



**University of Dundee**

## **(Re) Negotiating Police culture through partnership working**

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*Published in:*  
Criminology and Criminal Justice

*DOI:*  
[10.1177/1748895812469381](https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895812469381)

*Publication date:*  
2014

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
O'Neill, M., & McCarthy, D. J. (2014). (Re) Negotiating Police culture through partnership working: trust, compromise and the 'new' pragmatism. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 14(2), 143-159.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895812469381>

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Megan O'Neill and Daniel J McCarthy, '(Re)negotiating police culture through partnership working: Trust, compromise and the 'new' pragmatism', *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 1748895812469381, first published on December 20, 2012 as doi:10.1177/1748895812469381

**Title:**

**(Re)Negotiating Police Culture through Partnership Working: Trust, Compromise and the 'new' Pragmatism**

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**Abstract**

While a topic of considerable interest in the 1990s and early 2000s, there has been little literature on partnership working in the public sector in recent years. This is surprising given that the practice has been extended through the national roll-out of Neighbourhood Policing in England and Wales in 2008. This paper presents a reassessment of how the police operate in partnership with other agencies. In contrast to the previous literature, our research suggests that police officers involved in partnerships find them effective, crucial to their work and, at times, enjoyable. Rather than conflicting with traditional police culture, partnership work is enhanced by, and enhances, the police orientation towards the pragmatic. We explore the implications of this for our understandings of police culture.

**Key words**

Policing, police culture, partnership work, Neighbourhood Policing

Word count: 8,752 words

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## **Introduction**

Studies of partnership working between the police and a host of community agencies received sizeable criminological attention during the 1990s and early 2000s. Beginning formally with the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) which made partnership working a statutory duty for agencies in England and Wales, there have been several changes and additions to these modes of working, particularly associated with Neighbourhood Policing reforms which have extended the philosophy and practice of partnership working (see Hughes and Rowe 2007). In these operational contexts, policing has been reframed as a series of practices associated with a more diverse range of community problem-solving tasks which transcend those of managing crime and disorder. At the same time research has identified a sceptical attitude from the police to partnership working (Sampson et al 1988, Pearson et al 1992, Gilling 1997, Bullock et al 2006), commonly explained through the difficulties faced by officers in relinquishing their own cultural values of police work with a more compromised

set of tasks and functions associated with partnership working (Skinns 2008). Examples have included: the lack of action and task-orientation from non-police agencies, lack of chain of command, a fear of agencies intruding in traditional police functions, and the tendency of the police to view community problem solving functions as low-priority examples of 'soft policing.' Employing findings from our two distinct research projects, we analyse the factors behind the police's traditional scepticism to partnership working, suggesting ways through which the unwritten codes, conventions, and ways of thinking manifest in police occupational culture can be negotiated and realigned within direct experience of partnership working over time within the structure of Neighbourhood Policing. Reasons for this are explained during the article, drawing attention to factors such as the stability of named professionals involved in coordinating partnership working in different agencies, the trust-based relations this enables, as well as broader challenges which have impacted on the police in attempting to deliver a range of community services and provisions. Here, instead of finding a general reluctance of the police to accommodate a more community problem-solving set of responses, we found consistent examples of the police working collaboratively with professionals such as youth workers, neighbourhood wardens, social workers, and similar professionals, as well as in some instances realigning their organisational structures to adopt a mandate which was more akin to support-based preventive working, such as with children and young people (also see McCarthy 2011).

In this article, we will examine some of the existing research in the areas of partnership working and Neighbourhood Policing in more detail, before turning to a discussion of our respective research projects, their congruent findings and the implications of these for police culture research generally. Our research findings suggest that the traditional police orientation towards pragmatism is both drawn upon and enhanced through their ongoing work with partners. This is in some contrast to earlier work on police culture which presents pragmatism as a barrier to the police working with outside agencies or in long-term projects. We close the article with a consideration of how these working practices will fare in an era of fiscal restraint, where partnership work is encouraged, but has fewer resources to draw upon.

### **Police, Partnership Working and Neighbourhood Policing**

The initial introduction of partnerships during the 1980s was treated with scepticism by police officers who referred to them as 'talking shops' which lacked action in the form of tasks and tangible outcomes (Pearson et al 1992, Liddle and Gelsthorpe 1994). Part of the early scepticism of the police to partnership working was the perceived incompatibility between the police's action-orientation and readiness to 'take charge' of a range of situations (Holdaway 1986), at the expense of more negotiation or process-based working shared by other community agencies. This also corresponded to the lack of clear hierarchy and chain of command in partnership proceedings – a factor which several authors have argued is often a challenge for police officers to reconcile (Pearson et al 1992, Edwards 2002). Police scepticism to partnership working has also been identified within the police organisation itself, with the skills of inter-agency working often treated as 'soft', 'social work-like', and largely treated as inferior to more traditional crime-fighting mentalities of police work (Sampson et al 1991, McCarthy, forthcoming). Particularly evident in the early stages of partnership working during the 1980s and 90s was the high allocation of female police officers to partnership-based duties. Despite evidence of contempt and scepticism of partnership working from the police organisation, research has concluded that their role has been largely dominant in steering discussions, resources, and responses, often using 'partnership' as a selective agenda to suit their own needs and interests (Pearson et al 1992). Bullock et al (2006) also found the importance of compromise and flexibility in successful partnerships – a feature which was difficult for many police departments to manage, especially in relinquishing aspects of their territorial mandate in preserving public order. During recent years, the police organisation has been more frequently involved in providing community policing responses in tandem with a number of other agencies, sometimes referred to as the 'wider policing family'<sup>i</sup>, consisting of agents like neighbourhood wardens managed by housing associations or local authorities, youth workers as part of organised patrols working with young people, as well as with drug and alcohol service providers in supporting clients in police custody and in the community more generally (Johnston 2003, Crawford and Lister 2004). The establishment of the *Crime and Disorder Act* (1998) was an important step in beginning 'a long overdue recognition that the levers of crime and causes of crime lie far from the traditional reach of the criminal justice system' (Crawford 2002:31).

Although examples of police partnerships can be found in other areas of policing, such as domestic violence, mental health/public protection, and road traffic, this article focuses principally on Neighbourhood Policing. Since the 1990s there has been a broad political project underway to reshape policing in England and Wales,

away from an orientation around reactive 'crime fighting' and towards 'communities' and citizens as the core to police work. Central to this has been the development of Neighbourhood Policing, a derivative of Community Policing and initially piloted in England and Wales as Reassurance Policing (see Innes 2005 and O'Neill 2010). Neighbourhood Policing was rolled out nationally in 2008, with every area in England and Wales having a dedicated Neighbourhood Policing team. These comprise not only police officers, but Police Community Support Officers (introduced in 2002) and Special Constables. Each team is required to consult with and respond to the needs of their local area, as expressed by its residents. This move towards the local has further developed under the Coalition government elected in 2010, with the removal of centralised performance targets for the police and the creation of locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). While this new government has also dramatically reduced the funding available to police forces, financial support for Neighbourhood Policing is due to continue until the end of 2012 (Home Office 2010). After that point, the ring-fence around the funding will lift, but Chief Constables and PCCs will be *encouraged* to continue to implement this method of policing, including the work of Police Community Support Officers and working with public sector partners (Herbert 2011).

Neighbourhood Policing reform has re-legitimated the emphasis on partnership working. Hughes and Rowe (2007) have argued that whilst Home Office police performance targets dominated partnership working to accord with a crime reduction rather than community safety emphasis (which tends to favour the police) there are also many areas of complementarity. Recent Neighbourhood Policing reforms have created greater opportunities for problem solving and partnership working in communities (Innes and Fielding, 2002). At the same time factors including the differences in operational cultures between the police and local authority, intra-organisational resistance to Neighbourhood Policing from front-line police officers, as well as a crime reduction focus from the Home Office, can all hinder connections between police-led and partnership-orientated policies (see Innes 2005). Within the current context of resource constraints and reductions in police staff numbers, there are indications that partnership working is being recognised as a possible solution to these predicaments, especially in light of well established concerns about public confidence and policing (Home Office 2010). We will explore the significance of these funding and other political changes for partnerships later in the paper. The point being made here is that Neighbourhood Policing remains a political priority, as does the mandate for the police to work in partnership with other public sector agencies.

## Our Studies

The findings discussed here emerge from two research projects on police partnership working. Each project was conducted by one of the authors and there are several areas of convergence in relation to the topic of investigation, types of research participants and project outcomes (this latter area to be explored in the next section). One project investigated the views of police officers on various issues to do with partnership work and Neighbourhood Policing. In this project, funded by the British Academy<sup>ii</sup>, 25 officers were interviewed in a semi-structured format, ranging in rank from constable up to Superintendent. Six of the interviewees were women. These officers came from four police forces in England, two of which cover largely urban areas and two of which cover largely rural ones. Research participants were selected based on familiarity with partnership work. Interviews lasted about an hour each and were taped-recorded and later transcribed. Analysis was facilitated by MaxQDA software. Responses from these interviews are indicated by a number (from 1 to 7) followed by a letter from A to D (e.g.: 5A). Each letter refers to one of the four police forces who participated in the research and each number to one of the officers interviewed in that force. This research will be referred to as the 'British Academy Project'. The second project investigated the role of the police and other community agencies working in partnership to respond to low-level disorder. The research comprised of extensive field observation of inter-agency case conference meetings<sup>iii</sup>, and 18 in-depth interviews with a range of professionals. The research was carried out in two field settings – Hobart and Shore Acres (both pseudonyms) – located within a twenty mile radius of London. These areas were selected for having similar socio-demographic profiles - primarily white, British, but with several deprived neighbourhoods. The areas were also close geographically but in different police force areas. These data were coded using thematic analysis schema employed through Boyatzis (1998), and analysed using the qualitative data package Nvivo. The typical composition of the case conference meetings in each area was the meeting chair – a female police inspector in Hobart, and a male Local Authority Officer in Shore Acres, two police sergeants (usually both female), an average of six police and PCSO officers (40/60% male/female), two drugs workers (female), one mental health worker (female), three housing officers (male and female), one or two youth offending team workers (female), two social workers (male and female), one Education Welfare Officer (female), two local

authority staff (male and female), and two Children's Services officers (usually female). The interviews took place with at least one representative from all of these agencies that were regular attendees of the case conference meetings. Interviewees consisted of six police officers (5 female, 1 male), three social workers (2 female, 1 male), one drugs worker (female), three youth offending officers (2 female, 1 male), three housing officers/community wardens (2 male, 1 female), and two local authority officers (males). Quotes from this project are indicated by the use of a pseudonym followed by the person's rank or role (e.g.: Vicky, police sgt). This project will be referred to as the 'case conference research'.

### **Research findings**

These two projects revealed similar results in relation to the role partnership working has come to play in police forces in England and Wales and why this has developed in the way we observed. We will explore the four main thematic areas of the findings here and will conclude the paper with a consideration of what this signifies for the current configuration of police culture in England and Wales. These results will be grouped in the following themes: 'the way forward', 'gender and partnership working', 'trust and belonging' and 'culture and compromise'.

#### *The way forward*

One of the most consistent themes in our research was the way in that partnership working was not only regularly employed by police officers and Neighbourhood Policing Teams, but welcomed and valued. Over and over again, our projects uncovered widespread acceptance that partnership work 'made sense' and was 'the way forward' for police forces. This does not suggest that there were no problems encountered in partnership working, but to recognise that these problems did not significantly impinge on overall inter-agency relations. It became clear that the advantages of this method of working were seen to outweigh the shortcomings. This shows a marked departure from much of the existing literature which suggests that partnership working is treated as a burden by police officers (see for example Bullock et al 2006). The quote below from an officer in the British Academy Project:

I think we just realised we don't do things on our own anymore, we are, although our primary role...might be to detect and prevent crime but in order to do that we need the partner agencies that



we work with in order for us to work better, more efficiently...by dealing with the offenders, it's not about just dealing with putting people in cells, it's about preventing them committing a crime, finding out why they've done it in the first place, trying to prevent them now from going into prison, which is our main culture now. (Interview 3A, sergeant)

The quote above indicates several reasons why police in our studies value partnership working. First of all, partnership working is seen by respondents to be a more effective method of addressing social problems which can lead to crime and disorder. Rather than repeatedly 'kicking the door in' (Interview 5B, inspector), the police can work with partners to identify areas or people of concern and put into place more long-term solutions. This ranges from the level of the individual ('problem families', delinquent children, repeat offenders) as well as to the level of the community (loitering youth, environmental disorder, crime 'hotspots'). The police recognise that while they may still be the first port of call for local problems, they are not always the best equipped to fully address a situation. Whereas in the past the police might have 'just muddled our way through stuff...go and deal with it as we think best, and then shut the door and that's the end of it' (Interview 6B, Inspector), our respondents are now much more open to planning projects, interventions, securing funding for initiatives (in the tradition of problem-orientated policing, see Goldstein 1990) or just working with public services to ensure that a family's problems are appropriately addressed instead of just taking punitive action against the parents.

The police in our research see the opportunities for preventative work as being far more 'sensible' than repeatedly employing the same short-term solutions. It was openly acknowledged that this would not only benefit the people concerned, but there would also be an ultimate cost-saving for the public sector, especially for the police. The inspector quoted below refers to one of the several projects described to us whereby this type of thinking was put into practice. In this case, there had been a series of similar insurance claims for malicious damage in a housing estate which the police and housing officials found suspicious. Their joint initiative addressed the issue in a preventative way.

And yet this project which has effectively solved (a problem), costs £2500, is it not right for us to have a look at rather than pay the budget in terms of (repeatedly repairing damage), to actually be brave and say "we going to afford you a slice of our budget each and every year to run Project D so it becomes a stone solution". Now that for me is really intelligent budgeting because if you don't do that and you do just knee jerk every time you get an issue, then to be fair we are letting the community down. (Interview 5D, inspector)

In addition to making police practice more effective for people and communities, partnership work is also valued for saving police time or easing the police workload. While in some ways partnership work may add to police activities in terms of more meetings to attend or more projects to complete, officers in interviews also expressed the practical benefit of not having to address issues that are not a police remit.

### *Gender and partnership working*

The exact value attached to partnership working reflected subtle differences between male and female officers. Although both male and female officers in our studies portrayed a pragmatic account of partnership working as discussed previously, female officers tended to have a closer role in working in supportive capacities with children and families engaged in low-level disorder which was often a career choice, and not necessarily a barrier towards promotion (See also Miller, 1999, Westmarland, 2001, with exceptions see Brown, 1998). This was reflected especially within the case conference research where one author's observations of the interactions of female police officers over the course of two years revealed a strong mission to deal with problems beyond a crime control mentality, including building a supportive infrastructure which included medical and social work intervention. This corresponds closely to previous studies, including Miller's (1999) research into gender and community policing where she found clear differences in the ways female police officers accounted for their roles compared to their male colleagues. Female officers were generally more open to building personal connections with partner agencies, especially in the context of working with children and young people, as this would enhance the overall effectiveness of the partnerships:

In Hobart we are very fortunate with the person who is heading up anti-social behaviour for the police which is Kate. Kate and I used to knock heads quite a bit, but now I regard her as a colleague and do regard things similarly. In terms of where she started she was much more about enforcement, whereas now she is much more about empowerment and she is much more about change and she has been able to influence other police officers in those terms. [Interview with Hayley, YOT Manager - Hobart]

For male officers in our research, there was support for building relationships, but more prominent was scepticism of not all agencies carrying their weight evenly, with some criticisms of agencies voiced around their lack of willingness to take action themselves in responding to young people engaged in crime. Thus the partnerships which are valued most highly among male officers in our projects are the ones that the most productive in terms of outputs, rather than personal relationships:

We get on with everybody, but when I say get on I mean getting down and doing business with some agencies and not others. Because there are those differences. From a police point of view it is engrained into us in training that if there's a problem then we see it as our problem to run and grab and try and fix. I don't see that happening with all the other agencies. I think they see themselves as information providers for someone else to go and do the intervention work. [Interview with Neil, Police Officer – Shore Acres]

In addition, the aspects of partnership working which were viewed as the most pragmatic varied between male and female respondents. In the British Academy Project, for example, it was the male officers who usually discussed how partnership work led to better 'intelligence' coming in from the local community which would help them address crime. Male officers in this study were more likely to discuss the long-term cost savings to be had from addressing problems 'further upstream', or saving police time when partners take less relevant work away from them. Female officers in the research were more likely to talk about preventing a child from entering a life of crime or helping families with complex problems, and were less likely to use a crime control mentality as a core justification for this method of working. In attempting to gain value for partnership initiatives within the police organisation more widely, female officers often utilised the language of pragmatism in order to provide credence to their benefits and practical worth:

I just get on and do it. I worry about the consequences and strategy later. We won't do a report and a pie chart ...You can sell the product, but you may sell it four or five different ways depending on who the person in front of you is...It's about knowing people I guess and I don't think that can be taught-it's a bit of a life skill. [Interview with Kate, Police ASB Co-ordinator]

Thus both male and female officers in our studies found a pragmatic value in partnership working, but in different ways. These findings also correspond to many previous studies of partnership working. Sampson et al (1991) have argued that higher proportion of practitioners involved in partnership working have tended to be women, with the police particularly keen to use female officers in such activities as it suited stereotypical views of 'soft' policing. They found that the role of women in partnership was often beneficial in increasing informal relationships which they argued provided for fertile ground to form working partnerships. By contrast, Crawford and Jones (1995), again finding a high proportion of female professionals working in partnerships, argued that these instances of 'informality' should be treated more sceptically in potentially leading to the suppression of conflict and the avoidance of confronting differential power relations within partnership groupings – a theme discussed in more detail during the next section.

### *Trust and belonging*

An overwhelming theme which was consistently expressed during interviews with agents and police, as well as evident during observation of meetings and other interactions was the importance of trust relations between partner agents. This was found to be more about the person than his or her membership of a particular agency (Pearson et al, 1992, Crawford and Jones, 1995, Clegg and McNulty, 2002). Respondents from the British Academy Project, for example, often referred to ‘phoning up X at the council’ to get something done or would say ‘Y from youth services is brilliant’. Of particular importance was both length of time in getting to know these agents, and the actual working relations in terms of joint projects and similar operations in which they participated:

One of the main reasons we have a good relationship with the police is because the key people haven’t moved. If you look at Vicky Hill [Police Sgt], she has been doing partnership working for as long as partnership working has been around, so at least ten years. So we understand each other, and she is able to say to people in the police ‘this is the way to deal with housing’ and it filters down through the organisation’. [Interview with Kevin, Housing Officer]

Being part of the group – being a regular attendee of meetings and signing up to the goals of the group were all favourable characteristics shared by agents. A show of commitment in terms of not only attending, but also participating in discussions and not simply ‘taking’ information away, and offering resources from their agency (such as money, officer deployment, or other modes of response) were fundamental attributes of group loyalty. Although typically 15-20 agents would attend meetings ranging from housing, social work, police, education, mental health, substance misuse, and youth officers, there was a clear structuring of ‘key players’ who would often make decisions outside of the remit of the wider partnership group. These ‘key players’ were not driven by the police *per se*, but included agents with a long-term and committed interest in partnership working, characterised by the additional features of being trustworthy, and significantly with resources to offer – whether in terms of financial support, staff deployment, or data sources. See for example the following from the British Academy project:

It’s nice from my perspective to be able to email X over there and say “look we have had a complaint about whatever on this particular street, and this guy wants to know about what councils involvement are in it and can you just give them him bell”, and she will give him a ring and then she will email me back saying “right, we have arranged to do this from our perspective, what’s your next move”. But it certainly works for anti social behaviour... if we are doing something in particular we will ring X the anti social behaviour co-ordinator over there, and just say “we are out on Friday night, come out with us”, and 9 times out of 10 she will do. (Interview 7C, police constable)

However, as this officer went on to explain, trying to organise involvement of several partner staff in a large police operation can be a different matter:

There's always staffing issues, and when we are planning say Operation Z or something like that, I always try and give people a month, 5 or 6 weeks' notice and you always get your people that pull out due to staffing restrictions and this, that and the other. That's probably the biggest bug bear if you like, it's nobody's fault though is it? It's just the way it is. (Interview 7C, police constable)

Thus knowing the specific people who can help address an issue effectively and building up a strong professional relationship with them was a key aspect of partnership working in our research. The named and known individuals were trusted to come when called or to take action when asked, whereas the larger, less known organisation tended to let officers down.

Although these instances were frustrating for officers, their frustration should not be understood merely as apathy or disengagement with partnership working, but rather as indicative of their overall commitment as well. This was especially marked with the professionals with prior basis for expecting a reasonable level of engagement from partner agencies. At times, this led to the establishment of separate working groups for specific projects which involved handpicked colleagues who were trusted, showed prior commitment, and had suitable resources to deploy. The role of these 'key players' was fundamental in reducing conflict in direct partnership interactions, as was observed during meetings in the case conference research. This connected to what Crawford and Jones (1995) have argued as 'management of conflict 'off-stage' in discrete settings which control their impact upon broader inter-organizational relations and community representation' (p.20). This was, for the most part, well managed where a strong element of compromise was in place especially from the police whose value orientation to partnership working had moved on from its early accusations of being overbearing and dictatorial (e.g. Foster, 2002). Thus, conflict was of course experienced in the partnership groups, but processes have been developed to work around these to avoid having to rely too heavily on partners who did not uphold their end of the arrangement. This again reflects a pragmatic element of partnership working which allows the police in our research to embrace it. Issues of trust and conflict avoidance are developed further in the next section.

#### *Culture and compromise*

One key finding from our research was the nature of compromise created through partnership working.

Contrary to previous research which has found that the police can selectively use partnership working when it suits their own pre-set agendas (Sampson et al 1988, Pearson et al 1992, Foster 2002), the importance of maintaining trust with other agencies involved compromise from the police in deciding on particular forms of action to take (see also Bullock et al 2006). Whilst this does not apply to *all* aspects of the police organisation, within Neighbourhood Policing a consistent theme from the fieldwork was how these forms of compromise were formulated. Whilst the police tended to act as the lynchpin partner agency in terms of controlling the partnership, such as structuring resources, data, and deploying officers, this was often *supported* by other agencies especially those struggling to provide services in the wake of cut-backs to their organisation. One notable finding was the level of support from social welfare agencies for the police, especially their willingness to engage with 'soft' policing functions:

It must be pretty difficult for them [police]. The idea that they wouldn't have to manage that conflict of interest in engaging with the young person whilst being very clear about their boundaries. That's a difficult act to pull off and if we lived in a perfect world then they wouldn't have to do that. I think they do it remarkably well. They are assisted in that by community safety wardens and the neighbourhood teams, the PCSO's [Police Community Support Officers] who I guess have the opportunity to be slightly softer with people, or engaging with them because they don't have the full use of police powers. There is a mix of skills there, a mix of powers and a mix of roles that I think is quite useful. [Interview with Evan, Children's Services Manager]

The idea that police were both suspicious of 'outsiders', and 'outsiders', namely social welfare agencies, as suspicious of the police was not a marked aspect of the working relations in either research project (as has been the case previously, see Hughes 2007). The police were conscious of their reputation as arrogant, tough-minded controllers of partnerships, so (whilst these styles of response were not entirely absent) the police did strive to provide a more open forum for other agencies to provide input and alternative suggestions for action. Thus a compromise existed in that the police tended to take the lead in cases, with support from other organisations to do so, in exchange for an open dialogue for planning and tasking, which may include more moderate responses than the police would historically use. In the past, the police have been seen as sceptical of partnership working where it does not fit their agenda. Hughes and Rowe (2007) have attributed this, in part, to the way the Home Office implemented Neighbourhood Policing as a police-led reform, rather than through partnership. The following quote from the British Academy Project illustrates this:

I must admit that the police have historically taken the lead on things perhaps other organisations should have taken a lead, but I think that's changing. I think the reason why it's always been that is that crime and disorder has always been a police issue that's led by the police, and a number of key partners have had to understand their roles and responsibilities a lot clearer given that things have changed and the onus of responsibility has changed over time. Because 10 years ago it (would) have been a major thing for the local authority to get involved in on the scale that it is now. So there's been a change climate and that has therefore over time, the responsibility for ownership has started to change, so...there's now more balance... (Interview 1A, sergeant)

Despite the 'top down' implementation of Neighbourhood Policing, there was a close interaction with other community agencies in our research. Amongst many police officers there was some complementing of their typical investigative work practices with partner agents. As studies of police investigative practices have shown, the role of officers in making *informal* enquiries such as phoning trusted contacts and informants is a common part of this type of work (e.g. Innes 2003). In many respects, key dimensions of partnership working correspond closely with these informal methods of 'doing business': by finding informants and allies who could support both the partnership and individual agencies. In practice the police operated a 'trade off' whereby they delivered a more moderate set of control responses in exchange for the benefits of partnership which delivers a more joined-up range of interventions. Following Paoline (2003), the prior trust relations, stable relations between agents, and generally open-minded policing philosophy (with restrictions) certainly meant less of a need for police officers to 'maintain the edge, become suspicious, and be isolated from their "partners" (citizens) of policing' (p.208). This again provides a pragmatic benefit in that while the police are less control orientated than they might usually be; they experience more effective working in communities through partnership with trusted allies.

## **Discussion**

The findings discussed above from our two research projects on partnership working present some important insights into the current configurations of police culture in England and Wales. As we discussed earlier in this article, police culture has been identified in the past as a barrier to partnership work (Pearson et al 1992, Edwards 2002, Bullock et al 2006). The reasons cited for this include the lack of organisational hierarchy in the partner agencies, reluctance on the part of the police to relinquish some of their authority, lack of action-filled activity from partnership work, etc. While we would agree that this may have been the case early on in the

development of close partnership working in the public sector, our studies suggest that this is no longer the case for many police officers. As we have shown here, over time our respondents who do partnership work in the context of Neighbourhood Policing have come to value this method of working and have built relationships of trust with their colleagues in partner agencies. They now welcome working with groups and agencies which hitherto would have been viewed with suspicion as 'outsiders'. The reason this has happened, in our view, is *because of* police culture, not in spite of it. We will explore why this is the case in this discussion to follow.

There has been a great deal of literature on the topic of police culture since the 1960s (O'Neill 2005, O'Neill et al 2007). Debate has oscillated between those who identify recurring attitudes, orientations or police officer types across police forces, across time and across some states; and those who see these types of generalisations as unhelpful and misleading, especially when taking into account generational and socio-political differences. For example, Sklansky (2007) has argued that the concept of police culture not only has no basis in reality, but that it is becoming unhelpful in a context of police reform by unnecessarily holding back progress. Waddington (1999) has noted that some of the classic writers on police culture confused what the police *said* with what they actually *did*. 'Canteen talk' was a way of releasing tension and building rapport, but when it came to actual work on the streets with the public, police action was different. He also argues that many writers use police culture as a convenient conceptual tool with which to blame the police for all that is wrong in the criminal justice system, rather than seeing it simply as a way to give meaning to their work and enhance occupational confidence. The work of Chan (1997) is notable in that while she does present police culture as an occupational reality, her analysis of it is far more complex than what had been presented from the 'classic' police culture writers in the 1960s, 70s and 80s (such as Westley, Skolnick, Manning, Holdaway, and Reiner). For Chan, who employed Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field in her analysis, there is a lot more going on than straightforward suspicion, solidarity or pessimism, for example. Wider organisational and political changes in the policing *field* can influence, and be influenced by, police officers' *habitus*. Habitus refers to one's personal orientation and experiences, a 'feel for the game'. Chan refers to the policing field as the 'rules of the game', and officers use their various types of organisational knowledge (their habitus, the police culture) to navigate this field. Thus as field and habitus can be changed as well as change each other, police culture is likewise open to modification.



However, there is an emerging body of literature which questions those who question the classic accounts of police culture. For example, Skinns (2011) found in the context of custody suites that police tendencies towards authoritarianism and territoriality remained, especially in relation to the private sector staff who assisted them. Loftus' (2010) recent ethnography of patrol officers found that the traditional picture of police culture was still very much in evidence, although it had been modified somewhat in response to contemporary high profile issues, such as that of police racism. What she found was that racist feelings were much better hidden now and what remained overt was a strong distaste for young, white working class males who were unemployed (Loftus 2007). Thus police culture had been merely 'interrupted', not changed and not the creation of academics from 30 – 40 years ago. Reiner writes that 'Police culture is neither monolithic, nor unchanging. But the predicament of the police in maintaining order and enforcing the law in liberal democracies generates a typical cultural pattern...' (2010: 137). He discusses how 'cop culture' is not something that is passed from one generation to the next and diffused across the organisation, but is rather 'a patterned set of understandings that helps officers cope with the pressures and tensions confronting the police' (2010: 118). Reiner compiles and summarises some of the key research in this area and presents several core police characteristics, i.e., common coping mechanisms. These are: a sense of mission, a love of action, cynicism, pessimism, suspicion, isolation/solidarity, conservatism, machismo, racial prejudice and pragmatism (Reiner 2010: 118-132). While the debate will continue in terms of exactly how universal and resilient these characteristics are, recent research on the police adds weight to the argument that commonalities in police coping mechanisms are real and remain in force.

What many of these texts discussed above have in common is that they tend to be based on research with patrol and/or response officers (including Skinns' work, in that the officers in the custody suites are usually drawn from patrol). Our research with officers involved in partnership work has found that this method of working can in fact produce an alternative deployment of those common coping mechanisms which Reiner identifies, especially in relation to pragmatism. Rather than preventing the police from engaging fully in partnership work (as it did initially), police culture, especially the tendency towards pragmatism, has actually *facilitated* multi-agency working in our studies. Once the officers saw the pragmatic elements of partnership work in action, this allowed them to value partnership work to the extent that previous incarnations of police culture were disturbed.

The pragmatism attached to partnership work varied between officers in our research, and in particular, between male and female officers. Male officers tended to favour the 'hard edge' of partnership work: its ability to bring in 'intelligence' and thus further crime control, its ability to save money in the long-term, and its potential to save police time by reallocating tasks to more appropriate agency staff. For these officers, the most effective partnerships were the ones that had the best outputs. Police women involved in partnership work tended to focus more on how partnerships can benefit the *individual* in the long-term, such as through diverting a child away from a criminal career path or intervening in 'problem families' with help and support rather than opting for crime control methods in isolation. Female officers thus valued those partnerships with strong interpersonal relationships. Both perspectives see the practical value of partnership work, but in different ways.

A final reconfiguration of police pragmatism which is divergent from existing literature is that of the long-term orientation of police pragmatism displayed in partnership work. Reiner (2010) writes that pragmatism is valued in policing because officers are mainly trying to get to 'tomorrow' safely and so do not tend to invest much time and energy into long-term problem-solving measures because their value is not as apparent to the immediate situation. Our research would suggest that this is not the case for those officers we studied in partnership work. Their view of the pragmatic benefits of partnership is *precisely because* it has a long-term effect, as well as, in some cases, short-term ones. It would seem that for our respondents involved in partnership work, pragmatism has come to have a different meaning from that gleaned from previous research on the police. Policing methods that show a pragmatic element were still valued, but for officers in partnership work that meant something different to that of other officers who have not experienced partnership working.

The early research into partnership working stemming from before and after the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) revealed mostly negative findings regarding the police's role in partnerships (e.g. Sampson et al, 1988, Pearson et al, 1992, Foster, 2002). Over ten years on from these studies, it is perhaps unsurprising that there have indeed been many changes to the police's engagement in partnerships, especially in the context of Neighbourhood Policing. In addition to pragmatism (as discussed above), the police culture tendency to distrust outsiders was also deployed differently with our research participants than has been in

the case in research on patrol officers. Police officers may still be wary of some new members to the partnership table, but once these new recruits had demonstrated their willingness to share resources and engage fully in the process of partnership, they would be welcomed and trusted as part of the team. These practices are not without their potential problems, however. Partnerships sometimes excluded certain agencies and agendas (especially if they did not 'pull their weight'), and although the findings of this study found general support from the police and other agencies, it should not be discounted that there are indeed situations where this is not the case. Such instances include forming 'in groups' to make decisions outside of partnership meetings which can place agencies with less to offer partnerships being sidelined (Crawford and Jones, 1995). While all partner agency staff may never be fully embraced as 'insiders' due to not being warranted police officers, they have been able to gain a level of police officer familiarity and trust not usually experienced by other workers, especially ones from the social welfare services. In effect, the police we studied have set the terms of engagement for the partnerships but this operates as a compromise in that the police then are more willing to engage with the 'soft side' of partnership work. Our research suggests that the police do dominate partnerships in terms of their available resources and personnel to deploy, but mostly *negotiate* these relations with other agencies with degrees of tact and compromise, rather than simply 'dominating' in zero-sum ways. The guiding force in how this develops in each case is pragmatism.

The above discussion of police culture is specific to partnership work which we studied in the context of Neighbourhood Policing. Other areas of the police organisation may not be as open minded or enthusiastic about working with partner agencies and their staff, and thus may reflect more closely the recent findings of Loftus (2010, who did not study partnership working directly) about the continuing currency of traditional police culture research. Other officers who are primarily engaged in response policing or in specialist units (such as firearms) will not be directly involved in these methods of working and as such their day-to-day experiences and their deployment of the police coping mechanisms will not be fundamentally altered. Thus their occupational cultures may remain more closely aligned with the traditional policing characteristics of suspicion of outsiders and seeing as 'pragmatic' that which has a clear practical value in the short-term. This adds credence to Reuss-Ianni's (1993) argument about there being multiple cultures of policing within one organisation. Our research shows how police culture regularly develops new formations and expressions, but these serve the same purpose as those which went before: to help make sense of the police 'predicament'

(Reiner 2010). What we have shown here is that the way the police predicament is interpreted and managed is significantly different in the partnership work we studied than in other areas of the police organisation (as described by the existing body of work on police culture), to the extent that over time, police culture became a facilitator in partnership working, rather than a barrier as had been the case in previous studies of partnership. As Chan (1997) has suggested, police culture is indeed open to change under the right conditions and with sufficient time to adapt.

Our projects were conducted prior to the funding cuts of 2010 and beyond, and therefore some reflection is required as to what the new income situations for these organisations may mean for partnership work. Recent Home Office reports on the futures of policing include a continued emphasis on partnership working and localism as vital aspects for maintaining services during austerity cuts (Home Office, 2010b, 2012). Reductions to front-line policing look set to involve neighbourhood officers carrying out a greater range of policing tasks beyond reassurance and community problem solving (HMIC, 2012:7). Although increased partnership working may serve as a key survival mechanism during these challenging times, there could easily be a temptation for the police to focus on the most pressing, day-to-day matters and neglect the projects and initiatives that have produced the longer-term interventions we encountered. It remains to be seen whether the new pragmatism of police in partnership can withstand and survive the many financial pressures that they now face.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

We would like to thank Robert Reiner and Karen Bullock for their insightful comments on previous drafts of this paper and to the anonymous reviewers and the editor for their helpful feedback. Sincere thanks are also extended to the police officers and agency staff who gave up their time to be interviewed.

#### **Funding Information:**

This work was supported by the British Academy [grant number SG-46702 to author 1]; and by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number PTA - 031-2006 - 00462 to author 2].

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<sup>i</sup> Although, as Johnston (2007) has pointed out, this phrase can also refer to just the police and the auxiliary staff in their employ, such as Police Community Support Officers.

<sup>ii</sup> Award number SG-46702. The support of the Academy is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>iii</sup> Case conferences are operational meetings attended by multiple statutory agencies. Each case conference meeting consists of a discussion of referred cases – typically involving children and young people involved in low-level disorder or exhibiting 'at risk' symptoms of crime. Referrals can be made by any agency, with the goal of the referral to devise joined-up interventions to support the individual and hopefully divert her or him from more problematic behaviours.