

**The McDonaldization of Police-Academic Partnerships: Organizational and Cultural
Barriers Encountered in Moving from Research *on* Police to Research *with* Police**

Abstract

Partnerships between police and academics have proliferated in recent years, reflecting the increased recognition of the benefits to be had on both sides from collaborating on research, knowledge transfer and other activities. The literature on police-academic partnerships refers to inherent obstacles in bringing the ‘two worlds’ of research and practice together, and reflects an increased recognition on both sides of the benefits to be had from the co-production of research – reflecting a shift from conducting research *on* police, to conducting research *with* police. This takes place in the wider context of moves towards evidence-based policing, and the professionalization of policing in the UK. In this paper we reflect on our experiences of building a police-academic partnership, focusing on: 1) the internal organizational and cultural drivers and barriers; 2) the opportunities offered via ‘in-house’ research by analysts and police officers; and 3) evaluation. We highlight the increasing risk presented to both sides by the ‘McDonaldization’ (Heslop 2011, Ritzer 2004) of police-academic partnerships, and the need to thus pay close attention to how the identification and prioritisation of research, its conduct, and aspects of evaluation, are managed and supported in practice, with open and transparent dialogue between police and academic partners. The paper draws on qualitative interviews conducted with police officers and police staff, and our observations and reflections while conducting a strategically driven university-police collaborative project with police forces in England.

Keywords: evaluation; evidence-based policing; McDonaldization; police-academic partnerships

Introduction

This paper contributes to the growing corpus of international reflections and accounts of police-academic collaborations by focusing on the authors' experiences of knowledge transfer work with police forces in England, and interviews with police officers and police staff in which they reflect on the barriers and drivers to collaborative working. We focus on three main areas: 1) the organizational and cultural drivers and barriers; 2) the opportunities offered via 'in-house' research by analysts and officers; and 3) evaluation. Recent years have witnessed increased discussion of how successful police-academic collaborations might be built and sustained, and these writings reflect a shift to acknowledgement of the increased benefits to be had on both sides via the co-production of research by police and researchers, for instance via 'participatory action research' (PAR) (see Fleming 2010, 2012, Wood *et al.* 2008), 'shadowing' (Bartkowiak-Théron and Sappey 2012), 'communities of practice' (Henry and Mackenzie 2012), and an approach which goes beyond an either/or 'critical' or 'policy-based' research tradition to address the 'dialogue of the deaf'. This third tradition should be based upon 'an intimate and continuous partnership between police and the university system' (Bradley and Nixon 2009, p.424). These examples highlight the myriad ways in which academia has moved away from doing research *on* police, to doing research *with* police (*cf* Greenhill 1981).

A more strategically-driven impetus for police and academics to collaborate has emerged, evidenced internationally by initiatives such as the Centre for Excellence in Policing and Security in Australia (CEPS), the Australia New Zealand Police Advisory Agency (ANZPAA), the Centre for Law Enforcement and Public Health Limited (CLEPH), and the Nexus Policing Project in Victoria, Australia (see Wood *et al.* 2008, Bradley *et al.* 2006). In the United States, programs designed by academics such as Skolnick and Bayley (1986) and

Wilson and Kelling (1982) have encouraged police organizations to experiment widely (Wood *et al.* 2008). Specific examples of collaborations in the USA notably include George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (Jenkins 2015). In the UK, the focus of this paper, examples include the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR), recognised as a best practice model for police-academic partnerships (Engel and Henderson 2013); the N8 collaboration between police forces and universities in the North of England; the Universities' Police Science Institute (UPSI) in Wales, the East Midlands Policing Academic Collaboration (EMPAC), the Society of Evidence Based Policing (SEBP), and various police-university collaborations funded via the College of Policing Innovation Fund in 2014, and the College of Policing/HEFCE Policing Knowledge Fund in 2015.

There is also an increasing emphasis on training police officers (and staff), so they have the required skills to undertake their own research in force (or in collaboration with an academic), as part of a wider professionalization of policing. This professionalization is reflected in the creation of the College of Policing in 2012, a professional body which has a 'mandate to set standards in professional development, including codes of practice and regulations, to ensure consistency across the 43 forces in England and Wales' (College of Policing 2015a). The College of Policing aims to promote the use of knowledge and research to develop an evidence-based approach to policing, for instance hosting the 'What Works Centre for Crime Reduction'. The UK 'What Works Network' consists of seven independent Centres and two affiliate members. The purpose of these Centres is to: 'enable policy makers, commissioners and practitioners to make decisions based upon strong evidence of what works and to provide cost-efficient, useful services' (GOV.UK 2015). The 'What Works Centre for Crime Reduction' specifically focuses on: reviewing 'research on practices and interventions to reduce crime'; labeling 'the evidence on interventions in terms of quality,

cost, impact, mechanism (why it works), context (where it works) and implementation issues'; and providing 'Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and other crime reduction stakeholders with the knowledge, tools and guidance to help them target their resources more effectively' (College of Policing 2015b). It has promoted the use of evidence-based policing (see Sherman 1998) for informing policing policy and practices, although it is important to note that, within the UK, there have always existed important differences between policing in England and Wales, and policing in Scotland; which are even starker after reforms including the creation of a national police force in Scotland in April 2013 (Fyfe 2014).

In their review of the UK 'What Works Centres' Bristow *et al.* (2015, p.134) claim that 'generating, synthesising and translating evidence in ways that lead to tangible improvement in policy and practice is a tall order, and the Centres will need to remain alert to a number of risks.' Furthermore, despite the rapid growth of collaborations between police and academia, Fyfe (2015) argues that 'today many would claim the impact of research evidence on police policy and practice remains limited'. The broader context in which these developments are taking place also includes a number of paradoxes (*cf* Fyfe 2015), which can drive and inhibit successful collaboration, and which are explored further herein. For example on the police side a period of austerity and cuts in public spending have necessitated difficult choices about a more targeted deployment of resources. Police are also faced with the changing nature of crime (including a rise in online crime, the threat of terrorism, and the unearthing of previously 'hidden' crimes of the powerful – for instance the investigation of cases of historic child abuse). A series of developments have also occurred in response to political and public imperatives, including not only the professionalization of the police (Brown 2013), but also what has been referred to as the 'McDonalidization' of the police (Heslop 2011), and the increasing politicization of policing in England and Wales via the introduction of locally

elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in 2012. As Fyfe (2014, p.501) notes the introduction of PCCs shows that England and Wales continue to look ‘across the Atlantic towards the United States in terms of policy innovation in policing given some parallels with the role of locally elected officials in the running of police departments in America’. It is against this backdrop that the rise and spread of evidence-based policy and practice across a number of public sector organisations in previous decades, has now also spread to policing (see Sherman 1998). In addition, for academics there is an increasing emphasis on demonstrating the ‘impact’ of research, of involving research users more closely in the research process, and of greater public engagement, including for instance Burawoy’s (2004) call for ‘public sociology’, similar calls in criminology (Loader and Sparks 2010), and the advent of the ‘enterprise university’ (Marginson and Considine 2002).

It is within this context that we offer an analysis of our experiences of building police-academic partnerships in England, drawing on our reflections and interviews conducted with police officers and police staff to explore their understandings of police-academic partnerships. The paper begins with an overview of the literature on police-academic partnerships and McDonalidization (Heslop 2011) and the methods utilised in knowledge transfer work with police. We then focus on the organizational and cultural drivers and barriers, the opportunities offered via ‘in-house’ research by analysts and officers, and the need for robust evaluation.

Police-Academic Partnerships: From Research *on* Police to Research *with* Police

Ending the ‘Dialogue of the Deaf’

The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of writing from academics (Fleming 2010, 2011, 2012, Wood *et al.* 2008), police-practitioners (Wilkinson 2010), and co-authored

reflections (Marks *et al.* 2010, Guillaume *et al.* 2012, Gravelle and Rogers 2014) on police-academic collaborations and the barriers, facilitators and drivers for successful partnership working. For instance, a special issue of the journal *Policing* (Murji 2010) focused on collaborations, while special issues of *Police Practice and Research* have focused on partnership working (see Johnston and Shearing 2009, Cordner and White 2010, Fyfe and Wilson 2012). The relationship between police and academics has typically been conceptualized as ‘two worlds’ consisting of a ‘dialogue of the deaf’ (Bradley and Nixon 2009, p.423, MacDonald 1987), which can be understood as a ‘mutual misunderstanding that negatively impacts on the police-academics relationship’. As Foster and Bailey (2010, p.197) note, the opposition and reticence academics can encounter is epitomized in a comment by one officer of working with academics as akin to ‘letting lunatics into the asylum’. They argue that such a comment ‘reflects widespread scepticism and stereotypical attitudes towards academics’ (Greenhill 1981, Young 1991). Academics can be criticized for failing to engage with the complex demands of policing (Fyfe and Wilson 2012, Weisburd and Neyroud 2011) resulting in ‘a lingering cultural mistrust between police and academia that can hinder research partnerships’ (Wilkinson 2010, p.147). Thus academics must be willing to adapt their professional identity to ‘team work’ and ‘reliance on others’ in contrast to the atypical ‘lone scholar’ (Fleming 2012, p.375). They must ‘be willing to be “tested” repeatedly by police prior to being accepted as legitimate’ (Engel and Whalen 2010, p.111).

Police research has also been described as a ‘mirror’ or a ‘motor’: for it ‘either seeks to reflect back to police the complexities of the police operating environment and how policing interventions in it are conducted, to promote enhanced understanding of their role and impacts’ or functions ‘as a “motor” for change, where reform is the explicit motivating intention’ (Innes 2010, p.127). Punch (2010, p.158-159) suggests, however, that the current

problem is not so much between academia and police but involves ‘short-sighted, populist-oriented governments who want the police organization to be a servile agency that is institutionally deaf’, thus highlighting the wider political contexts which both policing and academia operate in, and are affected by (Stephens 2010). We use the concept of McDonaldization to explore this in more detail below.

Barriers to Successful Collaboration: Organizational, Cultural and Interpersonal

This literature on police-academic partnerships reveals a host of barriers (or tensions) to collaboration on both sides, with recommendations for how to navigate successful partnership working while being sensitive to interpersonal, cultural, contractual and processual factors (Wilkinson 2010), while also building trust between partners, focusing on openness and honesty (Fleming 2011). The ‘right’ people need to be identified since the individual personalities of researchers and police partners shape ‘the nature and extent of the changes being sought’ (Marks *et al.* 2010, p.112). Effective leadership is also crucial (Foster and Bailey 2010) as is good communication and mutual understanding (Fleming 2012, Stephens 2010). The ‘speed of change’ in police work (see Foster and Bailey 2010) is also cited as of significance. Wilkinson (2010, p.147) notes that ‘lead times have implications for police who are often required to adapt to fast-changing circumstances, sometimes driven by responses to unforeseen critical incidents or emerging issues and sometimes to changing political priorities’. The reactive nature of police work can create barriers to long-term research input, while changing organizational cultures and conflicting demands (Foster and Bailey 2010, Stephens 2010) can also impede successful collaboration. Viewing police as consisting of multiple ‘police cultures’ helps to ‘convey the nuances and differences within and between different elements of the police organization and the people who work in it rather than presenting it as homogenous and one-dimensional’ (Foster 2003, p.196).

Heslop (2011) draws our attention to the ‘McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 2004) of policing. Here, the effects of professionalization ‘from above’, is not occupational control of their work by the professionals but control by their employers and managers (Evetts 2003). Integral to this has been the introduction into the police of new public management principles (McLaughlin 2007, Reiner 2010). Through being subjected to increased public scrutiny, and as part of the ‘performance’ strand of new public management, the police have become obsessed with quantifying. Crime rates, public confidence and ‘value for money’ are constantly measured, signalling an embedded ‘counting culture’ within British policing (Heslop 2011, p.316). Heslop highlights the ways in which the police service is becoming increasingly micro-managed, bureaucratic and risk averse, producing what Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) (2010) described as ‘industrial quantities’ of guidance documents. The introduction of new public management into policing has thus resulted in the police service increasingly becoming McDonaldized, ‘with a disproportionate stress on narrowly defined efficiency, an obsession with calculability and measurement and the power of the controlling mechanisms needed for imposition and enforcement’ (Heslop 2011, p.319). He notes the Home Office’s intention to ‘free the police force from central control by removing government targets... reducing bureaucracy and supporting professional responsibility’ (Heslop 2011, p.319). We will explore below the impact of McDonaldization on the development of police-academic partnerships.

A further obstacle to effective police–researcher collaboration is ‘radically different conceptions of what constitutes “evidence of effectiveness.” Tradition distorts reform into existing practice; research results must speak in the language that the police understand if they are to be adopted’ (Buerger 2010, p.135). Greater attention has been paid recently to the

issue of transferring research into practice (Thacher 2001, Hoover 2010, Engel and Whalen 2013, Fyfe and Wilson 2012). Researchers have drawn attention to the importance of ‘practitioner knowledge’ and for instance Bradley and Nixon (2009) warn against belittling or ignoring police experiences and knowledge. This is a wider issue related to the promises offered via evidence-based policing and a ‘what works’ approach (Bullock and Tilley 2009, Hope 2009).

The Co-Production of Research

To mitigate some of these issues, police and researchers have drawn attention to the benefits of co-produced research for shaping successful police-academic collaborations and research agendas (see Fleming 2010, 2012, Foster and Bailey 2010, Wood *et al.* 2008, Stephens 2010). Bradley *et al.* (2006, p.190) suggest that academics and police need to come together in a ‘policing research network’ to help address a deficiency in ‘knowledge generation, validation, diffusion and adoption’. Fleming (2012) and Wood *et al.* (2008) argue that participatory action research (PAR) can help to involve police in the research process and focus on a micro-level view of a fragmented police culture. In this sense, it is possible to advance police theory and research when police officers are ‘actively involved in the research process and in finding solutions to practical problems’ (Wood *et al.* 2008, p.72).

In their discussion of the ‘Dialogue of the Deaf’, Bradley and Nixon (2009, p.423, see also Engel and Whalen 2010) call for a third model of research which goes beyond the either/or of the ‘critical research’ and ‘policy police research’, thus allowing academics and police to work in ‘close and continuous collaborative relationships’. Rosenbaum (2010) views the National Police Research Platform in the USA as an opportunity to merge action research and the policy evaluation tradition to serve the needs of police and researchers. In this tradition,

case studies from the UK, US, South Africa and Australia give insights into successful projects which emerged initially from fruitful relationships between single academics and senior police officers, and grew into a sustained collaboration over some years (see Marks *et al.* 2010, Wuestewald and Steinheider 2009). Participants were committed to the co-production of knowledge leading to structural, processual or cultural change.

Henry and Mackenzie (2012, p.315) in their knowledge transfer work on community policing with police forces in Scotland draw on learning theory familiar to those engaged in professional practitioner education to suggest that the nature and scope of police-academic partnership work could fruitfully be understood as brokering ‘communities of practice’. By practice, communities are able to establish boundaries and criteria for what it means to be a ‘competent participant, an outsider or somewhere in between’ and ‘in this regard, a community of practice acts as a locally negotiated regime of competence’ (Wenger 1998, p.137). Others such as Jenkins (2015) and Birzer (2002) highlight respectively the value of ‘practitioners-as-authors’ and ‘writing partnerships’ as further means of enhancing police research collaborations. However despite the enthusiasm for collaborative work of this nature which is illustrated by these cases, Guillaume *et al.* (2012) claim that such examples remain ‘atypical’.

Utilizing Research Evidence in Policing

Attention has also turned to how the police can utilize existing research evidence more effectively. To date there has been little impact from research evidence or change in practice as Kennedy (2010, p.167) notes: ‘despite a great deal of research on core police practices, and some very clear and central conclusions, most of what police departments do has been known for a very long time not to work’. Hoover (2010) cautions us to be realistic about

police efforts to draw from research arguing that police practical knowledge is also valid, and that there is a danger in ‘over-selling’ research evidence to police. Moreover, in their survey of 850 law enforcement agencies in the United States, Rojek *et al.* (2012) found that reported use of research findings did not necessarily reflect a connection with the empirical work of the research community. Steinheider *et al.* (2012) also surveyed academics and police practitioners to determine their philosophical viewpoints and perceptions of research, highlighting how each values different qualities in a research partnership.

Despite the progress made above, a number of key areas still remain for further analysis and discussion. By engaging in critical reflection, we highlight three aspects that can impact on the development of successful partnership working and the co-production of research. Significantly, these examinations take place against the backdrop of the growing familiarity of police in the UK with evidence-based policing. We discuss our experiences of building a police-academic partnership by focusing on the organizational and cultural drivers and barriers encountered by police officers and staff, the opportunities offered via ‘in-house’ research, and the need for robust evaluation.

Methods: Strategically Developing a Police-Academic Partnership

The data presented herein relates to a one-year funded Enterprise Project Grant [*details anonymised for peer review*], which focused on developing partnerships and conducting knowledge transfer with police forces in England. The main aim of the project was to strategically develop a university partnership with regional police forces, showcasing research in the social sciences (and cognate disciplines), which was applicable in various policing contexts, and further developing research collaborations and opportunities. This included identifying completed research projects with an application for policing and sharing

these, mapping the research needs of the police forces and examining how these might be addressed, and identifying and facilitating contact between key personnel who might develop future research opportunities. As Birzer writes:

Researchers may glean invaluable insight on the appropriateness of the fit between research and practice by spending time at a police organization. Researchers should not ignore the experience and knowledge base of rank and file police practitioners. Thus, a sabbatical conducted within a police agency for the purpose of study is one way in which the researcher can tap into this invaluable knowledge base. (2002, p.150)

The Senior Research Associate (in a role similar to what might otherwise be termed a Knowledge Transfer Manager) spent seven months seconded to a specific police force while also liaising with relevant stakeholders from other police organizations. The discussion that follows is based on our personal reflections in the form of field notes collected via our observations during the setting-up and reviewing of the collaboration(s), observations during relevant meetings and at research fairs, informal conversations with a variety of police personnel including from probationary Constable level to Assistant Chief Constable level, and shadowing of officers on response, in a custody suite and in a control room.

We also conducted 15 semi-structured interviews during the secondment phase. Interviewees were identified during this phase by the Senior Research Associate in discussion with a senior officer who had responsibility for police-academic partnerships. They were drawn from a group of police staff and officers who either had key roles in relation to the utilization of 'research evidence' or who had prior or current experience of undertaking research

themselves and/or of collaborating professionally with academics. Hence they constitute a ‘purposive’ rather than a ‘representative’ sample. The sample included Inspectors and Chief Inspectors, analysts and staff with responsibility for Strategic Policy Development. Informed written consent was obtained for the interviews to be audio recorded using a dictaphone and fully transcribed by the Senior Research Assistant. The interviews explored interviewees’ perspectives on police-academic collaboration including the perceived drivers, facilitators and barriers. We also explored their familiarity with, and understandings of, ‘evidence-based policing’ and their personal experiences of conducting or participating in research. Finally, we were also concerned with their views of the ‘types’ of research they felt should be prioritised and which would be most relevant to informing and shaping policing practice. Interviews were analysed thematically. The identities of the police forces, individual police officers and staff in question have been fully anonymised. Equally, it is important to note that in no way did this project entail the assessment of the practices or policies of forces, police officers, or civilian staff.

Organizational and Cultural Drivers and Barriers to Collaborative Working

In interviews with both police officers and staff there was confirmation that collaborating with universities had gained greater impetus in recent years:

In the course of the last 3 or 4 years I’ve had the unglamorous role of dealing with strategic research and liaison with universities. It’s only now that it’s... become quite interesting, where people want to know what the answers are and what’s going on.
(Interviewee 10, Chief Inspector)

Financial constraints were viewed as the main driver behind police-academic partnerships:

‘Austerity’s a huge driver for it. I think the days of us identifying a problem, throwing loads of resources at it... those days are gone’ (Interviewee 7, Temporary Chief Inspector).

There was also recognition of changes in the nature of policing, requiring links with academic research in order to police ‘more intelligently’:

We have to think much more about what we do than perhaps we had to in the past and find different ways of dealing with things... when it comes to modern technology, because the cutting edge of technology is not going to be police officers who’ve sat at home and taught themselves and picked it up as they’ve gone along. (Interviewee 3, Inspector)

We found that in each police force, research and partnerships were seen to have potential for contributing to a strategic, future-scanning agenda. Police-academic partnerships could bring teams together to identify priorities and plan an overall strategic approach, or allow for the commissioning of particular projects:

Where we’re making major policy decisions or investment decisions, we should be doing that on the basis of evidence... it isn’t something that happens with any degree of consistency or robustness... where are our biggest cases of concern, what should our priorities be; looking at the underlying causes of those issues; getting the right people together to plan an approach, to tackle that problem at its root cause. (Interviewee 2, police staff)

Partnerships with academics were seen as bringing independent professional expertise and the ability to challenge routinized taken-for-granted practices:

Perhaps work in partnership to say, ‘You’re an academic, you know how to crunch through all this, you might come up with some hypotheses yourself. I’m a practitioner but with a certain amount of academic background, so I can understand where you’re coming from – let’s work together to get a better, or a greater understanding of how we ended up with the outcome.’ (Interviewee 7, Temporary Chief Inspector)

However, significant barriers were identified which may account for frustrations felt by some of those to whom we spoke. When ‘police culture’ is the subject of academic writing, it is typically referring to a kind of ‘macho’ approach to the characterisation of, attitude towards and treatment of ‘criminals’ by ‘rank and file’ officers (Loftus 2010). Here, some aspects of operational policing – being ‘on response’, dealing with a crime scene or being reliant on colleagues in high risk situations, lend themselves to the development of what is typically ‘bundled up’ as ‘police culture’. However, we encountered occasional references to how a particular mentality, driven by the need to make unreflective on-the-spot decisions in challenging situations, can percolate *upwards* to inform approaches to the management and leadership of a force more generally:

Officers, especially at the senior ranks, it’s all ‘implemental’... part of it may be a bit of bravado. They’re expected to show leadership and they confuse leadership with making a snap decision... And I think that the higher up that you go, they never really leave that behind. (Interviewee 1, police staff)

Furthermore, what was evident in the accounts of the (managerial level) personnel, was an organizational culture characterised by calls for accountability, the pervasiveness of performance management and measurement, and a proliferation of bureaucratic systems as a form of micro-management (see Fleming 2010, Fleming and Rhodes 2005). Frustrations arose in relation to a perception that in some places organizational structures and bureaucratic procedures had been created that were a response to *a need to be seen to be managing effectively* but which were not actually the outcome of sound decision-making:

All you've done is create a process and you haven't actually done the decision-making bit. That's the bit that you should have focused on, to get better decisions made, and then put the structure in to help those decisions be delivered and monitored... we don't sort of think strategically how we need to put in place-, what's the direction of travel, what milestones we're going to meet, what's the critical path, what do we need to change? (Interviewee 1, police staff)

The significance of this culture in relation to collaborative working was the impact it was seen as having on any research that is undertaken:

It's going to require some deliberation about interpreting the results, some deliberation about how best to implement those results or change the organization - everything will be rushed through... and it will likely fail... research can only inform your thinking as to what is probably a good thing to do or what you may need to consider. They will probably not view it like that. (Interviewee 1, police staff)

Others spoke of the need for ‘instant success’ and an associated lack of space for *learning* as militating against the effective use of research:

When you do read an application form for a job, it’s always: ‘Did this – and it was excellent! First time!’ and you know, ‘Look at all my fantastic results!’ There is no: ‘I set off, and I did this, and it didn’t quite achieve what I wanted it to achieve, so I went back and had a look, tweaked it, and then it still wasn’t quite right, tweaked it again and I think I’ve got a good product here - and this is the learning’. We don’t value learning. (Interviewee 5, Temporary Inspector)

From various quarters, we identified a clear message that any proposed research must map on to forces’ strategic priorities:

We’ve got a Police and Crime Plan which has just been re-written ready for the new financial year and that has all sorts of pillars to it... We have our strategic priorities... so they would be our top two at the moment... So there will be things that the force are saying ‘These are our most important things’ and if it doesn’t hit those – I mean there is a certain amount of hierarchy to those – so what you want to be aiming it at are the ones that we’re saying are the highest risk and if it’s not really in there ... we’ll park that. (Interviewee 7, Temporary Chief Inspector)

At the same time we were struck by the difficulties external researchers might have in identifying what these are for individual forces at any one time. PCC strategies, targets and research plans also played a crucial role in shaping the research conducted, or supported, by particular forces, and fed into force research priorities:

Even though the Home Office removed it, the PCCs still came at us with targets... it's very much an administrative process without understanding, actually, a lot of the variables that's going to have an effect on this are outside the individual's control – although we'll still hold those (people) to account. (Interviewee 2, police staff)

Although these priorities can be beneficial for helping to shape and mould research objectives that partnerships can address, attention must be paid to how these are shaped internally in organizations by senior officers in leadership positions and whether, for instance, rank-and-file officers are consulted in the development of these by the key decision-makers in the organization. Externally set targets set by PCCs highlight the potential politicization of research priorities, influencing how open forces will be to research proposals which fall outside of these priority areas.

Research 'In-house': Analysts and 'Cops as Researchers'

Officers also discussed how 'in-house' resources in the form of analysts were not being used effectively. They were constrained by the use of outdated and standardized models and products, and also viewed as lacking the confidence to assure senior officers that they do not need to react in a 'knee-jerk' way to increases in crime in specific areas:

They have a wealth of knowledge and expertise and it's very difficult for them to come face-to-face with a Superintendent and say 'Well, what you need to do for this particular problem is this. And you need to run it in that geographic area and not in that one'... We're now in this evidence-based practice, and it would be great if those

analysts the country over could now step up to the mark, change what they actually deliver, and start to advise. (Interviewee 10, Chief Inspector)

The 'reluctant' behaviour exhibited by analysts can be viewed as a reflection of their status within the organization and the view of 'research' in the eyes of certain managers (see Bartkowiak-Théron and Herrington 2015). Significant amounts of research were also being conducted by police officers, either funded by the Home Office or by individuals themselves. Among these groups, a combination of 'practitioner' and 'academic' knowledge was evident, which helped to bridge the gap between the 'two worlds' and build successful partnerships, as demonstrated below:

I do (have a good grasp of what constitutes good practice in multi-agency working) but it would be quite tricky to put it on paper because you do get a good feel for how the relationships are... most of it in my experience comes down to relationships or trust... that's something I spend a lot of time on... and then obviously I've had a certain amount of academic input on partnership working – that was one of our modules – and things like negotiating, influencing, what works for one agency doesn't necessarily work for another agency, and sometimes there's that pull between agencies... (Interviewee 7, Temporary Chief Inspector)

This officer highlights the importance of strong interpersonal relationships for successful research partnerships, something that was also evident to us as our project progressed and key officers left the organization or moved to another role. As the officer above observes, 'trust' and 'negotiation' are important for successful partnerships (Foster and Bailey 2010, Fleming 2011, Stephens 2010). Overall there was a genuine interest in the use of research from police

officers and police staff alike. Moreover, a certain research skill-base which was already in existence, coupled with motivation, offered ideal opportunities through which officers could enhance those skills and thus represent a solid foundation on which to build collaborations. Those who were currently engaged in academic study were especially enthusiastic:

I'm currently undertaking my own degree... in Police Studies... in my own time, funded by myself. Prior to that I worked at the College of Policing on a secondment... I saw it as an opportunity to develop myself in terms of particular skills... my skill base, my knowledge and experience just grew exponentially... the College of Policing were fantastic... got a real taste for studying... and I've loved it.
(Interviewee 6, Inspector)

For forces wanting to capitalize on what research has to offer, these officers and staff constitute an invaluable organizational asset. However, the organizational barriers that we discussed above were viewed as impeding not only collaborative research with external academics, but also the 'in-house research' conducted by officers and analysts themselves. There were several instances of officers feeling impeded in their own research efforts and many of those we spoke to were unaware of colleagues similarly engaged in research within their force:

It's getting to know people and then saying 'Have you done any work on this before?'
Because although we all work in the same organization, everyone works in silos.
(Interviewee 8, Inspector)

I'm sure there'll be absolute gems of this sort of research going on within the organisation... something that could maybe help me with mine... And we are completely oblivious to each other and unaware that it's going on... that's really sad.
(Interviewee 6, Inspector)

Where officers and staff had received support for undertaking research it had often come from a key individual in a senior position. Again, the risk here, as noted above, is that people move on (Fleming 2010). There were several instances of officers reporting this – promotion, transferring to another force, or retirement. The longer-term thinking and planning that was seen to be compatible with the co-production, exchange and utilization of research knowledge in collaboration with academics was inhibited by a lack of organizational stability. In the face of such barriers, officers engaging in research/collaborations while still 'doing the day job' reported becoming discouraged.

Evaluation

A need for proper evaluation was also frequently cited, with academic partners seen to offer a robustness that has been lacking, or lending weight to efforts to influence current methods of measuring performance:

The traditional approach that policing has always taken is 'This is what we've always done and therefore let's just carry on doing it because it's worked in the past' whereas... there's never been any robust evaluation of what we've done to actually determine if what we've done has made a difference... we always put a standard model against – we've got a spike (in robberies), therefore we will flood the areas with yellow jackets – that's always the standard response for policing... but we've

never truly evaluated it... having-, actual partnership, would offer that... (Interviewee 5, Temporary Inspector)

For others working closer to the ground, it was not so much evidence of ‘what works’ that was needed, but empirical evidence of ‘what is’ – an accurate picture of what is actually going on, before coming up with a more evidence-based operational design to deliver a service: ‘the first stage being to get an accurate picture because you couldn’t solve the problem until you’d dispelled the myths that existed’ (Interviewee 3, Inspector). Elsewhere, however, there was frustration that empirical evidence did not necessarily influence policy – for example, where policy-based evidence-making was seen to be in operation:

HMIC have just got a seventy million pound increase in their budget to recruit more into HMIC... why can’t you just *not* do that and give it to policing? You’ve identified a load of issues that we can no longer afford to do anything about. But no, no, you get some more guns and some more bullets and we’ll get some thicker flak jackets... The Home Office created a consultation document... it was based on anecdotal evidence... ‘Therefore we’ve made these two recommendations’, which were ridiculous and completely unworkable for policing... we understood that we need to reform police charge bail... so from 38 forces we got 26 forces that had comparable data to provide an evidence-based product back to policing, to say ‘This would be a favoured structure’ - a recommendation based on evidence... And the response was... ‘We recommend this’ which was completely contrary to what we asked. And a little line that said ‘The policing response didn’t go far enough’ – Excuse me? So evidence-based products didn’t go far enough for you? Cos it’s political. (Interviewee 12, Inspector)

This quote is important for a number of reasons. First, it highlights the frustration at resources and funding being re-directed from front line officers and operations to the performance management, inspection, and evaluation of policing, in a time of austerity. Moreover, it highlights the ironic tension in that the evidence-base, which the Home Office currently promote, might also entail the need for increased resources and spending in certain areas of policing in order to improve practices. This highlights the wider political barriers to the successful implementation of an evidence-base for policing in England. It also offers an explanation for the tendency of police to view ‘experimentation’ as ‘resource-wasting’ (Wood *et al.* 2008, p.83).

Crime reduction in particular was seen by officers as more complex than producing satisfactory performance figures. What was needed was an enhanced understanding of the causes of crime in order to inform programmes of intervention. This highlights how police face a ‘broader range and a more ambiguous mix of values’ (Thacher 2001, p.391) than the current instrumental-facing incarnation of evidence-based policing, espoused by the College of Policing, is able to address:

[We are] very ineffective at preventing crime because we never deal with cause...
‘Really good result last night, we’ve charged somebody with five burglaries, we’ve remanded them – brilliant result’... That doesn’t deal with the issue though.
(Interviewee 5, Temporary Inspector)

Similarly, the fact that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) too often have to wastefully send under-built or over-built case files back, was seen as part of the same culture which

celebrates at the point of arrest and at the point of conviction but gives little regard to the process in between:

There's a mind-set of 'catch and convict'... that is still quite a strong cultural background that we've got... [but] people are much more likely to be serving a sentence in the community, much more likely to be tagged in the community, there's Transforming Rehabilitation, Offender Rehabilitation Act that's just come in, privatization of three quarters of probation, payment by results, there's going to be more of offenders in the community, even if they are convicted. So, if they're in the community, they can commit crime ... would it not be useful for us to be involved in the process of looking at why somebody does this? (Interviewee 7, Temporary Chief Inspector)

The implications of these officers' analyses of what research might offer – a better understanding of the causes of the crimes they are trying to tackle and an opportunity to participate in the design and delivery of effective interventions - are that a multi-factorial mixed-method approach is needed. Not everything can be measured and there is a need to recognise the 'social construction' of phenomena (Berger and Luckmann 1966), including crime figures and performance data. Officers and civilian staff who were working in partnership with other agencies across the boundaries of health, education and welfare highlighted the need to gain a better understanding of what lies behind crime figures before engaging in any kind of intervention:

If I put something in place – a youth group – how do I know that's been successful?

Do you measure that against what we project the anti-social behaviour (ASB) figures

should be in 5 years' time? And then if they're lower than that, it's a success? Or, that isn't really a good measure because actually there might be fewer young people in that areas, therefore there's probably going to be fewer ASB? (Interviewee 4, police staff)

Working out how to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts was a common theme among those interviewees working in partnership with other agencies across organizational boundaries. As Fyfe and Wilson (2012, p.308) point out, we need 'knowledge about problems so that the nature of the inter-relationships between, for example, crime, anti-social behaviour and socio-economic contexts are better understood'.

Discussion and Conclusions: the McDonaldization of Police-Academic Partnerships

Police-academic partnerships are interesting in a number of ways. First, at a political level, in terms of what they reveal about the continuing privileging and spread of the 'what works' movement and evidence-based practice across the public sector. Second, at an institutional level, as both a means of academics addressing imperatives to demonstrate the impact of their research, and for police forces to rationalise their service delivery in response to austerity-driven cuts in public funding. Third, at an individual level, for researchers and police to engage in reflective practice about 'what works' well in partnerships. As Marks *et al.* (2010, p.113) argue the previous tendency to write 'about' the police' instead of 'with' the police has resulted in 'the disempowerment of an otherwise powerful grouping from knowledge production' and this had relevance at all three levels.

The interviews and our reflections on our own collaborations demonstrate that there was genuine interest in the use of research to inform and enhance policing. There are also

indications that this will become increasingly formalised in the future if the College of Policing becomes more established and influential in England and Wales. However, there are also clear indications that a particular model of ‘what’ constitutes research/evidence in the tradition of crime science and ‘what works’ is dominant amongst police officers who might be regarded as the pool from which leaders of the future will be drawn, regardless of whether other kinds of research might be more suitable in certain contexts. The knowledge needs of policing are much broader than ‘what works’ (Fyfe and Wilson 2012, p.308, see also Henry and Mackenzie 2012, Hope 2009, Thacher 2001). Thus, the dominance of this model risks missing out on knowledge exchange and research collaboration in areas of academic expertise that do not exclusively use these methods and in areas of policing where there is a concern to ‘unpack the box’ of interventions, to understand why initiatives work (or do not), using theories of human behaviour and qualitative methods to counterbalance the empiricism of pure experimentation (Davies *et al.* 1999). Specific areas for investigation that were identified to us were gaining a better understanding of the causes of crime to inform crime prevention initiatives, and tracking victims’ and witnesses’ journeys through the criminal justice system in order to understand their experiences and improve services. Here, specific attention was given to the collection of victims’ narratives. Police also highlighted the need to understand public engagement and trust, their use of social media, and the need to incorporate research on human-computer interactions from the outset when introducing the use of new technologies. Furthermore, there was recognition of the importance of contextual factors in many of these areas and the value of non-experimental methods. As the discussion of evaluation makes clear, the instrumental knowledge produced by an evidence-based approach, cannot by itself ‘speak to the full range of concerns relevant to criminal justice practice, which is characterized by a great variety and ambiguity of values’ (Thacher 2001, p.387). We also experienced the tensions identified by one of our interviewees between

‘public pressures for short-term funded research’ conducted in the here-and-now and ‘theoretically grounded scholarship’ of a slower, more reflective nature (Manning 2005, p.23; Wood *et al.* 2008).

We were cognisant of the importance of mapping academic expertise onto forces’ strategic priorities as suggested in previous discussions of partnerships (Stephens 2010). However our experience also raises questions about how well articulated these are by forces and how stable they are. Academics may find that strategic priorities differ according to whom they ask in the force, or that they are aiming at a constantly moving target, particularly given the increasing external influences of PCCs, the College of Policing ‘What Works Centre’, and the Home Office. Having a single point of contact within a force might facilitate identifying common goals and priorities but this will depend on the contact’s status, location and ‘stability’ in an organization. It will also depend on their other areas of responsibility and priorities, and the lines of communication they have up and down hierarchies and across organizational boundaries, in order to breach a ‘silo mentality’. Thus as Marks *et al.* (2010, p.112) note, it is helpful to view both parties as ‘actors with fluid identities and modes of intervention’ within and across organizations and contexts. This represents a challenge to both sides not only in terms of time needed to build effective relationships but a high degree of skill in terms of organizational analysis and interpersonal interaction. Therefore as Bradley *et al.* (2006, p.190) advise: ‘notions of professionalism and ways of evaluating performance and success will have to be revisited on an ongoing basis’.

As indicated above, officers who were trying to undertake research themselves found their own internal processes less than transparent and communication with key personnel less than timely. Even where knowledge, experience and support for research is held by a number of

people spread across a force, this may not represent in practice the kind of valuable 'human resource' it could be if they are unaware of each other and work in 'silos'. Fleming (2010) draws attention to what she calls a 'patch mentality' in police organizations, whereby police operating in silos also compete for resources. We experienced this as a barrier to research, where there was 'competitiveness around performance management targets and scarce resources' (Fleming 2010, p.140). It also impeded those police conducting research 'in-house', raising questions about what kind of asset they might become and what kind of institutional support they might expect. Are they seen as an asset or a liability by forces? And if the former how should this be managed? In times of austerity, it is all too easy for investment in research to be seen as abstraction and this highlights a paradox of police-academic partnerships: that the main driver for their development also represents one of the biggest barriers. Nonetheless, there are clear benefits to academics working with officers engaged in 'in-force' research. As Bartkowiak-Théron and Herrington (2015, p.75) note, the 'engagement of police officers with academia is a demonstration that (early) university-community engagement can be a catalyst for critical thought within the profession, changing professionals into reflexive, critical thinkers and positive agents'.

The role of analysts however was less clear. As Evans and Keibell (2012, p.218) note, there are particular characteristics which help to determine whether somebody will be an effective crime and intelligence analyst. They draw attention to the importance of being able to 'meet the needs of decision-makers' and 'provide well informed inferences and recommendations based on crime and intelligence data'. In our project, they were seen as possessing vital skills but also as 'disempowered' in terms of enabling the organization to capitalise upon these skills. In other instances, such personnel occupied positions of power which enabled them effectively to block access to research activity for officers and academics alike. This again

highlights tensions around how research is viewed, managed and supported within and across the police organization, and the need for support at very senior levels if *sustainable* partnerships are to be created and maintained.

We also drew attention to the importance of distinguishing between ‘police culture’ (Foster 2003) as constituted by practices arising out of some aspects of front-line policing and ‘police culture’ as constituted by practices arising out of organizational structures and processes – what might be thought of in sociological terms as ‘the social organization of the organization’. Among the ‘managerial grades’ with which we had contact, there were few signs of the ‘macho’ version of ‘police culture’. What was more in evidence were personnel who already thought of themselves as professionals committed to delivering a high quality service to the public, a number of whom were investing personally in acquiring the kind of research skills they saw as enhancing their ability to do so more effectively. What was impeding them – and potentially impeding the development of police-academic partnerships – was not merely the ‘professionalization’ of the police, but the ‘McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 2004) of the police. Our work draws attention to the increasing risk presented by the ‘McDonaldization’ of police-academic partnerships themselves, if careful attention is not paid to how the identification and prioritization of research, its conduct, and aspects of evaluation are managed and supported in practice. This must be accompanied by open and transparent dialogue between police and academic partners. As Bartkowiak-Théron (2011) also notes, partnership working is problematic due to the ‘invisibility’ of the procedural effort required by both academics and police to develop these collaborations successfully. The quantification of research ‘outcomes’, ‘performances’ and ‘successes’, as attested to here, leaves inadequate space for learning and/or reflecting on what *doesn’t work*. It therefore presents real barriers to the construction and sustainability of partnerships. The above

interviews demonstrate an organizational culture still in thrall to ‘McDonaldization’, with Home Office targets being replaced by PCC-imposed targets. The role of the PCC in determining a research focus must also be acknowledged in police-academic partnerships in England and Wales, as they play an increasing role in shaping, supporting, approving, signing-off and in some instances funding academic research. This further reflects the continued ‘politicization’ of policing and hence the potential politicization of academic research on policing as well. In addition, for police officers, ‘bureaucracy works because it imposes order’ (Fleming and Rhodes 2005, p.198). This sheds light on how “management-speak” and the language of competition abound and infiltrates their “worldview” (Fleming and Rhodes 2005, p.198), (reflected in a number of the interview excerpts included here). Therefore, for police to successfully reform, they will need to balance the ‘unholy trinity’ of the ever-changing mix of markets, hierarchies and networks’ (Fleming and Rhodes 2005, p.203).

These wider political and institutional trends also partly explain the dominance of the ‘what works’ model of evidence-based policing, since it maps so readily onto the aims, objectives and institutional forms of the new public management. Insofar as the picture presented here is an accurate analysis of more widespread phenomena within policing, it presents a significant barrier to the development of police-academic partnerships, which require forces to be outward facing, to be able to engage in longer-term thinking, and to be allowed to take the kind of risks inherent in genuine learning. Therefore the current context of strategically-driven partnerships between universities, academics and police forces represent a shift from the latest ‘new realism’ phase described by Reiner (1989), to a neo-liberal ‘paradoxical phase’ in which the drivers to collaboration are underpinned (both for police and academics) by economic forces and public management principles, promoted and privileged by the latest

incarnation of the evidence-based movement – that of ‘evidence-based policing’. In going forward, we call for further debate concerning how both sides can best negotiate and cross the ‘third way’ identified by Bradley and Nixon (2009), and for academics specifically to be sensitive to the push-and-pull forces linked to the ‘McDonaldization’ of policing (Heslop 2011) and aware of how these can shape policing research itself. As Manning (2005, p.39) warns us, there is a risk that if policing research merely becomes ‘mirror work’ – the current driving force for policing research in the UK and US – it will merely reflect ‘the interests of the government of the day’ resulting in ‘the fragmentation of ideas of justice under the smashing forces of the market’.

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