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# Junior partners or equal partners? Civilian investigators and the blurred boundaries of police detective work

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## ABSTRACT

Fuelled by the declining numbers of warranted detectives and growing demand for non-traditional skill-sets within the police in England and Wales, non-warranted Civilian Investigators (CIs) were introduced by the Police Reform Act 2002 to enhance the police's investigative capacity. In the absence of existing research on CIs, this paper uses the junior partner thesis as an analytical lens through which to examine the nature of the CI role relative to that of warranted detectives. Findings point to an evolving 'equal partner' role for CIs, resulting in an expansive occupational remit which belies their place in the formal police organisational hierarchy as the complementary 'junior partners' of detectives. The article concludes by arguing for better accommodation of the CI role/remit within the police organisational infrastructure. Developing effective training and progression opportunities for CIs are essential if the police are to retain both their specialist skills-sets and the organisational memory they represent.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Civilianisation; detective;  
modernisation; blurring

## Introduction

Recent decades have seen much attention paid to the issue of 'plural policing' (Jones and Newburn 2006), the rise of a 'police extended family' (Johnston 2003) or a 'mixed economy' (Crawford *et al.* 2004) of policing, as scholars have sought to account for the diversity of actors now engaged in authorising and delivering policing alongside the public police. However, within this expanding field of research, few have acknowledged the intra-organisational dimensions of this trend and its impact on 'core' areas of police work, such as crime investigation. Like other police forces in the neo-liberal Anglosphere, the police of England and Wales (E&W) have engaged with civilianisation as a key pluralising strategy. Inspired by the principles of New Public Management – which precipitated the hiving-off of administrative and clerical support roles to cheaper-to-employ civilian staff during the 1980s (Home Office 1988) – the Police Reform Act 2002 introduced the Civilian Investigator (CI) as a new actor within the pluralised policing landscape of E&W. Alongside warranted detectives (DCs), CIs help to investigate crime and, at the Chief Officer's discretion, may be designated with certain enforcement powers (such as the power to undertake premises searches, seize property and, at the time of the research, the power to arrest a person at a police station for a further offence). Despite the frontline nature of their role/remit, and with comparable roles also operating in the US (Green 2016) and Canada (Kiedrowski *et al.* 2017), the contribution of CIs remains unexplored. The paucity of information about CIs is problematic. A burgeoning academic (O'Neill 2014, Wilson-Kovacs 2014) and policy (Winsor 2012, Home Office 2016) discourse has drawn attention to

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the importance of the 'civilian element' for police effectiveness and legitimacy in the contemporary period. The absence of information about CIs obscures them from consideration within such debates, placing limits on the police's ability to respond effectively to the changing conditions of policing. Considered within the context of declining detective numbers (HMIC 2017) and growing public concern over the effectiveness of the contemporary investigative response (Tong and Bowling 2006, p. 323) – in particular, involving 'vulnerable' people (HMIC 2015) – there exists an urgency to better understand the nature and extent of CI involvement in the investigative process.

Reporting on original data collected from the first (to my knowledge) study of CIs operating within police forces in England, this article fills this current gap in knowledge by examining the role and occupational positioning of CIs relative to that of detectives within the police organisation. The 'junior partner thesis' (Kakalik and Wildhorn 1971) is used as a conceptual framework through which to examine the working relationship between CIs and DCs at both the level of the *occupation* (i.e. how they are treated and perceived by their detective colleagues and managers) and at the level of the *organisation* (i.e. their practical/structural 'fit' within the police's existing organisational infrastructure relative to that of detectives). In so doing, this article seeks to answer the question: *to what extent can CIs be conceptualised as the 'junior partners' or 'equal partners' of detectives with regard to the provision of investigative policing in the contemporary period?*

The central argument put forward is that the relationship between CIs and DCs is more complex than is currently being purported by fixed police organisation charts and job descriptions, with considerable 'boundary blurring' (Hoogenboom 1991) evident between the roles at both the level of the occupational and of the organisation. Findings reported in this paper thus point to a tension between the rhetoric and reality of the CI role in that while CIs are in many ways the 'equal partners' of DCs at the level of the occupation, they continue to be relegated to the status of 'junior partners' at the level of the organisation. This dissonance highlights the fragmented nature of contemporary 'detective work', as traditional and well-established divisions of labour within 'core' areas of police work (such as crime investigation) continue to be broken-down under the conditions of pluralisation. Within these conditions, a need exists for conceptual clarification and for a better road map of the ways in which the shift in the 'governance of detective work' is rendered operational in practice. This paper thus contributes to a growing body of evidence on the impact of recent pluralising trends on 'core' police work areas, namely patrol (O'Neill 2015), custody (Skinns 2011) and criminal investigation (Cope 2004), and offers new insight into the changing nature of police investigative practice in England by examining the devolution of 'detective work' from warranted officers to non-warranted CIs. In doing so, it also calls for a more considered examination of the evolving recruitment, training and development needs of the contemporary investigative workforce and may thus prove helpful in informing debates about how to best respond to the current national 'policing crisis' (HMIC 2017, p. 15), as fewer officers seek to become detectives. At the conceptual level, this paper builds bridges between different parts of the plural policing literature and serves as the basis for a more comparative conversation about civilianisation.

The first part of this article sets out the conceptual framework to be used to analyse the empirical findings reported later in the article. This is followed by explication of the research methods that have been used to collect the data. Findings from the research are presented in the following two sections and deal with the style and extent of CI involvement in the investigative process at the occupational level as well as the 'fit' of CIs within the police's organisational infrastructure relative to that of detectives. The paper is concluded by a discussion of the research findings and their implications for the future trajectory of the police investigative process in E&W.

## Conceptual framework

This section describes the conceptual framework around which this article is framed. It delineates the concepts of 'junior partner' and 'equal partner' and how they are used here to analyse the role and 'fit' of the CI within the police occupational and organisational contexts.

The 'junior partner thesis' provides a useful analytical framework through which to examine relationships between CIs and their detective colleagues in the investigative units which were studied. The junior partner metaphor – as first proposed in the US Department of Corrections commissioned RAND Corporation report (Kakalik and Wildhorn 1971) – was one of the earliest attempts to conceptualise the relationship between the state and the private sector in respect of the provision of policing and security. The thesis takes the one-dimensional view that the policing functions performed by private agencies/organisations (e.g. 'in-house' investigations by commercial businesses) are largely supplementary to the activities of the 'public' police. Initially developed with a focus on the preventative role of private security (i.e. those individuals, organisations, and services other than the police whose primary business is the prevention of crime, loss, or harm to people, organisations, or facilities) reducing loss within 'corporate entities' (e.g. employee theft/fraud etc.) the junior partner thesis maintains that rather than challenging state authority as 'private armies', private security remain the junior partner engaged primarily as 'full service providers of visible crime prevention' (Bayley and Shearing 2001, p. 19). From this perspective, private operations are envisaged to be complementary, beginning where government operations stop; the private and public security domains are thus *not* perceived to be in competition with one other as private policing does not threaten the state's monopoly over the 'crime-fighting' function.

A lively discourse on the 'pluralisation of policing' since the 1990s has exposed the failure of the junior partner thesis to capture the extent of 'boundary blurring' (Hoogenboom 1991) evident between the state and the 'constellation of actors, agencies and processes' (Crawford 2014, p. 174) which now typify the contemporary policing and security landscape. The absence of a discernible hierarchy of provision (as envisaged by the junior partner thesis) has, for example, been noted by scholars in relation to the muddying of public-private functional remits (Shearing and Stenning 1983, p. 502); the willingness/ability of private security to enforce its own 'private justice' (Henry 1983; Meerts 2018); the increased marketisation of police services and functions (Skinns 2011, White 2014); as well as in relation to the projected size (Provost 2017, p. 20) and wealth of technical and specialist expertise (cf Button *et al.* 2007) held by the private sector relative to that of the state. Together, the complexity of these functional intersections has emphasised the variable role of non-state actors, as both 'junior' and 'equal' partners with the public police engaged in the co-production of 'security governance'; an endless 'new economy power relations' (Foucault 1982, p. 210).

Despite the nature and extent of blurring evident *beyond* the state, surprisingly little is known about the intra-organisational dimensions of this trend and its impact on functional (e.g. knowledge sharing) and power (e.g. coordination of provision) relations between policing forms/actors operating *within* the state. A number of scholars have begun to document the important role of 'police civilians' and their contribution within 'core' functional areas of police work, much of which belies traditional assumptions about the supportive/auxiliary and thus 'junior' status of police staff; for example, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) who work alongside uniformed constables to provide reassurance patrols through Neighbourhood Policing Teams (O'Neill 2014) and Civilian Detention Officers (CDOs) who perform cell welfare checks of suspects detained within the custody suite (Skinns 2011). Much of this work has highlighted the competitive, nature of the non-warranted/warranted division of labour. This has been noted most clearly in reference to 'mission creep', whereby staff have moved away from their original purpose by taking on new roles/functions; for example, PCSOs assisting with drugs raids (Cosgrove 2016) and CDOs 'booking-in' suspects to the custody suite (Skinns 2011). The difference between a cooperative/complementary and competitive relationship between officers and civilians has potentially drastically different implications for frontline policing. While a cooperative relationship might lead to enhanced service provision, a competitive relationship might cause a lack of coordination leading to 'role strain' and damage to police legitimacy.

In this article, I argue that, notwithstanding the complexity of the contemporary 'policing web' (Brodeur 2010), data collected in the course of this study are best presented within the broad framework of the junior partner thesis. This thesis affords an analytical lens through which to examine the

nature of functional boundary blurring *within* the police, specifically in relation to the hierarchy of investigative provision between CIs and DCs. Where CIs fall on the scale of complementarity (junior partner) to competition (equal partner) is first analysed at the *level of the occupation*; that is the social and functional dimensions which serve to define CI-DC interactions within the CID itself. Findings here are considered in relation to three core *occupational* themes which relate to the role of the CI as 'equal partners': *functional remit, skills and expertise* and *(CI) staffing*. Second, the extent to which CIs might be considered the 'junior partners' of DCs is considered at the *level of the organisation*; that is the structural conditions/parameters of CIs 'fit' within the police organisational infrastructure relative to that of DCs. Focus here is afforded to three elements broadly associated with the police infrastructure: *training, progression* and *job (in)security*. Engaging the junior partner model in such a way enables a more considered analysis of the impact of intra-organisational pluralisation on core functional areas of police work than has previously been the case. Translating the model's application to CIs and the governance of 'detective work' allows for a better appreciation the complex relationship(s) which exist between CIs and DCs within the contemporary police CID, including how the police are responding (if at all) to changing divisions of labour and shifting role boundaries.

## Methods

The research question posed in the introduction of this paper is answered based on qualitative and quantitative data gathered between June 2013 and March 2015. The principal source of information for the research is qualitative, consisting of 36 semi-structured interviews and 61.5 h of observational work conducted with CIs, DCs, police constables, civilian unit managers and senior police officers (including Detective Sergeants, Detective Inspectors and Detective Chief Inspectors) working within five distinct investigative units across two police forces (referred to in this article under the pseudonyms of *Newbank* and *Shorewick*) in England. CIs were interviewed and observed wherever they were located in both forces. At *Shorewick* this included in the Reactive Generalist Unit (GRU), Major Incident Team (MIT), Economic Crime Unit (financial investigation team) (ECU), Public Protection Unit (Domestic Abuse and Child Protection Teams) (PPU), and Crime Management Unit (Diary Team) (CMU). At *Newbank* this included, the Reactive Generalist Unit (GRU), Economic Crime Unit (financial investigation team) (ECU), Public Protection Unit (PPU), and Crime Management Unit (Prisoner Handling Team) (CMU). Observations were carried out in each force using a schedule and varied in context, scope and duration: CIs and DCs were observed operating within district level police stations, headquarters or co-located police buildings (e.g. council buildings the police shared with social care, housing etc.), within the police custody suite, on home visits with members of the public and during other routine out of station enquiries. CIs were observed when working individually and alongside DCs as part of a team within the CID suite. Since the research was concerned with delineating the working practices and occupational position of CIs relative to DCs, observational field notes were made in relation to working environments, particular activities and incidents, interactions and conversations between CIs and between DCs and other police officers, decision making practices and use of discretion and designated powers and emotions, attitudes and values expressed by CIs and their DC counterparts. Qualitative field notes and interview transcripts were analysed using the method of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) which involved systematic coding driven by a mixture of theory and data-led approaches.

Interviewees were approached through gatekeepers and snowball sampling. For each group of respondents, a slightly modified topic list was used, so as to take full advantage of the knowledge of the respondent. However, to ensure that the research question and sub-questions can be answered, the following topics were part of every interview: roles and responsibilities; training; perceptions of CIs; detective skill; occupational status. Interviews had an average duration of one hour and seven minutes and were conducted face-to-face. The majority of the interviews were with a single person however, two were conducted with two respondents simultaneously. When possible,

the interviews were audio-recorded to be transcribed verbatim at a later point. Only one participant did not consent to being audio-recorded. In this case, as with interviews undertaken ad-hoc while accompanying participants outside of the police station (e.g. taking a witness statement), extensive notes were taken.

19 (52.7%) interviewees in this research were female (14 CIs and 5 officers), the remaining 17 (42.2%) were male (13 CIs and 4 officers). None of the participants encountered at either Shorewick or Newbank were from BAME backgrounds and all worked in mixed warranted-officer teams. Most participants fall into the age group of 40–60 years old and have substantial (more than 5 years') work experience in the field of crime investigation. Participants were mixed in terms of their educational levels ranging from school-level attainment (e.g. O-Levels/GCSEs) and/or having being trained in the police organisation itself, to University degrees; at least three CI participants were identified as being educated to degree level.

Within the group of warranted officer participants, 13 were DCs (including 5 of Sergeant rank or above) and 4 were Police Constables (trainee DCs). Within the group of non-warranted CIs, 28 were *ex-officers* (i.e. individuals who had recently retired or left the police organisation having served as warranted constables) and 27 were *non-ex-officers* (i.e. individuals who whom have never been police constables). 53 CIs were employed by the police organisation and two were employed by private security agencies.

Quantitative data gathered via a semi-structured survey are also drawn upon where relevant. The survey was emailed to the Detective Chief Superintendent (DCS) of all 43 police forces in E&W. The process was repeated where forces failed to respond. Contact information for each force DCS was identified from force webpages and/or telephone calls to individual constabularies. Despite a low response rate of 33% (14 English forces), survey findings provide useful insight into the persistence of the CI trend beyond the two forces targeted for fieldwork and also point to inconsistency in CI profile and deployment between forces. The questionnaire asked questions about the deployment of CIs: whether CIs were currently being utilised in that force, in what capacity, how CIs were managed, who employed them (police or private sector) and also asked how police managers perceived the current and future contribution of CIs. Useful information was also gleaned from documents including CI and DC role profiles and job advertisements as well as Home Office data about the utilisation of 'designated persons' within police CID units in E&W at the time of the research (Dhani 2012). These data were also used to inform fieldwork site selection as they provided the only available information at that time about the likely presence of CIs within each police constabulary.

All data gathered are treated with utmost confidentiality and have been anonymised (using pseudonyms in place of participant (individual and force) names where necessary) to ensure that no information can be traced back to any respondent or his or her employer. No parts of this research were covert and informed consent was sought for all interviews.

## Findings

### ***Equal partners: CIs and the occupation***

The occupational experience of CIs was characterised at both forces by significant 'role blurring' and/or 'mission creep', whereby CIs had, over time, taken on new roles/tasks beyond their intended supportive remit. CIs were thus rarely found to be operating as the junior partners to detectives 'on the ground' and, rather, were more likely to be engaged in the co-production of detective work as 'equal partners'. The extent to which this was found to be the case at both forces is outlined in the section below with reference to three dominant occupational themes: *functional remit, skills and expertise, and staffing*.

*Functional Remit:* None of the CIs encountered at either force perceived their role to be junior to that of their detective counterparts in terms of their role/remit and thus generally considered the 'support staff' label to be a disingenuous and ill-considered reflection of their actual contribution:



No, it's not a support role at all; quite the opposite ... You are the main investigating officer, there's nobody else. There's no detective above me overseeing my job and who takes the responsibility for my job. It's on me. Ultimately if I don't investigate it properly it's on my neck isn't it, not theirs. (*Newbank, PPU, ex-officer CI*)

No, absolutely not. We're not a support role. I do the same work as detectives, I'm responsible for my own case load and I'm under the same kinds of pressures. I think it's a real misconception about this role that we're support staff, because in reality what we do, here anyway, is far from support. (*Shorewick, MIT, non-ex-officer CI*)

Similar dispositions regarding the supportive nature of the CI role/remit were expressed by warranted officers at both forces, pointing to the commensurate/equal partner status of CIs' in many cases:

There are some people who I've worked with who are civilian investigators that I don't see as being support. In fact, they had a lot more knowledge in some areas than I do about certain things. Some of them are more experienced than the DCs. (*Shorewick, GRU, DC*)

No, definitely not. Karen is brilliant at what she does. She knows what she's doing and she does the same as us. It's definitely not a support role. Not for her anyway. (*Newbank, GRU, Police Constable*)

Mirroring results of the survey, at Shorewick and Newbank CIs were found to be engaged in a wide range of investigation types ranging from the more general to the most serious and complex. These included burglary, assault, child and vulnerable adult abuse, sexual offences, fraud and financial crime, arson, kidnapping, drugs offences and murder. Contrary to their 'support' designation, ex-officer *and* non-ex-officer CIs were also observed interviewing suspects and complex (vulnerable) witnesses (e.g. children), undertaking disclosure on major enquiries and performing family liaison on murder investigations. Non-ex-officers were particularly involved in the interviewing witnesses and suspects at Newbank PPU and Newbank GRU and like DCs, operated with notable discretion, working autonomously as the main Officer in Charge (OIC) on their own caseloads.

At Shorewick, a number of ex-officer and non-ex-officer CIs were also performing supervisory roles in both formal and informal capacities. For non-ex-officers this included working as unit managers (at Shorewick PPU Domestic Abuse unit), as CCTV coordinator and as Missing Persons Search Coordinator (at Shorewick MIT). For ex-officer CIs, supervisory roles included as Family Liaison Coordinator and as Unit Resource Manager (at Shorewick MIT). At Newbank, one CI was found to be performing the role of 'acting-up sergeant' and had responsibility for workload allocation and/or supervising/advising the actions of less experienced members of personnel (including some detectives).

*Skills and Expertise:* The CIs observed and interviewed at Shorewick and Newbank ranged in length of service from two months to nine years, and in age from the late twenties into the sixties. Needless to say, with an age range such as this, CIs came to the role from a variety of backgrounds. Most had previous experience of working/volunteering for the police, either as warranted officers or members of police staff (e.g. as enquiry desk staff, PCSOs, Indexers, Special Constables etc.). In total, twenty-two of those encountered at Shorewick and six of those at Newbank were ex-police officers, though not all had previous experience working as detectives.

However, a significant proportion of those CIs identified at both forces came from outside of the police including a fraud investigator for the Department of Work and Pensions, a Drugs Worker, a Social Worker, a Risk Analyst for Network Rail, an Enforcement Officer for the Borders Agency, a Nursery Teacher, a Probation Officer and an Intelligence Officer for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. In most cases, these CIs had been recruited into the CID for their particular skills-set, underwriting the contemporary necessity for a broader range of professional skills and specialist expertise in investigative policing. At least three non-ex-officer participants were also degree-level educated, two of these participants (both based at Shorewick) being recruited specifically for their academic credentials (i.e. a forensic accounting degree new entrant into a financial crime unit; a psychology and child development degree entrant to the Child Abuse team). These CIs were highly valued for their non-traditional skills-sets by the majority of warranted participants, which were recognised not to be contained within the traditional 'tool-kit' of the warranted officer. As the police Sergeant unit manager of Newbank PPU explained:



CIs have an important place and I see that as being when they come with the skills we [organisation] need that our regular Bobbies don't and can't have. Our officers have a really broad range of knowledge which they need for their role, but sometimes we need that extra knowledge-base that CIs who haven't been 'brought-up' in the organisation can provide. So, I see them as a real asset when they're used properly.

The fixed nature of the CI role relative to that of DCs (who could be moved around) also meant that CIs were able to develop high levels of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1986) within the units in which they worked (e.g. knowledge of prolific offenders and repeat victims and relationships with outside agencies/organisations). This allowed them to emerge as specialist investigators and key 'knowledge brokers' within niche areas of provision which, in turn, contributed towards improved clear-up rates and building trust with local businesses and individuals. It also made CIs particularly effective intelligence gatherers. The resulting fragmentation of the investigative process forced DCs, in many cases, to accept 'role relegation', as they became progressively excluded from certain tasks (e.g. risk assessment, and specific areas of volume crime investigation such as shoplifting and fuel theft) – a trend referred to as 'de-skilling', with potentially serious implications for the overall resilience of the CID, or so it was alleged by some officers. However, as in the below quote, most officers nonetheless attached considerable value to the specialist knowledge of CIs:

Julie can blast through those CCTV stills like nobody's business. She can spend half a minute looking at a suspect caught on CCTV thieving from a shop in the local area and she can tell you immediately who it is because that's what she does, day in day out. It's amazing. She can tell by their walk or by what colour trainers they're wearing because they're repeat offenders and she seems them that often. It really speeds the process up for the victim. (Shorewick, CMU, Detective Sergeant)

*(CI) Staffing:* While the staffing theme sits across the occupational and organisational levels, it is here discussed as an occupational factor, relating to the composition of the investigative teams. Survey results found CIs to be employed in all 14 of those police forces that responded, indicating widespread uptake of the provision nationally (though only 12 of the 14 forces that responded to the survey were able to provide data as to the total number of CIs employed). Nonetheless, when considered in terms of their overall capacity as part of the investigative workforce, CIs remained very much the junior partners of DCs at the time of the research (Table 1). However, recently published data on the spread of CIs designated with powers under provisions contained within the Police Reform Act 2002 (s.38) (Home Office 2018) implies a growth in the number of CIs (by headcount) employed in at least 4 of the participating forces (Hampshire (249), Hertfordshire (155), Kent (188) and Suffolk (77)). Furthermore, the tendency of Chief Constables to designate CIs with powers of enforcement similar to those afforded to DCs – in 23 of the 43 police forces as of March 2017 (Home Office 2018) – suggests that a consolidation of CI authority may be currently underway. However, lack of equivalent data on detective capacity means the extent to which these

**Table 1.** Total number of CIs identified working in participating forces as of 2015.

Responding police force	Number of CIs reported (survey results)	Number of warranted officers operating within CID (Home Office 2015)	Total number of CID investigators (CIs & officers)	Approx. % of investigator workforce constituted by CIs
Bedfordshire	43	169	212	20.2%
Cumbria	6	107	113	5.3%
Gloucestershire	12	132	144	8.3%
Hampshire	140	695	835	16.7%
Hertfordshire	60	351	411	14.5%
Kent	100	323	423	23.6%
Nottinghamshire	61	308	369	16.5%
South Yorkshire	26	538	564	4.6%
Suffolk	35	168	203	17.2%
Sussex	52	308	360	14.4%
Warwickshire	67	117	184	36.4%
West Mercia	14	303	317	4.4%

developments can be said to equate to a shift towards an equal partner status for CIs remains, at best, ambiguous.

Survey findings also demonstrate a concentration of CI utilisation within specialist fields of investigative work traditionally reserved for operation by warranted detectives, such as fraud, rape and sexual assault, online paedophile investigation, family liaison work and road traffic death investigations etc. CIs were also found to be involved in an equally expansive range of tasks including taking statements, exhibits management, suspect interviewing, victim interviewing, disclosure, prisoner handling/processing, indexing and HOLMES processing for major crimes (data set analysis), training of officers and police staff, CCTV recovery and viewing and undertaking intelligence profiles/searches.

Local variations in CI utilisation meant that in some forces the CI role was more representative of a traditional member of support staff than in others. Where this was the case, CI capacity was generally concentrated in the investigation of low level volume crime, with fewer CIs operating in mixed teams alongside detectives. Survey findings indicate that in some instances this division was being maintained by cultural resistance to CIs, in particular by the CID:

I think CID would see that [introduction of CIs to the CID] as a step too far and would resist at all costs. My investigators are viewed as a valuable part of the team and it works really well. So much so that the force has recognised their contribution and have increased the number working within volume crime investigations. My view would be – PIP 2 accreditation and train the best as advanced interviewers. CID won't like it but tough, it makes sense and creates a positive workforce. (*Force Anonymised, Senior Officer*)

With regard to line management, CIs were most likely to be supervised by a Detective Sergeant and/or Sergeant, however, in some forces CI unit managers were also present – suggesting potential opportunities for CI progression and also for their involvement in leading investigations.

In at least seven of those forces that responded to the survey, CIs were afforded duties which extended their role beyond that of purely support. These included acting as lead investigator on digital images, and as CCTV coordinator on major enquiries. Three of these forces said they employed CIs as investigator unit managers with decision making authority for case-disposal decisions, budgeting, hiring of staff and for supervising mixed teams of police officers and civilian staff.

Together the findings presented in this section reveal the complexity of contemporary social relations evident within the investigative units at both Shorewick and Newbank. They also suggest that fine-status distinctions based on skills and experience rather than traditional rank and/or formal position continue to shape and determine individual occupational standing within the CID (Fielding 1988), even in the light of considerable intra-organisational pluralisation. However, such social complexity was rarely reflected in the formal organisational position of CIs, resulting as we shall see, in a dissonance between the 'equal partner' role operated by CIs on the ground and the 'junior partner' status of CI as perceived by the police executive.

### ***Junior partners: CIs and the organisation***

In a fashion comparable to that of PCSOs (O'Neill 2014), when CIs were first introduced in 2002, there was a great deal of confusion over how they were intended to fit both practically and culturally within the investigative units. At both forces, CIs were recruited as 'support staff' and thus, were envisaged to be the complementary 'junior partners' of detectives. However, as illustrated in the previous section, in most cases the CI remit had been allowed to evolve into that more representative of an 'equal partner', resulting in significant role blurring. Mirroring findings from other studies of police staff and volunteers (cf Bullock 2017), little effort had been made at either police force to accommodate the changing/evolving nature of the CI role within the existing organisational infrastructure. This meant that CIs faced a series of 'perceived organisational injustices' (Latham and Pinder 2005) resulting from their civilian status, which impacted greatly on their overall employment experience. These injustices took the form of inadequate *training* provision,

lack of opportunities for *progression* within the role and pervasive *job insecurity*, the nature of each will be discussed below.

*Training:* Like new officer recruits to the police (Bayley and Bittner 1984) and in keeping with 'old regime' perspectives about detective work (Tong and Bowling 2006), non-ex-officer CIs generally learned the 'craft skills' of the investigative role through experience on the job and through informal mentoring by warranted or more experienced CI colleagues. None of the CIs encountered at either force felt the training they had received had been wholly instructive to practice and commonly perceived themselves to be the junior partners in this regard. While most had received basic induction training (e.g. on relevant information systems such as HOLMES, CATS, PNC etc., on health and safety, on use of police radios (where applicable), first aid, police driver training etc.), only marginal steps had been taken at either force to accommodate the specific training needs of CIs (e.g. on how to interview, forensic awareness etc.) with little consistency in approach evident between units and between police forces (mirroring findings from the survey). The paucity of training for CIs was most apparent amongst ex-officer CIs whom, owing to their existing 'craft' skills and practice knowledge, were generally presumed by unit managers to be able to 'hit the ground running'. The immediacy of the transition from officer to CI (occurring overnight in many cases) characterised a widespread reluctance within the organisation to accept the limits of ex-officer re-deployability (referred to commonly as 'omnicompetence') and, with that, the resulting investigative skills-gap that was evident in most cases, as the following quotation illustrates:

We've got an Inspector, a guy who retired as an Inspector who spent most of his last 15–20 years working in a communications centre. Now, he had an important job when he finished in there but he didn't take statements, didn't deal with members of the public face to face, he hadn't done any of that for years, so you know, he hadn't got any real relevant skills, and he really struggles which isn't his fault. It's the fault of the organisation. (*Shorewick, ex-officer CI, MIT*)

The absence of a designated training process for CIs at both forces also meant that CI proficiency was not subject to formal assessment in the same way as for warranted officers. For example, CIs were not afforded annual development reviews like DCs and, despite their involvement in serious and complex investigations (CoP 2017, p. 15) (including being appointed as Officer in Charge), were not able to progress past Level 1 of the national Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP). As such, CIs were also prohibited from undertaking the National Investigators Examination (the national mandatory qualifying examination for those seeking progression to detective rank) and thus, from formal professional recognition of their investigative capabilities. Unit managers were therefore also afforded a limited evidence-base upon which to judge individual CI competence and from which to seek-out additional training. This could pose difficulties in the event of either police force wishing to discipline/dismiss a CI and also has the potential to raise liability issues should member of the public be injured and/or put at risk by the failure of a CI to act competently. For non-ex-officer CIs, the absence of initial (and ongoing) assessment served to further exacerbate feelings of inadequacy, contributing to their lower-class status within the CID and engendering anxieties about the potential for CIs to be viewed as 'policing on the cheap' or 'plastic detectives', in a similar fashion to how PCSOs have been equally criticised (O'Neill 2014). These anxieties were deepened by the fact that, even at their highest pay banding, CIs could be paid on average 38% less than their detective colleagues.

Where CI line managers had actively sought to address the role-specific training needs of CIs it was not uncommon for applications to be turned down at the senior level, reflecting a growing tension between the attitudes of unit managers and the orientation of powerful external 'sovereigns' (Scott 1995) (namely ACPO, now NPCC) regarding the utilisation of CIs. In the current study, this was evidenced most clearly in the continual denial of training for CIs operating as family liaison officers at Shorewick MIT, as the following quotation taken from interview with one non-ex-officer CI demonstrates:

... Family liaison is a role I've undertaken a lot ... So I asked, 'Can I be trained as a Family Liaison Officer?' My Senior Investigating Officer said straight away, 'Absolutely, I want you in that role'. But he was knocked back as he was told it has to be an accredited detective who does that role ... I don't understand the reasoning behind it, if I'm honest ... quite often in a murder investigation somebody from within the family can be responsible or can be implicated and the reasoning was, 'Well if a civilian's doing that role and information's found out, they can't arrest this person'. But really that's very similar to if I go and interview someone or if I go and take a statement from someone? If they give me information that implicates them in that murder, I can't arrest them, but I can make arrangements for them to be arrested. So, I don't really understand that argument and they [ACPO] haven't explained it at all ... its quite frustrating, the fact that I do the role, or I've done the role in the past, and now I want the training for it so I can do it properly but I can't have it. It doesn't really make sense and it's not fair.

Perceived to be one of the most instrumentally significant investigative roles (Innes 2003, p. 103), the denial of family liaison training to CIs demonstrates a reluctance at the police cultural level to formally acknowledge CIs' proficiency in undertaking such specialist, high prestige roles. The failure of ACPO to provide feedback to CIs regarding the decision-making process (owing to the hierarchical nature of the organisation) also meant that applicants were afforded little/no opportunity to voice their discontent at the outcome. Such experiences contributed greatly to feelings of 'procedural unfairness' (Tyler 2006) and low-status amongst CIs at both forces.

*Progression:* Lack of progression opportunities for CIs within the organisation also contributed significantly towards their structural subjugation as 'civilian' staff within the CID. While opportunities for what was referred to by managers as 'lateral progression' were observed (e.g. between civilian roles), prospects for CIs to progress vertically *within* their investigative role remained fundamentally restricted. Experienced CIs were routinely found to be mentoring and inducting new CIs at both police forces without financial reward, raising the possibility for a tutor CI role parallel to a tutor police officer. Establishing such an incentive would seem sensible in dealing with a key disparity between police officers and CIs, while also giving CIs a more formalised development opportunity. This would be of particular benefit for non-ex-officer CIs who, unlike ex-officer CIs whose transition to CI tended to be based more on instrumental reasoning (namely, financial need following retirement and/or difficulties adjusting to life as an 'outsider', including trouble securing work in other fields), sought out the CI role due to a combination of longstanding interest in investigative work, a desire to help/protect others and, mirroring comparable findings of new police officer recruits (Lester 1983), hope of a secure career with the police. In a departure from other studies of police staff (cf Cosgrove 2016 on PCSOs), none of the CIs interviewed at either force were motivated by a desire to become warranted officers. Thus, for non-ex-officer CIs seeking to build a career as an investigator with the police, the paucity of training and promotion/advancement opportunities within the CID was particularly damaging to morale and had implications for both CI job satisfaction and retention. It was also more likely to lead to a sense of 'status frustration' than for non-ex-officer CIs:

It is very frustrating because I see this as a career but the organisation doesn't value commitment if you're a civvie, but yet they expect the same from you [as a detective]. It really makes you feel quite rubbish and it makes you question your commitment. It's especially true for the younger generation. What incentive have they got to stay? (Shorewick, non-ex-officer CI, ECU)

In at least three cases (2 at Shorewick and 1 at Newbank) non-ex-officer CIs were actively seeking out alternative career opportunities beyond the police, in particular in the private sector (via recruitment agencies such as G4S or Servoca) where opportunities for improved pay and/or advancement were widely considered more practicable.

*Job Insecurity:* Anxiety about job security was prevalent amongst CIs at both forces and was most clearly manifested in respect to job tenure and occupational status. Large scale police budget cuts at the time of the research (HMIC 2013) weighed heavily on the minds of CIs at both police forces, forcing them to accept their status as members of the police 'precariat' (Standing 2011), as one CI explained:

You just don't know what the situation is going to be from one day to next ... it's a constant feeling of insecurity. (Shorewick, non-ex-officer CI, GRU)

For some CIs, threat of redundancy left them feeling understandably ‘demoralised’ and ‘demotivated’, impacting negatively on their sense of value, as one non-ex-officer CI working at Shorewick PPU explained:

I feel let down. A lot of people have given a lot of loyalty to this force so it does make you think, what’s the point? ... When the review came it was like, well actually you’re just a civilian and you’re just a number. I worked with people who had worked here 13, 14, 15 years and they were made redundant as easy as anything because they were just a number, yet they’d worked here longer and had as much if not more experience in this particular area than some of the Bobbies!

For other CIs, however, the precarious nature of their employment encouraged a greater willingness to accept ad-hoc remit extensions, as these CIs sought to demonstrate their value to warranted colleagues. For these participants, role blurring was considered an unavoidable condition of their precariat status which could be used to demonstrate individual proficiency in managing the ‘art’ and ‘craft’ elements of detective work (Tong and Bowling 2006), helping them establish their position and professional identity within the unit.

Echoing findings from other studies of officer perceptions of civilianisation (cf Loveday 2006), job insecurity amongst warranted participants tended to be concentrated in concern about the capacity of CIs to usurp DCs, and the effect their utilisation could have for the ‘valued job features’ of the detective role, namely career progression, income stream and status/self-esteem (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt 1984, pp. 441–442). CIs were criticised for taking up roles in specialist units where DCs desired to work or where they would be required to have experience if they were to seek-out promotion. With regard to income stream, CIs were lamented for stealing detectives’ overtime, forcing them to accept a lower annual income. Ex-officer CIs were viewed with particular disdain by some DCs for choosing to supplement their police pension with employment as a CI – a practice referred to by some as ‘double-dipping’. The potential for CIs to undermine the ‘professional’ status of DCs was echoed by warranted participants in a variety of roles, including at senior officer level (e.g. Detective Chief Inspector), reflected deep-seated cultural assumptions about the importance/desirability of officer redeployability/omnicompetence, and the senior partner status of warranted officers over the junior partner CIs.

## Discussion: a place for CIs?

In the absence of previous empirical research on CIs, this exploratory study provides insight into their world and work and underwrites debates about the extent of pluralisation occurring *within* the police workforce. In seeking to ascertain whether CIs can be conceptualised as the ‘junior partners’ or ‘equal partners’ of warranted detectives, this paper contributes to the intersecting literatures on police pluralisation and experiences of organisational change (Fleming 2012) and ‘ontological insecurity’ inherent to the workplaces of late-modern societies. In relation to the latter body of literature, the case of CIs shares much in common with the muddying of professional and paraprofessional domains in other fields of work – for example in health care (Sutton *et al.* 2004) and within the field of criminal justice, for example, in parole and probation (Robinson *et al.* 2016). It also adds nuance to debate about the blurring and ‘hybridisation’ of core police functions, framing the introduction of CIs within the context of an increasingly more plural and differentiated policing landscape.

The results of the study presented in this article reveal that at the level of the occupation CIs are operating as the *equal partners* of detectives in most cases, particularly in terms of their functional remit, skills and expertise. Yet at the same time, their collective experience of organisational injustices in the forms of inadequate training, pay, progression and job (in)security, continues to relegate them to the position of *junior partners* at the organisational level. This disjuncture draws attention to the (in)adequacy of training and support for CIs and ultimately calls into question received ways of thinking about ‘detective work’ and the traditional auxiliary, ‘junior partner’ status of police staff relative to warranted officers. The following discussion considers the need to reconceptualise detective work in

the light of these findings and considers the implications of CI-DC boundary blurring for future investigative practice.

The extent of boundary blurring evident between occupational remits means that CI-DC roles are frequently overlapping, complementary and mutually supportive. Within this context, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between 'frontline' (detective) and 'support' (CI) work. What is most clear from the research is that CIs are conducting roles that go well to the heart of what is conventionally understood as 'frontline' detective work. Like their detective counterparts (Westera *et al.* 2014, p. 1), CIs are entrusted with 'a serious and onerous role' which belies their place in the formal organisational hierarchy (as support staff). The contribution they make to the investigative process is central to the (correct) identification and prosecution of those guilty of a range of 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Webber 1973), including the most serious of crimes (e.g. child abuse and exploitation). Moreover, their responsiveness to victims, in particular those considered most 'vulnerable' (for example, children, victims of abuse etc.) has immediate implications for 'access to justice' as well as public perceptions of the police and the justice system overall (Patterson 2011). This issue becomes even more pertinent when considering the degree of personal autonomy and range of enforcement powers available to CIs, alongside their involvement in areas of investigative work of high public and media interest (e.g. murder investigation). However, the concealed nature of their remit means that little consideration has hitherto been afforded to assessing the significance of their contribution to frontline investigative practice and thus, their specific institutional needs.

In drawing attention to the expansive remit of the CI, this research demonstrates a prevailing need within the police studies literature to appreciate the police investigatory process as the outcome of a complex 'negotiated order' (Strauss *et al.* 1963). Just as in the broader field of policing and security, police investigative work is being radically transformed under the conditions of pluralisation: traditionally-defined role boundaries within the CID are being broken-down under the influence of work-load pressures and a changing knowledge context, fragmenting the locus of operational responsibility for detective work across warranted and non-warranted occupational lines. This assertion makes it necessary to think beyond dominant assumptions about the centrality of the detective to the police investigative process, and to look again at established concepts and ways of thinking about the role and title of 'detective' and how this is used to explain and interpret the criminal investigation process (and the role of the police more broadly). This re-visioning of the crime investigation process contributes towards the 'demystification' of investigative practice (Reiner 2010, p. 139), and further challenges us to better understand the role and occupational experience of warranted and non-warranted staff involved in the direct provision of contemporary crime investigation – or what might be now better termed the emerging 'investigative complex'. To do so requires us to think conceptually about the parameters of contemporary investigative provision and the special status of the warranted DC therein.

The utilisation of CIs thus calls radically into question normative ideals about the nature of police investigative practice – namely that detective skill can only be learnt through experience and that steady progression through the traditional rank structure is a prerequisite to 'effective detective' status. Reallocating warranted personnel, even with additional training, is insufficient for the requirements of today's criminal investigations. The decision to hire CIs itself reveals a fundamental flaw of the current rank system which affords the police little flexibility in terms of the acquisition and retention of personnel with the desired/required skills. As investigative roles continue to be changed by developments in technology, user expectations and budget constraints, so must the police seek to appeal to a wider mix of personnel with skills commensurate with tackling a multifaceted and complex crime environment, for example, to deal with cybercrime (Thomas 2016). The recent introduction of direct-entry detective provision by some forces further propagates the sacralisation of *constable* status at the expense of the 'civilian' investigator and ultimately fails to address the need for greater flexibility in the investigator resource e.g. to better accommodate those seeking fixed hours to suit childcare or those for whom full warranted authority (including coercive force) holds little/no appeal.



It is in these ways that CIs present the police with the opportunity to do things differently, and in a way which progresses the development of a more specialised, responsive and professionalised CID. CIs non-traditional skill-sets and/or accompanying professional and academic qualifications help to foster 'occupational cultures of learning' that facilitate the transfer of good practice (Crawford and L'Hoiry 2017, p. 652). This makes CIs well placed to respond to increased calls for specialised investigative provision, making them an essential part of the contemporary 'policing web' and an important tool in the police's quest for legitimacy in the contemporary period. However, despite the obvious advantages of CIs, in particular their capacity to feed into the police's commitment to evidence-based practice (CoP 2018) and continued professionalisation (Holdaway 2017), such promising opportunities for transformation are not being readily exploited by the police. For the most part, the value of CIs continues to be obscured by the endorsement of an investigative model which elides contemporary policing realities in favour of a 'fetishisation' of the omniscient warranted detective – what Brown (1997) calls 'organisational narcissism'. The failure of the police to accommodate the evolving CI role reflects a wider cultural resistance to CIs as a new style of provision and ultimately demonstrates the continued 'symbolic power' of the detective to resist change (Ratcliffe 2008, p. 215). However, it also raises significant normative questions about whether the current investigative model – which privileges the detective at the expense of the CI – is entirely consistent with the police's core business of protecting the public.

Considerable research from the field of organisational psychology (Cropanzano *et al.* 2007) suggests that addressing the 'organisational injustices' faced by CIs at the organisational level would help to foster a greater sense of value and job satisfaction. Comparable research on police volunteers (Callender *et al.* 2018) suggests that ensuring a better 'fit' for CIs would enhance both the service quality and the performance of the CID. Most urgent of all is the need to acknowledge CIs training requirements, which itself will enable better setting-out what knowledge and skills are required in modern investigation. Beyond that, to retain CIs, their skills, and the organisational memory they represent, will require consideration of deployment and career progression, as well as formal acknowledgement of the contributions they make. As a priority, the police must look to establish occupational territories which best exploit and promote the particular skills-sets of warranted *and* non-warranted personnel. There remains a clear need to move away from the current twin-track approach to the recruitment, training and progression and towards the development of more structured and flexible career pathways for CIs both within the role and within the wider police organisation. However, operationalising these changes will demand a reorientation of the prevailing 'doxa' (i.e. common belief) as it applies to 'detective work', making further disputes over the role of detective likely in the coming years.

This paper has demonstrated how concepts from one branch of pluralisation (the advancement of private security provision beyond the state) can be used to explain more recent developments in other core areas of pluralised provision (the development of civilianisation within the state). As illustrated here, engaging the junior partner model as a framework for the conceptualisation and empirical assessment of the CI role allows for a more nuanced appreciation of the multifaceted nature of contemporary pluralisation and its consequences for those (CIs and DCs) engaged in the 'governance of detective work'. Most significantly, in the absence of an accepted theory of police reform, it helps to better map-out distinct variables for comparison which can be differentiated between the occupational and operational levels (here as *functional remit, skills and expertise, staffing, training, progression and job (in)security*), enabling a more focused analysis of the police investigator role which can be traced across varying geographical locations and between policing contexts. The conceptual flexibility afforded by the junior partner model accounts for the complex nature of contemporary pluralisation and its underlying socio-economic and cultural antecedents, making it a highly adaptable analytical framework. As this article has illustrated, at the intra-organisational level, the warranted-civilian dichotomy is often far more complex than typically assumed. This situation has become even more acute within the post-financial crisis world wherein workforce reform processes – such as civilianisation and privatisation – have emerged as integral components of the new politics



of austerity. When reflecting upon the direction of the police reform agenda both in the UK and internationally, it has become necessary to show greater awareness of the friction involved in *processes* of organisational change, and its influence over the trajectory and dynamics of provision in key frontline areas, including crime investigation. Demonstrating such an awareness would provide space for meaningful conversation about limits of the traditional models of provision and would ultimately help the police better navigate the challenges of the future.

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