


# Young People as Co-producers in Policing across England. An Evaluation of the 'Youth Commission' on Police and Crime

Samantha Burns 

Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York, York UK

*This paper discusses a recent study on three 'Youth Commission' on police and crime projects. Professional viewpoints were interpreted to understand how they valued young people's participation and made sense of their experiences and capabilities. Framed within policing reforms, the 'Youth Commission' projects regard young people as co-producers, who work in partnership with professionals to address police and crime issues. The focus is upon professionals and their relationships with young people for transformative participation and social outcomes. Working in partnerships showed interdependency but identifies further challenges if professionals do not truly value young people's participation. © 2018 John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children's Bureau*

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## Introduction

Allegedly, police disregard young peoples' needs, whilst relationships between these two groups have not been positive (Graham and Karn, 2013). This could relate to representations of young people as socially problematic and therefore excluded from police community engagement initiatives, such as Independent Advisory Groups (Graham and Karn, 2013). Despite this, young people are considered a vulnerable group and the most likely to be criminalised than any other age group (Muncie, 2015). So, it becomes evident that relationships between police and young people need to be addressed.

Police reforms occurred across England to address relationships between the police service and the public. These reforms were promoted through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act (2011). This underlined changing governance principles of localism, democracy, accountability and social responsibility (Lister, 2013). Lister (2013) argues the most radical reform from this legislation was the statutory introduction of democratically elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). This new role sought to overcome the 'democratic deficit' of policing by building stronger relationships between the public and the police (Lister and Rowe, 2016). It is assumed that placing the police into wider social, cultural, political and economic contexts, would be sufficient to democratically enhance the police service. The Government also claimed how reforms would give more power to the public to solve their crime problems (Cabinet Office, 2010). This included a greater focus upon the police being more responsive to vulnerable groups and their needs, offering empowerment opportunities (Lister and Rowe, 2016). As such, the effort to build better relationships between police and young people can be made visible through the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime.

This paper provides a background around the concept of youth participation and places it within a public service context. It will show that ideas of youth participation in the field of policing have rarely been pursued. The discussion of youth participation literature also recognises the importance of relationships with professionals when recommending

'transformative participation'. Then, findings of a recent study on the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime are drawn upon. The focus will be on how young people were valued in the projects from the viewpoints of professionals who worked alongside them. This includes professional's attitudes and beliefs towards the project and how this translated into beliefs about young people's capabilities. Following this, the paper will reflect upon the challenges and contradictions of partnership working between professionals and young people in these projects. Objectives of accountability, social responsibility and empowerment will also be considered, to see how the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime projects can support police reforms.

### The 'Youth Commission' on police and crime

The 'Youth Commission' on police and crime was established by a social enterprise in 2013 to *provide a platform for young people to influence policing and crime prevention in their area* (Leaders Unlocked, 2017). The projects became facilitated within some regional police areas across England (Leaders Unlocked, 2017). The 'Youth Commission' defines itself as an independent group of volunteers. This group comprises of 25–30 young people aged 14–25 from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Leaders Unlocked, 2017). The 'Youth Commission' involves these stages of work;

1. Provided with skills training to prepare and present workshops;
2. Become 'peer researchers' through engaging with a wider group of young people, listening to experiences on policing and crime topics across their local communities;
3. Analyse data and work in partnership with the PCC to put forward policy recommendations to support crime prevention initiatives;
4. Present findings and recommendations at a conference to the police service and local youth agencies, ensuring their voices are heard (Leaders Unlocked, 2018).

It is expected that young people will participate in the field of policing through policy making and community engagement processes. This offers a structured, staged process of youth participation in both organisation and community settings, which aligns with literature regarding methods of successful youth participation (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster, 2003; Gallagher, 2008; Landsdown, 2003; Tisdall, 2009). Objectives of the 'Youth Commission' projects provide positive skill development and empowerment for young people, whilst actively working in partnership with the PCC and police service for crime prevention. Subsequently, the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime can be viewed as a hybrid form of youth participation which aims to improve public services and support young peoples' needs.

### Youth participation

Across many societies, human development theories influence both policy and sociocultural perspectives of young people (Kehily, 2007). A human development perspective views young people as 'adults in the making' which is usually measured through a linear measurement of age (Arthur, 2015). This emphasises their powerlessness, passivity and incompetence as individuals (Checkoway, 2011). Subsequently, they can be; socially constructed as vulnerable, dependent upon adult support for development, subjugated to adult decision making, and brought into institutions of adult power (Arthur, 2015; Barnes and others, 2007). However, young people are also valued as 'beings' with democratic rights to acquire decision making power (Thomas, 2007; Tisdall, 2017). From this, the view of 'adults in the making' has been challenged, as widespread recognition of youth participation has been growing.

When exploring participation in public policy, an initial typology of citizen participation was created by Arnstein (1969), whom critically promoted that; partnerships, delegated power and citizen control are the only meaningful acts of participation. Hart (1992) later specified this typology towards children and young people. Hart (1992) looked closely at power relations between adults and young people. He proposed tokenistic forms of participation are pursued, suggesting that 'youth led' initiatives are the most empowering and authentic forms of youth participation. Although both critical theorisations are widely cited, they are considered too simplistic for the varied youth participation initiatives that are currently being practiced across diverse environments (Head, 2011). Therefore, these theories now undermine the complexity and diversity of youth participation initiatives. Nevertheless, they can be useful normative frameworks to challenge youth participation within public services and organisations.

Other scholars recognise the concept of youth participation has become unhelpful and confusing to determine, which contributes to many uncritical practices (Farthing, 2012; Gallagher, 2008; Thomas, 2007). For example, one report cited 35 models of youth participation (Karsten, 2011). Moreover, the justifications for youth participation are rarely reflected upon by adults (Farthing, 2012). Critical understandings even view youth participation as a control mechanism for socially problematic youth (Bessant, 2003; Fergusson, 2016). Therefore, youth participation is a highly normative concept, framed in a multitude of ways. Despite the broad, confusing conceptualisations of youth participation, this paper loosely views youth participation as a process where young people have decision making power (Farthing, 2012). The defining feature of decision-making power situates with public service reforms in England, understanding that youth participation can now be placed in a public service context.

### *Co-production*

Youth work in England has now gained interest in the concept of co-production (Tisdall, 2017). Ostrom and others (1978) first introduced co-production within community policing in America. Their evaluation emphasised partnerships between police and communities were essential for effective crime prevention (Ostrom and others, 1978). Since then, co-production has been limited in policing, but has been utilised across other public services for improved social outcomes (Loeffler, 2016). The idea of 'co-production' identifies citizens as active participants in reforms of public service delivery (Loeffler, 2016; Tisdall, 2017). For young people, this can challenge dominant views of them being powerless, passive and incompetent.

Tisdall (2017) argued the concept of co-production offers a 'transformative' aspect to youth participation. She advocates 'horizontal relationships', where power is shared equally and professionals are held to account in youth participation initiatives (Tisdall, 2017). Young people are trusted as important resources because professionals can utilise their skills, knowledge and expertise (Tisdall, 2017). What strikes the most from Tisdall's (2017) discussion is suggesting public service professionals also become dependent upon young people for support through 'interdependency'. This offers the potential to completely challenge youth development perspectives by finding young people fully capable to participate in public service reforms. Interdependency formed between public service professionals and young people can prove that young people no longer need to be viewed as passive, powerless and incompetent.

Examples of co-production have already portrayed young peoples' expertise and experiences (Tisdall, 2017; Zlotowitz and others, 2016). This included how young people desired to gain trusted relationships with public service professionals (Zlotowitz and others, 2016). Yet, knowledge is still limited about whether the professionals involved could value young peoples' participation and partnership working. Therefore, it is necessary to continue

understanding the value of youth participation from the perspective of professionals. It can be questioned whether professionals have similar desires towards young people.

*Problems of partnership working*

Partnerships are deemed necessary for improving public services, however, problems occur when professionals do not value young people’s skills, knowledge and expertise (Checkoway, 2011; Tisdall, 2017). Professionals can hold negative assumptions, distrust young people’s capabilities, and fear losing control and power (Willow, 2002). These assumptions can be influenced from dominant human development ideas and normative beliefs about young people. This inhibits transformative ideas of youth participation to emerge, because professionals believe they are the experts, even though young people are experts of their own experiences (Checkoway, 2011). Elsewhere, this has been defined as ‘the professionals know best dilemma’ (Burns, 2018). Moreover, many professionals ‘respond’ rather than ‘transform’, which means they extract information from young people rather than meaningfully engage with them (Tisdall, 2017). Figure 1 is created below to establish conceptual differences between youth participation being theorised as either responsive or transformative.

Previous studies identified how professionals devalued young people’s expertise across education, health and police services (Barnes and others, 2007; Milbourne, 2009; Walmsley, 2015; Willow, 2002). In general, all studies shared limited trust and confidence in young people, which caused conflict and showed that professionals feared losing power in youth participation initiatives (Walmsley, 2015; Willow, 2002). Subsequently, co-production provides new ideas of horizontal relationships and interdependency between professionals and young people. Yet, problems may persist when these ideas are implemented into practice. Further exploration is required to determine whether transformative relationships in youth participation projects can be achieved.

<i>Responsive</i>	<i>Transformative</i>
<b>Professionals</b> ↓ <b>Young people</b>	<b>Professionals ↔ Young people</b>
<b>Vertical relationship</b> <b>No meaningful engagement</b> <b>Adults retain decision making power</b> <b>Extract information</b> <b>Adults are the experts</b> <b>Mistrust</b> <b>Conflict</b> <b>False empowerment</b> <b>No professional accountability</b>	<b>Horizontal relationship</b> <b>Partnership approach</b> <b>Shared decision making power</b> <b>Interdependency</b> <b>Experts by experience</b> <b>Trust and reciprocity</b> <b>Cooperation and coproduction</b> <b>Empowerment</b> <b>Shared accountability and responsibility</b>

Figure 1. Concepts of ‘responsive’ and ‘transformative’ youth participation.

*Notes:* The conceptual framework identifies the disparity between responsive and transformative youth participation on a relational level between professionals and young people. This figure allows for a framing of analysis when identifying youth participation in a public service context. Relationships can include both responsive and transformative concepts.

Furthermore, empowerment is viewed fundamental to youth participation by addressing unequal power relations in society (Bessant, 2003). Initially, it is assumed that participation leads to empowerment. This coincides with 'partnerships' as the first ladder rung by Arnstein (1969) and 'youth-led' proposed initiatives by Hart (1992) to formulate true participation and empowerment. However, Barnes and others (2007) has uncovered limitations of empowerment, which are captured in the idea of 'institutional resistance'. In local youth forums, rather than empowering young people, adults drew them into new 'fields of power' because decisions were still made by adults on behalf of young people (Barnes and others, 2007). The professional role of adults can therefore be problematic in the aim for empowerment and transformative participation. Holding professionals to account can challenge their professional expertise, institutional practices, normative beliefs, and attitudes towards young people.

### *Participation in the field of policing*

In the field of policing, professional's attitudes towards young people are more critical (Walmsley, 2015). Partnership working can prove more difficult to achieve because young people can fear punishment and be reluctant to engage with police (Creaney, 2014). Elsewhere, Haines and Case (2015) suggest that partnership working may support prevention of youth offending and break negative stereotypes of young people. To promote youth participation, professional commitment supported by an institutional culture is arguably required (Hart and Thompson, 2009). The All Party Parliamentary Group for Children (2014) reported on relationships between children and the police. They commented how projects, including the 'Youth Commission', can build trust for improved relationships (All Party Parliamentary Group for Children 2014). Therefore, participation in the field of policing is being welcomed.

On the other hand, Walmsley (2015) conducted research on a police and young people 'together project'. Based in community settings, he found that police officers were patronising towards young people. Negative attitudes towards the project stemmed from wider organisation changes in the police service (Walmsley, 2015). Although, this project focused solely on community engagement, these community engagement initiatives did not appear to fully provide young people with decision making power understood through more 'transformative' youth participation in public service organisations.

From previous findings, it can be argued that specific practices of youth participation each require their own empirical analysis. In addition, qualitative research investigating youth participation in the field of policing comes at an important time of public sector reform. These reforms recognise a need to understand whether professionals encourage the transformative nature of co-production, with regards to principles of partnership working, horizontal relationships and interdependency. Therefore, in-depth understandings of how professionals valued young people's capabilities, skills and expertise are now uncovered. The study hereafter discusses how professionals made sense of young people involved in the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime projects across England.

### **Method**

This paper reports on a recent qualitative study that followed a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). At the time of the study, there were seven 'Youth Commission' projects ongoing with PCCs and police services across regions in England. The study focused on three projects. The social enterprise overseeing the projects determined these were the most established. I named these; Area A, B, and C for anonymity purposes (Flick, 2014). Area A was in the South East of England and was first to establish a 'Youth Commission' on police and crime, remaining active for four years. Area B was in the North West, and Area C in the East of England. These projects had been active for two years.

The social enterprise provided a contact email for one professional leading the project in each area. I sent initial emails to the lead professionals and found Area A was most responsive to the study. I later discovered that only Area A had an official role of 'Youth Commission Coordinator', whereas the other areas relied on staff to accommodate the 'Youth Commission' as an additional duty. These contacts became my gatekeepers. I was heavily reliant upon them for access.

Access is considered an important part of qualitative research. Although access into criminal justice organisations can prove difficult, because of their closed nature and assumed reluctance of professionals to be involved in research (Westmarland, 2011). Sharing my own previous examples of voluntary work with the police helped alleviate some difficulties of access, which could be defined as using 'insider knowledge' (Flick, 2014). Though, I still encountered delayed and fragmented communication with the gatekeepers.

I travelled to each area to conduct face to face, semi-structured interviews (King and Horrocks, 2010). The location of interviews was decided by the gatekeepers. In Area A, interviews were held at the PCC office. In Area B, interviews were at police headquarters. In Area C, interviews were at both the PCC office and police headquarters. The power of the gatekeeper meant I was not told about the total number of professionals who had agreed to be interviewed until I arrived at the interview locations. The total number of professionals working in each 'Youth Commission' project was not shared with me. There were 11 participants in total. This included; four participants from Area A, three from area B and three from area C. The total involved nine male participants and two female participants. Ethical procedures were undertaken by instruction of the University of York ethics committee. All participants gave informed consent and were given the right to withdraw. Data were kept securely, and all efforts were made to ensure that no harm was caused.

It is argued that a small interview group can identify a problem with credibility and generalisability in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). This study had no intention to generalise as it focused on individual attitudes and viewpoints. Also, with limited knowledge as a researcher, I assumed that there were a small number of professionals working directly alongside their 'Youth Commission' on police and crime. I reflected on my relationship with the gatekeepers (Charmaz, 2006). At the time I did not challenge the credibility of information they provided. Although, perhaps I was overly conscious of the power relations between myself and the professionals involved in the study.

The focus of the study was to interview professionals working directly with young people in their 'Youth Commission'. The professional roles included; one PCC, six senior PCC professionals, one police chief superintendent, two police superintendents and one human resources manager. The participants' diversity of experience and knowledge were recognised. Equally, it was identified that a higher number of participants were from the PCC office rather than the police service. Surprisingly, no professionals from the police service were interviewed in Area A, even though their 'Youth Commission' had been active the longest. I anticipated only interviewing senior professionals limited what can be known about each 'Youth Commission' project. At the same time, interviews with senior professionals were possible because they authorised time and office space for interviews to be conducted.

Individual perspectives, attitudes and beliefs of the professionals towards young peoples' capabilities were explored during the interviews. Constructivist grounded theory puts emphasis on individual viewpoints (Charmaz, 2006). This supports interviews to be an appropriate qualitative method for this study. Although, Silverman (2011) states that the problem with interviews is what people say and what people do can be very different. Therefore, a disparity between voice and action from the participants' construction of experiences can occur.

To overcome this, I proposed that the interviews were an opportunity for participants to self-reflect on their partnership working with young people and valuation of the project.

Constructivist grounded theory offers flexible guidelines for an inductive approach to the research process and an interpretivist standpoint of the social world (Charmaz, 2006). The importance of co-constructing knowledge between researcher and participant within the study was also recognised (Charmaz, 2017). I remained critical and reflexive throughout the study, adopting the idea of ‘methodological self-consciousness’ (Charmaz, 2017). Interview data were collected using a topic guide and audio recorder. Full verbatim transcripts and memos were created to develop ideas. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state that transcripts can become impoverished and decontextualised interpretations of interview conversations. Therefore, greater emphasis was pursued upon the researcher being a valuable tool of co-creation in the research process. Further information from ‘Youth Commission’ reports and websites were also analysed to support the interview data. Then, all data sources were combined, and a multiple staged coding approach was used. Coding is considered a rigorous approach to analysing qualitative data (Charmaz, 2006). The coding approach allowed for themes to arise. Some themes were chosen for discussion in this paper.

### Evaluation of the ‘Youth Commission’ on police and crime

These findings share professional viewpoints from ‘Youth Commission’ on police and crime projects, alongside critical discussions regarding how they made sense of young peoples’ capabilities. The participants shared various examples of their ‘Youth Commission’ being involved with aspects of community policing and crime prevention, which are summarised here;

- Involved in police training on how to engage with young people;
- Setting up a local youth community court;
- Supporting police campaigns on topics important to young people;
- Involved in scoring bids for funding grants;
- Creating surveys to seek views of young people;
- Being consulted on a police strategy;
- Evidence panels to share policy recommendations with police experts;
- Involved in a feedback panel for senior officer police recruitment process;
- Produced a film about police response to young people suspected of committing crime;
- Represented young people in meetings on police effectiveness and accountability.

The extensive list of examples shared above implies young people were engaged in co-production across the police service. However, it does not explain professionals’ attitudes and viewpoints towards the young people involved. These particular findings from the interviews are now explored in-depth. For effective co-production principles of interdependency and partnership working to be practiced in a public service context, valuing young people as resources has been recognised as a key component.

#### *(De)valuing young people as resources*

In a public service context, young people participate as ‘experts by experience’, bringing valuable resources into public services (Tisdall, 2017). The participants expressed some value in young peoples’ capabilities through recognising their array of experiences, knowledge and skills;

The main thing they bring is their own perspectives on things and knowledge of things that young people are doing.

(Engagement and Communication Officer, Area A)

Nonetheless, some participants also simultaneously dismissed young peoples' skills which portrayed a paradox, whereby adults say they value young people but actually hold underlying beliefs of devaluing their abilities;

they've volunteered to do it, but you know, they've got no presentation skills, no additional skills to do that but they just did it.

(Superintendent, Area B)

They are great, but you need a great deal of patience... I wouldn't say it's like herding cats, but it can be close.

(Senior Performance and Policy Development Officer, Area A)

Therefore, these participants may be unaware they hold corresponding notions of devaluing young people's capabilities, which challenges aims of youth participation (Barnes and others, 2007; Milbourne, 2009; Walmsley, 2015; Willow, 2002). Although, the participants did give a sense of how they were impressed by young peoples' involvement, so perhaps there is still potential to transform individual attitudes towards valuing young peoples' capabilities in order to create horizontal relationships and successful partnership working.

### *The hierarchy of professional expertise*

Partnership working is a fundamental aspect of participation (Arnstein, 1969). To support successful partnerships, professionals can offer their expertise to young people for knowledge development to co-produce. It is considered important to empower young people through knowledge and skill development (Burns, 2018). Yet, this may cause tension for transformative youth participation. Some professionals in the 'Youth Commission' believed that it was important to empower young people they were working alongside through knowledge development;

I can't expect them to go and run a workshop with young people in a school or wherever if they haven't had that kind of background knowledge... they need to have that information to give them the confidence to deliver well.

(Youth Commission Coordinator, Area A)

This participant in Area A legitimised developmental aims of youth participation whereby professionals can build young peoples' capabilities and knowledge (Farthing, 2012). This professional seemed to believe that they were improving partnership working, and wanted to educate young people so they could offer 'youth led' workshops which are supposed to be the most empowering form of participation. Youth participation has no meaning if young people do not have the capacity to participate (Farthing, 2012). So, professionals are still recognised as important facilitators for supporting young people's capabilities and improving relationships in participatory initiatives.

Although, in Area C, this participant believed their role was solely to educate young people, and believed their knowledge about policing was more valuable;

So the relationship between me and young people is me educating them.

(Superintendent, Area C)

This viewpoint above is arguably a narrow understanding of youth participation. The participant dismissed the process of giving young people decision making powers and did not share attitudes about working in partnerships with young people. This did not encourage transformative participation, with no intention to change power relations between young people and professionals.

Similarly, both examples show that professionals unintentionally presume that young people have limited knowledge and expertise in police and crime issues. Therefore, these



attitudes may inhibit the idea of 'horizontal relationships', whilst supporting how a 'professionals know best dilemma' can occur (Burns, 2018; Tisdall, 2017). The attitudes and beliefs of professionals propose a hierarchy of professional expertise compared with young people's expertise and knowledge. At times, it was considered whether this was only police professionals who held these attitudes towards young people. However, similar comments came from both PCC and police staff, so hierarchy of professional expertise is not exclusive to the police service.

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that some participants did share how they worked alongside young people and welcomed their expertise. Professionals facilitate young peoples' ideas in the 'Youth Commission', though it is interpreted that these participants below still held greater value to their professional roles, by suggesting that their guidance was required;

Outlining the work that they've done and the findings they have produced was rewarding, but then I give them a steer and some direction of travel.

(Chief Superintendent, Area B)

If it was just us telling them what to do I don't think they would think it would work... But ultimately you've still got to be there... you've got to be there to provide that guidance.

(Senior Performance and Policy Development Officer, Area A)

The importance of professionals are acknowledged, yet these comments continue to illuminate a hierarchy placed upon professional expertise in youth participation whereby professionals 'steer' young people. This problematises transformative youth participation ideas, by creating barriers for horizontal, trusted relationships that are recommended for partnership working and empowerment (Burns, 2018; Tisdall, 2017). Professional attitudes and beliefs may still be largely guided by the developmental perspective of young people, which maintains a vertical relationship between professionals and young people. Professionals still believe that young people are dependent on them for knowledge and skill development. Professionals placing too much value on their expertise, prevents young people being able to equally support professionals for effective co-production to improve police service delivery.

### *Interdependency and informalities*

A method of peer-peer research is used by the 'Youth Commission' to gather information for improving police service delivery and discussing solutions for change (Leaders Unlocked 2017). Across all areas, this method was described as 'the Big Conversation'. This involved the 'Youth Commission' running workshops in schools and organisations to share information and prompt conversations about police and crime topics. These participant's shared their views;

What we find from feedback of young people who've gone and done workshops, they really appreciate it being done by someone nearer their own age.

(Youth Commission Coordinator, Area A)

A lot of young people don't want to talk to the police and don't want to talk to people like me who are sat in offices, so the conversations they are having amongst themselves... you would never get from a formal consultation and engagement process.

(Policy Officer, Area C)

This highlights how professionals viewed the importance of young people for gathering information to support police reforms. This also exemplified a flexible and informal method of work, which appeared as a distinctive way of engaging with young people in the field of policing. The participants believed conversations between young people in the workshops allowed for police and crime topics to be discussed, presuming young people would be

honest and find solutions to improving police services. This could help to overcome the aforementioned relationship barriers between police and young people (Creaney, 2014). Therefore, 'the Big Conversation' was considered essential to the 'Youth Commission', and an influential way to build trust between young people and professionals. Most importantly, professionals became dependent on young people for sharing information from the conversations. Therefore, interdependency formed between young people and professionals.

Interdependency in partnerships shows how young people are valued as important resources by professionals which can build trust and transformative participation (Burns, 2018; Tisdall, 2013, 2017). Nevertheless, whilst professionals recognised the value of young people having informal conversations about police and crime topics with other young people, one participant expressed discomfort towards this;

They may have spoken to thousands of people, but we don't know how the information has been handled by the young people, though I don't want to lose the strengths of that approach because they get a sense of how people are feeling.

(Policy Officer, Area C)

Even though the 'Youth Commission' was able to seek unique information from young people to enhance the police service, there was still some hesitation amongst participants to trust young people's capabilities. The participant above expressed conflicted attitudes as they recognised merging of formal and informal methods of working. This peer-peer research method invited professionals to learn and incorporate new ways of working with young people that challenges professionals roles and knowledge. Actually, this can be a particular strength of co-production and enhance interdependency. Within these interdependent relationships, professionals can also learn and adapt new informal ways of working to increase flexibility and efficiency. Despite the discomfort, it is shown that these methods of youth participation provide transformative solutions and opportunities for professionals to both improve working practice and trust in young peoples' capabilities.

### *Using age to measure capabilities*

The concept of age was a common measurement to determine how capable young people were at being able to participate in the Youth Commission. This participant expressed;

This year some of them are a bit younger so their capacity to deliver isn't as great.

(Engagement and Communication Officer, Area A)

The general attitude was that 'younger' people were compared as incompetent, which dismissed the wider sociocultural contexts of young peoples' lives. These attitudes towards young people are evidently guided by theories of human development (Arthur, 2015). Capabilities were based around the normative linear measurement of age, which relates to legal definitions of children and young people in England (Arthur, 2015; Tisdall, 2017). Moreover, in a criminal justice context, this shows the illogical contradictions of believing that young people are responsible for their criminal behaviour, but not equally capable of sharing their experiences and knowledge to work alongside professionals within policing (Arthur, 2015; Haines and Case, 2015). When questioned about understandings of young people working in the 'Youth Commission', one participant claimed;

well the transition... you've got age, so by 10 you're criminally responsible in the criminal justice system and its 10-17, so over 18 and you're classed as an adult.

(Senior Performance and Policy Development Officer, Area A)

This shows that it is highly likely that professionals use legal age definitions to construct their beliefs and attitudes towards young people. The 'Youth Commission' can challenge legal boundaries of age and provides an opportunity for a broader group of young people to participate. Alternatively, this may be confusing to professionals who use rigid legal guidelines. The same participant reflects that;

it almost needs to be like all bagged up and just be one age, so 17 is everything rather than different stages and then everything works for that, the criminal justice system, health, social services, everything just under one age.

(Senior Performance and Policy Development Officer, Area A)

Therefore, the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime highlights implications for professionals to trust young people's capacity to participate. They may ignore that young people can already be viewed as responsible individuals and focus on young people's weaknesses and incompetence, rather than their strengths. Professionals cannot always appreciate the complex diversity of skills and knowledge young people already acquire (Willow, 2002). These findings further support the hierarchy of professional expertise, by showing how professionals view the benefits of youth participation, but still use developmental capacity building and contradictory legal guidelines. This continues to view vertical relationships between young people and professionals which does not appear to offer a transformative nature to youth participation. This isolates youth participation from wider debates about co-production and police accountability.

#### *A fragile focus on police accountability*

The 'Youth Commission' aims to increase police accountability and social responsibility (Lister, 2013). When participants reflected on their local 'Youth Commission' holding police to account, there were varied understandings of how this was achieved. Viewpoints from PCC professionals believed the role of the 'Youth Commission' was to explicitly hold police to account. This differed to participants from a policing background who did not talk about police accountability. Describing the impact on police accountability, a PCC professional shared;

there's examples of how young people have been heavily handled... and how police have value judgements of young people because they are from a particular area or family, and a lot of the work the youth commission has done is to bring that out from under the surface.

(Policy Officer, Area C)

Here shows another strength of the 'Youth Commission' exposing the police to reflect on their operational practice with young people. However, this information was only shared with senior officers and was mostly interpreted as a way of extracting information from young people. Therefore, if the value of youth participation is not fully shared throughout the police organisation, it questions how transformative this can be, and whether the recent police reforms are truly being adhered to;

At the conference, we had senior officers saying the right things and pledging to take it away, but really, there has not been an awful lot of action done yet.

(Policy Officer, Area C)

This feeling was strongly voiced in Area C. Whereas in Area A, the participants expressed how the police were more supportive, even though no police were invited for interview. In Area A, the 'Youth Commission' had developed into a role of educating young people about their rights, responsibilities, crimes and consequences of their behaviour;

It is still trying to make young people accept that there are rules they need to abide by and that there are consequences, but without ruining their future life chances.

(Engagement and Communication Officer, Area A)

This comment shows detachment from the 'Youth Commission' aims of holding police to account and being more responsive to young peoples' needs. A critical viewpoint presupposes that this may be another mechanism of control towards young peoples' behaviour (Bessant, 2003; Fergusson, 2016). Subsequently, if co-production with young people is sought after within the field of policing, young people as co-producers, problem solvers and 'experts by experience' needs to remain appreciated. Solely thinking about young people and their responsibilities detaches from viewing young people as empowered decision-making partners. Professionals in the study did not reflect on their responsibilities in partnership working with young people, therefore the transformative nature of co-production may still be absent.

### *Participating in decision making at a senior level*

Young people being involved in decision making processes is a vital aspect of youth participation (Checkoway, 2011; Farthing, 2012). Participants viewed young people supporting police campaigns, voicing their own ideas and sharing their recommendations to influence policy and practice, as examples of decision making. In area A, another example shared was young people helping to make decisions on community grant giving;

We do try to involve them as much as possible, so we had a small grants funds, we had a pot of money for about £30,000 for hate crime projects, and we had young people come in and score the bids, and that was quite good actually.

(Senior Performance and Policy Development Officer, Area A)

This example could show young people making decisions, which offers empowerment and a sense of legitimacy towards youth participation. It can also be regarded as partnership working and an example of co-production (Tisdall, 2017). Although, these examples were only from individual senior level professionals. When asked if young people had participated across wider policing practice and service delivery, none of the participants could be confident in this;

I think we are slowly beginning to see some of the recommendations actually implemented... not all of them, but yeah, some of them.

(Communications and Engagement Officer, Area A)

Participants felt worried the 'Youth Commission' was not having impact 'on the ground'. This could be from wider organisational problems across the police service (Walmsley, 2015). These participants suggested;

There's probably more we can do to understand the impact it is having, and you know how at an operational level,

(Police and Crime Commissioner, Area C)

We need to make sure the youth commission is visible across the whole force, not just through people like me because I'm a specialist.

(Superintendent, Area B)

Across the projects studied, young people could engage with senior PCC and police professionals, assuming opportunities for young people to gain decision-making power and engage in partnership working. This is in contrast with previous research on police engagement with young people (Walmsley, 2015). The notion of institutional resistance could be applied in

these projects, meaning power was not really shared with young people (Barnes and others, 2007). These examples suggest that the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime may not fully offer transformative participation because horizontal relationships and power sharing were not fully uncovered.

In addition, senior level support of the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime was recognised, though it cannot be known if these attitudes towards young people are shared more widely. Subsequently, it is uncertain whether organisational practices, culture and attitudes within the police service support youth participation. These projects were only known by a small number of professionals across the organisations, most of whom were not even from a policing background. So, it was difficult to know if wider cultures and attitudes supporting youth participation actually exist and questions how 'transformative' can youth participation be at an organisational level in policing.

Furthermore, participants could not confidently express any social outcomes in terms of police accountability and building stronger relationships between the police and young people (Lister and Rowe, 2016). The organisational challenges in these projects can be reflected upon when aiming for effective co-production in policing that extends upon relations between individual professionals and young people. Establishing transformative participation on a relational level is important. Although, perhaps youth participation needs to also become embedded into an organisational culture, which fully recognises and values young people as resources for improved service delivery, so the transformative nature of co-production can become apparent.

## Conclusion

Across England, seven 'Youth Commission' on police and crime projects enabled a form of co-production to occur. Young people were invited to be decision-makers, problem solvers and active co-producers in community policing and crime prevention. In the field of policing, there have been minimal studies on co-production between young people and professionals. Likewise, co-production projects view young people as valuable resources, but how young people are valued by professionals has been somewhat ignored. Therefore, this paper revealed individual attitudes and beliefs from senior police professionals involved in three projects, sharing their experiences of working with young people. The concepts of partnership working, horizontal relationships and interdependency were discussed further, to consider how 'transformative' co-production can be for young people and professionals in police and crime issues.

These findings confirmed that professionals valued the peer-peer research method as a successful youth-led practice. This shows opportunities for transformative participation can occur on a relational level, if professionals truly value young people's ways of working, whilst trusting their capabilities. Despite conflicted attitudes and discomfort shown, building interdependency through the 'Youth Commission' was able to challenge professionals' working practice, which can also be transformative. Willingness to change formalities of public service engagement may be required for successful co-production with young people. This can increase flexibility and efficiency of the police service to become more responsive to young people's needs.

However, young people in the projects still had limited decision-making power, and many participation examples were perceived as responsive more than transformative. At times, relationships were more vertical than horizontal. This may stem from deeply held beliefs influenced by the youth development paradigm. This was especially noticeable when professionals believed their role was to educate, or when they measured the value of young people's knowledge and capabilities through age. These findings challenge ideas of co-

production because professionals devalue young people and place a hierarchy on their professional expertise. Moreover, police professionals made more obvious presumptions that young people were not 'experts by experience' in crime prevention. However, with only three senior police officers able to contribute their knowledge in this particular study, analysis of co-production activities with the wider police service was restricted. It is also still unclear if the 'Youth Commission' on police and crime formed successful partnership working with police in the community.

Theoretically, co-production empowers and alleviates hierarchal power relations through emphasis on partnerships. However, these findings challenge ideas of co-production with young people in policing again, because the focus on partnership working actually disregards the wider organisational cultures, practices and power relations which can impact beliefs and attitudes towards young people in a public service context. More specifically, interpreting youth participation initiatives in the field of policing has signified the closed, formal and rigid nature of the police as a public service, alongside different attitudes between PCC and police professionals. The findings in this study show how these differences can be practical barriers to effective co-production, especially with regards to holding professionals to account. Partnerships are important, but this study proves that more evaluation is required beyond a relational level, to understand how the 'Youth Commission' projects can be valued across the wider police service.

Practices of co-production between young people and professionals appear more sustainable when there is a dedicated professional role facilitating youth participation. As such, the project in Area A could be viewed as 'transformative participation' when professionals recognise the requirement to work in partnership with young people, and then the structure of the organisation changes to accommodate this. Subsequently, this shows that transformative participation needs to occur on multiple levels. Yet, there is a highly contradictory claim of limited police involvement in Area A. So, even though PCCs can be democratically beneficial for young people, the small and fragmented projects presents further challenges towards the transformative nature of co-production between young people, PCCs and police across England. Therefore, this paper is reluctant to claim co-production between young people and the police can be implemented successfully.

Overall, individual professionals involved in the 'Youth Commission' on police were enthusiastic about youth participation, but still patronised their capabilities to co-produce. Youth participation is considered transformative when professionals recognise young people as partners and value their expertise, then also accommodate organisational change to share power with young people and form interdependent, horizontal relationships. As previously argued, professionals would benefit from holding themselves more accountable and engage in critical self-reflection on their partnership approach with young people. Understanding how their attitudes and beliefs devalue young peoples' capabilities, and how interdependency is a fundamental aspect of co-production, can transform their working practice too.

Although, this paper regards it as too simplistic to just suggest ongoing critical reflection of professional's partnership working with young people. Further challenges highlighted in this paper need to be resolved with a broader analytical lens for co-production projects that goes beyond relationships between professionals and young people. The lens needs to view youth participation on multiple levels. This could include a wider organisational analysis of professional power dynamics, changing institutional cultures, attitudes and working practices, in order to support transformative participation with young people in a public service context. There is a continued need to fully understand if the transformative nature of young people as active problem solvers and co-producers in the field of policing can be pursued.

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Correspondence to: Samantha Burns, Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences, City University of Hong Kong, Kowloon, Hong Kong, Tel.: +852 95352618. E-mail: sburns2-c@my.cityu.edu.hk

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