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Managing Two Worlds. Role-Exit Processes among Swedish Police Officers with PhDs

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Abstract
Given the international trend in police education in recent decades towards a more academic focus, the starting point for this article was the fact that only a few police officers with a PhD stay on in the Swedish police organisation. Thus the objective of the study was to investigate the role exit processes of police officers with a PhD, with special emphasis on organisational opportunities and obstacles in the relationship between higher education and the police organisation as a pre-profession. This relationship has been described as a difficult combination involving 'two-world thinking'. Police officers with a PhD were interviewed about their experiences from research training and careers after dissertation. Inspired by the role exit model developed by Ebaugh, the study identified a role exit process that was caused by the inability of the police organisation to manage and integrate academic competence inside the organisation. At the same time, the graduate police officers discovered an alternative labour market outside the police profession, often in police education itself, which alleviated their professional phantom pain. The involuntary nature of the role exit, given the graduates' wish to remain relevant in the police organisation, prolonged a process that was emotionally painful to them.

Keywords
role-exit processes, police officers with PhDs, police education, police science, higher education

1. Introduction
The general tendency in police education in recent decades has been a shift towards academic orientation (Bjørgo & Damen, 2020; Cordner & Shain, 2011; Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017). Fundamental arguments for the shift are the perceived need to professionalise the police organisation and police officers as an occupational group (Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017). Discussion of the need for academisation of the police is not a new phenomenon (Loftus & Price, 2016; Sherman, 1978), and the subject has also been discussed in Sweden (Jonsson & Persson, 2023; SOU 2008:39; SOU 2016:39), though academisation of the police has never been realised. Despite the distance between higher

education (HE) and the police organisation, there are a small number of Swedish police officers who have earned a PhD in a variety of academic disciplines: police officers with PhDs.

In countries where the academisation of policing is more advanced than in Sweden, the police organisation is said to have failed to adapt to the demands for professionalisation to the same extent as other welfare state professions (Brante, 2013; Cockcroft & Hallenberg, 2022). Rather, cooperation between HE and the police organisation has been described as "two worlds thinking", where expected synergies do not always occur (Fleming, 2010; Hallenberg, 2012). They are, rather, two disparate institutions with different purposes and logics that impact on the formation of the individual's professional identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

The police organisation is argued to be characterised as pragmatic and event-driven, with a strong professional culture and a negative attitude towards HE. Academia, on the other hand, is characterised as slow-moving, theory-oriented and working towards long-term goals (Hallenberg, 2012). Although this is a stereotypical distinction highlighting organisational characteristics, it demonstrates two disparate organisations that do not always communicate effectively with each other. Police officers with PhDs are uniquely positioned to understand the nuances of the two organisational logics they navigate, having experienced both worlds first-hand. Using the analogy of "two worlds thinking", most of them have exited one world and entered another.

These police officers are the focus of the present article. Most of them have undergone a role-exit process from the police profession and moved from the police organisation to the HE system or other employers. The objective of the study is to investigate the role-exit processes of police officers with PhDs, with special focus on organisational opportunities and obstacles in relation to HE and the police as a pre-profession. In doing so, we highlight one of several dimensions of the relationship between HE and the police profession and organisation in Sweden. The relationship between HE and the police is extensively studied in other countries, but the way in which this form of academic knowledge is perceived and received by the Swedish Police Authority has yet to be studied. This is our contribution.

1.1 Role-exit theory

When police officers with PhDs leave the police profession for research training, they exit one professional role and enter another. A role exit means departing from a role that is central to one's professional self-identity, e.g., as police officer or researcher, or to one's situational or personal identity, such as going from being married to being separated (Ebaugh, 1988). Professional and/or organisational affiliation has been described as having as much influence on identity formation as other ascribed identities such as gender, age, ethnicity or nationality (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The central role of the police profession in shaping social identity has previously been recognised (Bradford, 2014; Westley, 1953). Both the role as police officer and as researcher are strong identity markers with clear organisational affiliation.

It is not unusual for individuals to undergo major role transitions in contemporary society, such as changing gender or setting out on a new career path (Ebaugh, 1988). Despite these very different roles, what all exes have in common is that they have gone through an exit process, which Ebaugh (1988, p. 1) defines as follows: "The process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the re-establishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role". Thus, the term *role-exit processes* refer to leaving a significant social role for another.

Ebaugh (1988) discusses social and psychological factors in the role-exit process. Support from family, friends, and communities can influence how easy or difficult it is to exit a role. Additionally, individuals may experience various emotions during the process, such as relief, guilt or anxiety. The social psychological aspects are prominent in our empirical material. However, the role-exit process in our material is linked to structural conditions within the police organisation. Ebaugh mentions how structural factors influence different stages in the process of leaving a role, for example how organisational change can trigger doubts in people. However, we emphasise structural factors to a greater extent than Ebaugh.

By integrating the empirical findings on structural factors with Ebaugh's theory, we can analyse how organisational structure, including hierarchical systems, organisational culture and policies, can influence both individuals' decisions to leave a particular role and their experience of doing so, within the context of Ebaugh's role-exit framework. Such a synthesis allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in an individual's role-exit process, taking into account the broader structural context and the personal, social and emotional aspects outlined by Ebaugh's theory. This justifies the inclusion of the organisational level of professionalisation processes in the research review, which will be used in the analysis.

1.2 The Swedish police education

Basic police education in Sweden currently lasts for two and a half years, including six months of practical training. It is a contract education that is delivered at academic institutions but is funded and regulated by the Police Authority. Through initiatives from the academic system, educational paths at bachelor's and master's level in policing (referred to by some HE institutions as *police work*) have been established (Jonsson & Persson, 2023). However, there is still no doctoral programme in policing in Sweden. Police officers who wish to pursue a doctoral education must therefore turn to another academic subject.

There is no lack of ambition to fully integrate police training into the academic system. Two government inquiries (SOU 2008:39; SOU 2016:39) have concluded that Swedish police training should become an academic programme. Lately, this ambition has been overshadowed by government policy decisions to increase the number of police officers (Jonsson & Persson, 2023).

Over the years, the Swedish Police Authority has fully or partially funded a few individual doctoral students, although this should not be interpreted as a joint investment in police research. The projects have been unrelated to each other; the doctoral students have only anecdotal knowledge about one another and the Police Authority has not offered a career plan for the postgraduates. In addition, the police organisation was divided among different authorities until 2015 and did not have an overall strategy for research. The police officers with doctoral degrees in our empirical material attended police education before it became valid for HE credits. Thus, they undertook their academic basic education in other subjects and had a long path to tread before becoming eligible for doctoral studies. In this context, it makes sense to examine how and why police officers with PhDs began their academic studies.

2. The police as a pre-profession at the margins of academia

In order for an occupation to be acknowledged as a profession, it is deemed essential to link academic knowledge and professional practice (Brante, 2013). The traditionally weak link between the police profession and academic system is a significant reason why the former has come to be recognised as a pre-profession rather than a semi-profession like many other "welfare professions", e.g. teachers, nurses and social workers (Brante, 2013). Compared to more established (semi-)professions, pre-professions have "no clearly delineated, scientifically anchored platform" (Brante, 2013, p. 7) and in some cases "no ambition to construct more abstract systems of knowledge" (Brante, 2013, p. 7). In contrast to most other pre-professions, though, the police profession is closely related to the welfare state. A police officer has no employer other than the state if he or she wishes to practice the police profession. In this respect, the police profession is considered to be highly organisation-dependent (Evetts, 2010). This means that formal academisation is virtually impossible without collaboration with the state, embodied in the present case by the Swedish Police Authority, even if recent research indicates that academic initiatives have in fact originated from within the academic system (Jonsson & Persson, 2023). It also means that an exit from the profession is likely to become an exit from the organisation.

2.1 Comparisons to other welfare professions

For several decades, other equivalent welfare professions have undergone processes of academisation and professionalisation as part of a broader international trend (Brante, 2013). In Sweden, this occurred mainly in connection with the 1977 Higher Education Reform, through which a number of professional training programmes were incorporated into the HE system (e.g. nursing, social work, and teaching). Several studies have been carried out on semi-professional occupations and how they evolved from pre-professional occupations; studies, for example, on nurses (Millberg German, 2012), occupational therapists (Bellner, 1999; Karlsson & Törnquist, 2007), social workers (Dellgran & Höjer, 2016; Sunesson, 2003; Svensson, 2019) and teachers (Berntsson, 1999; Cain, 2015; Nilsson-Lindström & Beach, 2013). A review of the research indicates that interest has mainly been focused on the organisational level rather than on individuals' career paths, as in the present study (Brante, 2013).

Another way of studying the evolution of professions has been through doctoral thesis as part of the development of the professions' knowledge base (Hallsén, 2013). The status, credibility and practice of a profession is largely measured by the quality and composition of its body of knowledge (Brandy et al., 2014; Fook, 2003). A review of all doctoral theses in social work between 1980 and 2009 (after social work training was incorporated into the academic system in 1977) shows how the subject first emerged in the 1980s with a small number of PhDs and later gained momentum to become today's well-established social science discipline with a scientific knowledge base (Dellgran & Höjer, 2016). The nascent state of policing as an academic discipline indicates that the road to further professionalisation is still uphill, but also that research-driven police officers must use other strategies and turn to other academic disciplines to establish themselves as researchers. It is therefore questionable whether their doctoral thesis can be seen as the beginning of an emerging knowledge base in policing.

In the context of occupational professionalisation, several researchers have pointed to interdisciplinary discussions on the lack of application of research as well as perceptions of the discrepancies between research and practice (Cain, 2015; Harbman et al., 2017; Jansen et al., 2010; Joyce & Cartwright, 2020; Myers, 2019; Thomas & Law, 2013). This

mirrors the difficulties identified by international research on communication between HE institutions and police organisations in other countries (Cockcroft & Hallenberg, 2022; Fleming, 2010). It also ties in with the Swedish police's interest in police research and in retaining police officers with doctoral degrees, which is one of the themes of this article as it seeks to understand the interaction between the police organisation and HE.

An overarching conclusion is that professionalisation is a process that takes different forms in different contexts, which makes it difficult to predict a specific point in time when professionalisation actually begins (Brante, 2013). However, there is little reason to believe that police officers with doctoral degrees are involved in a deliberate process of transitioning from pre-profession to profession, even though a few of the doctoral students have been funded by the Swedish Police Authority. No such strategy is currently to be found in the Police Authority's steering or policy documents. Police officers interested in pursuing research about their own profession are referred to organisations and disciplines outside policing.

2.2 An academically trained police force?

Discussion of the need for academic training for police officers has been underway in several countries since the early twentieth century (Dalley, 1975; Lee & Punch, 2004; Sherman, 1978; Shernock, 1992). Three main reasons for the academising of police training can be discerned. Firstly, HE has been assumed to improve police behaviour towards the public and reduce police brutality and corruption (Sherman, 1978). Secondly, rapid societal development is considered to have led to a change towards more complex criminality requiring specialist police knowledge linked to "police work in the risk society" (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997; Lee & Punch, 2004). The third reason has more to do with the state's changing expectations of professionalisation in public sector institutions, which should be obtained through HE (Brown et al., 2018; Cockcroft & Hallenberg, 2022; Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017; Paterson, 2011). These three reasons can be summarised as legitimacy and professional status being the two main arguments for the shift in police training from vocational to academic (Brown, 2020). This is in line with the reasons given by the Swedish Police Association (2023) and by representatives of Swedish police education (Jonsson & Persson, 2023).

2.3 Remain in or exit professional roles

Concerns have been raised that high educational attainment among police officers could increase staff turnover (Jones et al., 2005) rather than increase knowledge in the organisation (Murray, 2000). HE is assumed to increase individuals' expectations of career changes and at the same time provide greater mobility in the labour market (Murray, 2000). Small-scale empirical studies have shown a weak relationship between police officers, HE, and voluntary attrition (Jones et al., 2005). The police organisation is accustomed to low staff turnover, although there has been an increase in the number of voluntary resignations among police officers in recent years (Annell et al., 2019; Carless, 2005). These results thus differ from the situation concerning police officers with PhDs, who tend to leave police organisations. This is probably due to the fact that postgraduate training is longer and provides different qualifications than academic undergraduate training.

Individuals with practical police experience and university qualifications have been described as "pracademics" (Huey & Mitchell, 2016). Hendy (2020) discusses specific methodological issues in relation to pracademics, which he calls "police officer practitioner

researchers". He highlights the advantages of their prior knowledge as insiders and their access to the field but also calls attention to potential bias in police practice, i.e., the possibility that prior knowledge may stand in the way of objective and critical analysis. Pracademics have been described as possessing the ability not only to strengthen scientific knowledge in policing but also to act as mediators by managing the two worlds (Huey & Mitchell, 2016). However, this reasoning assumes that individuals continue to operate in both worlds, which presupposes organisational structures that enable police officers with doctoral degrees to be retained within the police organisation.

3. Methods and material

To achieve the purpose of the study, we began by establishing criteria for the respondents we were interested in. They had to have been a police officer before their doctorate and to have either retained their badge or surrendered it during their academic studies for a doctorate. We identified 18 people, three females and 15 males, who were police officers in connection with such studies. For the sake of simplicity we use the term "police officers with PhDs", even though many of them are no longer police officers in a formal sense.

There is a relatively long time span between the first and last police doctorate in our sample. The first police officer earned his PhD in 1990, the last two in 2023. During these 30-odd years, organisational conditions in both the police organisation and HE have changed, resulting in different conditions for the educational and professional careers of police officers with doctorates. Time differences in the years of graduation also reflect the wide age range between respondents, implying that they are at different stages in their careers. Some have just completed their PhDs and it remains to be seen how their research studies will affect their careers, while others have retired and their careers can be viewed retrospectively. However, the majority defended their doctoral theses some years ago while much of their working lives still remained, which means we can assess the direct work-related effects of the doctoral thesis and also learn about their hopes and wishes concerning future careers. The empirical material thus provides insights into different time phases in the respondents' careers.

Two people, both males and considered close matches against our selection criteria, were identified and interviewed. One (respondent K) is a police officer who started the doctoral programme but dropped out early on the grounds that it was difficult to see how a doctoral degree would benefit his career within the Police Authority, which reinforces our findings from the other respondent. The other (respondent M) was not a police officer when he started the doctoral programme and was therefore unable to provide information about the switch from police officer to academic; he consequently fell out of the sampling frame. However, his comments also support the view of other respondents that combining police work with the role of researcher is difficult, and that one tends to be seen as neither a real researcher nor a real police officer.

There are also a number of police officers who were still active as PhD students during the course of the present study. These were excluded from the sample because we are interested in the process as a whole: educational and vocational career choices before, during and after the doctoral defence. It will be valuable to follow up these individuals to gain further insight into the future development of the field. The exclusion of those who fell outside our criteria reflected our methodological and theoretical delimitations, making clear that it is the role-exit process of exchanging one professional identity for another that we are interested in.

Table 1. The graduation years and academic disciplines by doctoral thesis of the police officers with PhDs

	Year of Graduation	**Academic Discipline**
1	1990	Law
2	1999	Business Administration
3	2004	Psychology
4	2005	Computer Science
5	2005	Criminology
6	2008	Computer and Systems Sciences
7	2009	Business Administration
8	2013	Social Work
9	2016	Sociology
10	2016	Neuroscience and Physiology
11	2017	Psychology
12	2017	Public Health
13	2019	Clinical Sciences
14	2022	Criminology
15	2023	Epidemiology and Global Health
16	2023	Psychology
17	2023	Teaching and Learning Education/Pedagogy
18	2023	Physiology and Pharmacology

By consulting the respondents and others with knowledge of the study's sample group, we have done our utmost to ensure that we have included all individuals who fall within the study's selection criteria. No more than the 18 people we contacted have come to our attention. However, there may be others who for a variety of reasons remain unknown to us. They may for instance have not made it known that they are, or were, police officers during their doctoral studies, or they may not have written their theses on police-related subjects. However, our conclusion is that the "known" individuals, i.e. those who have made some kind of impression as police researchers, are all included.

Since policing as an academic subject is new to HE in Sweden and does not exist at the doctoral level, the respondents have a doctorate in other academic disciplines. Regardless of the academic discipline, all doctoral theses except one take, to a greater or lesser extent, police-related issues as their empirical basis. This indicates that the police identity, or at least the interest in policing issues, persists into the academic career. In Table 1 we present the graduation years and academic disciplines by doctoral thesis of the police officers with PhDs.

3.1 Data collection and analysis

All 18 individuals who fell within our sampling frame were invited to participate. Fifteen accepted, one declined and two did not respond. Semi-structured oral interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed by telephone by one of the authors. The quotes used in the article have been translated from Swedish to English by the authors and adapted from spoken to written language to facilitate reading comprehension without altering the content.

The interviews and initial coding followed a chronological framework, focusing on educational and professional biographical themes spanning the period before, during and after the dissertation. The interviews focused on motivation for HE, perceptions of the interplay between practical and academic aspects of police work, and experiences regarding the influence of their research within the Swedish Police Authority. During the analysis, we wanted to follow the respondents' movements within and between the police organisation and HE and compare their answers to detect any patterns sensitive to similarities and differences that may be found within the group.

Thus, the project initially had a more exploratory character with open-ended questions about study and career choices before, during and after the PhD. One pattern that could be discerned early on was that the respondents focused on the exit process from and the relationship between their roles as researchers and police officers on the one hand, and the police organisation on the other. After an overall reading of the various interview transcripts, a clear pattern emerged in the exit processes. In this phase, we turned to Ebaugh's (1988) role-exit theory and used the four steps that make up the theory as analytical codes: First doubts, seeking alternatives, the turning point, and creating the ex-role (Ebaugh, 1988). Thus, the theoretical framework was added after a first reading and analysis of the interview transcripts.

Although our empirical material shows similarities between the steps in Ebaugh's theory and the respondents' exit processes from police officers to researchers, it should be emphasised that the steps often overlap and do not always correspond to Ebaugh's ideal-typical career model. However, this is also in line with Ebaugh's empirical studies (1988) as well as with theories in general. Likewise, the material contains deviating examples and differences in the timing of the various steps. For the empirical presentation, we have chosen to follow the sequential order but endeavour to be transparent in presenting the differences between the respondents' statements regarding deviant timing and emotional responses in cases where this is deemed essential. Thus, the application of the theory does not aim to test the theory but assist in organising and explaining the empirical material.

3.2 Ethical considerations

Good research practice was followed throughout the research process. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and gave their consent both for the recordings and for the use of the material. Complete anonymity is difficult to achieve in this type of finite population, a point the respondents were made aware of. To minimise the possibility of identification and to emphasise that our research interest is in the process involving actors with specific experiences within the framework of two organisations and not the private lives and opinions of the respondents, the interviews have been decoded. Since the study does not have a gender focus and only two respondents are women and thus more easily identified, we do not mark gender.

The respondents were also given the opportunity to review draft manuscripts before publication. This allowed them to ensure that no misinterpretations were included, or that any information that could potentially be of detriment to their future careers was introduced. However, it is important to underscore that the analysis of the empirical data is entirely our own and has not been discussed with the respondents.

4. The role-exit process from police officer to researcher

4.1 First doubts – entering the academic world

According to Ebaugh (1988), doubt is the first stage in a role-exit process and concerns "reinterpreting and redefining a situation that was previously taken for granted" (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 41). Feeling a sense of doubt does not necessarily mean that the individual is dissatisfied with their current situation. Doubt can also be a gradual recognition of other possibilities in combination with re-interpretation and re-evaluation of the current situation. This gradual recognition, spurred by enrolling in HE, that unconsciously started a slow exit process, is evident among our respondents. Two empirical findings in relation to first doubts among our respondents are worth highlighting: Firstly, the studies were spurred by professional curiosity, e.g., HE was seen as a means of advancement in the police profession. Secondly, enrolment in HE did not initially have role exit as its aim. It was not supposed to be a "second career". Instead, first doubts about the police role slowly grew in the context of HE. The respondents recall their entrance to HE:

> I worked as a police officer in the field and felt that I wouldn't be able to do this for the rest of my life. I'm curious and need to learn things, I couldn't let university go, it was my hobby. Without it I withered away. I worked as a police officer and started to think more seriously about what I would have wanted to do research about. I didn't want to give up either one, I like both worlds. […] I love the whole police thing – but university! (V)

Worth noting in this quote is that the respondent distinguishes between "policing" and "HE". Police work is one thing and HE another, and the two worlds are kept apart rather than combined – this is despite the fact that it was curiosity about police matters that motivated enrolment in HE.

> [...] it [police work] led me to start reading popular science literature about communicating with people. Then I tried to apply my newfound knowledge in different work situations. Some of it was completely crazy, but if you don't try, you remain ignorant. This led me to study [subject] at university in my spare time. (N)

> I thought when the day comes when I don't want to work shifts, I'll get the job I'm looking for. I started studying at the university […] I was only going to take one course in [police-related subject] but I found it so exciting that I continued. (O)

Respondent O implies that "the job I'm looking for" does not necessarily mean outside the police organisation, but that the intention is to prepare for other options.

Our empirical material touches upon several of the factors Ebaugh listed as common causes that strike the first sparks of doubt: organisational change, role disenchantment, (presumed future) job burnout, or idiosyncratic events (Ebaugh, 1988). Prominent in our respondents' reasons for entering HE is work-related curiosity, due to idiosyncratic events at work. Thus, what later led them to exit was not a specifically negative attitude in relation to their police role. The police-related frustration expressed by the respondents concerned organisational limitations such as the lack of a scientifically anchored platform for knowledge and a perceived lack of professional development within the police organisation (e.g., Brante, 2013). Their experiences can be interpreted as reflecting an organisational

immaturity on the part of the Police Authority in relation to a possible professionalisation process (Brante, 2013). One respondent concretised this by asserting the following:

> The police don't have an organisation or structure like for example in medicine that allows doctors to maintain statistics on their patients. There's no support [from the Police Authority] such as "this is how you do an ethics application" or "this is how you do research" or "this is how you get research funding", "here you have a mentor" and so on. This knowledge doesn't exist in the police force. (V)

4.2 Seeking – and finding – alternatives

It is when doubts about their current role begin to take shape that individuals interpret specific previous events as cues in the search for a new role (Ebaugh, 1988). In this context, it was when the police work or police organisation no longer met expectations that respondents' experiences of HE came to the fore as the start of a possible new career path. In this, the second stage of the role-exit process, individuals began an active search for alternatives and started to express dissatisfaction with their current role to others (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 122). Some explored options and alternatives within the framework of the Police Authority, but not all were successful: "I talked to the county police chief in […] who was very innovative, but he found it difficult to justify funding a PhD student." (A)

Others had better luck:

> I came up with the idea of maybe going back to university and doing a PhD because I needed a new kind of challenge and wanted to change my perspective. I didn't want to be like some colleagues who sit around whining and complaining about everything that's wrong. […] I told my boss that I'd go back to the university and do a PhD on policing issues because there is so much to look at. He said "No, you're going to do it for the police" and I just said "Yeah, sure, good luck". But he said "Yes, you should". They decided to let me do a course at [name] University as part of my police employment. A new world opened up: "Can you study here during working hours?" It led to a new context where I could express that I wanted to do a PhD. (E)

The organisational boundaries and perceived professional immaturity of the police organisation are apparent in this part of the process, too. The perceived irregularity in arranging for doctoral positions within the framework of police employment indicates that the police organisation lacks a functioning structure for the purpose.

The role-exit process is preceded by searching and comparing different options and seeking alternatives as a kind of evaluation. On these occasions, "significant others" often play an important role as support and guidance (Ebaugh, 1988). In the case of our respondents, the significant others were often teachers at their HE courses who encouraged them to take a PhD or police officers with doctorates who offered career advice. Crucial significant others mentioned by several of our respondents were managers or employees in the police education department:

> When the opportunity arose to work at the department of police education, all the pieces fell into place. I enjoyed being at the university [...]. [The head of police education] told those of us who were teachers and police officers that the first person to start a postgraduate course

> was guaranteed half-time funding from the police education department, and I was the first. (O)

> I began to wonder whether I should continue being a police officer for life. By studying for a master's degree, I satisfied my curiosity about what the university could offer. When I started applying – or at least looking – for other jobs, the creation of a new police education department was being discussed. [...] Someone suggested that I should apply for a job there, which I did, and I got the job as a teacher with police experience. […] The PhD position resulted from an agreement between me, the [academic institution] and the police education department. (Z)

In line with Ebaugh's (1988) theory, our respondents expressed emotional relief when they found the various opportunities and alternatives to policing, regardless of the form in which they obtained their doctorate.

If individuals at the police education department acted as significant others, they functioned for many of our respondents as bridges between the police organisation and HE. The importance of bridges is emphasised in role-exit theory as a means of enabling individuals to transition to their new role more rapidly (Ebaugh, 1988). Through being located at university, police education departments provide a bridge facilitating the transition between the police role and the research/teacher role. In particular, they provide practical support in the shape of contacts with doctoral programmes and co-financing. One respondent for whom the police education department served as a bridge talks about the socialisation process in the new group and the encouragement that led to postgraduate studies:

> And then you would learn to be a teacher as well. Very challenging and I love learning new things, I felt there was room for learning, and it was encouraged. This led me to study for a university degree in parallel with my job. (D)

As doctoral students, they were given the chance to test and rehearse their new role as researchers and teachers, opportunities deemed to favour a smoother transition from one role to another (Ebaugh, 1988).

4.3 Remaining relevant to two worlds

That the police world and academia are two different worlds is expressed by several respondents and also appears in previous research (Hallenberg, 2012; Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017). However, no one expresses it more clearly than the person in the following quote, which should be interpreted as an exaggeration designed to emphasise a categorical difference:

> The police culture is family, you are there for each other, you eat together. Academia is a bloody fight where you gain legitimacy by seeing to it that others come off worse. That may be a bit extreme, of course. (F)

The point of the above quote is to illustrate that for our respondents, moving between the two worlds was a big step. Role exit means abandoning one's previous personal identity associated with that role in favour of a different role (Ebaugh, 1988). Personal identity

is formed through the internalisation of role expectations and the reactions of others to one's position in the social structure. When an individual takes on a new role or deviates from their old role, this poses a threat to their self-identity. Both role exit and role entry are closely related to self-identity, as the role an individual takes on contributes to the individual's self-definition (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 22). As previously mentioned, the police profession strongly shapes social identity (Bradford, 2014; Westley, 1953). Despite the fact that our respondents have undergone postgraduate training in different academic disciplines, and only a few have been funded by the Police Authority, they have, with one exception, used police-related issues as empirical data. This is perhaps not surprising given that they have worked as police officers and that policing is the world they know most about. However, based on how our respondents talk about their choices, our interpretation is that many have deliberately sought to be relevant to the police organisation and thus retain a part of their police identity:

> The advantage [of being a police officer researching police issues] is that it is faster, because we know what the needs are. (U)

> When I wrote my dissertation, the police were my empirical data. I studied police officers. (F)

> I wanted to stay relevant to police officers on the street. I think that was one of the hardest and most difficult objectives. To keep it relevant and make sure it would benefit someone, that it would be possible to use the findings and results and not just end up as a dissertation on someone's bookshelf. (E)

During their doctoral studies, the respondents feel they had good support from people within the police organisation and thus remained connected to the profession:

> I have had good support from the organisation. Managers at different levels, from the top – it varied a bit depending on who was the national police chief – down to the rank and file, have been very supportive. (L)

> Most of them were curious to know "What are you going to do?" "What does it mean?" Unfortunately, the level of academic experience and knowledge in the police was quite low and probably still is. I don't think many people know what a thesis is. Just like me, if someone had asked me ten years ago what a thesis is, I wouldn't have known either. But there was quite a lot of curiosity and a few raised eyebrows: "Can you do that sort of thing?" (Z)

Some of the respondent's recount comments highlighting how they existed between two worlds during their research studies:

> I got comments like, "When are you going to come back to reality?" I replied, "What reality do you have in mind?" That was mostly from older colleagues (H).

> Often I become "the police" in academia, and in the police I become "the professor" [...] I didn't always feel that I was taken seriously in the academic world. People got stuck in trivialities instead of listening to the research or the scientific aspect of it all. (E)

Usually, this part of the process is emotionally stressful and leads individuals to seek out a new reference group more deliberately (Ebaugh, 1988). It is a juncture where many experience a phase of uncertainty, experiencing a sense of not fitting in or belonging. This transitional period, often referred to as a "vacuum", tends to be briefer for those who successfully established connections or "bridges" in their prior roles, encompassing areas such as work, friendships, family and hobbies (Ebaugh, 1988; 107ff.). Prominent in this part of the process is how the individuals change reference group and begin to visualise the new role more clearly.

Empirically dealing with police issues failed to motivate many of the police officers with PhDs to remain in both worlds. Our interpretation is that the quotes exemplify how police graduates stand with one foot in each world but gradually move further and further away from the police world and the police role. At the end of the "seeking alternatives" phase, the respondents start to shift reference group and prepare for the third phase: the turning point.

4.4 Turning points

From individual quotes, it may appear that for some the turning point was a specific event:

> Somewhere I was told that "you have to choose between being a scientist or a police officer". That was useful because it made me think, "What am I?" (V)

> I worked part-time for the police for about a year [during the study period]. Finally I felt that no, I'm too old for this, I'm forty years old now and I can't go on doing both. It has to be one or the other. (A)

In some cases, it was a single event that led respondents to perceive that they were at a turning point. However, we conclude from our analysis of the interviews as a whole that it was more of a gradual process, yielding a decision based on accumulated experience. This reasoning is supported by the theory according to which the turning point is often spurred by specific events (Ebaugh, 1988). In the present context, one such specific event was the completion of the doctoral thesis and the immediate period thereafter. By then, most of our respondents had officially resigned as police officers but had not made a complete break emotionally. Many of them had hoped the Police Authority would show an interest in their research and newly acquired research skills and would be prepared to cooperate in the future. Thus, the turning point in this case refers more to the emotional process than the instant at which they officially submitted their resignations.

> I have decent qualifications and experience, and I am a name in the business and public sectors, where I have worked a lot, but the police are not interested [...] The silence of the profession is... take that as your headline. (F)

> No, I didn't get that [response from the Police Authority in connection with the defence of the thesis]. I don't know if it was because of me, that I didn't spread awareness, but no, no reaction [from the police organisation]. (V)
> […] There aren't so many police officers with a PhD that they wouldn't have the time or opportunity to pick up on it. From my experience of the police organisation, I didn't expect them to. At the same time, I think it's a shame. Not for me as a person, since others are

> interested. There has been more interest from abroad than from the Swedish police. Partly through contacts I've made along the way. (D)

Apparently, the police organisation does not perceive police officers with PhDs as part of the police world and rejects them by not paying attention to their performance or research. Not being recognised and acknowledged by the Police Authority was emotionally painful for many, forcing them to turn to a new reference group and leave their old roles behind. It should be noted that a few of the respondents still have some form of employment with the Police Authority, some of whom have been offered research opportunities within the police organisation. However, the general trend is an exit from the police profession and the police organisation, despite people's attempts and wishes to stay on in some capacity.

It is not only the individual's own wishes about staying or leaving that need to be taken into account; there must also be an organisational framework in place that enables combination of the two roles.

> In a profession like the police, there are either police officers or non-police officers. And if you are both, it all becomes pretty weird. If you are a PhD and also a police officer, you can't help feeling strange. To be honest, I found it really tough in the beginning. (F)

In the classical professions, the combination of researcher and practitioner is a long-standing tradition, and to obtain certain positions a doctorate may even be required. While younger professions strive to find the right forms, pre-professions tend to lack proper opportunities (Brante, 2013). This is clearly apparent in the police profession. For instance, several respondents expressed a desire to remain within the police organisation:

> I enjoyed being a police officer very much. I've often wondered whether I should return to the police profession and what that might look like. When I was working in police education, I asked several times if it might be possible to work part-time, work summers or something, but it never was. (P)

> If only someone [at the police] had said that you could have part-time employment here and research this or run this project or something like that. I think both parties would have benefited from that. (D)

When they found that continuing in the police would inevitably mean their academic merits going to waste, graduates usually chose to return to the academic system in some form and to turn away from the police profession and organisation.

We have seen how police officers with PhDs have gradually come to feel that they want something the police organisation cannot offer. Ebaugh (1988), p. 128) refers to a turning point occurring through a gradual build-up of events – as in our material – as "the straw that broke the camel's back". For many of our respondents, the lack of interest shown by the police organisation in connection with the defence of their theses was one such straw. Seeking alternatives and turning points are not inherently visible as separate sequences in accordance with the ideal-typical image conveyed by Ebaugh. The turning point is, however, often associated with grief and a last look back, and exiting a role seems a reasonable way of reducing cognitive dissonance (Ebaugh, 1988). This is true among our respondents as well, as shown by the above quote. After the turning point, the role exit is final and a new role awaits.

4.5 Creating an ex-role

While exiting a previous role, individuals work on establishing a new one. This stage involves adapting and making the new role part of the individual's sense of self. As Ebaugh (1988, p. 182) puts it, "role exit theory emphasises the impact of previous role identification on current concepts of self". In the present case it is a matter of becoming something other than a police officer while at the same time handling "phantom pains" from the previous role. One of the respondents who entered the academic world emphasises the importance of making statements in the new role as a researcher and not as a police officer:

> It took a long time for me to really don my academic spectacles. It was a very long process that I experienced without perhaps being aware of what I was going through. […] [Today] I speak in my role as a researcher not because I have worked as a police officer or am a police officer or represent the police. I don't want to exploit their brand and I want to feel free to say what I think and feel. To be honest, I don't think of myself as a police researcher, but I have researched phenomena that might be relevant to the police. (V)

This type of statement aims to make the change of role clear both to the speaker themselves and to others.

One way for the respondents to make the exit smoother was to establish themselves in a different context before the formal exit process took place. This made it easier to handle the former role when the time came to establish themselves elsewhere, a phenomenon described in sociology as "anticipatory socialisation" by Merton (1968).

> I had already taken the step from the police to university before I started the PhD programme. It's hard for me to imagine that I might have gone back to the police organisation even if I hadn't become a PhD student and been employed at the university. (H)

Another respondent persisted in their aim to stay within the police organisation but not without acting in the scientific role for which they had been trained and prepared. This person actually managed to find employment as a researcher in the police organisation, something that most respondents desired but were unable to achieve:

> When I finished my PhD, I was very clear that I wanted a new kind of job. I wanted people to see that I had learnt something new and that I had a new skill after all those years of doctoral studies. Then I wanted the authority to understand that I had learnt to do research, that now I had to do it, so I was allowed to do research in 20 percent of my position. (E)

The former role was thus introduced into the organisation, which seemed to alleviate phantom pains and the type of mourning process that often accompanies an exit. However, most respondents ended up in positions where their police identity endured even in their new roles outside the police organisation. The police identity seems to be difficult to erase:

> I still see myself as a bit of a policeman. I'm in the police, I'm researching policing, I think I can do better for the police now than when I was a police officer. (H)

Once a policeman, always a policeman, as they say. (G)

5. Concluding remarks

Given the general international trend in recent decades to move police education towards an academic orientation (Bjørgo & Damen, 2020; Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017), this article proceeded from the fact that only a few police officers with PhDs stay within the police organisation. Thus, the objective of the study was to investigate the role-exit processes of police officers with PhDs, with special focus on organisational opportunities and obstacles in the relationship between HE and the police organisation as a pre-profession. In doing so, we highlight one of several dimensions in the relationship between HE and the police organisation in Sweden. Our study shows that three intertwined factors are significant in the most common scenario involving a role-exit process for police officers with PhDs.

Firstly, the exit process started in connection with the police officers' academic studies. That these studies would lead to exit was however an unintended consequence. Rather, the studies were spurred by professional curiosity with a view to personal development in the policing profession. For this to happen, officers needed to look beyond the police organisation and into the academic world, which provided new credentials and contacts that in turn triggered the exit process. The police organisation lacked the foresight to utilise the graduates' academic skills and credentials. The police officers with PhDs were not prepared to return to regular police duty unless their newly acquired academic knowledge was put to use.

Secondly, our study shows that as a result of being located in academic institutions, police education programmes act as bridges between the police organisation and HE, providing an infrastructure of doctoral opportunities for police officers. In addition, these programmes enable participants to have one foot in the police world and the other in the academic world, both before and after graduation. Participants also get the opportunity to rehearse their researcher/teacher roles prior to research studies. This makes for a smoother transition from the police to the teacher/researcher role as the programmes enable participants to apply experience and knowledge of both roles. It also alleviates the "phantom pains" that may linger from the police profession among exiting police officers with PhDs.

Thirdly, throughout the exit process the police officers with PhDs harboured an ambition to remain relevant for police work but failed to receive the desired response from the police organisation. This means that the actual exit event can be divided into two separate occasions. The first was the official administrative moment of actual dismissal from the police, which usually occurred several years before the second, more definitive exit. The second was the emotional exit that usually took place after the doctorate had been attained, when it became clear that there was no possibility of returning to the police organisation in any form. This further highlights the reluctant and protracted exit process in relation to the police role, which accords with previous studies identifying the strength of police identity (Bradford, 2014; Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Our results thus support previous research that has pointed to difficulties in establishing fruitful cooperation between HE and the police organisation (Hallenberg, 2012; Hallenberg & Cockcroft, 2017). As a pre-profession, the police organisation has an immature organisation for postgraduate staff (Brante, 2013). Consequently, the

organisation lacks a structure in which police officers with PhDs can operate if they wish to make use of their acquired research skills and develop within their profession. The police organisation has thus been unable to offer in-depth studies in its field, nor has it been able to exchange academic qualifications. As a result, it misses out on the acquisition of research conducted by its own people with insider knowledge and access to the field (Hendy, 2020), and the potential impact of pracademics as mediators between the two worlds is lost (Huey & Mitchell, 2016). In a more academically mature organisation, rather than role exits there would be role development to the benefit of the police organisation. The police officers with PhDs could theoretically be regarded as pioneers of academic policing, as "those who laid the foundations of the theoretical knowledge base of the subject". As a group, they also express consistent expectations that as researchers they could contribute to improvements in policing and the desire to build organisational bridges between HE and the police organisation. However, our conclusion is that they have been too disparate, isolated from each other, and more akin to temporary individual trajectories in a large organisation than a cohesive group with the potential to contribute to organisational change. Their absorption into HE organisations is therefore a more likely path for career development. Their shared experiences of leaving the police role provide valuable insights into the difficulties for police officers of pursuing an academic career while remaining relevant to the police organisation. Managing both worlds successfully is thus a tricky task, providing additional and deeper theoretical knowledge on the process of leaving a role where (i) organisational aspects and (ii) the degree of voluntary/involuntary exit need to be taken into account in order to understand the outcome. According to the respondents' statements, several of the respondents in this study would have preferred to work in the "two worlds" if the organisational opportunities had been available. For this to become a reality in the future, we believe that investment in police work as an academic subject is required and that the Police Authority should give police officers the opportunity to study and create space for researching police officers in the organisation.

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