

Identity (Re)constructions in Public Meetings: An Ethnography of the Governance of Crime and Disorder

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Introduction

On 29th June 2010 the new Home Secretary, Teresa May announced to ACPO¹ 25% cuts in police over the next three years and the removal of targets such as the single confidence measure and the Policing Pledge² though still emphasising the government's and community's wish to see more

¹ ACPO: Association of Chief Police Officers, main item reported on 6pm news BBC Radio4

² The Policing Pledge is a published a list of commitments made to the public by Neighbourhood Policing Teams including direct contact details for the team, responding to call outs etc. Pertinently for this paper it includes a commitment to monthly public meetings between the police and community within every Neighbourhood and the

police on the streets. While ACPO responded negatively to the cuts they did not comment on the potential phasing out of community-partnership meetings. This research provides some insights into the experiences of one Police Force over a two year period at such public meetings within a deprived urban area and highlights a range of factors that might influence the police decision to continue – or not – with such meetings.

Partnership working has been a central feature within UK public service reform for a number of years. The New Labour modernisation agenda introduced collaboration and new governance structures to bring together partners from the public, private, and voluntary sectors (Gilling 2007, Newman et al 2004). Creating new sites of and struggles over networked governance (Newman & Clarke 2009 cited in Barnes & Prior 2009:200) such reforms intended to give new players equal partner status in the ‘co-production’ of public services and to ‘responsibilise’(Garland 2001) them within the design and/or delivery of localised services. However, the actual practice of partnership frequently falls short of the claims made for it (Audit Commission 2002, Stephens & Fowler 2004; Glendinning & Powell 2002) and there is now a plethora of critical organisational studies that suggest that inter-organisation collaborations are a complex and uneven practice (Audit Commission 1999, Huxham & Vangen 2005; Huxham & Hibbert 2008:503). Some authors have attempted to specify typologies of effective partner structures and technologies with the recommendation to look at the agency of participants to provide insights and explanations (Munroe, Roberts & Skelcher 2008). Others have queried the presumption of synergistic outcomes based on the construction of shared meanings across organisational differences / boundaries suggesting that actors bring and (re)construct different meanings within these new sites of collaboration (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Tomlinson, 2005). The focus of this paper is on the different tensions and contestations in collaboration meetings between public service partners and community residents. Such collaborations which focus on giving citizens voice and choice in participative ‘deliberative’ governance (Prior 2009:203) are often ‘messier’ and more complex. Davies et al (2009) suggest community-partner collaborations cast public sector providers in the new identification as ‘community leaders’ who are tasked to operate beyond the boundaries of their organisation and “mobilise diverse voices and to secure ownership of cross-cutting outcomes developed in collaboration”. For Prior (2009) the bringing together of new actors, including frontline staffs and citizens/consumers will in and of itself have subversive tendencies that can be studied by looking at their situated exercise of agency and counter-agency (2009). This paper is

setting of up to three local priorities for policing in that Neighbourhood. The Pledge was formally launched across all Forces in March 2009.

based on a close analysis of the agency of participants at a public meeting dealing with crime and disorder issues. It will examine how their identity work and the relational identity positions constructed (Hartley 2005, Barnes et al 2003, Davies et al 2009) serve to escalate or ameliorate the tensions of collaboration.

Community-Partner Collaborations and Identities

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of individual, organisational, and occupational identities within collaborative encounters and the problematic achievement of a collective identity in situated practice (Beech and Huxham, 2003; Maguire and Hardy, 2005). According to Hardy et al (2005) a prerequisite to effective collaboration is the building of new collective identities and ties including assertive and other types of interactive talk. Within this research we focus on 'identity work' (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008) within a community partnership examining the way that identities are (re)constructed, as an ongoing process, within social interactions. While such an approach has become increasingly accepted in the study of organisational and inter-organisation collaborations (Hardy et al 2005) and public policies (Muir & Wetherell 2010), only a few studies have extended this to consider actual instances of interactive activity such as public meetings, and their effects on individual identities (Llewellyn 2005, 2008, Davies et al 2009). Poststructuralist theorising underpins our understanding of identities as fluid, flexible and reflexively linked to discursive practice. This suggests we may talk 'as if' there is an inner self but in constructionism the inner and outer selves are both 'constructed metaphorically' and produced in discourse with the focus of interest to examine people's own understandings of identity (Benwell & Stokoe 2006:4). In summing this up, Benwell and Stokoe state "who we are to each other, then, is accomplished, disputed, ascribed, resisted, managed and negotiated in discourse" (ibid:4). This affords the examination of the micro-level identity manoeuvres and relational 'positions' adopted (Davis & Harre 1990) in situated instances of interactive collaborative talk.

Co-joining the Community within Neighbourhood Policing

Neighbourhood Policing is the latest incarnation of community oriented policing (COP)³ introduced – by Labour - within the UK in 2005-8. It can be seen as an attempt at reform, to shake

³ COP: community orientated policing. Introduced across England and Wales this was a legislated Home Office / government initiative introducing neighbourhood teams of police as well as public and police meetings to set local priorities for their area.

up existing power relations, diminish the distance and increase the contact and legitimacy between police and community and make police accountable on a neighbourhood basis (Westmarland & Clarke 2009; Sullivan 2009). The Police & Justice Act of 2003 also reinforces previous legislation to co-join Local Authorities as responsible partners in quality of life and disorder issues, particularly anti-social behaviour (ASB). This legislation also introduced the role of the Police Community support officer (PCSO) who is a non-warranted officer, whose training and duties focus on providing a visible presence on the streets (foot or cycling) and play an integral role in meeting communities and partnership activities (Hartley 2005). Part of this initiative enshrined in the Policing Pledge is monthly community-police meetings for local citizens to set three local priorities for policing/partnership action. Within the Force studied they elected to call these Partnership and Communities Together (PACT)⁴ meetings. These have been conceptualised by the police as opportunities to bring police, partners from local authorities, councillors, and local citizens together at a public meeting to hear updates on action, communities' views, and to set priorities for future action. While it emphasises citizen-led aspects of this activity and joint decision-making, the reality is that these meetings are viewed as a police owned initiative. By 2009 these public meetings and priority setting formed part of the HMIC inspection process for the police making them a Neighbourhood Policing performance measure/target.

Previous research on community collaborations highlights problems and power inequalities with bringing communities to the table. They are constructed as 'usual suspects' who are serial meeting goers (Barnes et al 2004) and 'counter-publics' who are either unrepresentative or have their own agenda's to progress (Barnes et al 2003). Professionals struggle to give credence to their views of situations, citing their lack of expert knowledge or emotionality as inappropriate within rational views of deliberative democracy (Clarke et al 2007, Barnes 2008). Finally in some studies of COP, the differential capacity of individual or groups of residents to have their voice heard may reinforce existing inequalities and be experienced differentially with advantaged and disadvantaged communities (Westmarland & Clarke 2009, Herbert 2006).

Methods

⁴ PACT: Partnership and Community Together Meetings is the title and description given to these meetings by this Welsh Police Force. Other Forces have adopted different titles. For example Lancashire who also uses the acronym PACT uses this to mean Police and Community Meetings.

The design of this study is a longitudinal ethnography, based on one of the researcher's attendance at PACT meetings across a number of neighbourhoods of within the City studied, including Evergreen, the PACT discussed in this paper. In addition to the observation of these meetings, interviews and focus groups were conducted and other meetings, such as the Neighbourhood Management Area⁵ meetings for professional partners, were attended. This wide range of research activities and multi-sited methodology (Marcus 1995) helped to build a broader understanding of the construction of and practice of PACT within the specific locality. The rationale for the longitudinal study was to see if situated power relations, resistances, and identity positions changed through time as well as build an in-depth knowledge of the collaboration within these meetings. One of the authors attended 15 of 21 Evergreen PACT meetings run over 25 months (October 2007 – October 2009). This had the benefit of allowing embedded participant observation over numerous meetings and providing rich naturally occurring ethnographic data (Van Maanen 1988, Kondo 1990).

The meetings were all held in a modern Salvation Army building that hosts many community events including weight watchers and a play group as well as religious services on Sundays. In police eyes Evergreen was one of the most difficult neighbourhoods in the police force area, a large council estate - mainly neglected - though a focus of regeneration activities from the 1990s onwards. It has a fairly static mainly white population, some of whom have not worked for generations. Characterised by poor health and low educational achievement it ranks as one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Wales. Not unexpectedly, it experiences higher levels of crime, disorder, and ASB than many other wards in the city. During the 25 months of observation, attendance at these meetings usually ranged between 10-34 residents although the venue could not hold more than fifty. Importantly, it was the first PACT within the BCU⁶ (and possibly the Force) to succeed in having a community chair: *'from being our biggest critic and a typical resident who is part of the problem became part of the solution within a deprived council estate area where the community generally wouldn't want to be seen speaking to the police'* (Inspector Evergreen, Workshop June 2007). The Force's own guidance on PACT states having a community chair is ideal: *"community chairs mean the Police can be seen as more neutral and the meetings as driven and owned by the community."* The community are thus co-joined and responsabilised (O'Malley

⁵ Neighbourhood Management Areas: The cities 29 Wards are grouped into six coterminous Neighbourhood policing and local authority sectors. In 2008 the professional partners, including council and police, introduced joint Neighbourhood Management Area meetings to discuss mutual interests with service delivery including updates on crime, disorder, quality of life. PACT priorities are occasionally discussed at these meetings.

⁶ BCU: Business Command Unit of the Police Force developed from the previous Divisional Structure. This BCU covers the whole of the city and its six Neighbourhood Management Areas each have their own Neighbourhood Inspector and FLSO.

2004 cited in Gilling 2007:14) not only to actively participate by attending – they must play their part – but also through the symbolism of community chair to act ‘as if’ they have ownership of these meetings. Indeed the Senior Chief Inspector for partnership in this Force stated: *‘even if we have empowered no one else at least we’ll have empowered the community chairs’ (Workshop June 2007).*

As what is said in public meetings is in the public domain it is therefore within ethical considerations to audio record a couple of meetings and take notes of others. Residents were particularly concerned not to be identified and did not want any photographic or video evidence of attending meetings so this was not undertaken. PACT has a code of asking people not to give names or specific addresses. All residents have been anonymised in this paper and all participants at the meetings were aware that the co-author present was conducting research. Overtime more regular attendees felt able to let the researcher join their chat, grumbles, laughter and talk before and after meetings and this included councillors, FLSO⁷ and PCSOs. As the following conversation after her fourth attendance at these PACT shows, she was made to feel most welcome and included rather than tolerated by staff and residents.

Researcher: I spoke to some more residents tonight

FLSO Maureen: Good. They’ll speak to you now they’ve got to know your face (07.01.08)

Overtime the researcher successfully constructed herself and was co-constructed in an identity and status of ‘trusted researcher’.

Res 1: I know you go to other PACT and I want to know how Evergreen compares with other ones, do the police attend most other PACT?

Researcher: A few, a few, err [thinking about what to say] I don’t go to every PACT but it sounds like you know the police attend some have you attended any others? (04.03.08)

This made withdrawing from these meetings a wrench in terms of losing touch with the issues, people, and activities that had been viewed through the window of PACT meetings and the lives of residents. The longitudinal ethnographic approach allowed for an in-depth knowledge of interactions and participants’ perspectives within the meetings. This was invaluable to the researcher’s interpretation and co-construction of experiences and events (Van Maanan 2003, Kondo 1990).

⁷ FLSO: Front Line Support Officer: a non-uniformed support post created by this BCU who undertake a number of Neighbourhood policing duties; particularly the preparation, running, and publicity of PACT meetings.

Identity re(constructions) and manoeuvres within Evergreen PACT

Typically Evergreen PACT meetings are fast paced. Talk frequently overlaps as multiple speakers try to take speech rights, often shouting with emotion, and frustration. Arguments are mounted and progressed through alliances as the various actors draw on their relational identity positions. The struggles for control of the meeting and identity positions are also highlighted in the flow of interaction. This in some ways is similar to what Kunda (1992) describes as ‘role embracement’ and ‘role distancing’ referring to the ambiguities we experience within the role and identity positions we place ourselves, or our placed by others, and can be viewed in interactions.

Barnes (2008) suggests that no attendees within these meetings, whether professional or public will be ‘agenda free’ and it is the legitimacy and acceptance of their agendas within the deliberative governance setting and whether they are allowed voice or are unequal in power that is important. These juxtapositions and the tensions that surround them are clear within the collaborative space of the Evergreen meetings. The following analysis will highlight the fluid positions adopted by the various meeting attendees and the contestations and resistance that arise from the ways they position themselves or are positioned by others (Kondo 1990).

Police, FLSO and PCSOs

To a large extent the police are the most powerful partner within PACT meetings. They have set the scene for the collaboration. They are the professionals who define what is possible and attempt to co-opt the community to their agenda (Herbert 2006). This is referred to by one of Evergreen’s Police Inspectors:

Residents need to have realistic expectations, and that’s all down to explaining what we can deal with and how we work so people understand. [...] Of course the major benefit has been getting community intelligence and as public have learnt to trust us we are getting a lot of detailed information that we weren’t getting before and just wouldn’t get any other way.’

The PCSOs are very much the public face of the police on the streets and, at the Evergreen PACT meetings. They are usually the sole attendees from the police. This is a source of frustration to themselves, the residents, and councillors present. Over the research period three PCSOs were involved in the meetings, Carl, Dylan and Wayne. Carl the original PCSO, an older ‘calm’ man in

his late 30's, was the constant attendee. In the absence of the community chair he frequently chaired the meetings. First Dylan and then Wayne, both young men in their 20's, were appointed and attended as the second PCSO. The FLSO, Maureen, supported the PCSO at 9 of the 15 meetings. She had over 10 years support staff experience in the police, and since late 2006 worked locally as an FLSO. She has been a resident of Evergreen and Coolgreen⁸ for all this time. Within the meetings we see how these police representatives manoeuvre through a range of identity positions from 'being a resident too', through to a 'frustrated policing professional' and a 'hero', serving the community. One position they draw on in response to the issues residents' raise and their requests for help from the police is 'as resident' and as someone therefore able to understand, empathise, and even experience similar problems:

I am an Evergreen & Coolgreen girl myself, I live here too (Maureen FLSO 04.03.08)

I live in Basil and we have the same sort of issues there. So I know what you're going through (PCSO Carl 10.06.08)

This manoeuvre brings them closer to the community, presenting themselves as an ordinary member of the public, one of you, who understands their concerns. In doing this they often distance themselves from the agenda of their host organisation and from being 'the police'. This distancing suggests they are somehow different to the 'police' who have let this community down or have other agendas or targets to serve beyond aiding and assisting residents. This is what Kunda calls 'role distancing'. This separation of PCSO and police can be seen as an attempt to alleviate tensions and diffuse anger demonstrating a willingness to listen and address concerns. At times residents respond positively and acknowledge this manoeuvre:

Res 2: Not a reflection on you as PCSOs. Happy with your role

Res 3: You boys ok, you do your best. It's the others [police]. (03.11.08)

There are other times when residents lambaste the PCSO as the only available representatives of the police - a service that is failing them - and the PCSO then moves to present themselves as 'the police' identifying with and defending their organisation. This distances them from the public and

⁸ Coolgreen and Evergreen used to be one Ward which given the increase in population was split prior to the 2000 local elections.

will often entail attempts to provide explanations that fit with ‘managing expectations’ and reflect the party line on PACT, what Kunda refers to as ‘role embracement’:

PCSO Carl: [Now I] totally understand what you’re saying, but then you have to understand what we’re saying. YOU know we’ve explained before, before, time and time again it’s not [that]

Res 4: [Even when we get police] its ‘oh I’m off my shift in a minute’. We all know it may be one in the morning but we all gotta work (01.09.08).

Such statements can diffuse tensions particularly if they successfully ‘shut down’ a discussion or request. However more frequently this institutional identification and attempts to explain what the Inspector calls ‘reality’ and ‘constraints’ lead to an escalation of tensions and inflame residents and councillors.

At other times the PCSOs seem to drop their ‘organisational mask’ or capability to sustain their occupational identity and reveal their own ‘emotions’ and frustration at being unsupported by their colleagues /hierarchy as police representatives at PACT. For example, both PCSOs react immediately with strong physical and a verbal reaction to Res 5 softly spoken but persistent requests. PCSO Carl goes rigid and jumps back in his chair while pushing both his hands up in front of him toward the audience as if defending himself, then shouts his response. PCSO Wayne also pushes himself away from audience then turns to PCSO Carl and adds a softer placatory positioning to defuse the situation:

Res 5: Can you pass a message to Chief Officer and Chief Superintendent

PCSO Carl: **WHY DON’T YOU WRITE TO CHIEF OFFICER AND SUPERINTENDENT**

PCSO Wayne: Please do write to them Err Err. We can pass message on that we’ve had complaints but it would also be better to write yourselves (11.05.09)

In this extract they position themselves to be as abandoned as the public – caught in a difficult twilight position between the public and their organisation. They often appear neither fully one

nor the other: *I can't keep going back and banging my head on a brick wall. The Sergeant and the Inspector have said 'no' and they're not budging (PCSO Carl 02.02.09).*

What does shine through at Evergreen is the PCSOs' wish, if not that of the police, to be seen as 'good servants of the community', supporting residents and dealing with both disorder and the disorderly. Time and time again they position themselves as the 'hero', the 'action men' or 'knights in shining armour, punishing the unworthy on behalf of the 'good citizens' of the neighbourhood (Herbert 2006). This also identifies them as part of the macho occupational police culture rather than as 'pink and fluffy' community officers (Davies et al 2008):

PCSO Wayne: We all arrived in a 4 by 4 with the truck, had success: 4 off road bikes confiscated; 5 riders under warning; plus 1 bike and 3 riders today which makes a total of 5 bikes confiscated and 8 riders warned

PCSO Carl: The kids are petrified of the [crusher] truck (11.05.09)

There are occasions when residents praise PCSOs as 'their heroes'. However this is not the flavour of most Evergreen PACTs. It is more common for the anger and frustration of community residents, for being let down by the police, to be directed at the PCSOs. It is clear they struggle to deal with this often leaving meetings frustrated by the impossibility of managing community expectations and delivering the police agenda of reassurance to residents.

Within Evergreen much of the PCSOs work in meetings is directed towards attempts to alleviate tensions and provide acceptable 'account giving' to residents. These accounts or explanations are as likely to be rejected and this leads to increased tension. Within their identity work and the ambivalent positions they adopt we can see the personal and occupational cost and strain contained in their struggles. Managing expectations and reassurance at community-partner meetings is not an easy or enviable task in Evergreen. Before considering the resident identities it is important to consider how councillors, as potential partners and supporters of the police agenda or as 'special residents' position themselves at Evergreen.

Councillors

The councillors at this PACT meeting have refused the identity attribution of ‘full partner’, sitting alongside the police at the top table. One of these councillors, Councillor JONES has lived in Evergreen for 30 years. She is a regular attendee of Evergreen and has a long history of working with the police on a range of community events and initiatives. She argues that taking on a partner identity would give a false impression of her role in the meeting, stating:

I think the police were totally naïve. They thought if they get councillors they will represent the council. Nothing of the sort, I can’t tell council officers what to do. I’m dependent on them to respond to my requests on behalf of the community [...] some of them do some of them don’t. That’s why I won’t sit at the top table because they’d present it as if I was the council’s representative (14.03.08).

At many PACTs, other councillors - from all political parties - do position themselves as formal partners with the police. It is felt that community-partnership is further legitimised because of this. Evergreen residents know other councillors do this, and their councillors’ refusal has a mixed response. Some adopt the position that they would like to see them formally on the panel and given priorities or tasks to report. Others float between this and an alternate position of speaking up for Councillor JONES emphasising how much she does for the community. The main thrust of pressure to sit as a formal partner is from the police as voiced through the PCSOs:

PCSO Carl: These PACT meetings have become too police oriented. Don’t think it runs well at moment and want to address this at this meeting - so at the next meeting want to sort councillors on panel out.

Cllr JONES: NO, NO because I represent the community NOT council I’ve always sat in the audience with the community and I always will, I’m here for them (PACT 02.02.09)

Councillor Jones is keen to construct herself at PACT as an ‘ordinary resident’. She, and the other two Councillors Smith and Harris, who occasionally attend Evergreen, align themselves with community residents, distancing themselves from the police and council at these meetings. These councillors however do also draw on the identities of a ‘special resident’ (Westmarland and Clarke 2009) or ‘knowledgeable expert’ in the PACT meetings and these manoeuvres often serve to escalate tensions and pressures on the police at times when residents are feeling particularly

frustrated by what they see as police inaction. They draw on these identities to support residents in holding the police to account and in reinforcing residents' right to do so.

Cllr Smith: We know and the police know they have the power [to deal with this] after all 18 months ago used this in Splash⁹. What we want to know is why when people in Apple Terrace, Cutting Close, and other areas of Evergreen are suffering so much on a daily and nightly basis, is why not used here when it should be

Cllr Harris: The only way to do this and get what you [residents] want which seems to be having Senior Officers here is for you to make it a PACT priority for a Sergeant or someone above him come to the next meeting because you are complaining about them not coming

One of the regular residents wryly resists this positioning, suggesting that if the councillors are so knowledgeable they should act for Evergreen. This is ably dealt, with using humour and self-effacement (Holmes & Stubbe 2003), by the councillor, reverting to the identity of the ordinary residents, or even to a position of less influence than ordinary residents!

Res 6: We've got two councillors here they should be able to get them to come. They must have some influence

Cllr SMITH: [laughs] I'm a Councillor but if I write to Chief Constable I never get an answer, it just keeps getting passed down to the lowest level (06.10.08)

What is particularly interesting is that this contribution, which seems to be aimed at increasing tensions, actually serves to decrease them. The response by the councillor, by being presented in an expert style of assertive language and positioning combined with humour and an attempt to decrease inter-group differences, de-escalates the situation (ibid, Hardy et al 2005). Through the course of this ethnographic research, we see how these meetings ebb and flow as individual and collective identity positions are revealed and performed to achieve different outcomes. As Llewellyn suggests, public meetings are not chaotic or unordered discourses but have their own structure and in situ patterns (2005).

⁹ Splash is another disadvantaged Ward in a different sector of the city where the police, with the necessary council and councillor support, utilised a dispersal order to deal with congregations of large groups. To make them work dispersal orders need sufficient police resource allocated to enforce them.

Community Residents

The community residents who attend Evergreen draw on a range of different identity positions. Some attend because they see themselves as ‘victims’ of crime or ASB in their local area. Others believe it is their duty as ‘deserving good citizens’ or as the ‘faithful’ to hold the police and other partners to account. Reference is also made in residents’ talk to the strength of the collective community identity with Evergreen. The regular attendees at Evergreen were a mix of men and women although there were usually more men. The ages ranged from late 30’s up to late 70’s with the majority seeming to be in the 50 -70 age range. What characterised the regulars and the Chair was that they had all lived in the area for many years, and many for their whole or adult lives. Evergreen is similar to other PACTs in having no youth attendees and minimal ethnic minority attendance (some Asian shopkeepers attended occasionally to speak about their problems and then ceased attending).

Most new attendees are unsure or a little nervous, often wanting to know the format and style of the meetings or speak quietly to a PCSO at the end, unsure whether they can speak at a public meeting. There also many trust issues around attending PACT meetings within this historically deprived area and many do not want it known that they are attending or talking to the police. It is a major issue for residents of this area to come forward in public and be seen to be talking to the police. A focus group held with regular resident attendees provides some insight into the poor relationship between the police and residents of this community:

Most people fear the police in this area, they’re the people who arrest them or raid the area; surprised people prepared to talk to them at all..... never listened, never come and helped us ordinary folk when we needed them. For years and years we’ve been left to suffer so what’s the point of trying to talk to them people, don’t trust the police and others [agencies like council] to come and help us when we’re so desperate.... Lucky anyone comes.... Need to prove to us they’re actually going to listen and do something for us when we ask them (Res 6, 07.07.08)

Residents draw on this past hurt as well as present police and partner inaction in their construction of a ‘victim’ identity and of being viewed as ‘second class citizens’ by the authorities. There is also an ‘embattled community’ identity which surfaces within many of the meetings as community residents attempt to influence and change the dynamics within power relations in order to better

exercise their voice and choice. This identity work and the implications of their deprived environment create tensions and high emotion in the meetings. As the community chair points out:

I don't think the 'high ups' realise what people are having to put up with 24/7 in Evergreen... no idea none of them. [For residents] it's daily, horrendous, we can't go home to nicer areas. Of course they get upset, of course they're angry people are at their wits end by the time they come to a PACT (14.04.08)

Public service decision-makers are cast as too distant from the realities and suffering of the residents. For Herbert (2006) the police are driven by competing modes of interaction one of which is subservience in responding to community needs. Residents in Evergreen view the police as seriously failing to fulfil this duty. Herbert suggests another mode is 'separateness' as independent, authoritarian law enforcers who are 'expert providers' of specialist services entrusted not to exercise or serve particular factions or agendas (see also Westmarland & Clarke 2009). For Herbert (2006) this positioning gives police particular difficulty when dealing with communities and acts to distance them from hearing and responding to community needs.

In their construction of their 'embattled' collective identity, residents at Evergreen also talk of being treated less favourably than other areas. *'You go round the corner into Moleskin Estate [part of a better off area] and there's no rubbish. Their bins are emptied, they're done properly but it seems your from Evergreen and there's nothing done for us here, why's that?'*

A persistent and fraught issue that has been raised by residents and councillors at ten of the fifteen meetings attended, related to the absence of police constables or more senior officers at these meeting. *Most PACTs have police in West Sector, and I believe in rest of City (Cllr Harris 03.11.08)*. It was suggested this should be set as a priority but this was refused. What is a critical issue is police are known to attend other PACTs within the BCU, and like the earlier comparison that other better off areas may be getting a better level of service this is a critical relational differentiation of 'us' compared to 'other'. The use of the 'other' (Hughes 2007) characterises PACT, people are concerned to be getting equal treatment and equality of voice and choice. At Evergreen PACT, 'other' partners such as local authority staff are also constructed as unresponsive and 'absent partners' by residents, building a picture of the 'abandonment' of the community.

This situation is even more incomprehensible and frustrating for residents who position themselves as deserving ‘good citizens’ who ‘represent our area and entitled to services’. This was often linked to being ‘deserving’ of services; and extended to having an affinity with the area and being able to speak with legitimacy and authority about what is needed.

Res 7: I’ve lived in Evergreen 78 years, my house xx Ibson Rd and for years had to put up with nuisance, summers here and it’s happening again after school, playing football by my house. I’ve sat here quietly and listened all the time now I want to raise my issue [...] I’m ill. I shouldn’t have to suffer like this (11.05.09).

They reinforce their deserving good citizen identity by reference to ‘other’ residents bad families/neighbours, who are creating problems for them and who the police and other services need to deal with. The following exchange shows this ‘deserving’ position and how services and professionals are cast as ‘failing’ the community:

Visiting Speaker / Arson Professional: [...] problem is its ‘families’ and how kids are brought up that’s the problem next worst area to Evergreen is Pentup for [abandoned] cars and setting fires

Res 8: I’ve brought up my children properly I control them not like those families... we shouldn’t have to keep suffering because of this. We’ve always lived here. We go to work we don’t let our children behave like this we deserve to have these services

Res 9: Years ago people had more control. Now we need help from police [& other services] to come and sort this out (07.01.08).

The embattled collective identity of Evergreen also on occasions gives rise to strong community identification and to residents’ talk of how Evergreen is wrongly blamed for ‘others’ problems. Particularly as Evergreen has a bad reputation compared to ‘other’ areas. For example, not wanting ‘our’ youth or ‘our’ crime statistics made to look worse when the perpetrators have come from neighbouring ‘better off’ areas and ‘aren’t our boys at all’.

Res 10: Don’t like Evergreen boys being blamed for it’ and later ‘was it our boys just as likely to be Bluewater ones’ (11.05.09), and

Res 11: And this motor cycle right, which is so annoying, it's from the Well To Do Estate and that's part of St. Magans there's terrible crime up there and what we can't understand is why is crime for Well To Do Estate coming under Evergreen? They're up there and quite a lot of posh private houses and that but their called St. Magans Ward when it suits them but when there is crime and violence it doesn't come under them it comes under Evergreen and that's so UNFAIR, it's NOT RIGHT

PCSO Carl: I think you'll find it doesn't. The way it's classed up there it goes under sector beats and the way beats work is [long technical explanation of police beats] (01.09.08)

Such attempts at denial or to stop further debate by providing misleading or 'technical' answers serve to escalate tensions and resistances within PACT. This also shows the strength of collective feeling concerning local identity compared to 'others'. The strength of these localised and embedded community identity positions create tensions in the operation of PACT and provide some insight into the difficulties with the smooth implementation of top-down 'generic' governmental policies and programmes (Walkerline et al 2010).

It is frequent within Evergreen that the PCSO attempt to position their expert explanations and solutions as more legitimate and valuable than local resident knowledge. Giving citizen and 'experience based expertise' less legitimacy than professional 'specialist accredited expertise' is common in community-partnership deliberative spaces (Barnes et al 2003, 2004; Collins & Evans 2002 cited Elliott et al 2010:182). The police as 'authoritarian experts' and controllers of PACT repeatedly fail to respond to residents suggestions to resolve some of the problems within Evergreen. In the following extract the request is treated by Maureen, the FLSO, as outside the boundaries of the purpose of PACT - which is to obtain a maximum of three priorities the police can meet within a short timescale. It can be argued this positioning of PACT by the police which emphasises 'quick fixes' is not fit for purpose – and does not provide solutions that are resident led nor resolve long term quality of life issues - particularly in deprived areas:

Res 11: can we have a request for money for diversionary activities for the young people in the summer holidays

FLSO Maureen: No I can't put that because it's not something the police can achieve between now and the next meeting so it doesn't fit as a priority unfortunately. Sorry, nothing I can do that's the way it is, my Inspector would kill me (07.07.08)

The legitimacy of the community residents who attend PACT meetings is also called into question by the BCU Neighbourhood Inspector who indicated how PACTs attract serial meeting goers who are an unrepresentative minority:

‘You can’t even say they represent [anyone] because you’ve got a handful of people out of a much bigger area and it’s always the same old faces with axes to grind [...] (Inspector Evergreen, Workshop June 2007).

Conclusion

This paper has set out to conduct an in depth analysis of identity work and manoeuvres in interactive collaborative talk around crime and disorder issues. Community-police meetings (PACTs), which were also intended to include other public service partners, were set up in the case constabulary in 2006, with the aim of ensuring citizen-led public service delivery and action. For many years the British police have been urged to involve communities in the policing of their own neighbourhoods as a means of ensuring ‘policing by consent’ and enhancing trust and legitimacy in the force (Clarke et al 2007; Casey 2008; Westmarland & Clarke 2009; Tuffin et al 2006, Timm 2007; Tyler 2006). However, establishing effective community collaborations is a highly complex process and in this paper we show how the identity work of participants serves to escalate as well as reduce the tensions at these meetings. Our analysis draws on a poststructuralist understanding of identities as fluid and relational with a focus on nuanced positionings and the workings of power.

The police representatives at the meetings often struggle to maintain control and to deliver messages of reassurance to the assembled residents. They draw on a ‘hero’ or ‘action-man’ identity to emphasise their contribution in improving the quality of life in these communities. When these identity manoeuvres fail to alleviate tension, and they often do, they oscillate between, on the one hand, distancing themselves from the ‘failures’ of the police and aligning themselves with residents, while on the other, fully embracing their professional role and engaging in ‘professional speak’ to educate residents of the constraints and pressures that the police face. It could be argued that the police as an organisation seem to be unwilling to be held to account by what are often negatively referred to as the ‘usual suspects’ of community residents who attend collaborative meetings. It may also be the case that these meetings are no more than a ‘tick box’ activity to meet their own HMIC performance measurement (Hughes and Rowe 2007). The councillors at the meeting contribute to the pressures on the police and also serve to escalate the tension in the meeting through their identity work. Their refusal to take on the identity of a ‘full partner’ at the

meetings results in their alignment with the residents in holding the police to account. At times these councillors also draw on the identity of a 'special resident' or 'knowledgeable expert' in their struggle for power with the police.

Previous research has referred to the power inequalities between community members and professionals in public service collaborations (Barnes et al 2004; Clarke et al 2007; Barnes 2008). However, the residents who attended Evergreen PACTs were determined to have their voice heard at these meetings and with the support of the community chair and the councillors present they often succeeded in exerting pressure and heightening levels of emotion and tension. Whether they position themselves at these meetings as 'victims' or as 'good citizens', or whether they align themselves to the collective embattled identity of Evergreen residents, their talk is of frustration and dissatisfaction with the public services they receive. Interactive talk and exchanges became even more frustrating as they do not seem to result in services re-allocation, additional resource, nor the provision of assistance to resolve issues. Their views seem to go into the ether and despite raising some issues month after month there is no communication or response to requests for changes in service provision. This seems to indicate the gaining and exercise of voice by this disadvantaged community within meetings, but with no ultimate gain in influence, wider voice, or choice to tackle inequalities. How this is accommodated and the boundaries of active citizenship, citizen-led policing and making communities partly responsible for the solutions to their problems is still being negotiated, defined, and at times contested.

The paper demonstrates the importance of identity work in understanding the dynamics and tension within collaborative meetings. This identity work however is situated with broader macro discourses that both residents and partners (police and council) draw on. Examples of these are discourses highlighting the turn to managerialism, joined up working, and citizen led governance. There are also meso-level discourses that may vary depending on whether you come to PACT as a resident (who lives in a deprived area) and experiences problems 24/7 or whether you come to this as a professional (works in) an area; each drawing on different resources including occupational and organisational discourses or locality and life experiences (Karn 2007). Karn's distinction of 'live in' or 'work in' an area draws on Bordieu's ideas of habitus, suggesting that professionals and communities will experience difficulties in communication in public engagement due to the differences in their habitus and in the identity framings they bring with them to this arena. This highlights the importance of knowing the history and context participants bring to collaborative engagements and therefore how a detailed ethnography of identity and agency is vital to an

understanding of challenges and tension in the governance of public services. The Evergreen PACT does not seem to be working as a site of citizen-led services, suggesting that such governmentality projects may be overly simplistic and naïve (for example see Walkerdine et al 2010, Hughes 2007) and there is a need to focus on more nuanced situated locality factors which include community, occupational, and institutional identities.

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