Chapter 4

The Thin-Blue Web: Police Crime Records of Internet Trolling Show Chivalrous Attitudes That Can Be Resolved through Transfer of Powers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter using an empirical data-driven approach to investigate crime recording logs of South Wales Police relating to Internet trolling by and towards different sexes. The chapter finds more favourable attitudes towards women as victims in even the most trivial of cases. It finds male victims of trolling are only treated as victims when a form of unwanted face-to-face encounter is needed for action. The chapter shows transferring police powers to local authorities, can cut the cost of community policing by 50% across the board and eliminate sexist attitudes also. The chapter finds that the way social media platforms are exercising ‘sysop prerogative’ where they have no right to – such as not passing over account information on alleged defamers – puts a huge burden on police resources. Using local authorities, which have many of the same powers as the police and indeed more, can resolve problems without the need to criminalise offenders.

INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that since William Westley’s seminal study in the 1950s, descriptions of a “single” police culture have focused on the widely shared attitudes, values, and norms that serve to manage strains created by the nature of police work (Paoline, 2004). As will be explored in this chapter, a police culture of benevolent sexism has crept into the digital age, including with regards to Internet trolling and cyberbullying.

Such attitudes by the police service have a significant effect on the administration of justice and how they are perceived by members of the public as a whole (Porter & Prenzler, 2012). By giving favour or disfavour to one group over another, it
means that the police are denying justice to those they do not see as victims but who are, and providing access to criminal remedies for people they see as victims, but who are not. This is no truer than in the recording of and responding to reports of alleged crime (Averdijk & Elffers, 2012), and as this study shows, the reporting of incidents of trolling by men and women in particular.

INTERNET TROLLING AND THE DARK WEB

The act of being provocative or offensive on the Internet is often called Internet trolling or cyberbullying, which are huge problems facing the world today (Bishop, 2014c; Buckel, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Hardaker, 2013). People who abuse others online show no regard for any differences, such as age and sex and will abuse others for occurrences in their life whether happy events or tragic ones (Bishop, 2014a; Bishop, 2014d; Phillips, 2011; Walter, Hourizi, Moncur, & Pitsillides, 2011; Walter, 2014). Internet trolling on websites like Facebook and Twitter are often easy to identify and deal with as they are recorded in a durable form. Others, however, such as those which occur via Skype video calls, where the abuse is not recorded in a durable form, or otherwise accessible via a public-facing website are more problematic, and form part of the ‘Dark Web.’ The dark web is generally thought of to be the part of the Internet containing websites and file locations that are not indexed by conventional search engines and are therefore hard to find (Stevens, 2009).

Police are now struggling to cope with the number of reports of Internet trolling, and unlocking those dark web networks hiding illegal content. It is often the case that these electronic message faults (EMFs) will be recorded differently depending on the officer and the reporting person in question. Other than through the Data Protection Act 1998 in the UK, it is otherwise unlikely someone will know what information, or misinformation, has been recorded about them by the police, creating a de facto ‘dark web’ in the police, where what they record about citizens will usually go unchecked (Gürses, Troncoso, & Diaz, 2011). This will be referred throughout this chapter as the ‘Thin Blue Web.’

What is apparent from the most prominent of cases brought against trolls since 2011, which have been reported in the media, is that the targets for the authorities have been young men. Namely; Liam Stacey, Reece Messer, Jamie Counsel, Anthony Gristock, and Matthew Woods, among others. One notable exception was Isabella Sorley who was a woman convicted for the trolling of radical feminist Caroline Criado-Perez, known mostly for her misandrist views on wanting less men on banknotes (Bishop, 2014a; Bishop, 2014b; Bishop, 2014d).

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN AS ‘TROLLS’

Internet trolls are often depicted in the media as young men (Bishop, 2014c), who go online to target women for misogynistic reasons (Allen, 2014; Faye & Hopgood, 2012). However, research has shown that those likely to display anti-social behaviour on the Internet, such as defriending others – are as often likely to be women as men, sometimes more so (Bishop, 2013c; Bishop, 2013d). Indeed, in the case of discredited feminist, Caroline Criado Perez, who in 2014 was found by the press regulators to have misrepresented domestic violence figures in order to attack men, she should only have expected that people would fight flame with flame, and her sexist remarks against men would not go unchallenged. At the same time another radical feminist, Stella Creasy MP, was targeted, and it was alleged that 63-year-old Brenda Leyland was the person who trolled her, becoming the first recorded death at the hands of neo-feminism. This confirms the finding that those who have the most confrontations
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