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Reflexive academic-practitioner collaboration with the police

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Introduction

Reflexivity in the understanding and practice of research is not just something to be cultivated amongst researchers. Particularly as models of collaborative research develop – models which tend to already work with a reflexive understanding of research – there is a growing need to think about the reflexivity of the researched. This chapter characterises research as ultimately being about learning across the (recognised) boundaries of social worlds (the academy or, in this case, the police being distinctive social worlds). It will argue that reflexive practice on the part of social researchers, in that it challenges some of the myths about scientific social research, might itself play an important role in encouraging reflexivity on the part of practitioners (or 'the researched'), and that reflexivity on the part of practitioners will encourage challenge of some of the myths about their practice, fostering a more realistic understanding and ownership of research that sees it not in narrow instrumental, credibility-enhancing terms, but as something relevant and to be learned from, even where – perhaps especially where - it is critical of extant practice. However, local demands of practice, external politics, and interests in maintaining public relations also make reflexive engagement with research a challenge.

I begin by sketching out what I term a new praxis of research – the sustained academic-practitioner collaboration – doing so with reference to knowledge transfer and exchange (KTE) literatures, to my own conceptualisation of it as brokering communities of practice, and to a particular example, The Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR), an ongoing attempt to build a sustained and multi-disciplinary dialogue between Scottish Universities and the police with which I have worked since its formation in 2007. In the

section that follows I draw on some foundational theory on reflexivity to examine its role in demystifying both researchers and research in ways that I think are promising for opening up a more credible dialogue around research. I conclude by returning to the conceptualisation of academic-practitioner collaboration as the brokering of communities of practice to emphasise some of the risks and challenges to both researchers and the researched inherent in such processes, and to emphasise the possibilities and impediments thus far characterising attempts to cultivate reflexive academic-practitioner collaboration.

Academic-practitioner collaboration: a new praxis of research?

Even though recent emphases of UK Research Councils and the REF have sharpened interest within the social sciences in having research impact on practice, the desire to inform policing through research evidence is far from new (Fleming 2010; Engel and Henderson 2013: 218; see also Lumsden, this volume), and work on the reflective use of knowledge in problem-solving within professions (Schon 1983), and on the transfer, exchange and mobilisation of knowledge (KTE) and research evidence within fields as diverse as medicine and health (Mitton, Adair, Mckenzie, Patten and Perry 2007), education (Davies 1999), social work (Sheldon and Chilvers, 2000), and throughout public services (Nutley, Walter and Davies 2007) is extensive, and growing. Numerous common challenges to informing or shaping practice through evidence are found across all of the different disciplines, an in-exhaustive list of which would include: the incongruence of research and practice organisations, including in relation to the timelines for doing and acting upon research; the need for personal trust relationships to be forged, and how this constantly needs to be renegotiated as people move roles; uncertainty about the 'message' of bodies of research evidence; and different value placed upon different kinds of research and the purposes for which it is being undertaken (for a brief overview see: Henry and Mackenzie 2012: 318-321). What runs

through all of these challenges is the fact that academics and practitioners occupy different worlds of work, each of which has its own distinctive, and not always compatible, ways of understanding and doing things. By 'worlds of work' I refer to the institutional, professional and organisational domains which organise and validate recognised activity within them through the evolution of defined and tacit frames of reference. They are 'epistemic communities' in which members' shared understandings of what they do make sense to them, and which are recognised in numerous anthropological and sociological literatures on institutions (Douglas 1986), the 'worlds' of the arts (Becker 1982), sciences (Kuhn 1996) and law (Fish 1989). Crossing the boundaries of these epistemic communities, or 'worlds of work' is, in theory, difficult and the problem of knowledge exchange is thus often a problem of distorted communication across the boundaries of the academy and the work worlds of practice where the products (research) of the former are either incomprehensible to, or likely to be largely re-interpreted within, the latter.

I have argued elsewhere (Henry 2012; Henry and Mackenzie 2012) that Wenger's communities of practice perspective (Wenger 1998) is a helpful framework for understanding this problem and for thinking about research as necessarily involving the crossing of boundaries. Communities of practice refer to the social relations and attendant ways of thinking about the world that evolve through people's everyday social interactions in collective activities. They are ubiquitous in that they exist in all such activities – families negotiating everyday routines, our pursuit of hobbies, or within more formal activities like work (whether that be academic work or the work of a police officer). In pursuing collective activities we build tacit and sometimes explicit shared knowledge and understandings of the world, and think about ourselves, who we are, and what we know, in relation to the multiple overlapping communities of practice in which we participate (Wenger 1998: 45). Because communities of practice are so entwined throughout our personal and professional lives we

are constantly negotiating the boundaries of them and in this way the brokering of these boundaries is a very necessary and natural concept for Wenger (1998: 108-113). However, communities of practice can become very 'deep' – where the shared knowledge, language, routines and skills of members become a distinctive/primary dimension of their identities that differentiates them from non-members. So, for example, the talk and practice of lawyers or technicians in the IT department will often be difficult to fully comprehend by those who are not members of communities of practice within those occupations. For Wenger, if organisations want to harness knowledge from the numerous deep communities of practice that constitute them there has to be brokering across them, carried out by people who cross the boundaries of different communities of practice with sufficient membership of them to be able to appreciate their practice and to interpret and translate it for other communities of practice in the organisation. An example of a broker in Wenger's work is the supervisor of a claims processing unit within an insurance company, located on the boundaries between communities of practice of both managers and claims processors. An analogous example in the police would probably be the Sergeant. In both cases mere occupation of the formal role does not itself make the incumbent an effective broker, in the same way that not all researchers are necessarily as good at appreciating and interpreting the worlds they study.

It is useful to think about research and academic practitioner collaboration in these terms. Crossing the boundaries of communities of practice is essentially what reflexive social researchers are doing as they seek to understand and interpret the worlds and practices of others. As they translate those worlds to be comprehensible within their own communities of practice in the academy there is an element of brokering, although until recently there was usually only brokering into the academy with little engagement going back to the world of practice. Academic-practitioner collaborations probably represent the most sustained attempts to rectify this, to broker between academic and practitioner communities of practice.

'Collaborative' models of research influenced much of what is now viewed as academic-practitioner collaboration. Here practitioners are recognised as co-producing new knowledge through their participation as the subjects of research, but also through their wider participation and involvement in the whole research process from formulation and design, to implementation, analysis, and practical application. The paradigm example of such an approach, in methodological terms, is participatory action research in which the research process is very much conceptualised as a 'collective' enterprise between researchers and practitioners (McIntyre 2008). Not dissimilar, in that it involved researchers being situated within the field of practice concerned, in this case a Youth Offending Service in Swansea, is the reflective friend research developed by Case and Haines (2014). Case and Haines argue, drawing on Wenger as I do, that collaboration involving researchers being situated within the field, responding to emergent questions and findings from the research context, engaging in dialogue with collaborators, and sustaining this kind of relationship with them, itself allows researchers 'a means of producing better quality (in the sense of a closer and more accurate description of social reality) research' (2014: 60-61). It is a key argument of proponents of such approaches that collaboration in the research process itself allows a deeper and richer 'appreciation' of the research field to emerge (see also: Henry and Mackenzie 2012: 320-321), through which sharper, critical research questions can be identified that otherwise would have been hidden, or, to use my favoured terminology, incomprehensible to a researcher who had not sufficiently crossed the boundary of the community of practice being studied. The key charge against such collaboration (also commonly made against ethnography), however, is that the researcher becomes too immersed in the field, inured to what is sociologically interesting about it or what is critical or problematic about practice in which they have themselves become invested as participants. In short, the criticism tends to be that the researcher 'goes native' and so lacks a critical distance and independence from it.

This is also a noted challenge of boundary work explicitly recognised by Wenger, effective brokers being those who avoid 'capture' by particular communities of practice (Wenger 1998: 108-110; Henry 2012: 421-422). As we'll come to in the following sections, claims to independence and freedom from bias within positivist sociology are themselves not unproblematic (Gouldner 1970: 54; Case and Haines 2014: 58-59). However, criticisms around independence should nonetheless also be acknowledged in relation to the more structural manifestation of collaboration that goes beyond individual ad hoc projects, specifically, institutional collaboration arrangements between Universities and practitioner organisations. Arguably the police have been at the vanguard of forging such relationships, initially in the US through pioneering work at the University of Berkeley at the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays there is evidence of such work in many (albeit largely 'western') jurisdictions (see: Johnston and Shearing 2009). I am going to focus my observations largely on my direct experience of working within the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR).

The Scottish Institute for Policing Research

SIPR was established as an inclusive partnership between twelve independent Scottish Universities, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, and, at the outset, all eight of Scotland's regional police services, since amalgamated into a single service called Police Scotland. SIPR has aspired to engage the police and the academy in ongoing dialogue around research in a sustained way in order to cultivate a broader 'culture of engagement' (Fyfe and Wilson 2012: 311), rather than focusing on individual projects per se. SIPR does have a modest budget to fund small projects – whether new research or projects to disseminate existing evidence – but these are generally viewed as 'seed corn' funding, designed to support work that might inform the design of larger project bids to UK and/or EU

funding councils. SIPR does not 'monopolise' policing research, which continues to be sustained by individual academics working in independent Universities. Given that it seeks to forge collaboration across a diverse set of disciplines (including social sciences, psychology, international relations, geography, health sciences, education, law, forensic sciences and management studies) this would in any case be impossible, as well as undesirable. Rather, its more modest aspiration has been to act as a hub and facilitator for academic practitioner collaboration. It has developed a multifaceted approach to this end, using standard activities such as conferences, events, workshops, small project grants, and the use of a website as an information and contacts hub for users alongside attempts to foster collaboration and relationships at different levels throughout the academy, the police, and partner agencies. Examples include (also see: Fyfe and Wilson 2012: 309-311):

- an Executive Committee of academics and practitioners meeting regularly to maintain an overview of its activities, identify and facilitate important strategic areas of work, and connect SIPR to wider UK and international collaborations to ensure that it avoids becoming parochial;

- a Practitioner Fellowship scheme whereby practitioners work with an academic mentor on fashioning a project relevant to their practice but also informed by substantive research evidence and sound research practice and ethics;

- a blended-learning Masters degree in Policing Studies, administered by the University of Dundee, works closely with the Scottish Police College to ensure academic input into its continuous professional development programmes for serving police officers;

- an Executive Sessions programme pairing up senior police officials (not always from Scotland) with academics to work together on using research evidence to engage with 'wicked issues';

- themed 'sandpit' events bringing police, partner agencies and academics together to generate conversations on issues of mutual interest that might be developed into KTE or research projects; and

- active engagement of PhD researchers with an interest in policing, broadly defined, initially through some funded scholarships, latterly through away days, workshop events and poster presentation competitions, which interested practitioners attend and are involved as respondents (there are also serving police officers undertaking PhD degrees).

In short, SIPR is playing a long game, incrementally exposing police practitioners throughout the organisation to research and the process of producing research evidence. It has to be acknowledged that this remains a work in progress. However, although recent scholarship on reflexivity already identifies many of the challenges and opportunities facing the researcher within this more collaborative praxis of research (Case and Haines 2014), less has thus far been said about the reflexive practitioner and how reflexivity on their part might also be something to be cultivated. Experience in SIPR suggests it is worthwhile, but that it comes with limitations.

Reflexive research and reflective practice

Reflexivity in research practice is not just about researchers being transparent about their standpoints, biographies and biases that naturally shape their research choices, although this does flow from it. More fundamentally, reflexive research in the social sciences (theoretical and empirical) is about the researcher being cognisant of the fundamentally social process of interpretation through which knowledge is produced and given meaning, their role in that process, often in collaboration with others (the researched), and of the ways in which this

process is inherently political because it implicitly or explicitly gives credence to some perspectives over others, either challenging or validating the status quo, extant practice and/or interests (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: 10-12). This insight - that research is an interactional, interpretive and appreciative activity in the lived world in which the researcher is a participant, and that reflection and study of that activity itself forms as appropriate a focus of social scientific investigation as much as the worlds of work of 'lay' practitioners - may have been long-coming (Gouldner 1970: 54), but it certainly has arrived. Importantly, it emphasises that the researcher should not be distinguished from the researched as being the only active participant in research.

In the social interactions and interpretations that lie at the heart of research, knowledge is coproduced and collective rather than the individual creation of the researcher alone, even though the traditional reified outputs of research (the report, article, monograph) tend to be represented as such (see: Becker 1982: 1-39 on art as collective activity). It is therefore to *both* the researcher and the researched (actually with an emphasis on the latter) that I want to turn in my own observations on reflexivity and its resonance for thinking about academic-practitioner collaborations as brokering communities of practice. In doing this I will highlight two related insights gleaned from Giddens' and Gouldner's foundational work which informs my sketch of the reflexive practitioner. I will note in conclusion a distinction to be made between that and the 'reflective' practitioner.

Reflexive research is credible research

One of the staunchest criticisms of collaborative research (and of 'funded' research more generally) is that it lacks, or has a tendency to lose, the independence of objective positivistic science (Engel and Henderson 2013: 230-231). This is a vitally important issue for research,

and I will come on to argue that acknowledgement of the boundaries between academic and practitioner fields remains crucial precisely because it gives cognisance to the issue.

However, there is a problem with the positivist claim, one that reflexivity towards the interactive process of research guards against:

> 'When sociologists stress the autonomy of sociology – that it should (and, therefore, it can) be pursued entirely in terms of its own standards, free of the influences of the surrounding society – they are giving testimony to their loyalty to the rational credo of their profession. At the same time, however, they are also contradicting themselves as sociologists, for surely the strongest general assumption of sociology is that men are shaped in countless ways by the press of their social surround.' (Gouldner 1970: 54)

In this formulation sociologists' claims to independence from fields to be objectively scrutinized ultimately reflected the trammels, culture and recognised methods of a profession rather than a reality. For Gouldner, the idea of the social scientist free from any bias or prior assumption was a presentational affectation designed to bolster the professional credibility and distinctiveness of the scientist. In fact, he argued, social scientists, like all human beings in society, exercised their 'freedom' to choose their topics of interest and the methods to study them within 'the press of their social surround', which included accepted theoretical and methodological resources within the communities of practice of sociology, as well as elements of their personal biographies. Sociologists' failure to acknowledge themselves as socially constructed, and as making political decisions in their choice, method and dissemination of sociological work, framed by professional and personal assumptions, became internally visible within the discipline as these assumptions became dissonant with

those of newcomers to the field who recognised them as such – assumptions and biases rather than neutral, true, or incontestable ways of seeing society (see: Gouldner 1970: 39) – and with whom such theorising lost credibility.

Gouldner's insight lies at the very heart of current theorising of reflexivity which sees acknowledgement of the researcher as part of the field of study, their interpretations of it framed within their own professional and personal identities, as simply more credible than the positivist 'myth' of the independent social scientist, standing above a field of study, ready to provide the objectively 'right' answer in relation to it. For researchers, this debunking can be liberating and suggests a need to be honest, humble, and realistic about what their work can do (see also Blaustein, this volume). The skills and resources of their communities of practice (subject to their own competence) allows them to provide credible understandings of issues grounded in an explicitly articulated academic rigor, with due attention being given to its limitations, but do not imbue them with the mythical power of finding incontestable truth. Such a myth itself (one I still see in practitioners' expectations from researchers) creates a distance between researcher and researched and a denial of the ways in which research processes do (whether reflexively recognised or not) involve a coproduction of knowledge through interaction, appreciation and interpretation. Researcher reflexivity provides a good starting point for cultivating practitioner reflexivity by narrowing this distance and acknowledging the collective and collaborative nature of the process, giving practitioners purchase on this more realistic enterprise. Further, the nature of researcher reflexivity, drawing into view issues of bias, professional, personal and political standpoint, and presumption, plausibly cultivates similar reflection on the part of collaborators. Being transparent about their interests in the research, and how it might be used, is beneficial if it can lead to a transparent engagement around the research with the researcher in the first instance (see: Case and Haines 2014), but also raises potentially more thorny issues reflecting

the real issues of power implicit in collaborations, from narrowly focused agendas seeking to validate and 'rubber stamp' 'successful' initiatives that do not challenge the status quo (Henry and Mackenzie 2012: 321), to questions of organisational reputation and practice deemed beyond contestation (see the discussion of stop and search below).   I will argue in the final section that brokering captures the fact that these issues are unlikely to go away but also that rendering them transparent provides a more likely condition for the kinds of sustained collaboration necessary to challenge them.

Social scientific research does not have 'the answers'

This point was alluded to above, where credible research was characterised as research that does not claim to have 'the answer'. It is a common finding in KTE research that practitioners often place particular value on research that they feel will provide an answer to an instrumental question (Nutley et al. 2007: 36), or worse, which will enhance their legitimacy (Boswell 2009). In the field of policing the rise of 'crime science' and 'what works' are cases in point. It is dangerous for social science to claim to have the 'right answer' as the reality of research and analysis, even in what might seem like very technical areas such as crime mapping and profiling, tends to be messy and rather less 'scientific' than is presented (Innes, Fielding and Cope 2005). Of course, the more reflective proponents of crime science emphasise incremental learning through ongoing research, not bald claims to truth, but such claims, and the associated aspiration that answers are indeed what research can provide, still persist and are detrimental to the maintenance of any serious research collaboration. They are detrimental because they reflect another myth about social science, one that reflexivity dispels. For Giddens, the institutional formation of the social and natural sciences was guided by the Enlightenment's aspiration that the incremental accumulation of

knowledge would ground society in reason, stability and proof, a belief which still lingers. However:

> 'Science depends, not on the inductive accumulation of proofs, but on the methodological principle of doubt. No matter how cherished, and apparently well established, a given scientific tenet might be, it is open to revision – or might have to be discarded altogether – in the light of new ideas or findings.' (Giddens 1991: 21)

The answers provided by science are subject to revision and refutation and are not, even within the worlds of natural scientists, stable and incontestable. In the more mundane contexts of academic practitioner collaboration and KTE further questions about extracting an answer or a coherent message from what might be an extensive, even multi-disciplinary, body of research also arise (Henry and Mackenzie 2012: 320 & 324-325). Not only are individual pieces of research not 'the answer', systematic analyses of whole bodies of research do not necessarily contain a single message, rather being contested, contradictory or incompatible. One issue this raises for SIPR is that it has to be very clear that it does not 'represent' any particular 'research community view', because there generally is no single agreed 'view' within the research community.

This further demystification of research and 'evidence' again, when made explicit, provides for more, realistic, credible, modest and necessarily qualified engagement between collaborators. Of course, there might be a risk of the researched taking the demystification to mean that research tells them nothing, but this would be a mistake. Paraphrasing David Smith somewhat (2007: 302), people generally trust doctors not because they can cure them but because doctors work to professional standards, are of good character, have a duty of

care, and draw on the best (but imperfect) evidence-base that they have to help people. The doctor who says 'trust me, I can cure you' should be avoided. Similarly, I would suggest that trust between researchers and practitioners is not on a firm foundation if the researchers' trust-claim is 'I can give you the answer'. More plausible might be to claim to work to professional standards, to be of good character (which might be extended to include reflection on standpoint) and subject to a duty of care (research ethics), and to draw on the best evidence-base (substantive and methodological, both imperfect) available, to provide rigorous, critical interpretations of a problem or field. This demystification wrought by reflexivity on the part of researchers invites reflection on the part of research collaborators by opening up research as something that can be engaged with, even challenged, not something that happens elsewhere, probably in a locked laboratory. It sees research characterised more as a resource to prompt and open deliberation, not as an 'answer' that closes it. If research is not merely a search for answers this suggests questions for practitioners: what might research be for?; what ought it to be for?; and, are the right questions even being asked? Whether such questions necessarily evidence reflexivity or reflection is a matter of degree as there is an important distinction to be made between the two.

Reflection in practice is what people do, and is certainly a pre-requisite of professional practice (Schon 1983). Schon's work provides examples of architects, psychotherapists, planners and scientists, amongst others critically reflecting on and evolving their practice through using, applying, and stretching the intellectual tools of their worlds of work to negotiate emergent problems or new cases to be dealt with. Police officers very clearly do this in applying (or not) their legal powers and craft skills to meaningfully carry out tasks in ways that are coherent with the frames of reference of their jobs. This professional creativity and skill in using professional resources demonstrates reflection in practice, in much the same way that a researcher applying the methodological skills of their

discipline to the design of a new project is. Reflexivity, however, implies not only

competence within a particular community of practice/world of work but an ability to see

oneself within it, and to peer beyond it. Reflection is within a community of practice and

reflexivity takes you beyond its trammels.

Academic-practitioner collaboration as brokering communities of practice

Thinking about academic-practitioner collaboration as brokering communities of practice sits

well with a reflexive understanding of research and suggests possibilities for cultivating

reflexivity in practitioners that serves to challenge, or at least unsettle, the sometimes narrow

trammels of their communities of practice[1]. In this section I draw out and emphasise two

recurrent themes of the discussion so far – that research itself involves appreciation across

boundaries and that collaborations are best conceptualised as ongoing processes of brokering

and learning – before concluding with a third point, that recognising boundaries also acts as a

healthy reminder of the importance of independence (academic research is valuable precisely

because it tests police communities of practice) and of the limitations of cultivating

reflexivity towards research in practitioners who are ultimately beholden to many internal and

external pressures that make learning from research a challenge to them.

Research involves appreciation across boundaries

Research into social groups and what they do involves crossing the boundaries of

communities of practice. The reflective researcher, using the tools of their trade, whether

observation or interviews, but also if drawing upon the artefacts of a community of practice

(which could be the data it routinely collects of the documents and reports it produces), is (to

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[1] It should be acknowledged that many police officers in Scotland were already reflexive and outward looking
prior to SIPR, indeed some of them were instrumental in establishing the collaboration.

greater or lesser degrees) making another world comprehensible to them and their academic communities of practice through their interpretation of it. Of course, the reflexive researcher explicitly recognises that their interpretation is not 'neutral' but is framed by the professional and personal assumptions they bring to the study from the communities of practice in which they are immersed (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: 10-12). Recognising these boundaries, and the unfamiliar character of communities of practice to non-members behind them, acts as a reminder to the researcher that they don't necessarily know from the outset what the most important research questions are. It is by starting with a critical appreciation of the field, an engagement with the communities of practice that comprise it, that researchers are more likely to identify research questions that talk to the issues that matter within it, that are comprehensible to those working within it, and so which form the basis of research which better reflects the lived experience of participants, and so which stands a better chance of communicating across academic and practitioner communities of practice, the perennial problem of KTE where the importance of the boundary has not been so heeded (see also: Case and Haines 2014: 60-61). Crossing boundaries of communities of practice seems to me to be an accurate descriptor of the reflexive research process and the active negotiation of academic and practitioner frames of reference, values and interpretations implied by it. For the researcher, the promise of a reflexive approach to research is thus better research that meaningfully grapples with the lived world. For the researched, reflexive research demystifies and makes accessible the research process. However, cultivation of deeper practitioner reflexivity lies beyond individual research projects and through learning within more sustained brokering of communities of practice.

Research collaborations are processes of brokering and learning

The aim of SIPR has been to create a 'culture of engagement' (Fyfe and Wilson 2012: 311) around research through sustained interactions with the police involving diverse academic disciplines, and at different levels, from the strategic development of the Institute through the Executive Committee, to its broader role as an information and contacts hub, to its more grass roots engagement through events, practitioner fellowships, research and KTE collaborative small grants, training and CPD, and through the nurturing of a growing community of doctoral researchers. The reflexive demystification of researchers and the 'messages' of research have lain (sometimes more implicitly than they should have it must be said) at the heart of these various efforts to allow practitioners to feel that they have a stake in the research process, that it is something that necessarily involves them, and in which they ultimately contribute to the generation of new knowledge valuable both as academic output and as aid to practice.

Cultivation of a culture of engagement and deliberation around research, perhaps particularly with the police where the values, tacit knowledge and craft of communities of practice are notoriously deep (Loftus 2009), is not an overnight task. We are not there yet but there are some promising signs. The sheer diversity of police research emerging in Scotland since 2007 – covering fields including criminology, law, politics, forensic science, psychology, education, health studies, geography, social policy and business studies – has only been made possible by active police engagement across all of these fields. This has itself exposed the police to the point that there is no single, simple message to be gleaned from 'the research', a healthy outcome in itself. The sheer variety of research is also worthy of note because it alludes to the inclusive understanding of 'policing' within SIPR (not an institute of 'police' research) which is of interest and importance to agencies beyond the police themselves. Through its work SIPR has drawn in and connected with a broad set of

agencies with policing interests, including local government services and third sector

agencies, an unspoken benefit of which is that it decouples policing from just the police,

offering opportunities to expose the police to non-police knowledge and data about policing,

challenging traditional, often dearly held, 'police views' of the world (yet more boundary

crossing of course). All of this, has been to cultivate a kind of reflexivity in police

collaborators, to help them see outside the parameters of their own communities of practice to

problems and challenges that they simply might not have recognised. In particular, I think

that it has been about trying to cultivate two things: the asking of more diverse questions

from research; and, the insight that 'critical' research is to be welcomed, not feared.

As noted previously, there are documented tendencies for practitioners (not just the

police) to value and seek research that provides answers to instrumental concerns, or which

can be used tactically to validate existing practice (Nutley, et al. 2007: 39; Boswell 2009).

The aspiration of sustained brokering is to challenge both. On the first there is evidence of

such reflexivity amongst some police officers in Scotland who have actively sought to ask

questions about ethics, human rights, social and demographic trends, concepts of procedural

justice, and community engagement, all of which look beyond the traditional focus of the

police and demonstrate an understanding that research can inform and challenge values and

commitments, as well as evaluate initiatives and practices. In short, the police are beginning

to ask a more diverse set of questions from research than the instrumental. On the second,

the fear of the 'critical' remains something of a concern[2]. It's true that the asking of broader

questions and the engagement with non-police perspectives already indicates critical thinking

and awareness that the status quo may need challenging. There is probably quite a lot of

understanding within the police that it is critical research that drives innovation and

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[2] Here I'm not using 'critical' to denote critical theory as such (although it might of course produce very important, albeit challenging insights for practitioners), rather I'm using it in a general way to refer to research that does not merely validate extant practice.

creativity. Engel and Henderson (2014: 230) demonstrate that critical research is far from something that the police should fear, given that now well-accepted developments in police practice (they give Goldstein's problem-orientated policing as a key example, others might include more enlightened approaches to domestic violence and greater probity in the recording of interviews etc.) emerged out of research that was critical of extant practice. Evidence of real appreciation of the value of 'critical' research as something to be learned from will be evidence of practitioners seeing beyond the parameters of their own communities of practice and engaging in their own research reflexivity. However, the interests, responsibilities, and liabilities of researchers and the researched are not identical. There are real boundaries between them, and different priorities given to research within them.

Boundaries are real

Recognising boundaries talks to issues of independence, the value of critical research that questions the status quo, and wider internal and external influences on practitioners' receptivity to research.   Academics and practitioners occupy different communities of practice and this is precisely the point of their collaboration. Both collaborators have different skills, expertise and interests, and although sustained brokering may see a negotiation and mutual acceptance of these that can be of benefit to the research process (Case and Haines 2014), the differences and the boundaries between them remain of value (see: Henry and Mackenzie 2012: 324-325) and are brought into stark relief when there is controversy about research. In Scotland the clearest recent example of this has been in relation to Murray's research on stop and search. The research was funded as a PhD by the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (SCCJR), a sister collaboration to SIPR covering wider criminal justice issues, and supervised through both SCCJR and SIPR, both of

which supported its subsequent dissemination (Murray 2014a; 2014b). The study was published into what was already becoming a politicised climate around policing following the 2013 amalgamation of Scotland's eight regional forces into Police Scotland. Amongst other things it demonstrated that use of the tactic was substantial, that it was disproportionately used against young people and children, and that it lacked adequate legal regulation (Murray 2014).

Over the longer term the result has been largely positive where research that uncovered problematic police practices that had developed over a long period of time (certainly before the creation of Police Scotland), seemingly under the radar of researchers, government and the police themselves, created much-needed formal deliberation about those practices. The police established an internal working group – inviting academics, including Murray, to sit on it - to 'improve' practice drawing from reviews that had swiftly been undertaken by the Scottish Police Authority (the body which formally oversees Police Scotland) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland. Interest was such that The Scottish Government also established an independent review convened by a leading Human Rights lawyer, one of its tasks being to explore the drafting of a Code of Practice to clarify and regulate stop and search (see: Advisory Group on Stop and Search 2015). Then the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 was recently given Royal Assent and provides a statutory basis for a stop and search Code of Practice, as well as explicitly removing police powers to conduct 'consensual' searches without a legislative basis. So far so good. Thus far the narrative sounds like a success for collaborative research, with public deliberation and legislative reform following critical research, but this is only part of the story.

In the concluding sections of her thesis Murray (2015) documents difficulties she faced pursuing and disseminating the research, including Police Scotland and the Scottish Government running their own event justifying stop and search to coincide with (and

presumably take attention from) the initial publication of her findings with SCCJR. Unsubstantiated claims regarding the tactic's role in contributing to Scotland's declining experience of knife crime, collaboration with an academic willing to place a positive spin on the tactic, and a series of uncomfortable meetings before the Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament, including a bizarre and embarrassing scene involving admission that 20,000 stop and search records had been 'lost' through the pressing of the wrong button on an IT system (Ellison 2015; Hutcheon 2015) are but some of the less edifying chapters in the wider story of Police Scotland's initially defensive response to the concerns about their practice uncovered by Murray (such tactics not being new, see: Henry, 2007).

Even in a context where considerable progress has been made in cultivating a culture of engagement around research, and in which many police collaborators do show a reflexive interest in challenging the status quo of their practice, there are necessary limits to academic-practitioner collaboration that talk to the boundaries between collaborators. Murray's research was useful to the police (even if they did not at first view it this way) precisely because it was independent, rigorous, and did not shy away from findings that challenged extant practice. The boundaries between the academy and the police were tested by the coordinated police resistance to it, but they were maintained and the research was published (2014a and 2014b), and duly informed the independent review of stop and search. It's disappointing that the police did not initially respond more constructively to the research as a prompt for internal critique and an opportunity for learning, but it's naive to assume that research will necessarily be the primary focus for practitioners. It's difficult to know exactly what prompted their initial response, but unreflective internal commitment to the practice, coupled with the public relations challenge of a politicised external environment in which the media and the Scottish Parliament were increasingly willing to challenge them, seem to have been part of the story. Ultimately it's the latter, the external political pressures on the police,

rather than the research itself, which resulted in their more positive engagement with the issues in this instance. Certainly it is to be hoped that SIPR's ongoing efforts to foster a culture of engagement and more reflexivity towards research from practitioners might result in more measured responses to uncomfortable and critical research findings in the future, responses characterised more by deliberation than defensiveness. Indeed, it is when findings are critical of the present that opportunities for learning and improvement truly arise.   Such opportunities are more likely when the boundaries between the academy and the world of practice – so necessary to maintain critical distance and independence - continue to be recognised and respected even as we work to negotiate and broker between them. This – like all good academic-practitioner collaboration - will be an ongoing project.

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