ought to...It's...I dunno...it's really weird...it's, I'm doing things to protect myself. I'm...um...like...we do it now...we talk about it quite openly. It's a matter of worst-case scenario...what can the organisation do to us...we do this job...ok...if the worst-case scenario goes up like this...up like this all those will have us...right in that case let's do it like this. We're doing it...you know...arse covering...you know...I do so much...use of...you know if ever I have to lay hands on anyone...use of force is ridiculous. I know all the probationers say you should be doing use of force anyway...I'm doing it out of...not out of fear to justify myself...out of a fear to justify myself to you, the organisation
> *(Andy, 1834-1848)*

Andy's repetitive language ("*more*" and "*fear*") suggests a heightened sense of self-protection, where his primary motivation has shifted from duty to survival. The phrase "*arse covering*" reflects his cynical recalibration, suggesting that procedural adherence has become a defensive measure rather than a professional obligation. This recalibration process highlights how institutional mistrust reshapes everyday decision-making, with officers becoming more focused on safeguarding themselves from scrutiny.

Dave's reflection appears to offer insight into this recalibration process:

> I think having experience of going a long period of time without being able to eat, sleep...uhm...not being able to concentrate, I think that probably has [sighs]...uhm...given me a little bit of credibility and I...I think probably before it...I may have been a little naïve and thought mental health...stress...they're swinging the lead (Dave, 617-623)

Dave's reflection on the credibility gained through suffering suggests that his personal experience of emotional hardship may have altered how he views himself and others. His sighs and pauses throughout this quote seem to indicate a sense of emotional exhaustion, suggesting the experience has weighed heavily on him, both mentally and physically. His realisation that mental health challenges are valid seems to mark a shift in how he perceives both his professional identity and the emotional labour that accompanies his role. While Dave does not explicitly name this as moral injury, his reflections appear to align with themes of growth through adversity and the emotional impact of professional challenges.

Andy's recalibration journey appears to reflect his evolving understanding of vulnerability:

> ...you know, PSD will always be a stressful situation. If I get Reg'ed tomorrow, it will be a stressful situation. Hopefully, I will be able to do it a bit better and perhaps even stand up and say: 'actually, I'm not doing very well, can I speak to...you know...[name of counsellor]'...be more aware that I can ask for help and...you know...don't...just don't lock the door and cry at home and then go to work and sit in the office by yourself (Andy, 2182-2192)

Andy's tentative willingness to ask for help in future seems to reflect a significant recalibration of his values, as he shifts from the stoic culture of policing to one that acknowledges the importance of seeking support. His decision to refrain from "*locking the door and crying*" might signal a change in how he views vulnerability - no longer as something to be hidden but as a potential source of strength.

In my professional experience, I have seen how the gradual acceptance of mental health support in policing can create cognitive dissonance for some officers. Individuals like Andy, who are tentatively beginning to be receptive to seeking help, often face an internal conflict between the ingrained expectation of resilience and the real need for emotional support. This cultural tension can complicate their ability to fully recalibrate their sense of self.

Greg's recalibration takes on an intellectual approach:

> I read up on misconduct procedures, I knew everything about all that sort of stuff because I wanted to know the way it worked (Greg, 387-391)

Greg's intellectual recalibration seems to contrast with the more emotional responses of his colleagues. His desire to "*know the way it worked*" suggests a need to regain control over a process that initially disempowered him. By focusing on procedural knowledge, Greg adopts a cognitive coping mechanism, where understanding the system seems to become his way of reclaiming power and shielding himself from future vulnerability.

Andy's tentative approach to vulnerability, Dave's emotional acceptance of hardship, and Greg's intellectual recalibration present three distinct yet interconnected paths officers take in rebuilding their professional identity. Andy's and Dave's emotional recalibration through vulnerability and acceptance contrasts with Greg's cognitive approach, where procedural knowledge seems to serve as protection to him. This synthesis reflects the broader polarisation of emotional vs. cognitive recalibration, revealing how officers diverge in their attempts to regain control over their identities.

Ben's account describes his experience after a misconduct hearing was concluded without substantiating the allegations against him:

> He just went...you've been through enough, NFA. And he NFA'd it...yeah...he just said you've been through enough....I just remember...a bit tearful to be honest. Just uhm...I just remember the relief...and just the...how grateful I was to him for seeing it what it was. He was the only one...I sort of...I went to his leaving do and we talked about it and I said...you don't and you can't underestimate what that decision meant to me...because it was the relief of it...and you...you were the only one that saw it for what it was...and it was a load of crap...it was, it was a nothing... (Ben, 708-718)

Ben's emotional reaction to the NFA decision seems to illustrate the depth of the psychological burden some officers may carry during misconduct investigations. His gratitude and relief suggest a desire for validation within a system where he previously felt misunderstood. Ben's journey from distress to vindication reflects a recalibration process shaped by external validation, where emotional closure is only achieved once fairness is perceived to have been restored.

Harry's recalibration highlights resilience:

> I don't think there's anything you could change but ah...always look on, hopefully the...the light at the end of the tunnel, if you know you haven't done anything. I don't think there's anything you could do or say to make them change how they...they deal with things (Harry, 818-823)

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Harry's metaphor of "*the light at the end of the tunnel*" might illustrate his resilience, despite previous moral dissonance, or it could more simply highlight hope. His tentative hope suggests a recalibration process where he accepts the limitations of the system but maintains his sense of integrity. His recalibration may reflect a shift towards emotional survival, where hope becomes a necessary tool to endure the emotional challenges of professional life.

In this subtheme, the officers' recalibration processes seem to highlight a spectrum of responses to the emotional challenges posed by their experiences of misconduct investigations. From Andy's tentative openness to vulnerability, Dave's emotional growth, and Greg's intellectual recalibration, we observe a convergence in their desire to reclaim control while acknowledging the divergence in their coping strategies. These polarised recalibration experiences - whether intellectual or emotional - emphasise the complexity of navigating professional identity post-investigation. Recalibration does not seem to be linear; it reflects the officers' evolving understanding of their place within an often-dissonant institutional structure.

The final theme explores the moral and existential challenges officers might face during and after being subject to an internal misconduct investigation. Participants described experiencing symptoms similar to those with moral injury when their ethical beliefs clashed with their experiences, often leading to their disillusionment and embitterment. However, my interpretation also highlighted what appear to be processes of resilience and existential recalibration, where officers attempted to rebuild their sense of self and professional purpose despite this experience. This theme highlights the complex journey

of moral and existential reckoning that some officers seem to undergo, revealing both the potential for growth and the risk of lasting disillusionment.

4.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION
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This analysis offers insights into the complex and often profound impact that PSD misconduct investigations appear to have on police officers' lives. Through the lens of IPA, I have explored five interconnected themes that aim to capture key aspects of the officers' lived experiences. These themes, emerging from my interpretative engagement with their accounts, suggest a range of ways in which officers may experience and make sense of misconduct investigations.

The analysis suggests a journey that often begins with intense emotional upheaval and appears to progress through stages of professional identity crisis, perceived organisational betrayal, social isolation, and what might be described as moral injury and some form of recalibration, perhaps even growth. Throughout this journey, officers seem to grapple with polarised experiences - trust versus suspicion, belonging versus alienation, resilience versus vulnerability - highlighting the complex and often contradictory nature of their experiences.

Participants' use of vivid metaphors provided insights into their emotional landscapes, often capturing experiences that appeared beyond conventional description. These 'gems', as Smith (2011) terms them, offer a window into the depth and intensity of officers' lived realities during investigations as interpreted by the researcher.

The analysis also indicated significant divergences in how officers appear to navigate and make sense of their experiences. While some seem to find ways to recalibrate their professional identities and find renewed purpose, others appear to struggle with lasting disillusionment and embitterment. This variation underscores the deeply personal nature of these experiences and the importance of an idiographic approach in understanding them.

Importantly, the study suggests how misconduct investigations may fundamentally alter an officer's sense of being-in-the-world, potentially reshaping their relationships with colleagues, the institution they serve, and their own sense of self. The pervasive uncertainty and instability that seem to characterise these experiences may have significant implications for officers' mental health, professional efficacy, and overall well-being.

These findings underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of the human impact of PSD misconduct investigations within policing. They challenge simplistic notions of resilience in police culture and highlight the profound emotional labour that appears to be involved in navigating these processes. As we move forward, these insights offer valuable opportunities for reflecting deeply on how current PSD investigative practices may impact those under investigation, with a view to appropriately supporting officer well-being and fostering a more just and transparent organisational culture in policing.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore the lived experiences of police officers who have undergone internal misconduct investigations, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to illuminate key themes. My aim is to understand how officers experience and make sense of the psychological, emotional, and professional challenges posed by these investigations.

As illustrated in Figure 1 (see Chapter 4, p. 80), five interconnected themes emerged from my analysis: Psychological and Emotional Upheaval, Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability, Organisational and Procedural Injustice, Social Isolation and Relational Strain, and Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration. These themes, represented as segments of a circle, emphasise the holistic nature of the officers' experiences, with each aspect influencing and being influenced by the others. My analysis revealed the interconnected nature of these themes. Psychological and Emotional Upheaval often appears to trigger other themes, with each theme potentially influencing and intensifying others. This complex interplay underscores the deeply interconnected nature of officers' experiences during misconduct investigations

In the following sections, I will explore these themes in depth, drawing on participants' accounts to illustrate their experiences and engaging with existing literature. This discussion will also reflect on my interpretative role as a researcher, in line with IPA's

double hermeneutic approach, which acknowledges the interaction between the participants' experiences and my analysis as the researcher (Smith et al., 2009).

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
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My interpretation suggests five interconnected themes that describe the participants' journeys through misconduct investigations. These themes, emerging from my analysis of the officers' accounts, appear to capture the complex and often profound impact of the investigative process on their personal and professional lives.

The theme of Psychological and Emotional Upheaval emerged strongly from the data. Participants often described experiences of intense stress, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future. The investigative process seemed to trigger significant emotional responses, which for some officers, appeared to persist long after the investigation concluded.

Closely related to this was the theme of Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability. Many officers expressed a deep sense of questioning their professional self and a fear of job loss. This theme reflects the potential for misconduct investigations to shake the foundations of an officer's career identity.

A third theme that emerged was Organisational and Procedural Injustice. Participants frequently reported perceptions of unfairness in the investigative process. These experiences appeared to contribute to a loss of trust in their organisation, potentially reshaping their relationship with the police service.

The theme of Social Isolation and Relational Strain was also prominent in the officers' accounts. They often described feeling cut off from colleagues and experiencing strain in personal relationships. This theme highlights the broader social impact of misconduct investigations beyond the professional sphere.

Finally, the theme of Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration emerged from the data. Many participants expressed a profound questioning of values and shifts in their professional outlook. This theme suggests that misconduct investigations may prompt a deep re-evaluation of an officer's sense of purpose and place within the police service.

The interconnected nature of these themes emerged clearly from my analysis. For instance, the psychological and emotional upheaval experienced by officers often seemed to trigger or exacerbate a professional identity crisis. Similarly, perceptions of organisational injustice appeared to deepen feelings of social isolation.

Table 5.1 illustrates the complex interrelationships between these themes:

Theme	Relationships with Other Themes
Psychological and Emotional Upheaval	Often triggers Professional Identity Crisis; Can lead to Social Isolation and Relational Strain
Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability	May intensify perceptions of Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice; Can contribute to Moral Injury
Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice	Often exacerbates Psychological and Emotional Upheaval; Can deepen Professional Identity Crisis
Social Isolation and Relational Strain	May worsen Psychological and Emotional Upheaval; Can contribute to Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration
Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration	Often results from cumulative effects of other themes; May lead to long-term changes in Professional Identity

Table 5.1. Relationships between themes

These findings underscore the complexity of officers' experiences, with individual journeys varying in intensity and impact. Many officers appeared to undergo a process of profound personal and professional reflection, where their sense of identity within the police service seemed to be reshaped by the investigation experience.

The diverse trajectories through these themes highlight the idiographic nature of this phenomenon, reinforcing the importance of a nuanced, empathetic approach to supporting officers both during and after misconduct investigations. While these findings cannot be generalised to all officers undergoing misconduct investigations, they offer valuable insights into the potential lived experiences of those facing this process.

The following sections will discuss each theme in detail, drawing on participants' accounts to bring their lived experiences into focus and engaging in a dialogue with existing literature to contextualise my findings.

These five interconnected themes - Psychological and Emotional Upheaval, Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability, Organisational and Procedural Injustice, Social Isolation and Relational Strain, and Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration - offer a window into the complex lived experiences of officers undergoing misconduct investigations. In the following sections, I will delve deeper into each of these themes, exploring how they manifest in the officers' accounts and how they interrelate with one another. By closely examining each theme, I aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the profound impact these investigations can have on officers' personal and professional lives.

5.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL UPHEAVAL: 'RIDING THE EMOTIONAL STORM'

The experience of being under investigation appeared to be profoundly disorienting for the officers in this study, often sparking significant emotional and psychological distress. Misconduct investigations, by their very nature, seemed to disrupt the stability and identity that these officers derived from their professional roles. The disruption of professional identity in these cases might be seen as mirroring the loss of security van der Kolk (2014) describes in his work on trauma, potentially drawing a parallel between

external traumatic events and internal organisational processes like investigations. While van der Kolk's (2014) research focused on more conventional forms of trauma, the accounts of officers in this study suggest that being informed of a misconduct investigation may evoke similar responses, making some officers feel destabilised and vulnerable.

My interpretation suggests a split in how officers experienced the emotional impact of the investigation. Some reported what appeared to be an immediate and overwhelming emotional response, while others described what seemed to be a more gradual realisation. This diversity challenges a simplistic understanding of how officers might handle organisational stress, potentially underscoring the need for a more nuanced approach that acknowledges individual differences in coping with such profound events.

Participants often employed vivid metaphors to express their experiences, suggesting that conventional language may have struggled to capture the emotional intensity involved. Ben's metaphor of "*crashing off a cliff*" encapsulates what might be interpreted as the sudden, overwhelming nature of the experience.

Such imagery offers valuable insight into what appears to be the profound psychological impact of these investigations, which for some officers may rival operational incidents typically linked with police trauma. As a researcher, I was particularly struck by these vivid metaphors. My professional background may have heightened my sensitivity to their emotional depth, prompting me to explore their meanings more thoroughly.

My interpretation suggests that for some officers, the initial shock of being informed about a misconduct investigation often triggered intense emotional and physiological responses, as Greg's description of "*heart rate in the sky, sweating, panicking*" illustrates.

While Brewin et al. (2022) identified high rates of PTSD among officers, linked to various factors including operational stressors and experiences of humiliation or harassment, the accounts in this study suggest that non-operational processes, like misconduct investigations, may also provoke intense stress responses for some officers. This potentially extends their work by suggesting that organisational stressors, though less examined in their study, could be highly impactful for some individuals.

These findings appear to complement the work of Soomro and Yanos (2019), who focus on trauma exposure and PTSD from operational police work, by pointing to misconduct investigations as a potentially overlooked source of psychological strain for some officers. This suggests that both operational and non-operational factors may play significant roles in some officers' mental health, potentially underlining the need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing stress in policing.

The potential severity of the psychological impact of investigations is starkly illustrated by instances of suicidal ideation shared by some participants. Ben's candid admission highlights the profound distress he experienced: "*I won't lie and say that I didn't think of suicide because I did... in fact several times throughout the whole process*" (Ben, 216-219). My interpretation of participants' accounts suggests that for some officers, misconduct

investigations may intensify mental health risks by exacerbating a reluctance to seek support. This reluctance is further highlighted by Greg's statement: "*No, I didn't tell my GP... I didn't even tell my family because I thought they'd be ashamed, yeah...mental...uhm...and they've got enough stuff going on*" (Greg, 365-369).

Such hesitation, even with close family, seems to extend Foley and Massey's (2021) findings on mental health stigma in policing, where stigma significantly impacted help-seeking behaviours. Their research underscores how entrenched cultural norms may discourage officers from seeking mental health support. The accounts in this study suggest the added stigma of misconduct investigations may compound this for some individuals, potentially further isolating officers and heightening their psychological vulnerability.

The prolonged nature of these investigations appeared to sustain emotional upheaval for many of the officers in this study reporting experiences of constant hypervigilance and anticipatory anxiety. This suggests that for these individuals, the duration of investigations, not just their occurrence, may play a significant role in their psychological impact. Ben's account vividly illustrates this prolonged stress:

> All-consuming...literally for...for two years, yeah...all-consuming...[name] said to try to sleep at night...but I'd be up three, four times a night...just sitting and...just...just how has that happened? What...why has that happened to me? (Ben, 525-531)

This experience of prolonged stress aligns with Cartwright and Roach's (2020) documentation of the prevalence of psychological ill-health and stress-related absences in UK policing. While their study did not specifically address misconduct

investigations, their findings provide a foundation for understanding the broader context of stress in police work. The accounts in this study suggest that for some officers, how misconduct investigations may create an equally, if not more, stressful environment.

This study points to the need for clearer, more transparent processes. Zgoda et al. (2016) advocated for trauma-informed practices to address these issues, suggesting that fostering fairness, trust, and emotional safety could help mitigate the psychological harm caused by procedural uncertainty.

Sleep disturbances emerged as a common issue during investigations for several participants, potentially exacerbating their emotional distress. Andy described difficulty sleeping and frequent nightmares ("*I wasn't sleeping very well... my emotions were up and down... I kept having nightmares*" [Andy, 557-559]).

This aligns with Violanti's (2017) highlight sleep disturbances as a common manifestation of occupational stress in policing. The current study's findings suggest that for some officers, misconduct investigations may exacerbate these sleep problems, potentially creating a feedback loop where sleep deprivation intensifies emotional distress, further complicating their ability to cope.

As a researcher, I was drawn to the embodied nature of participants' accounts, where physical manifestations of stress, such as Greg's description of his elevated heart rate and sweating, appeared to mirror the emotional turmoil of the investigative process. This aligns with Smith et al.'s (2009) emphasis on the embodied nature of experience in IPA.

The vivid physical descriptions shared by participants suggest that for these officers, the investigation's impact was not just emotional but deeply corporeal, offering further insight into their lived experience of being under investigation.

The profound psychological toll reported by some participants suggests that trauma-informed approaches (SAMHSA, 2014) could potentially mitigate these effects. Participants' accounts of feeling unsafe and vulnerable resonate with the principles of trauma-informed care, which emphasise safety, trust, and emotional support during stressful processes. The apparent absence of such practices in the current investigative framework may be amplifying the psychological distress they experienced. This area has not been extensively covered in existing research on police misconduct investigations.

Zgoda et al. (2016) advocated for trauma-informed practices to address issues in organisational processes, suggesting that fostering fairness, trust, and emotional safety could help mitigate psychological harm caused by procedural uncertainty. While their work wasn't specific to policing, the experiences shared by participants in this study suggest that such approaches might be beneficial in the context of misconduct investigations.

The 'emotional storm' experienced by officers under investigation in this study appears to be a complex, often prolonged process with potentially severe psychological consequences for some individuals. While these findings seem to corroborate existing research on stress and trauma in policing, they also appear to extend this literature by

highlighting misconduct investigations as a significant, yet potentially underappreciated, source of distress for some officers.

These insights raise important considerations about how investigative processes might be improved to minimise unnecessary harm while maintaining accountability. The incorporation of trauma-informed practices, which have been shown to reduce psychological harm in other organisational settings, may potentially alleviate the emotional toll these investigations impose on officers (Zgoda et al., 2016).

It's important to note that while these findings offer valuable insights into the experiences of the officers in this study, the idiographic nature of IPA research means that these experiences cannot be generalised to all officers undergoing misconduct investigations. However, they do provide a rich, in-depth understanding of how some officers may experience and make sense of this process, potentially informing future research and practice in this area.

This emotional upheaval also appears to intersect with concerns about professional identity for many of the participants. In the next section, we consider how these investigations may disrupt not only emotional stability but also officers' sense of identity within the profession, offering a deeper understanding of their experiences.

5.4 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS AND CAREER INSTABILITY
'UNMOORED IN FAMILIAR WATERS'

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The metaphor of being "unmoored in familiar waters" emerged as a powerful representation of officers' experiences during misconduct investigations, potentially encapsulating both the destabilisation of their professional identity and the paradoxical nature of feeling lost in a familiar environment. This theme directly addresses my research question by illuminating the profound impact these investigations may have on officers' sense of professional self and career stability.

5.4.1 LOSS OF PROFESSIONAL ROLE AND SELF-CONCEPT
'ADRIFT IN A SEA OF UNCERTAINTY'

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Harry's vivid metaphor appears to capture the depth of this crisis:

> It just felt like it was taking a part of you away... You know, you say, you lose a piece
> of your heart when someone passes away (Harry, 274-282)

This poignant comparison to bereavement suggests that for Harry, the investigative process didn't merely challenge his job security; it appeared to threaten a core part of his identity. My interpretation indicates that for some officers, the investigation seemed to shake the very foundation of who they understood themselves to be as police officers.

This imagery suggests a depth of identity crisis that may extend beyond Bullock and Garland's (2018) concept of 'spoiled identity' in policing. While Bullock and Garland

found that misconduct allegations could damage officers' professional reputations and self-concepts, my findings indicate what might be interpreted as a more acute and immediate threat to professional identity for some officers. This study may contribute to the literature by revealing how misconduct investigations could potentially penetrate deeper into an officer's sense of self than previously recognised.

Officers' love for their profession emerged as a poignant backdrop to their experiences of instability. Andy's sentiment illustrates this devotion:

> I love the job I do; I love the people I work with... (Andy, 2065-2066)

Demirkol and Nalla's (2020) study on job satisfaction in policing identified factors like organisational support and career development opportunities as institutional challenges that can impact an officer's career stability. My findings may extend this work by suggesting that misconduct investigations could introduce a unique tension between officers' passion for their work and the uncertainty forced upon them. This potentially adds a new dimension to our understanding of job satisfaction in policing, highlighting how internal processes might significantly disrupt an officer's relationship with their profession.

5.4.2 FEAR OF JOB LOSS AND FINANCIAL INSECURITY
'WALKING THE TIGHTROPE OF CAREER PERIL'

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The fear of job loss emerged as a dominant concern for several participants, intertwining with their sense of professional identity and financial security. Felix's anxieties appear to capture this fear:

> At the end of the day, I've got a wife and kids and a mortgage and all the rest of it... I was the significant earner in the house, so am I going to lose my job? It's all on my mind (Felix, 155-161)

This interpretation may extend Hesketh et al.'s (2017) work on job security in policing. While Hesketh et al. identified job insecurity as a significant source of stress for UK police officers, my study suggests that misconduct investigations might create what appears to be a uniquely acute form of insecurity for some officers. The lived experience of insecurity described by our participants seemed to permeate various aspects of officers' lives, potentially reshaping their sense of self and extending beyond the professional concerns identified by Hesketh et al. to encompass fundamental worries about financial survival and family welfare.

5.4.3 NAVIGATING PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES AND REINTEGRATION
'CHARTING A COURSE THROUGH STORMY SEAS'

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Maintaining professional competence while under investigation emerged as a significant source of stress for several participants. Felix reflected:

> You know you're under investigation. So, you... you're always second guessing yourself... (Felix, 216-220)

Hough et al. (2018) explored how organisational ethical climates influence decision-making and behaviour, particularly within the context of police misconduct. My findings may extend this work by suggesting that during misconduct investigations, some officers might experience a more immediate and personal impact on their decision-making confidence. This process of self-doubt, seemingly driven by the investigation itself, could potentially contribute to a significant decline in these officers' professional self-efficacy, an aspect not fully explored in previous literature.

The data suggests a paradoxical experience where some officers felt simultaneously disposable and indispensable. Dave's account captures this apparent contradiction:

> *On the one hand... they spent... a considerable amount of money to try and get us sacked, and on the other hand, they were ringing me up and asking me to come back to work* (Dave, 429-433)

This duality appears to add nuance to Paoline's (2020) review of police culture as a protective factor. While Paoline argued that shared occupational norms typically shield officers from certain stressors, my findings indicate that during investigations, this usually cohesive culture may fracture for some officers. This potentially challenges existing understandings of police culture and suggests that misconduct investigations might create unique ruptures in the protective aspects of police occupational identity.

Throughout these subthemes, I observed both convergence and divergence in participants' experiences. This nuanced finding may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how misconduct investigations might impact officers at different points in their careers.

This theme of professional identity crisis intersects significantly with other themes in this study, particularly psychological upheaval and perceptions of procedural injustice. These intersections highlight the complex, multifaceted nature of officers' experiences during misconduct investigations, suggesting that the impact on professional identity might not be understood in isolation from other psychological and organisational factors.

In conclusion, this exploration of professional identity crisis and career instability provides insights into how officers in this study experienced misconduct investigations. The findings suggest that these processes can profoundly shake some officers' sense of professional self, potentially introducing acute insecurity that extends beyond job stability to question their very identity as police officers. By illuminating the deep, personal impact of misconduct investigations on officers' professional identity and career stability, this study may contribute to our understanding of the lived experiences of officers undergoing these processes. It potentially extends existing literature by highlighting the unique and intense challenges to professional identity posed by misconduct investigations, offering a more nuanced picture of this critical aspect of policing.

5.5 ORGANISATIONAL AND PROCEDURAL INJUSTICE
'SHADOWS OF DOUBT IN THE THIN BLUE LINE'
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The metaphor 'Shadows of Doubt in the Thin Blue Line' seemed to encapsulate the complex interplay between officers' sense of professional solidarity and their growing

mistrust of organisational processes. My interpretative analysis revealed what appeared to be a pervasive sense of organisational and procedural injustice among officers undergoing misconduct investigations. This theme manifested in two primary sub-themes: erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues, and systemic failings in investigative processes and communication.

5.5.1 EROSION OF TRUST IN LEADERSHIP AND COLLEAGUES
'FRACTURES IN THE POLICE FAMILY'
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A striking convergence among officers was their shared experience of what seemed to be a profound sense of abandonment by the organisation they were dedicated to. Dave's words appeared to illustrate this:

> The organisation will back and support people...until...it gets to a point where it's uncomfortable to and then they'll drop you like a stone (Dave, 385-393)

Dave's metaphor, "*drop you like a stone*," might be interpreted as capturing an abrupt and complete withdrawal of organisational support, potentially evoking a profound sense of abandonment and disillusionment. This experience appears to align with Wolfe and Piquero's (2011) study on organisational injustice, which highlights how perceptions of unfair treatment can severely damage officers' trust and engagement. However, my interpretation indicates what might be a more nuanced and deeply felt dynamic during misconduct investigations. These processes not only erode trust but also seem to destabilise the relational foundation on which officers' professional identity is built, particularly when officers feel unsupported by their organisation.

The perceived injustice during these investigations appears to foster a deep sense of alienation, intensifying mistrust and emotional disconnection. Wolfe and Piquero's research is helpful in understanding how these perceptions of injustice manifest, but this study's analysis suggests that misconduct investigations may deepen this rift further, potentially undermining officers' sense of belonging. Rather than simply deterring misconduct, this erosion of the organisational bond may exacerbate the emotional toll on officers, threatening not just their trust but also their professional identity. This sense of being "dropped" by the institution they once relied on for validation may further intensify their feelings of abandonment and long-term psychological distress.

Chris's stark reflection appeared to capture the profound disillusionment many participants expressed:

> It should have been professional, and it wasn't. It should have been honest, and it
> was dishonest (Chris 1398-1403)

This powerful statement might suggest a fundamental breach of what these officers believed to be an ethical contract between themselves and their organisation. The metaphor of shadows creeping into the 'thin blue line' seemed to reflect how a once-solid bond of professional unity may have given way to suspicion and doubt.

The interpretative analysis suggested a divergence in participants' experiences of leadership during misconduct investigations, with varying perceptions of support and understanding from those in leadership positions. Some officers reported feeling unsupported, while others described more positive experiences. One participant noted they were "fortunate" that the superintendent chairing their misconduct hearing took

time to understand their role, suggesting that this level of understanding was uncommon, as most leaders might simply accept PSD advice without deeper inquiry.

These experiences appear to both align with and potentially extend Hesketh and Cooper's (2023) work on ethical leadership in policing. While Hesketh and Cooper emphasise the importance of ethical leadership for maintaining trust, this study offers insights into how some officers appear to experience and make sense of what they perceive as a breakdown in ethical leadership during misconduct investigations. This study's interpretations of participants' accounts may extend their insights into misconduct investigations, as the accounts suggest inconsistent application of supportive leadership during these processes. The depth of disillusionment expressed by some participants suggests that the impact of perceived unethical practices during investigations may be particularly significant for these officers, possibly due to the high stakes involved and their strong identification with their professional role.

The perceived inconsistency in leadership seemed critical in shaping participants' feelings of injustice and isolation. While some positive experiences were mentioned, they were rare. Most participants described a lack of supportive leadership during investigations, which appeared to deepen their sense of abandonment. This inconsistency may have compounded feelings of isolation, potentially contributing to a deeper sense of organisational injustice.

These predominantly negative experiences in participants accounts suggest that the gains of ethical leadership, as described by Hesketh and Cooper, may face challenges in

the sensitive context of misconduct investigations. The pressures of these situations, where leaders may feel constrained by procedural guidelines, seemed to create obstacles to consistently embodying supportive leadership, as perceived by our participants. This study might extend our understanding of ethical leadership in policing by illustrating how its absence during critical periods, such as misconduct investigations, could have profound effects. While Hesketh and Cooper's work emphasises the importance of ethical leadership in day-to-day operations, the current study suggests that in high-stakes situations, the impact of perceived unethical practices may be even more acute. This could indicate that ethical leadership might be especially crucial during periods of organisational stress or scrutiny, though further research would be needed to explore this possibility.

5.5.2 SYSTEMIC FAILING IN INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES AND COMMUNICATION 'NAVIGATING A LABYRINTH OF OPACITY'

Participants often described what could be interpreted as systemic bias in the investigative process. Chris's account of his discovering evidence documents during his investigation represents a particularly stark example of this perceived bias:

> There was disclosure from PSD officers ohm...and there was a PSD inspector uhm...and investigator in PSD, after about 12 to 18 months...that said...we've reviewed this case...there is no...there's no evidence at all to support any of these allegations...and the inspector had written back...and I've got it written down still...'I don't care, go away and find something' (Chris, 850-859)

The phrase *'I don't care, go away and find something'* might encapsulate what some participants seemed to interpret as a predetermined investigative process. This experience seems to resonate with Lawson et al.'s (2022) work on 'noble cause

corruption', a concept where officers may justify unethical actions for a perceived greater good. While Lawson et al.'s work focused on operational policing, my findings might suggest that some participants sensed similar attitudes within PSD investigative units.   For these officers, the investigation appeared to be perceived not as a neutral search for truth, but rather as a process tainted by what they sensed as a drive to assign fault. My interpretation suggests that participants may have experienced the investigation as an effort to substantiate allegations, irrespective of evidence, potentially influencing their understanding of organisational justice.   Officers' accounts hint at a perception that investigative processes may have been driven by a need to achieve certain outcomes, rather than by impartial inquiry. This perception, rooted in their lived experiences, suggests that 'noble cause corruption' might not be confined to operational settings but could potentially be perceived within internal PSD investigative processes, offering a new lens through which to explore ethical challenges across various areas of policing, including those tasked with upholding professional standards.

It is important to note that this interpretation reflects the subjective sense-making of officers' accounts and my analysis of these accounts. It should not be taken as a definitive statement about PSD investigative units, but rather as an exploration of participants' lived experiences and perceptions.

A recurring theme in officers' accounts appeared to be the perceived lack of transparency in the investigative process. Chris's experience seemed to exemplify this opacity:

> I had an email from an inspector at [X] one day to say come and see me in my office. No idea why...there was nothing else about that at all. Hadn't got a clue. Went to see him....He didn't speak to me and said come with me and walked through [location] into an office in the old building. Hidden behind the door, there were two professional standards officers (Chris, 92-102)

Chris's repeated use of phrases like, "*No idea why*", "*Hadn't got a clue*", underscores the disorienting nature of his experience. This account suggests that, for some participants, the PSD investigative process may have been experienced as a form of procedural injustice, adding to the confusion and mistrust officers felt. My interpretation of this aligns with Brennan and Cole's (2024) findings on organisational betrayal and injustice in policing, where perceptions of unfair treatment during disciplinary processes were strong predictors of feelings of betrayal. Furthermore, Carter's (2021) work on moral injury in disciplinary processes suggests that such experiences of perceived injustice can have profound psychological impacts on officers.

A notable divergence emerged in how officers responded to their experiences over time, highlighting a polarisation in their reactions to misconduct investigations. Some officers, like Chris, expressed such profound disillusionment that they would prefer criminal proceedings over internal investigations:

> I have said that since then, that if ever...they tell me I'm in an investigation...I will completely shut down...I will not help them...I will not assist in any way shape or form...I will not voluntarily be spoken to...uhm...they will have to arrest me (Chris, 1373-1382)

This extreme response might be interpreted as reflecting a complete loss of faith in the organisation's ability to conduct fair investigations. The preference for being "arrested like a criminal" over facing an internal investigation suggests a profound shift in how

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these officers view their relationship with the organisation and this was reflected in several accounts.

Schulenberg et al.'s (2017) study on procedural justice in complaint systems provides a useful framework for interpreting these findings. They highlight that perceptions of procedural fairness significantly influence officers' views of organisational legitimacy. In my study, participants expressed varying levels of trust in the investigative process, and for some, the perceived lack of fairness appeared to sever their sense of legitimacy in the organisation altogether. While Schulenberg et al.'s research focuses on external complaint processes, my findings may extend these principles to internal misconduct investigations, suggesting that perceived procedural injustice in these contexts may have a more profound impact.

The accounts I interpreted suggest that perceived procedural injustice might result in a spectrum of responses - from compliance under duress to outright rejection of organisational processes - potentially indicating a more severe impact on officer-organisation relationships than Schulenberg et al. observed. Officers like Chris, who expressed a preference for criminal arrest over internal investigation, exemplify how internal processes can provoke extreme reactions when fairness is perceived as lacking. Similarly, Greg's willingness to '*just sign whatever, I don't care anymore. I just wanted this to stop*' (Greg, 940-943), reflects a sense of desperation and helplessness, where the desire to end the investigation outweighed any consideration of the outcome. These polarised responses - from perceived intimidation to non-cooperation - could also be seen as coping strategies officers use to navigate what they perceive as an unjust process,

reflecting a spectrum of attempts to regain control in an environment they feel has undermined their professional integrity.

This polarisation in responses highlights the various ways officers navigate what they perceive as an unjust process. Schulenberg et al. (2017) demonstrated that procedural fairness shapes engagement, and my findings suggest that the absence of fairness in misconduct investigations may deepen officers' sense of injustice, leading to disengagement. As Schulenberg et al. noted, procedural justice is crucial for maintaining organisational legitimacy in policing, and when officers perceive these processes as unjust, it may undermine their trust in the organisation. This suggests that the impact of procedural injustice within internal investigations may have long-term effects on officer behaviour and attitudes towards their organisation.

My interpretation also points to a temporal dimension in how officers' perceptions of injustice evolve. While initial reactions of shock and disbelief appeared common, over time, these often seemed to give way to more entrenched disillusionment. This evolving sense of injustice may also have psychological consequences, contributing to feelings of anxiety or disengagement from the organisation. The temporal aspect suggests that the negative impact of perceived injustice may compound as investigations progress, further exacerbating officers' disconnection from the organisation. These feelings of anxiety or disengagement may contribute to long-term occupational stress, potentially leading to burnout or withdrawal from the profession altogether

The experience of organisational and procedural injustice appeared to intersect significantly with other themes identified in this study, such as psychological upheaval and social isolation. This intersectionality suggests that the impact of perceived injustice in misconduct investigations may be far-reaching, affecting multiple aspects of officers' personal and professional lives.

Interpretation reveals a complex landscape of perceived organisational and procedural injustice during internal misconduct investigations. While officers generally reported a shared sense of injustice, their experiences and responses varied significantly. These insights may contribute to the understanding of procedural justice in policing, highlighting the need for greater transparency, consistent ethical leadership (Hesketh & Cooper, 2023), and stronger support systems to address the nuanced and potentially lasting effects of perceived injustice in internal investigations.

In the next section, I explore how these experiences intersect with officers' feelings of social isolation and relational strain during the investigative process.

5.6 SOCIAL ISOLATION AND RELATIONAL STRAIN
'ALONE IN A SEA OF BLUE'

The metaphor "alone in a sea of blue" appeared to capture a paradoxical experience described by officers undergoing misconduct investigations. While the "sea of blue" might typically reflect the solidarity within the police community, participants in this study often conveyed a sense of profound isolation during their investigations. This

theme explores how officers seemed to experience and make sense of social disconnection and strain in their relationships, both professional and personal.

5.6.1 PROFESSIONAL OSTRACISM AND PERSONAL FRACTURED BONDS: 'FROM COLLEGIAL TIES TO FAMILY TIES'
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The initial shock of an investigation often appeared to signal the onset of professional isolation for many participants. Greg's account seems to reflect this sense of ostracism:

> I went into my shell, didn't speak to anyone. Uhm... everyone was really different around me because they knew something was happening around me, so no one really wanted to talk to me because then obviously...you...I felt like a leper (Greg, 308-313)

Greg's use of the word "*leper*" might be interpreted as particularly striking, potentially evoking not only social isolation but also a perceived sense of contamination. This metaphor suggests that for Greg, the isolation was not just emotional but also felt physical, as though his very presence had become threatening to others.

This experience of exclusion might indicate a disruption in the process of enculturation within policing. Paoline (2020) describes enculturation as the internalisation of shared norms and values, critical for fostering trust, cohesion, and belonging within the police community. My interpretation suggests that for some officers, misconduct investigations may disrupt this crucial socialisation process, potentially severing the ties that underpin an officer's integration within police culture.

The professional isolation often appeared to intensify over time for some participants. Ben's metaphor of being "*the one fish that's swimming the other way*" (Ben 326-332) seems to powerfully illustrate his growing sense of alienation, potentially capturing both the emotional and physical toll of being ostracised.

My findings appear to challenge and extend Westmarland and Conway's (2020) concept of the "*blue code of silence*" in policing. While they describe this as an unwritten rule of solidarity among officers, my study suggests that this dynamic might undergo a significant shift during misconduct investigations. Participants' accounts often hinted at feelings of betrayal or abandonment by their peers, suggesting what could be interpreted as an inversion of the "*code of silence.*" This inversion suggests that, rather than closing ranks in solidarity, officers under investigation may feel isolated or abandoned by their peers, as if the loyalty expected under normal circumstances is reversed. This unexpected rupture in camaraderie may intensify the psychological impact of investigations, deepening feelings of distrust and anxiety, and leaving officers emotionally isolated.

As investigations progressed, many officers reported that the strain began to affect their personal relationships. Dave's reflection captures this:

> You feel guilty because you know...you know...you know that they're not sleeping because they're worried about it...uhm...Yes it definitely put a...a...a strain and pressure on my relationship with my wife (Dave, 192-195)

This account suggests that the stress of investigations may permeate officers' personal lives, potentially straining relationships with loved ones. My interpretation indicated that

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for some officers, the perceived looming threat to their professional future not only

heightened stress at work but also seemed to intensify feelings of uncertainty and

emotional strain at home, as family members often appeared to share these anxieties.

Violanti et al. (2017) noted work-family conflict as a significant issue in policing. My

findings suggest misconduct investigations might intensify this conflict.

5.6.2 NAVIGATING COMMUNICATION RESTRICTIONS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS: 'WHISPERS IN THE DARK: FIND LIFELINES AMIDST SILENCE'

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My interpretation suggests a divergence in how officers navigated social isolation during

misconduct investigations. While several officers, like Greg, described withdrawing into

themselves, others, such as Dave, appeared to find support through family or peers:

> I had another officer that was going through the same thing with me... I had a wife
> and children... that was supportive... (Dave, 569-575)

This divergence might suggest that individual coping strategies, particularly the ability to

maintain support networks, may mediate the emotional impact of investigations for

some officers.

However, some participants, like Felix, reported a lack of formal support:

> No. Well, only... only in the form of a Fed Rep, no counselling or welfare
> (Felix, 594-599)

Felix's experience might indicate a gap in organisational support during these

investigations. Hesketh and Cooper (2023) found that supportive leadership practices -

such as open communication, empathy, and recognising the emotional toll - are

significantly associated with officer well-being and are especially crucial during times of organisational stress or change. In the context of misconduct investigations, these leadership qualities may be vital for promoting officer resilience and well-being. Felix's account suggests a disconnect between this ideal and some officers' experience during misconduct investigations.

The emotional toll of isolation and relational strain during misconduct investigations appeared profound for some officers, with some experiencing severe psychological distress. Greg's account seems to capture the depth of this experience:

> I was going to hang myself because... uhm... what's the point? I'm... I'm gonna lose my job.--Uhm... this is the only thing I've got... I love the police. I love helping people. There's no other role for me that I want to do in life. Uhm... what's the point in being here? (Greg, 437-446)

While not all participants reported suicidal thoughts, many described what appeared to be a deep sense of loss. Harry likened the experience to losing "*a piece of your heart*" (Harry, 274), a metaphor that might reflect how the emotional pain extended beyond personal identity, potentially affecting officers' social relationships.

Krishnan et al. (2022), in their systematic review of risk factors for police suicide, identified occupational stress as one of several significant factors contributing to suicidal behaviour among police officers across various countries. my findings extend this understanding by suggesting that the loss of social support, combined with the threat to an officer's professional identity during investigations, might exacerbate stress-related risk factors.

My interpretation suggests a temporal aspect to this isolation, with some officers reporting that the sense of alienation persisted after the investigation concluded. Harry described perceived ongoing judgment and rumours a year after the process ended (Harry, 388-412).

This persistent stigma might align with Bullock and Garland's (2018) concept of a 'spoiled identity,' where misconduct allegations can damage an officer's reputation and self-concept, potentially affecting both professional standing and personal relationships long after the formal investigation has concluded.

In conclusion, my interpretation suggests that isolation during misconduct investigations often begins with professional ostracism, extends into personal relationships, and may persist post investigation. Officers' responses varied, with some seeking support and others withdrawing. These experiences highlight how misconduct investigations may disrupt officers' sense of belonging within their policing community.

Though this isolation was a common experience, with most participants describing some form of social disconnection, officers' responses varied. For instance, both Greg and Ben described withdrawal, with Greg feeling "*like a leper*" and Ben feeling like "*the one fish that's swimming the other way*", while Dave found support through "*another officer that was going through the same thing*" and his family. This illustrates different coping strategies within a shared experience of isolation.

These findings might inform the development of support mechanisms for officers under investigation, potentially mitigating the isolating effects while maintaining investigative integrity. This exploration offers insights into how officers in this study experienced misconduct investigations, potentially contributing to our understanding of these processes. However, these findings are based on the experiences of the study participants and may not be generalisable to all officers undergoing misconduct investigations.

5.7 MORAL INJURY AND EXISTENTIAL RECALIBRATION:
'REFORGING THE BADGE OF HONOUR'

This theme explores the process of moral dissonance and identity reconstruction experienced by officers during misconduct investigations. Their accounts suggest a non-linear journey from disillusionment and embitterment to attempts at resilience and recalibration. The metaphor of "reforging the badge of honour" encapsulates this process, reflecting both the erosion of previously held moral certainties - such as the belief in organisational fairness and professional solidarity - and the effortful reconstruction of a new professional ethos.

5.7.1 MORAL DISSONANCE AND EMBITTERMENT:
'THE TARNISHED SHIELD'

Papazoglou et al. (2020) introduced the concept of moral injury in policing, drawing from military research to suggest that moral injury occurs when officers witness or participate in actions that conflict with their moral beliefs, resulting in distress, guilt, and shame.

Their work primarily focused on operational incidents, such as public interactions, as potential sources of moral injury.

My interpretation of several accounts suggests that this concept might extend to internal organisational processes, potentially broadening the understanding of moral injury in the policing context, suggesting that internal processes like misconduct investigations may have a psychological impact comparable to operational incidents. Misconduct investigations, particularly when marked by perceived procedural injustice or lack of transparency, appear to conflict with officers' deeply held beliefs about fairness and institutional loyalty and integrity.

The disillusionment expressed by Chris (1398-1403), who described a perceived lack of professionalism and honesty in the investigative process, highlights this interpretation. Chris's expectations of organisational fairness appeared to be shattered, potentially creating a deep moral conflict. This experience might align with Papazoglou et al.'s concept of moral injury, suggesting that organisational betrayals may cause psychological distress in ways not previously explored in the policing literature.

Brennan and Cole's (2024) study on organisational betrayal offers further insight into the bitterness expressed by some participants. Their research found that perceived organisational betrayal can lead to long-lasting feelings of embitterment, reduced job satisfaction, and increased thoughts about leaving amongst police officers. Particularly, they noted that perceptions of unfair treatment during disciplinary processes were strong predictors of feelings of betrayal. The interpretation of some accounts resonates

with and may extend Brennan and Cole's work. Many participants expressed frustration with PSD, often contrasting the high expectations placed on frontline officers by the organisation and public with what they perceived as incompetence within PSD. Felix's account illustrates this:

> The interview just showed the level of incompetence of...of these people uhm...which beggar's belief really. You know, as a response bobby, we are constantly criticised for the quality of our investigations and...and there's...uhm...you know uhm...how we're not doing this right or that right or the other right. And yet here is PSD, Professional Standards, who cannot investigate to save their life, as far as I can see, not in my experience anyway (Felix 352-362)

Felix's frustration seems to reflect a deeper moral dissonance, where the very institution tasked with upholding standards is seen as failing to embody them. This may highlight a sense of betrayal that intensifies the emotional toll of misconduct investigations, potentially adding nuance to Brennan and Cole's findings by revealing the complex emotions underlying the cynicism they identified.

The bitterness expressed by participants seemed to vary in intensity and manifestation. Ben's account appears to capture this experience of bitterness:

> All-consuming...literally for...for two years, yeah...all-consuming...[name] said to try to sleep at night...but I'd be up three, four times a night...just sitting and...just...just how has that happened? What...why has that happened to me? Really, really quite [long pause]...bitter towards the whole process and the whole thing (Ben, 525-531)

Ben's repetition of "all-consuming" and his description of sleepless nights may reflect the pervasive emotional toll of the investigation. His struggle to make sense of the experience might be interpreted as a reflection of deep-seated moral injury, extending Linden's (2009) concept of Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED) to the specific context of police misconduct investigations. Linden characterised PTED as involving

persistent feelings of injustice triggered by perceived unfair life events. My interpretation suggests that some officers may experience symptoms consistent with PTED during misconduct investigations, where perceived organisational betrayal exacerbates emotional distress and embitterment.

Participants accounts appear to align with and potentially extend Carter's (2021) work on moral injury, suggesting organisational injustice can lead to a distinct form of moral injury, characterised by betrayal, violation of moral beliefs, and loss of trust in the organisation. This study suggests that this loss of trust may be more nuanced than previously understood and may evolve over time. Some officers continued to trust individuals within the force but had lost faith in the institution itself, as Andy's account illustrates:

> Everyone I speak to involved with PSD mistrust the PSD, not the person, I don't think trust the organisation. We trust the...there are certain people in it...you know...I trust supervisors and stuff like that but it's really weird, you can trust people who form the organisation but the organisation itself...I don't trust (Andy, 1851-1856)

This dissonance between trust in individuals and mistrust in the broader organisation may reflect a broader sense of betrayal, potentially contributing to embitterment and alienation, adding depth to Carter's work on trust and betrayal in the context of misconduct investigations. While many participants described experiences that might be interpreted as moral injury and embitterment, their accounts also suggested various ways of navigating these challenges, which we explore in the following section.

5.7.2 RESILIENCE AND EXISTENTIAL RECALIBRATION
'RISING FROM THE ASHES OF DISILLUSIONMENT'

Despite the profound challenges, many officers described processes of resilience and existential recalibration. Hesketh and Tehrani (2024) highlight the importance of personalised resilience strategies in managing institutional challenges within policing. They found that officers who actively engaged in knowledge acquisition and skill development were better equipped to handle occupational stressors and maintain well-being, particularly by understanding organisational processes, which enhanced their sense of control. In this study, some officers pursued a similar approach, acquiring knowledge about misconduct procedures in an attempt to regain mastery in a situation where they felt powerless. Greg's account illustrates this:

> I read up on misconduct procedures, I knew everything about all that sort of stuff
> because I wanted to know the way it worked (Greg, 387-391)

Greg's account suggests that knowledge acquisition served as a coping strategy, allowing him to regain a sense of control in an otherwise disempowering situation. This approach might be interpreted as an attempt to level the playing field, reducing the power imbalance inherent in the investigative process and provided Greg with a renewed sense of agency. It aligns with and potentially extends Hesketh and Tehrani's (2024) findings on the importance of personalised resilience strategies in managing institutional challenges within policing, by showing that in the specific context of misconduct investigations, officers may use similar resilience-building approaches to navigate uncertainty and regain a sense of control.

Interpretation of participant accounts suggests that moral injury and existential challenges encountered during misconduct investigations may have a lasting effect on their professional identities. Many participants described a shift in their perceptions of their roles and organisations, marked by heightened cynicism and diminished trust in leadership and processes. This aligns with Westmarland and Conway's (2020) findings, which indicate that perceived injustices can erode officers' faith in their organisation's ethical standards. Harry's metaphor of "the light at the end of the tunnel," reflects either resilience despite moral dissonance or, more simply, hope:

> I don't think there's anything you could change but ah...always look on, hopefully the...the light at the end of the tunnel, if you know you haven't done anything. I don't think there's anything you could do or say to make them change how they...they deal with things (Harry, 818-823)

This expression of hope, despite systemic disillusionment, may suggest that officers attempt to retain some optimism, even when change seems unlikely. This interpretation of hope in the face of perceived systemic injustice adds nuance to existing literature on ethical tensions in policing.

This study's findings suggest that for some officers, the investigative process prompted a journey of painful self-reflection, leading to a more nuanced, though guarded, professional identity. This process of existential recalibration appeared to evolve over time, as illustrated by Andy's account:

> More guarded...more...more...more...I do stuff...not because I ought to...It's...I dunno...it's really weird...it's, I'm doing things to protect myself. I'm...um...like...we do it now...we talk about it quite openly. It's a matter of worst-case scenario...what can the organisation do to us...we do this job...ok...if the worst-case scenario goes up like this...up like this all those will have us...right in that case let's do it like this (Andy, 1834-1848)

This shift from disillusionment to a more realistic, cautious outlook indicates a form of growth, though marked by increased guardedness and self-protection. This process might be interpreted as a manifestation of moral injury, where officers, having lost trust in the organisation, recalibrate their values to focus on personal protection rather than professional service. Brown et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of perceived organisational support in mediating the relationship between procedural justice and outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and discretionary effort in policing. Extending this concept, this study's findings suggest that in the absence of perceived organisational support during misconduct investigations, officers' responses may focus more on self-preservation. This suggests that misconduct investigations, where organisational support is often perceived as lacking, may result in a form of professional adaptation characterised by heightened distrust and a defensive approach to work.

Officers' shift towards a more guarded approach might be understood as a form of existential strategy-building, reflecting not just an adaptation to new circumstances but a fundamental re-evaluation of their place within policing. This shift suggests a move from idealistic service to strategic survival, pointing to a deeper, more complex understanding of their professional self.

This recalibration process, while reflective of growth, appears to be shaped by the specific pressures of misconduct investigations. The shift towards self-protection suggests that organisational challenges, when left unsupported, may lead officers to adopt a survivalist mindset, which has significant implications for both officer well-being

and organisational culture. Unlike conventional notions of post-traumatic growth (Calhoun et al., 2010), this process of existential development seems uniquely shaped by the context of policing and misconduct investigations.

This study suggests a potential interplay between what might be interpreted as moral injury and resilience in some participants' accounts. The temporal aspect of officers' experiences emerged as significant, with many describing a journey from initial shock, through moral distress, to eventual recalibration. Notably, officers' responses showed a marked polarity. While some, like Ben, expressed profound bitterness and disillusionment, others, such as Andy, described a cautious recalibration of their professional identity, developing coping strategies such as knowledge acquisition or maintaining a broader perspective.

This theme intersects with others in this study, particularly professional identity crisis and perceptions of procedural injustice, highlighting the complex nature of officers' experiences during misconduct investigations. The possible moral injury experienced by some officers appears to both contribute to and be exacerbated by threats to professional identity, while perceptions of unfair treatment seem to intensify feelings of moral dissonance and embitterment.

By illuminating these experiences, this study may extend existing literature on moral injury (Papazoglou et al., 2020), organisational trust (Carter, 2021), perceptions of unfair treatment (Brennan and Cole, 2024), and resilience in policing (Hesketh et al., 2017,

2023, 2024). It addresses the central research question by providing insights into how officers experienced and made sense of internal misconduct investigations.

These findings suggest a need for more transparent investigative processes, better communication, and tailored support systems that acknowledge potential moral injury and foster resilience. Future research might explore implementing such systems within necessary investigative constraints.

As a researcher with a background in trauma psychology, I acknowledge that my interpretation may have been influenced by my sensitivity to moral injury and resilience. However, I've attempted to ground my interpretations in the participants' own words and experiences.

While these findings offer valuable insights, the idiographic nature of IPA research means they cannot be generalised to all officers undergoing misconduct investigations. Nonetheless, they provide a rich, in-depth understanding that may inform future research and practice in this area.

5.8 BROADER IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that misconduct investigations have complex and far-reaching consequences, affecting not only individual officers but also the broader culture and functioning of the police institution. Integrating trauma-informed approaches into these investigations could mitigate the potential for psychological

harm. As demonstrated in social work, trauma-informed policies – such as those emphasising safety, trust and empowerment – can prevent re-traumatisation and improve both individual well-being and organisational trust (Zgoda et al, 2016). Brown et al. (2020) demonstrated the importance of procedural justice and perceived organisational support in reducing emotional exhaustion and increasing discretionary effort among police officers. Extending these findings to misconduct investigations, clear communication, transparency in investigative processes, and emotional support for officers under investigation could be key factors in reducing long-term negative outcomes. In policing, where misconduct investigations can severely impact personal identity and professional stability, the application of these principles could significantly enhance the fairness and supportiveness of the process. Thus, misconduct investigations that are conducted with a focus on transparency and support may not only ensure accountability but also maintain organisational cohesion and officer well-being.

While the primary goal of these investigations is to ensure accountability, their impact seems to extend much deeper, often reshaping how officers might perceive their role and the organisation itself.

At the heart of the officers' accounts is a sense of destabilisation. Their identities, closely tied to their professional roles, appear shaken by the investigative process. The experience of being under scrutiny seems to trigger a vulnerability that challenges their long-held beliefs about their place within the institution. This invites reflection on the psychological and professional support that may be needed during these investigations. Without careful attention to this disruption, the process could risk pushing officers into

long-term disengagement, making it harder for them to re-establish their confidence and commitment to their profession. Furthermore, the officers' growing mistrust in the investigative process seems to compound the destabilisation of their professional identity, with the isolation described intensifying these challenges.

Alongside this personal destabilisation is a growing mistrust in the investigative processes themselves. Many officers shared feelings of being let down or abandoned by their organisation during a time when they most needed institutional support. This erosion of trust seems to reflect a broader issue of perceived organisational injustice. When officers view internal procedures as unfair or biased, the impact may ripple outward, potentially undermining the integrity of the relationship between the officer and the institution. In this way, the findings suggest that misconduct investigations have the potential to weaken organisational cohesion and morale, pointing to the need for more transparent and consistent processes that could rebuild trust rather than diminish it.

The strain of these investigations appears to extend beyond professional identity and trust in the institution, impacting officers' personal relationships as well. Many officers described a deep sense of isolation, feeling cut off from both colleagues and family during the investigation. This isolation seems to exacerbate the emotional toll of the process, as the typical support systems that help officers manage stress become fractured. These experiences highlight the wider relational consequences of misconduct investigations and suggest the need for approaches that could maintain support networks rather than further alienate those under investigation.

Moreover, the ethical dilemmas faced by officers during these investigations appear to prompt a re-evaluation of their professional values. Many described a shift from an idealistic view of their role to one more characterised by self-protection and caution. This recalibration suggests that the investigative process, while necessary for accountability, might lead to a lasting change in how officers engage with their work and the organisation. The challenge here may be for institutions to provide not just procedural fairness but also emotional and ethical support, acknowledging the moral conflicts that can arise during such deeply personal and professional moments of scrutiny.

Overall, these findings suggest that misconduct investigations are not isolated events; they appear to reverberate through the individual, relational, and organisational layers of policing. The complex interplay of psychological disruption, fractured trust, and moral recalibration points to the need for police organisations to rethink how they approach these processes. By developing more empathetic and trauma-informed methods, organisations may ensure that accountability is achieved without sacrificing the mental health and professional dignity of their officers. As the researcher, my interpretative process was shaped by my understanding of organisational dynamics, and I remained mindful of the potential influence of my background on the analysis.

In light of these implications, it seems clear that misconduct investigations serve as pivotal moments within an officer's career. The balance between upholding rigorous standards and safeguarding officers' wellbeing needs to be carefully managed to prevent these investigations from undermining both individual resilience and perceived organisational integrity. Recognising the broader institutional impact of these processes

invites a rethinking of how accountability may be pursued in a way that strengthens, rather than weakens, the relationship between officers and the institution.

5.9 EVALUATION USING YARDLEY'S CRITERIA

This study's quality and rigour can be evaluated using Yardley's (2000) four key criteria:

Sensitivity to Context: The exploration of officers' lived experiences within the specific framework of UK policing demonstrates sensitivity to context. I acknowledged the complex interplay between individual perceptions and broader sociocultural factors, grounding analysis in participants' accounts and relevant literature.

Commitment and Rigour: I demonstrated commitment through systematic application of IPA methodology, involving in-depth engagement with each participant's account and moving beyond descriptive analysis to interpretative insights. Rigour is reflected in careful participant selection, depth of data collection, and iterative analysis process.

Transparency and Coherence: I have provided clear descriptions of the methodological approach, data collection, and analytical process. The coherence is demonstrated through the logical flow from research question to findings, with clear links between themes and the overarching concept of officers' experiences.

Impact and Importance: This study contributes to understanding officers' lived experiences of misconduct investigations, potentially informing approaches to police accountability and officer wellbeing. While the idiographic nature of IPA means the

findings are not directly generalisable, they offer insights that may resonate with other policing contexts and potentially inform future research in this area.

5.10 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This study's primary strength lies in its in-depth exploration of officers' lived experiences of misconduct investigations, offering insights into an area that has received limited attention. The use of IPA allowed for a rich, nuanced understanding of how officers make sense of these challenging experiences across multiple dimensions - emotional, professional, and relational.

Another key strength is my commitment to researcher reflexivity throughout the study. This ongoing process of self-reflection and critical examination of my own preconceptions and potential biases enhances the transparency and credibility of the results. It allowed me to more clearly distinguish between participants' accounts and my interpretations, aligning with IPA's emphasis on the double hermeneutic.

The participants represented a range of ranks, ages, and years of service, providing a diverse set of experiences within the police service. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that the sample consisted exclusively of white male officers. This homogeneity limits understanding of how gender and ethnic background factors might influence experiences of misconduct investigations. The experiences shared by the participants

represent their unique perspectives and may not reflect the full spectrum of experiences across all demographic groups or types of misconduct investigations.

It is important to acknowledge the homogeneity of this study's sample, which consisted exclusively of white male officers who remained in service following their investigations. This homogeneity, while providing consistency for the IPA approach, inevitably limits the diversity of experience captured.

The experiences of officers who have been dismissed, or who resigned as a result of misconduct investigations, likely differ significantly from those who remained in service. Officers who are dismissed face placement on the Police Barred List maintained by the College of Policing, which permanently excludes them from all policing roles for life with little provision for appeal or review. This lifelong ban extends beyond policing to numerous public service and security positions, effectively closing entire career paths permanently. It should be noted that investigations may still conclude in the absence of those who resign during the investigation, potentially resulting in their placement on the barred list despite having left the service. These outcomes are often published in local media and on police force websites, adding a layer of public scrutiny to their experience. The permanence and far-reaching consequences of the barred list represent a profound and irreversible life transition that fundamentally alters career trajectories and personal identities, an outcome whose psychological impact warrants dedicated study.

Additionally, the experiences of female officers and officers from ethnic minority backgrounds may differ substantially from those of white male officers. Gender and race

can significantly influence professional experiences within police organisations, potentially shaping how misconduct investigations are perceived and navigated. These demographic factor could influence officers' experiences of support, stigma, and reintegration in ways not captured by this study's homogenous sample.

While the idiographic focus of IPA does not aim for broad generalisability, these limitations highlight important directions for future research that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how diverse officers experience misconduct investigations across different outcomes and identity positions.

The retrospective nature of the interviews means that participants' recollections may have been influenced by the passage of time and subsequent events. Their accounts represent their current understanding and interpretation of past events, which may have evolved since the investigations took place.

Lastly, despite my efforts to maintain reflexivity, my own background and preconceptions as a researcher may have influenced my interpretations. The homogeneity of the sample may have influenced the themes that emerged, and a more diverse sample might have yielded different insights. However, my awareness of these potential limitations and efforts to address them through reflexive practices contribute to the overall rigour of the study.

5.11 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Given the limitations of this sample, future studies might explore these experiences across a more diverse range of officers. This could help to identify whether the themes we've uncovered resonate more widely within the policing community and how demographic factors might influence these experiences.

In summarising my findings, we can distil key points and implications for each theme as shown in Table 5.2:

Theme	Key Points	Implications
Psychological and Emotional Upheaval	Intense stress; Anxiety; Uncertainty about future	Need for psychological support; Potential long-term mental health impacts
Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability	Questioning of professional self; Fear of job loss	Career counselling; Clear communication about process and potential outcomes
Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice	Perceived unfairness; Loss of trust in organisation	Review of investigative procedures; Transparency in process
Social Isolation and Relational Strain	Withdrawal from colleagues; Impact on personal relationships	Peer support programmes; Family support services
Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration	Questioning of values; Shift in professional outlook	Ethics training; Post-investigation reintegration support

Table 5.2: Summary of Themes, Key Points, and Implications

These summaries highlight the multifaceted impact of misconduct investigations and point to potential areas for organisational intervention and support.

Additionally, future research could examine the demographic composition of officers subject to internal misconduct investigations. Such studies could provide valuable insights into whether certain groups are disproportionately represented in these processes and, if so, explore the underlying factors contributing to this disparity.

Longitudinal studies tracking officers' experiences from the start of an investigation through to post-investigation reintegration could provide valuable insights into how these experiences evolve over time. Such research might help to identify critical points in the process where additional support could be beneficial.

Another potential avenue for research could be exploring the perspectives of those conducting the investigations. Understanding their experiences and challenges might provide a more comprehensive picture of the investigative process and its impact on all involved.

Lastly, given the profound impact on officers' sense of professional identity revealed in this study, further research into how officers rebuild or recalibrate their identities post-investigation could be valuable. This might include exploring the concept of post-traumatic growth in the context of these experiences.

5.12 REFLEXIVITY

Consistent with IPA's emphasis on the double hermeneutic, I remained acutely aware of my active role in the interpretative process throughout this study. My background as a psychologist working with police provided valuable insights but also necessitated vigilance to avoid imposing preconceptions onto participants' accounts. Regular reflective practices, including journaling and supervisory discussions, helped challenge my interpretations and ensure they remained grounded in the data.

My professional experience sensitised me to expressions of psychological distress in participants' accounts. While this awareness enriched my interpretations, it also required a conscious effort to balance these elements with other aspects of officers' experiences, ensuring a holistic representation of their lived realities.

The homogeneity of the sample in terms of gender and ethnicity prompted careful consideration of how this might influence the emerging themes. I remained mindful of how my own background might interact with this homogeneity, potentially reinforcing certain perspectives while overlooking others. This awareness led to ongoing reflection about the potential limitations of my interpretations and the importance of acknowledging the specific context of the findings.

Throughout the analysis, I grappled with the tension between empathetic engagement with participants' accounts and the need to maintain a critical, interpretative stance.

This balance, central to IPA, allowed me to move beyond simple description to offer insights into the deeper meanings and implications of officers' experiences.

This ongoing process of reflexivity has been integral to my research, enhancing the transparency and credibility of the findings while acknowledging the inherently interpretative nature of IPA.

5.13 CONCLUSION

This study provides an interpretative account of how police officers in this sample experienced and made sense of internal misconduct investigations. The findings highlight the deeply personal and often emotionally challenging nature of their interconnected experience, one that touches not only on their professional roles but also on their identity, relationships, mental health and sense of belonging within the police service.

At the heart of this study are the human experiences of officers navigating a process that many found profoundly disorienting and distressing. The vivid accounts provided by participants - from feeling "dropped like a stone" to being willing to "sign whatever" to end the process - offer a window into the lived reality of officers under investigation. These accounts suggest that, for some officers, misconduct investigations may be experienced not just as professional challenges, but as deeply personal ordeals that shake their sense of self and belonging within the police community.

My interpretation of participants accounts suggested that this professional destabilisation was compounded by perceptions of organisational and procedural injustice. Officers repeatedly referred to navigating a system riddled with opacity and bias, which contributed to their deep mistrust of the investigative processes. These perceptions often appeared to intensify their emotional turmoil, as the very structures meant to ensure accountability were perceived as betraying their ethical commitment to fairness. This dynamic of perceived betrayal added a further layer to the crisis of identity and exacerbated the emotional strain.

The investigation process disrupted officers' social worlds, leading to isolation and relational strain. Participants expressed feeling ostracised professionally and personally. The metaphor "alone in a sea of blue" captures their paradoxical experience, deepening their distress and eroding their sense of support and stability.

As officers navigated this complex terrain, they engaged in what might be interpreted as a form of moral and existential recalibration. The investigation process seemed to prompt a re-examination of their values, sense of purpose, and professional identity. Some participants described efforts to regain control by educating themselves about procedural details, while others adopted more guarded, self-protective strategies in their work. This process of "reforging the badge of honour" suggests that, for many, the investigation marked a turning point in how they saw themselves, not just as professionals but as individuals navigating a challenging and often unforgiving institutional environment.

While this study cannot claim to offer generalisable findings, given its idiographic focus, the experiences shared by the participants provide rich insight into how misconduct investigations might affect officers on multiple levels. The interwoven nature of emotional upheaval, professional crisis, perceptions of injustice, and social isolation suggests that these experiences are not discrete but deeply interconnected. The process of making sense of these experiences appears to be both personal and relational, reshaping officers' identities and relationships in ways that may persist long after the investigation concludes.

The study's findings invite reflection on the potential human cost of misconduct investigations and raise questions about how these necessary processes of accountability might be conducted in ways that are both rigorous and reflective of psychologically informed practice. This study contributes to ongoing dialogues about the path forward which appears to require a delicate balance - one that maintains rigorous standards whilst acknowledging the profound personal impact these investigations can have on officers and their families. As policing continues to evolve, studies like this may play a role in informing approaches that uphold professional standards whilst also recognising the need for approaches that safeguard and respect the dignity and humanity of all involved and offer a starting point for further inquiry and reflection.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Exploring Lived Experiences of Being Under Investigation for Misconduct

Introduction
Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. Today we will be discussing your experience of being investigated for misconduct. I'm interested in hearing how you make sense of that experience, in your own words. Please feel free to take your time and if at any point you need a break or would prefer not to answer, just let me know. There are no right or wrong answers, and I'm interested in your thoughts, feelings, and reflections. You are welcome to terminate the interview at any moment, and if you find anything distressing, I can sign post you to further support. Usually, interviews take between an hour and an hour and a half.

Questions:
- To start with… could you tell me about your decision to take part in this research?
- Can you tell me about what it was like for you when you were under investigation?
- Prompt (only if necessary): What comes to mind when you reflect on that time?
- How do you understand or make sense of what happened to you during the investigation?
  Prompt (if needed): Has your understanding of this experience changed over time?
- How did this experience affect how you were feeling at the time?
  Prompt: How did your emotional or mental state shift, if at all, during that period?
- What was your experience of being around other people during this time?
  Prompt: Did this experience affect your relationships with others - at work or at home?
- Did this experience change how you see yourself?
  Prompt: How, if at all, did this affect your sense of who you are, either personally or professionally?
- How did you respond to this experience?
  Prompt (if needed): Was there anything that helped you cope during that time? Or anything that felt challenging?
- Looking back, what kind of support did you feel you had during this experience?
  Prompt (if appropriate): Was there anything that helped or hindered you during this period?
- How do you think this experience has affected how you see the future?
  Prompt: How do you feel about your future, either personally or professionally, after this experience?
- How has the experience of being under investigation affected how you see yourself, either personally or professionally?
- Prompt: Do you feel this experience has changed you in any way?
- Are there any moments or events from that time that stand out for you?
- Prompt: What about these moments feels significant to you now?
- How has this experience changed you?
- How do you feel now, thinking about the investigation and your life after it?
- Prompt: How do you think this experience will affect you in the future?
- Is there anything else you feel is important to share that might help me understand your experience better?
- Reflexive Question: After discussing difficult emotions or experiences, consider asking, how are you feeling now that we've discussed this experience? to ensure the participant feels supported.

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PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH INTO POLICE OFFICERS' EXPERIENCE OF BEING UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR PROFESSIONAL MISCONDUCT

We are looking for volunteer serving police officers to take part in a study who have been through an investigation for misconduct.
As a participant in this study, you would be asked to take part in an online semi-structured interview with the researcher via Zoom or face to face in a private office should you prefer.
Your participation would involve *one* interview
of up to 60 minutes.
There is no payment or explicit reward for your participation, your contribution will be entirely voluntary and provide valuable insight that may be of benefit to officers going through investigations in the future in relation to support and mental health care.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,

please contact:

T Lavis

Department of Psychology
City, University of London

Email:
This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance
through the City University Ethics Committee, City, University of London.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email:
City, University of London is the data controller for the personal data collected for this research project. If you have any data protection concerns about this research project, please contact City's Information Compliance Team at dataprotection@city.ac.uk

Stage 1: Example of reading, re-reading and listening to original interview transcripts – (Andy)

Time	Speaker	Conversation	Comment
	Andy	It was two days before I went on holiday. I went on holiday two days after and my wife didn't know… at all… cos I didn't want to ruin the holiday for her.	
	Researcher	Was there anything particular you recall about the leadup to your holiday.	
00:07:47	Andy	No. So we went away for a week and… we went away for a week and she said I was a nightmare… I was miserable, I was short tempered, I was angry. You know…. I was introvert (*inaudible*)…. and so when we came back after the holiday, I sat her down… and said I need to tell you something because obviously I'm not managing very well and she…. we had a bit of a cry… because she… because she said …. you know…. (*inaudible*) but she said you should have told me,….	
	Researcher	Ah	
00:08:13	Andy	But I couldn't… because obviously I didn't want her to worry about anything… she had a bit of a cry and and she just said what's happened… and I just said this…. they're alleging this and this is what's been served on me. She said… She said what does that mean and I said I don't really know,…. but I'll have to go through a process…. and then yeah… and then… and then went through the process.	
00:08:34	Researcher	Are… are you finding it challenging to recall this conversation…	
00:08:40	Andy	No… No…	
	Researcher	What stands out in your memory about your thoughts or feelings during that part of the conversation….	
00:08:43	Andy	Nothing… I just got served the papers and then…. I can't remember the time frame because it's blurry…. but I remember meeting my Fed Rep …,, Uhm… up at headquarters and he went through the process… say…. obviously with the disclosure… he debated the disclosure and he this is what they alleged they've got against you… kind of thing… and it… you know…. this gross misconduct. There are… you know aspects of it… because for me it's just a blur because for me I was just fixated on… I was under investigation… you know… I don't think… I don't think anyone sat me down and said do you understand what's going on… I don't think anyone took an effort… I think it was… if anyone did explain it to me I can't remember… and if they did I think it was just like the… right… go through like a tick list… right we've told him what… this…. I can't remember of someone said to me we'll stop…. do you understand what's going on. I don't think that was ever asked me. It's just like literally again… I think	

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE ANALYSIS PROCESS

Analysis Process.

as per Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2022)

**Stage 1: Reading and re-reading
of interview transcipts.**

Multiple readings of each transcript whilst listening to audio recording of interview to
famaliarise with content and actively enagage with data.

Stage 2: Exploratory noting of interview transcipts.

Exploring semantic content and language used during interviews and understanding the
context of concerns and patterns of
meanings verbalised by participants.

**Stage 3: Constructing of Personal Experiential Statements
(PES).**

Articulating the most important features of transcripts and exploratory notes relating
directly to each participants personal experiences. Local level of organisational and
interpretive analysis.

**Stage 4: Making Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) from
connections across each individual participants' PES's**

Analytical grouping of Personal Experiential Statements into clusters describing the
characteristics of each cluster, per individual participant.

**Stage 5: Developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs) from
combined PET's, across all participants.**

Reviewing PET's, across all participants, to identify convergences or divergences of
interpreted experiences into grouped GETs and get sub themes.

Stage 1: Example of reading, re -reading and listening to original interview transcripts – (Andy)

Time	Speaker	Conversation	Comment
	Andy	It was two days before I went on holiday. I went on holiday two days after and my wife didn't know... at all... cos I didn't want to ruin the holiday for her.	
	Researcher	Was there anything particular you recall about the leadup to your holiday.	
00:07:47	Andy	No. So we went away for a week and... we went away for a week and she said I was a nightmare... I was miserable, I was short tempered, I was angry. You know.... I was introvert (*inaudible*).... and so when we came back after the holiday, I sat her down... and said I need to tell you something because obviously I'm not managing very well and she.... we had a bit of a cry... because she... because she said .... you know.... (*inaudible*) but she said you should have told me.....	
	Researcher	Ah	
00:08:13	Andy	But I couldn't... because obviously I didn't want her to worry about anything... she had a bit of a cry and and she just said what's happened... and I just said this.... they're alleging this and this is what's been served on me. She said... She said what does that mean and I said I don't really know..... but I'll have to go through a process.... and then yeah... and then... and then went through the process.	
00:08:34	Researcher	Are... are you finding it challenging to recall this conversation...	
00:08:40	Andy	No... No...	
	Researcher	What stands out in your memory about your thoughts or feelings during that part of the conversation....	
00:08:43	Andy	Nothing... I just got served the papers and then.... I can't remember the time frame because it's blurry.... but I remember meeting my Fed Rep ..... Uhm... up at headquarters and he went through the process... say.... obviously with the disclosure... he debated the disclosure and he this is what they alleged they've got against you... kind of thing... and it... you know.... this gross misconduct. There are... you know aspects of it... because for me it's just a blur because for me I was just fixated on... I was under investigation... you know... I don't think... I don't think anyone sat me down and said do you understand what's going on... I don't think anyone took an effort... I think it was... if anyone did explain it to me I can't remember... and if they did I think it was just like the... right... go through like a tick list.. right we've told him what... this.... I can't remember of someone said to me we'll stop.... do you understand what's going on. I don't think that was ever asked me. It's just like literally again... I think	

Stage 1: Example of reading, re-reading and listening to original interview transcripts – (Andy continued)

		because PSD and all that kind of stuff and the Fed they're used to... it's like what we...... every day is the same day... and they're use to doing it so many times... but for me it was the only time I was ever investigated like that. Uhm... so yeah it's just... yeah.	
00:09:55	Researcher	Yeah I get that. It makes sense doesn't it....but for them... from what you are saying it seems like routine for them so they wouldn't check that you understood.....	
00:10:02	Andy	Yeah....	
	Researcher	... so can you describe your work situation on the day that you were served papers	
	Andy	Yeah... (long pause)	
00:01:14	Researcher	... could you tell me more about your work arrangement at that time	
	Andy	... ████████████	
	Researcher	.... Could you walk me through your work experiences on that day.	
00:10:21	Andy	I was called in... I was called in served... the papers.... by the... by the Detective Inspector... he just showed me the papers and said because of this we can't have you in the department because of the delicate nature of where we're working so I had to give all my ID cards over. Uhm.... I had to then be driven back to Headquarters and I think I was just drop.... I think I was just told... I can't remember.... I remember being.... being taken out I couldn't talk to anyone.... literally it was a matter of we go.... and.....	
00:10:58	Researcher	Can you tell me more about this experience	
	Andy	It was an open plan room but the offices were set off. So I was... I was... talking.. walking away at which point I just had the boss shout up saying come in here and have a chat... so I walked in closed the door and said I've been told I need to serve papers on you and then.... I ok....	
	Researcher	How are you feeling now talking about this.	
	Andy	████████████████████████	

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Stage 2: Example of exploratory noting of interview transcripts
(Andy)

Line No	Speaker	Conversation	Researcher Exploratory Notes
186	Andy	It was two days before I went on holiday. I went on	He felt the need to protect his wife from worry, keeping investigation secret from her before their holiday
187		holiday two days after and my wife didn't know... at	He had internal conflict and worry about keeping the MI secret from his wife.
188		all... cos I didn't want to ruin the holiday for her.	
189	Res.	Was there anything particular you recall about the	
190		leadup to your holiday.	
191	Andy	No. So we went away for a week and... we went	Emotional disclosure related to his experience of being served papers and the impact it had upon their holiday
192		away for a week and she said I was a nightmare... I	
193		was miserable, I was short tempered, I was angry.	He experienced emotional turmoil during the holiday, feeling miserable, short-tempered, and angry
194		You know.... I was introvert (inaudible).... and so	Explanation reagrding his decesion not to tell his spouse about his being served papers to avoid ruining their holiday
195		when we came back after the holiday, I sat her	He felt guilty for not telling his wife and struggled with the weight of keeping the secret
196		down... and said I need to tell you something	Emotional disclosure describing their emotional state during their holiday including feeling miserable, short tempered, angry and introverted
197		because obviously I'm not managing very well and	
198		she.... We had a bit of a cry... because she... because	Explanation reagrding his revelation that he eventually dislcosed his situation to his wife after the holiday.
199		she said .... you know.... (inaudible) but she said you	Emotional disclosure describing both his and his wife's emotional response to the revelation
200		should have told me.....	
201	Res.	Ah	
202	Andy	But I couldn't... because obviously I didn't want her	He felt vulnerable & uncertain when explaining the situation to his wife
203		to worry about anything... she had a bit of a cry and	Emotional disclosure to wife after their holiday and disclosing emtional detail during this event.
204		and she just said what's happened... and I just said	
205		this.... they're alleging this and this is what's been	He struggled to articulate the potential consequences of the investigation
206		served on me. She said... She said what does that	Explanation to spouse about allegations they are facing and the process they would have to go through.
207		mean and I said I don't really know..... but I'll have	Emotional uncertainty expressed about the meaning of the allegations and the processes invloved in the investiagtion.
208		to go through a process.... and then yeah... and	
209		then... and then went through the process.	
210	Res.	Are... are you finding it challenging to recall this	
211		conversation...	
212	Andy	No... No...	Confirmation that he was ok talking about his revelation regarding the allegations to spouse .
213	Res.	What stands out in your memory about your	
214		thoughts or feelings during that part of the	
215		conversation....	
216	Andy	Nothing... I just got served the papers and then..... I	He felt confused & lacked clarity about the MI process, feeling lost without proper explanation or guidance
217		can't remember the time frame because it's	Explanation reagrding his lack of knowledge when initially served papers at the begiining of the MI
218		blurry..... but I remember meeting my Fed Rep	Explanation regarding his meeting with his Fed Rep and receiving detail around the misconduct process that he was about to go

Stage 2: Exploratory Noting of interview transcripts
(Andy continued)

Line No	Speaker	Conversation	Researcher Exploratory Notes
219		Uhm... up at headquarters and he went through the	*through.*
220		process... say.... obviously with the disclosure... he	
221		debated the disclosure and he this is what they	*Explanation regarding the Fed Rep when the Fed Rep dicussed the disclosure made against Andy causing the MI process.*
222		alleged they've got against you... kind of thing... and	
223		it... you know.... this gross misconduct. There are...	*He felt overwhelmed & unsupported during the initial stages of the investigation*
224		you know aspects of it... because for me it's just a	
225		blur because for me I was just fixated on... I was	*Emotional disclosure about Andy's inability to absorb information at this stage*
226		under investigation... you know... I don't think... I	*Reflected a lack of clear communication and understanding about the MI process*
227		don't think anyone sat me down and said do you	
228		understand what's going on... I don't think anyone	*Emotional disclosure that no one assessed his inability to absorb the information about his situation*
229		took an effort... I think it was... if anyone did explain it	
230		to me I can't remember... and if they did I think it	
231		was just like the... right... go through like a tick list..	
232		right we've told him what... this.... I can't remember	*He experienced a lack of personal consideration for the impact on him*
233		of someone said to me we'll stop.... do you	
234		understand what's going on. I don't think that was	
235		ever asked me. It's just like literally again... I think	
236		because PSD and all that kind of stuff and the Fed	*He felt like just another case to those handling his investigation*
237		they're used to... it's like what we...... every day is	*Explanation about his situation being business as usual for both PSD and his Fed Rep that it was depersonalised for them to such an*
238		the same day... and they're use to doing it so many	*extent that they failed to understand the personal impact upon him*
239		times... but for me it was the only time I was ever	*Emotional disclosure about the shock to him of his being subject of an MI for the first time.*
240		investigated like that. Uhm... so yeah it's just... yeah.	
241	Res.	Yeah I get that. It makes sense doesn't it....but for	
242		them... from what you are saying it seems like	
243		routine for them so they wouldn't check that you	
244		understood.....	
245	Andy	Yeah....	
246	Res.	... so can you describe your work situation on the	
247		day that you were served papers...	
248	Andy	Yeah... (long pause)	
249	Res.	... could you tell me more about your work	
250		arrangement at that time	
251	Andy	████████ ...	

Stage 3: Examples of constructing Personal Experiential Statements (PES) (Greg)

Researchers Note	Participant	LineNo	Identified PES
Feeling emotionally depleted due to the enforced isolation from his new support structure.	Greg	445 - 447	Emotional exhaustion caused by forced isolation from support networks
Trying to write a note of his positive memories and achievements to make himself feel better.	Greg	448 - 449	Attempting to cope by focusing on positive memories and achievements
Struggling to cope with a third move and having to start all over again.	Greg	459 - 460	Difficulty coping with multiple work-related changes and disruptions
Feeling uncomfortable that people are wondering why he's being moved a third time.	Greg	460 - 461	Discomfort and self-consciousness about others' perceptions of work-related changes
Metaphor: He is feeling judged by his colleagues for being in trouble.	Greg	462 - 463	Feeling judged and stigmatised by colleagues
Metaphor: His feeling of desperation at his loss of professional identity and being unwanted by his colleagues.	Greg	464	Loss of professional identity and feelings of rejection by colleagues
Metaphor: A sense of doom at his colleagues sensing the impending end of his career.	Greg	465 - 466	Perceived inevitability of negative career consequences
Feeling helpless at not being able to stop crying in a public place with a friend.	Greg	467 - 469	Helplessness and emotional vulnerability in public settings
A sense of relief that he had someone to listen to him.	Greg	473 - 476	Relief and comfort in having someone to listen and provide support
Feeling that he might be ok in the end.	Greg	475 - 476	Hope and optimism about the eventual outcome
Feeling happier at his first communication from PSD.	Greg	478 - 480	Relief and positive emotions associated with initial communication from PSD
Thinking that PSD have taken too long.	Greg	481 - 485	Frustration with the length and pace of the investigation
Hypothesising how he would investigate the MI allegation himself.	Greg	486 - 495	Reflecting on personal approach to conducting investigations
Thinking about the length of time the same investigation by him would have taken.	Greg	497 - 500	Comparing the investigation timeline to personal standards

Stage 3: Examples of constructing Personal Experiential Statements (PES) (Ben)

Researchers Note	Participant	Line No	Identified PES
He felt naive upon returning to work, expecting things to return to normal	Ben	14 - 18	Emotional vulnerability from misplaced optimism about workplace reintegration
He experienced a lack of guidance from the command team upon his return	Ben	18 - 21	Sense of organisational abandonment due to absence of reintegration support
He initially felt positive about returning to his previous position	Ben	21 - 25	Fleeting relief and hopefulness upon resuming normal work duties
He proactively decided to address potential rumours by informing a few close friends	Ben	27 - 30	Anxiety-driven attempt to control narrative and preserve professional reputation
He trusted these friends would challenge any gossip they heard about his situation	Ben	30 - 33	Emotional reliance on trusted colleagues for maintaining workplace integrity
He took initiative by gathering his entire team at a pub	Ben	33 - 36	Proactive stress management through direct communication with colleagues
He felt it necessary to openly share what had happened with his team to prevent rumours	Ben	36 - 38	Psychological burden of disclosure balanced against fear of unchecked speculation
He experienced relief when his team heard the truth directly from him	Ben	39 - 41	Momentary emotional reprieve following transparent communication with team
He felt compelled to address the situation with his team, recognising it as a conscious decision	Ben	44 - 48	Internal struggle between vulnerability and necessity of open communication
He was upset by a former colleague's disrespectful comments about his situation	Ben	48 - 55	Hurt and anger from perceived betrayal by a professional peer
He heard about the negative comments early on, which influenced his decision to speak openly	Ben	55 - 60	Heightened anxiety driving proactive defence against workplace gossip
He consulted with his Sergeant colleague, who was also a Federation Representative, about addressing the team	Ben	60 - 64	Seeking emotional support and professional guidance from trusted colleague
He felt supported by his colleague, who helped arrange the meeting with his team	Ben	64 - 68	Relief and gratitude from receiving practical assistance in a challenging situation
He was determined to gather everyone together to share his story	Ben	68 - 70	Resolve to maintain control over personal narrative despite emotional vulnerability
He believed it was crucial for his team to hear the truth from him to prevent rumours	Ben	70 - 72	Psychological pressure to pre-empt potential damage to professional relationships

Stage 3: Examples of constructing Personal Experiential Statements (PES) (Felix)

Researchers Note	Candidate	Line No	Identified PES
Feeling uneasy that the PSD interviewer was suggesting an inappropriate deal about his pension.	Felix	317 - 318	Unease and discomfort with the interviewer's suggestion of an inappropriate deal
His feeling of relief that the PSD investigators threat, prior to interview, was worthless	Felix	319 - 320	Relief at the ineffectiveness of the interviewer's pre-interview threats
Feeling unsettled that the PSD interviewers approach was designed to illicit an unintended statement.	Felix	321 - 323	Feeling unsettled and manipulated by the interviewer's tactics to elicit unintended stater
His feeling of anxiety when the PSD officer was trying to coerce him into saying things.	Felix	321 - 323	Anxiety and discomfort with the interviewer's attempts at coercion
His feeling of relief at the PSD interviewers lack of knowledge about him.	Felix	324	Relief at the interviewer's lack of personal knowledge and information
His feeling of confidence when he challenged the PSD Officer who was coercing him.	Felix	325 - 327	Confidence and assertiveness in challenging the interviewer's coercive tactics
Feeling hopeful for a fair interview after standing up for himself.	Felix	326 - 327	Hope for a fair interview after asserting one's rights and position
Feeling contempt, anger and frustration at the PSD interviewer.	Felix	329	Contempt, anger, and frustration towards the PSD interviewer
Feeling shocked that in different circumstances the PSD Interviewers threat could have had immense potential power over him.	Felix	330 - 334	Shock at the potential power and influence of the interviewer's threats in different circum
A sense of integrity knowing he would have answered honestly regardless of any intimidation tactics.	Felix	334 - 336	Sense of personal integrity and commitment to honesty despite intimidation
Relief that the PSD officer had lost the ability to intimidate him into making involuntary statements.	Felix	334 - 338	Relief at the ineffectiveness of the interviewer's intimidation tactics
Reflecting that the PSD interviewers conversation would have left left hime feeling scared and vulnerable.	Felix	337 - 338	Reflection on the potential emotional impact of the interviewer's tactics on others

Stage 4: Examples of making Personal Experiential Themes (PET) from PES's

(Greg)

LineNo	Identified PES	Identified PET
445 - 447	Emotional exhaustion caused by forced isolation from support networks	Professional isolation and social withdrawal
448 - 449	Attempting to cope by focusing on positive memories and achievements	Development of self-protective behaviours
459 - 460	Difficulty coping with multiple work-related changes and disruptions	Sense of profound injustice and unfair treatment
460 - 461	Discomfort and self-consciousness about others' perceptions of work-related changes	Emotional vulnerability in professional settings
462 - 463	Feeling judged and stigmatised by colleagues	Emotional vulnerability in professional settings
464	Loss of professional identity and feelings of rejection by colleagues	Crisis of professional identity and self-image
465 - 466	Perceived inevitability of negative career consequences	Crisis of professional identity and self-image
467 - 469	Helplessness and emotional vulnerability in public settings	Emotional vulnerability in professional settings
473 - 476	Relief and comfort in having someone to listen and provide support	Development of self-protective behaviours
475 - 476	Hope and optimism about the eventual outcome	Resilience and post-traumatic growth
478 - 480	Relief and positive emotions associated with initial communication from PSD	Emotional turbulence throughout investigation
481 - 485	Frustration with the length and pace of the investigation	Frustration with opaque investigative procedures
486 - 495	Reflecting on personal approach to conducting investigations	Empowerment through misconduct procedure knowledge

(Ben)

Line No	Identified PES	Identified PET
14 - 18	Emotional vulnerability from misplaced optimism about workplace reintegration	Naivety and initial optimism upon return to work
18 - 21	Sense of organisational abandonment due to absence of reintegration support	Organisational neglect and lack of guidance
21 - 25	Fleeting relief and hopefulness upon resuming normal work duties	Naivety and initial optimism upon return to work
27 - 30	Anxiety-driven attempt to control narrative and preserve professional reputation	Proactive reputation management among colleagues
30 - 33	Emotional reliance on trusted colleagues for maintaining workplace integrity	Proactive reputation management among colleagues
33 - 36	Proactive stress management through direct communication with colleagues	Proactive reputation management among colleagues
36 - 38	Psychological burden of disclosure balanced against fear of unchecked speculation	Proactive reputation management among colleagues
39 - 41	Momentary emotional reprieve following transparent communication with team	Proactive reputation management among colleagues
44 - 48	Internal struggle between vulnerability and necessity of open communication	Proactive reputation management among colleagues
48 - 55	Hurt and anger from perceived betrayal by a professional peer	Betrayal by former colleagues and rumour impact
55 - 60	Heightened anxiety driving proactive defence against workplace gossip	Betrayal by former colleagues and rumour impact
60 - 64	Seeking emotional support and professional guidance from trusted colleague	Support from unexpected allies
64 - 68	Relief and gratitude from receiving practical assistance in a challenging situation	Support from unexpected allies
68 - 70	Resolve to maintain control over personal narrative despite emotional vulnerability	Struggle for truth-telling and narrative control

(Felix)

Line No	Identified PES	Identified PET
317 - 318	Unease and discomfort with the interviewer's suggestion of an inappropriate deal	Ethical concerns about the investigation process
319 - 320	Relief at the ineffectiveness of the interviewer's pre-interview threats	Relief, vindication, and emotional release
321 - 323	Feeling unsettled and manipulated by the interviewer's tactics to elicit unintended statements	Experience of power imbalance and intimidation tactics during the investigation
321 - 323	Anxiety and discomfort with the interviewer's attempts at coercion	Experience of power imbalance and intimidation tactics during the investigation
324	Relief at the interviewer's lack of personal knowledge and information	Relief, vindication, and emotional release
325 - 327	Confidence and assertiveness in challenging the interviewer's coercive tactics	Coping mechanisms and resilience
326 - 327	Hope for a fair interview after asserting one's rights and position	Coping mechanisms and resilience
329	Contempt, anger, and frustration towards the PSD interviewer	Perception of investigator incompetence and unprofessionalism
330 - 334	Shock at the potential power and influence of the interviewer's threats in different circumstances	Experience of power imbalance and intimidation tactics during the investigation
334 - 336	Sense of personal integrity and commitment to honesty despite intimidation	Challenges to personal integrity and professional identity
334 - 338	Relief at the ineffectiveness of the interviewer's intimidation tactics	Relief, vindication, and emotional release
337 - 338	Reflection on the potential emotional impact of the interviewer's tactics on others	Emotional turmoil and distress

Stage 5: Example of developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs) from combined PET's. (Partial view 3 of 5 GET's)

GET: Psychological and Emotional Upheaval				GET: Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability				GET: Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice			
Sub Theme	Clusters	PET	Participant	Sub Theme	Clusters	PET	Participant	Sub Theme	Clusters	PET	Participant
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional trauma of investigation	Andy	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Loss of professional identity	Andy	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Leadership Impact	Impact of leadership during the investigation	Harry
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional rollercoaster of the process	Ben	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Impact on self-image and professional identity	Ben	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Loss of Trust in Organisation and Leadership	Loss of Trust in Organisation	Andy
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Anger and emotional turbulence	Ben	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Loss of professional identity and purpose	Chris	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Loss of Trust in Organisation and Leadership	Erosion of trust in the policing system and leadership	Chris
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional rollercoaster of hope and despair	Chris	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Loss of Professional Role	Ed	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Loss of Trust in Organisation and Leadership	Erosion of trust in force's support for officers	Dave
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional turmoil during prolonged IOPC investigation	Dave	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Professional Identity Crisis	Ed	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Loss of Trust in Organisation and Leadership	Loss of Trust in the System	Ed
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional Impact	Ed	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Professional identity crisis	Felix	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Loss of Trust in Organisation and Leadership	Loss of trust in the organisation	Felix
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional turmoil and distress	Felix	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Crisis of professional identity and self-image	Greg	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Loss of Trust in Organisation and Leadership	Loss of trust in organisational processes	Harry
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional turbulence throughout investigation	Greg	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Professional identity crisis	Harry	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Sense of Betrayal	Perceived betrayal by leadership and organisation	Felix
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional and psychological trauma	Harry	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Specific Professional Identity Challenges	Loss of career aspirations	Ben	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Sense of Betrayal	Sense of betrayal by the organisation	Harry
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional turbulence throughout the investigative process	Harry	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Specific Professional Identity Challenges	Crisis of professional identity as a police sergeant	Dave	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Erosion of Trust in Colleagues	Betrayal by former colleagues and rumour impact	Ben
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional turmoil and psychological distress	Chris	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Specific Professional Identity Challenges	Challenges to personal integrity and professional identity	Felix	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Erosion of Trust in Colleagues	Erosion of trust in police organisation and colleagues	Greg
Emotional and		Initial shock and betrayal from		Fear of job loss and	Fear of Job Loss &	Fear of job loss and financial		Erosion of trust in	Erosion of Trust in	Distrust in colleagues and	

Stage 5: Example of developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs) from combined PET's. (Partial view 2 of 5 GET's)

GET: Psychological and Emotional Upheaval				GET: Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability			
Sub Theme	Clusters	PET	Participant	Sub Theme	Clusters	PET	Participant
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress	Psychological Burden of Prolonged Uncertainty	Psychological burden of prolonged uncertainty	Greg	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Self-doubt & Uncertainty	Struggle with self-doubt and uncertainty	Chris
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress	Psychological Burden of Prolonged Uncertainty	Psychological burden of prolonged investigations	Harry	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Self-doubt & Uncertainty	Scrutiny and self-doubt over incident decision-making	Dave
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	General Anxiety and Uncertainty	Anxiety and Uncertainty	Ed	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Self-doubt & Uncertainty	Self-doubt and Confidence Issues	Ed
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	General Anxiety and Uncertainty	Uncertainty and anxiety about the process	Felix	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Self-doubt & Uncertainty	Self-doubt and questioning of actions	Felix
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	General Anxiety and Uncertainty	Anxiety and physical stress reactions	Greg	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Impact on Self-esteem and Professional	Impact on self-esteem and professional confidence	Chris
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	General Anxiety and Uncertainty	Anxiety and uncertainty about the future	Harry	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Impact on Self-esteem and Professional Confidence	Impact on self-esteem and professional confidence	Greg
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress	General Long-term Psychological Impact	Long-term psychological impact	Ben	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Impact on Self-esteem and Professional Confidence	Impact on self-worth and confidence	Harry
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of	General Long-term Psychological Impact	Long-term psychological scars and trauma	Chris	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Loss of Professional Credibility	Loss of professional credibility	Andy

Stage 5: Example of developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs) from combined PET's. (Partial view 2 of 5 GET's filtered for Greg)

GET: Psychological and Emotional Upheaval				GET: Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability			
Sub Theme	Clusters	PET	Participant	Sub Theme	Clusters	PET	Participant
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Trauma and Distress	Emotional turbulence throughout investigation	Greg	Loss of professional role and self-concept	General Loss of Professional Identity	Crisis of professional identity and self-image	Greg
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Initial Shock and Disbelief	Initial shock and disbelief at allegation	Greg	Fear of job loss and financial insecurity	Fear of Job Loss & Financial Instability	Fear of career loss and financial instability	Greg
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	Emotional Vulnerability in Professional Settings	Emotional vulnerability in professional settings	Greg	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Impact on Self-esteem and Professional Confidence	Impact on self-esteem and professional confidence	Greg
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress	Psychological Burden of Prolonged Uncertainty	Psychological burden of prolonged uncertainty	Greg	Navigating Professional Challenges and Reintegration	Changes in Professional Approach	Hypervigilance and risk-aversion post-investigation	Greg
Emotional and Psychological turmoil	General Anxiety and Uncertainty	Anxiety and physical stress reactions	Greg	Navigating Professional Challenges and Reintegration	Changes in Professional Approach	Redefinition of workplace relationships and boundaries	Greg
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress	General Long-term Psychological Impact	Long-term psychological impact post-investigation	Greg	Navigating Professional Challenges and Reintegration	Career Reassessment	Reassessment of career path and aspirations	Greg
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress	Physical Manifestations of Stress	Physical health decline during investigation	Greg				
Manifestations and Lasting Impact of	Suicidal Ideation	Suicidal ideation and mental health deterioration	Greg				

Stage 5: Final Group Experiential Themes (GETs) from combined PET's.

GETs	Psychological and Emotional Upheaval	Professional Identity Crisis and Career Instability	Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice	Social Isolation and Relational Strain	Moral Injury and Existential Recalibration
Sub Themes	Emotional and Psychological Turmoil	Loss of professional role and self-concept	Erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues	Professional Ostracism and Personal Relationship Challenges	Moral Dissonance and Embitterment
	Manifestations and Lasting Impact of Distress	Fear of job loss and financial insecurity	Systemic Failings in Investigative Processes and Communication	Navigating Communication Restrictions and Support Networks	Resilience and Existential Recalibration
		Navigating Professional Challenges and Reintegration			

APPENDIX E: ETHICAL APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION

Dear Tracy

Reference: ETH2223-0361

Project title: Doctoral Research Project

Start date: 28 Nov 2022

End date: 29 Nov 2024

I am writing to you to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval from the Psychology low risk review. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

Please ensure that you are familiar with City's Framework for Good Practice in Research and any appropriate Departmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension

You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;
- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers;
- Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;
- Change the end date of the project.

Adverse events or untoward incidents

You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

a) Adverse events

b) Breaches of confidentiality

c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults

d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the Psychology low risk review, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

Mehdi Keramati

Psychology low risk review

City, University of London

.**Title of study:** *A qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of being under investigation for misconduct in serving police officers in England and Wales*

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Ethics approval code: ETH2223-0361

Name of principal researcher: T Lavis

Thank you for taking part in this research study. In contributing to this project, you have provided valuable information into the understanding of how serving officers experience being under investigation for professional misconduct. In studying your unique and detailed account as a serving officer, this research seeks to better understand how your experience, and those of other participants, impact of the lives of those in similar circumstances, and whether findings may be able to inform improved support to those individuals.

If participating in this research has raised any issues, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher on the contact details provided below. Additionally, please find a list of support lines and websites that might be helpful in cases of psychological distress:

- The Samaritans: Someone to talk to who won't judge. Call 116 123 (24/7)
- Police Care U.K. Call 0300 012 0030 or email hello@policecare.org.uk. Charity for serving and veteran police officers and staff who have suffered any physical or psychological harm because of policing
- Defence Medical Welfare Service is a national welfare support service via the Police Federation. Helpline: 0800 999 3697
- OscarKilo, the National Police Wellbeing Service for online wellbeing guidance and support. https://www.oscarkilo.org.uk

We hope you found the study interesting. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at the following:

Researcher: T Lavis

Title of study: *A qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of being under investigation for misconduct in serving police officers in England and Wales*

Ethics approval code: ETH2223-0361

Name of principal researcher: T lavis

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information. You will be emailed a copy of this information sheet to keep.

What is the purpose of the study?
This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of serving police officers who have been through a professional misconduct investigation. This study seeks to better understand the experiences of such police officers and hopes to contribute to the future provision of wellbeing, mental health support and care to serving officers throughout such investigations. This study forms part of a thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University London and is intended to run until November 2024.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to participate in this study as you have told the researcher you are a police officer currently serving in an English force. You are also over the age of 18 and have told the researcher that you have experienced a professional misconduct investigation in the last six years. You have confirmed that this investigation has been fully completed and this was over six months ago. You also confirm that you are not currently being treated for mental health difficulties. Please inform the researcher if any of these details are inaccurate.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose not to participate in part or all of the project. You can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. You will be able to avoid answering questions that you feel are too uncomfortable or intrusive without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

If you wish to take part, you will be invited to attend a one-to-one interview expected to last 60 minutes. The interview will be semi-structured, so there will be six or seven open-ended questions which are expected to lead onto further topics. You will be encouraged to take the lead in sharing your experiences. The interview will be audio recorded, all recordings will be made on an encrypted recording device and transferred to a password protected computer for storage. Recordings will be accessible only to the researcher. After the interview recordings will be transcribed, replacing any identifying or personal information with pseudonyms to ensure your identity remains anonymous. The data, including quotations will then be analysed using an Interpretative Phenomenological approach. This involves looking at your insights and how you have made sense of your experiences. The study is expected to last until June 2024 and recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Due to the nature of the topic, it is possible that exploring your experience of a completed professional misconduct investigation may involve some emotional upset. If this was to occur, we would be able to take a break from the interview and you will be encouraged to express these feelings if they arise so that we can ensure your wellbeing and care. Also please remember your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any stage.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
This is an opportunity to share your views and experiences of going through a professional misconduct investigation and may provide a space to be listened to and reflect on what this has meant to you. You will also be contributing to research on an important topic that seeks to serving police officers a chance to speak openly about how they experience such investigations, which will contribute to knowledge on the topic and will benefit the field of counselling psychology and possibly benefit future officers and the provision of mental health care and support.

Will me taking part in the study be kept confidential?
All information you disclose will be treated confidentially. All recordings will be accessible only to the researcher and stored securely on a password protected computer until they are destroyed at the end of the study. Confidentiality will only be broken if the researcher feels there is risk of serious harm either to yourself or others, or where the researcher is legally obliged to do so. All identifying or personal information will be replaced by pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. Your contact details will not be shared with any third parties and future use of personal contact information will be used only if you express interest in being informed of the results of the study once completed.

Data privacy statement

City, University of London is the sponsor, and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is City's public task.

Your right to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way for the research to be reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further

information please see https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/.

City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. If you wish to receive the results of the study, your contact details will also be kept for this purpose. The only people at City who will have access to your identifiable information will be the researcher, T Lavis. City will keep identifiable information about you from this study for 1 year after the study has finished.

You can find out more about how City handles data by visiting https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal. If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (I.O.C.) https://ico.org.uk/.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The findings of this study will be written up as part of a thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. The findings may also be included in various future academic publications. All details, including direct quotations from interviews will be listed under a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. There will be no identifiable or personal information in the final thesis or any other publications, so there will be no way for readers to identify you. If you would like to be sent the results of the study, please inform the researcher and consent to your contact details being kept for this purpose on the 'participant consent form.'

Who has reviewed the study?
This study has been approved by City, University of London Research Ethics Committee

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns, or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you can phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is:
A qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of being under investigation for misconduct in serving police officers in England and Wales
You can also write to the Secretary at:
Research Integrity Manager
City, University of London, Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB
Email: ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Further information and contact details
▬▬▬▬▬▬

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Informed Consent Form

Title of study: A qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of being under investigation for misconduct in serving police officers in England and Wales
Ethics approval code: ETH2223-0361
Name of principal researcher: Dr T Lavis

Please initial box

1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above-named study dated 22.7.22 Version 1. I have had the opportunity to consider this information and to ask questions about what is involved. I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep for my records.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	
3.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the time of transcription.	
4.	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	
5	I understand that any information I provide is confidential and that no identifiable personal information will be published or shared with third parties. I understand that the original recording will accessible only to the researcher and will be stored securely and destroyed following the completion of the research project.	
6	I agree to the use of direct, anonymised quotes from my interview being included in this research project.	
7.	I understand information I provide will be used as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis in counselling psychology and a pseudonym will be used when referring to this information, including direct quotations, as a way of maintaining anonymity.	
8.	I agree to City, University of London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the participant information and my consent is conditional on City University complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (199	
9.	I understand that the duty of confidentiality is not absolute and in exceptional circumstances this may be overridden by more compelling duties such as to protect individuals from harm	
10.	I would like to have a summary of the results of this study once it has been completed - yes or no	
11.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature

PART B: CLIENT STUDY AND PROCESS REPORT

THIS SECTION HAS BEEN REDACTED FOR REASONS OF CONFIDENTIALITY

PART C: PUBLISHABLE PAPER

Article for submission to: Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles

The case study of Sally offers a vivid illustration of how therapeutic interventions can address deep emotional distress and foster resilience. Throughout our work, themes such as trust, abandonment, and the healing power of supportive relationships emerged themes that reflect the broader psychological struggles experienced by individuals when their sense of security and fairness is compromised. These ideas resonate strongly with the findings from my research into the lived experiences of police officers undergoing internal misconduct investigations. Many officers spoke of feelings of 'organisational betrayal' and 'procedural injustice', where the very systems designed to protect them appeared to turn against them. This connection between individual therapeutic experiences and the systemic challenges officers face offers a cohesive narrative that bridges the personal with the institutional.

In the final section of this portfolio, I take the insights from both the research project and the case study and translate them into a publishable paper for The Police Journal: Policy and Practice. Centred on one theme from my research project, the theme of organisational betrayal and procedural injustice, this paper explores how officers' experiences of unfairness and a lack of transparency during internal investigations contribute to their feelings of abandonment and isolation. By examining these lived experiences, the paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of how procedural processes can impact the mental well-being of officers. While it does not seek to directly advocate for change, it highlights the complexity of these experiences and the psychological toll they can take, offering a nuanced view that invites reflection on the role of organisational practices in shaping officers' mental health. Through this work, I hope to contribute to the broader discourse on the emotional challenges faced by officers during such investigations, encouraging further exploration into how organisational structures can impact well-being.

Shadows of Doubt in the Thin Blue Line: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Police Officers' Experiences of Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice During Misconduct Investigations

Dr Tracy Lavis
Department of Psychology, School of Health & Medical Sciences, City St Georges,
University of London EC1V OHB, UK.
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ABSTRACT

This study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore how police officers experience internal misconduct investigations conducted by Professional Standards Departments (PSDs) in England and Wales. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight white, male British officers who had undergone these internal PSD investigations. While the broader study identified five major themes, this paper focuses on 'Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice', comprising two subthemes: (1) 'Fractures in the Police Family' and (2) 'Navigating a Labyrinth of Opacity'. Participants' accounts indicated what appeared to be experiences of procedural opacity, perceived bias, and profound sense of institutional betrayal within these internal disciplinary processes. Officers described what might be interpreted as a striking paradox - instead of experiencing the supportive solidarity often associated with police culture, they reported encountering isolation, what could be understood as professional infantilisation, and patterns that might cautiously be interpreted as forms of noble cause corruption within internal investigative practices. Psychological impacts described by participants ranged from significant distress to severe psychological harm, including suicidal ideation, with suffering reportedly stemming primarily from investigative processes rather than conclusions. All participants ultimately returned to active police service, their accounts representing the experiences of officers who continued serving despite their reported challenges. Their narratives suggest potential benefits of reviewing internal investigative practices to consider how they might balance necessary accountability with procedural justice and robust protection of psychological wellbeing - recognising that the mental health impacts of these processes on officers can be severe and long-lasting. This study raises important questions about whether current approaches adequately safeguard the psychological wellbeing of officers while maintaining the same standards of fair treatment they are expected to provide to the public.

1. Introduction

Police misconduct investigations are a cornerstone of accountability in law enforcement, yet they represent a complex and often contentious aspect of policing. In the UK, these internal processes, typically conducted by Professional Standards Departments (PSDs), aim to uphold integrity within the force. However, the lived experiences of officers undergoing these PSD investigations remain understudied, particularly in terms of their psychological and professional impacts.

Recent statistics underscore the significance of this issue. According to the Home Office (2024), over 45,000 officers were involved in complaints in the year ending 31 March 2023, resulting in more than 130,000 allegations. While only a small percentage escalated to serious misconduct proceedings, these figures highlight the prevalence of PSD investigations and their potential to profoundly affect officer wellbeing and retention. Indeed, the Police Federation of England and Wales (2022) reports widespread low morale within the service, with PSD misconduct investigations often cited as a significant contributing factor.

Organisational justice and procedural fairness provide crucial frameworks for understanding these experiences. Wolfe and Piquero (2011) found a significant inverse relationship between perceived organisational justice and misconduct, while Lawson et al. (2022) showed how these perceptions moderate the influence of job-related stress on ethical decision-making. However, these quantitative studies don't capture the nuanced, lived experiences of internal PSD investigations, particularly the unique power dynamics and potentially devastating impact on officers' professional identity.

Schulenberg et al. (2017) touched on this gap, finding that perceptions of fairness in handling complaints were closely tied to overall trust in the police organisation. Yet, their focus on external complaints did not address the distinctive dynamics of internal PSD investigations, including the potentially profound power imbalances and the complex interplay between investigative practices and officers' sense of professional identity and psychological wellbeing.

The psychological impact of these processes represents another critical consideration. Brewin et al. (2022) identified high rates of PTSD and cPTSD among UK officers linked to both operational stressors (traumatic incidents) and non-operational factors, including experiences of humiliation or harassment. However, PSD investigations' potential to produce similar or even more severe psychological distress remains largely unexplored. Papazoglou et al.'s (2020) concept of moral injury- psychological distress from experiences violating one's moral code - may be especially relevant for understanding how misconduct investigations might fundamentally alter officers' wellbeing and professional identities.

Leadership, resilience, and ethical considerations also play crucial roles in shaping officers' experiences. Hesketh and Cooper (2023) emphasised the importance of ethical leadership and transparent procedures in maintaining organisational trust. Their work suggests that supportive leadership could potentially mitigate some negative impacts of challenging experiences like

PSD investigations. However, the specific ways in which officers develop resilience and coping strategies during these potentially traumatic processes remain underexplored.

Research has explored the 'blue code of silence', a theorised norm of loyalty among some officers that might complicate misconduct investigations. Westmarland and Conway (2020) found officers hold more nuanced attitudes toward reporting misconduct than this simplified concept suggests, involving complex considerations beyond mere loyalty. During PSD investigations, this cultural dynamic may significantly affect whether officers experience isolation or support from colleagues, potentially transforming their professional relationships and sense of organisational loyalty in unexpected ways.

Moreover, the notion of 'noble cause corruption', where unethical actions are justified for a perceived greater good, traditionally explored in operational policing contexts (Lawson et al., 2022), may have unexplored implications within the PSD investigative process itself. This raises important questions about the ethical standards applied within different areas of policing, including how these standards might be compromised within misconduct investigation practices.

Despite this body of research, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how officers personally experience and make sense of PSD misconduct investigations, particularly in relation to feelings of betrayal and injustice. The existing literature tends to focus on broader organisational issues or general occupational stressors, leaving room for a more nuanced, phenomenological exploration of the immediate and long-term impacts on officers' professional identities, relationships with the organisation, and psychological wellbeing.

The Current Study

This study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach suited to exploring how individuals make sense of significant life experiences (Smith et al., 2022). This methodology allows for an in-depth examination of officers' subjective experiences during PSD misconduct investigations.

Our research question asks: "How do police officers experience and make sense of being under PSD investigation for misconduct?" It's important to note that this paper focuses on one key theme that emerged from a larger study which identified five major themes. Specifically, we explore the theme: "Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice: Shadows of Doubt in the Thin Blue Line." This theme encompasses two interconnected subthemes:

1. "Erosion of Trust in Leadership and Colleagues: Fractures in the Police Family"
2. "Systemic Failings in Investigative Processes and Communication: Navigating a Labyrinth of Opacity"

While the broader study identified five major themes – including "Professional Identity Under Scrutiny," "Navigating Psychological Impact," "Coping and Resilience Strategies," and "Transformation and Growth" - this paper focuses specifically on one: 'Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice'. This theme was selected for deeper exploration due to its prominence in participants' accounts and its significant implications for police organisational practices.

In line with IPA's principles, the aim is not to test predetermined hypotheses, but to provide a detailed account of how officers make sense of their experiences during PSD misconduct investigations, particularly in relation to perceptions of organisational betrayal and procedural injustice. By doing so, I hope to shed light on the nuanced, subjective realities of officers undergoing these potentially transformative processes, contributing to a deeper understanding of the psychological and professional impacts they may have.

By exploring these themes, this study aims to provide insights into the complex ways officers navigate the challenges of PSD misconduct investigations, including their coping strategies, perceptions of fairness, and experiences of potential isolation or support. This exploration may reveal how these processes impact officers' sense of professional identity and their relationship with the police organisation, both in the immediate aftermath and long-term career trajectory.

Understanding these experiences could contribute to crucial discussions about balancing necessary accountability with officer wellbeing and help shape policies that maintain organisational integrity while supporting the psychological health of officers. Moreover, by examining officers' perceptions of investigative practices, this study may offer valuable insights into the ethical implications of current approaches to misconduct investigations, potentially informing more effective, transparent, and psychologically informed processes.

2. Methodology

IPA's idiographic focus and emphasis on examining personal meaning-making guided our research design. This approach aligns with our aim of understanding officers' perceptions of organisational betrayal and procedural injustice, allowing us to explore the nuanced ways they interpret and respond to misconduct investigations.

Eight white, male British officers who had completed internal misconduct investigations within the past six years were recruited using purposive snowball sampling. This method was chosen due to the sensitivity of the research topic, ensuring participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences (Noy, 2008). The inclusion criteria required that investigations had concluded at least six months before interviews to allow for reflection and to minimise psychological distress.

It is important to acknowledge that this homogeneous sample, while appropriate for IPA's idiographic focus, means these findings may not capture the potentially distinct experiences of female officers or those from minority ethnic backgrounds. The sample size of eight

participants aligns with recommendations for IPA studies, allowing for sufficient depth of analysis while maintaining the ability to identify meaningful patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2022).

Semi-structured interviews, lasting 60-90 minutes, were conducted face-to-face in private, comfortable settings. Open-ended questions guided the exploration of participants' experiences before, during, and after the investigations. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis followed Smith et al.'s (2022) updated IPA approach, beginning with immersive reading to capture emotional nuances and conceptual insights. Each case was analysed independently with emergent themes developed that moved beyond literal words to deeper interpretations. The researcher bracketed previous insights to preserve idiographic focus before identifying shared experiences and divergences. Group Experiential Themes (GETs) identified overarching patterns across cases. Although five major themes emerged in the broader study, this paper focuses specifically on the theme of "Organisational Betrayal and Procedural Injustice."

Throughout, the analysis adhered to an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data without imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks. A key element of IPA, the double hermeneutic, was central to the process, involving the researcher making sense of how participants made sense of their own experiences.

Ethical approval was obtained from City, University of London Ethics Committee. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time. To protect participants identities, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper and identifying details have been altered or removed. Given the sensitive nature of the study, particular attention was paid to participant well-being, and a protocol was established to provide support in case interviews triggered distress. Care was taken to conduct interviews with sensitivity and empathy.

3. Results

Our analysis revealed a profound sense of organisational betrayal and procedural injustice experienced by officers undergoing misconduct investigations. This Group Experiential Theme (GET) encompasses two interconnected sub-themes: (1) Erosion of Trust in Leadership and Colleagues: 'Fractures in the Police Family', and (2) Systemic Failings in Investigative Processes and Communication: 'Navigating a Labyrinth of Opacity'. It is important to note that these accounts represent participants' subjective experiences and perceptions, which may differ from the perspectives of those conducting internal misconduct investigations or from official procedural intentions.

Erosion of Trust in Leadership and Colleagues: 'Fractures in the Police Family'

This subtheme examines the decline of trust in leadership and among colleagues that seems to occur during internal misconduct investigations. The metaphor "fractures" effectively illustrates the gradual disintegration of relationships within what officers previously perceived as a unified "police family." Their accounts describe a transition in which confidence in the organisation evolves from initial disbelief and shock to a deeper sense of betrayal.

Dave's experience serves as a pertinent illustration of this transition, employing a compelling metaphor to convey his feelings of abrupt abandonment:

> The organisation will back and support people...until...it gets to a point where it's uncomfortable to and then they'll drop you like a stone [long pause]...uhm... and I still feel like that now (Dave, 385-393)

This metaphor could be interpreted as reflecting Dave's perception of an abrupt and profound shift in his relationship with the organisation. The long pause in Dave's speech might indicate the emotional weight of this realisation. His statement that he "*still feel[s] like that now*" suggests that this experience may have had a lasting impact on his trust in the organisation. Dave's emotional turmoil seems to persist, indicating the profound impact that the investigation has had on his confidence in leadership.

Several participants report conflicting signals from the organisation throughout their investigation:

> On the one hand...they spent...a considerable amount of money to try and get us sacked, and on the other hand, they were ringing me up and asking me to come back to work because they were short stra...short staffed (Dave, 429-433)

The tension between the perceived organisational efforts to dismiss him and its requests for his return highlights the duality of communication some officers may experience. For Dave, this may have fostered mistrust, as it suggests unpredictable shifts in the organisation's priorities, leaving him uncertain about where he stood.

Many participants in this study expressed discomfort regarding abrupt transition from trust to suspicion, as Andy's recalls:

> I always thought they'd look after me. You know...no...you know...they'll trust me but now it's not...it's...what..you've done something to a baddie...ok...they said this...but yeah, I didn't...well uhm...prove it...it's you know...you know...it's not a matter of we believe you...our standpoint is we'll believe you unless we can prove it otherwise...our stand point is we trust you over them. But now if you speak to most coppers half the time, they believe the organisation will believe the complaint first...they believe...the PSD...they believe the complaint." (Andy, 1858-1872)

Andy's fragmented discourse suggests an emotional struggle in his transition from trust to suspicion. This experience mirrors that of several participants, indicating that his relationship with the organisation has shifted from one characterised by a sense of protection to one defined by scrutiny and distrust. Andy's phrase "*look after me*" may indicate that he previously viewed

the organisation as fulfilling a protective, almost parental role. However, his account indicates a shift in this perception, leading to feelings of abandonment during a time of need.

His reference to "*most coppers*" indicates that he thinks this disillusionment may be shared by other officers. By using the present tense, Andy suggests that this unsettling reality may be ingrained within police culture. His prior understanding - that "*they'll trust me*" - appears to have been replaced with the burden of needing to "*prove it.*" The repeated emphasis on "*believe*" may highlight how central trust once was to his professional identity.

The Professional Standards Department (PSD) appears to play a significant role in Andy's experience. The perception that the PSD favours complainants seems to mirror the wider experiences of procedural injustice reported by certain participants in this study. The reflections of Andy, similar to those of Dave, indicate a significant shift in organisational trust away from officers, resulting in feelings of neglect and lack of support. Although the investigation has concluded, Andy's discourse continues to convey a lingering sense of loss, particularly regarding the perception that the organisation no longer trusts him. His frequent pauses and hesitations may signify the emotional toll of processing this vulnerability and absence of support.

Dave, Andy, and Greg describe a gradual erosion of trust, which collectively reflects a fracture within the "police family." Their accounts indicate a disillusionment that reshapes their relationship with the force, casting doubt on their once-solid professional identity.

Harry's account seems to reflect this dynamic:

> I remember having a phone call and I was next to [family name], and he asked me 'who was that on the phone?', and I said it's my inspector, and he was like, why's he telling you to find another job and all of this? He was just...he was even gob smacked with it and that it was coming from a supervisor (Harry, 448-454)

Harry's family's presence during the call seems to have intensified the emotional weight of the moment, transforming what might have been a private disappointment into a more public form of perceived betrayal. The phrase "*gob smacked*" suggests that even those outside work, like his family, shared in Harry's shock, possibly validating his feelings of disbelief.

His description that the undermining remarks came "*from a supervisor*" appears to deepen Harry's vulnerability. The involvement of family appeared to heighten the perceived betrayal. This experience could have reshaped not only how Harry viewed his professional standing but also how he was perceived by his family, adding another layer of emotional complexity to the event.

During the interview, Harry's face flushed as he recounted this moment. This subtle change in his expression seemed to convey the lingering emotional intensity. I considered probing further but held back to avoid causing discomfort. This interaction highlights the interpretative nature of research, shaped by both the participant's narrative and the researcher's decisions.

Greg's account suggests that experiences with supervisors were not all negative:

> I can't criticise the supervision I got as my welfare officer in the new shift because they were brilliant and they probably kept me going, but the ones that were my original supervisors, absolutely did not speak to me (Greg, 325-329)

Greg's experience highlights the inconsistent support from supervisors, reflecting the broader theme of polarisation described by Dave and Andy, where officers perceive different levels of support based on individual supervisors. His "*brilliant*" welfare officer seems to have "*kept me going*" and helped sustain his resilience, while silence from his original supervisors likely increased his isolation.

Feeling isolated and excluded during an investigation may affect some officers' sense of belonging, as captured by Ben:

> I sort of likened it to a school of fish...the police are all swimming in the same direction...and as soon as you're on that naughty step...for want of a better expression...you're the one fish that's swimming the other way. And that's...I felt the whole raft of, wow...everything and everybody is against me here..." (Ben 326-332)

Ben's "*school of fish*" metaphor indicates his separation from peers. The contrast between his colleagues swimming in unison and Ben's solitary swim in the opposite direction suggests his shift from feeling connected to feeling like an outsider. The image of his solitary swim suggests both isolation and a shift in identity. This mirrors Greg's account of isolation when he was moved to a new shift during his investigation. Both officers describe a sense of separation from colleagues, possibly intensifying the emotional toll of the investigation.

The term '*naughty step*' appears to evoke feelings of childish punishment. This infantilising metaphor - drawn from parental discipline of young children - powerfully illustrates how misconduct investigations might diminish officers from respected professionals to childlike subjects of discipline. His comment '*everything and everybody is against me*' appears to reflect his profound isolation from colleagues, highlighting a potential pattern where officers under internal misconduct investigation experience not just procedural scrutiny but a fundamental social abandonment.

Systemic Failings in Investigative Processes and Communication: 'Navigating a Labyrinth of Opacity'

This theme explores officers' perceptions of systemic failings within misconduct investigative processes, particularly focusing on communication breakdowns and procedural inconsistencies they experienced. Participants' accounts suggest they were attempting to navigate what appeared to them as a complex and often opaque system, where the perceived lack of clarity left many feeling disempowered. The metaphor of 'navigating a labyrinth' seems to encapsulate their described struggle to understand procedures that, from their perspective, appeared

deliberately unclear. These experiences appear to have contributed to heightened frustration and a sense of mistrust among participants.

Chris's account provides insight into the confusion and perceived lack of transparency reported by many officers during their investigations:

> I had an email from an inspector at [X] one day to say come and see me in my office. No idea why...there was nothing else about that at all. Hadn't got a clue. Went to see him....He didn't speak to me and said come with me and walked through [location] into an office in the old building. Hidden behind the door, there were two professional standards officers (Chris, 92-102)

His repeated phrases '*no idea why*' and '*hadn't got a clue*' could be interpreted as indicating his experience of sudden confusion and perceived loss of control in what he experienced as an increasingly obscure process. His workplace, which he had previously appeared to view as a structured environment, seemed to transform into a space of uncertainty for him. Being led without explanation through the building appears to have emphasised his sense of disorientation, as though he felt he was navigating a process that, from his perspective, seemed deliberately opaque.

The image of officers '*hidden behind the door*' might be interpreted as symbolising what Chris experienced as the concealed nature of the internal misconduct investigation itself. This potentially reflects a broader pattern in participants' accounts regarding perceived opacity in the misconduct investigative process, where officers described feeling caught off guard, potentially contributing to their expressed feelings of mistrust and vulnerability. The unannounced presence of these PSD officers appeared to heighten Chris's sense of disempowerment, suggesting that, from his perspective, the system did not seem designed to be transparent, but rather appeared to function in ways that he experienced as disorienting and destabilising to his professional identity and sense of security.

This account appears to contribute to a shared narrative across our participants' experiences, where many recalled what they interpreted as sudden and unexplained actions by PSD investigators. Participants often described these experiences as what they perceived to be intentional efforts to undermine their sense of security, trust, and control. This described feeling of being caught off guard or misled seemed to represent, in participants' accounts, a deeper psychological impact, potentially reflecting their experience of a breakdown in trust in the organisation and its investigative processes.

Chris later shares an account that might be interpreted as illustrating his perception of what he experienced as bias within the internal misconduct investigative process:

> There was disclosure from PSD officers ohm...and there was a PSD inspector uhm...and investigator in PSD, after about 12 to 18 months...that said...we've reviewed this case...there is no...there's no evidence at all to support any of these allegations...and the inspector had written back...and I've got it written down still...'I don't care, go away and find something' (Chris, 850-859)

Chris's account of the PSD inspector instructing the investigator to "*go away and find something*" despite what he described as a lack of evidence could be interpreted as marking what appeared to be a critical turning point in his relationship with the misconduct investigation. His sense of disillusionment seems to crystallise in this moment, where he described experiencing the internal investigation as persisting despite what he believed to be an absence of proof. This phrase might have intensified his perception that the process was, from his perspective, biased and driven not by truth-seeking but by what he experienced as a need to confirm guilt.

His repetition of "*I've got it written down still*" might be interpreted as suggesting that this moment left what appears to be a lasting emotional imprint, potentially symbolising his growing sense of mistrust in a system that, from his perspective, seemed to be working against him. His description of preserving this written record could be understood as providing him with tangible evidence of what he experienced as unfairness in the process.

This account of the investigation continuing despite what participants perceived as exculpatory evidence appears to echo in the experiences of other officers, who similarly described feeling trapped in processes that they experienced as prioritising outcomes over fairness. Chris's account, like others', might illustrate the emotional toll of navigating what officers perceived as a system that appeared to them to disregard its own principles, potentially contributing to feelings they described as powerlessness and disillusionment.

In his reflection on this moment, Chris appears to underscore what he perceived as systemic issues that might underpin the internal misconduct investigative process. His account of the perceived persistence of his PSD investigation, despite what he described as a lack of evidence, could be interpreted as indicating what he experienced as a breakdown in the fairness he once trusted, potentially contributing to what appears to be an erosion of his professional identity and sense of justice.

Felix's account offers what might be interpreted as his perception of what he experienced as intimidation tactics and what appears to be, from his perspective, inconsistent standards in investigative conduct:

> The officer from PSD, who was uh...who made a point of telling me that he was a retired detective from the [large urban force] and, you know, how much experience he had...and uhm...and then he uh...he made this veiled threat about my pension. Uhm...and basically said, you know that all...all he wanted was the truth and that if I...if I was truthful with him, uh...he wouldn't take my pension, uhm...uh...which I found funny because I'm not in the pension" (Felix, 300-320)

Felix's description suggests he experienced what felt like coercion and manipulation through the PSD investigator's implied threat about his pension. The PSD officer's reference to his career as a retired detective from a '*large urban force*' appears to have functioned, from Felix's perspective, as an assertion of authority and legitimacy, creating what he experienced as a power imbalance. Felix's characterisation of this as a '*veiled threat*' prior to his interview

indicates his sense of intimidation and pressure to comply. As a researcher, this prompted me to reflect on the possible reasons why the investigator would casually mention his extensive career in this context prior to interviewing Felix - whether it might represent a deliberate attempt to establish dominance, create intimidation, or psychologically unsettle Felix during the interview. Felix's account suggests a concerning dynamic where a PSD investigator appeared to leverage professional status in a way that heightened Felix's sense of powerlessness, potentially undermining what should be a fair and objective investigative process.

Felix's humorous response about not being part of the pension scheme, delivered with what appeared to be mockery, seemed to contrast with the seriousness of the situation, possibly representing his attempt to maintain some dignity and agency within what he perceived as a disempowering interaction.

This experience, as Felix described it, appears to share notable similarities with accounts from other participants such as Chris and Harry, who also portrayed experiences of feeling pressured or manipulated during investigations. A common thread across these accounts seems to be the perception of a power imbalance where investigators 'held all the cards' - controlling the process in ways participants found deeply disempowering. Felix's impression that the process seemed more focused on forcing officers to comply with investigator demands than on discovering what actually happened reflects a pattern of disillusionment across participants' accounts, suggesting a shared perception of a system that undermines rather than supports fair treatment.

The apparent inconsistencies in investigative standards emerged as a significant frustration for many participants. Felix expressed this sentiment:

> When you've got people who are saying things that are designed to threaten you into saying what they want you to say, you know, if you did that in a PACE interview, it'd be thrown out of court. If...if you did that uhm...with a solicitor present, you know...you know, they'd stop the interview because it would be non-compliant. Uhm...and yet they...they seem to live by a completely different set of rules to everybody else" (Felix, 660-661)

Felix's comparison to PACE interviews reveals what appears to be profound frustration with the investigative standards he experienced. His account highlights a striking perceived inconsistency: as an officer, Felix must adhere to strict legal protocols ensuring fairness, yet during his own PSD investigation, he experienced these same principles as conspicuously absent. His phrase "*a completely different set of rules*" seems to capture his perception of a double standard - PSD investigators apparently exempted from the rigorous standards they enforce on others. This perceived inequity appears to have intensified his sense of injustice, feeling evaluated by standards his PSD investigators themselves appeared to disregard. His repeated "*you know*" might indicate his struggle to reconcile his professional expectations of fairness with his lived experience of what he perceived as selective rule application. The phrase

"*everybody else*" potentially reflects his sense of isolation - officers bound by stringent protocols while PSD investigators seemingly operate under more permissive conditions.

Some officers described a complete loss of faith in internal PSD misconduct investigative processes. Chris's statement is particularly striking

> I have said that since then, that if ever...they tell me I'm in an investigation...I will completely shut down...I will not help them...I will not assist in any way shape or form...I will not voluntarily be spoken to...uhm...they will have to arrest me. If I'm arrested, I'm protected...I'm protected by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. We need to have a similar process for an investigation into police...as PACE is to any other suspect in the crime (Chris, 1373-1382)

Chris's account might be interpreted as reflecting a significant shift in his perception of the investigative process, potentially indicating a profound transformation in his professional identity and relationship with the institution. His stark comparison between PACE protections for suspects and the absence of similar safeguards for officers under internal PSD investigation appears to reveal the depth of his disillusionment. Strikingly, his expressed preference for being treated as a criminal suspect rather than as an officer suggests a profound inversion of his professional self-concept - he would rather be afforded the rights of those he once arrested than continue in his role without similar protections. Where he seemingly once identified as a valued part of the broader justice system, his experience with the internal PSD misconduct investigation appears to have recast the entire system as adversarial and threatening from his perspective. His call for PACE-like protections for those under internal misconduct investigation might reflect not just a procedural suggestion, but a devastating indictment of the current system - that officers under internal PSD investigation would be better protected as criminal suspects than as serving police officers. This extraordinary position suggests his perception that the current internal misconduct investigation process has fallen so far below basic standards of fairness that the system designed to protect the public from criminals could offer more justice than the one meant to oversee police conduct.

The cumulative impact of what participants perceived as systemic failings appears to have led to a profound sense of injustice and helplessness among officers. Greg's account captures the desperation this perceived injustice could produce:

> I said, look, I'm just...I'm worried I'm gonna lose my job. I was like, I'll take a final written warning, I'll just take it now, I don't care. I just wanna keep the job because then I can restart building back up. I'll just sign whatever, I don't care anymore. I just wanted this to stop (Greg, 938-943)

Greg's described willingness to accept what he perceived as unjust punishment to keep his job might be interpreted as highlighting the extreme stress and sense of powerlessness expressed by several participants in their accounts of PSD investigations. His disclosure of suicidal ideation provides a particularly powerful illustration of the profound psychological impact these experiences appeared to have on some officers:

I was going to hang myself because... uhm... what's the point? I'm... I'm gonna lose my job.--Uhm... this is the only thing I've got... I love the police. I love helping people. There's no other role for me that I want to do in life...uhm... what's the point in being here?" (Greg, 437-442)

This deeply troubling account reflects the extreme psychological distress that some officers experience during PSD investigations, highlighting the potential for severe mental health impacts. The intensity of Greg's distress was particularly challenging for me to hear. I had to balance my empathy for his suffering with the need to maintain a professional distance. This account reinforced for me the critical importance of support systems for officers undergoing these processes.

Across these narratives emerges a consistent pattern where officers' relationship with their organisation becomes fundamentally altered through the internal PSD investigation process. What officers described as initially confusing procedures appeared to evolve into experiences they interpreted as betrayal and injustice. The perceived opacity of investigative processes seemed to compound these feelings, potentially leading to powerlessness and, in Greg's case, to such despair that he contemplated ending his life. Responses ranged from reluctant acceptance to complete rejection of organisational procedures.

These accounts collectively illuminate experiences of what participants perceived as profound institutional betrayal during a process many had previously trusted.

4. Discussion

This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis reveals what appears to be a troubling landscape of perceived organisational betrayal and procedural injustice in police misconduct investigations. Participants' accounts illuminate how these PSD processes profoundly impact individual officers, potentially challenging conventional understandings of accountability mechanisms. The psychological toll described by officers extends beyond procedural concerns to encompass fundamental issues of trust, identity, and professional belonging.

My interpretation suggests these experiences represent not just administrative challenges but potentially transformative events that reshape officers' relationship with their profession. The depth of distress expressed by participants raises important questions about how accountability can be maintained while protecting officers' wellbeing and professional identity

Erosion of Trust and Organisational Betrayal: A Breach of the Psychological Contract

Our participants' accounts vividly illustrate what appears to be a profound erosion of trust in leadership and colleagues during PSD investigations. This finding resonates with Brown et al.'s (2020) work on discretionary effort in policing, which found that perceived organisational support and procedural justice significantly influenced officers' willingness to go beyond minimum requirements.

Our study suggests that misconduct investigations may severely undermine this sense of organisational support, with potentially lasting implications for officers' commitment and performance.

Dave's powerful metaphor of being "*dropped like a stone*" might be interpreted as encapsulating a fundamental breach of the psychological contract between officers and their organisation, a concept Rousseau (1989) explored in workplace relationships.   Rousseau emphasised the importance of perceived mutual obligations between employees and employers that extend beyond formal contracts. Our findings suggest that PSD misconduct investigations might represent a particularly devastating breach of this psychological contract in policing contexts, potentially leading to more severe consequences than those Rousseau originally documented.   The sense of abandonment officers described appears intensified by the protective, family-like culture they previously perceived within policing.

This apparent erosion of trust resonates strongly with Hesketh and Cooper's (2023) emphasis on ethical leadership and transparency in fostering organisational trust.   While they found supportive leadership significantly contributed to officer resilience, my interpretation suggests that PSD misconduct investigations – when perceived to lack these elements – may trigger profound psychological distress and institutional mistrust among officers. This dimension of leadership impact extends Hesketh and Cooper's findings by highlighting the potential institutional harm when these qualities are absent during critical processes.

This erosion of trust also appears to complement Wolfe and Piquero's (2011) work on organisational justice in policing. Whilst they demonstrated that justice perceptions influence misconduct, our findings suggest a reciprocal relationship – internal misconduct investigations themselves may reshape officers' perceptions of justice within their organisation.   This suggests a more complex, bidirectional relationship where investigative practices potentially undermine the very foundation of trust necessary for effective policing.

The experiences shared by our participants powerfully illustrate potentially problematic leadership practices during some PSD investigations. Harry's account of being advised to find another job by his inspector - while still under investigation - could be interpreted as exemplifying leadership behaviours that actively undermine trust and directly contradict the principles of ethical leadership that Hesketh and Cooper identify as crucial. Such experiences suggest that misconduct investigations might create a context where ethical leadership principles are particularly vulnerable to compromise, yet paradoxically most essential. This represents a significant gap in our understanding of ethical leadership in policing contexts, as the unique pressures of internal misconduct investigations appear to test leadership ethics in ways not fully explored in previous research.

Procedural Injustice: The Gap Between Principles and Practice

Our analysis reveals that participants consistently described PSD investigative processes as opaque, unpredictable, and fundamentally unjust. This pattern aligns with broader critiques in

policing literature regarding disciplinary impacts. Brennan and Cole (2024) demonstrated that perceptions of unfair treatment during disciplinary processes strongly predicted feelings of betrayal among officers. Our findings extend this understanding by suggesting that perceived procedural opacity throughout the entire PSD investigative journey - not merely during formal hearings - may significantly deepen officers' sense of injustice. The psychological impact of this perceived opacity aligns with Carter's (2021) work on moral injury, which suggests that experiences of institutional injustice can inflict profound psychological harm on officers, potentially undermining their sense of moral coherence and professional identity.

Our findings complement Schulenberg et al.'s (2017) work on procedural justice in complaint systems. While they examined external complaints, our study suggests that perceived procedural injustice in internal PSD investigations may profoundly impact officer-organisation relationships in ways that determine further exploration.

Chris's preference for criminal suspect protections over those afforded to him as an officer reveals a striking inversion of professional identity. This transformation - from justice system member to perceived target - represents a devastating form of procedural injustice absent from previous research. His call for PACE-like protections isn't merely a procedural suggestion but a profound indictment of a system where officers would rather be arrested and treated as criminals than undergo current internal PSD investigation processes. This extraordinary position - that officers may feel safer within the criminal justice system than when facing their own PSD investigations, which they experience as adversarial and threatening - suggests a catastrophic failure of internal processes to maintain basic standards of fairness, potentially creating irreparable damage to institutional trust.

Participants' accounts reveal what appears to be deliberate opacity in PSD investigative practices. Chris's recollection of being told to "*come and see me in my office*" without explanation, only to be confronted by PSD officers "*hidden behind the door*," illustrates the profound procedural ambiguity officers described. This perceived lack of transparency appears to intensify feelings of absolute powerlessness and deep institutional mistrust, creating what officers experience as a procedurally unjust environment designed to disorient and disadvantage them at every turn.

The devastating psychological impact of this perceived injustice manifests in extreme responses, such as Greg's desperate willingness to "*take a final written warning*" and "*just sign whatever*" to end his ordeal. These accounts extend Lawson et al.'s (2022) work on organisational justice and stress in policing. While Lawson et al. demonstrated that justice perceptions can moderate job-related stress impacts, our findings suggest PSD investigations may create such profound perceived injustice that normal coping mechanisms collapse entirely. The overwhelming psychological toll appears to push officers toward desperate self-preservation - accepting punishments they believe fundamentally unjust rather than continuing within a process they experience as psychologically crushing and deliberately dehumanising.

The Paradox of Isolation: Inverting the 'Blue Code of Silence'

My interpretation reveals a striking paradox within PSD investigations - a complete inversion of the traditional *'blue code of silence*.' While Westmarland and Conway (2020) found officers generally willing to report serious misconduct but protective over minor infractions, our participants described experiencing the opposite: a form of enforced isolation and institutional silence that severed them from peer support precisely when they felt most vulnerable.

Ben's powerful metaphor of being "*the one fish that's swimming the other way*" illuminates the profound alienation officers experienced. This enforced separation - often formalised through explicit communication restrictions - created what many described as a form of social death within the police community. Officers who once belonged to a tightly knit professional family suddenly found themselves cast out, abandoned by the very culture of solidarity that typically defines policing.

This institutional isolation functions as a troubling form of organisational control that, paradoxically, undermines the very principles of integrity and accountability that PSD investigations ostensibly uphold. By fracturing the camaraderie that Paoline (2020) identifies as central to police professional identity and effectiveness, this enforced isolation appears to damage not just individual officers but potentially the ethical foundations of policing itself.

Noble Cause Corruption: A New Perspective

Our analysis suggests a potentially significant extension of noble cause corruption - traditionally associated with operational policing (Lawson et al., 2022) - into the domain of internal investigative processes. Participants' accounts offer a perspective that dramatically broadens this concept beyond its conventional application.

Chris's disturbing recollection of a PSD investigator being instructed to "*go away and find something*" despite a reported absence of evidence represents a particularly striking example. This account might be interpreted as suggesting the existence of what officers perceive as noble cause corruption within the very systems designed to prevent misconduct. Officers' experiences suggest that some PSD investigators might potentially engage in questionable practices - bending procedural rules, disregarding evidence standards, or pursuing predetermined outcomes - all potentially justified by a perceived higher purpose of "cleansing" the organisation or satisfying political demands for accountability.

It is essential to emphasise that this interpretation stems from officers' subjective perceptions rather than objective assessment of PSD practices. The study cannot verify these accounts or determine whether they reflect institutional realities. Nevertheless, these narratives provide crucial insight into how officers experience and make sense of investigative processes that profoundly affect their lives and careers.

This potential extension of noble cause corruption to internal investigations raises fundamental questions about ethical consistency across policing domains. It suggests that the moral

complexities typically attributed to frontline policing may paradoxically manifest within the very mechanisms established to uphold professional standards - an irony that merits further exploration.

Psychological Impact and Existential Recalibration

My interpretation suggests PSD investigations can trigger profound psychological impacts on officers, potentially forcing a fundamental existential recalibration. This finding shares features with Carter's (2021) work on moral injury in emergency services and Papazoglou et al.'s (2020) concept of moral injury in policing. PSD investigations appear to create conditions that officers experience in ways strikingly similar to moral injury descriptions - though this study makes no clinical diagnoses.

Carter established that organisational injustice can produce symptoms consistent with moral injury, but our findings suggest misconduct investigations may represent a particularly potent context for such distress. Greg's disclosure of suicidal ideation illustrates the potentially devastating psychological toll these processes can exact. Such extreme distress - where an officer contemplates ending his life rather than continuing to endure the investigation - demands serious attention from policing organisations regarding the psychological safety of their accountability processes.

Officers displayed varied coping responses to these psychological challenges. Some, like Greg, described accepting punishments they perceived as unjust simply to escape the process, while others, like Chris, expressed complete rejection of internal systems they once trusted. This spectrum of responses aligns with Hesketh and Tehrani's (2024) work on resilience in policing, though our findings suggest PSD investigations may overwhelm even robust coping mechanisms.

Felix's use of ironic humour when confronted with perceived intimidation tactics reveals how officers develop subtle resistance strategies to preserve agency and dignity. This strategic deployment of humour appears to serve multiple protective functions: creating psychological distance, maintaining personal dignity, and retaining a small measure of control within an otherwise disempowering process. This finding extends Hesketh and Tehrani's work by identifying humour as a specific psychological defence mechanism that emerges during institutional challenges to professional identity.

Even with these adaptive strategies, our findings suggest the pressures of PSD investigations can overwhelm officers' resilience resources, forcing a fundamental recalibration of professional identity and relationship with policing. This profound transformation underscores how dramatically these processes can reshape officers' psychological wellbeing and career commitment.

Implications for Police Culture and Professional Identity

My interpretation suggests PSD investigations may fundamentally transform both police culture and individual officer identity. Participants' experiences challenge core aspects of police culture as conceptualised by Paoline (2020) - particularly the solidarity and shared mission he identifies as central. Our findings suggest PSD processes may fracture these cultural cornerstones, creating profound psychological disruptions that extend beyond individual officers to potentially reshape departmental cultures.

The inversion of the traditional '*blue code of silence*' - where officers experience enforced isolation rather than protective solidarity - appears to fundamentally alter their relationship with policing. Ben's powerful metaphor of "*swimming the other way*" captures this disorienting experience, reflecting both identity destabilisation and the profound alienation of becoming a stranger within one's professional home.

Ben's *'naughty step'* metaphor further illuminates a disturbing dimension of this professional identity disruption: institutional infantilisation. This reduction of officers from respected professionals to childlike subjects of discipline represents a particularly damaging transformation. Unlike operational challenges that might strengthen identity through shared adversity, PSD investigations appear capable of stripping officers of adult agency and professional standing. This infantilisation may constitute one of the most psychologically harmful aspects of how these processes undermine the professional identity that Paoline identifies as foundational to police culture.

These cultural disruptions potentially create profound role conflicts for officers. Our findings complement Brown et al.'s (2020) work by suggesting that PSD investigations generate a uniquely challenging form of role conflict - officers simultaneously experience scrutiny as potential wrongdoers while being expected to maintain operational effectiveness. Dave's account of being investigated while still being called in to work reveals the cognitive dissonance and emotional strain this creates, extending beyond what Brown et al. examined in their research on organisational support.

Whilst acknowledging that misconduct investigations serve critical accountability functions, our findings suggest current approaches may inadvertently damage both individual officers and organisational culture. The challenge for police organisations lies in developing processes that maintain necessary standards whilst preserving procedural justice and officer wellbeing - a delicate balance that requires recognition of internal misconduct investigations' profound cultural and psychological impacts.

Ethical Considerations in Investigative Practices

Our analysis raises profound questions about the ethical dimensions of current PSD internal misconduct investigative approaches. Participants' accounts suggest practices that could be interpreted as ethically troubling, potentially undermining the very principles these processes

are designed to uphold. While these interpretations derive solely from officers' subjective experiences rather than objective assessment of PSD practices, they merit serious consideration.

Chris's disturbing account of an investigator being instructed to "*go away and find something*" despite a reported absence of evidence exemplifies what officers perceived as predetermined outcomes - an approach fundamentally at odds with principles of fairness and impartiality essential to ethical investigation. Such experiences suggest the possibility that, in some cases, finding misconduct might take precedence over finding truth, creating what officers experience as a system more focused on securing outcomes than ensuring justice.

These findings connect conceptually to Lawson et al.'s (2022) work on noble cause corruption, though in a novel context. While Lawson et al. explored how frontline officers might justify questionable actions for a perceived greater good, our participants' accounts suggest similar dynamics might potentially operate within internal PSD misconduct investigative processes themselves. This raises a troubling possibility: that some PSD practices might reflect a belief that procedural corners can justifiably be cut in service of the "*greater good*" of removing potentially problematic officers - regardless of evidence standards or procedural fairness.

If accurate, this interpretation would extend noble cause corruption to a particularly concerning domain - the very systems designed to maintain ethical standards. This creates a fundamental paradox where the mechanisms intended to ensure integrity might themselves operate outside ethical boundaries, potentially undermining the moral foundation of police accountability.

Whilst acknowledging the limits of our interpretative approach, these findings highlight the critical importance of examining not just what standards officers are held to, but the ethical framework guiding how these standards are enforced.

5. Conclusion

This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis explores how officers appear to experience and make sense of PSD misconduct investigations, with particular focus on what emerged as perceptions of organisational betrayal and procedural injustice. By examining participants' subjective accounts in depth, this research addresses important gaps in existing literature, which has typically focused on broader organisational issues rather than individual lived experiences. The officers' narratives suggest these processes may have profound psychological, professional, and relational impacts, potentially raising questions about current approaches to police accountability and highlighting areas where investigative practices might benefit from reconsideration.

Key Findings

Our analysis reveals what appears to be a devastating erosion of trust between officers and their organisation during internal PSD misconduct investigations. This breakdown often begins with

the initial notification and progressively deteriorates throughout the process, potentially causing irreparable damage to the officer-organisation relationship. Participants consistently described experiencing the investigative process as deliberately opaque and potentially biased, with this perceived lack of transparency intensifying profound feelings of powerlessness and injustice - to the point where some, like Greg, reported contemplating suicide rather than continuing to endure the process.

A striking theme emerging from officers' accounts is what might be interpreted as paradoxical isolation - a complete inversion of the traditional 'blue code of silence.' Rather than experiencing protective solidarity, officers described enforced isolation that fundamentally challenged their sense of belonging within the police community. This institutional separation appeared to create what participants experienced as professional exile, fracturing their relationship with both colleagues and the organisation. The psychological toll was evident in participants' accounts of profound distress, potentially consistent with moral injury and post-traumatic embitterment disorder. Ben's "*naughty step*" metaphor illuminated the infantilisation officers experienced - reduced from respected professionals to childlike subjects of discipline. Our interpretation suggests officers undergo a form of existential recalibration during and after PSD investigations, reassessing both their relationship with their profession and their place within the police organisation, potentially transforming their entire sense of professional identity.

Contributions to the Field

This study offers significant contributions to policing research through its idiographic exploration of officers' lived experiences during PSD misconduct investigations. By focusing on subjective experiences rather than statistical patterns, our research illuminates dimensions of these processes that broader approaches might overlook, providing insight into their profound human impact. Our findings appear to complement existing theories of organisational justice in policing by suggesting how perceived injustice during PSD investigations might potentially affect officer wellbeing, professional identity, and organisational commitment in ways not previously documented.

My interpretation of what appears to be paradoxical isolation adds a new dimension to understanding the *'blue code of silence*,' suggesting this cultural dynamic may function differently during internal investigations than in other policing contexts. The officers' accounts also raise the possibility that what might be interpreted as a form of noble cause corruption could potentially operate within internal PSD misconduct investigative processes - where evidence standards might be compromised in pursuit of predetermined outcomes - extending this concept beyond its traditional application in operational policing. By connecting officers' described experiences to psychological frameworks such as moral injury and post-traumatic embitterment, our findings contribute to the emerging research on how organisational practices might impact officers' psychological wellbeing, potentially offering new perspectives on the unintended consequences of accountability mechanisms.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The sample was homogeneous, consisting of eight white, male British officers. This demographic uniformity may not capture the potentially distinct experiences of officers from different backgrounds, particularly female officers and those from minority ethnic communities. Furthermore, the retrospective nature of the interviews means that participants' accounts may have been influenced by subsequent events or reflections. This study focuses solely on the perspectives of officers who underwent internal misconduct investigations, without representing the experiences or viewpoints of those conducting the PSD investigations or making decisions about outcomes. These alternative perspectives might offer important contextual insights that could modify some interpretations. Finally, the study was conducted within the specific context of UK policing, and the findings may not be directly applicable to police organisations in other countries with different structures and processes.

Future Research Directions

Based on these findings and limitations, I propose several directions for future research and practice. Internal PSD misconduct investigation processes might benefit from greater transparency about timelines, regular communication updates, clearer procedural explanations at the outset, and specialised wellbeing support for officers under investigation. A comprehensive approach would integrate perspectives of investigating officers, leadership, and external oversight bodies alongside the experiences documented in this study.

Future research should include more diverse participants to capture a broader spectrum of experiences, particularly those of female officers and officers from minority ethnic backgrounds. Longitudinal studies tracking officers from investigation initiation through post-investigation reintegration could illuminate how perceptions and impacts evolve over time, potentially identifying critical intervention points.

Future research might also examine potential oversight and accountability mechanisms for investigative practices themselves. Participants' accounts suggest a perceived absence of effective safeguards against what they experienced as procedural inconsistencies. Studies could explore how external review processes, enhanced governance structures, or formal appeal pathways might address these perceptions, potentially contributing to greater procedural legitimacy while maintaining necessary accountability standards. Such research could evaluate models from other professional disciplinary contexts to identify best practices that balance investigative integrity with procedural justice.

Additionally, research evaluating trauma-informed and transparent internal misconduct investigative approaches could inform evidence-based recommendations for reform. Large-scale quantitative studies might test the generalisability of these findings and identify factors influencing officers' experiences during PSD investigations. Our analysis suggests demographic factors might significantly influence how officers experience these processes;

future research could explore whether certain groups face disproportionate representation in misconduct proceedings and examine contributing factors to any identified disparities.

Final Thoughts

This study bears witness to the profound and deeply personal experiences of police officers who have endured internal PSD misconduct investigations. Through an interpretative phenomenological approach, I have sought to understand how these officers make sense of what many described as life-altering challenges to their psychological wellbeing, professional identity, and institutional relationships. Their accounts suggest these processes often transcend mere procedural experiences, potentially becoming transformative events that fundamentally reshape officers' sense of self, organisational trust, and understanding of justice within their profession. It is important to acknowledge the tentative nature of these interpretations, these experiences are highly individual and situated.

It is important to contextualise that all participants in this study successfully returned to active police service following their internal PSD misconduct investigations, with their accounts representing the experiences of officers who continue to serve their communities. While investigation outcomes varied among participants, the psychological distress officers described appeared to stem primarily from the investigative process itself rather than from any particular conclusion. Their narratives suggest that the manner in which internal misconduct investigations are conducted may have had profound psychological impacts regardless of the officer's culpability or the final determination. These officers valued robust accountability mechanisms within policing while simultaneously describing internal investigative processes that they experienced as unnecessarily distressing. Their continued commitment to policing despite these challenges speaks to both their professional resilience and their belief in the importance of the police role, even as they advocate for more psychologically informed approaches to internal misconduct investigations.

While acknowledging the interpretative nature of these findings, the consistency with which themes of trust erosion, procedural opacity, and paradoxical isolation emerged across participants' accounts appears striking. Though each officer's experience remains uniquely situated, the emotional and existential weight these investigations placed on participants emerged as a powerful shared reality that demands recognition. The courage these officers demonstrated in sharing painful and complex experiences offers valuable insights that might otherwise remain hidden from those who design and implement these investigative processes. What is clear, though, is that the emotional and existential weight of these internal misconduct investigations cannot be overlooked.

This research does not claim definitive answers but rather offers a window into the lived experiences of those who navigate these challenging processes. The potential for psychological impacts similar to moral injury (profound distress from experiences that violate one's moral code or expectations of others) and post-traumatic embitterment disorder (persistent feelings

of injustice and bitterness following perceived unfair treatment) suggests these investigations may carry consequences far beyond their procedural outcomes. Several participants described experiencing suicidal thoughts during their investigations, highlighting the potentially life-threatening severity of psychological distress these officers reported. These experiences appear to affect officers' wellbeing and professional identity long after formal conclusions are reached. The resilience officers displayed, even while describing such profound distress, speaks to both their psychological resources and the severity of the challenges they faced.

In presenting these findings, I hope to encourage greater empathetic engagement with officers' experiences during internal misconduct investigations. By acknowledging both individual struggles and the systemic contexts that shape them, this research invites reflection on how accountability processes might be conducted with greater procedural justice and psychological awareness. The voices of these officers, powerful in their vulnerability and insight, deserve not just to be heard but to inform meaningful improvements in how police organisations approach their own misconduct investigations - balancing necessary accountability with genuine care for those who serve.

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