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Overlapping Values, Mutual Prejudices: Empirical Research into the Ethos of Police Officers and Private Security Guards

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Abstract

What determines professional motivations and values of security operatives: sector or profession? Our article aims to answer this question through a survey study among police officers ($n = 405$) and private security guards ($n = 329$) in the Netherlands. Our results show that both groups closely resemble each other in how they prioritize motivations and values, although police officers have a slightly more “missionary” and “crime fighting” work ethic than private security guards. Mutual perceptions, however, reveal contrasts: Police officers look down on private security guards, while private security guards look up to police officers. We conclude with theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

Keywords

public administration, public values, professional values, police officers, private security guards, job motivations

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Introduction

In recent years, the increasing use of private security has been debated around the globe. This increase leads to unrest, according to reports by various international news agencies: “Private security guards are Homeland’s weakest link,” reported *USA Today* on January 22, 2003; “What is the implication of ‘Private security firm G4S to run Lincolnshire police station’ in terms of the quality of our national security systems?” *BBC News* asked on February 22, 2012. *Metro*, a free British newspaper, warns, “Outsourcing police roles to private firms ‘extremely dangerous’” (March 3, 2012). These headlines are by no means isolated outcries. Ever since the 1990s, academics too have been concerned with the perils of what they label the “privatization” of the security field, not least because business representatives themselves show “moral ambivalence” (Thumala, Goold, & Loader, 2011) about the products and security they are selling.

It will come as no surprise that this shift of tasks is eyed with suspicion by public administration scholars in particular. In their view, different norms and values (should) characterize the public and private sectors (cf. Frederickson, 2005; Gregory, 1999; Van der Wal, 2008). Government organizations, the police above all, are there to set rules and to enforce laws. At the same time, they must guarantee that people are treated impartially and have equal access to public services. The corporate world, within which private security firms operate, is expected to create employment, initiate innovation, and generate profits for its shareholders.

If such worries about “market morality” are well founded, security as a collective, social good might be at risk (Loader & Walker, 2001). However, whereas some are afraid of extensive privatization and commercialization of the government domain, others feel that police officers and private security guards collectively can enhance security in society (Fleming & Wood, 2006). Both groups operate in the local security field; the *occupational sector*—public or private—is less relevant than the *professional group* the operatives belong to (cf. Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006). For example, Rigakos (2002) has coined the term “parapolice” to express that some private security companies explicitly seek to take over police duties, including foot patrols, law enforcement, and making arrests.

These developments give rise to many pressing questions, for academics as well as everyday practitioners. In the Netherlands, the country we study in this article, leading politicians and police unions have expressed worries about the concept of “private policing in public space” (Van Steden, 2007). In part, such worries relate to the different natures of both types of security actors: The security industry offers its services on a commercial basis, while

the police retain their monopoly on violence. On top of that, police spokespeople stress their overall “professional” character and emphasize that private security operatives are less well trained and less qualified to take over many policing duties. However, in empirical terms, we know little or nothing about the ethos of private security guards. With the exception of the work of Loyens (2009), research on the culture and moral orientation of the police as compared with the security branch is virtually nonexistent.

The aim of our article therefore is to reexamine police culture anew but within the larger context of plural and private policing. After all, the culture of public policing only partially determines the professional ethos within security governance (cf. Wall, 2007; White, 2012). We attempt to provide a more nuanced view on the culture of “hybrid” policing by comparing the professional motivations and values of police officers with those of private security guards, guided by the following central research question:

Do professional values and motivations differ between police officers and private security guards, or can we distinguish a “security ethos” across sectors?

The article is structured as follows. We first outline classical images of public and private morals. Second, we discuss whether sector or profession matters the most in determining professional motivation and value orientation. Following from these discussions, we present two rival propositions on differences and similarities between police and private security and set out our research design. After explaining our selection of respondents, the next sections offer empirical findings on professional motivations and values. The article concludes with theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

Classical Images of Public and Private Morals

We wish to state from the outset that research into the motivations and morals of police officers and private security guards does not imply that their occupational culture, of which these motivations and morals are measurable expressions, is static. Rather, as Chan (1997) argues, changes in the broader structural and political field of policing can spark cultural changes within organizations and their employees. Furthermore, clear divisions in the culture of police and private security managers and their staff on the ground can be identified (Reuss-Ianni, 1983), while the same is true for the cultures of “mundane” patrol officers and those of their colleagues in “high-policing” (Brodeur, 1983)—investigative and intelligence gathering—functions. Organizations, in fact, represent a plurality of cultures.

That said, culture is arguably the product of organization and management as much as it is the product of one's inherent personality. Specifically, reward structures may shape the professional ethos of police officers and private security staff. "Equal" and "just" provision of policing and security can be damaged as the result of a greater emphasis on performance measurement, performance reward, competition, and thinking in terms of output (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Whenever efficiency becomes too dominant as an organizational value, it may come at the cost of humaneness and social equity (Frederickson, 2005). Against this background, we seek to measure the professional motivations and morals of police officers and private security staff providing visible patrols in the Netherlands. Our interest has been sparked by debates in the international public administration literature about classical images of "government" and "market" morality.

Such debates are not new. Twenty years ago already, Jacobs (1992) pointed at conflicting moral syndromes. She distinguishes the "guardian syndrome," which prescribes how public organizations should behave in the public interest, from the "commercial syndrome," which prescribes which behavior is suitable in a free market. The conflicting character of both syndromes implies that "gray" areas, in Jacob's view, lead to moral and functional problems in organizations. Such a strict distinction sounds fair, but the question is whether it is still relevant in the light of policy targets increasingly being achieved through "public-private partnerships." However, despite the issue's relevance, to date, there is very little empirical research on the moral differences between government and business, and about the problems that occur because of value intermixing (cf. Kolthoff, 2007; Van der Wal, 2008).

Sector or Profession?

The current security domain is preeminently suitable as an object of comparative research into the values and motivations in public and private organizations—and possible mixtures thereof. Although a critical body of knowledge exists on the work, values, and professional culture of police officers (cf. Skolnick, 2002), in the wider literature, they are generally depicted in a more rose-colored way than their private colleagues. The sting in the tail lies in the assumption that private security guards, given their "commercial syndrome," might give priority to earning money over safeguarding the common good and principles of justice (Sklansky, 2006). In addition, private security guards are distrusted due to the biased idea that they are "cowboys" (Livingstone & Hart, 2003); some might even have a criminal past.

It follows that both sectors perhaps attract different character types; the "raw material" may be somewhat different (cf. Bozeman, 2004). Employees

in both sectors have differing motivations and views of their social role and responsibility. Some studies have shown that private-sector employees are more extrinsically motivated—by status, salary, joy, and success—while government employees have a more intrinsic motivation—through social involvement, problem solving, self-sacrifice, and challenging work (Karl & Sutton, 1998). It should be noted, however, that more recent comparisons show that younger cohorts of employees and managers in both sectors increasingly display a mixed motivational profile (Andersen, 2010; Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007).

Research that incorporates the contents of the specific profession or professional domain suggests that such professional characteristics are more important for the professional ethic and the dominant work values of individuals than the “privateness” or “publicness” of their organizations (Lyons et al., 2006). This insight is also reflected in the work of researchers who believe that police and private security are looking more and more similar (Stenning, 2000)—specifically because the private sector is increasingly operating in the public domain. From this perspective, a police officer is more akin to a private security guard than to a public-sector colleague in, for instance, education or health care.

Based on the preceding debates, we formulate two rival propositions:

Proposition 1 (P1): The occupational motivation and professional values of police officers and private security guards differ fundamentally. While the latter are mainly focused on “making a profit” and “serving the customer,” the former are driven by “justice” and “the common good.” Private security guards are mainly extrinsically motivated, as they ply their trade for money and success, whereas police officers choose their profession based on intrinsic motivations, such as the wish to contribute to society. It can be expected that these differences in underlying mores and motivations result in various work cultures and views on the mission of the job.

Proposition 1 (P2): The occupational motivation and professional values of police officers and private security guards are more alike than different in many ways. From this perspective, differences in values and professional orientations are less marked than might be expected, perhaps even absent. The sector is much less relevant than the profession: A “security ethos” exists across sectors. As both groups of respondents carry out more or less comparable tasks, their values and motivations are also comparable—police officers and private security guards like to help people and ensure safety but also want to earn a decent salary. We expect the work ethic and views on the mission or the job to be more similar than is often assumed.

Questionnaire and Respondents

We tested these propositions by making use of a standardized survey. In November and December 2009, we presented an online questionnaire to police officers of the Amsterdam force, the largest and the most well-known police force of the Netherlands, and private security guards from Group 4 Securicor (G4S), one of the largest multinational security firms in the world and a prominent player in the Netherlands.

In total, 405 police officers (a response of 40.5%) and 329 private security guards (a response of 52.3%) completed our online questionnaire. To compare both groups as well as possible, respondents were selected only from operational personnel in the field. Our samples of police and the security group show certain heterogeneity in rank and/or specialty. In the police force, police officers are divided into some dozen different subgroups, including “surveillance officers,” “specialists,” and “police employees.” In the security company, there are 15 different subgroups, such as “object security guard,” “detention supervisor,” and “customs officer Amsterdam Schiphol Airport.” All respondents were recruited at random. Table 1 displays the most relevant respondent characteristics.

It is remarkable that police respondents are quite a lot younger than security respondents; more than 63% of the police officers are aged 35 years or less; the proportion of this group in the private security guards is below 27%. In addition, on average, police officers are higher educated than private security guards. In both groups, a small percentage was formerly employed in the “other sector”: the share of these so-called sector switchers (De Graaf & van der Wal, 2008) is relatively small, and additional analyses did not result in significant differences with the majority of respondents. Subsequently, there are few significant differences in employment history; except for the fact that many more police officers entered the police force directly after finishing school—which also explains why this group is younger.

Research Design and Measures

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part covers the *professional motivations* of police officers and private security guards. Despite that the police are not a homogeneous organization—we briefly touched on differences between management and workforce and between street work and detective work—the general assumption is that public policing represents a specific culture in terms of types of employees, their value orientations, and professional motivations (cf. Loftus, 2010). However, in recent years, scholars have also studied the organizational culture of private security companies

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (in Percentages).

Characteristics	Police officers (<i>n</i> = 405)	Private security guards (<i>n</i> = 329)
Age		
18-25 years	30.6	5.8
26-35 years	32.6	21
36-45 years	19.5	30.4
46-55 years	11.2	26.7
56-65 years	2.3	10
Gender		
Male	67.4	71.2
Female	32.6	28.8
Highest education		
Primary education	0.2	0.3
Lower vocational education	0.4	3.6
Midlevel vocational education	13.1	28.2
Secondary vocational education	44.1	48.5
High school	25.8	9.4
Bachelor's degree	9.4	6.1
Master's degree	2.5	3.9
Function type		
Generalist 05/07	25.4	
Professional 02/08 (in training)	25	
Generalist 2002 (in training)	19.1	
Operational assistant	12.3	
Police employee (in training)	9.8	
All-round police officer	3.1	
Project leader 07/08	3.1	
Surveillance officer (in training)	2.3	
Object protection		33.1
Agent Schiphol Airport (different functions)		23.9
Penitentiary supervisor		11.9
Commercial surveillance		1.8
Other (i.e., public transport)		29.3
Professional status before current job		
School	23.7	11
Unemployed	0.6	4.9
(Partly) unfit for labor	0	1.3
Sector in which previously employed		
(Para)public sector	14.8	15.5
Private sector	55.3	61.5
Own company	1	5.8
Previously employment (sector switcher)		
Police officer		6.8
Private security guard	5	
No	95	93.2

(e.g., Button, 2007; Loyens, 2009; Manzo, 2009; Singh & Kempa, 2007). Assumptions and ideas resulting from this work may partially overlap classic notions about the police—who therefore seem less unique.

To gain more clarity about police culture and private security culture, we confronted our respondents with a series of motivations (or characteristics) derived from the studies into public and private police culture mentioned above. We translated these motivations into 15 statements, which represent insights from the literature. With respect to the police officers, it is often assumed that they have a “tough” image and enforce rules; that their work is active, varied, and dangerous; that they enjoy their autonomy and independence, but work with a tight knit group of colleagues; that they pursue social ideals (helping and protecting people, catching criminals); and that they display a certain pride or honor in their work. At the same time, private security guards, rightly or wrongly, are regularly painted as less heroic than police officers. In a certain sense, private security remains a “stigmatized” profession (Manzo, 2006), which is almost opposite to what has been written about police culture. Private security guards are quite happy to have a job (do not sit at home all day) and earn an income.

Second, based on earlier studies on police officers (Kolthoff, 2007; Lasthuizen, 2008) and managers in the public and private sectors (Posner & Schmidt, 1996; Stackman, Connor, & Becker, 2006; Van der Wal, 2008), we have selected 15 *professional values* to present to our respondents. For each value, police officers and private security guards were asked to give two grades, with marks between 1 (lowest) and 10 (highest), to indicate how important the specific value is for their professional conduct and for that of the other group. Given the views in the literature, together with the more popular images of police officers and private security guards, we expect the police to emphasize values concerning enforcing laws and regulations (“legality”), being helpful to people (“serviceability”), being honest and truthful (“integrity”), and being transparent. However, private security guards would primarily emphasize finishing their work within the given time period (“efficiency”), as well as having a career and developing their professional potential (“self-fulfillment”). Such expected outcomes highlight Jacobs’s (1992) rather crude distinction between public guardians with “high” morals and the “lower” intentions of their commercial counterparts.

Finally, to yield greater insights into their professional ethos, we included nine statements containing value dilemmas that prompt respondents to discuss how they would handle certain situations. In the processes of considering pressing dilemmas, it is possible to clarify how and why respondents handle certain situations (their “practical reasoning”). Drawing on public

administration literature (cf. Van der Wal, 2008), we juxtapose various motivations found. Neither police officers nor private security guards can simultaneously be completely efficient, honest, supportive, and transparent, that is, adhere to values that may be contradictory or even conflicting (cf. Van der Wal, De Graaf, & Lawton, 2011). For example, we focus on “flexibility” versus “rule-abidance” (police are seen as more creative than private security guards who work within their clients’ frameworks), “collegiality” versus “integrity” (policing in general may suffer from a “blue code of silence”; Skolnick, 2002, in case of misconduct) and unhealthy career-mindedness (a vice associated with the private sector).

Results: Professional Motivations

Police Officers

For the police, it is especially noteworthy that the statements that score the highest do not reflect heroic professional motivation to the degree we expected (Table 2). Police officers are motivated by having “varied work,” “immediate interaction with people,” and “earning an income.” However, the oft-emphasized, “tough” image that the police eagerly use to recruit new employees is relatively unimportant. In addition, elements such as “tension,” “threat,” and “danger” end up as second-to-last in the ranking of statements. In general, however, variation is small. Between 80% and 96% agree much or even very much with all statements, referring to more idealistic motives and motivations such as “helping people,” “protecting people from evil,” “catching criminals,” as well as pragmatic, common denominator employee motives such as earning “a good salary,” “varied work,” and “not sitting at home all day.”

Private Security Guards

The professional orientation of private security guards shows greater variety, and overall percentages are lower. Here again, earning a personal income is considered extremely important. Other statements that score very highly are the importance of “direct interaction with people” and “working independently,” a “good salary,” a “close-knit and supportive group of colleagues,” and “varied work.” Down at the bottom, we find terms such as “tension,” “threat,” “danger,” “catching criminals,” and “tough image of their profession.” Private security guards clearly do not see themselves as functioning in the context of “hard” crime control. In general, well over three quarters of the

Table 2. Professional Motivations of Police (n = 405) and Private Security (n = 329).

	Police	Security
	% (very) much in agreement	% (very) much in agreement
1. I consider the “tough” image of my work as important.	31.5	14.2
2. I consider elements such as tension, threat, and danger in my work important.	60.7	25.9
3. I consider it important to have varied work, work that that is varied every day.	96.3	87.4
4. I consider the active character and the action element in my work important.	92.1	81.2
5. I consider it important that I can work with a tightly knit and supportive group of colleagues.	93.6	88.3
6. I consider immediate interaction with people important in my work.	95.6	92.6
7. I consider the level of payment—a good salary—important.	95.1	89.6
8. I consider it important that I can do my work independently.	88.5	92.6
9. I consider it important that I can help people in my work.	94.3	81.9
10. I consider it important that I can protect people from evil in my work.	94.3	74.8
11. I consider catching criminals an important part of my work.	90.5	24.3
12. I consider maintaining rules an important part of my work.	90.0	86.1
13. I consider it important to realize “honor” or “pride” in my work.	88.5	75.7
14. I consider it important that because of my work I do not sit at home all day.	81.0	77.7
15. I consider it important that I earn an income of my own.	96.9	91.9

respondents agree with statements about the importance of the “pride” and “honor” derived from their work, protecting people against “evil” and “not sitting at home all day.”

How Motivations Differ Between Both Groups

If we compare the professional motivations of police officers and private security guards, we see fewer differences than studies on public- and private-sector motivations suggest. In this regard, the “uniqueness” of police culture should not be overestimated. An overwhelming majority in both groups—even larger in the police than in the private security sector—believes that a down-to-earth motivation such as “earning one’s own income” is very important. Furthermore, in both sectors, “independence”—slightly higher in private security than the police—and “direct interaction with people”—slightly higher among the police than private security—are important motivators.

At the same time, we see that macho elements such as “tension,” “threat,” and “danger,” “being tough” receive the lowest relative rankings. Statements on “catching criminals” and, to a lesser degree, “protecting people from “evil,” show the largest differences between both groups. These differences are functional, as they relate to the police’s more repressive nature, embodied by the monopoly of violence. Finally, we can say that police officers have a somewhat higher, idealistic conviction about their work than private security guards, which is shown by the statements on “professional pride” and “professional honor.”

Results: Professional values

Police Officers

Table 3 shows that police officers rate all 15 values relatively highly (between 7.7 and 9.6), implying that all the selected values are (very) important for their professional practice. The five most important values are “integrity/incorruptibility,” “honesty,” “expertise,” “collegiality,” and “serviceability.” “Efficiency” receives the lowest score (although still 7.7), followed by “obedience.” Also significant is the relatively modest score for “legality,” which together with the higher marks for “ingenuity” and “progressiveness,” again suggests that police officers see themselves as independent professionals who make judgments at their own discretion.

Private Security Guards

For private security guards, the five most important values are “integrity/incorruptibility,” “honesty,” “expertise,” “serviceability,” and “reliability.” In that respect, differences with police officers are minimal, although the mean scores generally work out somewhat lower. In private security, classic

Table 3. Professional Values Police (*n* = 405) and Private Security (*n* = 329).

Values	Police		Security		<i>t</i> test
	M grade	SD	M grade	SD	<i>p</i>
1. Incorruptibility, integrity	9.6	1.09	9.4	1.36	.02*
2. Honesty	9.4	1.07	9.3	1.30	.26
3. Expertise	9.2	1.11	9.2	1.28	.78
4. Collegiality	9.1	1.26	8.8	1.52	.00***
5. Serviceability	9.1	1.25	9.1	1.33	.54
6. Reliability	8.9	1.20	8.9	1.40	.81
7. Justice	8.9	1.15	8.7	1.52	.01**
8. Progressiveness	8.7	1.25	8.7	1.44	.75
9. Ingenuity	8.7	1.25	8.8	1.39	.44
10. Transparency	8.6	1.38	8.5	1.55	.49
11. Self-fulfillment	8.6	1.41	7.9	1.76	.00***
12. Effectiveness	8.5	1.33	8.6	1.53	.41
13. Legality	8.5	1.28	8.3	1.57	.21
14. Obedience	8.1	1.37	8.1	1.76	.52
15. Efficiency	7.7	1.76	7.7	1.90	.61

Note: Independent-samples *t* test: The difference between the two means is significant in **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, and ****p* < .001.

organization and “watchman’s values” such as “efficiency” and “obedience” also score relatively low. More interesting is that “ingenuity” and “progressiveness” score high, given that private security work can follow fairly tight protocols. For some security tasks, however, it is true that, just as with the police, they demand a certain discretionary space (or freedom of policy) with creativity and flexibility as necessary values.

Comparing Value Preferences between Police and Private Security

Besides a few (minor and obvious) differences, our results show considerable similarities between police officers and private security guards. Four of the five most important values are identical in both groups. One difference is that “collegiality” is more important to police officers than “reliability”; for private security guards, this is the other way around (together with “ingenuity,” “collegiality” stands in the sixth place). But again, our results clearly show more similarities than (major) differences between both groups.

Private Security Guards and Police Officers on Each Other's Values

Besides the values of interest to their own functioning, police officers and private security guards ranked the values they consider most important for the other group. Dominant images and prejudices of private security guards about police officers, and vice versa, are likely to affect such perceptions. We expect police officers and private security guards to have a more distinctive, perhaps even cliché-type, image of each other than actual differences might justify.

Table 4 shows the major values of police work according to private security guards. In general, the marks given by police officers and those allocated by private security guards to the police officers are often close. Nevertheless, a number of differences are relevant. For nearly half of the values, private security guards give higher grades to the police than police officers do themselves.

As indicated by private security guards, although police officers are fractionally less "honest" and have less "integrity" than they think themselves (even though the scores remain very high), they perceive "legality" and "obedience" as more important for them than is actually the case. According to private security guards, the police have more respect for "effectiveness" and "efficiency" than according to the police themselves. We can infer that private security guards put police officers on something of a pedestal. The traditional image of police officers as "guardians of justice" and the "sword of the state" lives strongly in the minds of their private colleagues—in some ways even more so than among the police officers themselves.

The opposite emerges when we observe police officers' perceptions of private security guards and to a much greater degree: Police officers mark *every value* of lower importance for private security guards compared with guards themselves. Moreover, the differences between the scores are fairly large: an entire point, for instance, in the case of "progressiveness"; in the case of ingenuity, the difference rises to 1.3 points. Whereas private security guards themselves assign high grades to ingenuity and progressiveness, another image of private security guards exists among police officers. An explanation might be that police officers consider private security work to have a relatively high content of set protocols and routine.

Furthermore, it is remarkable that police officers estimate the "efficiency" and "effectiveness" of private security guards substantively lower than their private colleagues do themselves. Precisely, these types of commercial values are often used as an argument for outsourcing, privatizations, and public-private partnerships between the public authorities and the market. Police

Table 4. Professional Values of Police According to Private Security (*n* = 329) and Professional Values Private Security According to Police (*n* = 405).

	Security about police	Police about security
	<i>M</i> grade	<i>M</i> grade
1. Being incorruptible and selfless (<i>incorruptibility, integrity</i>)	9.3 (9.6)	9.1 (9.4)
2. Speaking the truth and doing as promised (<i>honesty</i>)	9.1 (9.4)	8.9 (9.3)
3. To act with know-how and based on the proper information (<i>expertise</i>)	9.2 (9.2)	8.5 (9.2)
4. Solidarity toward colleagues (<i>collegiality</i>)	8.9 (9.1)	8.5 (8.8)
5. To treat clients and people in a thoughtful and respectful way (<i>serviceability</i>)	9.0 (9.1)	8.8 (9.1)
6. Acting consequently toward clients and/or people (<i>reliability</i>)	8.9 (8.9)	8.4 (8.9)
7. Contributing with commitment for a just society (<i>justice</i>)	8.8 (8.9)	8.2 (8.7)
8. Thinking ahead, future-oriented (<i>progressiveness</i>)	8.5 (8.7)	7.7 (8.7)
9. Being creative and resourceful in finding solutions (<i>ingenuity</i>)	8.5 (8.7)	7.5 (8.8)
10. To act in an open and accountable way (<i>transparency</i>)	8.8 (8.6)	8.1 (8.5)
11. Self-development and making a career (<i>self-fulfillment</i>)	8.2 (8.6)	7.7 (7.9)
12. To attain set goals as fully as possible (<i>effectiveness</i>)	8.6 (8.5)	7.8 (8.6)
13. Compliance with laws, rules, and procedures (<i>legality</i>)	9.0 (8.5)	7.7 (8.3)
14. Doing the things that the organization requires (<i>obedience</i>)	8.4 (8.1)	7.8 (8.1)
15. Get maximum results with a minimum of means (<i>efficiency</i>)	7.9 (7.7)	7.0 (7.7)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the mean value of the own professional group.

officers, whose own “efficiency” and “effectiveness” have been a matter of discussion in recent years, are skeptical about the degree to which private security guards operate businesslike. Police officers’ perceptions of

differences are much larger than the previously mentioned comparison of factual value orientations justifies.

Results: Value Dilemmas

If we compare how police officers and private security guards respond to nine value dilemmas (Table 5), the former appear less rule abiding than the latter if rules and procedures may hamper the need for inventive decision making in unexpected and uncertain situations. Moreover, in contrast to police officers, private security guards grant more value to rules and procedures than to a “just” outcome of their actions, supporting the aforementioned view that public values such as “social justice” matter for public professionals. However, private security guards are more inclined to choose “effectiveness” over “rule-abidance” and, in some cases, “honesty”. This is not the case for police officers.

With respect to seniors and managers, most private security guards comply with the instructions they get. This is less obvious for police officers, although a majority of them still think that “delivering on promises” to their managers (even if not checked on) is important. In addition, police officers, no less than private security guards, articulate that they will not go about “covering” a colleague “who oversteps the mark.” Regardless of the sectors they work in, respondents emphasize “transparency” and “openness” as important professional values. Hardly anyone displays the view that “career comes first in life.” In sum, police officers’ and private security guards’ responses to value dilemmas posed are again more alike than different, with the former being concerned with just outcomes rather than effectiveness.

Police Officers Speaking Out

Mutual perceptions and prejudices shown by the results of value ratings are confirmed by the answers to an open question incorporated in the questionnaire: “What in your view is the most crucial difference between the values of a police officer and those of a private security guard?” We provide an impression of how answers are distributed. One of the first answers is immediately striking: “Being a police officer is often seen as a calling, through which we work with full inspiration . . . ideals, etc. . . . In the security world I do not see this.” This shows that police officers do not always think in a very nuanced or positive way about the commercial security branch. Another respondent feels that “the values of a private security guard are sometimes hard to discover, if one observes their way of dealing with people. Generally, the police are more approachable and more social than security personnel”

Table 5. Dilemmas for Police (*n* = 405) and for Private Security (*n* = 329).

	Police	Security
	% (very) much in agreement	% (very) much in agreement
1. I always follow the rules even if this hampers my inventiveness in responding to unexpected situations.	57.9	67.3
2. I consider goal achievement more important than sticking to rules and procedures.	33.2	47.2
3. I always deliver on my promises to my managers even when they are not monitored.	80.1	91.3
4. I always obey my managers even if this compromises my own preferences.	59.0	71.8
5. Working with a tightly knit and supportive group of colleagues is very important to me. Nevertheless, I would never “cover” a colleague who “overstepped the mark.”	64.2	61.2
6. I do not always tell the whole truth to achieve my goals. I consider effectiveness more important than honesty.	6.9	13.9
7. I prefer making decisions on the basis of rules and procedures rather than “just” outcomes.	47.0	59.2
8. I am so busy working that I barely have time to think about work–life balance.	17.9	13.3
9. Career comes first in life.	9.8	12.0

and “a police officer is treated less respectfully, although he runs a greater risk and does important things. Security is useful in bars and discotheques, but for the rest the police still need to turn up all the time.”

This contrast between a regular job and a job with ideals—answering “a calling”—is repeated in many answers of police officers. One respondent writes, “A police officer usually works in public and [is] paid by public authorities; private security is mostly not served by public action, but looks at what is most important for the client.” Moreover, police officers indicate that they ultimately serve the law, while private security guards do not: “In general, private security guards think like civilians and look for quick solutions, not always in accordance with applicable rules. [This] sometimes leads to clashes with police officers, because they solve problems according to the rules.” Again, “a police officer works in the interests of the rule of law; a

security guard for the interests of a commercial company.” Even more simplistic, one police officer claims that “a security guard works for a commercial company and a police officer does not. A police officer works because he wants to serve society; a security guard to earn a salary.” Thus, police officers grant themselves a certain status in comparison with private security guards.

Alternative viewpoints exist among a minority of police respondents who stress that values and motivations should be similar: “The difference lies in the fact that a private security guard works for a commercial company and less often works from a kind of idealism, but for the rest I think that in terms of values we should be on the same level” and “the values should be identical. Both stand for security, and the public or the client, each have a right to security.” A few argue that the amount of leeway and discretion lies at the core of what makes both groups different, rather than morals and motivation: “This is defined, in my view, by the importance in tasks and responsibilities. This results in differences in values”; “The greatest difference lies in competences”; “Power to investigate”; “Police are deployable anywhere, go when alerted. Also provide assistance.” Only a handful of respondents deny the existence of differences by simply answering “none.”

Private Security Guards Speaking Out

Among private security guards, we find the necessary normative statements about similarities: “There should be no difference,” “no difference may occur,” “ought to be no difference according to me,” and “should not be.” Obviously, just as with the police, private security guards also stress differences: “In general I think that a police officer finds values more important than private security guards do.” Other statements by private security guards stress the special character of the police and state that “the police act as a role model,” “the police officer must play an exemplary role for society, also in their private life, [whereas] a security guard has more of an exemplary role at work,” and that the “security guard [has] just as much power as a citizen in general—and a police officer has more power, thus also more value and respect.”

A fellow respondent indicated the difference between public and private even more directly: “A police officer has a public task and dual competence; and a private security guard has a private task. The values differ primarily in the commercial character of the private employer. A police officer does not have to take that into account.” There are also private security guards who stress differences, but give themselves a stronger exemplary function in certain senses compared with the police, because they operate so often in close contact with people and society: “The security guard is closer at hand and is

more involved with people” and “A security guard is more service oriented and service minded.” Sometimes, private security guards mention the distinction between prevention and repression in their answers: “In my mind the core of security always has a preventive character, whereas police often act repressively.”

Finally, it should be noted that many private security guards mention the differences in their tasks and competences as the most decisive. Values and ethics are simply not mentioned in such statements. Answers such as these can be seen often: “A police officer has more investigative power than a security guard,” “police have much more power than a security guard,” “a police officer is more broadly authorized to act,” and “a police officer must act according to the law.” One last respondent stressed that differences in powers can be problematic, as it hampers cooperation: “The police have more power than a security guard and that is a very troublesome situation. If we could get more power, the police would have a much easier job.”

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, we have compared the professional motivations and values of police officers and private security guards. In addition, we discussed the awareness of norms and the employee’s value patterns within both sectors. Finally, the two groups of respondents also judged each other. In this section, we answer our central research question and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

To start with, the motivational profile of police officers and private security guards is *more alike than is often assumed*, supporting P2. The second subject concerns the value patterns of police officers and private security guards. Again, the results come the closest in relation to P2: In broad lines, both groups agree on the values and norms (and potential dilemmas arising out of these) that are of importance in their work and profession. As a result, to answer our central research question, we can indeed distinguish unique motivations and values for each group, but the similarities exceed differences: A shared “security ethos” exists across sectors.

Nevertheless, concerning *mutual perceptions*, our findings suggest support of P1: Major (even fundamental) differences exist between professional motivations and values of police officers and private security guards. The police certainly perceive private security guards to be “lower level forces.” However, private security guards look up to the police. Put differently, although the sector—public versus private—is in fact less relevant than its occupational group, mutual imagery shows a different picture.

How can our findings be explained? First, convergence between police and private security find may partly be due to the fact that several professional motivations and values we measured (such as “good income,” “honesty,” and “integrity”) turn out generic for professions and sectors—and, possibly, for others too. Although public administration literature on value orientations assumes significant divergence between the motivations and morals of government and business, police and private security share a common and intermixing *core* of professional standards and qualities (cf. Van der Wal, 2008). Second, the finding that private security guards regard a number of professional values (such as “legality,” “transparency,” and “obedience”) to be more important for the functioning of the police than for themselves is not groundbreaking given the symbolic character of the police (Loader, 1997). Historically, the modern police have held an almost “sacred” place in the public’s eye as a revered national institution with their key symbols of political authority and collective identity.

Third, our results might be tainted by a certain degree of social desirability common to surveys on values and motivations (cf. Van Thiel & van der Wal, 2010). “Integrity,” and its corollary “honesty,” received a great deal of attention in the past decade within the Dutch police, especially in the Amsterdam force. In view of the police motto “vigilant and serving” (Netherlands Project Group Vision on Policing, 2006), it comes as no surprise that serviceability also receives a high score. From their part, private security companies obviously try to vest a good commercial reputation of “integrity,” “honesty,” and “serviceability.” Fourth, relatively high scores are probably a result of the method chosen: a “rating” of values always yields higher scores and lower mutual differences than a “forced choice ranking,” in which respondents must set a hierarchy in (some of) the values presented (cf. Schwartz, 1992). These explanations provide avenues for future research that include more advanced ranking designs and vignette studies and in-depth interviews with police officers and security guards and with sector switchers in particular, as they may shed new light on experienced value differences which might even relate to their switch (cf. De Graaf & van der Wal, 2008).

Yet, our results have intriguing and partly unexpected implications. If professional motivations, norm awareness, and value patterns of police officers and private security guards are more similar than alike and the public/private divide is less important than oft-assumed, this raises questions about the “sacredness” of the police culture and identity. Indeed, the extent to which police officers continue to occupy such magical status has itself been the subject of challenge and erosion because the creation of new private and plural security-orientated functions has blurred the conceptual frontier between what is and what is not public policing (cf. Reiner, 1992). The police

seem best in upholding an *image* from which they award lower status to other, notably commercial, security providers. However, now this image has been nuanced, police organizations might display more lenience toward possibilities and advantages of public–private partnerships than has currently been the case in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Another observation is that our respondents do not recognize the popular depiction of a “macho” police culture. Notwithstanding that police officers find “crime fighting” more important than private security guards do, this is quite unexpected given the tough men’s image of the police as sketched in the dominant North-American literature and popular culture, such as TV shows and movies. Dutch police officers are pragmatists rather than one-dimensional “thief-catchers.” Moreover, in past research, the value of “collegiality” has been characterized as very important within the police (Kolthoff, 2007), with positive connotation (having a pleasant group of supportive colleagues) and negative connotations (“the blue wall of silence”). Under extreme circumstances, colleagues have a tendency to cover each other at all costs. From our questionnaire, it becomes apparent that such negative assumptions do not necessarily hold for police officers or private security guards.

In addition, the consistent high grade for “expertise” among both groups is interesting. Increasing professionalization of police officers and private security guards and the level of training that is maintained by means of continuing education have undoubtedly contributed to this. Still, expertise might very well mean something different for a police officer who is—on average—higher educated and has to possess sufficient knowledge on criminal law and its applications, whereas a security guard operated under a much smaller and protocolled set of regulations. The high scores for “ingenuity” and “progressiveness” indicate a certain flexibility and creativity enacted by police officers and private security in their daily work. Taking into account the results of our value dilemmas, police officers clearly act more like “street-level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980), who operate based on their own discretionary judgments and do not shun to bend rules or regulations when they conflict with their room for maneuver in achieving just outcomes. In this respect, police officers characterize their professional motivation with more conviction. They attach slightly more value to “professional pride” and “professional honor” than private security guards, who are more straightforward and amoral in how they balance rules, ethics, and effectiveness.

Finally, we draw attention to a number of “should be statements” on part of police officers and private security guards. These normative statements seem to be about the future and what the respondents desire in terms of a shared ethos. A substantive minority of respondents, from both groups, feel that there “should be no difference” between them, “values should be on the

same level” or “values should be identical.” This may well signal that police culture—or more broadly: *policing* culture—is in flux at the moment. Over the past quarter century, changed conditions under which the Dutch police operate (think, for example, of dramatically risen crime rates) have encouraged them to reflect on how and where to create public–private partnerships as a solution to the demands they face. Police culture, including the internalized motivations, norms, and values of individual practitioners, cannot be understood independently from such changes in the outside world (cf. Chan, 1997; Wood, 2004). In fact, the normative statements of both groups show more willingness toward close cooperation than mutual prejudice suggests. Perhaps we worry too much about the classical public–private divide in policing.

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