

# **Diversity, Difference or Disorder?**

## **Exploring neurodiversity in police-community partnerships**

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## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated to my brother, Mark, without whom, I would have never had the reason.*

*You will never read this but I hope in your own way, you will be proud of the legacy I have created for you.*

## **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to investigate whether the police use neurotypical practices by exploring the interactions they have with neurodivergent citizens, examining whether the language used in police policy, procedure and practice is predominately neurotypical and assessing partnership relations between the police and organisations that support neurodivergent people. Incident report data from North and South Yorkshire Police was analysed in order to explore the nature of contact between the police and neurodivergent people. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with police practitioners ( $N = 19$ ) about their understanding of neurodiversity and their interactions with neurodivergent citizens, and with practitioners from organisations that support neurodivergent people ( $N = 8$ ) about their partnership working with the police.

This research found that neurodiversity was not a concept frequently understood by the police, nor was it considered a policing priority. The language used by police practitioners and partner agencies was predominately neurotypical, medicalised and conflated autism with mental health, vulnerability and risk. Police responses rarely involved partner agencies, with partners only being contacted when it was necessary to obtain information or expertise. Police practitioners were keen to highlight their individual agency and discretion in developing initiatives to support neurodivergent citizens. However, there was little by way of strategic or organisational support for such initiatives. This thesis concludes that neurodiversity needs to be embedded into police organisations, not just through tokenistic initiatives or through informal partnership working, but through profound structural, cultural and linguistic change.

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## **Key Words and Abbreviations**

BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CR	Critical Realism
EHCP	Educational, Health and Care Plans
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
Gen 117	A general social care referral the police use
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (now known as HMICFRS Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services)
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MHA	Mental Health Act
NPAA	National Police Autism Association
OEL	Occurrence Enquiry Log
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
PCSO	Police Community Support Officer
PPU	Public Protection Unit
RWD	Resolved without Dispatch
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator
SPOC	Special Point of Contact
THRIVE	A method of assessing response to a police incident, implemented by call handlers by most UK police organisations. It stands for Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation Opportunities, Vulnerability of Victim and Engagement Level.

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Rationale, aims and significance of this research**

In 2015, my autistic brother experienced a meltdown of extreme proportion. All we asked him to do was take off his shoes. The meltdown lasted for hours, and required us to lock him in different rooms, as well as outside of the house, for our safety. When my mum said she was going to have to call the police, my reaction was severe. I had read books and articles, even heard personal stories about how the police interacted with autistic people, often mistaking their differences for disorder. The police did not attend that day, but I believed that the police would not attend the situation thinking about my brother's differences, about whether his behaviour was a result of a neurotypical environment, or if the question we asked him was too much for him to process, but rather assess his behaviour as disorderly, potentially even criminal, and act accordingly. The concern this caused me led to further investigation into the topic throughout my Master's degree, where I found that, although there was research being undertaken about police interactions specifically with autistic people (and even more so at the time of completing this research), there remains no research that has explored policing and neurodiversity, as a way of working and thinking within the police organisation. The significance of this research is therefore to question police interactions with neurodivergent people, like my brother, and attempt to make some difference to autistic people and their families when they require police support.

From what can be ascertained, the police appear to employ policies, practices and ways of thinking that have been developed by and used primarily with neurotypical people. Owren and Stenhammer (2015) highlighted that, in a society where the



majority of people are neurotypical, there is a likelihood that neurodivergent behaviours will be perceived as outside the 'norm'. The assignment of behaviours that are seen as productive and acceptable and those that are abnormal or deviant are underpinned by ideas of 'normality' (Lewiecki-Wilson *et al.*, 2008). Social constructions of 'normality' allow social actors, such as the police, to assess whether behaviours that are seen to deviate from those of the general population are either different, deviant or criminal (Glannon, 2007). Part of the police role is to determine whether someone's behaviour is criminal, disorderly/antisocial, or not. Therefore, neurodivergent people may be at greater risk of becoming the subject of suspicion because of their neurological differences in thinking and behaviour. The importance of this research is to investigate whether police perceptions of the interactions they have with neurodivergent people, are influenced by neurotypicality and/or their conceptualisations of vulnerability and risk, as well as whether partnership working promotes or improves neurodivergent ways of working and thinking.

## **1.2. Defining neurodiversity, autism and vulnerability**

The following defines what is meant by neurodiversity, autism and vulnerability in this research. The neurodiversity movement was developed by autistic self-advocates, by way of the Autism Rights Movement, in the 1990s. The movement introduced the concept of "*neuro-equality*", which suggested that everyone is and can be, to some extent, neurodivergent, with the literal meaning "*to think differently*" (Fenton and Krahn, 2007, p. 1). Neurodiversity formally encompasses those diagnosed with neurological conditions (Fenton and Krahn, 2007), such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Alzheimer's disease, dyslexia, dyspraxia, epilepsy and Tourette's syndrome, but implicitly applies to the entire population, in that everyone

has different ways of thinking and behaving (Owren and Stenhammer, 2015). In this research, I have chosen to focus only on diagnosed neurodivergence, like autism, as opposed to the entire population's diversity of thought and behaviour. The concept of diagnosable neurodivergence sits firmly within the social model of disability, which rejects medical models that propose neurological differences such as autism are deficiencies that should be repaired (Silberman, 2010). In this respect, neurodiversity advocates continue to demand for autism and other neurological 'conditions' to be accepted and respected, not as disorders, but as variations in "*brain wiring*" (Jurecic, 2007, p. 423). To describe these variations, Beardon (2017, p. 13) presents the theory of "*neurotypes*". Arguably everyone in society has a "*neurotype*", which is described as a way of thinking and behaving, that cannot be changed or altered (Beardon, 2017). Those who have no diagnosed psychological, cognitive or neurological difference are often recognised as the "*predominant neurotype*" (Beardon, 2017, p. 13) and are subsequently referred to as 'neurotypical', whereas people with diagnosed differences are often regarded as 'neurodivergent'.

Though all diagnosable neurodivergence is considered throughout this research, I concentrate on autism, one of the most widely discussed 'neurotypes', particularly in relation to police interactions. With latest figures from the National Autistic Society highlighting that 1 in 100 people in the UK are autistic, which equates to roughly 700,000 people (National Autistic Society, 2018), adapting ways of thinking about autism as a form of neurodivergence is essential to ensure that a significant number of people are not continually misunderstood as a minority. Autism is described by Beardon (2017) as "*a neurotype that leads to a cognition that is qualitatively different from that of the predominant neurotype in the way that information specific to communication, social interpretation and interaction is processed and understood; and*

*to a perceptual reality of the sensory environment that differs considerably from one individual to the next*" (p. 19). Using a definition such as Beardon's (2017) prevents the use of medicalised diagnostic criteria, which often leads to the application of damaging labels and stereotypes, such as autistic people being viewed as having impairments in verbal ability and social reciprocity, and having obsessive or repetitive behaviours (Fenton and Krahn, 2007). Unlike traditional models of difference and disability, the neurodiversity movement identifies difference as a positive attribute (Davidson and Orsini, 2013). Autistic people suggest that instead of looking for a cure, their differences should be accepted and celebrated as a category of human difference (Ortega, 2009). The neurodiversity movement is slowly moving attention away from misunderstandings about the presumed impairments of autistic people, onto the social and environmental barriers experienced by them.

For people who are neurologically different, the greatest barriers that can be found in society are expectations of normalisation (Owren and Stenhammer, 2015). It is the interaction between those considered 'normal' or neurotypical and those considered 'different' or neurodivergent where the most challenging barriers occur (Beardon, 2017), because most ways of behaving, and the procedures and practices put in place to manage the behaviours, are developed for 'typical' people (Owren and Stenhammer, 2015). This is hardly a criticism. In a society where the majority of people are predominately neurotypical, it is likely the needs of neurotypical people will be catered for, with little consideration of those who think differently (Owren and Stenhammer, 2015). However, a society that behaves solely in the interests of neurotypical people also perpetuates the assumption that disabilities or differences are inherent deficits that should be cured, overcome or made more 'normal' (Lewiecki-Wilson, *et al.*, 2008). The neurodiversity movement works hard to challenge the

attitudes of neurotypical people and encourages them to acknowledge and respond appropriately towards those who are different (Woods, 2017).

How autism is and was described, whether this is as a difference or a disorder, has implications for how autistic people see themselves and interact with the world, but also how neurotypical people see and interact with autistic people (Davidson and Orsini, 2013). In recent years, the ontological status of autism as a 'problematic category' has been disputed, yet in more traditional contexts, it remains seen as a curable or treatable disorder. Therefore, autistic people are often still perceived as diminished versions of the predominant neurotype, highlighting the continuing prevalence of medical understandings of differences in society (Woods, 2017). A point has been made to use identity-first language throughout this research, meaning that autistic people, and neurodivergent people in general, are referred to as such (as opposed to person first language i.e. 'person with autism'). There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the majority of the neurodivergent community prefers this type of language (as cited by Kapp *et al.*, 2013; Beardon, 2017; Milton, 2017), and secondly, having noted that 'person with autism' is used in almost all current research about autism and policing, I have taken a socially conscious decision to challenge the prevailing use of language, moving towards a way of researching that supports the neurodiversity movement.

Furthermore, in this research, neurodivergent people are not considered vulnerable because of their differences. For ease and simplicity, many organisations tend to develop lists of vulnerable groups, which often include people with poor mental health and physical disabilities (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2014). However, these lists would be criticised by neurodiversity advocates for placing blame and fault on the person for their vulnerability (McWade, Milton and Beresford, 2015).

Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith (2014) argue that problems surrounding the perception of vulnerability in policing stem from the focus on a person's predetermined sets of characteristics, and the subsequent stereotypes that exist. Therefore, if the police consider neurodivergent people to be vulnerable, they are more likely to see their deficits and difficulties, as opposed to their differences and diversity. Interlinked with vulnerability is risk. Stanford (2012) highlights that vulnerable people are often identified as being "*at risk*", as opposed to being "*a risk*". However, given the behaviours demonstrated by neurodivergent people that are potentially perceived as disordered, I discuss, in some depth, whether neurodivergence is seen as a vulnerability, "*at risk*" or "*a risk*" and the implications this might have during police interactions. Overall, the interaction between neurodiversity, autism and vulnerability has a significant role to play in the conclusions of this research, whereby the police appeared to have little understanding of neurodiversity, but greater knowledge of autism, considering both as aspects of vulnerability and ultimately risk.

### **1.3. Understanding police culture and partnership working**

What is presented in the following section is an understanding of what police culture and partnership working means in this thesis. At the outset of this research, it became clear that there was little to no research that explored police interactions with neurodivergent people from a cultural perspective. Conceptualisations of police culture present a discourse of prominent understandings about the way things are done within the police organisation. Therefore, the pervasive norms, values and attitudes that exist within police culture may have detrimental effects on neurodivergent people. For example, the concerns presented at the outset of this chapter about my brother's meltdown being seen as an assault, as opposed to a

difference in cognitive processing, could be the result of a predominately neurotypical police culture. In this thesis, I have presented a critical account of police culture that identifies gaps and new directions that advocates for a greater understanding of a neurodiverse police culture.

It has often been argued that 'culture', as a concept, encompasses several specific values, attitudes, symbols, and rules, which impact how people react to situations they are presented with (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, people tend to feel comfortable with those who share the same sets of values and attitudes as them but would feel uncomfortable in situations where different assumptions operate (Schein and Schein, 2017). The neurodiversity movement would suggest that those who are predominately neurotypical tend to share assumptions that are aligned to the majority of society, finding the values of those who demonstrate neurodivergence challenging to understand and appreciate, simply because they do not conform to the dominant assumptions that are held by most (Schein and Schein, 2017). In this research, Reiner's core characteristics of police culture, which were originally set out in the first edition of his book, *Politics of the Police* (1985), and remain cited in the most recent edition by Bowling, Reiner and Sheptycki (2019), have been used to broadly define police culture. This is given their longstanding pervasiveness in the literature (Campeau, 2015). There are three main characteristics that are discussed in this research: suspicion, an 'us' (the neurotypical) versus 'them' (the neurodiverse) attitude and ubiquitous machismo and racial prejudice present within police organisations.

Though some research has attempted to discuss the role of police suspicion in interactions with neurodivergent people (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012; van Dijk and Crofts, 2016), very little has suggested that the reason for this is because neurodivergent people do not conform to the neurotypical assumptions of the majority.

Therefore, if the police are routinely suspicious of behaviour that diverges from their own norms, they might consider it to be criminal, irrespective of whether it stems from neurological difference. Stroshine, Alpert and Dunham (2008) found that police officers are often suspicious of behaviour that does not 'fit', which is a particular issue when it comes to interacting with neurodivergent citizens, who often present with behaviours which may be considered suspicious, such as a lack of eye contact or fidgeting (stimming). For example, in the landmark case between ZH v. Commissioner of Police for Metropolis (2012), officers were called to a swimming pool whereby an autistic boy, ZH, was fixated by the water and was refusing to co-operate with his carers and swimming pool staff. The police acted forcibly against ZH, despite being told that he was autistic. This example highlights how a difference in behaviour (being fixated by water) can escalate to police involvement. If the police are predominately neurotypical, they may find a neurodivergent person to be more disorderly or deviant because of their differences in ways of thinking and behaving. I explore the impact of this throughout the thesis, with the role of police culture being defined, discussed and debated in the literature review, findings and discussion chapters.

In addition to police culture, the role of police-community partnerships was also explored in this research. In a time of austerity, partnership working has been observed as a feasible solution for improving the efficiency and the effectiveness of police work (Dick, 2018). A partnership is defined in this research as a diverse network of people and local authorities who come together "*...to achieve a common goal*" (Berry, Briggs, Erol and van Staden, 2011 p. 1). These common goals include safeguarding vulnerable groups of people, which could include neurodivergent people (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). Though there are a variety of partnerships that the police participate in, multi-agency partnerships are the main type of

partnership discussed in this research, primarily because they tend to focus on complexities within diverse communities (Meyer and Mazerole, 2014). Multi-agency partnerships are formed between statutory organisations, such as the police, health, education, social and youth services, however they can also include non-statutory organisations, such as voluntary and third sector organisations, i.e. charities. The inclusion of voluntary and third sector organisations is particularly important in this research because most agencies who support neurodivergent people are third-sector or charities, such as the National Autistic Society. Though often framed negatively in the literature, the benefits of working in partnership have clearly been identified as outweighing the challenges (O'Neill and McCarthy, 2014; Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017; Dick, 2018). There have been many successful accounts of partnership working within the police, some of which are discussed in the findings of this research. Therefore, I explore whether the introduction of police partnerships that specifically support neurodivergent people would increase and encourage more neurodiverse ways of thinking and working in the police organisation and also potentially change accepted ways of thinking about neurodivergent citizens.

#### **1.4. Development of the research questions**

The aim of this research was to investigate whether the police are predominately neurotypical, and whether such ways of working impact neurodivergent people. Due to the limited research in the field of neurodiversity and policing, I decided to first conduct a scoping study to assist and enable the development of research questions. Using semi-structured interviews with a number of police practitioners from four police organisations, including those that later became part of the main study, the scoping study explored what practices, procedures and ways of thinking are used by the police



to support neurodivergent citizens during their interactions, and the role of partner agencies in providing this support. The most significant finding of the scoping study was the sheer complexity of understandings about neurodiversity in policing. Although often illustrated in a negative way, neurodiversity was regarded as a less stigmatising label for those who should not be labelled as disordered, but who may require necessary protection because of their differences. Irrespective of contrasting understandings, neurodiversity was identified in the scoping study as a potential source of organisational reform. Neurodiversity was described as a movement and an important issue to address in regards to police policy and practice. Some participants were less optimistic, discussing how police culture is rigid and uses old fashioned ways of thinking. This was demonstrated through a resistance to change, which was viewed as an inflexibility in the way police officers thought about particular groups of people or situations.

In order to provide a unique and original perspective on police interactions with neurodivergent citizens, language was analysed as a specific area of potential police reform. Language is considered an important aspect of the neurodiversity movement (Sinclair, 1993), and is arguably embedded in police culture by way of everyday practices, policies and procedures (Waddington, 1999). Furthermore, the scoping study found that neurodivergent citizens are usually involved in domestic-related incidents, missing persons or public safety welfare incidents, as opposed to being offenders of crime. Therefore, it appeared important to understand how the police engage with neurodivergent people to ensure that when and if they needed support, the police are well-equipped to do this in a suitable way. Partnerships were also described as fundamental to increasing person-centred ways of working, which is essential for police interactions with neurodivergent people. From these conclusions,

the following research questions were developed to guide the research that was ultimately completed:

1. In what circumstances do the police engage with neurodivergent citizens in local communities?
2. How do relevant markers applied to cases on police databases appear to impact the policing of neurodivergent citizens?
3. How does the language used by the police, in relation to neurodivergent citizens and/or neurodiversity, appear to influence practice?
4. What is the nature of multi-agency relationships between the police, public sector and third sector organisations when supporting neurodivergent citizens in the community?

In this research, I have used Critical Realism (CR) to explore the 'reality' of police perceptions, which included the extent to which the police reinforced structural inequalities within society, through their engagement with neurodivergent people. CR is a philosophy that attempts to bridge the gap between positivist ways of researching and interpretivist understandings of analysis (de Souza, 2014). CR was chosen to develop theoretical intersections between neurodiversity and policing, as the current 'reality' of neurodiversity and the police remains relatively unknown. Therefore, the use of CR allows for many facets of a particular phenomena to be explored, using a multitude of methods (which can be restricted when applying other epistemological frameworks). CR was used to inform the data collection and analysis methods of the present research, including the analysis of 999/101 call log data and semi-structured interviews. In line with principles of CR, this research sought to challenge existing

thinking in the field of neurodiversity, autism and policing, providing a unique perspective on police interactions with autistic people, specifically.

### **1.5. Research Outline**

This thesis explores police interactions with neurodivergent citizens and whether the language used in police policies, procedures and practices is predominately neurotypical. The research also examines partnership relationships between the police and public and voluntary sector organisations that support neurodivergent people. The purpose of the research is to explore whether the police think and act in neurotypical ways. It is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute towards literature surrounding the application of neurodiversity in practice. In this sense, the original contribution of this research is to question the current diversity priorities and agenda of the police and to challenge the tendency towards neurotypicality in their policies and practices, as opposed to simply researching intersections between autism and policing. Although many researchers have attempted to establish the circumstances in which autistic people are involved with the police, none so far have attempted to quantify how many incidents autistic people are actually involved in, nor quantify the types of circumstances surrounding these incidents. I quantitatively analysed incident report data (from 101/999 call log records) from North and South Yorkshire Police to establish the types of incidents autistic people encountered the police.

At the time the research was conducted, North Yorkshire Police had just established a neurodiversity hub, which was the primary reason for their involvement. South Yorkshire Police, at the time of writing this thesis, had no formalised neurodiversity work on-going, and therefore, they were chosen as a comparison police

force. Though not in-keeping with the epistemology of this research, or the overarching principles of the neurodiversity movement, no autistic people were interviewed in regards to their understandings and experience. The involvement of autistic people was originally planned as part of the methodology, but due to personal and practical challenges, this could not be completed, but remains a fertile area for future research. Instead, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a variety of police practitioners ( $N = 19$ ) about their understanding of neurodiversity and their interactions with neurodivergent citizens. Practitioners from organisations that support neurodivergent people ( $N = 7$ ) were also interviewed about their partnership working with the police.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a literature review highlighting relevant literature on policing, neurodiversity and autism. The literature review also discusses vulnerability and risk and develops an argument for the existence of both a neurotypical and neurodiverse police culture. The role of police partnership working in promoting neuro-inclusive work practices is also reviewed. In Chapter 3, a more detailed outline of CR is established, and I present the data collection methods chosen and the rationales for using them. Chapter 4 is the start of two extensive findings chapters. The quantitative analysis of 999/101 call log records are evidenced in Chapter 4, identifying a number of statistical similarities and differences in the frequency and types of engagement with autistic people between North and South Yorkshire Police. Within Chapter 5, there are 4 sections. Each section represents a qualitative theme developed from police and partner agency practitioner interviews. The first section (*‘Conceptualisations of neurodiversity and autism’*), highlights one of the main findings of the research; that neurodiversity was not a concept frequently understood within North and South Yorkshire Police. This is despite

both the actual and perceived frequency of police contact with autistic people discussed by participants. This section also demonstrates that the language used by both police practitioners and partner agency organisations was predominately neurotypical, medicalised and tended to conflate autism with mental health conditions, vulnerability and risk.

This chapter goes on to discuss the role that individual police practitioners felt they played in supporting neurodivergent people (*'Role-based and individual-level factors that influence police practice during interactions with autistic people'*). Participants were keen to highlight their own agency and discretion in developing initiatives to support neurodivergent citizens, which was often not requested by their line managers, but designed and implemented by themselves. In the fourth section of this chapter (*'Structural and cultural influences on the implementation of neurodiversity within the police organisation'*), a discussion about police culture presented. It was found that neurodiversity was not considered a policing priority, nor was it supported culturally, strategically or organisationally throughout North and South Yorkshire Police. The role that line managers and managerialist principles play in implementing neurodiversity initiatives are also raised throughout this section. The final section of Chapter 4 (*'Promoting neurodiversity through police-community partnerships'*) illustrates the role of partnership working in supporting neurodivergent people. It was found that police responses rarely involved partner agencies due to the ad hoc relationships the police had with them, only being contacted when it was necessary for the police to obtain certain information or expertise, or when the police wished to refer someone to them. The closing chapters of this thesis, Chapters 5 and 6 situate this research within the existing literature, concluding that neurodiversity needs to be embedded into police organisations, not just through initiatives developed by

individuals, but through profound structural, cultural and linguistic change, in order to create a neuro-inclusive police system.

## **2. Literature review**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and evaluate the relevant literature in the fields of neurodiversity and the police. By doing so, the context of this thesis will be established within the existing literature, whilst also highlighting the need for further study in this field. Firstly, research relating to neurodiversity, autism and the police is presented. A number of research areas are highlighted as being over-emphasised, such as the police custody process or the interviewing of autistic people. Where initial police contact is considered, these interactions are often reported as negative by autistic people. Furthermore, much research links criminal and autistic behaviour, suggesting that autistic people are more likely to be perceived as disorderly due to their differences. This section is followed by consideration of whether autistic people are vulnerable or perceived as being “*at risk*” because of their associated behaviours (Stanford, 2012, p. 20). The discourse of vulnerability is questioned in relation to what is known about neurodiversity, that labelling people vulnerable by a particular characteristic (such as being autistic) could have implications for interactions with the police. Therefore, discussion occurs around autistic people being perceived as “*at risk*” or “*a risk*” in society (Stanford, 2012).

The next section of the literature review firstly discusses what is meant by police culture, evaluating a number of relevant issues that have been identified by police culture researchers. These include whether police culture is organisational, occupational or identity-based, whether police culture is or can be distinct from other cultures and how these distinctions reinforce inequalities and minority status within society. The role of human agency and discretion in relation to police culture is also

reviewed. This background is essential to be able to propose how police culture can be reformed in order for officers to adapt to the neurodiversity demonstrated by those they police. This section of the review concludes with the idea of a 'neurodiverse police culture', identifying ways in which culture can become more inclusive of different ways of thinking and working through a variety of reform initiatives, such as the introduction of training and policies and procedures (Loftus, 2009).

The final section of this literature review discusses the role of partnership working in police interactions with neurodivergent people. The section begins with an overview of the types of police partnerships that are currently implemented. These vary between multi-agency, academic and between-police partnerships, as well as informal, ad-hoc relationships and formal, statutory relationships. Informal partnership relationships include those which work towards a short-term solution, whereas formal partnership relationships relate to those that are contractual and legal in their conception. Discussion then moves towards the expectations of the police within partnerships. It is presented that the police often want to be in charge of the relationship (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017), yet the differing agendas of the police and partner agencies cause challenges in establishing roles and responsibilities within the partnership. Finally, though many features of police partnership working were identified within the literature, only one is focused on in detail with reference to supporting neurodivergent people; the sharing of information and resources. The reason for this is that autistic people are often supported by a number of agencies and therefore, when in contact with the police, the information shared by these agencies could contribute to positive and successful police interactions.



## **2.1. Neurodiversity, autism and the police**

There is a growing body of literature that focuses specifically on police engagement with autistic people. However, research involving the police and specifically autistic people has rarely focused on the potential for neurotypicality in policing. In providing an overview of the literature into autism and policing, research has instead focused on how to improve police processes, namely the interviewing of autistic suspects and how to support autistic people in police custody (Maras and Bowler, 2010; Larmour, Bergstrom, Gillen and Forth, 2015; Crane, Henry, Maras and Wilcock, 2015; Parsons and Sherwood, 2016; Holloway, 2020). Furthermore, much literature in this area concentrates on the frequency in which the police engage with autistic people, however in the majority of research these frequencies are based on officers estimations (Chown, 2009; Browning and Caulfield, 2011; Cheely *et al.*, 2012; Lerner *et al.*, 2012; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Rava *et al.*, 2017; Tint *et al.*, 2017). There has also been much discussion about whether training would resolve the seemingly negative experiences that autistic people have with the police (Crane *et al.* 2016; Chown, Beardon and Cossburn, 2018; Hepworth, 2018). Considering the broader research on autism and the criminal justice system, several attempts have been made to link autistic behaviour and criminality (Woodbury-Smith *et al.*, 2005; Allen *et al.*, 2008; Freckelton and List, 2009; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Helverschou *et al.*, 2015), with these particular areas of research focusing on later stages of the criminal justice system, such as the prevalence of autistic people in psychiatric hospitals and prisons, as opposed to autistic people's interactions with the police.

The relationships between the police and neurodivergent people, more accurately documented as the experiences of the police and autistic people, are more often than

not reported as negative (Allen *et al.*, 2008; Beardon, 2008; Higgs and Carter, 2015; Maras, 2015; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Salerno and Schuller, 2019; Gibbs and Haas, 2020). Crane *et al.* (2016) acknowledged that there is limited knowledge about the experiences of police officers' interactions with autistic people and more importantly, whether these experiences match those of the autistic community. Crane *et al.* (2016) found that of 26 autistic adults, 69% described their initial interactions with the police as unsatisfactory. One reason for this related to the way in which they were treated during their first encounter with the police, which was accounted to a lack of awareness and knowledge about autism (Crane *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, Salerno and Schuller (2019) found that the majority of autistic survey respondents were not satisfied with their overall police interaction (scoring  $M = 2.76$  on a 7-point scale, where 1 was strongly disagree and 7 was strongly agree) and felt they had not been treated in a procedurally fair manner (scoring  $M = 3.35$  on the same scale). Consistent with the findings of both Crane *et al.* (2016) and Salerno and Schuller (2019), Gibbs and Haas (2020) found that in 62% of incidents, autistic adults reported being dissatisfied with their interactions with the police.

These negative experiences have also been documented publicly, for example in the landmark case between ZH v. Commissioner of Police for Metropolis (2012), noted in the introduction, in which officers were called to a swimming pool whereby ZH was fixated by the water, refusing to co-operate with his carers and swimming pool staff. The police were called by swimming pool staff and on arrival, acted forcibly and inappropriately against ZH, despite being told that he was autistic and had profound learning disabilities. He was forcibly removed from the swimming pool, "*handcuffed, put in leg restraints and put in the back of a police van for 40 minutes*" ([2012] EWHC 604). In this civil litigation, ZH and his family's requests for financial compensation for

assault and battery, false imprisonment and unlawful disability discrimination were met, with a judge commenting that ZH had not committed a crime, but that the ignorance others had caused the interaction to escalate. However throughout the litigation, it was reported that “*the police contested the claim almost in its entirety*” ([2012] EWHC 604). This example highlights how a difference in behaviour, such as being fixated by water, can escalate to police involvement, and where this involvement is inappropriate, can lead to emotional and psychological distress. Another way in which significant harm has been well-documented during interactions between autistic people and the police is through the use of taser. Most recently in the case of *Gilchrist v. Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police (2019)*, a judge deemed officers’ use of tear gas and taser upon an autistic man unlawful. On arrival, the distressed man was in the street shouting, covered in blood. Two officers immediately discharged both tear gas and a taser in an attempt to calm Gilchrist down. When the use of these methods were ineffective, the officer used both the tear gas and taser once again, which subdued Gilchrist. By the time the tear gas and taser were used again, officers had been made aware that Gilchrist was autistic. The litigation deemed this an unlawful use of force, with the judge regarding that the initial response to the incident was “*justified, reasonable and proportionate*”, however once they were made aware that the man was autistic, “*a more cautious approach should have been adopted*” ([2019] EWHC 1233).

The experiences of ZH, Gilchrist and others, highlights what has been tentatively suggested in existing research that documents interactions with the police; that autistic people are often vulnerable in any situation where their differences are not fully recognised or understood (Bishop, 2008). There is a wide variety of literature proposing that behaviours displayed by autistic people can often be misconstrued by

the police or other criminal justice practitioners as 'offending behaviours' (for example, Allen *et al.*, 2008; Bishop, 2008; Freckelton, 2009; King and Murphy, 2014; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Helverschou *et al.*, 2015). Brewer, Zoanetti and Young (2017) conducted an experiment into jury decision-making based on whether an offender's diagnosis of autism was made known to them or not, finding that where participants knew the offender was autistic, more pronounced negative attitudes towards them were demonstrated. This has serious implications in real-life settings. If the police perceive neurodivergent behaviours as more criminal, the person may be criminalised as a result (Brewer, Zoanetti and Young, 2017). This is further exacerbated when one considers that research involving autistic people and the criminal justice system typically focuses on narrow medical model definitions of disability, rather than appreciating autism as a difference (North, Russell and Gudjonsson, 2008; Freckelton, 2013; Allen *et al.*, 2008; Kristiansson and Sorman, 2008; King and Murphy 2014; Salseda, Dixon, Fass, Miora and Lark, 2011; Higgs and Carter, 2015).

With the perceptions of 'normality', disorder and deviance changing all the time (Herrington and Clifford, 2012), it is even more crucial for the police to be aware of their conceptualisations and understandings of neurological difference and the subsequent effects this can have on their behaviour towards neurodivergent citizens. Browning and Caulfield (2011) support the need for police to have better understanding and awareness, proposing that because autistic traits are often not visible, there may be issues in identification when autistic people come into contact with the police. The impact of this might mean that during an initial interaction with an autistic person, officers may only see them as exhibiting a difference in behaviour, and possibly associating this difference with deviance. Furthermore, Crane *et al.* (2016) identified that 90% of 260 police officers reported that an autistic person always (11%)

or sometimes (79%) made their diagnosis known to them during first contact. However, what is notable about these findings is that disclosure mostly only happened 'sometimes' (Crane *et al.*, 2016). Despite an increase in research over the past ten years, which has endeavoured to explore how the criminal justice system in the UK supports offenders, victims and witnesses of crime who demonstrate neurodivergence (for example Woodbury-Smith, 2008, Cheely *et al.*, 2012; Eadens *et al.*, 2016; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Parsons and Sherwood, 2016), there remains a significant focus on the experience of autistic people. Therefore, regardless of proportionate research suggesting that disclosure of autism is rare, meaning responses to such behaviour often go unidentified (Chown, 2009), disclosure of other neurodivergent behaviour is possibly not even being taken into account and subsequently not being mitigated for during police interactions.

Related to concerns about unidentified difference, the vast majority of research in this area has over-focused on whether there is a direct link between autistic behaviour and actually committing crime (for example Woodbury-Smith *et al.*, 2005; Allen *et al.*, 2008; Freckelton and List, 2009; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Helverschou *et al.*, 2015). However, as King and Murphy (2014) highlight, the quality of the research into autism and crime is methodologically poor, rarely asking autistic people to be involved, leaving only the ability to draw tentative conclusions about the relationship between criminal behaviours and autistic traits. As not enough is known about the links between autistic behaviour and criminality, researchers have been left to assume that, like any member of society, autistic and other neurodivergent citizens will ultimately have some level of interaction with the police (Crane *et al.*, 2016). Drawing further on the perspectives of King and Murphy (2014), the majority of research in this field draws upon police practitioner experience. An example of this is in Crane *et al.*'s (2016)

research, whereby the researchers asked police officers to 'estimate' their interactions with autistic people, using self-report surveys. That being said, Crane *et al.* (2016) did include the perspectives of autistic people. In addition, Eadens *et al.* (2016) also used surveys to establish the amount of experience police practitioners had with neurodivergent people (described as 'people with an intellectual disability'), without the involvement of intellectually disabled people themselves.

At the time of writing, there are no official figures about the involvement of autistic people with the police (Crane *et al.*, 2016; Gibbs and Haas, 2020), with most authors reporting a general over-representation in the criminal justice system (Brugha *et al.*, 2012). To some extent, this is not a criticism of previous research, as a number of autistic people live undiagnosed, or may chose not to disclose their neurodivergence, making it challenging to identify how many autistic and/or neurodivergent people come into contact with the police (National Autistic Society, 2020). However, it does mean that it will likely remain almost impossible to gain any representative figures. However, from what has been presented in this literature review, more research could be done to ascertain the nature of police involvement with autistic people, as well as identifying the reasons for engagement. Furthermore, much of the research discussed in this section does not take into account the role of partner agencies that support neurodivergent people. As highlighted by a number of researchers, police interactions with autistic people continue to be reportedly negative, without critically evaluating neither the micro- and macro-level reasons for these experiences. Finally, what can be recognised from the presented literature is that none have yet considered the wider socio-political role of neurodiversity within policing, and the influence that this could have on interactions between autistic people and the police.

## **2.2. Considering vulnerability and risk in neurodiverse discourse**

As societies become more diverse, vulnerability and risk increases (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). In its simplest form, vulnerability can be defined as the inability to defend oneself against a specific risk (Bartkowiak-Theron and Corbo Crehan, 2012). Interestingly, both terms have similar linguistic definitions, with vulnerability being described as “*the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally*” and risk as “*a situation involving exposure to danger*” (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). Like many abstract concepts, there is a subsequent lack of consistent definition of vulnerability across policies, jurisdictions and geographical contexts. In an attempt to minimise this, many organisations have developed normative lists of vulnerable groups (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). In the Australian research by Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith (2012), these vulnerable groups were found to include young people, the elderly, those with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the mentally ill, the disabled, victims of crime, people with addictive behaviours, sexually and gender diverse communities and the homeless. Grouping people in this way restricts vulnerability discourse to that which perpetuates individual characteristics as a fault that increases a person’s vulnerability to risks. Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith (2014) go on to argue that problems surrounding vulnerability in policing is due to the focus on these predetermined set of characteristics. Vulnerability described in this way has been further criticised due to the stigmatising and oppressive connotations that are perpetuated by these ways of thinking (Brown, 2011). This is supported by Jaarsma and Welin (2012) who suggest that by labelling people as vulnerable, there is an increased risk of them being ‘Othered’, as they are potentially seen as diminished in some way. Instead, an alternative view proposed by Fineman (2008) argues that

vulnerability is a universal, inevitable aspect of the human condition, reflecting the more simplistic understanding of vulnerability proposed by Bartkowiak-Theron and Corbo Crehan (2012), that there is an ever-present possibility of harm, injury or misfortune that is beyond human control. Unfortunately, though, the view of labelling certain characteristics as vulnerable remains the dominant discourse (Fineman, 2010), and seems particularly the case in policing (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012).

Stanford (2012) highlights that when discussing vulnerability, people are identified as being “*at risk*”, as opposed to being “*a risk*”, which is often why the two concepts are understood as inter-related. Ericson and Haggerty (1997) conceptualise risk as a sense of uncertainty within individuals, institutions and organisations, created within power and authority structures, such as law enforcement and politics. In other definitions, risk is something that compromises ‘good’ citizens. ‘Good’ citizens are understood as those who make rational choices, maximising their capacity to avoid or effectively respond to risks (Stanford, 2012). Stanford (2012) argues that practitioners who work in risk-averse occupations, such as the police, must be critical of their constructions of who is defined “*at risk*” (vulnerable) or “*a risk*” (dangerous). More critical discourses surrounding risk suggest that public services create scapegoats for those which the police discriminate against. For example, Dhami, Lundrigan and Thomas’ (2018) research on perceptions of rape victims, suggests scapegoating occurs because officers presume the individual has put themselves at risk by being intoxicated at the time of the offence or for wearing revealing clothing. Furthermore, risk scapegoats often occur in cases involving people with specific identity characteristics, such as those described by Stanford (2012) (and similar to those used in vulnerability lists), including individual traits and experiences like dependency,



disability or psychological distress, and/or external factors, like a person's living conditions or living in high-crime rate communities.

However, these factors could also be regarded as deviance from the 'norm', which may instead be regarded as "*a risk*" (Stanford, 2012). Deviance is regarded as danger and therefore the concept of risk, unlike vulnerability, is identified as both a problem and procedure within policing (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997). Floud and Young (1982) argued that dangerousness is often not coherent with differences from the 'norm'. They go on to propose that there is no such psychological or medical entity as a 'dangerous' person. Instead, risk and dangerousness are identified on a continuum of subjectivity, with risk being a matter of judgement or opinion. Such subjectivity was demonstrated by Dwyer (2011), who identified that when young people from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community are seen by the police as embodying youthful vulnerability, they are "*at risk*", with the police subsequently protecting them. Yet, when participants from Dwyer's (2011) study suggested that some of their behaviours could become riskier, such as going out to meet potential partners, the police were more likely to be negatively involved. This is despite people from the LGBT community, as well as young people, being identified as part of the 'vulnerable' groups listed by Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith (2012). In this review, examples will be drawn primarily from the LGBT community, for two reasons. The first is that there is limited research that explores specifically neurological differences. The second is due to the shared nature of these differences. Being LGBT and/or neurodivergent are both examples of non-visible differences, in comparison to race and ethnicity, which is often more overt.

Due to subjectivities in the understanding of vulnerability and risk, and how these conceptualisations are put into practice by police practitioners, there perhaps needs

to be better consideration of the 'social diversity spectrum', by which terms such as 'vulnerable' and/or "at risk" are only applied to those who are in need of support in a particular moment or situation, and that those who are neurologically different are treated only with equity and respect, as opposed to being considered deviant or dangerous (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2014). There has been much focus on some categories of vulnerable or 'risky' people, but not on others (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). As neurodiversity is a relatively new movement, it is fair to say that there has been little consideration about the vulnerability of neurodivergent people in society. Arguably, autistic and neurodivergent people face a significant probability of being labelled vulnerable by those who do not understand, appreciate or know how to support their differences (Jaarsma and Welin, 2012). According to the HMIC Welfare of Vulnerable People in Custody report (2015), learning disabled and autistic people may not be vulnerable in day to day life because of their differences, but may be vulnerable in a police context because of the lack of understanding about their needs (HMIC, 2015).

### **2.3. A predominately neurotypical police culture**

Early accounts of the police, such as the work of Maureen Cain (1973) or Michael Banton (1964), researched the everyday realities of police work, as opposed to the idea of police culture. Looking back at these accounts retrospectively allows researchers to observe the complexities of the police culture debate as to how the police do their work and highlighting the organisational and occupational role they play in society. Bowling *et al.* (2019) describe how 'cop culture' has been developed as a patterned set of understandings that help officers cope with and adjust to the pressures and tensions confronting them in their daily activities. Reiner calls these the

'core characteristics' of policing and they include a sense of mission-action-cynicism-  
pessimism, suspicion, isolation/solidarity, police conservatism, machismo, racial  
prejudice and pragmatism (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). These characteristics do not only  
encapsulate the attitudes of the police, but they also translate into behaviour (Bowling  
*et al.*, 2019). This translation has not always been described in straightforward or  
obvious ways, as has been documented by a variety of police researchers including  
Waddington (1999) who proposed the idea of 'canteen talk', whereby cultural, and  
subsequently behavioural, characteristics are developed and sustained a result of the  
stories shared by officers.

However, there has been some speculation as to whether there is a definite link  
between 'talk' and behaviour, which has led police culture researchers to look more  
closely at how officers *do* policing, rather than how they *say* they do policing. Although  
'culture' is something that is often viewed as an internalised process, Terrill, Paoline  
and Gau (2016) propose that culture does not only comprise of attitudes, values and  
norms that help officers manage organisational strains, it also supports them in their  
interactions with the public. It has often been argued that 'culture', as a concept,  
encompasses several specific values, attitudes, symbols, and rules, which impact how  
people react to and interpret situations they are presented with, based on their own  
identity and experiences (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). People tend to feel comfortable with  
those who share the same sets of values and attitudes as them but feel uncomfortable  
in situations where different assumptions operate (Schein and Schein, 2017). To those  
who support the neurodiversity movement, this may demonstrate the parallels  
between neurodiversity and neurotypicality. Those who are predominately  
neurotypical tend to share the same set of assumptions that are aligned to the majority  
of society and would find the values of those who demonstrate neurodivergence

challenging to understand and appreciate, simply because they do not conform to the dominant assumptions that are held by most (Schein and Schein, 2017). For this reason, it is important to acknowledge that people categorise themselves and others into linear 'cultures' that align to their shared norms, values and attitudes, and it is this process that allows for intergroup differences and similarities to be made between people (Miles-Johnson, 2016), such as between those who are predominately neurotypical and those who are neurodivergent (Beardon, 2017).

The idea of culture originates in the field of social anthropology, therefore it seems appropriate to first discuss these anthropological understandings before further examining how police culture is described in existing literature. Caution must be prescribed in defining culture, as suggested by Small and Newman (2001), who comment that the considerable lack of consensus and rigour in such attempts means that it is something that *"has tormented both sociologists and anthropologists for decades, and there is no reason to believe we will ever arrive at a consensus"* (p. 35). Schein (1990) suggests that *"culture is (a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems"* (p. 111). Culture, in short, refers to the shared beliefs, values and attitudes of a group, what Schein (2017 p. 18) calls *"basic underlying assumptions"*. These assumptions often evolve over the course of a group's history, influencing how it thinks, acts and functions (Whelan, 2016). Shared beliefs, values and attitudes are often understood as the product of shared learning (Schein and Schein, 2017), manifesting as behaviours that are implicitly learnt through numerous experiences within a group (directly and

indirectly), ultimately expanding into a unique language, way of thinking and way of feeling specific to that group, that can be taught to others (new members).

Police culture has been defined as distinct from other 'cultures'. In awarding police officers' legal powers, such as to arrest or to stop and search, there becomes a division between what the police are allowed to do to the public, and what the public are allowed to do within the constraints of the law (Cockcroft, 2012). Put simply, police culture is a reflection and perpetuation of the power differences between the police and members of the public (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, Holdaway (1983) suggests that police culture is distinct because the residual beliefs and values, associated strategies and tactics relevant to policing remain a principal guide for the day-to-day work of rank-and-file officers. Though legal powers, and subsequent authority are embodied by police practitioners, Waddington (1999) proposes that the notion of the police possessing a distinctive occupational culture comes from the idea that police work is rarely guided by legal precepts, but instead driven by common-sense understandings of the way policing is done. Breaking down the idea of distinct 'cultures' further, in some police culture literature, there are multiple discussions about the similarities and differences between occupational and organisational culture and how these 'cultures' impact police work (Holdaway, 1983; Waddington, 1999; Manning 2007; Cockcroft, 2012; Bowling *et al.*, 2019). The problem of using the term 'culture' as opposed to 'cultures' is that it suggests something that is static, and therefore homogenises an entire population (Bacon, 2014). However, police culture varies according to structural factors, such as a person's role in the organisational division of labour, their own demographic background and their individual personalities and interpretations of society (Bowling *et al.*, 2019).

The notion of 'cultures' has been represented through occupational and organisational culture. Occupational culture relates to the multiple occupations that make up the police organisation (for example, Police Officer or Police Community Support Officer). Within these different occupations, there are differences in how decisions are made and how subsequent actions are taken (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Therefore occupational culture, as described by Holdaway (1983) and Bowling *et al.* (2019), is a context-dependent concept that is subject to varying occupational meanings between different roles and ranks. On the other hand, organisational culture refers to the wider culture of a specific police organisation (for example in this research, the different cultures within North and South Yorkshire Police). Organisational culture makes up different segments of the police force, that illustrate both individual identities and group goals, values and obligations (Manning, 2007). Manning (2007) describes the relationship between occupational and organisational culture as a dialectic, whereby the tensions between different segments of the police occupational culture are what holds the police organisation in place. O'Neill and McCarthy (2014) highlight this in their research on Neighbourhood Policing Teams. They found that officers, who were primarily engaged in response policing or specialist units, were not directly involved in partnership working, thus not experiencing the occupational cultures of such agencies, and as a result the police's culture remained more closely aligned with traditional policing characteristics (O'Neill and McCarthy, 2014). This is just one example of the multiple layers of cultures that exist both within the police organisation, but also within different occupational police roles.

On a 'micro' level, where culture may impact the interactions between people, as has been documented by Manning (2007), officers' cultural repertoire is informed by their location in different segments of the police organisation whether as operational

police officers, middle management (sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors) or top command (superintendents and chiefs). Within each segment, there are different expressions of their occupational culture. For operational police officers, there is a focus on 'the job' and 'real police work', which promote dependency and autonomy. Middle management emphasise the 'politics' of the police organisation. Finally, top command 'manage the job' and co-ordinate the work of middle management (Manning, 2007). Focusing on the hierarchical nature of the police organisation, Paoline (2003) suggests a fundamental difference between organisational and occupational 'cultures' is that the former types of cultures are 'top-down' and driven by management (organisational), whereas the latter are 'bottom-up' and driven by the rank-and-file (occupational) (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983). This highlights the contribution of management to how culture is disseminated through the organisation, often in the form of policy and procedural reform. Though argued that police culture is typically described as an occupational culture (Cockcroft, 2012), given that the police can be viewed as both an organisationally distinct social subgroup from the rest of society, it is permissible to use either term to refer to their everyday practices (Bacon, 2014).

#### **2.4. Core characteristics of police culture**

The core characteristics of police culture outlined by Reiner originally in 1985 appear to be pervasive within policing research (Campeau 2015). However, it should be noted at the outset of this section that in order to develop these core characteristics, Reiner's work collapsed a number of large-scale ethnographic studies together. As a result of this, Reiner's work has been critiqued by a number of scholars for lacking depth, suggesting that his list of characteristics has become a scapegoat in the

discussion of police culture, diverting attention away from new directions and emerging trends (Campeau, 2015). This being said, Reiner's work has stood the test of time, continuing to be referenced in almost every piece of literature about police culture (Campeau, 2015). Bacon (2014) suggests that, taken collectively, the core characteristics reveal a longstanding tradition of police research, which can be viewed as encapsulating the 'dominant' occupational culture of the police. Therefore, in this thesis, rather than attempting to add yet another definition of police culture to the existing literature, Reiner's concepts are discussed (specifically 'suspicion', a combined discussion around 'solidarity/isolation' and 'cultural conservatism' and finally a further combined evaluation of both 'machismo' and 'racial prejudice') to highlight general diversity issues within police culture. These characteristics have been chosen because they are most relevant to understanding the detrimental effects of police cultures on communities or citizens whose behaviour might be considered to fall outside of societies expected norms.

#### 2.4.1. Suspicion

Sklansky (2007) argues that the turmoil of the late 1960s and early 1970s made it seem more obvious than ever that police officers shared a distinctive mentality – rigid, insecure, inclined towards violence and hostile towards anyone 'different'. If this remains the same mentality today, such an outlook would be detrimental for anyone considered to deviate from the norms of society (Tillyer, 2014). Skolnick's (1966) research established the idea of a 'working personality', which focused mainly on the police's suspicion towards others. The 'working personality' was described as a combination of three characteristics of police work: danger, authority and efficiency. This is supported by the later works of Tillyer (2014) who found that police practitioner



behaviour requires suspicion to successfully navigate dangerous situations. Other researchers have discussed suspicion as a set of 'working rules', similar to Skolnick's 'working personality'. Strohine, Alpert and Dunham (2008) found a number of 'working rules' that police officers used to identify law-breakers in their research. These 'rules' included suspicion surrounding a person's appearance and behaviour (Strohine, Alpert and Dunham, 2008), which could be problematic for neurodivergent people who predominantly demonstrate differences in behaviour. Suspicion can often lead to the formation of stereotyping and discrimination (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Chan (1997) suggested that if police work is largely dictated by officers' perception of what constitute suspicious activities and who is considered respectable, stereotyping and prejudice on the part of police officers can easily lead to feelings of dissatisfaction, which is how neurodivergent people reportedly interact with their local police service (Beardon, 2008; Chown, 2009; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Salerno and Schuller, 2019; Gibbs and Haas, 2020). However, it has been suggested that the number of police practitioners that have the ability to distinguish between behaviours that are criminal or simply divergent, particularly in moments of danger, are decidedly limited (Skolnick, 1966).

There is continual psychological evidence that police officers, along with the majority of society, use cognitive maps or scripts to navigate the social world (Tillyer, 2014), which allow for the prediction and handling of the behaviour of a wide range of people (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Loftus (2009) similarly proposes that individual police officers develop an extensive repertoire, which include signals to a person's possible involvement in crime. In research conducted by Strohine, Alpert and Dunham (2008), it was found that police officers are often on the lookout for things that do not 'fit'. Loftus (2009) has argued that the ability to identify potential offenders derives from

police suspicion, which comes as a result of labelling certain behavioural cues. In addition to behavioural cues, suspicion can also stem from an individual's identity, appearance, locality etc. which is also important to consider as neurodivergent people often blend into society, only being identified through contact, interaction and disclosure (Tillyer, 2014). Stroshine, Alpert and Dunham (2008) identified that the 'working rules' surrounding suspicion also apply to a person's appearance and behaviour. Alpert, MacDonald and Dunham (2005) found challenges with the police interpretation of non-verbal behavioural cues. For example, they found that police officers mistook a lack of eye contact or nervousness when speaking with young Black males as suspiciousness, while in reality, the males themselves reported their lack of eye contact as an attempt not to be disrespectful, and that they were simply nervous to be talking to someone with considerable authority.

Despite acknowledging that not all police officers were alike within Skolnick's 'working personality' theory, or that they follow the same 'working rules' as suggested by Stroshine, Alpert and Dunham (2008), Skolnick (1966) did argue that understandings of suspicion were distinct cognitive tendencies that only existed within the police as an occupational group. This may be because of the dangerous aspects of their work, but to add to this, it may be because the police are assumed to only be in contact with law-breakers and therefore, after time, it is likely they believe everyone they encounter could be a threat (Skolnick, 1966; Tillyer, 2014). It is for this reason that Skolnick (1966) suggested that officers tend to be suspicious of everyone due to their *potential* for law-breaking. However, as has been argued as part of this literature review, other researchers such as Stroshine, Alpert and Dunham (2008) and Tillyer (2014), have discussed that a person's behavioural cues and appearance must play some role in conceptualising difference and deviance. If the police do have a distinctly

suspicious nature, whereby they inherently look for aspects of behaviour that do not 'fit' to neurotypical norms, it may be that neurodivergent people are more likely to be considered suspicious, and thus are more at risk of police contact because of their differences.

#### 2.4.2. Solidarity, isolation and cultural conservatism

Loftus (2008) describes the uniqueness of the police role as engendering feelings of solidarity, perpetuating the opinion that police practitioners are set apart from the rest of society. Police cultural solidarity can be described as a characteristic which makes clear distinctions between the police role as 'us' (the police) versus 'them' (non-police) (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). However, aside from police solidarity and isolation acting only as unique occupational traits (Loftus, 2008) or as ways of creating power dynamics between certain groups (Bowling *et al.*, 2019), it could also be argued that police solidarity causes in-group/out-group type conflicts between the police as an exclusive organisation and the communities that they police, such as the neurodiverse. The discourses of exclusion (in-group/out-group) put forward appear to suppose intolerance of 'Otherness' (Bacon, 2014). In context, and to provide an example of how this solidarity might be demonstrated in policing, Burke (1994) explains that deviant status and marginalisation of gay and bisexual male police officers comes from an inability to reject stereotypes of homosexuality that do not sit well with the conservatism of the dominant police culture. Using the cultural characteristic of solidarity to describe how the police create and maintain in-group/out-group identities between themselves and the public relates to cultural conservatism, which observes the police as insular and isolated to their role.

Within this conservatism, those who do not fit the police's perceived ways of working are 'Othered' or treated differently, and there are two ways this is demonstrated. The first is through their political status as an organisation, and the second is through conceptual conservatism, which encompasses the idea that the police are pragmatic and unable or unwilling to diverge from mainstream norms, values and attitudes (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Holdaway (1983) suggests that the police are a highly visible symbol of the political state. The concept of conservatism comes from the political position of the police who are constructed as a hierarchical, tightly disciplined organisational structure (Holdaway, 1983). In practice, a police officer with a conservative outlook is more likely to attempt to fit in both occupationally and organisationally (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Whether conservatism is learnt or comes from an individual's disposition is unknown, although considerable literature suggests the former. Applying this to policed communities, Miles-Johnson (2016) highlighted how the police maintain and reinforce in-group membership and identity by self-categorising themselves in ways that favour their organisation, at the expense of others that they considered to be an out-group. Miles-Johnson (2016) suggested that police officers' conscious acknowledgement and endorsement of their in-group membership may be indicative of an in-group expressing bias. The conscious linguistic separation of the police as a distinct in-group may contribute to the interpersonal transmission and maintenance of negative stereotypes that the police associate with transgender people, to use Miles-Johnson's (2016) example. Presumptions presented by the police that suggest transgender people may not conform to normative notions of gender behaviour, may raise questions as to how expectations of gender norms not only shape internal police structures, but their contact and experiences with transgender people in the community (Miles-Johnson, 2016).

Loftus (2009) argues that the way police culture has been conceptualised is often through demonstrating an insularity from the broader social, economic, legal and political landscape in which it operates. This may suggest that the police are dictated and controlled by a hierarchy that insists on fitting in with the norms, values and attitudes that have been associated with 'traditional' policing (Reuss and Reuss-Ianni, 1983). It has been proposed that police culture is inherently conservative (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). In an organisational sense, the police's political status affords them more power over citizens, potentially having a detrimental effect on neurodivergent citizens who are seen as a minority group with limited power in society (Owren and Stenhammer, 2015). Operationally, this manifests as conceptual conservatism, which highlights how the pragmatic, black-and-white nature of policing can have severe effects on both officers and citizens who diverge from the status quo (Campeau, 2019). Due to these factors, the following two characteristics build on the platform of police conservatism, which suggests that those who diverge from the norms of policing may be marginalised, excluded or treated differently by the police (Bowling *et al.*, 2019).

#### 2.4.3. Machismo and racial prejudice

The idea of 'machismo' and racial prejudice can be described as markers of difference which people are benched against. Failures to conform to dominant gender and ethnicity norms have been documented in policing research as weakness, difficulty, or deviance (Morant and Edwards, 2011; Hoyle, 1998). Within society, there is a wider structure of patriarchy, which the police have not been shielded from. Therefore the drive to be masculine is pervasive (Miller, Forest and Jurik, 2003). Collectively, these standards have constructed officers as masculine, invincible and visually acceptable to the public (Frewin and Tuffin, 1998). Therefore, it is argued that

machismo is neither an occupational or organisational trait of the police, but rather one that is held by the whole of society (Paoline and Gau, 2017). Waddington (1999), for example, proposes that the widespread sexism frequently found among police practitioners is probably influenced more by patriarchal beliefs embedded in society, than the macho elements of the police's occupational culture. This is supported by Brown *et al.* (2019) who concluded that such behaviours exist to maintain a male police identity in the face of the threat perceived by women. Where women were once viewed as being unable to conform to the masculine standards of the police (Silvestri, 2017), a similar problem is now being experienced by LGBT officers. At times, police organisations appear to promote and enforce heteronormativity (Miles-Johnson, 2016). However, because heterosexual masculinity informs practices and social interactions within policing, negative perceptions of contact involving the police and certain groups are often reflective of the delivery of policing techniques that are implemented toward minority groups (Miller, Forest and Jurik, 2003).

Although police organisations have attempted to improve their diversity relations, they still have a long way to go (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). This has been most obviously demonstrated through the relationship between the police and ethnic minority groups. Arguably, this remains the case at the time of writing. Whilst working as a police sergeant, Holdaway (1989) noticed that there were two features of police culture, particularly in relation to the racialisation of policing, which meant that the police were more likely to suspect and arrest people from ethnic minority groups. The first feature, he argued, was the tendency to use stereotypical thinking in relation to ethnic minorities and secondly, the neglect of the pertinence of race within police work (Holdaway, 1989). He also suggested that the process of racialisation was framed in such a way that police officers would act in racist ways without even realising it,

because this was how 'usual' practice had always been conducted (Holdaway, 1989), relating to a variety of literature that draws together unconscious bias and culture (Schein, 1990; Strohshine, Alpert and Dunham, 2008; Cockcroft, 2012; Tillyer, 2014; Dhimi, Lundrigan and Thomas, 2018). As described by Holdaway (1996), the police occupational culture has "*a strong strand of radicalised prejudice*" (p. 8). Chan (1997) suggests that, as a concept, police racism manifests from prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory police practices that are embedded within how the police think and work. The police are often accused of forming stereotypical opinions about the criminality of certain ethnic groups, which may be because most police organisations are made up of predominately white, heterosexual males (Miller *et al.*, 2003; Loftus, 2008).

The police as an organisation have a long history of discrepancies with their understanding, conceptualisation and implementation of diversity policies and practices. Although police organisations have attempted to improve their diversity relations, they still have a long way to go (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). This has been most obviously demonstrated through the relationship between the police and ethnic minority groups. Arguably, this remains the case at the time of writing. Lord Scarman's (1981) report on the Brixton riots in the early 1980s highlighted the increasing problems between the police and ethnic minority communities, which were further exposed in 1993 by the flawed investigation of Stephen Lawrence's murder (Foster, Newburn and Souhami, 2005). The mistakes made in the Stephen Lawrence case, as highlighted by the Lawrence Inquiry Report (Macpherson, 1999), demonstrated that in order to provide a service that is 'professional' and 'appropriate' to all communities, the police must deliver a service that "*recognises the different experiences, perceptions and needs of a diverse society*" (para 45.24). Since the

Lawrence Inquiry Report (1999), subsequent reports, such as the Morris Report (2004) and the Lammy Review (2017), have underlined the need for the police organisation to develop a structured way of supporting the increasing levels of diversity and difference in the UK's multicultural society (McLaughlin, 2007). Waddington, Stenson and Don (2004) suggest that, despite championing the notion of race equality within policing, there remains a disproportionate amount of stop and searches, as an example, toward racial minorities, with Bradford (2019) highlighting that Black people are stopped and searched almost five times more than white people across London. Home Office national statistics (2019a) highlight that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic ('BAME') people were 4.3 times as likely to be stopped and searched as those who were White, and between 2019 and 2020, searches against 'BAME' people increased proportionally more than those who were White (Home Office, 2020). Although dependent on the measure and accuracy of stop search data, the rates of disproportionate stop and searches have increased over recent years, with Black people being searched 30% more between 2018 (54,395) and 2019 (70,648) (Home Office, 2019a). These figures seemingly appear to continue to increase, despite diversity being high on police agendas (Shiner *et al.*'s discussion of the increased disproportionality in the stop and search of BAME people).

As discussed by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2009) and the 'Reading the Riots' study (Newburn *et al.*, 2018), there continues to be concerns about stop and search, the use of (lethal) force, and the unprofessional conduct of police officers in relation to race (discrimination). Newburn *et al.* (2018) adds that much of these concerns are "*informed by an ingrained historical narrative*" (p. 212) between the police and BAME communities. Such history is further perpetuated by individual events (such as the death of Mark Duggan as referenced throughout Newburn *et al.*'s



study, 2018) and the growth of globalised political movements, such as Black Lives Matter following the death of George Floyd in June 2020. From this, it would seem that the police continue to display a significant, and perhaps somewhat disproportionate, level of suspicion toward ethnic minorities. It is also important to acknowledge the ways that axes of disadvantage intersect, in particular, that there are Black and ethnic minority autistic people. Compared to white autistic people, minority ethnic autistic people reportedly have a lower quality of life, receive less educational support, struggle to access health care and are generally interpreted and perceived differently in regards to their neurological differences (Begeer *et al.*, 2009; Slade, 2014; Burke, Koot and Begeer, 2015; Burkett *et al.*, 2015; Emerson, Morrell and Neece, 2016). Though not explored comprehensively in this research, given the disadvantage faced by Black and ethnic minority people in society, it is important to recognise that the experiences of Black and ethnic minority autistic citizens will be different to White autistic people, when faced with police contact.

## **2.5. The role of human agency and discretion**

It is most commonly argued that culture is learned through processes of socialisation, however many researchers have highlighted that there also needs to be consideration of human agency and people's choice to be socialised or not into a particular culture (Chan, 1997; Bacon, 2014; Campeau, 2015). All people have the ability to reject and shape cultural values, both on an organisational level, but also within different occupational roles (Campeau, 2015). Patterson (2014 p. 22) proposes the following explanation of how human agency plays a part in culture: "*far from denying the play of freedom and human agency, the discipline of culture... enables us to create, in our social and individual beings, the wildest thoughts and feelings our*

*imaginations allow and the selves we choose to actualise. The more, the better, the collective constructions of culture work for us, the freer are we, as individuals, to be, to do, and to think as we please*". This definition has great significance to perspectives of neurodiversity, which propose diversity of thought and behaviour is a strength, as opposed to a hindrance. Bacon (2014) highlights that police officers are not institutionalised clones. They are a heterogeneous group of people who carry with them a history of learning and socialisation, of values, beliefs and personal ideologies that affect their interpretation of the police role and their adjustment to the demands of police work, presenting a diversity in their thoughts and subsequent behaviour. Therefore, in any discussion of police culture, it is essential to recognise the role of agency and discretion as part of police practitioners' identities and roles.

Discretion, in this research, is described sociologically, meaning it is recognised as a form of agency which can impact on decision-making processes and indeed all forms of social action (Skinns, 2019). Discretion in policing has historically been described as the police's ability to decide on the best way to handle a particular incident they are involved with (Banton, 1964). This definition is not far removed from more modern conceptualisations of discretion, which include those posed by Mastrofski (2004), who suggests that discretion "*means the leeway that officers enjoy in selecting from more than one choice in carrying out their work*" (p. 101), and Nowacki (2015) who proposes "*police discretion represents the flexibility to make decisions on the job and allows officers to decide whether to issue citations, arrest or even use of lethal force*" (p. 644). Furthermore, Skinns (2019) defines discretion and human agency as police practitioner's ability to choose to act within their authorised capacity, for their actions to be shaped by legal and administrative rules, yet often done so in accordance to the cultural and social structures of the wider police organisation. Dixon (1997) argues

that discretion is an essential element of police decision-making because the reality of police work involves not only law enforcement, but also service provision, crime prevention and order maintenance, along with a range of crisis-related incidents (Gundhus, 2017).

There are a number of factors that inform and impact police discretion, with the majority of literature focusing on the role of the law and use of police powers (Mastrofski, 2004; Schulenberg, 2015; Skinns, 2019). Other factors, including the laws and administrative policies that supposedly empower and guide policing, have also been explored in regards to police discretion (Nowacki, 2015). In addition, Skinns (2019) highlights the role of rule structures within police organisations, which encompass formal policies and codes of practice. However, these factors are often seen as redundant when police officers on the beat are having to make fast and reasoned judgements about how to handle a situation. For example, police officers have to decide whom to stop-and-search, whether to use force, which services to refer to, and whether to arrest within a matter of moments of arriving at a call for service (Dhami, Lundrigan and Thomas, 2018). The necessity of arrest criteria also impacts on an officer's discretion in the moment, in part due to their complexity (Pearson, Rowe and Turner, 2018). As Ericson (2007) points out: "*The selection, relevance and use of law is itself a matter of decision*" (p. 373), meaning that the police have the ability to make a choice about their actions, yet it is important to recognise that these decisions are embedded with legal and administrative rules (Skinns, 2019). In addition to these policy and practical pressures, are the officers' interpretation of their role, the context and circumstances of the suspected offence and the demeanour, history and attitude of the suspect (Pearson, Rowe, and Turner, 2018).

The day-to-day decision-making undertaken by most operational police officers are regarded some of the most important types of decisions made by the police (Skinns, 2019). The reason for this is because such decisions are usually made under conditions of relatively low visibility, in that they may not be scrutinised by supervisors, for example. However, such decisions would not be possible without the additional discretionary decision-making of police supervisors and line managers. Unlike the decisions taken by officers on the beat, managerial decisions are inherently political, focusing on the moral values of police organisations, involve weighing up demands for competing priorities and resources and ultimately enforcing policies that impact operational policing (Skinns, 2019). Despite the abundance of literature that continues to highlight the importance of operational decision-making and the lack of visibility that police managers have on operational staff, managerial decisions fundamentally impact operational decision-making (Skinns, 2019). Johnson (2015) noted that a typical officer is free to patrol their beats, act proactively and respond to calls for service with little supervision. Therefore, it has often been presented that supervisors have little first-hand knowledge of the performance of their officers, limiting their ability to be accountable for specific actions. However, the gaps between operational and managerial discretionary decision-making may not be as significant as reported in the literature. Wider organisational financial and resource constraints, as well as political priorities that guide and inform decision-making, both at a managerial and operational level, have an impact on the way operational officers conduct their enquiries. (Johnson and Vaughn, 2016). Due to the vast and varying influences on discretion and the role that individual agency has in policing, Skinns (2019) put forward that the influences on discretion should be more widely considered, but at the same time it should be recognised that preordained rules for officers to follow can be inflexible and can

damage the individual decisions that officers make to support members of the community.

Chan (1997) argues that the reality of police work allows room for individual officers' discretion, which is usually regarded positively, particularly during interactions with the public (see also Godfredson *et al.*, 2010). Many researchers have argued that the use of discretion is a positive aspect of policing, as it allows officers to be guided by the law, whilst exercising choice in a field which is often extremely context-dependent and circumstance-situated (Schulenberg, 2015). Another positive aspect of police discretion is that police officers are afforded a high degree of autonomy, meaning they have freedom to act in ways that are regarded appropriate for the situation they are in (Johnson, 2015). Loftus (2008) argues that extensive discretionary powers, and henceforth the use of such powers, are influenced by the police's cultural norms. Even if individual diversities and identities are brought into occupations and organisations, and there is a distinct police culture present, it is unsurprising that biases can become embedded into discretionary practice (Nowacki, 2015). This may be problematic during interactions with neurodivergent people, who may be considered as behaving outside of neurotypical norms, and henceforth could be treated differently and thus unfairly as a result. This assertion is supported by Johnson (2015), who argues that the right thing to do in one situation, may be an inappropriate in another.

## **2.6. Reforming police culture**

With Reiner's core characteristics capturing traditional understandings of police culture, and awareness that people can reject such culture, it is essential to discuss whether there can be an added layer of nuance to police culture: the consideration of

a neurodiverse police culture. The traditional and homogenised features of police culture presented thus far, may be perceived as predominately neurotypical (Beardon, 2017). Whilst there has been growing movement to embrace diversity in police organisations, there is yet to be consideration about the place of neurodiversity. In order to develop the idea of a neurodiverse police culture, and to increase the possibility of improved interactions with neurodivergent citizens, it is necessary to review the literature on reforming police culture, which is the main purpose of this section. Bowling *et al.* (2019) suggest that fundamental change requires not just changes aimed at individual officers, nor grand policy declarations, but a reshaping of the basic occupational character of the police role, as a result of wider social transformation in public policing. However, it has been well documented that the police are typically quite resistant to change (Loftus, 2009; Cockcroft, 2012; Bowling *et al.*, 2019; Campeau, 2019). Unfortunately, for this reason, it is difficult to know how to change cultural behaviour in policing, as researchers have seldom been able to understand or investigate the causes of these behaviours (Paoline and Gau, 2017).

One of the most frequently attempted ways to change culture is the introduction of training and education (Loftus, 2009). At the time of writing, police officers in England and Wales receive a two-hour mandatory 'mental health' training session, which includes a section on autism (Hepworth, 2017). Though written over 10 years ago, Chown (2009) highlighted that 70% of surveyed police officers in England and Wales received no formal training about autism and that there were significant misunderstandings about the differences between mental ill health and neurological differences. This remains significant today, arguably being one of the reasons for the dissatisfaction with current police practices, expressed by neurodivergent people and their families/carers (Crane *et al.*, 2016; Gibbs and Haas, 2020). Additionally, Crane

*et al.* (2016) noted that out of 242 police officers, only 37% had received training about autism, and 70% of the training was provided by police services themselves, rather than autism-specific organisations (16%). Beardon, Chown and Cossburn (2018) more recently accessed a Freedom of Information request from 34 of the 43 UK police forces, which confirmed that only 16 police organisations had some form of autism training. Furthermore, only 5 forces had involved their local autism organisation in developing or providing their training (Beardon, Chown and Cossburn, 2018). These findings might suggest a lack of consistency in regards to the training provision provided to police officers (Beardon, Chown and Cossburn, 2018). Bowling *et al.* (2019) suggest that suspiciousness does not only develop out of the intrinsic conditions of police work; it is deliberately encouraged by training. Therefore, if training has either never been provided or provided in a neurotypically-oriented way, culture will seldom change (Schein and Schein, 2017). A number of recommendations have been proposed to improve neurodiversity and/or autism training for police officers. In 2019, a bill was proposed to UK Parliament for mandatory autism awareness training for police organisations. This bill has since been put on hold, the reason for which, remains unpublished. However, if in-house optional training is to be effective, it must go further. As suggested by Beardon, Chown and Cossburn (2018), the police need to continuously receive training and education about the importance of recognising difference that is not specific to autism, and instead allows first responders to support people with a range of neurological differences.

A further method of reform suggested by Loftus (2008) is the introduction of additional policy to support the policing of diversity. Entangled within the concept of diversity is equal opportunities, whereby many individuals who are regarded as different are affected by multiple forms of disadvantage in a wide range of services,

which may extend to the criminal justice system (Fineman, 2010). Diversity in a multicultural Britain remains poorly understood by the police and is still not embedded in or connected to the organisational culture of the police (McLaughlin, 2007). Instead, diversity in policing is often seen as a buzzword, reduced to a series of tick boxes on a cultural check list (McLaughlin, 2007). Neurodiversity, like many other differences, is not easily understood within policy arenas, particularly in services relating to health, education and social welfare (Baker, 2006). In fact, the implementation of neurodiversity as an appreciation of neurological difference in society has not been well-documented in any policy literature in any public service in the UK (Baker, 2011). This may be due to the fact that neurodiversity is a relatively new way of thinking about difference, but mainly because mainstream, medicalised understandings of neurological conditions still prevail, often falling into the same categories as mental health and learning disabilities (Beardon, 2017). These understandings are perpetuated by a number of neurodivergent conditions, such as autism, still being encompassed within the Mental Health Act (MHA, 1983). Being part of this legislation is detrimental for two reasons. The first is that because mental ill health can often be treated through medication or talking therapies (Griffith and Tegnah, 2012). Though people may not fully recover from mental ill health, it is likely that their 'symptoms' can be alleviated. As highlighted by Beardon (2017), neurodivergence, on the other hand, relates to how the brain forms and works from birth. It cannot be changed or modified (only with extreme and harsh consequences) (Beardon, 2017). Secondly, services for neurodivergent people are different to those for people with mental ill health, and therefore referring an autistic person to mental health support, would not only be inappropriate, but increase the likelihood that the person would not receive the support they need.



Rather than focusing only on policy reform, Chan (1997), for example, advocates for a multi-pronged approach. She uses Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' and 'habitus' to highlight how reform can be implemented. The 'field', as described by Bourdieu, is the *"social space of conflict and competition, where participants struggle to establish control over specific power and authority"* (cited by Chan, 1997, p. 71), reflecting historical relations between certain social groups. The police are anchored by both legal powers, the discretionary nature of these powers and material resources within the community, influenced by environmental factors. On the other hand, 'habitus' refers to cultural knowledge, which combined with personal disposition and past experience enables individuals to cope with a range of unforeseen situations. Chan (1997) argues that both the 'field' and 'habitus' of officers and the organisation need to be changed in order to implement reform. However, it has been suggested that if culture is not as rigid as previously defined, when provided with appropriate learning opportunities and wider political, social and environmental support, change can more easily come about (Loftus, 2008). Any theory, understanding or definition of culture should allow for the possibility of change. Bacon (2014) suggests that reform initiatives may be deemed successful by virtue of them bringing about changes in behaviour, but unless they alter the deep-rooted characteristics of police culture, fundamental change will not occur. The problem in terms of neurodiversity reform is that change is particularly resisted when it challenges existing worldviews, when it requires officers to break from their established routines and norms, in ways that do not correlate with their intuitive common-sense (Chan, 1997; Bacon, 2014).

The narratives around the police organisation resisting change and reform have been criticised because they overlook the significant shifts in how police culture is used. Campeau (2019) describes this as a cultural inertia, whereby police practitioners

are reluctant to adapt to shifting environmental conditions. Instead of challenging occupational and organisational traits in order to develop change, Campeau (2019) suggests that police practitioners possess 'old' and 'new' cultural scripts, which create a conflict when attempting to reform police culture. For example, some police practitioners 'use' old cultural scripts, often in the form of sharing institutional myths, like the importance of teamwork and conformity (similarities waning towards Reiner's core characteristics). In sharing these institutional myths, those who use old cultural scripts are attempting to maintain the status quo within policing practice and procedure. This is in comparison to police practitioners who use new cultural scripts. These scripts pursue advancements to the workplace and tend to be used by diverse, often young, educated officers, meeting conflict with those who draw on old scripts (Campeau, 2019). Campeau's (2019) research goes on to describe the "*abundance of frustration-ridden narratives*" (p. 81) from those who use new scripts, due to the slow but careful impact of their forward-thinking. One participant from her research stated that police organisations "*just have to wait for the dinosaurs to die out*" (Campeau, 2019, p. 81), suggesting that cultural change is more so related to generational turnover or organisational re-structuring, than changes through training or education or the introduction of policies and subsequent procedures. As such, Campeau (2019) highlights that policing cannot be accelerated through policy alone, that policy-based imperatives are often side-stepped or re-interpreted in favour of comfortable cultural norms. However, as highlighted by Campeau's (2019) research, the mere fact that 'new'-generation officers draw on scripts which depart from 'old'-school ideas means that the status quo have the potential to be threatened. This means that a gap is established, in which subsequent change can occur.

To conclude this section, though discussed extensively, there is a need for caution in making generalisations about police culture (Chan, 1997). Skolnick and Bayley (1986) argue that in some cases, officers act in discriminatory and unequal ways because of the social inequality in overarching society, as opposed to an embedded or distinct police culture. Bowling *et al.* (2019) also acknowledge that occupational culture is both reflected and reinforced in patterns of disadvantage as part of broader social structures. Though also needing to be treated with caution, Reiner's core characteristics show the tendency of the police towards suspiciousness and to being influenced by patriarchal, white, hetero-normative beliefs that are embedded in the wider societal culture, and shared by many occupations. It should be noted that the police, like any other culture or subculture, are distinctive but not wholly distinct from the rest of society, despite a tendency to look at them in isolation from the general population (Waddington, 1999; Bacon, 2014). The fact of the matter is the police are actually akin to their fellow citizens in many of their general attitudes. Therefore, there becomes a greater issue concerning a neurodiverse police culture: the acceptance and inclusion of neurodiversity within society, as a whole.

## **2.7. Partnership working: A method of policing diversity, vulnerability and risk**

Partnership, or multi-agency working, attempts to promote 'inclusion' through the use of different perspectives and methods of working (Bradford, 2014). It is generally understood that "*'policing' is now both authorised delivered by diverse networks of commercial bodies, voluntary and community groups, individual citizens and national and local government regulatory agencies*" (Jones and Newburn, 2006, p. 1). There has been an increase in collaborative working between partner agencies and the police, both in local areas and more nationally, which is often referred to as the

*“extension of the policing family”* (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012, p. 86). This increase in collaboration has required the diversification of the police organisation as a whole and has been a necessary step in keeping up with the diversification of needs that potential partner agencies provide support for (Crawford and Lister, 2004). The diversification of needs within communities has grown from what are typically highlighted in previous research as ‘visible differences’ such as ethnicity and gender, to now include the need for awareness of ‘unseen differences’, such as sexuality and neurodivergence. In the past, there has been resistance from the police to become involved in the support and diversion of people with mixed and multiple differences and layers of vulnerabilities (Luna, 2009). However, more recently, the police have become aware that it is part of their role to identify such vulnerability and support other agencies in the safeguarding of vulnerable people, where this is needed and appropriate (Crawford and L’Hoiry, 2017). The diverse networks that have been developed are referred to in policing literature as ‘partnerships’.

A partnership, broadly speaking, is a *“co-operative relationship between two or more organisations to achieve a common goal”* (Berry, Briggs, Erol and van Staden, 2011 p. 1). These common goals include safeguarding vulnerable groups of people, which could include neurodivergent people. Therefore, where neurodivergent people are regarded vulnerable, it is important to consider the (increasing) role of partnership working to ensure the suitable support of neurodivergent citizens who come into contact with the police. It appears that much literature which predates the Crime and Disorder Act (1998), introducing the role of mandatory partnership working in community safety partnerships, tends to take a pessimistic perspective of police partnership working, focusing on the barriers and challenges that true collaboration requires. Furthermore, though commonly cited, research conducted around the time

of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) failed to interrogate the meaning of ‘success’ within partnership working, and instead continually overstated structural constraints (Dick, 2018). Even now, according to Skynns (2008), it is only “*in theory*” that all elements of partnership working *can* work – that it can create new opportunities, that trust can be built, information can be shared and that resources, skills, capacity and knowledge can be equally distributed (p. 312). However, it has also been acknowledged that all elements of partnership working are not always required simultaneously for effective collaboration (Allen, Karanoasios and Norman, 2014). The realities of partnership working with the police is that a lot has changed, and continues to change, in terms of attitudes towards partnerships, the logistics and practical elements of working in partnerships, as well as how partnerships develop and ‘succeed’ over time (O’Neill and McCarthy, 2014).

As has been discussed throughout this literature review, the concept of police culture arguably impacts partnership working with other statutory and non-statutory agencies (O’Neill and McCarthy, 2014). Though it is generally accepted that the police are unlike many other agencies with whom they collaborate, the idea that police culture may impact their ability to work in partnership relates mainly to the maintenance of cultural conservatism (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). The police appear to want to maintain and reinforce their ways of thinking and working (what Reiner calls conservatism) and therefore working in partnership may threaten their ability to do this. However, though possibly still the case in some partnerships, this cultural conservatism no longer seems to be a direct hindrance in the development of police partnership relationships. Instead, another cultural concept has been identified as a more positive focus of partnership working (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Pragmatism, as described by Bowling *et al.* (2019) is the ability to observe the practical elements of police partnership working

that serve a purpose. O'Neill and McCarthy (2014) conducted two research projects on police partnerships, the first to investigate the views of police officers regarding partnership working and Neighbourhood Policing and the second to investigate the role of the police and other community agencies working in partnership to respond to anti-social behaviour.

In their interviews, O'Neill and McCarthy (2014) identified that police officers expressed their enthusiasm to engage in partnerships simply because of the practical benefits they produced. For example, police officers observed the long-term benefits of working in partnership, as well as the short-term benefits (working together on longer pieces of work, but also the ability to solve a problem quickly). From this, O'Neill and McCarthy (2014) identified that police culture could actually facilitate, rather than hinder, multi-agency working and highlighted shifts in the attitudes police had towards the development of partnerships. Therefore, in reviewing the literature on police partnerships, there are a number of factors to consider. Firstly, that police organisational culture within partnerships has a significant impact on how the partnership functions, such as how much the police participate, engage and have an active role within partnerships. Furthermore, the expectations that the police have when engaging in partnership working are more often significantly higher than working in silo (Rosenbaum, 2002). To demonstrate, there has been a shift from the police being reticent to work in partnerships, to now being more actively involved in their function and development (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017). There is limited research that looks at the role of police partnerships in directly supporting neurodivergent people, and therefore, the support that can be provided to neurodivergent citizens through partnership working is discussed throughout the remaining sections of this literature review.

### 2.7.1. Types of partnerships, partner agencies and the impact of inter-agency relationships

There are a variety of different partnerships that the police can and do engage in, ranging from partnerships between police organisations, multi-agency partnerships, partnerships between the police and the academic community and between the police and the private security industry (Loftus *et al.*, 2014). In this research, multi-agency partnerships are the main type of partnership discussed, primarily because they tend to focus on the complexities within communities, which attempt to address the intricacies of policing diversity (Meyer and Mazerole, 2014). Multi-agency partnerships are formed between statutory organisations, such as the police, health, education, social and youth services, however they can also include non-statutory organisations, such as voluntary and third sector organisations, i.e. charities. A continuum can be used to describe the relationships that partnerships have in practice (Frost, 2005). At one end, ad-hoc or fleeting relationships are those likened to partner agencies that 'cooperate' with one another. These are informal relationships, whereby the partnership only focuses on the short-term solutions of a particular issue. They involve cooperation, whereby services work together toward goals, while maintaining their independence (Anning *et al.*, 2010). One example of an informal, ad-hoc partnership relationship has been explored by Allen, Karanasios and Norman (2014), who researched collaborations between partner agencies during major incidents, such as the 7/7 London Bombings. They highlighted that these situations require rapid and simultaneous intervention from several emergency services such as the police, fire and rescue and ambulance response (Allen, Karanasios and Norman, 2014). Though all classified as 'emergency services', each of these partner agencies plays a different

role in the major incident. Once the major incident has been resolved, the partnership is dissolved. Therefore, although ad-hoc partnerships may work as a short-term solution to a particular problem, they are not designed for long-term projects, which require integrated collaboration.

Another example of ad-hoc and/or informal partnership relationships, which are more common than major incident collaborations, are multi-agency meetings. These partnerships are designed to support an individual person at a specific point, concerning a specific issue. Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPAs), for example, require a number of criminal justice actors to come together to discuss a person who has recently been arrested, who is on probation or has recently been released from prison (Higgins, Hales and Chapman, 2016). Their purpose is short-term, to put measures in place that ensure the safety of the community that the individual is being reintegrated into. Once the individual has been reintegrated or perceived no longer a risk to the community, the partnership is disbanded. Another example of informal partnerships are Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). These usually involve fortnightly meetings between appropriate and relevant social service type agencies (safeguarding, social services, police, education) to discuss an individual who may be at risk of victimisation or offending (Higgins, Hale and Chapman, 2016). A short-term plan is put in place for the support of that individual, but once the person has been deemed no longer at risk, the collaboration is dissolved.

At the other end of the spectrum are integrated partnership relationships, where different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery (Anning *et al.*, 2010). These are the opposite of informal, ad-hoc partnerships, known as formal partnership relationships. These types of partnerships are often based on legal, contractual or organisational arrangements (Whelen and Dupont, 2017), which



mean that the partnership is a requirement, rather than just a fleeting, temporary relationship. As such, formal partnerships are created to enhance the support delivered from a specific intervention designed to be implemented by partnerships (Berry *et al.*, 2011). In Higgins, Hale and Chapman's (2016) analysis of a multi-agency partnership, they found that in order for a formal partnership to be successful, there needed to be strong practitioner buy-in and endorsement from a broad set of participating agencies. Furthermore, Whelen and Dupont (2017) identified that formal relationships include structured meetings, liaisons and fusion centres (co-location) and shared intelligence databases. Interestingly, aspects of formal partnership relationships are also aspects of informal partnership working (Higgins, Hale and Chapman, 2016). Therefore, while informal relationships often underpin formal networks, considerable work remains to be done to identify the distinction between formal and informal partnership relationships and to determine what distinguishes them, as well as how they complement each other (Whelen and Dupont, 2017).

#### 2.7.2. Roles within partnerships and the expectations of the police

The police recognise that, whilst they are often the first port of call for problems, they are not always the best equipped to address a situation (McCarthy and O'Neill, 2014). Specialisation, notions of expertise and differential organisational functions are essential in supporting those with complex needs, yet can often lead to a "*fragile web of inter-organisational conflicts and incongruities*" (Crawford, 1997, p. 95), which may be why there seems to be a lack of collaboration between the police organisations and specialist service providers. In informal or ad hoc partnership relationships, roles are often played by informal contacts, or 'specific people', within a partner organisation. These people, who can help to address an issue more effectively, were seen in

McCarthy and O'Neill's research (2014), as a more effective way of building up strong professional relationships and establishing identities within the partnership group. More importantly, the police often suggested that named and known individuals were more trusted to take action when asked, whereas reliance on the wider organisation tended to let officers down (McCarthy and O'Neill, 2014). In formal partnerships, roles are more likely to be pre-defined at the outset of the partnership agreement, and are less likely to lead to conflict in the expectations each key player or organisation takes. Conflict is often described within many partnerships and comes as the result of differing cultures, goals and working practice between different organisational ethos, priorities, and ways of thinking and working. However, differences in working practices can also be regarded as diversity, which have the potential to be sources of synergy, rather than conflict (Rosenbaum, 2002).

The importance of assigned roles and responsibilities in partnerships is so that no organisation tries to "*do it all*" (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017, p. 14), as this arguably defeats the purpose of working collaboratively. The roles taken by different partner agencies was found by McCarthy (2014) to create concerns about whether certain agencies, as well as individual people, were more likely to dominate partnership proceedings. This was particularly found in relation to the police, who often took a lead when it appeared that no one else was doing anything (McCarthy, 2014). The proactivity of the police is often surprising, given the recent cuts to service and the high turnover rates of staff (Higgins, Hale and Chapman, 2016). However, their proactivity often comes from their hierarchical structure, a 'top-down' management approach, meaning that if they are asked to participate in a partnership, they must (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983). It may also come from their action-orientated culture (Bowling *et al.*, 2019), as well as the police ethos of being 'first responders' (McCarthy

and O'Neill, 2014). Relatedly, another aspect of roles and identities within partnership working is the unrealistic expectations of what others can deliver. Meyer and Mazerolle (2014) suggest a number of reasons for these disappointments, including a lack of clarity and understanding about each other's capacities and boundaries. Therefore, there is not only the differing ways of problem solving and cultural boundaries that need to be overcome in partnership working, but also a range of practical obstacles, notably working patterns, that can impact relationships (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017). The types of partner organisations and the possible conflicts that arise as a result of these specific multi-agency working teams are important to consider when the police interact with neurodivergent people, because although they may be supported by all of the various agencies, where support is not shared, passed on, or referred to, neurodivergent people might be mistreated, disproportionately dealt with (specifically by police) or more importantly, not recognised as being in need of additional support.

### 2.7.3. Sharing information and resources

Another commonly discussed aspect of police partnership working revolves around the sharing of information and resources (Crawford and Cunningham, 2015). The sharing of resources and information is often seen as essential to 'successful' partnership working, and appears to be improving as partnership working becomes more widespread, particularly in policing. In ad-hoc relationships, information sharing has been reported to be lacking. For example, Allen, Karanasios and Norman (2014) highlighted that there is a lack of communication between organisations during a major incident, often because different services are receiving information about the same event, i.e. 999 calls to both the police and ambulance services, with each individual service holding this data on separate systems that have little ability to communicate

with one another. Partnerships, particularly informal and ad-hoc partnerships, therefore, require consensus, communication, mutuality and the sharing of not only information and resources, but also the sharing of knowledge and understanding (Crawford, 1997), in order to function at the most basic level. In more formal partnership relationships, where the collaboration is based on pre-defined terms of practice, agreements surrounding information sharing are addressed at the start of the collaboration (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017). In projects such as McGarrell's (cited in Berry *et al.*'s 2011 meta-analysis), information sharing processes between partners had to be put in place before any community safety initiatives could be implemented, however this was not explicit at the outset of the project.

The requirements of having information sharing practices in place mean that partners can come to a collective agreement about how data is received, interpreted and shared and that this is mandatory as part of the partnership collaboration (Dick, 2018). This is supported by Makin and Marenin (2017), who suggest that within community-level partnerships, the police and the community conduct their own formal and informal security practices, which are essential for the safeguarding of personal data. However, without 'working together', information sharing may mean important knowledge about a person may be missed or exploited (Maguire and Wells, 2002). Furthermore, where information and resources are not shared between partnership agencies, this may lead to gaps in practice, which is a particularly concerning aspect of partnership working where neurodivergent people are involved. Therefore, data sharing remains one of the most contentious aspects of police partnerships (Crawford and Cunningham, 2015). It has been suggested that in order for the sharing of such information to be fully integrated and streamlined, "*a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles*" (p. 29) are required (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002).

These frameworks are often a part of the language used in documents shared by members of the partnership (Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017). If the police are provided with information detailed from the medical perspective of disability and difference, they may approach a situation differently to if they were provided with more informal, individualised information about a person's behaviour. Therefore, what has not yet been assessed, evaluated or even developed is a set of shared practices, a 'framework', that addresses partnership working in response to neurodiversity in policing, and more specifically the support of neurodivergent people who come into contact with the police.

## **2.8. Conclusions**

The neurodiversity movement suggests that instead of seeing autism and other neurological differences as 'disorders' (Baker, 2011), people simply have different neurotypes, which encourages a more accepting way of thinking about differences in thought patterns and behaviour (Beardon, 2017). However, there has yet to be any consideration of how potentially neurotypical police practices affect neurodivergent people. This review began by highlighting the areas that previous research into field of neurodiversity, autism and policing has focused. These include the improvement of police processes (such as custody and interviews), identifying the frequency in which autistic people come into contact with the police and whether there are links between autistic behaviour and criminality. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the research in this field still discusses autism from a medicalised perspective, meaning that understandings may remain similarly medicalised and thus limited. In the existing research, seldom has there also been consideration of the wider political and structural

context of police interactions, nor have there been any attempts to explore the neurotypicality of police actions or the potential for a more neurodiverse police culture.

In a variety of policing contexts, vulnerability is generally used as a labelling exercise, which can be seen as both helpful and detrimental to identifying people who might be at risk (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). On the one hand, by doing this, the police may further stigmatise the individual, blaming them for being at risk or a risk rooted in their differences. On the other hand, the discretionary powers of the police can allow for the equalising of impact of police actions on diverse groups, whereby on labelling a person as vulnerable, situations can be de-escalated without legal action and personal factors can be taken into account (Bartkowiak-Theron and Corbo Crehan, 2012). Further consideration needs to be taken when reviewing whether a neurodivergent person is “*at risk*” or “*a risk*” (Stanford, 2012), given the thin line between victimisation and criminalisation of certain divergent behaviours. This review has highlighted that vulnerability and risk discourses surrounding neurodiversity and policing is of increased importance during police interactions, where legal and social definitions and understandings of what neurodivergence is could impact the support an individual receives (i.e. whether they are considered vulnerable or not).

Police organisations have been carefully considered as potentially neurotypical within this review, by recognising a number of Reiner’s core characteristics, such as suspicion, isolation and solidarity, conservatism, machismo and racial prejudice. From Skolnick’s (1966) ‘working personality’ theory to discussion about ‘working rules’ (Tillyer, 2014), this review has highlighted that suspicion assists the police in distinguishing between behaviours that are criminal or not. Furthermore, attention has been paid to the role of ‘us’ (the police) versus ‘them’ (non-police). By doing so, this

review has noted that the police have a political status and conceptual conservatism, meaning they are unwilling to diverge from mainstream norms and values (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Finally, the police have been recognised as lacking in their organisational diversity, documented as being predominately white, male and heterosexual, and that this homogeneity presents unique challenges in policing diverse citizens (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Thus, this literature review states that growing the level of support afforded to neurodivergent people may come from the development of a neurodiverse police culture. Though it is unlikely to occur purely through education and training, policy reforms (Loftus, 2008), and the use of theories such as 'field' and 'habitus' (Chan, 1997) and cultural toolkits (Campeau, 2019), there may be the ability to change ways of thinking and working to improve interactions with neurodivergent citizens by attempting to understand and apply them in the field of neurodiversity.

In a time of austerity, partnership working has been observed as a feasible solution for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of police work (Dick, 2018). Though previously framed negatively in the literature, the benefits of working in partnership can be clearly identified as outweighing the challenges (O'Neill and McCarthy, 2014; Crawford and L'Hoiry, 2017; Dick, 2018). There have been many successful accounts of partnership working within the police, some of which are discussed in the findings of this research. McCarthy and O'Neill (2014) propose that, previously, police culture has been seen as a barrier to partnership working. However, they also highlight that police culture can positively contribute to the development and effectiveness of partnership working (McCarthy and O'Neill, 2014). There has yet to be any literature regarding police partnership working in the support of neurodivergent people, particularly considering the role of multi-agency partnerships. The introduction of partner agencies that specifically support neurodivergent people may increase and

encourage change in regards to the ways the police think about and treat neurodivergent citizens. As such, there is scope for police organisation to become part of a more varied and complex assortment of organisations and agencies, in order to develop a diverse community-based approach to policing (Crawford and Lister, 2004).



### **3. Methodology**

The aim of this chapter is to highlight my epistemological, ontological and reflexive positionality, all of which have been impacted by the theory of Critical Realism (CR). CR is a philosophy that attempts to bridge the gap between positivist ways of researching and interpretivist understandings of analysis (de Souza, 2014). It is rarely used to inform research and is often used to retrospectively analyse data. However, I found it most important that the research remained critical of police practices, policies and procedures, given the diverse nature of society, therefore CR informed the methods of data collection that were decided upon. In line with more positivist or 'empirical' understandings of CR (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017), quantitative data collection methods were regarded as essential to gain perspective of the circumstances in which the police interact with neurodivergent people. From a more interpretivist or 'actual' perspective of CR (Bhaskar, 2008; Fletcher, 2017), qualitative research methods were also utilised in order to gain an understanding of how people, namely police officers and staff, reproduce and reinforce power (both occupationally and organisationally). As suggested by Critical Realists, this reproduction and reinforcement is often done through the use of language (Bhaskar, 2008), the implications of which may impact how the police interact with neurodivergent people.

Through the process of exploring both the 'empirical' and the 'actual', CR adds another layer of epistemological and ontological thinking, which is subsequently named the 'real' (Bryman, 2016). Though the 'real' may never be fully established through the process of research (Porter, 2015), this chapter explores what this concept means in the context of this research. Firstly, CR is discussed in more depth, exploring

both its underlying principles, how it has informed the decisions made methodologically in this research and how it has been used more practically in this research. This is followed by a reflexive account which explores my reasonings for certain methodological decision-making. An introduction to the case study sites that were used and an overview of the individual participants who took part in interviews are presented, followed by a discussion of the methods that were implemented to collect data (namely, the more novel method of collecting quantitative data, in the form of analysing 999/101 call log records, and qualitative data collection methods, in the form of semi-structured interviews). The quantitative call log analysis led to the output of numerical frequencies and descriptive statistics, whilst qualitative analysis was conducted using critical thematic and discourse analysis, which is discussed in-depth. Finally, ethical considerations are referenced in line with the University's ethical policies and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, 2018), and their importance is highlighted as part of the data collection, as well as part of ongoing research requirements.

### **3.1. Epistemology**

Critical Realism (CR) is a philosophy of social science that arose in the UK during the late 1970s and early 1980s and is described as the link between sociological positivism and forms of social constructionism or interpretivism (Gorski, 2018). Both epistemologically and ontologically, positivism attempts to seek the causes of social phenomena with little regard for the subjective states of individuals (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975), and is often associated methodologically with quantitative approaches to research (Creswell, 2009). On the other hand, interpretivism, an epistemological approach that contrasts explicitly with positivism, argues that phenomenon cannot be

objectively observed or measured, and instead requires researchers to be open-minded to different interpretations of phenomena (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, interpretivists understand phenomena through how it is constructed and reinforced by those who experience it daily. CR, then, attempts to find the space between these two approaches, drawing on features of both positivism and interpretivism in regards to their epistemological and ontological principles. CR's manifesto, as described by Bryman (2016), is to recognise 'realities' of events and discourses, analysing content that empirically develops and may not be directly observable.

Historically, the first epistemological school of thought is that of positivists, who often referred to data as the measurable facts of human experience (Coolican, 2014). Their belief that all 'true' knowledge is only discovered using systematically scientific ways has long since dominated epistemological and ontological practices in many research disciplines (O'Leary, 2014). That being said, the positivist epistemological position advocates the application of methods that relate primarily, and often explicitly to the natural sciences as opposed to the social sciences. Usually measured using quantitative methods (Creswell, 2009), the primary purpose of the positivist epistemology is for a hypothesis to be generated and tested, allowing explanations to be assessed, and for the search for the absolute 'truth' of knowledge to be undertaken (Creswell, 2009). In this sense, there is a clear distinction between scientific statements and normative statements, with a belief that the former is the 'true' domain, or the 'real' explanation for specific phenomenon (Bryman, 2016). Although positivism remains widely used, it has often been subjected to criticism in terms of its vision of social reality and the appropriate methods that can and should be used for studying social phenomena (Denscombe, 2002). This criticism has often come from interpretivists and social constructionists, who view social reality as something that is

constructed and interpreted by people, rather than something that exists objectively 'out there', waiting to be discovered (Denscombe, 2002).

From interpretivists' point of view, the social world does not have tangible, material qualities that allow it to be measured, touched or observed in some literal way. Instead, it is seen as a social creation, constructed in the minds of people and reinforced through their interactions with each other (Denscombe, 2002). Typically relying on qualitative approaches, the interpretivist/social constructionist researcher tries to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have, which are understood to be constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting or constructing (Creswell, 2009). It contrasts explicitly with positivism, in that the interpretivist epistemological inquiry respects the differences between people and the objects within the natural sciences, whilst also proposing the need for social scientists to grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2016). Similarly, the ontological positioning of social constructionism suggests that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2016), and therefore both approaches oppose the scientific and objective nature of 'truth' proposed by positivists (Denscombe, 2002). Though influential in the development of CR, Critical Realists criticise the interpretivist and social constructionist approach due to its subjectivity, in that 'what is' ('reality') cannot be reduced to 'what I or we think it is' (interpretation) (Shoolman, 2017).

Unlike positivists, who attempt to observe reality through the lens of causation and interpretivists who attempt to deconstruct and interpret individual, cultural and social discourses and social action (Bunt, 2018), CR posits meaning or 'reality' as not only what can be observed empirically through research, but also as the structures and powers that exist within society that are perpetuated (and interpreted) by people (de

Souza, 2014). Often described as a 'broad church', CR emerged primarily as an intellectual response to the positivist and interpretivist approaches (Lopez and Potter, 2001). Whilst acknowledging that 'knowledge' can only be measured to some extent, CR brings together principles of positivism, and takes them further towards the understanding that 'knowledge' is whatever human beings come to socially certify as such, much like what is posited by the interpretivist approach (Lopez and Potter, 2001). The 'critical' part comes from the understanding that 'knowledge' is socially situated and structured, yet is dependent on human activity, therefore suggesting that people are shaped and affected by social forces that act upon us (Harré and Bhaskar, 2001). This feature is what makes CR stand out from other epistemological and ontological perspectives of knowledge acquisition.

In accordance to the CR approach, it is this emphasis on structure and power in society that frames research questions and subsequently frames data collection and analysis in social science research. Therefore, CR attempts to see 'reality' as something that exists at a much deeper level, and that using research, can potentially provide the ability to observe, understand and verbalise/document these particular situations and social structures (Mearns, 2011). CR has an intrinsic investment in how people make meaning out of their events and experiences, whilst also being interested in the mechanisms that produce an event and allow it to occur (Bunt, 2018). However, unlike the interpretivist approach who also posit these assumptions, CR suggests that realist ontology is a 'thing' rather than an event-centred phenomena, with these 'things' being very different from ordinary notions of understanding, taking into account but not limited to, powers, forces, mechanisms, characteristics or sets of relations (Lopez and Potter, 2001). In this research, it is these 'things' that directly involve the experiences of police practitioners, that are explored in the context of neurodiversity, along with

careful consideration of unobservable mechanisms, such as the 'culture(s)' and 'power' that may influence and direct the police role.

The current relationship between the police and neurodivergent people, more accurately documented as the experiences of the police and autistic people, are generally negative (for example in Allen *et al.*, 2008; Beardon, 2008; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Higgs and Carter, 2015; Maras, 2015). Though there are a number of reasons as to why these interactions may have been negative, it appears that the majority of media outlets and research studies report the reasons as being due to autistic people being an inherently vulnerable minority (Fisher, Moskowitz and Hodapp, 2012; Weiss and Fardella, 2018). The police, on the other hand, have status and power (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). There is very limited research or media publications that have explored this relationship, in terms of power and status. All that has been produced thus far focuses on individual factors that may influence interactions, such as a lack of knowledge and understanding about autism or a lack of training. However, CR would argue that the issue needs to be looked at with a broader lens, that it is this positioning of the police organisation and autistic citizens in society that may have an effect on reported interactions. Therefore, if the police are found to practice in neurotypical ways, the power dynamic between neurotypical and neurodivergent people may be what is partly causing negative interactions, as opposed to individually subjective interpretations of incidents involving neurodivergent or autistic people (though these are often valid too).

Neurodivergent people are arguably marginalised in all aspects of society (Mogensen and Mason, 2015). The care crisis for neurodivergent communities has been well-documented at the time of writing (Transforming Care and Commissioning Steering Group, 2014; NHS England *et al.*, 2015; Ryan, 2017; Trigg, 2019), and it

has become apparent that the reason for the poor relations with autistic or neurodivergent citizens is due to their differences and the subsequently failed attempts at interacting with a neurotypical society. The examples cited highlight the poor relations between neurodivergent citizens in society as a whole, but also demonstrate that, as the police are a major part of society, relations with the police will also be negative. Though there are a number of other factors that have been used to account for the poor relationships between the police and neurodivergent people, little discussion has been made about the role of risk, vulnerability and the perception of these concepts on behalf of the police in their interactions with these communities. Consequently, it has been interpreted in other research that there is discrimination, bias or stereotyping as a result of the differences displayed by neurodivergent people and the neurotypical organisations they interact with, seldom using such progressive language. When adding in the complexity of power and status, this possible discrimination, bias and stereotyping means that interactions are considered especially negative, regardless of any other documented factors. It may even be that neurodivergent people are not vulnerable, as is argued in this research, but it is the social and political standing that is ascribed to them in society in the first place that causes their interactions to be deemed as such.

The power that is provided to the police in society and the minority status given to neurodivergent/autistic people, who are described as vulnerable or at risk, puts the neurodivergent community against a powerful organisation, that are at the opposite ends of the social hierarchy. Therefore, there is a need to look at the effects of the police as an organisation, as opposed to individuals, as these individuals are socially situated, and their powers are perpetually perceived as such. The role of CR in this research attempts to do this. Although interviewing individuals, the critical analysis

conducted explores the ways in which the police are shaped and affected by social structures and the social forces that act upon them (Lopez and Potter, 2001). It attempts to understand how social structures, such as the domination of neurotypical patterns of behaviour and thought within the police organisation, limit the positive outcomes experienced by neurodivergent communities. This is of particular importance to the argument that the police are constrained, influenced and biased by neurotypical policies, procedures and practices. Furthermore, it is important to recognise this dynamic because social structures are not easily changed in modern society, instead those who are situated in those structures tend to reproduce them, rather than transform them (Lopez and Potter, 2001). However, what has been researched so far appears to have neglected whether these power structures causally affect relations and interactions between neurodivergent people and the police.

Returning to the theoretical principles of CR and how they are used and understood in practice, unlike the ontologies of positivism and interpretivism, that are often referred to as “*flat*” (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017, p. 31), CR’s ontology is often described as ‘multidimensional’ (Bunt, 2018). The reason for this is that CR sees reality as being stratified into three levels. Firstly, the ‘empirical’ level or ‘domain’ is the realm of events as we experience them first-hand. They are the events or objects that can be measured empirically or explained through common sense (Fletcher, 2017). The ‘empirical’ comprises observable experiences, as “*what actually happens*” (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017, p. 30). This domain relates explicitly to positivist epistemology and ontology, with Bhaskar (2008) respectfully acknowledging the usefulness and necessity to measure certain constructs or events. The second level of reality put forward by CR is the ‘actual’ domain. This refers to events, both observed and unobserved (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017), that happen when certain mechanisms



are activated (Hoddy, 2018). Bhaskar (2008) describes this domain as the distinction between 'empirical', measurable structures, mechanisms of the world and the actual patterns of events that they generate. At this level, there is no filter of human experience, suggesting that events occur whether or not we experience or interpret them (Fletcher, 2017). This domain draws inspiration from interpretivist accounts of reality, although as opposed to suggesting all phenomena is interpreted and this is what researchers should and can actively measure, Critical Realists propose events happen regardless of interpretation, and require more complex ways of being explored.

The final domain is that of the 'real', which is often referred to as the base of an iceberg, unseen and hidden below the surface (Fletcher, 2017). Bhaskar (2008) describes the 'real' level as where knowledge can be understood as containing all that exists about a particular phenomenon, and often involves hypotheses about the causal mechanisms which account for a situation (Bunt, 2018). This level suggests that causal structures or mechanisms exist, and that they are inherent properties that act as causal forces that produce events (Fletcher, 2017). Moving from perceptions and experiences of these events in the 'empirical' domain, through and towards the domains of the 'actual' and the 'real', reality and/or knowledge becomes increasingly difficult to access (Bhaskar, 2008; Hoddy, 2018). However, Fletcher (2017) argues that all levels are indeed part of the same entity or 'reality', suggesting that causal mechanisms are social products that can ultimately be understood through phenomena investigated at the empirical level. These domains have been explored in both the development and completion of this research. When exploring the 'empirical' domain, I assessed the field of neurodiversity in policing, realising that what had already been completed in the field was condition-specific (focused only on autistic

people's experiences) and was measured through subjective methods only (such as interviews or surveys). An example of this is in Crane *et al.*'s (2016) research, whereby the researchers asked police officers to 'estimate' their interactions with autistic people, producing results that are entirely based on individuals' subjective reality. Therefore, in this research, I attempted to establish the amount of interactions the police have with neurodivergent people in a way that could be considered more objective. Though being aware that nothing can be truly objective, or accurate, the study sought to provide a more realistic perspective as to the circumstances in which neurodivergent people interact with the police organisation.

When attending to the 'actual' domain, this research attempted to understand whether the language used by the police as an organisation has an impact on procedures and practices, prior to and during interactions with neurodivergent people. This domain acts in a more interpretivist way, and although critical thematic and discourse analysis was conducted, there was still a level of 'bias' on my behalf, in that language and themes were interpreted from only my perspective. This being said, it is hoped that critically analysing interviews with police practitioners and key stakeholders whom they work with has provided a more 'actual' account of practices and experiences of interactions. Finally, the 'real' domain is hard to reach, and is a widely criticised concept within CR (Porter, 2015). However, this research attempted to establish whether the police organisation, and their practices and procedures, were neurotypical, and thus reflect the wider dominance of neurotypical thinking within society. It is hoped that through the exploration of the 'empirical' and the 'actual', that some conclusions can be drawn about the 'reality' of circumstances involved in policing neurodiversity. CR suggests that it is important to assess phenomenon at all three domains, the 'empirical', the 'actual' and the 'real'. In this research, this was done

by using call log data, in an attempt to establish the 'empirical', understanding of how the police interact with neurodivergent people, the implementation of interviews to interpret the 'actual' and finally, the use of critical thematic and discourse analysis in an attempt to establish the 'real' circumstances of interactions.

CR questions data which, using other epistemological approaches such as positivist or interpretivist methodologies, would perhaps remain unquestioned (Mearns, 2011). This is partly how it receives its name as being 'critical', with an element of its 'critical' edge coming from the focus on social structures and power, as well as the reinforcement of inequalities. Oliver (1996) would argue that data remains unquestioned due to exclusionary and marginalising barriers (such as the power and status provided to neurodivergent people in regards to their rights and differences) that exist within society that cannot be explored using traditional epistemological approaches. For example, data collection around neurodiversity and policing has been limited, perhaps due to the inflexibility of other theoretical understandings. This has been especially noticeable in research into police interactions with autistic people, whereby all that has been collected and reported has thus far been based only on inferred methods, returning to how Crane *et al.* (2016) and others (for example, Chown, 2009; Eadens *et al.*, 2016) asked officers to 'estimate' their interactions with autistic people. Presenting an alternative perspective, this research utilises both quantitative analysis of police database logs and semi-structured qualitative interviews.

CR's ontology is often described as "*structured, differentiated and changing*" (Bhaskar, Danermark and Price, 2018, p. 52). It is also referred to as relational, in that people are born into societies that pre-exist and comprise of existing relations between one another. CR has increasing focus on the 'silent majority', suggesting that 'silenced'

individuals require more representation or influence upon political agendas (Baudrillard, 2007). Therefore, it is important to look at both the micro and macro interactions between both the day-to-day realities and the wider societal contexts that influence and impact minority statuses (Bunt, 2018). This research sought to carefully consider the potential marginalisation of those who may be considered 'different'. Brown, Fleetwood and Roberts (2002) further support this assertion, suggesting that CR must attempt to identify the 'real' causal phenomena that are hidden beneath the surface and perhaps obscured from view or interpretation, which often take the form of discourse and language. Bhaskar (1989) claims that people in society reproduce and transform societal norms through mechanisms, such as discourse. As a result, it is important to consider how language and discourse is being used in the policing of marginalised populations, such as neurodivergent communities. In this research, this was done through the implementation of critical discourse analysis, which attempted to explore the neurotypical 'reality' of police-neurodivergent interactions through the use of neurotypical language. Power as asserted through language has been well documented by Lopez and Potter (2001) and Harrè and Bhaskar (2001). They argue that the interpretivist position is closely related to the understanding that the language is used to construct such reality (Lopez and Potter, 2001). Taking the interpretivist approach to the use of language and discourse further, CR suggests that theory and knowledge are 'language-borne', meaning that it is impossible to make some features of social reality scientific and objective, as according to the positivist approach (Harrè and Bhaskar, 2001). It is therefore important to study language as a product of knowledge and theory development, as the production of knowledge is itself a social process and one in which language is deeply embedded. For example, in this

research, it is argued that the use of medicalised, person-first language has the potential to affect the way in which police interact with neurodivergent citizens.

To conclude, unlike the orthodox methodological theories of positivism and interpretivism, CR combines realist ontology with interpretive epistemology (Bygstad, Munkvold and Volkoff, 2016). Put simply, CR proposes that the world is 'real' in the sense that it exists independently from our perceptions and beliefs and that our understanding of society is also socially constructed. However, there is also importance in acknowledging that these constructions can be measured empirically. For this reason, there may be a variety of 'realities' and ways of 'knowing', but some descriptions and accounts of a given phenomenon will approximate more closely to reality than others. The ways in which these accounts are uncovered is through a variety of methods, any of which may be deemed necessary for a given inquiry. In this research, the 'reality' explored was the extent to which and how the police interact and engage with neurodivergent people, what these interactions involve and how these interactions are supported by police partnerships. To explore this, a number of methods of data collection were chosen to find the closest portrayal of this 'reality', recognising, however, that there may still be a number of other interpretations of it. This was then looked at through a critical lens during analysis, as according to CR assumptions, meaning that the structural, cultural and situational circumstances in which these interactions have arisen were considered at all stages of the research (Joseph and Roberts, 2004).

### **3.2. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity**

In addition to the Critical Realist epistemological position taken in this research, I have included a section to discuss my role within the research process and within the

neurodiversity movement as a whole. This section was written retrospectively, allowing for reflection on the entire research process. That being said, my positionality and understanding of the neurodiversity movement has remained unchanged throughout. Reflecting in this way is in-keeping with the CR approach, whereby it is not only important to acknowledge my own power, status and experience prior to, and throughout, researching (Fletcher, 2017), but also to apply principles of CR being used in hindsight. Armstrong, Blaustein and Henry (2016) continue to stress this, by suggesting that reflexivity is even more important within the field of criminal justice, whereby power is exercised in the most extreme forms, and research assists in the construction and re-defining of such 'problems' being researched. Before discussing the data collection methods used, it is important to reflect on significant decisions that have influenced and constructed the research process (Coolican, 2014), as well as presenting a number of personal experiences that may have impacted my interpretation of the research findings. Reflexive accounts of research consider how personal characteristics and experiences and the subsequent decisions that are made throughout, inform and shape the process and impact on the validity and conclusions of data collected. Reflexivity within social science research increasingly involves researchers recognising that their insights about the world apply to themselves and their work (Armstrong, Blaustein and Henry, 2016). Henceforth, given that researchers can interpret and appreciate neurodiversity in a number of different ways, it is important not only to highlight my personal perspectives within the research process, but also to state my positionality as part of the neurodiversity movement.

The principles of the neurodiversity movement often have personal meaning, and these meanings have subsequently affected the development of this research. Growing up with an autistic sibling means that you think about and do things differently,

which is often regarded a negative characteristic by most neurotypical people, who attempt to maintain the status quo (Owren and Stenhammer, 2013). Yet in my version of reality, my brother's difference, and the impact it has on me has never been a 'bad' thing. That being said, accepting difference in this way is not something that is forced upon you. Learning about neurodiversity was a cultural awakening, as was the realisation that my way of thinking was not negative or bad. Having always felt different because of my experiences with my brother, learning that the neurodiversity movement aims to encourage difference, rather than make people behave in certain ways was a revelation, and a form of diversity I subscribed to immediately. Though I had worked extensively as a volunteer in the criminal justice sector, I had not considered the devastating effects that a neurotypical criminal justice system could have on neurodivergent people. Then came the meltdown. It was at this point, the power and position of the police became a consideration. In that moment, I did not have confidence in the police to understand my brother; they would not appreciate his differences in the same way I had always done, that he was just having a reaction to the environment around him (Beardon, 2017). Instead, they might have thought he was trying to attack my mum and I.

Challenges of the police aside, it is my ability to observe situations from multiple perspectives that I thrive on in all aspects of my work. In accordance with the neurodiversity movement, I see my ability to think differently as a superpower. I have often been told that I think 'outside the box', a statement I have changed to thinking 'outside of the neurotypical box'. My place within the neurodiversity movement will always be to challenge the neurotypical rules and norms within our society. There have been varying points in the PhD process where I have felt the need to 'fit within the box'; to do what others are doing and to be a certain way as a researcher. This

stemmed right down to the development of the research questions, the methods I chose and the way I eventually analysed my data. On reflection, perhaps the research process itself is too neurotypical. The methods of this research, which will be discussed in the rest of this chapter, think outside the 'boxes' of what other researchers have attempted to do in this field. To demonstrate, and not without appreciating the limitations experienced by others in their research field, rather than just asserting that autistic people have contact with the police, I reflected on why there had never been an attempt to look at police call log records to establish the frequency of autistic contact, as well as to identify the types of circumstances and who was involved. Not only does this demonstrate neurodivergence within my research, it also demonstrates a greater commitment to the neurodiversity movement; challenging neurotypical aspects of life that continue to be unchallenged (such as police processes and ways of working).

One reflection on the methods I chose relates directly to my positionality within the neurodiversity movement. In accepting the neurodiversity perspective, one must also subscribe to the 'nothing about us without us' (Sinclair, 1993) mantra, which was developed and adopted by the neurodiversity movement as a result of research into autism being undertaken 'on' autistic people, rather than 'with' them (Chown *et al.*, 2017). As noted by Milton (2014), the vast majority of research is still conducted 'on' autistic people, as opposed to using more collaborative methods. It was hoped that this research would have a collaborative element to it, which would have involved feeding back the findings from the police and partner agencies to autistic people and their families. However, given the time it took to receive access to police data, and the time I had to afford to my own personal circumstances, this element of the research was removed. In hindsight, perhaps given my positionality within the neurodiversity



movement, I should have prioritised the inclusion of autistic voices. Subsequently, I also reflected on the collaborative potential of PhD research. Within participatory research, an equal decision-making partnership should be maintained between the academic researcher and the people affected by the subject of investigation (Chown *et al.*, 2017). Though I can appreciate the challenges of incorporating participatory methods into funded research, a PhD is ultimately the responsibility of the candidate and thus, awarded to the researcher on completion. Therefore, though it could be ethically problematic to exclude autistic voices, this research does give a voice in some respect, by analysing data that others have not yet been looked at before.

This piece of research does attempt to situate itself with what is generally cited in literature about conducting neurodiversity research. Stone and Priestley (1996) discuss the concept of emancipatory research, similar to the participatory research style, which has been previously discussed. Though there was limited scope for conducting participatory or emancipatory research in this thesis, many other principles have been embedded, and these factors fully demonstrate my positionality within the neurodiversity movement and reflexively acknowledge my understandings of neurodiversity, as a whole. For example, this research is grounded within the social and neurodiversity models of disability and difference, appreciating that although many neurodivergent people consider themselves disabled, their differences are perceived as an environmental and social disablement rather than medical or neurological disadvantage. Furthermore, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, there was an active decision to use identity-first language (e.g. autistic person) throughout this piece of work. At times, it made me feel uncomfortable to cite research that used person-first language (e.g. person with autism), knowing that the majority of the autistic community prefer the former terminology (see researchers such as Kapp

*et al.*, 2013; Beardon, 2017; Milton 2017). Yet it became clear that there was not enough research to write about once excluding these papers. In regards to both of these decisions, it became apparent that reflexive engagement with the history of disability and neurodiversity was increasingly important, and informed my decisions to move away from medicalised or psychologised language, methods and ways of thinking, but that this also informed the way I thought about police practice and influenced my data analysis methods (Armstrong, Blaustein and Henry, 2016). Put simply, this research has been developed and written in a way that I would want others to treat my autistic brother, with respect of his identity and who he is, and in a way that advocates for social justice.

### **3.3. Samples**

#### **3.3.1. Case study areas**

Police incident report data was analysed and compared between two regional police services: North Yorkshire and South Yorkshire Police. A cross-sectional comparative analysis was chosen to examine the variation between and within police organisations regarding the types of incidents the police were called to involving neurodivergent citizens, the way these incidents were recorded (including whether incidents had any police-applied markers) and the processes and procedures in place for addressing these incidents. North and South Yorkshire Police were chosen to take part in this case study design for a variety of reasons. North Yorkshire Police were chosen because of their established neurodiversity hub, which had been operational for approximately five years at the time of writing. The hub accommodates Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), police officers and police staff who have a commitment to supporting neurodivergent police officers and staff, but also a

commitment to improving external engagement with neurodivergent citizens in the community. North Yorkshire Police's neurodiversity practices were compared with South Yorkshire Police, who currently have limited neurodiversity work existing. They do have established practices and processes in relation to vulnerability, in the form of their Protecting Vulnerable Victims Unit and the allocation of specific Vulnerable Persons officers, within which the needs of neurodivergent citizens were sometimes addressed. On attempting to find participants for interviews, this unit is where I was first directed to.

Furthermore, North Yorkshire Police is regarded as one of the largest rural police organisations in England and Wales, covering approximately 8,310km<sup>2</sup>, whereas South Yorkshire, although covering a large percentage of Yorkshire and Humberside (approximately 1,554km<sup>2</sup>), is perceived as a more urban policing setting, covering a smaller geographical area. It has been suggested that the area in which a police organisation police, has a significant impact on their demand and resource allocation (College of Policing, 2015). South Yorkshire Police's service area is made up of four districts, which include Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham, which were compared to North Yorkshire Police, who have double this with eight districts, including Selby, Harrogate, Craven, Richmond, Hambleton, Ryedale, Scarborough and the City of York. Due to the size of the organisation and their bordering on several other police areas, North Yorkshire Police were found to support Cleveland and West Yorkshire Police services. South Yorkshire police are also known for and found to be, as a result of this research, supporting their adjoining police organisations, including West Yorkshire Police and Humberside. With this may come additional response and demand, as well as further social and environmental factors that may influence police

support for neurodivergent citizens in local communities, including how they engage with partnerships.

Within North Yorkshire and South Yorkshire Police, two specific areas were chosen to focus on in this research. In North Yorkshire, this was the City of York. The City of York has a total population of 198,051 citizens <sup>1</sup>(Census, 2011). This is made up of 48.6% people who identify as men and 51.4% who identify as women. As reported on the Census (2011), 94.3% of citizens identify as White, whereas mixed/multiple ethnic people represent only 1.2% of citizens, Asian people represent 3.4%, and the numbers of people who identify as Black are only 0.6%. This is contrasted with the South Yorkshire case study area, which is Rotherham. The population of Rotherham is 257,280 (Census, 2011).<sup>2</sup> This is made up of 49.1% people who identify as men and 50.9% who identify as women. 93.6% people identify as White, whereas there are reportedly only 1.0% of people who identify as multiple/mixed ethnic, 4.1% Asian and 0.8% Black (Census, 2011). Further reasons for these two case study sites were due to the location of the neurodiversity hubs and vulnerability units, and more specifically the allocation of their co-ordinators to this research. For example, the neurodiversity co-ordinator works at a police station in York and therefore the majority of contacts identified for participation in the research were based in York. For similar reasons,

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<sup>1</sup> These figures do not account for transient members of the public i.e. visitors to the city. York is the second most visited city outside of London, hosting 8.4 million visitors a year (Visit York, 2018) and therefore it must be considered that cases included in the analysis of this research may be visitors to the city, and not residents, as noted in figures from the Census.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the previous footnote, these figures do not account for transient members of the public.

Rotherham was chosen due to the point of contact within South Yorkshire Police being based there, as part of a broader vulnerability unit.

It has been documented that a high proportion of Rotherham's population have a long-term condition or are considered disabled. The Census (2011) showed that, in Rotherham, 56,588 people had a limiting long-term health condition or disability. Of these people, a third had a mental health condition or brain-based disability. Despite this, the most common disabling conditions in Rotherham were reported as arthritis (18.6%), learning disabilities (15%) and psychosis (6.6%). In York, the Census (2011) found that there are 19,220 people with a long-term health problem or disability, which is significantly less than the number of people in Rotherham. However, on the 2011 Census, there were no questions related to 'autism' or other neurodivergent conditions. This is significant because there are no accurate figures on how many people in each case study area are autistic, presenting limitations for how the data in this research was interpreted. It may be that of those reported with a disability, some are autistic, however many autistic people do not consider themselves 'disabled' (National Autistic Society, 2018) and therefore it is unlikely this question on the Census captures the relevant demographic.

North and South Yorkshire vary not only in geographical size but in police demographics, reputation and priorities. As of 2019, North Yorkshire Police comprised of 1,370 police officers (49%), 158 Special Constables (5.7%), 173 PCSOs (6.2%) and 1,095 police staff (39.2%), with a total workforce of 2796 members (North Yorkshire Police, 2019). This amounts to 164 police practitioners per 100,000 of the population. South Yorkshire Police, on the other hand, is comprised of a workforce of 2170 members, made up of 1,458 police officers (67.2%), 253 Special Constables (11.7%), 225 PCSOs (10.4%) and 774 police staff (35.7%) (South Yorkshire Police, 2019). This

is 176 police practitioners per 100,000 of the population. These figures demonstrate that the numbers of police practitioners per 100,000 of the population are relatively similar in both case study areas, but there are clear differences in the composition of officers and staff in each police organisation. For example, over half of police practitioners in South Yorkshire are made up of police officers, compared to North Yorkshire. In North Yorkshire, there are more police staff, but in South Yorkshire, there are more police officers in general, which makes sense as they receive more funding per annum, approximately £251 million, compared to North Yorkshire who receive approximately £147 million per annum. In comparison to figures for overall numbers of police per 100,000, which ultimately represent the strength and diversity of the population of England, the numbers of officers and staff in North and South Yorkshire Police fall short to the average amount of police practitioners per 100,000 people in the country (208). South Yorkshire's numbers have remained relatively steady until 2010 (2,953 police practitioners), with only a -1.0% reduction from 2,953 police practitioners to 2,459, whereas North Yorkshire Police have seen a more significant decrease from 1,486 police practitioners in 2010 to 1,350 in 2018 (-2.0%) (Allen and Zayed, 2018). It is important to recognise these peaks and troughs in relation to police staff and officer numbers as it may directly impact how practitioners deal with demand, as well as how the organisation works with partner agencies. This is also important to be aware of given the types of police responses to incidents involving neurodivergent people (as per the call log data), but also in relation to the composition of police practitioners involved in interviews conducted in this research.

South Yorkshire Police have a reputation for being a traditional, urban police organisation that have recently become beleaguered, struggling to come back from a string of allegations of malpractice (Dodd, 2016). The Police and Crime Commissioner

(PCC) of South Yorkshire has subsequently agreed that it was necessary for the organisation's way of working to be scrapped and started over. This includes the way in which South Yorkshire Police have dealt with vulnerable people, including child sexual exploitation, which came as a result of scandals in Rotherham (Jay, 2014), and even public order incidents, such as the Hillsborough Disaster (Hillsborough Independent Panel, 2012). These events have shaped the way the organisation prioritises and resources vulnerability demand. This is demonstrated in the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioners' priorities for 2017-2021. At the time of conducting this research, the PCC for South Yorkshire Police was Dr Alan Billings. His priorities include protecting vulnerable people as high importance, alongside reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and enabling fair treatment (SYPCC, 2017). In comparison, North Yorkshire Police, although not un-plagued by issues, have had less media coverage in recent years. At the time of writing, North Yorkshire's PCC, Julia Mulligan, also set priorities that include caring about the vulnerable, as well as ambitious collaboration, reinforcing local policing and enhancing 'customer' experience (NYPCC, 2017) and therefore, to some extent, echoing the priorities of South Yorkshire Police. These priorities also reflect the growing concerns around vulnerability across police organisations in the UK, as demonstrated in the College of Policing (2015) Demand Report, which suggests an increase in the nature of crimes recorded involving vulnerability, public protection and safeguarding. The data from 10 police organisations in this report demonstrated that there were 10,000 vulnerable child referrals per year (College of Policing, 2015). Furthermore, the National Police Chief's Council 2025 plan suggests that reducing crime and protecting vulnerable people are core priorities for the police service and, to achieve this, the service must increase partnerships within the community (Policing Vision, 2018). The current

research does this in a more focused way, exploring neurodiversity as an area of possible vulnerability (notwithstanding the potential misunderstandings surrounding this), demonstrating the relationship between policy and practice (i.e. how policing priorities influence practice) and investigating potential partnership working (which has also been stated as a priority in both police organisations).

### 3.3.2. Participants

In addition to the analysis of data from the police database searches, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a variety of police practitioners from North Yorkshire (York) and South Yorkshire (Rotherham) Police. There were 10 participants from North Yorkshire Police and 9 participants from South Yorkshire Police, making a total of 19 interviews. The officers and staff interviewed held a variety of roles and ranks, including police constables from response units, PCSOs, police sergeants, police staff from vulnerability units, and youth officers. As this was a volunteer sample, there was little opportunity to randomise the demography of the participants (for example their age, gender and ethnicity). There was a mixed demographic of male and female participants, which was similar in both force areas (6 males, 4 females in North Yorkshire and 6 males, 3 females in South Yorkshire). All participants were White and had a mean of 14 years in service (one participant's experience was not accounted for in North Yorkshire). These participants were identified through my points of contact within each police service and were asked via email if they wished to take part. To aid anonymity, each participant was allocated a pseudonym (Table 3.3.1).



Table 3.3.1: Anonymised list of the interview participants in their sub-groups, providing a brief overview of their backgrounds.

Participant Number	Role	Years in Service	Gender	Area
NYP01	PCSO	11	Male	York
NYP02	Detective Sergeant	Not stated	Male	Regional
NYP03	PCSO	12	Male	York
NYP04	Youth Officer	14	Female	York
NYP05	Inspector	21	Female	York
NYP06	Partnership Hub	2	Male	York
NYP07	Police Constable	4	Female	York
NYP08	Police Constable	20	Female	York
NYP09	Police Constable	13	Male	York
NYP10	Superintendent	28	Male	York
SYP01	Detective Sergeant	27	Male	Rotherham
SYP02	Police Constable	21	Male	Rotherham
SYP03	PCSO	12	Female	Rotherham
SYP04	PCSO	12	Male	Rotherham
SYP05	Inspector	21	Male	Rotherham
SYP06	Youth Officer	12	Male	Rotherham
SYP07	PCSO	12	Male	Rotherham
SYP08	Police Constable	8 months	Female	Rotherham

Participant Number	Role	Years in Service	Gender	Area
SYP09	Youth Officer	9	Female	Rotherham

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to investigate, in more detail, police views on the circumstances that involved neurodivergent citizens, how they deal with such incidents, and the involvement of partner agencies who support them. Though this was the aim of these interviews, one further important consideration must be recognised. The sampling type used in this study meant that police practitioners were self-selecting. They volunteered to participate and were recruited because of their interest in neurodiversity, and therefore may have known more about the concept than their colleagues who did not volunteer to take part. As such, the same results may not have been found had a random sample of police practitioners been interviewed, regardless of experience, potentially leading to a more valid perspectives of neurodiversity in policing. This is an unfortunate limitation, given that the principles of CR would consider it essential to explore and acknowledge different representations and views of the police's support towards neurodivergent people. Analysis cannot be critical if only one side (for example, the police side) is represented. Therefore, in an attempt to balance such perspectives, and enhance towards what is 'real', semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key individuals and organisations that are considered to engage in partnership working with the police in supporting neurodivergent citizens. There were seven interviews conducted with practitioners in North Yorkshire, specifically in York. However, in South Yorkshire, there were only two in-person interviews. There was a third potential participant, but due to their circumstances, they could only contribute their views via email. The low number of

participants occurred for a number of reasons including, but not limited to Rotherham, as a case study site, experiencing a lack of funding in regards to support services specifically for autistic people. That being said, the search for key stakeholders was extended to other areas of South Yorkshire, but this also failed to gain engagement in the research.

Within each case study area, participants were identified with the assistance of police contacts and information provided from the research interviews. The participants included both strategic leaders and managers of partner agencies who support the police, but also frontline support staff who have supported neurodivergent people in interactions with the police. Key stakeholders that were interviewed included advocacy agencies, council representatives and school staff. It should be noted that though the job roles presented in Table 3.3.2 could be identifiable given their nature (for example, Heads of Departments), the confidentiality and anonymity of participants has been acknowledged and respected throughout this thesis. The purpose for conducting these interviews was to ensure that the research can offer critical insight, that it is not focused on a police-only perspective, but explores a number of different angles of the potential issue being researched. As the research considers partnerships as a necessity to the development of neurodiversity within policing, it was also essential to consider the perspectives of those who work more so in the field of neurodiversity (than the police). Therefore, all key stakeholders involved had some affinity with neurodivergent or autistic people and were considered 'experts', either by experience or as a result of their profession.

Table 3.3.2: A table to show the roles of participant's who took part in partnership interviews in each case study area.

Participant Number <sup>3</sup>	South Yorkshire	Participant Number	North Yorkshire
SYAG07	Members of an advocacy group (Rotherham)	NYAG01 <sup>4</sup>	Members of an advocacy group (York)
SYTP08	Chair of autism charity (Sheffield)	NYLA02	Head of Disability and Special Educational Needs (City of York Council)
SYLA09	Senior member of staff at Sheffield	NYLA03	Head of Commissioning at Adult Social Care (City of York Council)

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<sup>3</sup> Local authorities were represented by the code *LA*, educational partners were represented by the code *ED* and advocacy groups were represented by the code *AG*. There was also one participant from a third-party voluntary sector organisation, a charity, who was represented by the code *TP*.

<sup>4</sup> NYAG01 and SYAG07 are made up of a number of participants who were not given unique reference numbers because their voices were indistinguishable in the audio recordings and subsequent transcripts.

Participant Number <sup>3</sup>	South Yorkshire	Participant Number	North Yorkshire
	Adult Services (Sheffield) <sup>5</sup>		
		NYLA04	Service Manager, Adult Social Care (City of York Council)
		NYED05	Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO) for Pupil Referral Unit (York)
		NYED06	Specialist Teacher (York)

A significant limitation with the sampling in this research is that the experiences of neurodivergent people were not gained directly from neurodivergent people themselves. In line with principles of CR, which emphasises the need to explore

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<sup>5</sup> This participant contributed by email.

multiple realities in order to gain the 'real' understandings of a researched phenomena (Bryman, 2016), and the neurodiversity movement, it was identified that there was a significant opportunity to engage with neurodivergent people as part of this research. In the original proposal, a third phase of this research hoped to involve creative visual methods to explore the experiences of autistic people who had previously engaged with the police. However, due to time and resource implications (namely the prolonged time involved in negotiating access to the 999/101 call log data from each police organisation), this element of the research had to be removed. This decision was not taken lightly, but due to the time that it would have taken to effectively work with and co-produce important research findings with autistic people and those who support them, it was decided that the following data collection methods would develop an important platform for this aspect of the research to be completed at a later date.

Whilst acknowledging that it is essential for research about neurodivergent people to be conducted with neurodivergent people (Singer, 2017), an interesting and unintentional aspect of this research was that some of the participants who volunteered their time disclosed that they were neurodivergent. At least four of 19 police practitioners that were interviewed identified openly to me that they were neurodivergent (three of which were autistic). Furthermore, as part of the partnership agency interviews, members of the two advocacy groups interviewed had learning difficulties and disabilities, and many identified as autistic. An additional two participants within the partner agency interviews also disclosed to me that they identified as neurodivergent. Therefore, in a total of 28 interviews, there were a possible eight individuals and two groups of people who identified as neurodivergent, which may suggest that, despite not directly inviting neurodivergent people to take part in the research, some of these views may still be represented implicitly throughout.

### **3.4. Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.4.1. Quantitative data collection of police records**

The primary aim of quantitative data collection in this research was to identify the most frequent types of situations/circumstances in which the police interact with neurodivergent citizens and how these interactions may be influenced by police-applied warning markers. This data collection method explored the first research question: “*In what circumstances do the police engage with neurodivergent citizens in local communities?*” The collection of incident report data began with a force wide search, on relevant police databases, for cases involving specifically autistic citizens. Cases included in the analysis were recognised as calls for service, and therefore included both notifiable offences (‘Crimes’) and non-crimes (National Crime Reporting Standard, 2020). For the purposes of this research, the term used to search for cases involving neurodivergent citizens who have encountered the police included only those identified by the caller or call-taker as ‘autistic’. This aspect of the research is original in its request for specifically recorded cases that feature only one search term, which was “*autis*”. This decision was made due to the large number of mental health/disability related calls that the police reportedly respond to and the wide variety of conditions that are associated with neurodiversity. Furthermore, though a comparator search term could have been used, such as “ADHD” or “learning disability”, little is currently known about recording practices in relation to neurodivergence and therefore, this could have led to increased over-generalisation and inaccurate comparisons.

As such, the term ‘autistic’ was used in the key word search, which identified the word ‘autism’ or ‘autistic’ used at any point in the log. This meant that although ‘autism’

may not have been apparent at the outset of the police interaction, the case was included in the research because it became apparent at a later stage and was reported this way on the log. Such specificity could also be recognised as a limitation of this research. By only analysing cases that had “*autis*” recorded within them means that there was reliance on the caller to disclose themselves or the person they were reporting as autistic in the first place. These cases are also reliant on the call operator logging that the person is autistic on the record, which is a general limitation on the use of call log records as a method of analysis (Maguire and McVie, 2017). Therefore, there may be a significant proportion of autistic people involved in incidents requiring police assistance, than are reported in this research. That being said, there has yet to be any research that has attempted to identify the amount of police incidents in which autistic people are involved in explicitly using call log records.

At the time of the research, North Yorkshire Police used a system called Niche and South Yorkshire Police used a system called Procad, both of which were used to record similar information from 999 and 101 calls. Call logs on these systems included a transcript of the call and often an ‘Occurrence Enquiry Log’ (OEL). The OEL included information about the reason for the call, who called, who responded, and what the outcome of the call was. The OEL also held information that followed the process of investigation, review, actions and referrals. Though not unusual to request data directly from the police in some form, it is unusual to request direct transcripts of call log records, adding to the original contribution of this research. In Macdonald’s (2015) research, data were requested for hate crimes involving those who had physical impairments, learning difficulties and mental health conditions. However, this data was requested via an organisation that held recorded incidents specifically involving hate crime, meaning data were not requested directly from the police organisation. The



reason secondary reporting agencies are often used, as opposed to requesting data directly from the police, is due to access and information constraints. Such constraints were experienced in this research, however the importance of requesting the call log data directly from the police, and specifically focusing on one type of neurodivergent difference (autism), was necessary to ensure that analysis could explore, more objectively, how the police respond to incidents involving neurodivergent people, how they report these incidents on Niche/Procad and how markers may influence interactions in some cases and not in others.

Data extraction involved incident report data (directly from 999 and 101 calls) from between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017. This timeframe was selected due to the development of the North Yorkshire Police neurodiversity partnership hub in September 2016. It was anticipated that this may have increased the recognition of cases involving neurodivergent citizens in North Yorkshire, and that this may have been demonstrated in how these incidents were logged on the Niche database. For parity and standardised comparison, the same time period was chosen for South Yorkshire Police. The data provided by North Yorkshire Police, demonstrated that when searching for cases, including the search term, there were 453 cases directly involving an autistic person out of 153,609 cases within this time-period (0.3% of the overall cases reported during the search time). The data was extracted by a Police Sergeant who pre-anonymised the data from Niche, before sending to me via secure email. This is compared to South Yorkshire Police, who experienced 2,369 cases involving autistic people, out of 449,778 within the same period (0.5% of the overall cases reported during the search time). Transcripts were sent from South Yorkshire Police directly to me to be anonymised and extracted into an analysable format. I

extracted data from the transcripts into the same format as North Yorkshire's for continued parity and standardisation.

In order to ensure all cases were fully relevant to the research, I, on extraction of cases, only included those that directly involved an autistic person, either as a 'subject' (the autistic person themselves calling the police as an offender, victim or witness) or as a person reporting an autistic person (as an offender, victim or witness). Following this specification, between the selected timeframe, there were 2014 relevant cases, meaning 355 were not deemed relevant for the purpose of the research<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, information written in free-text boxes in the police database were treated as an additional source of both quantitative and qualitative data. Of particular interest, and in direct reference to the second research question, "*How do relevant markers applied to cases on police databases appear to impact the policing of neurodivergent citizens?*", was the free text box used to create markers on the police database system. The applied markers were analysed to explore how language was used, how these markers were applied to autistic citizens and the effects these markers may have had on future engagements with the police, where the police were repeatedly called to incidents involving the same person.

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<sup>6</sup> There were a number of incidents in the South Yorkshire data that related to an incident that featured the word "*autis*", but did not directly involve an autistic person, for example, reports pertaining to burglaries at an autism-related charity shop.

### 3.4.2. Qualitative semi-structured interviews

In comparison to the quantitative collection of the call log record data, conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews in this research allowed for the expression of participants' everyday language and understanding of people's experiences to be explored (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In this research, attempts were made to understand the themes and discourses used in the everyday lives of the police and potential partnership practitioners, in relation to their interactions with neurodivergent people and with each other. The purpose of these interviews were in reference to exploring the third and fourth research questions, "*How does the language used by the police, in relation to neurodivergent citizens and/or neurodiversity, appear to influence practice?*" and "*What is the nature of multi-agency relationships between the police, public sector and third sector organisations when supporting neurodivergent citizens in the community?*". In-depth qualitative interviews lend themselves to the collection of data based on opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences (Denscombe, 2010), such as how participants feel they support neurodivergent citizens or work in partnership with other organisations. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are arguably more appropriate for sensitive topics, which was particularly important to consider when discussing experiences of supporting neurodivergent citizens with both police practitioners and partner agencies, who may have felt they had unsuccessful interactions. Therefore, using a careful and considerate approach, such as a one-to-one interview, can encourage participants to discuss personal and sensitive issues in an open and honest manner (Denscombe, 2010). Interviews are considered a simpler way of accessing privileged information, with the justification for interviews often being based on the value of contact with key players in the field (Denscombe, 2010). This was of significance in this research, where the quantitative

call log data were considered to be more sensitive and privileged, and therefore required secure means of transferring to me, leading to delays in the research process, whereas interviews could be and were quickly arranged via email with appropriate people.

An additional reason for using semi-structured interviews was due to their flexible nature, which works in accordance with CR (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Like CR, Kvale (1996) proposes there is no common procedure for conducting research interviews, allowing for variations of human conversation. In comparison to a structured or unstructured interview, or other more quantitative data collection methods, the semi-structured interview borders on everyday conversation, but with a purpose, involving specific questions, approaches and techniques (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The semi-structured nature allows for such flexibility, with many researchers following a guide as a foundation of each interview, yet acknowledging the natural variation of human conversation, ultimately the validating construction of participants' reality (Kvale, 1996). The semi-structured qualitative research interview is often theme-orientated (Kvale, 1996), whereby the questions from the research guide can allow for comparisons to be made between interview data, whilst also allowing for nuance and individual narratives to emerge. The answers in a semi-structured interview are open-ended (Denscombe, 2010), which means researchers can analyse data thematically, which was completed in all the interviews in this research project.

Knowledge can be developed through the interview process as a conversation between two people about a topic of mutual interest. In this research, the topic of mutual interest in both the police and partnership interviews was interactions with neurodivergent citizens, as well as engagement in partnership working. In accordance

to Kvale's (1996) principles of interviewing, language is essential within an interview and should be considered as a construction tool of knowledge, meaning and reality. Therefore, in accordance to the third research question, "*How does the language used by the police, in relation to neurodivergent citizens and/or neurodiversity, appear to influence practice?*", Kvale's (1996) structure for how knowledge is developed through the qualitative research interview further supported the decision to use semi-structured interviews to establish both thematic and discourse based data. The medium of the interview is language, and arguably knowledge is produced linguistically, in a way that constitutes reality (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, in this research, language was analysed within both police and partnership interviews in reference to how neurodivergent citizens were described and discussed (considering principles of CR surrounding power and structure) and how language constructed the participants' realities of partnership working. This will be discussed further in the next section.

For both the police and partnership interviews, I began with a clear list of issues and questions to be addressed and discussed, which were formed as a result of the aforementioned scoping study (Denscombe, 2010). The interview guide was different for the police and partner agency practitioners but followed a similar structure of questions in each. The full interview guides are provided in Appendix 1. However, in keeping with the nature of semi-structured interviews, I was prepared to be flexible in terms of the order of the questions and what questions were required, allowing participants to develop ideas and speak more widely about issues raised, and this was encouraged throughout (Denscombe, 2010). All participants were contacted via email in the first instance. They were asked to volunteer in a semi-structured interview that would last for between 30 minutes and 1 hour. The majority of interviews were audio recorded, which participants were informed of prior to and during the interview. There

were only three exceptions, all of which occurred in the education setting. These participants could not be audio recorded as there were students present during their interview. In these cases, copious notes were taken throughout.

### **3.5. Analysis**

#### **3.5.1. Quantitative data analysis**

The information extracted from OELs and call transcripts was mostly transformed into quantitative data, however data from free-text boxes was used to support qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis primarily explored the research question *“In what circumstances do the police engage with neurodivergent citizens in local communities?”* At the time of writing, there has yet to be any quantitative analysis that utilises real-life police data in an attempt to explore both the extent and the circumstances in which the police engage with neurodivergent citizens, and more specifically, autistic members of the community. Therefore, this analysis attempted to provide a snapshot of the extent to which the police engage with neurodivergent communities in two case study areas, over a one-year period. The analysis of the extracted data, as presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis, involved the use of descriptive statistics, such as frequency tables, to demonstrate and discuss how many times approximately in one year the police were called to incidents involving autistic citizens, what these incidents were, what the outcome of the incident was and whether any other organisations were involved in supporting the person during their encounter with the police. However, it should be noted that the way in which information is recorded on the Niche and Procad systems in itself was limiting to the analysis process.

Due to police and University of Sheffield data protection processes, accessing both sets of call log data from North and South Yorkshire Police took approximately one

year. In addition to this, due to different methods of accessing the data and the levels of involvement from each police force, additional time was required to extract, anonymise and subsequently analyse the data (taking approximately six months). Therefore, no comparator data was included in this research. Comparator data may have included comparisons to all cases recorded within the year timeframe (between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017), or it might have included comparisons to particular types of calls for service, for example comparing all 'Missing Persons' and autistic 'Missing Persons' cases. It could have also included comparisons between autistic people involved with the police, and autistic people in the general population. However, there are no accurate figures that indicate how many autistic people there are in the UK (National Autistic Society, 2018), and their location, making it challenging to compare autistic people involved with the police and the number of autistic people within each case study site.

Another reason why a wider comparator approach was not taken was because it took approximately three months for a police sergeant from North Yorkshire Police to extract all cases including "*autis*" for the relevant time period. Therefore, to compare such data to all cases in that timeframe, would have not only been time consuming for the police and myself (as in South Yorkshire, I had to extract and anonymise the data), but might have caused significant strain on the relationships that were established with the police. Furthermore, it could also be assumed that the data protection process would have also taken longer (taking one year to gain access to the data requested in the first instance), given the increased amount of data that would have been requested. Though a shorter timeframe could have been chosen to allow for more detailed analysis, as well as the use of comparator data, it could not be determined at the outset of the research how many incidents involving autistic people might have

occurred within one month (for example). This may have meant there would have been no incidents involving autistic people to compare with all incidents. It would have also required a more flexible data sharing arrangement with the police, to which they may not have agreed. Furthermore, one purpose of the research was to identify whether North Yorkshire Police's use of a neurodiversity hub had any influence on the outcome of cases. Therefore, it was unlikely that any differences would have been noted, if only one or two months' worth of data were analysed.

Once receiving the data, it was identified that call handlers can complete as many fields as required when taking information from a 101/999 call (these fields include information about the caller and the reason for the call). This means that incidents as recorded within the call logs could appear in multiple categories, for example, a person could be logged as being involved as a 'Missing' person, as well as being involved in a 'Domestic' (where the domestic preceded the missing episode). Furthermore, there was also scope for crossover in the way which autistic people were recorded as 'Suspects', 'Victims' and 'Witnesses'. For example, an autistic person could be recorded as both a 'Victim' and a 'Witness' to a particular incident (which could have also been logged into multiple categories such as 'Missing' and 'Domestic'). The same challenges appeared to apply where call handlers were not required to record certain information, such as age or ethnicity, meaning there were also a number of "Not Provided" categories present in the datasets. This, in addition to the free-text boxes, meant data extracted from the Niche and Procad systems presented a significant number of unique values within each dataset. Furthermore, due to differences in recording practices, the use of categories was often different between North and South Yorkshire Police. Therefore, in compliance with the assumptions of a number of categorical statistical tests (such as chi-square or Kruskal Wallis), it was not possible



to use these more complex forms of analysis. In addition, due to the majority of the data being categorical, and the significant number of unique values existing within the dataset, it was not practical to transform the information provided into interval or ratio level data within the timescales of this research.

Although alternative methods of statistical analysis could have been conducted on this dataset, it is questioned as to the value they would added, in the first instance. There has yet to be an exploration of police call log records in the field of autism and policing, let alone developing such understanding from a neurodiversity lens, meaning that this is the first attempt at analysing this data from this perspective. Macdonald (2015) conducted similar analysis using only descriptive statistics, finding that this was an effective way of gaining a preliminary view of an under-researched field. Descriptive data can be used as an indicator of norms, trends and values within a particular social group (in this case, the relationship between the police and neurodivergent citizens) and may also demonstrate other social forces that are underlying these interactions (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975), for example the impact of neurotypical policing practices on interactions with neurodivergent members of the community. Between the two police organisations, the descriptive frequencies utilised in this research were used to complete a comparative analysis of how often the police services were called to certain situations and circumstances, involving neurodivergent citizens.

The qualitative analysis of the police database logs involved significant details of each case, including how the case was written up on the OEL, what type of partnership intervention may have been recommended and what warning markers were placed on the incident/person. Analysis of these warning markers illuminated the second research question which asks: *“How do relevant markers applied to cases on police databases appear to impact the policing of neurodivergent citizens?”* The purpose of

this qualitative discourse-style analysis was to explore how markers may impact interactions with autistic or neurodivergent citizens and to discuss whether a change to markers is both necessary and warranted. It was also used to support the more thoroughly conducted thematic and discourse analysis, as will now be described.

### 3.5.2. Critical thematic analysis

Following the quantitative analysis of police database logs, semi-structured interviews conducted with police practitioners, once transcribed, were analysed using both critical thematic and critical discourse analysis. Thematic analysis is perhaps the most widely used analytic approach for qualitative data (Aguinaldo, 2012). Known as a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Clarke and Braun, 2017), it is highly regarded by qualitative scholars for generating codes and themes from qualitative data. The aim of thematic analysis is not simply to summarise the data content, but to identify, and interpret, key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the relevant research questions (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The goal, therefore, of thematic analysis is simply to paraphrase and summarise the dataset as a whole or in part in relation to particular research questions (Aguinaldo, 2012). Steps are taken to organise the data into relevant categories of interest, with units of analysis typically focusing on descriptions of experiences, feelings, thoughts, or behaviours but also perceived causal relationships (Aguinaldo, 2012). Therefore, as opposed to summarising, the analysis generates categories that represent the data in a succinct and coherent way. The most commonly known thematic guidelines were set by Braun and Clarke (2006), who suggest that thematic analysis is the process of coding features of an entire data set, collating codes, leading to the development of themes. Codes are the building blocks for

themes, which are larger patterns of meaning within an interview transcript or text (Clarke and Braun, 2017). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question(s) and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Though praised for its simplicity, and favoured in qualitative research, critical thematic analysis has been chosen for the analysis of this research, in order to compliment the use of CR. Unlike thematic analysis, critical thematic analysis has not been theorised in depth by qualitative researchers and/or critical scholars (Lawless and Chen, 2018). Lawless and Chen (2018) suggest that critical thematic analysts understand power to be embedded in texts, which then enables such texts to reproduce understandings of social positioning and reinforce hegemonic understandings of culture. In this way, thematic analysis can be suited for integration with critical perspectives, especially as an analytical approach for qualitative research that works toward social justice (Lawless and Chen, 2018). One of the hallmarks of thematic analysis, and critical thematic analysis, is its flexibility. By this, Clarke and Braun (2017) do not refer to its theoretical flexibility, but rather the flexibility of the research questions allowing for differing sample sizes and participant composition, as well as flexible data collection methods and approaches allowing for meaning generation. It is also flexible in how data can be used and analysed. Critical thematic analysis can be used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views, perspectives, behaviour and practices. Though this is similar to the way in which thematic analysis is conducted, critical methods challenge and question the way participants' think, feel, and do, similarly to how discourse analysis hopes to interpret a participants' use of language (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The ideal critical thematic analysis involves a progression from

description, where the data have simply been organised to show patterns in semantic content and summarised using interpretation, to attempts at theorising the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications, often in relation to previous literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is then taken further, going beyond a purely semantic level to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). By using critical thematic analysis in this research, the meaning of themes is broadened and capitalised on to analyse qualitative research and everyday discourses from a more critical standpoint (Lawless and Chen, 2018).

Several studies draw on Braun and Clarke's (2006) formula of thematic analysis to make critical claims about their qualitative work. However, much like the principles of CR, these authors often lack specificity in how the critical element is carried out. Owen (1984) suggests that thematic analysis could be benefitted by a critical reading of interview data, asking why and how communication codes are recurrent, repeating and forceful in ways that reproduce and reinforce social inequalities. Furthermore, Lawless and Chen (2018) suggest that, although useful, Braun and Clarke's (2006) method is limited in its critical specificity in connecting everyday discourses with larger social and cultural practices. Building on the idea that criticality is a spectrum that differs in depth, breadth, and levels of engagement with macro structures, issues, and forces, Lawless and Chen (2018) argue that what makes their method of thematic analysis "critical" is the effort taken to tease out how intersecting macro-forces enable and constrain everyday discourses. This relates to principles of CR, in that data that remains unquestioned could be seen as reproducing exclusionary and marginalising barriers (Oliver, 1996). Critical thematic analysis can also be used to examine the

interrelationships between interview discourses, social practices, power relations and ideologies (Lawless and Chen, 2018). For example, in this research, exploring how different police ranks or police and local authorities discussed the same theme enables consideration of some of these issues. In essence, Lawless and Chen (2018) contend that critical thematic analysis is the next step to considering how patterned results (themes in the data) are connected to larger social ideologies, linking frequency and forcefulness to the influence of dominant social discourses.

In this analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was used as a guideline for the overall structure of analysis. This approach considers the following steps; firstly, familiarisation, gaining in-depth knowledge of and engagement with the data set, which is usually completed by reading and rereading transcripts, listening to audio recordings and making notes of any initial analytic observations (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The next step is coding, which is the systematic process of identifying and labelling relevant features of the data. In this research, this was done through the use of 'theme grids', which tracked a variety of a codes identified in each transcript, mapped onto how often a single participant referred to it. The use of 'theme grids' added a layer of criticality to the analysis, in that frequency and forcefulness could be visually observed (Lawless and Chen, 2018). Furthermore, in line with principles of CR, the frequency of which participants colluded with a certain theme were noted in these grids. This was recorded as how many participants out of 19 felt a particular way about a topic. The inclusion of frequency was for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is supporting the frequency framework suggested by Lawless and Chen (2018), highlighting the forcefulness (or sometimes not) of a theme. Recording the number of participants that felt a certain way also attempted to maintain a sense of realism in what was being stated as reality. This was opposed to making sweeping assumptions

or over-generalisations, for example stating 'the majority of participants' felt a particular way, when in fact, it was only noted by three or four participants out of 10. This way of reporting data is continued into the findings chapters of this thesis.

The next step is 'searching' for themes, however the term 'searching' is used with caution. 'Searching' is a claim that analysis is only purposeful because themes are 'discovered' as though already embedded throughout the interview transcript (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This assumption however denies the active and interpretative role of the researcher in identifying patterns and themes (Taylor and Ussher, 2001). In this stage, codes are clustered to create a plausible mapping of key patterns in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was done using handwritten mind mapping, based on clusters of codes identified by the 'theme grids'. Finally, themes are reviewed to ensure a good 'fit' to the data and the definition and naming of themes is done in a way that accurately represents the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Though this approach was used as a guideline, Lawless and Chen's (2018) framework was then used to critically analyse the data. Firstly, this involved open coding, during which I was guided by repetition, recurrence and forcefulness, paying attention to what interview conversations revealed, indicated or identified as being important, salient or meaningful in a way that was individual or collective (Lawless and Chen, 2018). This was assisted by the use of the aforementioned 'thematic grids'. During this stage, it was important to understand what participants were actually saying and revealing about their social worlds and how these phenomenological experiences were similar across respondents (Lawless and Chen, 2018). The second stage was to conduct closed coding, whereby I began to interlink the interview discourses and conversations with larger societal ideologies, through the use of mind mapping (Lawless and Chen,

2018). The process was completed using the reviewing section of Braun and Clarke's (2006) analysis framework.

In summary, the reason for using critical thematic analysis in this research was to pull together a number of themes about the interactions between neurodivergent citizens and the police, as well as the nature of partnership working in the police in relation to supporting neurodivergent communities. The use of critical thematic analysis meant comparisons could be made between the ways in which the police and partner agencies 'do' partnership working, their involvement with the police and their supporting of neurodivergent people, in comparison to how the police discussed their role in partnerships and incidents involving neurodivergent people, specifically drawing upon the implicit power and structure displayed in the issues that were raised across the interviews. Partnership working, as highlighted in the literature review, has often been documented in terms of the challenges faced by the police and other agencies working towards a shared goal (O'Neill and McCarthy, 2014). However, by combining both critical thematic and discourse analysis of police and partner agency interviews, and comparing this across case study sites, a number of the benefits, limitations and challenges of partnership working can be critically discussed.

### 3.5.3. Critical discourse analysis

Language and communication often indicate what people do with their behaviour (Willig, 2015). Discourse analysis, in its simplest sense, is the study of social life, understood through the analysis of language (Shaw and Bailey, 2009). It attempts to look beyond literal meanings in language and discover more contextualised and internal assumptions that are being made in conversation using words (Brown and Yule, 1983). Similarly, to thematic analysis, the purpose of 'typical' discourse analysis

is to identify linguistic regularities (and irregularities) in the data and to describe them. However, unlike thematic analysis, these regularities are often dynamic, not static (Brown and Yule, 1983). This is because language is known to represent behaviours, thoughts, actions and understanding that are fluid, complex and dependent on context. Words, phrases and sentences appear as regularities in discourse, which could be considered as evidence in an attempt by the speaker to communicate a message (Brown and Yule, 1983). Denscombe (2012) suggests that the aim of discourse analysis, then, is to ‘unpack’ text to reveal what people are trying to do through their language and what background assumptions are needed in order for this to be achieved. In this research, the aim of discourse analysis, in its broadest sense, was to explore the language used by both police and partner agency practitioners about neurodivergent people, in order to reveal underlying attitudes towards neurodivergence as well as partnership working. The use of discourse analysis, in particular, explored the third research question: “*How does the language used by the police, in relation to neurodivergent citizens and/or neurodiversity, appear to influence practice?*”. Furthermore, using discourse analysis provides another original contribution to this field, whereby there has been minimal attempts at associating neurotypical language with neurotypical practice.

Critical discourse analysis, a branch of discourse analysis, explores how different groups achieve and maintain their status through their control of conversational encounters and systems of knowledge (Brown and Yule, 1983). Critical discourse analysis has been chosen in this research to allow for more in-depth analysis which explores the power and structural dynamics between police and partner agencies, and subsequently their interactions with neurodivergent members of the community and more generally, how this relates to a reinforcement of neurotypicality. Critical



discourse analysis is explicitly linked to CR, whereby the purpose of critical discourse analysis is to show how power is exercised through language, looking at content in context and treating data in a relational way to wider structures and processes (Denscombe, 2012). Taylor (2013) proposes that discourse analysis is strongly associated with critical research and many of the issues which researchers investigate relate to the status of knowledge. Many discourse analysts investigate the versions of knowledge which have become accepted as 'truth' and which advance the interest of particular groups in society, with critical discourse analysts looking further at how language may be used to present and perpetuate a version of reality that is taken for granted (Taylor, 2013). For example, in the current research, this might be how the language of how neurotypical ideologies are reproduced in the language of the police and local authorities.

Furthermore, CR suggests there is a distinction between transitive knowledge and intransitive objects. Transitive knowledge relates to embodied theories, practices, discourses and texts – it is socially and historically located and engendered. This may relate to how something such as 'police culture' might influence practice and discourse. On the other hand, the intransitive world refers to 'outside the text' i.e. that there is something beyond the text, knowledge or discourse and it is this very 'something' that makes the text or knowledge possible (Joseph and Roberts, 2004). In this research, this meaning may be reproduced explicitly in the language used by police and partner agencies, for example, in relation to how they 'view' partnership working in the 'actual' domain (transitive knowledge – how it *should* work), in conflict with the language they use in reference to the 'real' (intransitive world – how it works in 'reality'). Joseph and Roberts (2004) suggest that CR is concerned with how social and cultural changes are mediated through relatively stable and coherent means of

representation, and how these means of representation place people in particular relations of power. Realism can therefore situate language, discourse and ideology within context-specific circumstances and can help in understanding the manner in which non-discursive social structures are reproduced and transformed (Joseph and Roberts, 2004). If training for the police about how to deal with situations involving autistic people uses language that represents the medical model of disability, then it is likely that this language will be reinforced in the field. Analysis in this way requires researchers not only to translate the person's everyday language, but to be critical about the impact of such language being used in everyday, context-dependent situations (Martin, 2004).

The starting point for conducting critical discourse analysis is defining "*acceptable*" ways to talk (Shaw and Bailey, 2009, p. 415). In this research, "acceptable" language refers to the use of medicalised language (e.g. 'disorder') versus the neurodiversity model of language (e.g. 'difference'). Similarly to thematic analysis, critical discourse analysts stress the importance of becoming familiar with the data through repeated reading and noting of specific features (Shaw and Bailey, 2009). The next step is to develop an index for discursive features – what is "*acceptable*" or not (Shaw and Bailey, 2009, p. 415). Willig (2015) suggests that in order to identify diverse constructions in the text, it is necessary to pay attention to terminology, stylistic and grammatical features and preferred metaphors and other figures of speech, which may be used in their construction. In this research, discourse relating to neurodiversity and partnership working was of primary importance. Furthermore, discourse relating to power differences, structure and change were also considered. However, it is important to consider that discourse analysis proceeds on the basis of my personal interaction with the text, especially in relation to what is deemed "*acceptable*" language

(Shaw and Bailey, 2009, p. 415). The process of analysis began with reading and coding on paper, then transferring codes into 'grids' (as previously used in the thematic analysis), before developing the recurrent codes into mind maps, to focus primarily on the power dynamics occurring in the language used.

In summary, the use of critical discourse analysis in this research relates explicitly to principles of CR, whereby discourse can be used to investigate the versions of knowledge and 'reality' that have become accepted as 'truth' (Taylor, 2013). In this research, the language used by police practitioners in relation to neurodiversity and that of partner agencies in relation to how they discuss partnership working with the police, was under investigation. Ultimately the 'truth' of reality as identified through the use of critical discourse analysis may be that the police are predominately neurotypical and have neurotypical standards and practices that effect how they police neurodivergent members of the public. Critical discourse analysis allowed for data to be understood in a way that demonstrates how language can impact and shape interactions (Shaw and Bailey, 2009). The importance of this in the current research was that the ways in which police practitioners discussed and talked about neurodiversity and the neurodivergent citizens they interact with, may reveal how (to some extent) they view this particular community. Furthermore, the way that the police and partner agencies discuss partnership working may also allude to their underlying views of this process. This way of analysing data provides another contribution, whereby there has been minimal attempts at associating neurotypical language with neurotypical practice by other autism and policing researchers. Critical discourse analysis can thus investigate how the details of language vary, change and shape circumstances across contexts and mark social difference (Taylor, 2013).

#### 3.5.4. Integration of analysis methods

Both critical thematic and critical discourse analysis were used in the interpretation of the qualitative findings. In doing so, it is important to consider the theoretical and epistemological grounding of each approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and highlight both their individual and combined contribution to the interpretation of the findings. Using two forms of critical analysis was considered to be in keeping with the epistemological and ontological stance of this research, whereby multiple methods can be used to identify 'reality'. Where it would not have been practical to conduct ethnographic research (due to the unknown number of incidents involving autistic people), critical thematic analysis was used in its traditional sense, to summarise datasets from semi-structured interviews with police practitioners, and code the experiences, feelings, thoughts, behaviours of the participant's, providing suggestions as to why some of these considerations might be important or significant (Aguinaldo, 2012). When acknowledging the principles of CR, critical thematic analysis, alone only attempts to interpret the 'actual' (the domain where events experienced by the participant can be both observed and unobserved). Therefore, the addition of critical discourse analysis provided a further layer of understanding, by analysing text in a way that reveals people's actions through their language and what background assumptions are needed in order for this behaviour to be achieved (Denscombe, 2012). By using this additional method of analysis, there is increased scope to establish the 'real' (the domain by which all knowledge related to a phenomena can be understood) (Bhaskar, 2008). In this research, the aim of discourse analysis, in its broadest sense, was to explore the language used by both police and partner agency practitioners about neurodivergent people, in order to reveal underlying attitudes towards neurodivergence as well as partnership working. Critical thematic analysis

therefore compliments critical discourse analysis, as well as the epistemological principles of CR, by allowing for the organisation of semantic content into recurrent, repeated and forceful themes, and thus providing the ability to propose multiple interpretations, meanings and implications, which indicate towards the participant's 'reality' (Bryman, 2016).

Critical discourse analysis alone is explicitly grounded within the CR epistemology (Bhaskar, 2008), whereby the purpose of critical discourse analysis is to show how power is exercised through language, looking at content in context and treating data in a relational way to wider structures and processes (Denscombe, 2012). Similarly to how thematic analysts look for meaning across common themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), discourse analysts investigate the versions of knowledge which have become accepted as 'truth' and how language may be used to present and perpetuate versions of reality that are taken for granted (Taylor, 2013). Arguably, how critical thematic analysis was used in this research compliments this understanding. Critical thematic analysis was used to pull together themes related to the interactions between neurodivergent citizens and the police, as well as the nature of partnership working, identifying recurrent, repeating and forceful ways of reproducing and reinforcing social inequalities, before introducing a more semantic lens in the form of discourse analysis, to establish how language was used to demonstrate such inequalities. Therefore, the use of both critical thematic and discourse analysis meant comparisons could be made between the ways in which the police and partner agencies say they support neurodivergent people, in comparison to how they might 'actually' support neurodivergent people in reality, with the analysis specifically drawing upon the implicit power structures displayed in the issues that were raised across multiple interviews, and within the language they used to discuss them.

In addition to aligning with CR, using critical thematic and discourse analysis aligned with my positionality, as presented earlier in this chapter, as both a researcher and participant in the neurodiversity movement. When considering the epistemological underpinnings of this research, it was important to acknowledge my own power, status and experience when analysing the data. Therefore, critical thematic analysis was used to ensure coded themes were in keeping with the epistemological framework of the research and the subsequent data collection methods used (semi-structured interviews), but also with my skills and experiences as a researcher (having conducted thematic analysis a number of times in prior academic engagements). Furthermore, because of my knowledge and experience of neurodiversity and the neurodiversity movement, with its concerns related to the language of 'disability' and 'difference' (Baker, 2006), discourse analysis allowed for the expression of such understanding. A number of advocates and researchers have stressed the importance of language in relation to neurodiversity, in particular the importance of language in relation to neurodivergent people (Kapp *et al.*, 2013; Beardon, 2017; Milton, 2017). It has commonly been cited how damaging language can be, but also how language can progress and provide acceptance to a group of people within society (Beardon, 2017; Milton, 2017). Therefore, in order to gain a rounded view of police practitioners and partner agencies understanding of neurodiversity, neurodivergent people and ways of working together, discourse analysis was considered to be crucial in research of this nature, given the neurodiversity movement's emphasis on language. Critical discourse analysis, in combination with critical thematic analysis, meant the interpretation of findings were grounded epistemologically (Braun and Clarke, 2006), but also allowed for the expression of my positionality.

In this research, the critical thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis were completed separately. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, familiarisation was conducted twice with each transcript. On the first occasion, transcripts were coded thematically, and on the second occasion, transcripts were coded in relation to the definitions of "*acceptable*" language (Shaw and Bailey, 2009). An index of "*acceptable language*" was developed using the literature review, and focused mainly around the use of medicalised language (e.g. 'disorder') versus the neurodiversity model of language (e.g. 'difference'). Separate 'thematic grids' were created for codes relating to themes, defined by Lawless and Chen (2018) as recurrent, repeating and forceful topics of conversation, and language choices that were made by the participants (whereby codes were identified where they related to their use of "*acceptable*" language). For ease of presenting the findings, the results of the discourse analysis were then combined with themes identified from the thematic analysis. The integration of the thematic analysis and discourse analysis was largely done through the use of mind-maps. Thematic topics were mapped out, with overlapping areas of discourse analysis being combined, as opposed to standing alone as areas of analysis. Interestingly, there were very few topics from the discourse analysis that did not supporting the findings of the thematic analysis, which further supported the reason for presenting findings in this way. Finally, it was regarded more in keeping with principles of CR to include both in the same analysis, as how participants used their language appeared to be ultimately integral to the development of themes. Therefore, in Chapter 5, qualitative findings are presented thematically, with considerations and interpretations identified within the discourse analysis, woven throughout each theme.

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

Ethical research should be undertaken to ensure “*integrity, professionalism, quality and transparency*” (Bacon and Sanders, 2016, p. 159), which is particularly important in research conducted with or on the police due to their fundamental roles within society (Skinns, Wooff and Sprawson, 2015). The current research received full ethical approval from the University of Sheffield Ethics Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017 (Appendix 2). Though there are several ethical considerations within any research project, most of which were covered in the ethics application, only two are discussed in any depth in this methodology chapter. These are the issues of informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity. Though ethical challenges are often referred to a greater extent in qualitative as opposed to quantitative research (Skinns, Wooff and Sprawson, 2015), this research found that most ethical issues surrounded the access to quantitative data. Other ethical considerations are referred to throughout this section, such as the security of sensitive data, but these issues did not warrant a full discussion as part of this thesis, as they were already encompassed within more complex ethical considerations. As proposed by Bacon and Sanders (2016), though guided by ethical principles, research is often discretionary and therefore relies on a level of judgement to be exercised in the field. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the ethical challenges faced in this research were negotiated constantly throughout (Skinns, Wooff and Sprawson, 2015).

#### **3.6.1. Consent**

Informed consent refers to prospective participants being given as much information as might be required to make an informed decision about whether they wish to participate in a research study (Bryman, 2016). It should be completely



voluntary, competent, informed and participants must know that they are free to withdraw from the research at any time, with no repercussions (Bacon and Sanders, 2016). Furthermore, informed consent needs to be constantly negotiated and re-negotiated over the research process, rather than just being viewed as a one-off consent process at the beginning of a project (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Police and partner agency practitioners involved in this research were provided with a short summary information sheet, prior to taking part in any interview, which explained about the nature of the research, what would happen to the data collected, that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time (Appendix 3). They were also informed that the storage of their personal data would comply with the guidelines of GDPR (2018). The terms of reference, as set out by the University's Research Ethics Policy (2019) in regards to how long data can be kept, also applied to participant's recorded and transcribed data, which was outlined to them on the information sheet. The information sheet was sent prior to the interview and explained again to the participant immediately before the interview. Participants were then asked to complete a written consent form (Appendix 4). The consent form required participants to confirm they had understood the purpose of the research and had the opportunity to ask questions, whilst also consenting to being recorded for the purpose of the interview and their information being used in this thesis and subsequent outputs. In some research interviews, written consent could not be provided on a physical consent form due to the speed of the interview, or the environment the interview was being conducted in. This was a potential challenge that was acknowledged in the ethical approval sought from the university at the outset of this research and was overcome by asking participants to record their consent on the audio recording of the interview. Written consent can often be seen as an administrative task that, although

is required to inform the participant about their involvement, needs to be discretionary dependent on the person being interviewed (Bacon and Sanders, 2016). It was therefore regarded to be suitably recorded and transcribed in these cases.

### 3.6.2. Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality refers to maintaining and protecting information that is provided by participants and data throughout the research process, whereas anonymity refers to keeping participants and organisations from being identified by other participants or those who read the outputs (Braun and Clarke, 2013). With permission from the police services involved, the names of the police organisations involved have been used throughout the thesis (i.e. North Yorkshire and South Yorkshire Police), as have the names of the areas under investigation (i.e. York and Rotherham). At all levels, information sheets and data sharing agreements detailed how confidentiality was covered for that particular individual or organisation. Police and partner agency interviews were anonymised. However, their ranks are identified. The reason for this was so that the effects of their rank could be considered as part of the data analysis. Their names and collar numbers however were excluded. As per the information sheet, participants were reassured of their complete confidentiality and anonymity prior to, during and after the research interview. This means that I omitted any anecdotes that may identify the officer or the partner agency practitioner (or the person being discussed in the anecdote itself). The omission of any identifying details was also an attempt to minimise any adverse effects of the research on participants.

An integral stage in the research was discussion around how this confidentiality would be ensured between me, the University and the two police organisations with regards to the police incident data. A formal data sharing agreement was drawn up

specifying how the data would be shared, stored, used and destroyed. Data processing agreements took a lengthy amount of time to finalise, from February 2018 to January 2019 for North Yorkshire Police, and February 2019 to October 2019 for South Yorkshire Police. Despite leading to delays in the research process, it was essential to have this agreement in place in order to share information between the University and the police organisations involved in the research and to maintain the integrity of the data that was subsequently produced. Due to the sensitive nature of the data, in that incident logs contained people's personal information, the process of gaining the data resulted in complex negotiations between the police organisations and the University about how data could be shared and the way it should be stored. During the period in which the data sharing agreements were being put together, the new GDPR (2018) came into force, which also meant that the sharing data had to conform to these new requirements. In particular, the review, retention and disposal of data, had to follow the guidelines of GDPR (2018). In line with the University's Research Ethics Policy, data should be kept no longer than necessary. As this is PhD research, and it is likely that a number of publications could come about as a result of the findings, it was decided that the data would be stored for at least 10 years after completion of the PhD (Research Council UK, 2019). These terms were highlighted and confirmed in the research contract with each police organisation. This contract also included who will have access to the data, how the information may be used, for example within the PhD or related publications and what the participants would have access to.

Furthermore, in terms of the police incident data, the information sent from North Yorkshire Police was extracted by a police sergeant who then sent the data to me through an encrypted University-based system called the Assured Computing Service.

The Assured Computing Service is a service supplied by the University of Sheffield which, through a combination of training and technology, helps to protect researchers working in protected online and virtual environments, by implementing storage systems that allow for data to be stored securely and managed confidentially. All the quantitative data were stored on this system in compliance with the data sharing agreement. All the data sent by North Yorkshire Police were de-personalised, which meant that no personal information and incident reference numbers were included. As part of the data processing agreement, North Yorkshire Police stipulated that “*data must be rendered anonymous in such a way that the data subject is not or no longer identifiable*”, which is in line with the GDPR (2018). However, in comparison, South Yorkshire Police extracted the relevant transcripts from Procad and sent all the data to me, including personal information and incident reference numbers. This meant that I de-personalised the data, whilst having to maintain strict confidentiality, in accordance to the information sharing agreement and GDPR. Subsequently, all data were stored on the Assured Computing Service.

### **3.7. Conclusions**

When establishing the epistemology, ontology and positionality of this research, the dichotomy found between positivism and interpretivism appeared to be a logical place to begin. As such, principles of CR are used throughout this thesis. CR supports my own critical positionality, which stems from the literature I have reviewed regarding neurodiversity and policing (see Literature Review). It is essential to first recognise that my own perspective of neurodiversity and police interactions lies within the way in which autistic people are treated and referred to. Therefore, throughout this research, autistic people are referred to using ‘identity-first’ language, as opposed to

the commonly used 'person-first' language. Furthermore, though it was not possible for this research include autistic people, using the neurodiversity movement as the starting point in this research means that autistic voices are amplified, as a result. The way in which CR has been implemented in this research continues to support my own critical perspectives. For instance, using theoretical concepts such as the 'empirical', the 'actual' and the 'real' (Lopez and Potter, 2001; Harrè and Bhaskar, 2001) to shape and inform this research, means that both quantitative and qualitative methods have been implemented in an attempt to provide conclusions about the 'reality' of the policing of neurodivergent people.

To establish the 'empirical' domain, I began by providing an overview of the current field of neurodiversity and policing, finding that there was seldom research that even discussed the role of neurodiversity. I also found that previous research has mostly been conducted using subjective methods, such as self-reports of police practitioners. Therefore, a multisite comparative analysis of police incident report data was used in this research, in an attempt to (more) objectively establish empirical research about police involvement with neurodivergent people. Two police organisations, North and South Yorkshire, took part in this analysis. Their involvement continued into the qualitative data, which attempted to establish the 'actual' domain, predominately focusing on the language used by police practitioners discussing their interactions with neurodivergent people. As highlighted by Harrè and Bhaskar (2001), power is demonstrated through language and what has been demonstrated throughout this chapter is that neurodivergent people are often classified as lacking power, and are regarded as vulnerable, at risk and essentially a minority. Semi-structured interviews with 19 police practitioners from both forces, as well as nine partner agency participants, were conducted and it was hoped that through critical thematic and

discourse analysis, 'real' experiences about the neurotypicality of policing could be assessed. In the next two chapters, the findings of these analyses will be shared.

## 4. Quantitative Findings

The aim of this chapter is to present findings from the police incident data based on 999/101 calls made to the police. As identified in the methodology chapter of this thesis, there were restrictions on how these data could be analysed. Firstly, due to the time and resources taken to access and extract both sets of call log data for only cases including the term 'autis\*', comparator data was not used in this research. For this reason, the only comparisons that can be drawn are between incidents that occurred in North and South Yorkshire within the given timeframe, including the term 'autis\*'. Only cases including the term 'autis\*' were chosen for analysis because many other areas neurodivergence are equally under-researched, leading to the potential for even greater over-representation and inaccurate reporting when used as comparative data. A further limitation of the data related to how incidents were recorded on the police recording systems. Since the incidents recorded by the police fell into multiple categories, this meant chi-square and Kruskal Wallis tests (the main statistical tests used with categorical data) were not possible. Due to these constraints, frequency tables are presented and discussed instead. This descriptive analysis examines the types of incidents that autistic people were involved in, as well as highlighting the recorded ages and genders of the autistic person involved and whether they were identified as a 'Suspect', 'Victim' or 'Witness' (in line with how Crane *et al.*, 2016 reported their findings). The types of police warning markers applied to incidents involving autistic people and how these impacted on practice are then examined. Finally, though there was limited information provided, the ways partnership working and referral processes were recorded in the police data are explored.

However, caution should be taken when interpreting these results. At the time of writing, there are no data that accurately identifies how many autistic people there are in the general population. Therefore, comparisons cannot be made between the percentage of autistic people involved in this research and the proportion of autistic people within the general population. A further limitation that impacts these findings is that how police incidents are recorded and reported, particularly through 101/999 calls, relies on autistic people, and/or those reporting them, disclosing their autism to the call handler. Though the results found here are a starting point, there may be more (or less) incidents involving autistic people that are not recorded because of a lack of disclosure, misinterpretations of behaviour or simply by the way a call handler records the information on the log (Maguire and McVie, 2017). Furthermore, the percentages presented in this research cannot be generalised to all possible incidents involving autistic people. As with the described incident involving my brother, the recording of an incident relies on the person or those around them calling the police in the first instance. Where autistic people and/or others do report the incident, it is likely that there are continuous opportunities for police engagement. Therefore, the results presented here cannot be generalised to all potential involvement between autistic people and the police, but only those reported and recorded within the extracted timeframe.

#### **4.1. Analysis of incident log data**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017, South Yorkshire Police recorded a total 449,778 incidents. In the same timeframe, North Yorkshire Police recorded a total of 153,609 incidents (65.84% fewer incidents than South Yorkshire). However, only a small proportion of these incidents involved autistic citizens. When



applying the search parameters requested (“*autis\**”) in South Yorkshire, there were 2369 extracted cases. However, 355 of these were excluded from further analysis as, on closer inspection, they were not inclusive of incidents that directly involved an autistic person<sup>7</sup>, leaving 2014 incidents to be analysed. In North Yorkshire, there were 453 incidents (none excluded) with a log containing the word “*autis\**”. Therefore, between both police organisations, 0.30% (North Yorkshire Police) and 0.45% (South Yorkshire Police) of the total incidents that occurred between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017 directly involved an autistic person. These figures show the approximate extent to which police encounters involved an autistic person in North and South Yorkshire police force areas. This is an important finding in itself, as previous research has only attempted to estimate the rates of police-autistic person contact (Browning and Caulfield, 2011; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Eadens *et al.*, 2016; Beardon, 2017; Tint *et al.*, 2017).

It was found that, in the breakdown of cases, there were only 1462 individuals involved in the 2014 incidents in South Yorkshire, with 201 (13.75%) repeat callers (37.39% of all 2014 incidents) compared to 1261 (86.25%) ‘one-off’ callers (62.61% of all 2014 incidents). By comparison, in North Yorkshire, there were only 139 individuals involved in the total 453 incidents. Of these 139 individuals, 67 (48.20%) were repeat callers (84.11% of the total 453 incidents). The remaining 72 individuals (51.80%) were one off-callers (15.89% of all 453 incidents). This highlights a difference between the

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<sup>7</sup> These incidents included the term “*autis\**” but did not involve an autistic person. For example, the burglary of an autism charity shop or police attendance at a school for autistic people for educational purposes.

types of callers in South Yorkshire and North Yorkshire. In South Yorkshire, autistic people were more often involved in 'one-off' calls, whereas in North Yorkshire, they were most involved as 'repeat callers'. Repeat callers appeared to impact on the way the police interacted with the autistic person. For example, it was observed in the free-text boxes of the police data that the more calls received from the same person, the less likely it was for the incident to be graded as requiring a response, where police would attend. Though it would have been more accurate to have analysed the police data by person as opposed to incident, given the numbers of repeat callers and the way in which information was recorded and stored, only individual incidents could be analysed. This may mean that the results presented throughout this chapter are an over-representation of the population analysed, as the same person may be involved in different incidents a number of times.

Breaking down incidents, the location was a category that was always recorded by the call handler. In some cases, this was done automatically based on registered phone numbers. In relation to incidents recorded by South Yorkshire Police, it was found that a number of incidents occurred outside the South Yorkshire region, for example in Bath and Derbyshire, but were recorded by South Yorkshire Police. However, in North Yorkshire, there was less geographical spread in recorded areas, with the only incident outside of the county being recorded in Humberside. Of the incidents that occurred in other force areas, which were recorded by North and South Yorkshire Police, the police were often being called by someone living in North or South Yorkshire, to report a person who had gone missing in or who was now living in another force area. The opposite was also found, in that the police were called by someone living in another force area in regards to someone who lived in North or South Yorkshire. Therefore, on the police recording system, these incidents were

identified as involving an area that is not within North or South Yorkshire. Table 4.1.1 highlights the number of incidents per area.

Table 4.1.1: The number of incidents recorded per police force area.

South Yorkshire Police Incident Areas	South Yorkshire incidents	North Yorkshire Police Incident Areas	North Yorkshire incidents
Barnsley	285 (14.15%)	Craven	39 (8.61%)
Bath	1 (0.05%)	Hambleton and Richmond	41 (9.05%)
Derbyshire	1 (0.05%)	Harrogate	159 (35.10%)
Doncaster	497 (24.68%)	Humberside	8 (1.77%)
Hull	1 (0.05%)	Scarborough and Ryedale	99 (21.85%)
Rotherham	321 (15.94%)	Selby	33 (7.28%)
Sheffield	904 (44.88%)	Unknown	13 (2.87%)
Wakefield	2 (0.10%)	York	61 (13.47%)
Worksop	2 (0.10%)	Total	453 (100%)
Total	2014 (100%)		

As shown in Table 4.1.1, most incidents in South Yorkshire occurred in Sheffield (44.88%), followed by Doncaster (24.68%), then Rotherham and Barnsley (15.94% and 14.15%, respectively). However, when considering the number of incidents as a proportion of the population levels, the number of incidents that were called in from Rotherham (the case study area in this research) were broadly similar to those in Sheffield. With reference to Census (2011), these results highlight that incidents

involving autistic people in Rotherham only involve 0.12% of the population. This is comparable to Sheffield, where incidents with autistic people involved 0.16% of the population, demonstrating a marginal difference, yet an overall low amount of reported and recorded incidents involving autistic people<sup>8</sup> in general.

In North Yorkshire, the majority of incidents took place in Harrogate (35.10%) and Scarborough and Ryedale (21.85%), compared to York (13.47%). This was a surprising result given that the Census (2011) reports there are 157,869 people in Harrogate in comparison to the population of York, (the case study area for this research) where there are approximately 198,051 people. Incidents involving autistic people in Harrogate comprised 0.10% of the population, in comparison to incidents involving autistic people in York, which involved 0.03%. This indicates that, like South Yorkshire, most incidents involving autistic people were from other parts of South or North Yorkshire (for example, Sheffield and Harrogate) and not from the case study areas identified in this research (Rotherham and York). These findings highlight the implications of the social mobility of autistic people, and the need for police forces to work in partnership with one another (Loftus *et al.*, 2014), in order to continue support for autistic people, even when they move to other areas. These findings may also have implications on the responses of police practitioners interviewed in this research, whereby they predominately policed these case study areas.

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<sup>8</sup> Although wider comparisons cannot be drawn as it is unknown how many autistic people are in both South and North Yorkshire.

## 4.2. Age demographics

The following reports the recorded age demographics of autistic people involved in police incidents within the relevant timeframe. The data were aggregated into age groups in order to examine patterns in the data, based on age, in the two police force areas. These age categories were defined as 0-9 years old (below the age of criminal responsibility), 10-17 years old (classified as Child/Youth), 18-25 years old (Young Adult), 26-35 years old (Adult) and those over 36 years old (the reason for this category is because there were very few incidents in both force areas that involved those over the age of 36). The total of incidents involving each age group can be seen in Table 4.2.1 below.

Table 4.2.1: Total incidents involving autistic people by age group and police force area.

Age Group	Incidents in South Yorkshire	Incidents in North Yorkshire
0 – 9	179 (8.89%)	0 (0.00%)
10 – 17	891 (44.24%)	150 (33.11%)
18 - 25	406 (20.16%)	73 (16.11%)
26 – 35	194 (9.63%)	184 (40.63%)
36 – 100	123 (6.11%)	45 (9.93%)
Not provided	221 (10.97%)	1 (0.22%)
Total	2014 (100%)	453 (100%)

After aggregating the data by age group and after accounting for those whose ages were “Not Provided”, almost half of the incidents in South Yorkshire involved 10-17-

year olds (49.69%). The second most involved age group were 18-25-year olds (22.64%). The least involved age category in South Yorkshire were 36+ year olds (6.86%). In North Yorkshire, after accounting for those records where age was 'Not Provided', the largest proportion of incidents involved 26-35-year olds (40.71%). Similar to South Yorkshire, the second most involved age group were 10-17-year olds (33.19%). Furthermore, the least involved category (excluding 0-9-year olds, where there were no cases) were 36+ year olds (9.96%).

These findings suggest that, in both force areas, the majority of incidents involved autistic children and young people. There are many reasons as to why this finding is important. Firstly, autistic children and young people under the age of 18 should be receiving a level of support that may, to some extent, protect them from entering the criminal justice system (such as educational support, family support and support from Social Services) (Allen *et al.*, 2008; Jones and Talbot, 2010; National Autistic Society, 2019). Therefore, the results of this research could suggest that the more autistic 0-17-year olds are involved with the police, the more likely it is there are problems with the support mechanisms that are currently in place in that area. Second, the high proportion of autistic 0-17-year olds involved with the police in both force areas may also have a significant impact on interactions with the police due to police perceptions of vulnerability and risk. As highlighted by Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith (2012, p. 45), those regarded vulnerable include "*children*", "*those with cognitive, intellectual or social impairments*" and "*persons with impaired capacity*". Where there are multiple layers of vulnerabilities, then there is more necessity for differential treatment (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). This argument implies that when there is an autistic child who may lack capacity in regards to both their autism and their age, the

police need to consider and adapt more so than when interacting with a neurotypical child and/or autistic adult.

While those over 35 years old were the least likely to be involved with the police, the high rate of 25-35-year olds in North Yorkshire may represent the ending of funding for education, health and social care support provided to autistic people who have support plans. At 25 years old, those who have Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) lose this source of funding and are left to rely on their own or family financial support. Therefore, in addition to deficits in support for under 18s, which may lead to police involvement, there may also be issues with post-25 support, possibly indicated by the North Yorkshire dataset. Lastly, it is also notable that whilst only one incident in North Yorkshire fell into the “Not Provided” age category (0.22%), the number of incidents in South Yorkshire where age was “Not Provided” was much higher (221 incidents, 10.97% of all incidents). The absence of age information could be attributed to callers’ unwillingness to disclose their age, or could simply be reflective of the call logging process, whereby an age does not need to be provided. As it is not possible to attribute any of the 221 “Not Provided” incidents to an age category, it should be noted that the true number of incidents in any other given age category could be up to 10.97% higher than reported. For example, if all “Not Provided” incidents did fall into another single age category, 10-17 year olds would still remain the most involved in incidents, however there would be greater potential for cross-over between the other age categories.

#### **4.3. Gender demographics**

Much like age, police call log records did not require a response to ‘gender’, which was recorded as “Not Provided”. In both South and North Yorkshire, there were more

incidents involving males than females (even when excluding those whose gender was “Not Provided”). In South Yorkshire, 77.51% of incidents involved males in comparison to 21.15% involving females. These results are similar to those found in North Yorkshire, which reported 73.07% of incidents involving males, compared to only 26.71% of incidents involving females. In South Yorkshire, there were 5 incidents involving people who identified as transgender males and 1 incident involving a person who identified as a transgender female. There were no reported incidents involving transgender people in North Yorkshire. Though there is research to suggest there is a growing autistic transgender community (Gallucci, Hackerman and Schmidt, 2005; Jacobs, *et al.*, 2014; Kraemer *et al.*, 2005; Landen and Rasmussen, 1997; Lemaire, Thomazeau and Bonnet-Brilhault 2014; Mukaddes, 2012; Tateno, Tateno and Saito, 2008; Williams, Allard and Sears, 1996), the lack of transgender populations in this research meant that this demographic was excluded from further analysis. This being said, the involvement of six autistic transgender people in South Yorkshire draws upon another area of vulnerability as identified by Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith (2012) which is ‘sexuality’ and/or ‘gender’ and therefore, although not focused upon in this research, needs to be carefully considered as an important factor for policing practice as part of a multi-layered understanding of vulnerability. Further details are reported in Table 4.3.1.



Table 4.3.1: Total incidents involving autistic people by gender and police force area

Gender	Incidents in South	Incidents in North
	Yorkshire	Yorkshire
Female	426 (21.15%)	121 (26.71%)
Male	1561 (77.51%)	331 (73.07%)
Male (Transgender)	5 (0.25%)	0 (0.00%)
Female (Transgender)	1 (0.05%)	0 (0.00%)
Not provided	21 (1.04%)	1 (0.22%)
Total	2014 (100%)	453 (100%)

The number of autistic males involved in incidents was over half in both force areas. One possible reason for this over-representation of males in the incident data is that, despite increasing recognition of autistic females who are diagnosed, males are still more likely to be identified and diagnosed as autistic than females (Giarelli *et al.*, 2010). This is because, historically, diagnostic tools were designed for males, exclusively (Giarelli *et al.*, 2010; Goldman, 2013). Furthermore, the reason more males get diagnosed, and a possible reason as to why more males may have been recorded in this incident data, is that autistic behaviours manifest themselves more observably in males i.e. in more physical ways (Lai *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, it is likely that on engagement with autistic males, the police are more easily able to identify that they are autistic, in comparison to females, who often internalise their autistic characteristics, thereby potentially making them less visible to those they interact with (Gould and Ashton-Smith, 2011).

#### **4.4. Ethnicity demographics**

Out of all the demographic categories, the recording of ethnicity appeared to vary the most in the incident data. Ethnicity was a category that did not require an entry, however, this was not the only factor within the recorded data that made comparisons difficult to draw. North and South Yorkshire Police defined the ethnicity of an autistic person differently, with more ethnic categories applied in South Yorkshire than in North Yorkshire. In South Yorkshire, the majority of incidents did not include ethnicity information (69.51%). Of the incidents in which ethnicity information was provided (614 incidents), most incidents involved autistic people who identified as 'White' (80.62%). In the remaining incidents, 4.23% involved autistic Black/African/Black British people, 12.22% involved autistic Asian/Asian British people and only 2.93% involved autistic Mixed/Multiple Ethnic people. According to Census (2011), in South Yorkshire, only 2.0% of people identified as 'Black' (suggesting that black people were over-represented in the incident data in the study), 3.4% identified as Asian (suggesting that Asian people were the most over-represented in the incident data in this study, though it is not clear why this is) and 1.5% identified as Mixed/Multiple Ethnic (which is the most comparable to the data in the study). When comparing the sample data from this research with the Census (2011), all ethnic minorities were over-represented in the incident data. Table 4.4.1 highlights the number of incidents per recorded 'Ethnic' category in South Yorkshire.

Table 4.4.1: Total incidents involving autistic people in South Yorkshire by ethnicity of the autistic person.

Ethnicity	Incidents in South Yorkshire
Asian/Asian British	75 (3.72%)
Black/African/Black British	26 (1.30%)
Mixed/multiple ethnic	18 (0.89%)
Not provided	1400 (69.51%)
White	495 (24.58%)
Total	2014 (100%)

In North Yorkshire, there were only two ‘Ethnic’ categories recorded. These were “Not Provided” and “White/Black/Asian/Multiple Ethnic”. Only 12.14% of incidents were recorded as “Not Provided”, with 87.86% of incidents being categorised altogether as “White/Black/Asian/Mixed/Multiple Ethnic”. Due to the limited ethnicity information provided, it was not possible to make direct comparisons with either the Census (2011) or the South Yorkshire dataset. Table 4.4.2 highlights the number of incidents per recorded ‘Ethnic’ category in North Yorkshire.

Table 4.4.2: Total incidents involving autistic people in North Yorkshire by ethnicity of the autistic person

Ethnicity	Incidents in North Yorkshire
Not provided	55 (12.14%)
White / Black / Asian / Multiple Ethnic	398 (87.86%)
Total	453

The on-going and past conflicts between ethnic minority groups and the police mean that this finding could provide evidence of disproportionality (Holdaway, 1989; Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2008). Many ethnic minority people experience challenges when accessing health care, and subsequently autism diagnosis procedures, resulting in more undiagnosed ethnic minority people (Begeer *et al.*, 2009). Thus, if ethnic minority people are undiagnosed, then they are probably less likely to be flagged in police incident data as being autistic, leaving them vulnerable to mistreatment and potentially to criminalisation. This structural inequality means that autistic ethnic minority people receive less medical, educational and social support and have an increased likelihood of criminalisation when engaging with the police (Begeer *et al.*, 2009; Tsakanikos *et al.*, 2010; National Autistic Society, 2014; Burke, D. A., Koot, H. M. and Begeer, 2015; Burkett *et al.*, 2015; Emerson, Morrell and Neece, 2016; Eilenberg *et al.*, 2019; Waganash, Tammy and Drozda, 2019). The layers of vulnerability noted by Bartowkiak-Theron and Asquith (2012) highlight that a person's age combined with their ethnicity is also considered a form of vulnerability. Therefore, if the police encounter a Black autistic child, they need to be aware of how their various social identities may collectively impact on their interaction. Once again investigating the

South Yorkshire data, it was found that there were 13 incidents involving an autistic Black child (under 18), 14 involving an autistic Mixed/Multiple ethnic child and 72 incidents involving an autistic Asian/Asian British child. This is a total of 99 incidents involving ethnic minority autistic children (9.25% of all incidents involving under 18-year-olds), which supports the prior point about layers of vulnerability being an important consideration during police interactions.

#### **4.5. The circumstances in which the police engage with autistic people**

In this section, the types of engagement the police have with autistic people are presented in a chronological way. This means that the findings are presented in the order in which they would happen in real-time, representing the process in which 999/101 calls are handled, working through the types of information that are recorded in an incident log report. Firstly, findings relating to the call being made by an autistic person or from a person reporting an autistic person are highlighted ('Call Type'). This is followed by a presentation of descriptive statistics regarding the type of incident the police were called to attend ('Incident Type'). The status of the autistic person involved in the incident is then identified, for example whether the autistic person was categorised as a 'Suspect', 'Victim' or 'Witness' ('Status of the Person of Interest'). Finally, findings are presented on the type of police response that was dispatched to the reported incident ('Response Type'). It should be noted that the following findings (bar the outcomes discussed in the 'Evidence of Partnership Working' section) are based on information taken by call operators, and not police officers, and therefore do not reflect the 'reality' of the interaction, only what has been reported and recorded by a third-party.

#### 4.5.1. Call type

One way in which an interaction or an engagement with the police can take place is through calling 101 or 999. In this research, a person reporting an incident involving an autistic person was classified by 'Person Reporting'. If an autistic person called the police themselves, they were classified as a 'Subject'. Someone witnessing an incident involving an autistic person or an autistic witness are simply referred to as 'Witness'. An incident that did not involve a member of the public calling the police, but still resulted in an incident being recorded by the police, for example a 'Police Resource Activity' (a police-instigated activity such as the search of a house or suspect person), was categorised as 'Other'. In North Yorkshire, there was roughly an equal amount of people reporting autistic people, as well as autistic people calling the police themselves (24.72% and 24.95%, respectively). This could indicate that autistic people in North Yorkshire are trusting of their local police to support them when they are in need. This may also be supported by the higher proportion of repeat callers that were identified in North Yorkshire. It could however suggest a deficit in support services in North Yorkshire, whereby more autistic people are having to call the police for help with non-crime related incidents (as demonstrated in the next section).

By comparison, in South Yorkshire, there was a large difference in the number of people reporting autistic people and the number of autistic people calling the police themselves. This worked out at almost 80% of autistic people being reported by someone else, rather than the autistic person calling the police directly (79.59% and 14.94%, respectively). Unlike in North Yorkshire, this might suggest that autistic people feel less able to call the police. However, it may also be representative of the age demographic of those being reported in South Yorkshire, who are mostly under 18 and unlikely to call the police themselves. This being said, the high number of those

reporting autistic people (specifically autistic children) may also demonstrate a lack of support services in South Yorkshire, meaning the police are relied upon instead. Table 4.5.1 highlights the reported differences between ‘Call Types’.

Table 4.5.1: The differences between North and South Yorkshire Police for recorded ‘Call Types’.

‘Call Type’	South Yorkshire Police	North Yorkshire Police
Person reporting an incident involving an autistic person	1603 (79.59%)	112 (24.72%)
Autistic person contacting the police	301 (14.94%)	113 (24.95%)
Autistic witness reporting or person reporting an autistic witness	39 (1.94%)	5 (1.10%)
Other	71 (3.53%)	223 (49.23%)
Total	2014 (100%)	453 (100%)

#### 4.5.2. Incident type

Once connected to 999 or 101, an operator firstly asks the reason why the person has called the police. This often leads to the establishment of the ‘Incident Type’ – what the police are being called to respond to. These pre-defined categories were allocated by the call handler. It was quickly established on analysing the dataset that, because of how incidents were recorded by the call handler, autistic people could be

classified as being involved in a number of different incident types simultaneously. For example, an incident involving an autistic person could be classified as both 'Missing' and 'Domestic' (if the missing occurrence was as the result of a prior domestic incident, which was a common combination of events). Therefore, the ability to record multiple classifications makes comparisons difficult to draw. However, as per the example above, the recording of incidents according to multiple categories does allow for the variation within one incident to be examined. In this research, due to the complexity of classification, each category was analysed individually. In North Yorkshire, the majority of incidents that the police were called to involving autistic people were 'Public Safety' incidents (42.20%). A 'Public Safety' incident primarily includes circumstances where a person has reported a 'concern' about a person (i.e. they have not heard from them for a long time) and/or they are asking the police to conduct a welfare check on them or their property. 'Public Safety' incidents often also include circumstances where someone is suicidal and/or has injured themselves (intentionally or unintentionally). They are commonly non-crime related incidents (i.e. no criminal offence has been committed). The full title of the incident classification 'Public Safety', as shown on the police records system, was recorded as 'Public Safety, Concern, Collapse, Illness, Injury, Trapped', which adds further clarity to the types of circumstances this classification is applied to. 'Public Safety' incidents were the most common classification in South Yorkshire too (37.93%). This might suggest that the majority of incidents involving autistic people are about 'concern' and 'safety', as opposed to alleged criminal offences. A full list of the 'Incident Types' identified in this research can be seen in Table 4.5.2. Further information about how 'Incident Type' was aggregated can be found in Appendix 5.



Table 4.5.2: 'Incident Types' involving autistic people by police force area

'Incident Type'	South Yorkshire Police	North Yorkshire Police
ASB & Disorder	487 (15.57%)	100 (17.73%)
Domestic	379 (12.12%)	23 (4.08%)
Missing	232 (7.42%)	52 (9.22%)
Other	86 (2.75%)	76 (13.47%)
Property Crime	175 (5.60%)	30 (5.32%)
Public Safety	1186 (37.93%)	238 (42.20%)
Sexual Offence	56 (1.79%)	8 (1.42%)
Violence	526 (16.82%)	37 (6.56%)
Total	3127 (100%)	564 (100%)

The second most common incident type in North Yorkshire was Anti-Social Behaviour and Disorder (17.73% of all incidents). 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Disorder' is an aggregated category, which was defined by incidents including 'Nuisance', 'Harassment', 'Drugs' and 'Hate/Racial Abuse'. In South Yorkshire, this was the third most common incident type, accounting for 15.57% of all incidents. This might suggest that autistic people are considered 'anti-social' due to their differences, or perhaps, are more likely to be victims of nuisance-related offences. In South Yorkshire, the second most common incident type was 'Violence' (16.82%). Though similar to 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Disorder', this category may be considered more high risk, involving incidents such as 'Assault'. One reason for this difference might be because in South Yorkshire, there are generally more serious incidents compared to North Yorkshire, where there seems to be predominately more 'concern'-based incidents

(either for a person or their environment). This is supported by the prevalence of 'Violence' (and 'Assault') in North Yorkshire, accounting for only 6.56% of all incidents. However, these differences in 'Incident Type' could simply reflect differences in recording practices between the two forces. In either case, it is important that the seriousness of these offences is reflected on, particularly where autistic people may be considered 'disorderly' (Beardon, 2017). These findings align with research of a similar nature, with Crane *et al.* (2016) reporting that police respondents felt the majority of incidents that they responded to involving autistic people related to anti-social behaviour, as well as Gibbs and Haas (2020) identifying that autistic people were most likely to be suspects in violent/physical assaults. There were also a number of incidents that made up the 'Other' category, examples of which included calls that were hung up or abandoned before information could be recorded, complaints that were made against the police and road-related offences or traffic collisions.

The types of incidents that were the least frequently reported were similar in both South and North Yorkshire. The least frequent was 'Sexual Offences' (an aggregated category which included 'Sexual Assault' and 'Rape'). In North Yorkshire, there were only 1.42% of incidents relating to 'Sexual Offences' and in South Yorkshire there were only 1.79%. This finding is perhaps unsurprising, due to under-reporting of 'Sexual Offences' in the general population (Ellison and Munro, 2009), regardless of any disability or difference. However, it may be more important to recognise that because of the differences displayed by an autistic person, they may ultimately be more vulnerable to being victims of Sexual Assault (Brown, Pena and Rankin, 2017; Brown-Lavoie, Vecili and Weiss, 2014). This finding is further supported by Crane *et al.* (2016), who identified that only 12% of 259 police respondents suggested autistic people were likely to be victims of sex offences and harassment. However, they also

found that 17% of the same sample of police respondents suggested autistic people were likely to be suspects in sex offences (Crane *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, Gibbs and Haas (2020) found their sample were most involved with the police because of sex offences. These findings are even more interesting given that the majority of their sample were female. This may simply reflect different sexual offence reporting systems and standards across geographical locations, with Gibbs and Haas' (2020) research being conducted in Australia, and Crane *et al.*'s (2016) being England and Wales-wide. It may also be indicative of different data collection methods and analysis.

As examined in the next chapter, interviews with police practitioners revealed two categories of incidents that were commonly referred to when interacting with autistic people - 'Missing People' and 'Domestic Violence' (specifically Child-to-Parent Domestic Violence, where the autistic child is the perpetrator of violence). In comparison to other incidents types, South Yorkshire did not have a high reporting rate of either category when considering the involvement of autistic citizens. 'Missing People' accounted for only 7.42% of all incidents (the missing people were almost always the autistic person). Furthermore, only 12.12% of all incidents were recorded as 'Domestic Violence'. However, in support of the interviews referencing 'Child-to-Parent Domestic Violence', of the 379 reported 'Domestic Violence' incidents in South Yorkshire, well over half involved autistic under 18-year olds (60.37%). 'Missing People' in North Yorkshire accounted for almost the same percentage as South Yorkshire (9.22% of all incidents). There were fewer reports of 'Domestic Violence' incidents in North Yorkshire (4.08%), and in reference to 'Child-to-Parent Domestic Violence', only 26.09% of the 23 incidents involved autistic under 18-year olds. This might suggest that police practitioner's perceptions of the frequency of such incidents do not match incident data, where autistic people were more involved in 'concern-

based' incidents, than 'Domestic Violence' or 'Missing Persons' incidents. This being said, it is important to acknowledge that 'Domestic Violence' and 'Missing People' incidents must have some significance to practitioners when supporting autistic people, despite their recorded frequency being low.

Table 4.5.3 cross-tabulates data on incident type and age. It shows that in South Yorkshire, 10-17-year olds were the most involved in all types of incidents, which is unsurprising given that this age group accounted for over half of all incidents. 10-17-year olds were also most involved in 'Public Safety' incidents over any other age category (50.98%). There was also a high percentage of 0-9-year olds in this category (10.69%), which might suggest that the police record incidents involving this age demographic as 'Public Safety' automatically, as they are under the age of criminal responsibility. Furthermore, in 'Violence' incidents, 10-17-year olds were also largely involved, accounting for over half of these types of incidents (54%). In comparison, in North Yorkshire (Table 4.5.4), the majority of incidents involved 26-35-year olds (39.32%). In the 'Public Safety' category, 26-35-year olds were involved in 39.50% of these incidents, which was the highest involvement within this 'Incident Type'. However, this was closely followed by 10-17 year olds (39.07%). For incidents involving 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Disorder', again most incidents involved 26-35-year olds (43.44%).

Table 4.5.3: 'Incident Type' by Age<sup>9</sup> for incidents involving autistic people within South Yorkshire.

	0 – 9	10 – 17	18 – 25	26 – 35	36 +	Total
ASB and Disorder	31 (8.14%)	155 (40.68%)	93 (24.41%)	56 (14.7%)	46 (12.07%)	381 (100%)
Domestic	26 (6.93%)	201 (53.6%)	102 (27.2%)	36 (9.6%)	10 (2.67%)	375 (100%)
Missing Person	22 (9.69%)	153 (67.4%)	37 (16.3%)	7 (3.08%)	8 (3.53%)	227 (100%)
Other	13 (22.03%)	22 (37.29%)	14 (23.73%)	8 (13.56%)	2 (3.39%)	59 (100%)
Property Crime	5 (3.17%)	82 (51.9%)	46 (29.11%)	15 (9.49%)	10 (6.33%)	158 (100%)
Public Safety	115 (10.69%)	548 (50.98%)	224 (20.84%)	118 (10.98%)	70 (6.51%)	1075 (100%)
Sexual	1 (1.96%)	26 (50.98%)	11 (21.57%)	8 (15.69%)	5 (9.8%)	51 (100%)
Violence	35 (7.19%)	263 (54.00%)	116 (23.82%)	53 (10.88%)	20 (4.11%)	487 (100%)
Total	248	1450	643	301	171	2813

<sup>9</sup> Bracketed numbers in Table 4.5.3 and Table 4.5.4 are the percentages of how many of each age category were involved in the respective incident type.

Table 4.5.4: 'Incident Type' by Age for incidents involving autistic people within North Yorkshire.

	10 - 17	18 - 25	26 - 35	36 +	Total
ASB and Disorder	23 (23.23%)	21 (21.21%)	43 (43.44%)	12 (12.12%)	99 (100%)
Domestic	6 (26.09%)	7 (30.43%)	10 (43.48%)	0	23 (100%)
Missing Person	46 (88.46%)	3 (5.77%)	3 (5.77%)	0	52 (100%)
Other	10 (13.33%)	9 (12.00%)	51 (68.00%)	5 (6.67%)	75 (100%)
Property Crime	14 (46.67%)	6 (20.00%)	6 (20.00%)	4 (13.33%)	30 (100%)
Public Safety	93 (39.07%)	33 (13.87%)	94 (39.50%)	18 (7.56%)	238 (100%)
Sexual	2 (25.00%)	1 (12.50%)	5 (62.50%)	0	8 (100%)
Violence	13 (35.14%)	7 (18.92%)	9 (24.32%)	8 (21.63%)	37 (100%)
Total	207	87	221	47	562

Further descriptive analysis shows that in South Yorkshire, males were the most involved in an incident (79.77%). In incidents classified as 'Public Safety', 77.93%

involved males compared to only 22.07% involving females. Furthermore, in ‘Violence’ incidents, 84.81% of cases involved males compared to only 15.19% females. In fact, there were no incidents where females were more involved than males, as is also the case in the wider population (particularly young males, as per the Ministry of Justice Youth Justice Statistics, 2019). Table 4.5.5 highlights the frequencies of incidents in relation to the gender of the autistic person involved in South Yorkshire.

Table 4.5.5: Incident Type’ by Gender for incidents involving autistic people within South Yorkshire<sup>10</sup>.

	Male	Female	Total
ASB & Disorder	361 (75.37%)	118 (24.63%)	479 (100%)
Domestic	457 (86.23%)	73 (13.77%)	530 (100%)
Missing	168 (74.01%)	59 (25.99%)	227 (100%)
Other	155 (82.89%)	32 (17.11%)	187 (100%)
Property Crime	141 (81.03%)	33 (18.97%)	174 (100%)
Public Safety	911 (77.93%)	258 (22.07%)	1169 (100%)
Sexual Offence	31 (56.36%)	24 (43.64%)	55 (100%)
Violence	441 (84.81%)	79 (15.19%)	520 (100%)
Total	2665	676	3341

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<sup>10</sup> Bracketed numbers in Table 4.5.5 and Table 4.5.6 show the percentages of how many of each gender category were involved in the respective incident type.

Similarly, in North Yorkshire, further descriptive analysis shows that males were involved in 74.56% of incidents compared to only 25.44% involving females. 'Public Safety' incidents revealed that 73% of cases involved males, compared to only 27% involving females. Furthermore, in 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Disorder' incidents, males made up 75% of the cases, compared to females (25%). Table 4.5.6 highlights the frequencies of incidents in relation to gender in North Yorkshire.

Table 4.5.6: 'Incident Type' by Gender for incidents involving autistic people within North Yorkshire

	Male	Female	Total
ASB & Disorder	75 (75%)	25 (25%)	100 (100%)
Domestic	19 (86.36%)	3 (13.64%)	22 (100%)
Missing	52 (100%)	0	52 (100%)
Other	37 (48.68%)	39 (51.32%)	76 (100%)
Property Crime	26 (86.67%)	4 (13.33%)	30 (100%)
Public Safety	173 (73.00%)	64 (27.00%)	237 (100%)
Sexual Offence	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	8 (100%)
Violence	30 (81.08%)	7 (18.92%)	37 (100%)
Total	419	143	562

#### 4.5.3. Status of the Person of interest

Once the operator has established what kind of incident is being reported, they need to identify whether the person calling is or is reporting an 'Offender/Suspect' (in



this research, this was where an autistic person is the suspected perpetrator of a crime), 'Victim' (where an autistic person was the potential victim of a crime) or 'Witness' (where an autistic person was a witness to a potential crime). In this research, the criteria of 'Offender/Suspect', 'Victim' or 'Witness' was informed by research by Crane and colleagues (2016). In their research, police practitioners were asked about their interactions with autistic people as defined by these categories and also asked about the frequency in which they felt they engaged with autistic people in these capacities. Further inspection of the dataset in this research, however, identified that a number of additional factors were also considered by call operators, such as whether the person of interest was under the influence of 'Drugs and Alcohol' and/or whether they were potentially 'Suicidal'. Those classified as 'Suicidal' in this research were considered to be experiencing co-morbid mental health problems, alongside their autistic differences. Furthermore, there were a number of 'Other' classifications whereby the autistic person was not involved as the suspect, victim or witness of a crime, but simply had an interaction with the police. Examples of these incidents included, but were not limited to, the autistic person being involved in a traffic collision (where they were not the victim), being the subject of a welfare check or asking for help or support with matters related to their homes, finances or carers and families.

Much like with 'Incident Type', the autistic person, as the 'Person of Interest' could fall into multiple categories. For example, they could be both 'Victim' and 'Witness', or 'Suspect' and 'Affected by Drugs and Alcohol'. In some cases, autistic people were recorded as both 'Suspect' and 'Victim'. For the purposes of further analysis, autistic people 'Affected by Drugs and Alcohol' and deemed 'Suicidal' were added to the 'Other' category. As shown in Table 4.5.7, in South Yorkshire, there were almost equal amounts of incidents involving a 'Suspect' and a 'Victim'. In 29.35% of incidents,

autistic people were deemed 'Suspects' and 31.27 as 'Victims' %. By contrast, in North Yorkshire, autistic 'Suspects' made up 21.86% of all cases compared to only 8.44% involving a 'Victim'. These differences might suggest that in South Yorkshire, there are similar amounts of autistic people who are considered 'Suspects' of offences and 'Victims' of crime, which could be because autistic people are often both associated with 'Victim' and 'Offender' simultaneously, due to their differences (Crane *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, more autistic people were deemed 'Suspects' in North Yorkshire, which could highlight that call handlers and/or police practitioners are potentially more likely to presuppose that the autistic person is the offender of a crime due to their (lack of) understanding of what autism is. The 'Other' category in South Yorkshire was similar to the 'Victim and 'Suspect' categories, however in North Yorkshire, the 'Other' category accounted for 62.34% of all incidents. When comparing this to the next highest category, which was the 'Suspect' category (21.86%), the 'Other' category is almost three times greater, suggesting that autistic people in North Yorkshire were less involved in crime-related incidents.

Table 4.5.7: 'Status of the Person of Interest' by police force area for incidents involving autistic individuals

Person of Interest	South Yorkshire Police	North Yorkshire Police
An autistic person was the suspected perpetrator of a crime	627 (29.35%)	101 (21.86%)
An autistic person was the potential victim of a crime	668 (31.27%)	39 (8.44%)
An autistic person was a witness to a potential crime	61 (2.86%)	5 (1.08%)
An autistic person affected by Drugs/Alcohol	117 (5.48%)	9 (1.95%)
An autistic person was deemed 'Suicidal'	42 (1.97%)	20 (4.33%)
Other	621 (29.07%)	288 (62.34%)
Total	2136 (100%)	462 (100%)

The frequencies highlighted in Table 4.5.8 show that that in South Yorkshire, the highest recorded age group for all categories was again 10-17-year olds, with over half being considered 'Suspects' (55.28%). The least involved as 'Suspects' were those aged 36+, while the least involved as 'Victims' were 0-9 year olds. Table 4.5.8 displays the frequencies of how the person was classified in an incident in relation to their age.

Table 4.5.8: 'Status of the Person of Interest' by Age data for incidents involving autistic people in South Yorkshire<sup>11</sup>

	0 - 9	10 - 17	18 - 25	26 - 35	36 +	Total
An autistic person was the suspected perpetrator of a crime	26 (4.35%)	330 (55.28%)	162 (27.14%)	56 (9.38%)	23 (3.85%)	597 (100%)
An autistic person was the potential victim of a crime	47 (8.10%)	239 (41.21%)	137 (23.63%)	97 (16.72%)	60 (10.34%)	580 (100%)
An autistic person was a witness to a potential crime	21 (43.75%)	22 (45.83%)	3 (6.25%)	2 (4.17%)	0	48 (100%)
Other	85 (15.98%)	281 (52.82%)	92 (17.29%)	35 (6.58%)	39 (7.33%)	532 (100%)
Total	179	872	394	190	122	1757

In North Yorkshire, the most frequent 'Person of Interest' fell into the 'Other' category, which is to be expected given that 62.34% of North Yorkshire incidents were categorised as such. Much like in South Yorkshire, most 'Suspects' fell into the 10-17

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<sup>11</sup> Bracketed numbers in Table 4.5.8 and Table 4.5.9 are the percentages of how many age categories were involved in the respective 'Person of Interest' category.

age category (39.51%). On the other hand, the majority of 'Victims' were aged 26-35 years old (45%). This would suggest that autistic 'Children and Young People' were more common as 'Suspects' in both North and South Yorkshire, however, in North Yorkshire, 'Adults' were more frequently the 'Victims'. Table 4.5.9 highlights the 'Status of the Person of Interest' in North Yorkshire in relation to their age.

Table 4.5.9: 'Status of the Person of Interest' by Age for incidents involving autistic people in North Yorkshire.

	10 - 17	18 - 25	26 - 35	36 +	Total
An autistic person was the suspected perpetrator of a crime	32 (39.51%)	20 (24.69%)	21 (25.92%)	8 (9.88%)	81 (100%)
An autistic person was the potential victim of a crime	7 (17.50%)	9 (22.50%)	18 (45.00%)	6 (15.00%)	40 (100%)
An autistic person was a witness to a potential crime	1 (20.00%)	1 (20.00%)	1 (20.00%)	2 (40.00%)	5 (100%)
Other	110 (35.03%)	40 (12.74%)	134 (42.68%)	30 (9.55%)	314 (100%)
Total	150	70	174	46	440

Further descriptive analysis shows that in South Yorkshire, all categories ('Suspect', 'Victim' and 'Witness') involved mainly males (78.37%). Of 'Suspect' cases, the majority were males (86.13%) and as 'Victims', males made up 69.85%. Out of the

females involved in incidents, there were more ‘Victims’ than ‘Suspects’ (30.15% and 13.87%, respectively). The frequencies for South Yorkshire categories of ‘People of Interest’ in relation to the gender of the autistic person involved are displayed in Table 4.5.10 below.

Table 4.5.10: ‘Status of the Person of Interest’ by Gender for incidents involving autistic people within South Yorkshire<sup>12</sup>.

	Male	Female	Total
An autistic person was the suspected perpetrator of a crime	534 (86.13%)	86 (13.87%)	620 (100%)
An autistic person was the potential victim of a crime	461 (69.85%)	199 (30.15%)	660 (100%)
An autistic person was a witness to a potential crime	46 (77.97%)	13 (22.03%)	59 (100%)
Other	481 (79.77%)	122 (20.23%)	603 (100%)
Total	1522	420	1942

As previously discussed for the North Yorkshire ‘Person of Interest’ data, the ‘Other’ category was the highest recorded for both males and females. However, beyond this, the descriptive statistics from North Yorkshire showed that all categories (‘Suspect’,

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<sup>12</sup> Bracketed numbers in Table 4.5.10 and Table 4.5.11 are the percentages of different gender categories within the respective ‘Person of Interest’ category.

‘Victim’ and ‘Witness’) involved mainly males (73.06%). Of ‘Suspect’ cases, males were involved in 82.72% of incidents, compared to females (17.28%). Of the ‘Victim’ cases, males were involved in 77.50%, compared to females (22.50%). Table 4.5.11 highlights the frequencies of the ‘Person of Interest’ involved in relation to their gender.

Table 4.5.11: A frequency table of ‘Status of the Person of Interest’ and Gender data involving autistic people within North Yorkshire.

	Male	Female	Total
An autistic person was the suspected perpetrator of a crime	67 (82.72%)	14 (17.28%)	81 (100%)
An autistic person was the potential victim of a crime	31 (77.50%)	9 (22.50%)	40 (100%)
An autistic person was a witness to a potential crime	4 (80.00%)	1 (20.00%)	5 (100%)
Other	218 (69.87%)	94 (30.13%)	312 (100%)
Total	320	118	438

#### 4.5.4. Response type

Following the gathering of details from the caller, the call operator needs to establish whether a police response is necessary, if there is an officer available to attend and if so, what level of response is required. This may take the form of a Police Officer, PCSO or telephone resolution. Other types of response included Firearms Response, Ambulance Referral and School Officer Referral. The response type was

a category that had to be completed in order to close an incident. However, there were differences between North and South Yorkshire Police in the way these police responses were recorded. As shown Table 4.5.12, in both North and South Yorkshire, the majority of incidents were attended by a Police Officer. Over half of incidents in North Yorkshire were attended by a Police Officer (59.82%). North Yorkshire Police consists of 1,370 Police Officers (making up 49% of all North Yorkshire Police practitioners). On the other hand, in South Yorkshire, 58.64% of incidents were attended by a Police Officer. South Yorkshire Police consists of 1,458 police officers (making up 67.2% of all South Yorkshire Police practitioners), meaning the high response of police officers is unsurprising. However, it does suggest that police officers were sent to fewer incidents than might be anticipated, which may simply reflect the nature of the incidents being responded to, but could imply that a large number of incidents were dealt with by another response type. Only a very small percentage of incidents in both North and South Yorkshire were attended by a PCSO (5.96% and 2.31%, respectively). In North Yorkshire Police, there are 173 PCSOs (who make up 6.2% of the service), in comparison to 225 PCSOs in South Yorkshire Police (who make up 10.4% of all South Yorkshire practitioners).

This could suggest that the PCSO response in North Yorkshire is representative of the force numbers, whereas in South Yorkshire, the lack of PCSO response may be due to the serious nature of the incidents being reported, whereby a Police Officer would be more appropriate to attend. This may also highlight increasing cuts to PCSO funding (Loveday and Smith, 2015). Another important finding was that a large amount of calls that were 'resolved' over the phone, without any police or PCSO response, also meaning that call handlers often had a significant role in engaging with autistic people and those who were reporting information to the police about them. This was



recorded in each dataset as 'Resolved without Dispatch' (RWD) or 'Telephone Resolution'. In South Yorkshire, 32.47% of incidents were dealt with over the phone, which was higher than in North Yorkshire (22.74%). Call operators recorded all of the information analysed in this research and therefore their involvement in the outcome of incidents is unsurprising. Other types of response included an ambulance or firearms team being dispatched, whilst those being categorised as 'Other' included voluntary attendance to a police station, an appointment being made to attend the police station and restorative justice involvement.

Table 4.5.12: Responses to incidents involving autistic people by police force area<sup>13</sup>

Response Type	South Yorkshire Police	North Yorkshire Police
Ambulance	29 (1.42%)	0 (0.00%)
Firearms	11 (0.54%)	8 (1.77%)
No resolution on PROCAD	10 (0.49%)	0 (0.00%)
NPT	11 (0.54%)	0 (0.00%)
Other	56 (2.75%)	21 (4.64%)
PC	1194 (58.64%)	271 (59.82%)
PCSO	47 (2.31%)	27 (5.96%)
PC and PCSO	3 (0.15%)	18 (3.97%)
School Officer	13 (0.64%)	0 (0.00%)
Special Officer	1 (0.05%)	5 (1.10%)
Telephone resolution	661 (32.47%)	103 (22.74%)
Total	2036 (100%)	453 (100%)

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the North Yorkshire dataset was provided pre-analysed. Therefore, although values of zero are displayed in the frequency table, this could be attributed to such data not being extracted from the call logs and does not necessarily mean these types of response were not dispatched. Furthermore, within the South Yorkshire dataset, there were occasions where multiple types of response were sent to an incident, which accounts for additional values in the frequency table.

#### **4.6. The impact of warning markers**

During a 999/101 phone call, the call operator checks police records for any previous warning markers that appear on the police records system, following a person check. Warning markers are informational indicators that are used to alert police officers and staff that a particular person, address or property has an important warning or hazard that those involved need to be aware of (Home Office, 2014). In this research, the only types of warning markers that were analysed were those assigned to 'persons' and 'addresses'. Since 2014, in addition to warning markers, information that is provided during a 999 call is also "THRIVE'd" (HMIC Justice Inspectorates, 2015). This is a method implemented by call handlers in the majority of police organisations in the UK, including the two researched in this thesis. THRIVE is used to assess how best to respond to the report of a crime or problem. THRIVE stands for 'Threat' (a person or thing likely to cause danger or damage), 'Harm' (if the threat is carried out or the circumstances of the incident deteriorates, what is the likely level of harm caused?), 'Risk' (the possibility of something occurring, what is the likelihood that the threat or harm will occur), 'Investigation Opportunities' (is there a need for an investigation and if so in what form?), 'Vulnerability of the victim' (a person is vulnerable if as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care or protect themselves, or others, from harm or exploitation) and the 'Engagement level' required to resolve an issue (a decision on how the incident is graded/dispatched) (NPCC, 2017).

The introduction of THRIVE hoped that, rather than providing a 'one size fits all' approach to certain types of crime, an appropriate and proportionate response could be established by assessing the incident reported. THRIVE has been seen as an enhancement of recording practices and as a result, has found that the number of

police dispatches has reduced by 3.5% (Home Office, 2014), which may relate to the number of 'RWD' calls identified in this research. Consequently, there may be incidents that are not being responded to because they do not successfully follow the THRIVE acronym, despite being an incident that needs response. A HMIC Justice Inspectorates (2015) report highlighted this, by suggesting that although the THRIVE process allows the police to tailor the service they provide, some staff apply it to reduce or ration competing demands, rather than tailor the service to the need of the caller (which is its intention). The THRIVE process was not explored in this research. It became apparent during analysis of the South Yorkshire call log data that THRIVE was used in addition to police warning markers. As the call log records were not directly provided by North Yorkshire Police, the THRIVE process could not be compared between the forces without requesting further data from North Yorkshire. Due to data sharing agreements, and time and resource constraints, this was not possible.

It was also found that the information about warning markers on the analysed datasets was not always thoroughly provided. For example, many warning markers did not indicate how long they had been applied to a person or address. The only warning markers that indicated the duration of application were 'Domestic Violence' markers. Out of 2014 incidents in South Yorkshire, only 23.80% incidents had warning markers applied to them. This is in comparison to North Yorkshire, where warning markers were applied to over half of the 453 reported incidents (58.50%). This may simply reflect a deficit in recording practices. It also has implications for how police warning markers are used in each force area with regard to whether an autistic person has a marker or not. The following results should be interpreted with caution as a result. In South Yorkshire, there was an equal amount of 'Suspects' and 'Victims' with

warning markers applied to them (35.5% and 35.5%, respectively). However, in North Yorkshire, 16.6% of autistic people with warning markings were recorded as a 'Suspect' and only 6.8% were recorded as a 'Victim. This might suggest a lack of use of warning markers (possibly in favour of the THRIVE process), but could also mean that there is a lack of appropriate markers to be used in incidents involving autistic people. In South Yorkshire, 18-25-year olds had the most warning markers applied to them (33.40%). The age category with the least warning markers applied to them in South Yorkshire were 0-9-year olds, which might be expected given that this demographic are possibly too young to have had significant enough contact with the police to require a warning marker. In North Yorkshire, 26-35-year olds had the most markers applied to them (48.68%). This was closely followed by 10-17-year olds. Furthermore, in South Yorkshire, 77.7% of incidents involved males who had warning markers and in North Yorkshire, this was 70.9%. These results mirror what has previously been stated, that autistic 10-17 year olds and autistic males were most often involved in interactions with the police, and would therefore be somewhat expected. In both South and North Yorkshire, the response rates to those with warning markers was low, with officers attending 35.1% of incidents in South Yorkshire and only 18.5% in North Yorkshire. This may further indicate the effectiveness of warning markers (and again the more prevalent use of THRIVE).

Further challenges arose in comparing North and South Yorkshire Police when analysing the types of warning markers that were applied on their systems. There were more types of warning markers identified in South Yorkshire than in North Yorkshire. South Yorkshire Police used 23 different warning markers that could be applied to people and addresses, whereas North Yorkshire Police used only 12. A list of these markers are shown in Table 4.6.1. The markers themselves were also different in each

force area. This might be due to a difference in recording practices, yet could ultimately impact interactions with autistic people.

Table 4.6.1: The types of warning markers identified from incident data when searching for “*autis\**” between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and 31 August 2017.

South Yorkshire Police warning markers	North Yorkshire Police warning markers
Act-Other	<b>Alcohol</b>
Ailment	Child/Young Person
<b>Do not visit</b>	Domestic Abuse
Domestic Violence	Drugs
Drugs	<b>Firearms</b>
Firearms	Mental Disorder
Info; Other/Info-Other	Mental Health
Location of Interest	Other public agency/police force dealing
Mental Health	Persistent Caller
Missing	Vulnerable
Previous	<b>Weapons</b>
Public Safety	Youth Related
<b>Risk-Concern</b>	
Risk-Concern for Child	
<b>Risk-Other</b>	
Risk-Vulnerable	
Self-Harm	
Suicide	

South Yorkshire Police warning markers	North Yorkshire Police warning markers
Trigger Plan	
<b><i>Violent</i></b>	
<b><i>Warn-Other</i></b>	
<b><i>Warn-Violent Person</i></b>	
Weapon	

In North Yorkshire, three of these 12 warning markers were used for the purposes of informing officer safety ('Weapon', 'Firearms' and 'Alcohol'). In South Yorkshire, six of 23 warning marker were used for informing officer safety ('Do Not Visit', 'Risk – Concern', 'Risk-Other', 'Violent', 'Warn – Other' and 'Warn – Violent Person'). These are highlighted (bold and italicised) in Table 4.6.1. The remaining warning markers were used for informational purposes. South Yorkshire had no 'Alcohol' warning markers, despite there being more incidents involving autistic people who were affected by Drugs/Alcohol, whereas North Yorkshire had 58 incidents with allocated 'Alcohol' markers. South Yorkshire did, however, have more incidents that had a 'Drug' marker applied. South Yorkshire had 55 incidents with 'Mental Health' markers applied, compared to North Yorkshire, which had over double this, with 142 incidents that had the same marker. This is an interesting finding when referencing the police practitioner interviews discussed in the next chapter, whereby 16 of the 19 participants discussed the role of mental health in their interactions with neurodivergent people. This finding is perhaps what is expected in North Yorkshire, where there was a larger total number of mental health related incidents (with markers).

However, in South Yorkshire, 55 incidents with a 'Mental Health' marker seems to be an extremely small amount given the total number of incidents involving autistic people in the South Yorkshire dataset. This could be for two reasons. It may simply be that South Yorkshire are better at recording neurodivergent conditions appropriately, i.e. not recording autism as a mental health condition. However, an alternative reason might be that South Yorkshire are not as good as North Yorkshire at identifying that autistic people can also have co-morbid mental health conditions that impact their behaviour. This finding could also suggest that because 'Mental Health' markers were the most predominant marker for North Yorkshire, they recorded neurodivergent differences such as autism, as 'Mental Health', instead of 'Mental Disorder' or 'Ailment' (terms used in police recording practices). Autism as a neurodivergent condition did not have a dedicated marker in either force area. In South Yorkshire, incidents that involved a neurodivergent person were marked as a person with an 'Ailment' (featured in 68 incidents). North Yorkshire, on the other hand, recorded these cases as a neurodivergent person having a 'Mental Disorder' (featured in 31 incidents), which refers to how autism is listed in the MHA (1983). Both of these terms support the findings of further discourse analysis, where 15 out of 19 police participants (including all 10 participants in North Yorkshire) used medicalised language to discuss autism, of which 'Ailment' or 'Disorder' would be classed.

#### **4.7. Evidence of partnership working**

This research has investigated the role of partner agencies in supporting the police with neurodivergent citizens. However, on examining the police incident data, there was very little information about partnership working. This is despite the importance of partnership working as featured in the interviews and in the literature. In order to 'close'



or 'sign off' a call, the police practitioner who attended the call (or as in many cases, did not attend and was therefore 'signed off' by the call handler) must highlight the outcome of the incident. An example of an outcome was the arrest of a 'Suspect'. Though little could be established from the data provided, from what could be determined the most common outcome that involved partnership working was the submission of a Referral. Though some details could be sought from the call log records, the majority of the information was broad and difficult to draw conclusions from. For example, in the free-text description boxes, officers would often enter comments such as "*Referral sent to Social Services*", but this was the extent of the information provided about partnership working. Therefore, some of the more general findings are presented here, but these findings are also discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

Approximately a third of incidents in both North and South Yorkshire involved some form of partnership working. In South Yorkshire, 37.8% of all incident outcomes involved a partner agency, and in North Yorkshire, this was in 28.7% of all incident outcomes. This demonstrates that there were almost the same percentage of incidents in each force area that involved some form of partnership working, which may indicate some level of engagement with partner agencies, but not as much as is often portrayed in literature on the topic. In South Yorkshire, the most common partnership was with schools (which featured as a partner agency in 283 incident outcomes). This involvement may reflect the commonality of the age groups most associated with incidents in South Yorkshire (10-17-year olds). This was further supported by the frequency of partnership working with Social Services (which appeared as a partner agency in 209 incident outcomes). Further analysis showed that the most common age group involved in partnership intervention in South Yorkshire was 10-17-year olds,

involved in a total of 372 incidents. Interestingly, the second most common age group to be involved in partnership intervention was 0-9-year olds. This further supports both school and Social Services being the most common partner agencies involved in South Yorkshire. Furthermore, there were 70 incidents where the police worked alongside CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), which may further support the prevalence of the 10-17 age demographic.

In North Yorkshire, reports of how partner agencies were involved were even more limited. When searching through the call log records, there were further inconsistencies in how partnership working was recorded. From what could be determined, the most common partner organisation involved appeared to be Social Services, who were referred to in 72 incidents. This was followed by the broader services of the Local Authority, who were referred to in only 26 incidents. Apart from these details, there was very little information recorded. Though there was no information about the interaction of age groups and partner involvement, Local Authority involvement could reflect the 26-35-year-old age profile that was most frequent in North Yorkshire, as it is more likely that this demographic would live independently and require more support from agencies such as statutory housing services (who belong within Local Authorities). Furthermore, despite the amount of people who were described as being both autistic and as having mental health difficulties (indicated via a mental health marker) in North Yorkshire, there was no mention of services such as CAMHS and/or Crisis Teams. However, to draw comparisons with South Yorkshire, both force areas did cite partnership working with residential care settings and respite services that specifically supported autistic people. A list of all the partner agencies that appeared in the data (and their frequencies) in both data records are listed in Table 4.7.1.

Table 4.7.1: Partner agencies mentioned in incidents involving autistic people and the frequency with which they were mentioned by police force area

Partner organisations identified in South Yorkshire	Partner organisations identified in North Yorkshire
CAMHS (70)	Local Authority (26)
Crisis Team (20)	Residential Care (10)
Housing (12)	Safeguarding (4)
Local Authority (27)	School (2)
Residential Care (30)	Social Services (72)
Respite (16)	Taken to hospital (by police) (16)
Safeguarding (26)	
School (283)	
Social Services (209)	
Support Working Involved (50)	
Taken to hospital (by police) (19)	

Referrals were the most common way that partnership working appeared to be activated, as per the call log records. Referrals in North Yorkshire were split into Youth and Adult referrals, with a total of 34.2% of incidents having referrals as a result. This outcome might be expected given the number of incidents attended by a Police Officer and the number of incidents that were resolved over the telephone (as Police Officers were the ones who primarily initiated referrals). The breakdown of referrals in North Yorkshire highlighted that there were 81 Youth referrals and 73 Adult referrals, which

is an interesting finding given the prevalent age categories involved in the total number of cases. However, from the incident report data, it is unclear as to where these referrals were specifically sent to. In South Yorkshire, there were only 11 Youth referrals, which is surprising given the involvement of the 10-17 age group, as well as 25 Adult referrals. This led to a total of 1.8% specific referrals over the year, which does not seem to accurately reflect the number of referrals, yet these were the only ones reported in the dataset.

South Yorkshire also recorded the submission of 'General' or 'Gen 117' referral forms. 'Gen 117' referrals are sent to Social Services, primarily to raise concerns about children. In total, there were 156 of these referrals made over the year (7.7% of all cases). 'Gen 117' referrals were raised for 15.7% of 10-17 year olds. Of those who were aged 0-9 years old (below the age of criminal responsibility), 'Gen 117' referrals made up 87.2%, which might suggest that referrals were mostly reserved for those under the age of criminal responsibility, regardless of incident type. The number of these referrals, as they were sent to Social Services, might suggest that the police were more inclined to refer those 9 years and under to other services, as these services were deemed more able to support them, due to their age and possibly because of their additional neurodivergence. South Yorkshire Police also made referrals to the Public Protection Unit (PPU), an internal police unit that looks after victims and repeat victims of crimes. In addition to the reported 'Gen 117' referrals, there was a total of 136 PPU referrals made (6.8%). When considering the amount of reported 'Victims' in South Yorkshire, these referrals account for half of PPU referrals (50.1%), which might be expected.

#### **4.8. Conclusions**

To conclude this chapter, in both North and South Yorkshire, the circumstances in which the police engaged with autistic people most frequently involved 10-17-year olds meaning, generally speaking, it is mostly autistic children and young people who are involved with the police. In both South and North Yorkshire, the least likely age category to be interacted with was autistic adults (over 36 year olds), which might suggest that people within this age demographic are better supported or, more likely, less diagnosed as autistic and therefore not even recorded by this data (Mukaetova-Ladinska *et al.*, 2012). In both South and North Yorkshire, the police mostly interacted with autistic males. This may be representative of the autistic diagnosis process, whereby it has been well documented that there is a lack of diagnosed autistic females (Gould and Ashton-Smith, 2011). The most frequent response to an incident was from a Police Officer or a telephone resolution, as identified in both force areas. This response type, however, is not always reflective of the types of incidents which the police are called to, as within both North and South Yorkshire, over half of incidents were related to 'Public Safety' and 'Anti-Social Behaviour and Disorder', as opposed to criminal offences. In accordance to the second research question presented in this thesis, "*How do relevant markers applied to cases on police databases appear to impact the policing of neurodiversity?*", it appears that, from the results of this analysis, police warning markers have limited impact on interactions specifically involving autistic people. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, very few incidents in both datasets had warning markers applied to them in the first instance.

Furthermore, findings that have been presented here suggest that police responses to incidents with warning markers were generally low, which might mean that warning markers are not influential in whether the police are sent to an incident

involving an autistic person. Instead, one conclusion that may be drawn from this section is that the THRIVE process takes priority over warning markers. THRIVE assesses information that is possibly more dynamic and up-to-date than warning markers, therefore may give those responding a better understanding of what they will encounter on arrival. Despite being a prominent theme in the police practitioner interviews, not to mention that many of the partner organisations described in the call log records for both force areas were also interviewed in this research, the lack of detail about partnership working and referrals in call log records might suggest a number of conclusions. Firstly, that partnership referrals and details about partnership working are simply not recorded successfully on 999/101 call logs. The only stipulation of this is that the outcome of an incident often has to be recorded on the system for a call to be 'signed off', and therefore might suggest that information about partnership working is not always properly conveyed to the call handler. Secondly, these findings could also suggest that there is a lack of partnership working, more generally, between the police and partner organisations, particularly in North Yorkshire Police. This will be further discussed in the following chapters.

## **5. Qualitative Findings**

Interviewee's views and experiences were found to fall into four broad themes. These themes were decided upon based on the principles of critical thematic and discourse analysis, informed by CR, in particular how participants discussed topics in a way that was recurrent, repeating and forceful and used in ways that reproduced and reinforced social inequalities (Lawless and Chen, 2018). Furthermore, rather than presenting the findings from the critical thematic and discourse analysis separately, it was more in line with the principles of CR to include both in the same analysis, as the language used by participants was ultimately integral to the development of themes. CR is invested in how people make meaning out of their events and experiences, particularly when investigating the 'actual' domain, whilst also being interested in the mechanisms that produce an event and allow it to occur (Bunt, 2018). Where the interactions between the police and neurodivergent people were analysed empirically in Chapter 4, findings in Chapter 5 sought to interpret how police practitioners directly and indirectly acknowledged their understandings of such experiences, within their structural, cultural and situational contexts. The first theme presents the varying levels of understanding in regards to what neurodiversity is and how it impacts on policing. The majority of participants did not know what neurodiversity was or provided an explanation of neurodiversity that aligned with medical model ways of thinking. Furthermore, medicalised language was used predominantly by all participants. Participants also discussed autistic behaviours as potential identifiers, which alluded to how "*at risk*" or vulnerable the person was (Stanford, 2012, p. 20). Finally, mental health was discussed recurrently in many interviews, often where participants did not

have enough experience of supporting autistic people or where they believed autism and mental health were the same.

The second theme related to personal and individual factors participants believed influenced their interactions with autistic people. Some interviewees discussed their expectations of their role, specifically whether supporting autistic people was part of their role. An interesting and unexpected theme discussed by participants was that the police wanted to be seen and treated as human beings and thus, cannot know or understand everything about autism, neurodiversity and/or mental health, particularly in the field, which impacted the type of support provided during an interaction with a neurodivergent person. Other factors included the influence that one individual can have during an interaction, based on their personal understanding, knowledge and experience of neurodivergent conditions. Notwithstanding this, interviewees identified a wider role of the organisation as a whole in supporting neurodivergent people. This mainly revolved around the role played by police culture and the changes required for neurodiversity to become a regular feature of police work. The theme of police culture is discussed in conjunction with Reiner's core characteristics in this section. As well as culture, the role of senior management was often cited as a help or hindrance to progress regarding neurodiversity. Furthermore, the priorities set at both local and regional levels also had an impact on how participants presented their views of neurodiversity within police work. Within this theme, the impact of managerialism, cuts to budgets and resources are also discussed.

The final themes surrounded partnership working, which identified that, despite an abundance of academic literature about police partnerships, there was very little evidence of police partnerships relating to neurodiversity or in support of neurodivergent people, not only within the literature, but also within the context of this



research. Both police practitioners and partner agency participants' views aided in the development of themes for the final section of this findings chapter, providing multiple perspectives in regards to the promotion of neurodiversity through police partnerships. The roles that partner organisations, such as Social Service and education, play in police partnerships are discussed, as well as the positives and negatives of partnership working (in line with O'Neill and McCarthy's 2014 work). The formality of partnership working became an overarching theme of this research. Informality, ad-hoc relationships and fleeting information sharing were the norm noted by both police practitioners and partner agency participants. One of the most significant themes that is highlighted is 'expertise', and who are considered the 'experts' within the partnership relationship. This encompasses discussions about the importance of information sharing, as well as the role of families and autistic people themselves in supporting the police.

## **5.1. “I don’t think I could even say, I could probably have a guess!” - Conceptualisations of neurodiversity and autism**

This chapter opens with what I consider to be one of the most important and significant findings of the thesis. The ability for police practitioners to understand neurodiversity is essential to their interactions with neurodivergent people, and although this research cannot determine the effects of such understandings, this section does highlight the impact a lack of understanding could have. The section begins by demonstrating the mixed and multiple levels of understanding police practitioners demonstrated in regards to neurodiversity. These understandings are then narrowed down further to illustrate the impact of one specific type of neurodivergence: autism. Police practitioners described how autistic behaviour ‘presents’ to the police, and how their differences in behaviour can ultimately impact police interactions. Furthermore, a significant proportion of this section relies on the critical discourse analysis, given the extensive discussion about the language used to discuss autistic people, which was found to mostly align with the medical model of disability and difference. In this way, police participants mainly highlighted the deficits presented by autistic people, and how these often act as the cause for police interaction. This discussion then moves into a wider discussion of mental health and vulnerability, drawing on the thematic analysis. Mental health was a concept introduced autonomously by all participants in this research. This is most concerning when considering police interactions with specifically autistic people, because mental health and autism are completely different neurological differences. However, the reasons why autism and mental health were conflated in this research are considered. This section ends with a discussion about vulnerability and risk, finding that police participants understood autistic people to be vulnerable due to their risk of exploitation

by others, as opposed to their actual differences in society. Rarely were autistic adults discussed, with the emphasis of vulnerability and risk surrounding autistic children and young people.

#### 5.1.1. Understanding of neurodiversity

There is no exact definition of neurodiversity (Silberman, 2010), but many have attempted to define it (Glannon, 2007; Jurecic, 2007; McGee, 2012; Owren and Stenhammer, 2013). As such, neurodiversity is challenging to define in research. It has been defined broadly in this research as a 'difference' in thinking and behaving, supporting the social model of disability, which rejects medical models of understanding such 'conditions' as deficiencies or disorders (Silberman, 2010). Despite the lack of definition, it was deemed important in this research to establish how police practitioners understood and defined neurodiversity as part of their work. To do this, participants were asked "*What is your understanding of the term 'neurodiversity'?*", during the opening questions of the interviews, answers to which were analysed thematically using a mind-map. It was found that only a third of participants in South Yorkshire had any understanding of what neurodiversity was (three out of nine participants). Of those who were classified as not understanding neurodiversity, School Officers and three PCSOs were unable to provide a definition, which given previous findings about the amount of neurodivergent school-age children involved with the police in South Yorkshire, could be potentially detrimental to interactions. When asked about their understanding of neurodiversity, many of the responses concluded, "*I wouldn't have known what it was*" (SYP01), "*I would struggle to describe it*" (SYP05) and "*It's not a term I've heard much of*" (SYP06). Interestingly, one of the three practitioners who gave a close definition to the one presented in this

research was a response officer, who was only eight months into their probationary training (and up until this point had no other policing experience). When asked about their understanding of neurodiversity they said:

*“That everyone is different, pretty much” (SYP08).*

The reason this finding is interesting is because as a newly trained officer, who has come into the police with no policing background, their understanding of neurodiversity was greater than those who had been in the force for over 10 years.

In North Yorkshire, half of the police practitioners interviewed knew what neurodiversity was (five out of 10 participants). Those who did know about neurodiversity varied between PCSOs, one response officer, an Inspector and a member of police staff. Interestingly, much like in South Yorkshire, those who did not know about neurodiversity included a School Officer, and two members of senior staff. In response to “*What is your understanding of the term neurodiversity?*”, two response officers said the following “*I don’t think I could even say, I could probably have a guess!*” (NYP07) and simply “*I don’t know*” (NYP08). One participant felt they could answer, but using discourse analysis, it seemed that their answer used language that framed ‘neurodiversity’ within the medical model of disability:

*“It relates to perhaps disabilities or **restrictions** that aren’t immediately apparent, or physical, be them social or emotional, mental illness, that kind of thing” (NYP02).*

Their use of “*perhaps*” indicates that they were unsure of what ‘neurodiversity’ was, going onto give a relatively close answer, yet using medicalised and negatively perceived words, such as “*restrictions*” (which is bolded for emphasis in the quotation).

Those who did have an understanding of neurodiversity in North Yorkshire, as defined in this research, often provided more social model definitions, which was identified using discourse analysis to categorise medicalised and social model terminology. One member of staff, who had only two years policing experience, after coming from many years working in Human Resources (in another organisation) demonstrated their understanding of neurodiversity using words and phrases that aligned strongly with the social model of disability (bolded for emphasis):

*“What neurodiversity does is actually say that everybody is **diverse** and that, if you are on the spectrum, **it is simply that your brain is working in a different way...** it’s nothing to do with being ill or the like, **it’s just a reaction and how people work and react to, or how their brain works... and how they react to the environment around them**” (NYP06)*

Similar to the example from South Yorkshire, this participant had very little policing background, yet was able to provide an almost identical-to-the-literature definition of ‘neurodiversity’, further highlighting the role of staff and police officers from a multitude of backgrounds, or those who are new to policing (Chan, 1997; Charman, 2017). Furthermore, what this participant did, like many other participants in both North and South Yorkshire, was relate their definition and understanding of neurodiversity to a specific ‘condition’ or ‘difference’, often without being prompted by me as the

interviewer. The most common reference was to autism, but many others discussed dyslexia too.

What this participant did, like many other participants in both North and South Yorkshire, was relate their definition and understanding of neurodiversity to a specific 'condition' or 'difference', often without being prompted by me, as the interviewer. The majority of academic literature also relates 'neurodiversity' to specific conditions, namely autism (for example, and not limited to, Baker, 2006; Chamak, 2008; Ortega, 2009; McGee, 2012; Kapp *et al.*, 2013; Krcek, 2013; Cascio, 2015; Beardon, 2017). Therefore, it may be expected that police practitioners would also do this, based on what is being published and promoted. In North Yorkshire, Participant NYP04 suggested that *"I think most of us... have some kind of neurodiverse condition. I see a neurodiverse condition as somebody that has autism"*. To support this further, one senior officer in South Yorkshire suggested that, *"I've only ever heard the term neurodiversity used actually with response to autism"* (SYP05). Another police officer shared their experiences of being diagnosed with specific conditions as part of their definition of neurodiversity:

*"Well it's not the perfect definition, but I'm quite badly dyslexic and there have been rumours at points that they feel that I might be on the low end of the autistic spectrum"* (NYP09).

This might suggest that although police practitioners were not fully aware of how to define neurodiversity and its political support (Singer, 1996), they were aware of some of the divergent conditions that can be associated with it. Though difficult to make assumptions about whether a police organisation is predominately neurotypical

(Beardon, 2017), based on the limited answers provided by police practitioners in this research, language that was used to portray neurotypicality in both forces was recurrent, repetitive and forceful. This argument will be demonstrated through the following sections, however in relation to the understandings and conceptualisation of neurodiversity presented by individual police practitioners, the most predominant aspect of interviews was the lack of understanding about what neurodiversity actually is and how this was described. It appeared that in North Yorkshire, practitioners generally had a better understanding, yet used more medicalised or neurotypical language. In South Yorkshire, however, it appeared that practitioners generally had less understanding.

It was possible to further explore police practitioner understandings of neurodiversity through the discursive techniques they used when talking about interactions they had with neurodivergent citizens. Conversational terms were identified through discourse analysis, highlighting words and phrases that are used in conversation, yet may hold greater meaning. The most dominant discursive technique that demonstrated a lack of understanding in regards to neurodiversity was through a power dynamic tool presented in the form of police practitioners identifying themselves as “we/us” (the neurotypical) and ‘neurodivergent’ people as “they/them”. Within the interviews, there was not one participant in either police organisation that did not do this (10 out of 10 in North Yorkshire, and nine out of nine in South Yorkshire). Although in many instances the “we/us” and “they/them” divide was not used to put neurodivergent people in a place of inferiority, it was often used to justify police decision-making, “**we** police just deal with it because **we** always have” (SYP02), “*when **we** come across **them** it’s mental health assessments and sectioning, unfortunately when it gets to **us**, because **they’re** causing such a disturbance*” (SYP04). Other

times, participants used “we/us” and “they/them” to highlight the differences between neurotypical and neurodivergent people, for example:

*“I think **they** can be read wrong often because **they** don’t understand the seriousness of some things and if **they** think it’s right that this is what should be happening, it’s difficult for **them** to understand that even though it’s right to **them** it’s not lawful” (SYP08).*

The consequences of using “we/us” to understand neurodiversity is that neurodivergent people who demonstrate differences in behaviour may be ‘Othered’ as a result and subsequently will be treated differently by police practitioners. Researchers have attempted to interpret ‘Othering’ language in relation to disabled people. Ramilow (2006) highlights that the creation and maintenance of an “us” versus “them” mentality has and continues to be built upon heteronormativity, able-bodiedness and institutional racism, supporting the argument that the use of this discursive tool in interviews may allude to a neurotypicalness in the way the police think about difference. Furthermore, Runswick-Cole (2014) argues that movements such as the neurodiversity movement only perpetuate these constructions of differences, i.e. ‘gay/straight’, ‘neurodivergent/neurotypical’. It may not therefore be that the police are inherently neurotypical, but rather that the neurodiversity movement inadvertently contributes to structural language, used to contextualise and position people’s identities. However, it should also be considered that, during interviews, and even in general conversation, there are seldom other ways to describe groups of people with similar characteristics. Therefore, the use of “we” and “them” could have



simply reflected the limited semantic opportunities that are afforded in human discourse.

#### 5.1.2. Understandings of autism

Many participants made reference to 'autism' as part of their understanding and conceptualisation of neurodiversity, thus through thematic analysis, it was identified as an important discussion in relation to police practitioners' understandings. As autism is the most commonly cited difference in relation to neurodiversity in academic and publicly available literature, it is unsurprising that many participants introduced 'autism' as a topic of discussion, as opposed to more broadly discussing neurodiversity (of which, many knew little about anyway). Furthermore, given the relative newness of the term 'neurodiversity' (Singer 1996), in comparison to 'autism', which psychologists have been researching since the early 1900s (Silberman, 2010), may have also been a factor that enabled participants to more comfortably discuss their views of neurodiversity. It should be acknowledged that this theme could have also been researcher-led, as where participants did not feel confident enough to discuss neurodiversity, experiences of autism were encouraged during the interview instead. As such, practitioners in North Yorkshire made more reference to their understanding of autism than those in South Yorkshire (10 out of 10 participants, compared to five out of nine). Though not raised specifically by me, some participants suggested that police officers needed to know about autism, as much as they knew about mental health: "*Police need to know enough about autism to make firm decisions without the influence of others*" (SYP02), which suggests that even when neurodiversity was not considered essential within policing, awareness and understanding of autism, was.

Much of participants' knowledge of autism, however, was fuelled by stereotypes and assumptions that were either thematically coded as supporting the medical model of disability or as presentations in the media. Beardon (2017) argues that there is no such thing as a typical autistic person, yet many participants portrayed an image of the 'typical' autistic person:

*"I think if you met this male you wouldn't think automatically, he's any way autistic"*  
(SYP03).

*"Are they on the very high functioning end, are they the guy from The Good Doctor, are they Rain Man" (NYP09).*

Acknowledging that there are commonalities amongst many autistic people (Beardon, 2017), participants involved in this research had the tendency to label certain behaviours as 'autistic'. On the other hand, there were some police practitioners who took a more open-minded approach to the behaviour of autistic people, suggesting that the environment had an impact on autistic behaviour and that this reaction will be different for every autistic person. This relates to the formula of autistic experiences proposed by Beardon (2017, p. 11): "*Autism + Environment = Outcome*", which suggests that how a person's autism is impacted by the environment, depends on how they will react. This is opposed to the more traditional view that all autistic people have a deficit in their social communication and will react in similar ways regardless of the situation they are in. To demonstrate, one participant talked about interviewing autistic young people in custody and highlighted the effects of their environment on their behaviour:

*“My experience is with some people who are all ends of the spectrum, sometimes it’s very different for them to emote or actually say what they need to. So, it’s being aware of how to get best evidence if you’re in that particular environment” (SYP09).*

Another participant suggested that *“if we arrest somebody and we fail to establish that they are autistic and they do not like being touched or they do not like certain environments, we can then trigger a negative reaction, we can trigger that episode, can make it worse” (NYP06).* In both examples, participants demonstrate some level of assumption, that autistic people struggle to emote or say what they want to say, or that autistic people do not like being touched, which is a stereotypical trait of autistic behaviour. However, what they do acknowledge is that the environment around the autistic person also contributes to these behaviours, alluding to a more neurodiverse understanding of autistic individuals during police interactions.

Understandings of autism were not only littered with assumptions and stereotypes, but they were also described using medicalised language, as identified using discourse analysis. All police practitioners from North Yorkshire used medicalised language to describe autism in their interviews (10 out of 10 participants), compared to South Yorkshire (five out of nine). The medical model of difference identifies autism as a deficit, something that needs to be fixed or cured (Baker, 2006; Beardon, 2017), and arguably remains the dominant discourse in autism studies (Woods, 2017). However, it appears that participants were not talking about autism in medicalised ways consciously, but rather that these views were embedded and had become normalised within their ways of thinking about autism, more generally. The most common word used to describe autism was ‘disorder’. Much of the literature about

autism still uses the term 'disorder' (i.e. Autistic Spectrum Disorder). Milton (2012) argues that autism was historically considered to be an extremely rare 'disorder', a view that does not seem to have progressed from what 'was considered', to what still is considered. Furthermore, autism is still recognised under the MHA (1983) as a 'Mental Disorder'. Consequently, within a policing context, 'mental disorders' are recognised within the PACE Codes of Practice (1.13 (d)), as a vulnerability and as such, 'autism' may be regarded in this way when identified by police practitioners (depending on their awareness and understanding of autism). One of many participants used the term "*deficiency*", which is also still used in academic papers about autism (for example, Jaarsma and Welin, 2012). Another participant used the term "*mentally disturbed*" (SYP04). Other participants discussed autism as a "*disability*" and that subsequent autistic behaviour was a "*a bit backwards*" or a "*side-effect*" of their difficulties:

*"Some sort of **disability**, you might see it as a bit **backwards**" (NYP03).*

*"It can describe any learning **disability**, or learning **difficulty**, with a neurological causation or **side-effect**" (NYP04).*

Words that were considered to fit within the medical model of disability are bolded in the above quotations. Other participants used medicalised language to suggest that autistic people displayed "*odd behaviour*" (SYP04) and that when you are autistic "*other people still look at you skewwhiff*" (NYP03). These views align with historical views of disability whereby people viewed physical, developmental and/or cognitive disabilities or impairments as aspects of human behaviour that should be fixed or

attempted to be made better (Silberman, 2010). In McWade, Milton and Beresford's (2015) research on 'Mad studies' and neurodiversity, they describe medical model language as normative within society and that in order to move towards a society that accepts neurodiversity, 'autism' and related neurodivergence must no longer be understood as 'impairments' in medical terms.

Further ways in which participants demonstrated the use of medical model language and terminology was through describing a person as being "*on the spectrum*" (six out of 10 participants in North Yorkshire and three out of nine participants in South Yorkshire). Being 'on the spectrum' remains another dominant discourse surrounding understandings of autism (Beardon, 2017) and was identified as strongly embedded within police interviewees' discourses. One participant even suggested that "*we're all on the spectrum somewhere*", which in accordance with the neurodiversity movement minimalises the experiences of autistic people, suggesting that there are no differences to be acknowledged between the neurotypical and the (diagnosed) neurodivergent (Beardon, 2017). Furthermore, the neurodiversity movement calls for an increased recognition of sameness in the diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions, that there is no scale or spectrum towards a 'higher' or 'lower' functioning aspect of behaviour (Beardon, 2017). As such, participants' views of autism as a 'spectrum' condition were primarily focused on the idea that individuals could be graded on a 'spectrum' of functioning, which impacted how they might support a person during their interactions. Functioning labels were analysed as semantic phrase used throughout many interviews (four out of 10 in North Yorkshire and six out of nine in South Yorkshire). One participant suggested "*It's a big spectrum isn't it, are they on the very high functioning end?*" (NYP09). When functioning labels are used, autistic people are

being labelled as possibly being more or less capable (and culpable) in their involvement with the police. For example, one participant said:

*“On the severe end, we probably never come into contact with them because they never leave the house and they’ve got 24-hour care” (SYP03).*

These labels not only impact the way in which the police interact with autistic people, but where an autistic person is on the supposed “*severe end*” of the ‘spectrum’, they may not be provided the right type of support when the police interact with them. Of those on the ‘severe end’, five out of nine participants in South Yorkshire suggested autistic people are “*suffering*” from a ‘condition’, highlighting their conceptualisation of ‘autism’ as a deficit. Using the phrase ‘to suffer’ suggests that autism is something bad that the person is subjected to and must tolerate (Oxford Dictionary, 2015), and therefore through the process of discourse analysis, this language could reveal underlying assumptions about autism as a deficit.

Where individuals were seen as being at the ‘severe end’ of the ‘spectrum’, this also prompted interviewees to question whether the person had capacity. ‘Capacity’ was identified through the thematic analysis, but was not necessarily common across both police organisations, for example in South Yorkshire only two out of nine participants raised the matter of ‘capacity’, in comparison to in North Yorkshire (six out of 10 participants). The reason for its critical inclusion is that those who discussed capacity suggested that whether the person is able to comprehend what is happening influences the outcome of a police interaction, particularly that the treatment might be more lenient if the person does not have capacity, which is supported by the literature (Blair, 1996; Freckelton, 2009; Chown, 2009). Other participants, on the other hand,

suggested that just because the person is learning disabled and/or autistic does not mean they do not understand what is going on: “*Just because you’ve got a disability, doesn’t mean to say you haven’t got capacity and actually you can understand right from wrong*” (SYP07). Therefore, when looking at the recurrence of capacity as a theme and the use of severity language (i.e. severe or high functioning), there may be a wider impact on policy and practice, as well as on the extent of the types of support that are provided. For example, when discussing a supposedly ‘high-functioning’ autistic person, Participant SYP03 said “*she’s [his mum] got a social worker and I speak to his tutor at college and social worker, but I think, sometimes it’s whether she needs extra support or does she need police intervention*”. This further highlights the detrimental effect of not only ‘spectrum’ type discourse, but the ways in which the police use and apply these labels.

Though medicalised language was used by almost every participant, some participants did show more awareness of the social model of disability and, even used more neurodiverse language when discussing autism specifically (six out of 10 participants in North Yorkshire and six out of 9 participants in South Yorkshire). Using social model language not only highlights a more inclusive view of autistic people and a more diverse construction of ‘autism’, it also contributes to the overcoming of exclusion and discrimination (Crow, 1996). Discourse analysis identified that PCSOs and Schools Officers were most likely to use this type of language (despite their lack of knowledge about neurodiversity), which may be because they are working with the younger generation, those coming through the system with a wide variety of neurodivergent needs. One PCSO argued that one of the interview questions was too hard to answer because “*there’s such a **broad** range of people with a **broad** range of issues*” (NYP01). Through emphasising the term ‘broad’ (bolded), the multitude of

differences experienced by neurodivergent people have been interpreted. Another School Officer suggested that when working with autistic young people “*we’d do it [working with them] on a one-on-one basis or maybe a very small group and sometimes, normally it would be, a person with education, specific needs, we might do it in their home*” (SYP06), using phrases that highlight a needs-based approach to support, which aligns to the principles of the neurodiversity movement. Though participants frequently used this language, they often did so in conjunction with medicalised language, as well as using ‘we/them’, which on the whole contradicts their use of social model discourse.

Another way discourse analysis was used was to identify the use of person-first language (person with autism) or identity-first (autistic person). Identity-first language is favoured amongst most autistic people and neurodiversity researchers (for example Beardon, 2017; Milton, 2017; Kapp *et al.*, 2013) and is used throughout this research (as outlined in the introduction and methodology chapters of this thesis). In the interviews, person-first and identity-first language was used interchangeably by all participants. However, it is unlikely that participants were aware that identity-first language is favoured by the autistic and neurodivergent community (Milton, 2017). Participants also interchangeably referred to the autistic ‘person’ and/or an autistic ‘individual’. In one example, a participant used both stating, “*we treat **people** as **individuals** now*” (SYP01). The use of the word ‘individual’ may lead to further depersonalisation of autistic people (Runswick-Cole, 2014), yet treating ‘people’ as ‘individuals’ was a popular narrative in the interviews, adding complexity to how these terms are used to address people. Another way in which autistic people were depersonalised was through the reference of people as ‘cases’. For example, one participant said, “*I had one*”, referring to an interaction with an autistic person. This not



only depersonalises the person involved, but it also adds to the marginalisation of autistic experience (Milton, 2016). Furthermore, 'autism' as a neurodivergent difference was also referred to as a separate entity. Participant SYP09 suggested that "*We've had Asperger's started coming in more*". Using the third person adds more significance to the person's difference, isolating their autism and not acknowledging the whole person or their identity.

Moving away somewhat from the discourse analysis of autism, observing how police practitioners described the behaviour of autistic people, a theme that was most recurrent in South Yorkshire, and less so in North Yorkshire, was the way in which police thought autistic people 'present' (eight out of nine participants). Despite the lack of this discussion in North Yorkshire, this is an important theme, as how someone 'presents' may relate to how autistic people are identified and subsequently treated by the police. One participant from North Yorkshire proposed that "*it might take a while to get to the bottom of it and find out, you know, there's something not quite right about this person*" (NYP01). Furthermore, other participants reported:

*"I can pick up on whether they're potentially on the spectrum just by the way they behave, how the reports come in"* (NYP01).

*"I'm pretty au fait with how it might show up or the signs of what to look for"* (SYP04).

*"Sometimes something just makes you think he's not alright... We notice things"*  
(SYP08).

The presentation of autistic people may also relate to their treatment during and in the outcome of an interaction. It should also be noted that this treatment could also be impacted by the persons' age and capacity. One participant (SYP01) suggested that, "we [the police] *probably treat them the same as anybody else*", which may mean that treatment remains the same, despite the way in which an autistic person is identified and regarded. Furthermore, another participant (SYP04) suggested that "*I don't particularly cut them any more slack than with anybody else, but I'm aware of how I speak to them and interact with them will affect how they interact back with me*", demonstrating a level of awareness about the differences in autistic behaviour.

Every single participant made reference to 'autistic behaviour' and how this impacts police interaction and treatment. There is a wide variety of literature which suggests that behaviour displayed by autistic people can often be misconstrued by the police or other criminal justice actors as 'offending behaviours' (for example, Allen *et al.*, 2008; Bishop, 2008; Freckelton, 2009; King and Murphy, 2014; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Helverschou *et al.*, 2015). In this research, these behaviours were often based on stereotypes of autism. The two most common stereotypical 'autistic behaviours' that were discussed were 'anger' and 'strange' behaviour. In relation to anger, participants said the following:

*"... Anger comes across before anything else in our job"* (SYP08).

*"Their behaviour can become quite erratic and quite difficult to manage sometimes"*  
(SYP04).

*“They might have assaulted someone or caused some damage, but it won’t have been malicious or out of anger, it’ll have been a flare up or something’s ticked them off” (NYP09).*

Anger in any form (such as how the final participant describes behaviour) could consequently come across as violence, and thus be categorised as offending behaviour (Allen *et al.*, 2008). Alternatively, Freckelton (2009) suggests that where there is physical violence, it is more likely that an autistic person is reacting to an invasion of personal space, which leads to a fight or flight response.

Furthermore, autistic behaviour was often referenced as being ‘odd’ or ‘strange’. Participant NYP10 suggested that:

*“It’s quite easy to think ‘oh they’re drunk’ or, you know, they’re just being a dick for want of a better word, and not quite understanding what’s going off”.*

A second example demonstrates that ‘odd’ and ‘strange’ behaviour is often not the result of how the police interpret ‘autistic behaviour’, but instead, how the public perceive autistic behaviour:

*“In some cases, we do have incidents where a concern has been raised for a person and we are the first people to respond, we don’t know who that person is or any information but somebody will have phoned in saying, I’m a bit concerned about this person, they’re sort of hanging around and their behaviour’s a bit odd... obviously it kind of puts thoughts into your head like what is actually going on and why are they*

*on their own and why does somebody think their behaviour is different to everybody else's on the street" (NYP07).*

As can be seen in this example, how the police receive information impacts the way in which they may handle a situation. King and Murphy (2014) proposed that common behaviours displayed by autistic people such as social naivety, upset at disruption to routines, a lack of understanding about social situations and obsessional thinking could become misinterpreted by both the police and members of the public.

A final, yet interesting, finding from the thematic analysis in relation to the understanding of autism by police practitioners, was that 'autism' was often used by autistic people as an excuse for problematic behaviour. This was a much more common experience in South Yorkshire (five out of nine participants discussed this), in comparison to North Yorkshire (three participants out of 10). This is also a common conceptualisation of autism in the literature, whereby autistic children specifically are described as 'naughty children' (Farrugia, 2009). One participant proposed that "*some will use it [autism] as an excuse, where actually it was somebody who was a little shit to be honest*" (SYP09). Though this in itself is a challenge when reconceptualising the idea of 'autistic behaviour', it also causes a problem to policing, whereby the police may not take a call as seriously or provide the same level of support where they feel a child, in particular, is just being naughty. One participant highlighted that often "*offenders might claim to have something [such as autism], whether they do or not I don't know, but sometimes they do, and they will try and hide behind that*" (NYP08). Another discussed the role that parents play in presenting this understanding of autism: "*The one that winds me up most is when you get a parent saying well I can't do anything, they're autistic or they've got ADHD... it's challenging because they don't*

*seem to want to address the issue, they just put the autism ADHD tag on them and think 'I can't do anything with them' (SYP04). Another participant described how this has always been an issue, however that it used to be that ADHD that was used as an excuse for behaviour, which has now moved onto autism:*

*"Ten years ago, every single kid would be described as having ADHD, and often that was sort of undiagnosed or suspected ADHD or whatever. I don't know whether it's almost something that folks have cottoned onto, because you just see it so much and it's always with that undiagnosed or suspected sort of thing... you do think gosh, is it really that much of an iceberg of a problem, or is it that folk are thinking oh well, you know, such-and-such, he keeps doing such-and-such, rather than actually thinking he needs to stop that, he's being a naughty boy" (SYP05).*

This extract in particular highlights that some officers may be sceptical as to whether there is a difference that means they may need to be treated differently or whether it is just someone misbehaving and using a neurological condition as an excuse. The general consensus amongst participants seemed to be that autistic behaviour on its own was not a significant enough reason for adaptation. As stated by one participant, *"just because they've got autism doesn't mean that they're not doing what everyone else is doing"* (SYP08), suggesting that autism is not an excuse for criminal behaviour. An alternative view is that autism should be seen as a reason to adapt organisational practices to make them fairer and more inclusive (Beardon, 2017), especially during an interaction with the police, as opposed to being a mitigating factor for treatment.

### 5.1.3. Reference to mental health

Where participants did not have enough experience of working with neurodivergent or autistic people, their experiences of supporting people with mental ill health were referenced instead. Whether participants had these experiences or not, mental health featured as a theme within every interview in North and South Yorkshire. One participant suggested that, *“if mental health patients were taken out of police responses, the jobs would be 95% less than what they are now”* (SYP04). There was a large proportion of participants who suggested that they had mental health training, but nothing to do with autism. This being said, one participant actually suggested that, *“the issues we deal with, that we’ve been trained on to do with mental health, it really quite often is on the neuro side as opposed to mental health”* (SYP05). Glannon (2007, p. 1) uses the term *“mental disability”* to describe neurological ‘conditions’, such as autism, along with others who suggest that autism is part of mental health (Ghaziuddin, 2005). Furthermore, autism is a part of the MHA (1983). Therefore, it is unsurprising that mental health was such a prominent theme within the interviews, with many participants either talking purely about autism as a mental health condition, or about mental ill health alongside autism.

In 2018, the National Autistic Society campaigned for autism to be removed from MHA (1983), in order to convey the important differences between an autistic person and a person with mental ill health. In early 2021, they were successful in this campaign. Autism is to be removed as one of the grounds to detain a person under s.136 in the revised version of the Act (1983). However, there remains an embedded understanding which, since 2008, researchers such as Chamak have advocated for autism to be seen separately from diagnosed mental health conditions. Chamak (2008) highlights this distinction as problem number one when attempting to reframe

autism and neurodiversity. The neurodiversity movement has strongly proposed that mental health is not neurodiversity, instead it is something that sits alongside neurodiversity, co-morbidly. Such an understanding was highlighted by one participant, who suggested that *“it [autism] comes under the umbrella of mental health... they’re all to do with the brain”* (NYP10). Statements such as these are supported by how often autism was referred to as a mental health condition by participants in this research. In total, 10 out of 19 participants suggested that autism and mental health were the same, compared to nine who distinguished them as being different.

Breaking this down further, there were slight differences in how this was conceptualised by North and South Yorkshire Police practitioners. Interestingly, despite the presence of the neurodiversity hub, in North Yorkshire six participants (out of 10) suggested mental health and autism were the same. This is in comparison to South Yorkshire, where only four (out of nine) participants identified them as the same. This might suggest that those in North Yorkshire were less aware of the differences between mental health and neurodiversity, or simply that they were more influenced by policies such as the MHA and/or PACE. However, those who suggested there was a difference between mental health and autism, tended to take a positive perspective to changing this outlook. For example, one participant in North Yorkshire said:

*“We don’t draw a line in it because there can often be that crossover, but I think we are very clear as an organisation around mental health, there’s a massive support for internal mental health for individuals and external, we have our training programme... so all of that has been very, very well established and is on a really good pathway, but actually some of that will crossover into neurodiversity. So, what*

*we try to educate is actually there's these other 80 plus conditions here but some of them might crossover, so we don't say it's completely disconnected" (NYP05).*

Putting autism and mental health together in this way can be potentially problematic, as the police may treat an autistic person and someone with mental ill health the same, when they are not (McWade, Milton and Beresford, 2014) and subsequently may provide incorrect support, for example, sectioning them under 136 of the MHA.

As autism is currently still acknowledged under the MHA (until the aforementioned changes come into effect), autistic people can be arrested and sectioned under 136, purely as a result of their autism and no other mental health 'condition' (MHA, 1983). This was clearly an option for some participants in this research (and was prevalent with response officers): *"I mean some people we end up using our Section 136 power... A lot of people go down the 136 route, which we can now do inside premises [since the change in the MHA in 2017] as well as on the street" (NYP07).* However, whether with people with mental ill health or autistic people (or both), use of a Section 136 reportedly did not seem an effective management technique. One participant highlighted the revolving effect of using this power:

*"Going round in circles with the same thing... they're fine today, so put you in a taxi, send you home again, back into the community and then we're bringing them back in again the same day or the next day with the same thing, threatening to throw themselves off a building. And then they put them back in a taxi, because when they get there, they say they're fine and then they're back on the roof the next day. So, it's frustrating" (SYP08).*



This not only highlights the ineffectiveness of Section 136, but also the insufficiency of services that support people with poor mental health, let alone autistic people. Where an autistic person is sectioned, taken to a mental health suite and assessed, it is unlikely that this would be the correct place to get support (unless they had co-morbid mental health conditions), not only because these facilities are struggling to support those with mental ill health only, but also because, on its own, autism/neurodiversity is not considered a diagnosed mental health condition (National Autistic Society, 2019).

#### 5.1.4. Presentation of vulnerability and risk

Vulnerability and risk were important aspects of understanding and conceptualising neurodivergent and autistic people (as discussed by six out of 10 participants in North Yorkshire and eight out of nine in South Yorkshire), and was identified as a key theme within the thematic analysis. South Yorkshire Police have a dedicated Vulnerability Unit who work directly with autistic people and having interviewed one of the members of this unit, suggested that: “20% of what we [the police] deal with is crime... 80% is vulnerability” (NYP01). Furthermore, discourse analysis of the South Yorkshire and North Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner priorities for 2017-2021 highlighted a number of discussions around vulnerability and risk. In North Yorkshire, ‘Caring about the Vulnerable’ is their top priority. Furthermore, in South Yorkshire ‘Protecting Vulnerable People’ is also their first priority. Where autistic people are considered vulnerable, these categories would include them. Interestingly, the two forces appear to take different approaches to vulnerable people, identified through their chosen language. North Yorkshire suggests they will “care” for vulnerable people (NYPCC, 2018, p.5), whereas South Yorkshire claim they will “protect” vulnerable people

(SYPCC, 2018, p.5). The protection of vulnerable people alludes more to the police's role as protectors, as opposed to 'carers' of the community (van Dijk and Crofts, 2016), which might be the general stance taken by South Yorkshire Police. That being said, though both are positive statements to make, the protection of vulnerable people does not always ensure their care, and vice versa.

According to academic literature, vulnerable groups or individuals include those who are impoverished, disenfranchised or subject to discrimination, intolerance, subordination and stigma (Nyamathi, Keenan and Bayley, 1998), which may include those who are neurologically different. In this research, vulnerability and risk has been considered in relation to the differences displayed by autistic and neurodivergent people – not that autistic/neurodivergent people are vulnerable because of their difference, but in the way others treat them due to their difference. This has been highlighted by Chakraborti and Garland (2012) who suggest that conventional explanations of vulnerability are constrained by discourse, which describe 'vulnerability' as a characteristic that only impacts specific groups who demonstrate difference. From how participants talked about vulnerability and risk in these interviews, it could be suggested that, to some extent, police practitioners concurred with both my conceptualisation of vulnerability, and other researchers (for example Allen *et al.*, 2008; Chakraborti and Garland, 2012; Weiss and Fardella, 2018), which is that autistic people are seen as vulnerable *only* when they are exposed to risk, victimisation and exploitation.

On the wall in the office of one of the research participants was a sign that had a force-wide definition of vulnerability. It read: "*A person is vulnerable if, as a result of the situation or circumstances are unable to protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation*". This is the definition proposed in the national vulnerability agenda set

by the National Police Chiefs Council and College of Policing (2018). There were many occasions in which participants talked about autistic people being vulnerable to exploitation and victimisation. Participant SYP01 and SYP02 suggested that autistic people are “*easy pickings*”, that people “*look for vulnerable people to exploit and what autism does is provide that window of opportunity for them*”. They continued to talk about ‘mate crime’:

*“We talk about mate crime, so you get these people that align themselves with vulnerable people, they become friends. I’ll take you for some fags, I’ll buy you a pint or just lend us £20, I’ll give you it back, and then all of a sudden, 20 becomes 30, 30 becomes 40 and before you know it they’re taking all their money off them, giving them a fivers worth of shopping”* (SYP01).

Another participant also discussed ‘mate crime’ as a form of vulnerability: “*We are looking at people who are, unfortunately, victims of mate crime, they’re befriended, think somebody’s a friend and actually, that friend is mis-using and abusing them*” (NYP06). This suggests it is not autistic behaviour and traits that make autistic people vulnerable, but rather the circumstances in which they find themselves. Due to the nature of some autistic behaviour, literature has suggested that autistic people are not only vulnerable due to their differences but also due to ‘disability hate crime’ (Archer and Hurley, 2013; North, Russell and Gudjonsson, 2008). Chown, Beardson and Cossburn (2018) suggest that the social naiveté displayed by many autistic people lends them to being more open to exploitation by others, therefore these discussions from participants in this research may not be unexpected.

Though autistic people were often referred to as being victims or at risk of exploitation from others, there was an almost equal amount of discussion surrounding whether the person involved was a 'Victim' or a 'Suspect' of a crime, as perceived by the participants. Through the process of thematic analysis, six out of 10 participants referred to autistic people as 'Victims' in North Yorkshire, much like South Yorkshire practitioners (six out of nine). Similarly, North Yorkshire participants also talked about autistic people as offenders in seven out of 10 interviews and in South Yorkshire, there was the same as previous (six out of nine). The balance of this discussion supports what was found in the quantitative chapter of this thesis. To sum up these findings, one participant suggested that, "*offenders and perpetrators are also victims, in fact I would say they all are*" (NYP02), which highlights that where autistic people are considered vulnerable, it is possibly as both a victim and a perpetrator of crime. In comparison to vulnerability, 'risk' was less commonly discussed, which might suggest that the police do not see autistic people as "*a risk*" (Stanford, 2012 p. 20). This is also the case when talking about whether autistic people are "*at risk*" of exploitation and vulnerability (Salseda, *et al.*, 2011; Stanford, 2012). Risk was usually mentioned in relation to the incident the person was involved in:

*"It's like a conveyor belt of risk, an awful lot of folk who have been reported missing are children in care, looked after children in children's homes... they find out this person isn't where they want them to be, they pass that risk along by phoning up the police and reporting them missing"* (SYP05).

The "*conveyor belt of risk*" was identified through discourse analysis. The use of this metaphor revealed underlying assumptions about autistic people as a 'problem' or an

'issue' that is passed on from one organisation to another in order to be supported. It is not that the autistic person themselves that is "a risk", but more the situation that they are in which creates the risk. This further supports what has been said about participants believing autistic people are 'vulnerable', that it is context-based and situation-led. One participant talked about risk in relation to the role of the police: "we've got to be able to say thanks very much, but the risk is too great now to people in North Yorkshire" (NYP02). This highlights that the police are equipped to handle a certain level of risk, and that sometimes, autistic people are involved at this level.

An unexpected finding of the thematic analysis, which impacts the conceptualisation of autism/neurodiversity and vulnerability, was in reference to involvement with autistic children and young people. In both force area interviews, eight participants talked about autistic children and young people. Many participants referenced how much of their work involved autistic children and young people: "The lion's share of the people we deal with are young people, under 21" (NYP02), "Every other night we're looking for people who've gone missing, children, youths, who aren't really missing, they're just running about" (NYP09), "We do deal with quite a big age range really, from kids even pre-10, so technically they're not of criminal responsibility" (SYP04). This is an important consideration due to the conceptualisation of vulnerability within wider society, whereby under-18s are automatically considered vulnerable (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). Not only this, but where under-18s are not identified as autistic, they may be additionally at risk of being considered vulnerable by the police or exploited and victimised by others. A demonstration of the former can be seen in this example:

*“I’m aware of a sergeant who gave a caution then later had a phone call, it was a caution to a 15, 16-year-old and then, it was two or three days later, he got the phone call from parents saying, ‘Why was I not there?’ and the question that had failed to be asked was ‘Are you autistic?’” (NYP06).*

In this example, in addition to the failure to identify that the child was autistic, their parent should have also been present to act as an Appropriate Adult. Conversations such as these also led to discussions about diverting young people from the criminal justice system, as well as the prevention and intervention of autistic young people entering the system, with participants suggesting that *“prevention is cheaper”* (NYP01). This may also have impact on treatment, perceptions of autism (as something that only affects young people) and the types of interaction that are provided (from a PCSO or School Officer). All of these considerations add layers of vulnerability to an individual, which have a direct impact on police interaction, treatment and outcomes (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012), particularly for young autistic people.

Another conceptualisation of vulnerability that was proposed by participants was the frequency of repeat callers and the sameness of people that the police responded to. Over half of participants in North and South Yorkshire discussed this. Many participants commented that:

*“A large proportion and a lot of our time is taken up by the same group of people”*  
(NYP01).

*“We will hit the same people in different arenas, so that person that rings ambulance 90 times a month will be ringing police 90 times a month, it’s only a small nucleus of people” (NYP10).*

*“Some of the calls we get and the numbers of individuals who make the calls are relatively few, but their demands that they place on us can be huge, because they might call 20 times a night” (SYP05).*

The sense throughout all ranks, not just those who work in the community but also amongst senior management was that repeat callers affect all areas of police business (from response, to administration). Many referenced that repeat callers were a result of a lack of service provision: *“there are some people who fall into that sort of category, they are rarely only a police matter”* (SYP05), and others demonstrated exacerbation as a result of this: *“[referring to the sectioning of an autistic person who was subsequently released] I’ll probably see you next week then”* (NYP07). Where these repetitive incidents are occurring, one must question whether the autistic person involved is *“at risk”* or vulnerable, or simply requiring additional support, which is potentially why the police are being continually called for help and assistance (Stanford, 2012). This finding is supported by the quantitative findings in Chapter 4, whereby 13.75% of autistic people in South Yorkshire, and 48.20% in North Yorkshire, were identified as repeat callers.

#### 5.1.5. Conclusions

To conclude this section, only a third of participants in South Yorkshire and half of participants in North Yorkshire had any understanding of what neurodiversity was. Of

those who knew what neurodiversity was, this tended to be School Officers, PCSOs and newly trained officers and staff. When describing their understanding of neurodiversity, participants often used medicalised language, relating their understanding to conditions they were aware of, such as autism or dyslexia. Using medicalised language could impact on the way the police perceive, interact with and treat autistic people, by which the differences in behaviour are seen as disordered, and as such, possibly deviant. This was further highlighted by the use of ‘us’ (the neurotypical) versus ‘them’ (the neurodivergent) language. Every single participant made reference to autistic behaviour and how this impacts police interaction and treatment. These behaviours were characterised as being odd/strange and angry. Interestingly, mental health featured in every interview. Though this was sometimes self-initiated (where participants did not have enough experiences of working with neurodivergent people), the fact this theme occurred in every interview might suggest that participants associated neurodiversity with mental health. This may be detrimental where Section 136 is considered, because of the insufficiency of services that support people with poor mental health, let alone autistic people. Where an autistic person is sectioned, taken to a mental health suite and assessed, it is unlikely that this would be the correct place to receive support.

Vulnerability was referenced in relation to autistic people, in that they were perceived to be “*at risk*” of being exploited or victimised because of their differences. Furthermore, autistic children and young people were most commonly cited as interacting with the police, with their age and their difference making them more vulnerable, than other neurodivergent people. This relates to the quantitative findings, as does the mention of repeat callers. Over half of participants in North and South Yorkshire commented that a large proportion of the police time was consumed by the



same group of people, which might highlight a lack of external service provision supporting autistic people in the community. Beardon (2017) suggests that vulnerability should be understood as the result of differences not being understood by others and therefore, leading to discrimination, victimisation or labelling of behaviours that are not predominately neurotypical. Therefore, where there are neurodivergent citizens whose differences in thinking and behaviour deviate from the norms of society in such a vast way, consequently there may be increased vulnerability because autistic/neurodivergent people do not experience the world in a neurotypical way.

## **5.2. “In reality, we make mistakes” – Role-based and individual-level factors that influence police practice during interactions with autistic people**

This and the following sections highlight an array of factors that police participants felt impacted their interactions with autistic people. These factors may ultimately shape police decision-making (Hoyle, 1998; Nowacki, 2015). Here, I focus on factors that were located at the individual-level, whilst in the next section I focus on factors largely at the cultural and organisational level. In some respects, the two sections are inter-related. One participant, a PCSO in North Yorkshire, summarised some of the overall themes relevant to these sections. In wanting to improve the overall relationship between learning disabled people and the police, they were motivated to do so not only by their role as a PCSO, but by their lack of knowledge about learning disabilities. They also saw their efforts to establish a relationship with a group of learning disabled people as a way of combatting resistance from their colleagues and managers in the police organisation, i.e. their efforts expressed a degree of agency and demonstrated the effects of such learning from the ‘bottom-up’. What follows expands on how police

practitioners felt occupationally and organisationally influenced by neurodiversity and how this translated into their interactions with autistic people.

#### 5.2.1. Expectations of the police based on their role during interactions with autistic people

Participants in this research felt their roles were a significant part of interactions with autistic people. A variety of different police practitioners were interviewed, including four response officers and five PCSOs, in total. Participants felt their roles were a significant part of interactions with autistic people. As their name suggests, PCSOs are thought to play more of a community engagement role (O'Neill, 2019), meaning they spend time talking to and forging links with local citizens. However, in the current research, only two PCSOs described explicit examples of engaging with autistic people in the community on a regular basis. For example, Participant NYP01 talked extensively about their involvement with a neurodivergent group: *"I fell across this by accident really by being introduced to the group... as a PCSO I get more time on my hands than say a response cop... I can devote time to it [the group] and try and make a difference"*. By contrast, and in line with Participant NYP01's assertion, response officers have traditionally held a more crime control oriented role, meaning they spend more time 'fighting fires', than forging relationships (Reiner, 2015). These officers are the first response to emergency situations, in which they may have to think and act quickly, often by using their powers to arrest and detain (Morgan, Maguire and Reiner, 2012). Since the national roll-out of neighbourhood policing in 2008, community policing has been observed as having a different role to that of police constables (O'Neill, 2017). Typically, the understanding is that more serious incidents are attended by response officers, and less serious incidents are attended by PCSOs

(O'Neill, 2017). In this research, community support and engagement were limited in supporting autistic people, for example, one PCSO interviewed suggested that they “*can't offer weekly support*” (SYP03), which conflicted with what is reportedly expected of community support officers. Instead, many participants likened themselves to response officers. Another participant, a PCSO with approximately 12 years' experience in community support, also demonstrated the potential crossover between the more crime control oriented role of response, using an example of an autistic child who had hacked a school computer:

*“On that kid with the hacking, they [the school] weren't aware, they can't have been aware because they wouldn't have called me to come, and they wanted me to bollock him... speaking to school afterwards and saying, 'this isn't for me, it's not my job, I've gone through it with him but it's not my job to support him in the sense that you want”* (NYP03).

Not only does this example highlight the potential for partnerships, such as schools, to pass the buck to the police (which will be discussed later in this chapter), but it also suggests that the school wanted the PCSO to take responsibility for punishing the child, through a telling off. Where this happens, situations such as this could be confusing for autistic people. If an organisation that purportedly cares for them (i.e. school) deliberately involves an organisation like the police, to tell them off and scare them, this could lead to a lack of trust towards both organisations, meaning further exclusion for neurodivergent people (Beardon, 2017). Where they also ask a PCSO to play this role, community engagement, particularly with autistic communities, becomes challenging.

Although the occupational expectations of specific roles within the police were discussed in this research, participants argued that there was an immediate impact on their relationship with autistic/neurodivergent people based on what was expected of them as ‘the police’, as a whole. Despite there being a variety of officers and staff scoped for the research, there was still a strong sense that what was expected of them during interactions with autistic people was based on their role as a police practitioner, who held a particular authority or power, as someone who can help resolve a situation, as opposed to being associated with more specific roles, such as ‘PCSO’ or ‘Response Officer’. The impact of being part of the wider ‘police’ community was a particularly important influence within South Yorkshire Police interviews (nine out of nine participants), more so than in North Yorkshire interviews (six out of 10 participants). Participants were also keen to highlight the realities of police work, involving autistic/neurodivergent people, which often did not marry up with practitioners perceptions of what was expected of ‘the police’ by the public. It is important to note that the ‘realities’ of police work were based on the recurrence of the term identified during discourse analysis, as opposed to what was observed in the field. The only way in which the ‘actual’ reality could be identified would have been through conducting ethnographic research. One ‘reality’ presented by police participants, that conflicted with reported expectations, was their acknowledging that they made mistakes when supporting autistic people. One participant blatantly stated, “*in reality, [we] make mistakes*”. They went on to say, “*we’re busy cops, it’s a massively growing workload for a shrinking workforce, that’s the reality of it... We need to respond to incidents and it’s how police identify that person as autistic to start with*”. In this context, it is not only the suggestion that the police organisation is fallible, which could lead to detrimental interactions with autistic people (particularly where their expectations of ‘the police’

are too high), but also that non-identification of autistic people based on the knowledge and education of officers in the field, and the police organisations increasing lack of resources impacts the expectations of what can be achieved when responding to incidents involving autistic people.

To support the conflict between participant's perceived 'reality' and their understanding of expectations further, many participants unconsciously used words referring to what 'the police' 'can' and 'can't' do (thereby emphasising the realities of the job), what they 'should' do (emphasising the expectations of them), identified using discourse analysis, and rarely talked about what they 'could' do to better support autistic people that they engage with. An example of the use of this language was demonstrated by Participant SYP01: "[when supporting an autistic person] *you **must have done as much as you can***" (emphasis added). The use of "*must have*", similarly semantic to 'should', indicates that there are certain expectations of officers, for example, that they should be accountable for their actions when supporting autistic people, despite the reality of them having limited resources, knowledge or understanding (demonstrated by "*as much as you can*"). This type of language might suggest that, though 'the police' feel they should do as much as they can, they are limited in their capacity and role to support autistic people, as proposed by Participant SYP07: "*We **can only do so much***" (emphasis added). The negative use of 'can' might suggest that the police are limited in what they can achieve when supporting autistic people. Though currently tangled in the perceived 'realities', expectations and limitations of policy and procedure, there were often discrepancies in the use of 'can', 'could' and 'should' when talking about what the participant could do as a person, or within their occupational role. This finding highlights possibilities of what the police 'could' or 'can' do in the future, compared to what they 'should' do in response to

supporting autistic people in the community, as well as in regards to improving neurotypical practices.

Response, community support officers and senior managers claimed that being there to help was an integral part of their day-to-day role in supporting autistic people. This theme was more prominent in interviews with South Yorkshire participants than North Yorkshire, with almost all those in South Yorkshire suggesting that their role as 'the police', when interacting with autistic people, was to 'help'. From analysing the NYPCC and SYPCC priority plans for 2017-2021, it was found that the term 'help' occurred over 15 times in both documents. Using discourse analysis, it was identified that 'help' varied in meaning, from helping to prevent crime, helping victims after crime, and helping build stronger communities. Specifically, in the NYPCC plan, priorities are introduced with a headline: "*Helping you to feel safe and be safe in North Yorkshire*" (p. 5). In the interviews, 'help' was also often discussed in parallel with keeping autistic people safe and safeguarding them, which was a prominent theme (both in discourse and thematically) in both forces (eight participants in North Yorkshire and five in South Yorkshire). For example, one response officer described an incident involving a suicidal autistic person "*Whatever circumstance that they're in and whatever they're going through, if they're in crisis, they need **help**, but your approach and how you deal with them, you need to be really careful and sensitive... I can't sit there and go well what ailments do you have... I have to think, 'right we need to get you some **help** desperately'*" (emphasis added) (NYP07). Others described the differing safeguarding processes required to support autistic people and how this was a fundamental part of their role:

*“Sometimes it might be that they [a multi-agency hub] get information about a young person who’s at risk, I’m just thinking of one that I went to on Friday which was a young person who had been in custody a couple of days for a really serious matter, a wounding where another young person had been stabbed and there were six young people detained for it. So, because of the risk around that, they called a strategy meeting, so it’s about that individual young person and do we need to do anything to safeguard them and what can we do? That young person had ADHD, another really common condition that young people have” (SYP06).*

Similarly to their desire to help autistic people, one participant from North Yorkshire suggested that making a difference was a fundamental part of their role: *“My job isn’t particularly measurable, but if I can make a change on an individual and [on a] community basis” (NYP04).* Interestingly, this participant did not feel that their occupational role as a police practitioner was ‘measurable’, but that as an individual, they could make an impact when supporting autistic people. This assertion was further sustained through the use of language implemented by almost all participants, identified through discourse analysis. The use of *“I”* and variations of *“me”* indicated what an individual participant had done, or does, referencing the person’s occupational and organisational responsibility. In the following examples, the way in which the use of *“I”* relates to individual influence has been bolded for emphasis:

*“Nobody does my job when **I’m** not here” (SYP01).*

*“**I** don’t do that” (SYP04).*

*“The Inclusion and Diversity world is **mine**... I have personal responsibility... This is what **my** focus is to bring that focus together... I think as an individual, I could do more” (NYP10).*

*“**We’re** the first ones in the country to develop a neurodiversity network and I know the people are really interested in it” (NYP05).*

These quotes highlight how individuals felt that it was their personal responsibility to do something about neurodiversity in policing and that this was an expectation of their position. The personal pronoun “*I*” is a possessive term, that refers to something that the person is talking about and usually relates to an action of that person. However, what the person does as an individual could arguably be poor, especially based on what has already been discussed about assumptions, stereotypes and the lack of understanding about autism and neurodiversity. This means that, although their intentions may be good, the actions of police practitioners in ‘making a difference’ could have a negative impact on interactions and relationships with autistic people.

When participants were not referring to what was expected of them as ‘the police’, they were referring to expectations of them based on their specific role. Response officers typically saw themselves as dealing with citizens in moments of crisis, including autistic people, before potentially passing the incident onto someone more specialist. For example, Participant SYP05, a response commander in Rotherham described the role: *“I work a 24/7 shift pattern and deal with incidents as and when they come in and provide the initial response, and sometimes all of the response, and other times we’ll be just providing the first stage before it then gets sent onto a specialist department”*. Thus, response officers are often expected to be equipped to



handle a myriad of circumstances, some of which involved neurodivergent people. One response officer said, *“we would deal with initial contact... if you stumble across it, you are the person who is there to deal with it”* (NYP07). Bittner (1973) highlighted that the role of response officers is supposed to focus primarily on law enforcement and crime control, meaning that social welfare, human relations and educational differences are often overlooked. However, there has been a shift to recognise that the police now take on roles that encompass much more than their original law and crime mandates. For example, another participant highlighted the impact of the response role:

*“We get called to basically everything that people can’t work out so if it’s something on fire, it’s fire service, if it’s someone hurt, it’s the ambulance, anything else it’s us.*

*That’s absolutely anything”* (NYP09) (emphasis added).

An important consideration of the role of response officers, particularly when they are supporting autistic people in crisis, is that they may misinterpret their behaviour, or simply miss that someone is autistic altogether due to the high-speed intensity of the role. As previously mentioned by Participant NYP07, *“I can’t say, are you autistic, have you got diabetes, have you eaten today... I literally don’t know what’s going on”*. In this sense, most of the time, response officers have to deal first with the crisis they were called to.

Participants repeatedly discussed how much they were expected to know about autism and neurodiversity, and this subsequently became an important theme in relation to the development of neurodiversity in the police organisation. The most

commonly felt expectation was that police practitioners were required to be ‘Jacks of All Trades’:

*“We’re supposed to be ‘Jack of All Trades’, but we can’t be” (SYP08).*

*“PCSOs especially are Jack of all trades you rarely have time to specialise in one thing you should have a broad understanding of lots of different things” (NYP01).*

*“We do a bit of everything” (NYP03).*

The origin of the term ‘Jack of all Trades’ comes from Middle English poetry (Gower, 1390), and is often used in a derogatory way to reference someone who is multi-skilled, but only to an average standard. Looking back at the relative ignorance that police practitioners in this research demonstrated about neurodiversity and autism, confirms that police descriptions of themselves as ‘Jacks of all Trades’ were accurate. They were multi-skilled to deal with a variety of different situations, but in regards to neurodivergent people, they admittedly had only average proficiency, at best. Though this approach to police work is perhaps explicable, it is perhaps also inevitable, given that police resources, time and knowledge are thinly spread (O’Neill, 2014). Furthermore, were they better supported by partner agencies who have specialist skills and knowledge about neurodiversity, then this might mitigate the effects of the police being expected to know everything about everything (Beardon, Chown and Cossburn, 2018). Further to some participants feeling the need to be ‘Jacks of all Trades’, other participants’ expectations of themselves were in regards to being ‘experts’ when interacting with autistic people. Participant SYP04 stated: *“I’m no*

*expert but I just like working with people*”, which demonstrates that police practitioners did not expect themselves to be experts in all areas, such as when a person is autistic, but instead, that their role was intrinsically about working with all types of people. However, as identified by the findings of this research, police practitioners had little knowledge about how possible neurological differences affect the people they enjoy working with, which may indirectly (and directly) impact what they can do during an encounter (Bowling *et al.*, 2019).

Another factor that was interpreted as a result of the discourse analysis was in relation to individual officer’s capacity to and expectation to ‘do’ something, demonstrated in the amount of times participants referred to “*trying*” to do something about neurodiversity and autism within the police organisation. This was interestingly much more prominent in interviews with police practitioners from North Yorkshire (nine out of 10 participants), than South Yorkshire (two out of 9 participants). The reason why more participants in North Yorkshire may have discussed “*trying*” to work more/better with autistic citizens, could be due to the neurodiversity hub, which is attempting to improve relations externally with the autistic community. However, what should be considered is that the neurodiversity hub was barely mentioned during most of the interviews (only by staff and senior managers – three participants out of 10) and thus, those talking about “*trying*” to do things, were individual officers (often PCSOs and response officers, who seemingly had little awareness of the neurodiversity hub). One participant highlighted this:

*“I can devote time to it and **try** and make a difference... I’ve had to break down a lot of those processes and say right that process doesn’t work for what I’m **trying** to achieve” (NYP01) (emphasis added).*

However, though senior police practitioners talked highly of what North Yorkshire Police and the neurodiversity hub were “*trying*” to achieve, it was individual, and often frontline officers, who were making changes to their practice, based on their experiences, and seemed to be making most progress with this:

*“[NYP Scheme for neurodivergent people] It’s something that’s evolved quite a lot actually... it initially started as an NYP scheme to help people with learning difficulties and associated disabilities and that was a huge piece of work in itself, but since we’ve rolled it out it’s become evident that it can be useful for a wider scope of people, including people with neuro issues, it’s even dipping into mental health. What we’re really selling it as now is if somebody has a vulnerability or a communication issue that this can help with then we get them signed up, we think having them recorded on our system would help us and them and also if them carrying around this little place card would be to their benefit, then they then they can join up, it’s as simple as that” (NYP01).*

Only two out of nine participants in South Yorkshire and three out of 10 in North Yorkshire mentioned the way in which their individual decision-making influenced how they treated autistic people, and how this was impacted by the ‘realities’ or expectations of their role. Despite its reoccurrence in the thematic analysis, it seemed equally important to examine why this theme did not have particular influence. In the present research, discretion was often discussed in two ways – that autism was no reason for discretion and therefore, autistic people were not to be treated any differently during interactions, or that autism was a reason for discretion and therefore,

autistic people were to be treated differently, as a result. Participant SYP09 demonstrated views on the former:

*“It’s very dangerous to say well you’ve got to treat everyone with kid gloves just because they might have some disorder... It’s not a case of treating anybody with kid gloves, but just treating them in an appropriate way for whoever they are”.*

Though this participant suggested that autistic people should not be treated differently just because they are autistic, they did highlight that it is important to treat them in an “*appropriate way for whoever they are*”, meaning that there may be a range of other factors that need to be accommodated within police decision-making, including any autistic differences. This is supported by other statements, predominately made by PCSOs:

*“[When discussing the Victim Support team in their police organisation] They said we treat everybody the same because we have to treat everybody the same and we give the same information, the same brochures to everybody” (NYP01).*

This is a problematic narrative, as it fails to recognise structural disadvantage and difference. It is not about treating everyone the same, rather, it is about ensuring the impact of their interaction with the police is the same. Though having some discretion is beneficial when working with autistic people, police practitioners often have to make fast and reasoned judgements on how to handle a situation and may, therefore, not always make the right decision (Nowacki, 2015), particularly if they do not have enough knowledge about what they are dealing with in the first place. This means that

autistic people are treated in discretionary ways, which could be seen as both positive and negative, that they are treated on an individual-needs basis, but that there is a general lack of standardisation in practices when dealing with autistic people, more generally.

### 5.2.2. Training and the influence of experience, knowledge and awareness

When asked how they would like the relationship between the police and autistic people to be improved in the future, many participants suggested that they wanted more education and training, which was identified as a major theme in the thematic analysis. However, there were some participants (often the same participants) who said that they already had too much training and that they were not meant to be 'experts' in autistic differences or neurodiversity. As reported by participants, training about autism (let alone neurodiversity) was next to none, with no police practitioners in North Yorkshire recalling having had any autism-specific training. Only three out of nine practitioners in South Yorkshire reported having any autism-specific training, and of those who had, this was provided approximately 5-8 years ago. In Crane *et al.*'s (2016) research, it was reported that out of 242 police officers, only 37% had received training about autism, which may suggest very little has changed in relation to training up to the time of writing. In 2017, the House of Commons put forward the 'Police Officer Training (Autism Awareness) Bill'. This bill proposed that autism training should be mandatory for all police officers. Yet, at the time of writing, there has been limited progress with the bill, with its status remaining "in progress" (Clwyd, 2019). The mandatory training would mean that police practitioners would be required to have some level of knowledge about autism (specifically). An alternative to providing more

training, however, was provided by one participant who flipped the 'expert' narrative, stating that:

*"We can go to these people [autistic people] and say right you're the expert, how can you help me help this person"* (NYP01).

As such, rather than asking police officers to become 'experts' in autism and/or neurodiversity, perhaps what is required is asking autistic/neurodivergent people how best to support them during an interaction or alternatively, have more training provided by autistic people themselves.

Though many researchers who have investigated police interactions with autistic people have suggested that the way forward is through the implementation of training (Crane *et al.* 2016; Hepworth, 2017; Beardon, Chown and Cossburn, 2018), having time to do training varied amongst different types of police practitioners, with response officers commonly reporting that there was not enough time to complete training they had in the first instance. This contrasted with PCSOs who, during the interviews, often suggested that they wanted more training about autism and neurodiversity, and seldom reported having enough time to complete such training. This makes implementing training to all police practitioners, as the House of Commons bill (2017) could mandate, difficult - if officers do not have time to complete their current mandatory training, training (compulsory or not) about neurodiversity is unlikely to be impactful:

*"I just do not have time, I have to prioritise my work and I'm sure members of the public that are waiting for decisions on jobs or investigations that I'm doing would*

*think, oh right, [they've] taken 2 days off to just sit and do training packages”*

(NYP08).

*“We’ll get called in for like a training session or have a rest day cancelled to do things like that” (NYP09).*

Despite a number of methods of training being suggested (i.e. Autism alert cards) (Hepworth, 2017), all training would require time away from ‘the job’ to learn and understand how to implement such methods.

The results of the discourse analysis, subsequently showed, there were variances in the way participants talked about their knowledge of autism and autistic people. The most explicit way in which police practitioners demonstrated their knowledge was through their language, demonstrating a level of certainty about how much they knew about autism and autistic people. This was done at an extremely high rate of all 10 participants in North Yorkshire and eight out of nine participants in South Yorkshire. Though this language could have been used to express a degree of concern about how they were presenting themselves in the interview, police practitioners were often forceful in their demonstration of such knowledge. It could be suggested that participants were, at times, using terms such as “*obviously*” to conceal their lack of knowledge about autism insinuating that I mutually had the same level of understanding. Other ways participants did this was by proposing that it was not them but others who needed more knowledge or awareness about autism, further validating their personal knowledge and understanding about a situation. Participants proposed that this knowledge would be provided to other police practitioners through training, meaning that, ironically, the practitioners that were interviewed as part of this research



appeared confident in their knowledge, awareness and experience of autism, and therefore perhaps did not require the same level of training as others in the force.

This was further supported by the use of “*knowing*” or knowledge-type language used by participants. This mainly came in the form of “*knowing*” what to look for, or what they “*knew*” about autism already, based on their own assumptions. However, on a few occasions, this language also came from needing more knowledge about autism or discussing what could be done to ‘expand knowledge’. Crane *et al.* (2016) found that almost half (48%) of the 238 officers they surveyed felt they were knowledgeable about autism. Furthermore, around half of respondents indicated that they felt well equipped to work with autistic people (Crane *et al.*, 2016). In this research, though it was qualitative and involved fewer participants, it could be still suggested that more police practitioners felt knowledgeable about autism, than not. Some examples include (knowledge-type language has been bolded for emphasis):

*“If you **know** what you’re looking for you can get them to open by getting those ins, getting those hooks” (NYP02).*

*“Because I **know** obviously with autism it can come from repetition and the same sort of things happening all the time... it’s **knowing** what to look for as well because I’ve turned up to jobs and you can tell straightaway with some people but others you try and decide if they’re just drunk or if there’s just something else to it” (NYP07).*

It is clear from these examples that police practitioners’ knowledge of autism was often based upon assumptions they had about autism and that these assumptions could ultimately influence their interactions with autistic people. As documented in Hoyle’s

(1998) study on domestic incidents, police practitioner's judgements are often made based on how they routinely make sense of information. These judgements also interact with other factors such as force policy, training and procedural law, which ultimately inform the way the police make decisions (Hoyle, 1998). However, there were some participants in this research who were more aware of their lack of knowledge and highlighted their need to improve, not through training, but through getting to know autistic/disabled people: "[Talking about an NYP scheme] *Not only has it expanded my knowledge but it's made me realise how little I know about it at the same time*" (NYP01).

Another important theme relating to police practitioner's knowledge was their ability to identify that a person was autistic during interactions. All participants in North Yorkshire discussed their ability to identify autistic people during interactions, compared to only two out of nine participants in South Yorkshire. This is not to say that participants in South Yorkshire did not discuss the importance of identification. Instead, these participants were sceptical about how well police officers would be able to identify an autistic person. Participant SYP01 stated, "*you can't always tell*", and Participant SYP02 illustrated that when they asked a room of police officers about whether a particular person was autistic, the outcome highlighted the disparity in identification: "*how many of you looking at him would identify him as disabled or ASC [Autism Spectrum Condition], about three people out of 80 put their hands up*". The behavioural, physical, cognitive characteristics that are often presumed by police officers, those that are often portrayed in the media or some forms of training, are not always the best forms of knowledge and awareness for identifying autistic people (Eadens *et al.*, 2016). As such, when police practitioners are using their assumed knowledge to look for "*signs*" or "*traits*" of autism (NYP02), they may be treated

differently, particularly where the autistic person is 'masking' or does not display traditionally autistic characteristics (Modell and Mak, 2008).

Another theme that was identified in relation to police practitioner's knowledge of autism and autistic people was in regards to their own lived experiences of neurodiversity. Though this could still be based on assumptions, police practitioners discussed specific examples of their interactions with autistic people, with one participant suggesting, "*you can't learn that experience*" (NYP08). Another factor that influenced not only their knowledge about autism, but the subsequent interactions they had with autistic people, was whether the participant had a personal connection to an autistic person or was aware of an autistic person (as a family member or close family friend). There were four participants out of 10 from North Yorkshire who discussed having a personal connection to an autistic person and in South Yorkshire, there were five out of nine participants:

*"That's where my experience with my son comes in, because I know from an early age my son averts his eyes if anything's uncomfortable, so my wife and I, and the rest of the family actually have learnt to avert our eyes when we talk to him, and then we end up doing it to other children as well"* (NYP02).

*"You come across people that you think are a little bit different and I've got some... my neighbour's kids"* (SYP08).

*"I'm quite lucky in the fact that I've got a pretty good understanding of autism and stuff, my youngest son's autistic, my eldest niece has got autism"* (SYP04).

Though not a key finding in the thematic analysis, it is an interesting one, particularly because, as famously suggested by Stephen Shore, “*once you meet one person who is autistic, you have only met one person who is autistic*”, and therefore, holding assumptions about the autistic people they know personally could impact the interaction and outcome of an encounter with other autistic citizens. Furthermore, it must be recognised that out of 19 participants in total, nine of these had been significantly impacted by knowing an autistic person, enough to mention their experiences, and that this knowledge was something that had allowed them to feel able to take part in the research. As such, these police practitioners suggested that because their family member or friend was autistic, they were knowledgeable about it. This may impact (either positively or negatively) the treatment of autistic people where police practitioners use their knowledge of the autistic person they know, or the autistic people they have had experiences with, and use this during interactions with all autistic people. This reliance on personal knowledge and experience is perhaps inevitable where there is currently limited training for police practitioners to fall back on, as was the case for all the participants in the research.

### 5.2.3. Police practitioner’s agency in improving neurodivergent practices

Thus far, the influence of role expectation and individual knowledge about autism, which is reportedly due to a lack of training, has painted a complex picture surrounding the individual factors that impact the policing of neurodivergent people. As discussed here, participants also highlighted their individual influence (and their influence alone) as a contributing factor to the changing landscape of neurodiversity within police work. This reflected a sense of police practitioner’s own agency, in spite of the sometimes countervailing forces at work, as a result of the cultural and organisational context of

the police, which will be discussed in Section 5.3. The main way participants talked about their individual influence during interactions with autistic people was in regards to bespoke practices and ways of working. Identified as part of the thematic analysis, this theme was particularly prominent in interviews with those from North Yorkshire (nine out of 10 participants), and within this there were other factors identified through the discourse analysis. For example, one participant intimated they went 'above and beyond' to engage with a neurodivergent advocacy group. They began by saying:

*"[When talking about the neurodivergent group] A lot of people are a little bit scared to do something about it [engaging with neurodivergent people] because they don't understand it, so I basically threw myself in at the deep end and thought 'right I can do something about this'" (NYP01).*

This participant highlights the way in which they felt compelled, not only as a PCSO, but as a human being who has some ability to try and do something about the lack of engagement with the neurodivergent community. One reason they indicated they could do this because their superiors gave them the opportunity to go off and work on their own initiatives. The experiences of this participant, along with the forcefulness of this theme within North Yorkshire, might suggest that it is inaccurate to see the police organisation as entirely based on a 'chain of command', which can result in conflict between operational and managerial staff (Reuss and Reuss-Ianni, 1983). Rather, to demonstrate the positive effects of agency between operational and managerial staff, this participant continued to say, "*we have a great line manager at the minute, he really plays on people's strengths... he says it's like a football team and everybody's got a certain position that they play and he makes the most of that and he lets you go off*

*and do what you're good at*". This participant had the integrity and ability to form this relationship on their own time, and their supervisor supported their agency, recognising that this worked to the participant's strengths.

Similarly to previous sections of this chapter, participants often wanted to acknowledge their agency by putting themselves forward as being more knowledgeable or experienced about working with autistic people, than their colleagues. Returning to the use of the word "*I*", one participant demonstrated individual differences, stating that when other officers get cases involving autistic people, they often came to them to ask for assistance:

*"I find colleagues **I'm** working with might then come to me... I get lots of emails from officers who'll say, 'I'm dealing with this family or this child, do **you** know them, do **you** know anything about them' and I usually do"* (SYP09).

Again, the use of "*I*" has been bolded for emphasis, as has the word "*you*", to highlight that it was them who was being asked for guidance. In this way, this participant puts themselves forward as being the person who is most 'in the know' about autistic people. Many participants were subsequently keen to put themselves forward as 'pioneers' in supporting neurodivergent people in the community, using similar discursive techniques.

Another reason as to why this theme may have occurred is because practitioners wanted to demonstrate ways of progressing in their career or seeking promotion. Participants in this research often juxtaposed their justifications for going 'above and beyond', for the benefits of the neurodivergent community with for the benefits for their

own career. This is despite many claiming that they were not going above and beyond for the sake of progression or promotion, but for best practice and the greater good:

*“As long as you genuinely honestly believe in something, I think you can make changes, you can’t do it because you want a name for yourself or you see it as the next opportunity into something else you want to go... of course I want to be promoted in the long term but in my view, I genuinely believe in people” (NYP10).*

This participant is referring explicitly to changes to neurodivergent practices, by stating this assertion in the first part of their response. However, as can be seen in the extract, Participant NYP10 goes on to implicitly propose that promotion is their “*long-term*” goal in the latter part of the sentence, as though this was an unimportant factor in their involvement. Therefore, although practitioners may be conducting individual pockets of good practice, the underlying motives must always be assessed.

Related to this point was the need for individual police practitioners to have a reason to be invested in supporting autistic people or as some participants called it, having a “*why*” (a desire to learn or change). Without this, there was reportedly little drive to utilise their agency toward supporting neurodivergent people or practices. As such, having a “*why*” often influenced some participant’s desire to work with neurodivergent communities or to go ‘above and beyond’. Four participants in both police organisations mentioned this need for a reason to be interested in supporting and understanding autistic people. This is arguably low in terms of discussion rates, given that the police practitioners interviewed in this research came forward voluntarily, so it would be hoped they all had an invested interest in the topic. One participant stated: “*a certain proportion of us are going to have an interest, a natural*

*interest in it, others have to be almost force fed it"* (NYP01). This force-fed information could be detrimental during interactions with autistic people, particularly where, as identified, much of the current training sits within mental health and medicalises perspectives of autism and neglects neurodiversity. However, as suggested by this participant, there may be more disparity about other police practitioner's views than stated here. This particularly relates to whether police practitioners are being told to do something or whether they genuinely want to do it. The following example demonstrates the former:

*"I used to manage a team of PCSOs, and I would always say 'I want you to go and do this Tim', 'Why? Why?', 'Because this is the reason', 'Okay, right'. I had what's called the JFDI times, JFDI means Just F\*\*\*\*\* [mouths word] Do It" (SYP07).*

This finding suggests that 'the reason' police practitioners may need to have an interest in supporting and understanding autistic people is because it is being forced from the 'top-down' (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983), as opposed to coming from the 'bottom up', as many other participants in this research preferred to suggest. Having 'a reason' often came as a result of direct negative experiences or negative media publications, for example, one participant talked extensively about the reputational risk of the police in situations involving autistic people: *"There are examples where we have got it wrong, there are also examples where, because of the way we actually, what we did was right, but the perception of how it was done was wrong, and we were plastered all over Facebook very negatively, with no way of fighting back or responding, that's what I mean by risk"* (NYP06). This reputational risk may enforce



the need for a “*why*”, particularly in regards to the support of autistic people as it allows for the justification and accountability of certain actions.

Though the “*why*” could be developed in training, as has been discussed in previous sections, training (in a traditional sense) does not, to some extent, appear to be the way forward in developing a reason for police practitioners to consider autism and neurodiversity. This being said, in the present research, there was limited data to suggest that management were ‘forcing’ anything on operational officers either. In this research, police practitioners described themselves as acting and working in a professional manner, by which they responded to situations involving autistic people by following procedure. This was often compared to what participants described as acting and working in ‘appropriate’ ways, particularly with neurodivergent and/or autistic people, by which they referred to resolving the situation in a fair way, influenced by the person’s need and their ability to demonstrate discretion. Through discussions about their current processes and practices related to neurodiversity, participants were keen to inform me of what individualised work they were doing to support neurodivergent people. Subsequently, the discourse analysis conducted in this research identified that participants described their work with autistic people as either ‘appropriate’, directed by discretion (occasionally referred to as ‘needs-based’) or ‘professional’, inflexible to changes to the ‘rules’ and influenced by standardised policy and procedure.

There were a number of participants who were keen to inform me that they often behaved ‘professionally’ during interactions with autistic people, for example “*you have to be **professional** and you have to behave in an **appropriate, expected manner***” (NYP04). There were other participants who suggested that, because they were not experts on autism, the only way they could behave is in a professional

manner: “*You just have to remain completely **professional** because we’re not mental health experts and obviously you can only use your experience in dealing with lots of different people to alter your communication skills to a certain extent but if that doesn’t work then you’re just going to have to be **professional**... Deal with the matter **professionally***” (NYP08). Being ‘professional’ in this sense appeared to suggest that these officers used more standardised processes and procedures when working with autistic people, rather than using the discretion they are often afforded. Therefore, during situations that might be more challenging to respond to, Johnson and Vaughn (2016) suggest that, despite street-level officers having discretion, they must also follow a strict set of rules that govern their actions.

However, what made this discussion interesting was that participants proposed there was a difference between behaving in an ‘appropriate’ manner (which related to responding to the needs of individuals) and their ‘expected’, professional manner. The ‘appropriate’ manner which was described by some participants suggested that there needed to be a “*bespoke service*” when interacting with all types of people. This participant went on to state: “*People are complex beings and they need, and deserve, specialised support, and unless you put that work and intervention in place usually the situation doesn’t change*” (NYP04). One participant highlighted such intervention work:

*“We sent corporate documentation letting them know what PSHE [Personal, Social, Health and Economic] support and work we can do, either as a group or on a one-to-one basis. The only thing that we need to do when we work with any young person is have parent guardian consent and a member of staff that knows them well present.*

*That member of staff or parent will know that young person better than myself, especially with any learning disability or learning difficulty”* (NYP04).

Importantly, this participant highlighted that it was often a member of staff or parent that knew the person better and as such, would be able to advise on appropriate ways of working with them. Another participant talked about ‘tailoring’ intervention to the person, which would be associated to a greater extent with a neurodivergent way of working and thinking: *“Sometimes if the young person’s got additional needs, we’d do it on a one-on-one basis or maybe a very small group and sometimes, we might do it in their home... we tailor it to them”* (SYP06). This might indicate that there is a difference between how participant’s described themselves behaving in a professional way with neurodivergent people, in accordance to standardised practices and behaving in appropriate ways that responded to the individual needs of neurodivergence. Interestingly, there were some police practitioners who suggested, *“we [the police] needed to probably think out of the box and be a little bit bespoke with our response to people with neurodiversity issues”* (NYP04), from which one could assume that, despite ‘bespoke’ approaches being context-dependent and within the boundaries of the law, thinking outside of the box would not be an impossible task for police officers to achieve when interacting with autistic people.

The thematic analysis also showed communication to be commonly suggested by police participants as being integral to their role. However, it was also proposed that communication was an aspect of their role that had to be appropriately adapted with interacting with neurodivergent people. A participant in South Yorkshire provided an example of talking to an autistic young man who was engaging in gang behaviour: *“he’s got a hobby of fishing, and if you get him engaged in talking about fishing, you could be anybody, because he’ll show you all his photographs and gear”* (SYP03). Another participant provided a similar example:

*“When he becomes uncomfortable, he will make every effort to bring the line of questioning to somewhere he feels comfortable, so quick example of that, his comfort zone is Star Wars, Marvel, anything to do with that. So, when we had to tell him the difficult news that his grandma was poorly and ultimately died he, where other children would be very upset, he immediately wanted to talk about the Marvel movie that’s coming out and having seen the trailer wants to direct the conversation to his comfort zone... I’m able to use it to my advantage in order to get him to relax, and to get on the same wavelength and the same level as them to get him to open up” (NYP02).*

Finally, Participant NYP08 described an experience of having an autistic person in custody. Though they had specific processes they had to follow (such as their ‘rounds’) and had to behave in a professional manner, they acted in an appropriate way to support the autistic person and make their experience in custody less challenging:

*“Like when I was in custody, I had a lad and he was in for a breach of the peace, we’re bringing you in to give you some time to stop, and then they get released when they’re calm. The problem was he wasn’t calming, I went and spoke to him and he was saying that his sister was going to be disappointed with him because she was taking him to a convention the next morning and it was because he’d been doing so well, and he’d let her down and he’s going to miss it and he’s not going to go, and I was like, ‘Well what convention?’ he said, ‘The Walking Dead,’ I was like, ‘Well just give me five minutes, finish my rounds,’ and I went in, and I said, ‘Look, I’m going to come in with you, you’re talking to a Rick fan, I also like Michonne with the stick, can*

*I sit with you? Look, this is why you're here, you're here for this, it's just a naughty step, that's what it is, once you've calmed down and shown that you can remain on that level and chill for an hour, we can get you home”*

A common behaviour of autistic people is having a special interest, therefore using this special interest to keep the person calm, particularly in settings such as custody, is considered a more appropriate way to behave (Holloway, 2020).

Other examples of appropriateness involved those that were produced at a policy-level within the police organisation, such as changing or adapting documents that could be provided to autistic members of the community, in order to make them more 'appropriate'. Participant NYP01 highlighted this:

*“I had to go to Print and Design. Obviously, the way that we wanted to produce this package [the support package co-produced by the learning disability group] doesn't come within NYP's corporate policy, they have corporate colours, corporate fonts etc. and nothing that we wanted to do fitted within that remit. We needed bigger font, we needed to choose our own colour, we needed to simplify a lot of the questions and I think any big government organisation are great at making everything sound more complicated than it has to be... That was where there was a clash in Print and Design but in the end, we had to say, 'no we're doing it our way, not yours”*

All police work cannot be maintained against the backdrop of the organisation it represents (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009). Sometimes, depending on the audience, processes have to be adapted. A further example demonstrated that, despite being more 'appropriate' for the audience, changing processes can sometimes be

detrimental to the organisation: “*We're very, very risk averse, even to the point where the comms manager pulled the idea to have the bolt-ons [for the police organisation website], it's something they looked at but like the Braille allowed where you can change the font that sort of thing... she was concerned it would threaten the security of the website. So, again, it's thinking of that rather than actually the user, and that's the difficulty*” (NYP06). This is because in determining the correct way to handle situations involving neurodivergent people, ways that may be considered standardised or professional can neglect the flexibility that is actually required to respond to different citizens and as such, highlights that the ‘right’ thing to do in one situation may be an inappropriate way of handling another situation (Johnson, 2015).

#### 5.2.4. The police wanting to be seen as human beings

Though not a direct factor that could influence police interactions with autistic people, the police wanting to be seen as human beings demonstrates a shift in the way the police work with those who are different. An unexpected theme in the research was the desire to be regarded as authentic and ‘more than just a uniform’ during interactions with neurodivergent people, which was prominent throughout many participants’ interviews. The reason this finding is so interesting is that there appears to be a balance that is required between the police practitioner as a symbol of authority and power, which is of particular concern to CR, and as a person. This impacts on the policing of autistic people because police participants often suggested how difficult cases could affect them and the autistic people they police. Participants’ assessment of a difficult incident often relied upon how they conducted themselves and how they treated someone during the interaction, more so than how the interaction objectively went or how it impacted them after-the-fact. The interview appeared to offer

participants an opportunity to reflect, which was identified in the discourse analysis as the use of reflective language. These reflective experiences often related to what individual police practitioners should have or could have done during an interaction with an autistic person and to evaluate their response. For example, one participant suggested that: *“You do question yourself, you think ‘have I missed something, I’ve been doing my job and I’ve missed it”* (SYP01). Another stated: *“After the event, it’s easy to say, ‘you should have known that”* (SYP09). This is supported by Crane *et al.*’s (2016) research, which found that only 42% of 230 police officers felt satisfied by the way they had worked with autistic people. Furthermore, Participant SYP07 highlighted the importance of being reflective and responsive *during* an interaction as opposed to after, in order to achieve best practice when supporting autistic people:

*“What are we going to do here, I need to be a little bit more sensitive, a little bit more understanding, I need to be able to sort of step back and speak to them in a different fashion, different manner”.*

Being reflective during and after an interaction might be a factor that could influence or impact the outcome of an encounter (i.e. diversion or arrest), in that neurodivergent people may be treated in a more appropriate way, but only after some consideration.

Secondly, police practitioners portrayed themselves as ‘caring’ and that this was a fundamental aspect of their occupational culture (Schein, 1990). This reflects a shift from the police being hardened, uniformed, authoritative enforcers, towards being recognised as ‘real people’ who care about those they police (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). To demonstrate, Participant NYP10 stated: *“’Cos of this organisation I’m in, I care for people and I do”*. This was further supported by other participants who said almost

identical things (with words that were identified through the discourse analysis as part of this theme being bolded for emphasis):

*“They [autistic people] see the police as a **friend**” (NYP01).*

*“I want to be that **friendly** police officer because I don’t want them [autistic people] to be afraid” (NYP03).*

*“Cops are **caring**” (SYP05).*

This may represent an even broader shift in the police role towards vulnerability and safeguarding and this shift could result in more positive interactions between the police and autistic people, as it brings the caring, as opposed to the controlling, aspect of the police role into sharp relief. It seemed participants in this research wanted to be more ‘authentic’ about their role, with Participant NYP01 describing their humanness as a *“breach in the armour”*.

Finally, there was also a separation between the police as people and the authority their uniform afforded to them within their role. When asked *“What is it about the uniform?”*, Participant SYP04 replied: *“Some of them [autistic people] are attracted to it and some of them think if they see a uniform, they must have done something wrong”*. This demonstrates that the uniform is often the first thing that people see and that it has connotations, both positive and negative. This may relate again to the separation of the person and their occupational identity, whereby the uniform is a part of the ‘occupational culture’ in policing, a requirement of the job role, whereas the person wearing the uniform can, to some extent, adapt their behaviour (Cockcroft,



2012). This was further highlighted by Participant NYP04 who stated, “*We’re normal people when we take the uniform off*”, highlighting that the person does change with the addition and removal of the uniform. This finding is an important consideration during interactions with autistic people, as the uniform may come across as a barrier to engagement and thus, may continue to add challenges during an interaction.

The idea that the police want to be seen as human beings means mistakes can be made because people are imperfect, which allows learning to happen. Interestingly, there were some police practitioners who suggested, “*we [the police] needed to probably think out of the box and be a little bit bespoke with our response to people with neurodiversity issues*” (NYP04), from which one could assume that, despite ‘bespoke’ approaches being context-dependent and within the boundaries of the law, thinking outside of the box would not be an impossible task for police officers to achieve when interacting with autistic people because they are still people, despite the confines of their uniform and occupational role. Participant SYP07 reflected on the way in which they engage with autistic people:

*“I believe personally that I get it and if I don’t and somebody tells me different I’ll just look on it as improvement, ‘Okay, I’m doing that wrong, I’ll modify’ I always say to people, ‘If I don’t know I’m doing something wrong, how can I change my behaviour, how can I modify my behaviour?’ If they don’t tell me, don’t walk away and say, ‘Every time he looked at me, he did this, or did that or whatever’, if you don’t tell me I might be doing it subconsciously”.*

This participant changes the reflective narrative slightly. As well as demonstrating that they are a human being who makes mistakes, who has unconscious bias, who feels

they know how to handle a situation, they also highlight, at the same time, a sense of humility and recognition that the police need to be both flexible in their approaches, but in their thinking too.

#### 5.2.5. Conclusions

In this section, I have considered a number of ways in which the occupational and individual role of police practitioners impacts interactions with neurodivergent people. Occupationally, PCSOs did fulfil their expectation of being more community-based, often having the opportunity and time to work with autistic people in the community, as well as complete any necessary, mandatory training. Response officers, on the other hand, had to make rapid decisions, meaning that their ability to identify autistic people and make 'appropriate' decisions was more challenging. All police practitioners reported that, to some extent, they felt that they had to be a 'Jack of All Trades', despite acknowledging that they could not be experts in all types of difference. Therefore, many participants knowledge about autism and neurodiversity was based purely on their personal experiences with autistic people (such as having autistic family members). These participants often suggested that, because of these experiences, they needed no more training or education on how to support neurodivergent people. However, there was still a large amount of participants who reported a need for more education and training.

What was most surprising about the individual influence of police practitioners was that, overall, interactions were influenced by the police wanting to be seen as human beings (as opposed to merely representatives of the police organisation), which countered the organisational expectations of their role. Police practitioners reflected that they were fallible, that they often made mistakes during interactions with autistic

people, but this was not as a result of their inability to do their job, but because they were human beings. To summarise, police practitioners were keen to report that they, as an individual, had an impact during an interaction, as opposed to being 'professionally' guided by organisational policy or procedure, and that this influence existed because of the polices' discretionary practices and individual knowledge and expertise.

### **5.3. "I don't think it's high enough up the agenda" – Structural and cultural influences on the implementation of neurodiversity within the police organisation**

Much of what has been discussed in previous sections has revolved around individual perspectives of interactions with autistic people, as well as the wider influence of personal understandings of neurodiversity within the police organisation. This section goes on to consider the structural and cultural influences on the implementation of neurodiversity within the police organisation. Within this section, a number of organisational factors are presented by police participants as having a significant impact on their ability to implement neurodivergent practices and procedures. Cultural reform was considered by participants as a necessary step towards implementing neurodiversity into police culture. In sociological terms, structure refers to the patterns of social relationships between and within a particular social system or society (Chan, 1997). Structure in this research was associated with the influence of hands-on professionalised line managers, as part of a broader context of managerialist key performance indicators, targets etc. (Hood, 1991). Discussion then moves on to the impact of managerialism on the implementation of neurodiversity in the police organisation. Specifically, three factors of managerialism were highlighted

by participants. These were the role of line managers, priority-setting and resource allocation. In this research, managerialism is used to encapsulate the structural characteristics of the police organisation that either acted as a support or a hindrance to implementation of neurodiversity. Similarly to the personal efforts emphasised in previous sections, participants reported that it was often the role of line managers who allowed time and individual resources to be allocated to supporting neurodivergent people. However, neurodiversity did not appear to be considered a priority within the two police organisations involved in this research, meaning that work that supports neurodivergent people was reportedly less likely to be supported by financial resourcing.

#### 5.3.1. Cultural Influences: The neurotypicality of police culture

In this section, the way in which participant's discussed culture was analysed thematically against the backdrop of Reiner's core characteristics. Participants suggested that the cultural outlook of the police organisation was likely to impact the way in which police officers and staff engaged with neurodivergent people. This outlook included reference to some of Reiner's core cultural characteristics, including suspicion, particularly of autistic people's behaviour (which was often due to a lack of understanding or ability to identify autistic difference), and a solidarity that separates the police from those they police. Though participants presented some of the core cultural characteristics proposed by Reiner, they were not perceived by interviewees as prescriptive nor were they necessarily deterministic of police practice. The characteristics arguably do not capture how officers understand their work in the face of change and how they embed such change within the broader context of policing (Campeau, 2015). Therefore, as agreed by Campeau (2015) and Bowling *et al.* (2019),

police cultural characteristics cannot be generalised across all those who work in the police organisation and this was acknowledged when analysing themes relating to them. However, most participants highlighted that there was a resistance to change within the police organisation, which supports the existence of a conservative outlook in the way police practitioners think and do police work (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Participants in this research appeared to be aware of embedded cultural understandings, which often manifested in what they described as ‘normal’ ways of working and the impact that this ‘normality’ had on their practices, particularly with neurodivergent people. Participants’ conceptualisation of this ‘normality’ was established using discourse analysis. Police practitioners reflected that they were “*a little bit stuck in us ways sometimes*” (NYP01), demonstrating an inertia about the norms they felt guided them. Another participant described the characteristics of the police as being “*just is what it is*” (NYP09).

These quotes illustrate what Campeau (2015) describes as the unchallenged nature of police cultural characteristics, that there is simply an acceptance of norms, values, beliefs and ways of working that have long been in existence within the police organisation. Participants used their language further to demonstrate the ‘normality’ in their ways of working. Some participants unconsciously made reference to how they “*normally*” interacted with autistic people or what was “*normal practice*”:

*“We’ve dealt with incidents, we’ll then find out what those ailments might be and obviously what service people are using and things like that so initially, I’ve been to plenty of jobs, that’s **normally** how we would operate”* (NYP07) (emphasis added).

*“The way that I worked in the early days has ended up being **normal practice**”*

(NYP04) (emphasis added).

Others used terms such as *“traditional”* to describe what had previously been accepted, whilst acknowledging that these concepts had or needed to change. For example:

*“The nine protective characteristics, the five obvious ones if you like were the ones that **traditionally** exist around gender and disability, race, religion, and then neurodiversity was very much an emerging trend for us”* (NYP05) (emphasis added).

This not only demonstrates that language can be used to highlight what is ‘normal’ or ‘traditional’, in line with principles of CR and the identification of ‘actual’ domains (events that are experienced, whether they are interpreted or not) it also illustrates that challenging these ways of talking about neurodiversity can be the start of reform, as has been identified in neurodiversity literature (Milton, 2014; Beardon, 2016). By challenging what is seen as ‘normal’, neurodiversity could become part of a new dialogue within police cultural understandings, which may subsequently influence police practice.

### 5.3.2. Being suspicious of autistic behaviour

Suspiciousness was expected to be an important finding in this research, as discussed in the literature review. Participants often made reference to the ‘odd’ and ‘strange’ behaviour of autistic people: *“Their behaviour comes across as a little bit odd or a little bit standoffish”* (SYP09). Autistic people’s behaviour was also described as

'erratic': "*Because unfortunately, a lot of the time, young people who have some of these conditions, their behaviour can be quite erratic*" (SYP06). Though participants often made reference to autistic behaviour as 'odd' or 'strange', there was no direct inference to them being suspicious of autistic people because of this, though in some cases it did seem to be implied:

*"Most people especially in my line, you want to be able to see what you're dealing with or you see what you think you're dealing with... you can't always see why somebody's behaving like they are"* (SYP04).

When analysing participant's language further, using discourse analysis to identify language related to 'suspicion', a level of suspiciousness about such behaviour, based on the assumptions of participants, was identified. For example, one participant claimed that autistic people "*can be read wrong*" (SYP08). This was further supported by Participant NYP09, who suggested that "*sometimes their behaviour might have been misconstrued as something else*". Police practitioners proposed that their suspicion centred around autistic people displaying behaviours seen as problematic but not necessarily criminal. This again demonstrates the potential associations that are developed by police practitioners between what is and what is not autistic behaviour. It also highlights the difficulties police practitioners face with the identification of autistic people.

Unlike more traditional conceptualisations of suspicion in police culture literature, participants in this research highlighted a transference of suspiciousness based on what the public regarded as suspicious and how this suspicion was relayed to officers

who responded to 999/101 calls. One example of this was portrayed by a response officer in North Yorkshire:

*“In some cases, we do have incidents where concern has been raised for a person and we are the first people to respond. We don’t know who that person is or any information but somebody will have phoned in saying, I’m a bit concerned about this person, they’re sort of hanging around and their behaviour’s a bit odd, that’s normally what we get, that their behaviour’s a bit odd or they’ll say, oh they’re acting drunk or whatever it might be, and obviously it kind of puts thoughts into your head like what is actually going on and why are they are on their own and why does somebody think that their behaviour is different to everybody else’s on the street” (NYP07).*

Hoyle (1998), in her study of domestic violence, described how police officers tend to enter situations with prior information about the person or situation (this may be that the person is neurodivergent or not). They then gather further information at the scene about the suspect, victim and occurrence. At all stages, actions are informed and shaped by police norms, values and beliefs. This is particularly important given that, there is currently little understanding about the norms, values and beliefs they hold about neurodivergent citizens, nor the policies or procedures in place to support them. Therefore, transference of suspicion means that police practitioners may not be necessarily suspicious of autistic or neurodivergent people, but rather, they respond to the suspicions of the public.

This would go against what is known about suspicion, as it is presented by Bowling *et al.* (2019), who suggest that ‘the job’ has bred an attitude of constant suspicion that cannot be switched off. Instead, participants in this research identified that suspicion



is situation-dependent and that, although it was sometimes difficult to know or tell whether someone was autistic, they would only be suspicious of their behaviour because it was criminal, not simply because it was different due to their neurodivergence:

*“I know there’s a lot of people who are on the autistic spectrum who are not diagnosed so yeah, without asking them obviously whether they’ve got a diagnosis or whatever, it’s sometimes difficult to know” (SYP04).*

This also goes against what Bowling *et al.* (2019) proposes about stereotyping being an inevitable tool of suspicion, that it is something finely ingrained within police practitioner’s cognitive maps that allow them to readily predict and handle the behaviour of those they interact with. For example, other participants highlighted that *“not everybody’s the same when you approach them”* (SYP05). Furthermore, another participant recognised a shift in the way suspicion was utilised in practice:

*“You encounter someone and their behaviour’s strange straightaway, in the past you might’ve thought, ‘Oh I’ve got a weirdo here’ or whatever, now your first thought is possibly this person’s got mental health issues, okay what are we going to do here, I need to be a little bit more sensitive, a little bit more understanding, I need to be able to sort of step back and speak to them in a different fashion, different manner”*  
(SYP07).

Police practitioners in this research tended to report that, when dealing with behaviour they regarded as different, they did not necessarily see this as something to be

suspicious about. Instead, they were willing to consider other explanations for behaviour, such as neurodivergence. Loftus (2009) similarly proposes that individual police officers develop an extensive repertoire, such as visual or behavioural cues within the working environment, which signal a person's possible involvement in crime. This is important for police to consider when establishing whether behaviour is neurodivergent or criminal.

### 5.3.3. The solidarity of an “us” versus “them” mentality

In this research, there was reference within every interview to the differences between the police and the neurodivergent community, represented discursively through the use of “*we/us/they/them*”. By using these terms, police practitioners were perhaps inadvertently consolidating their position as ‘the police’ (and as the predominantly neurotypical) versus a challenging population (the neurodivergent), demonstrating a cultural solidarity (Runswick-Cole, 2014). This reinforces a solidarity within occupational police culture, creating a gulf between them, their role and their interactions with autistic citizens. Solidarity and an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality serves to reproduce an unequal relationship between the police and autistic citizens, which is in-keeping with Critical Realists’ understanding of the maintenance of power dynamics in society. For example:

*“**We** don’t know who that person is or any information but somebody will have phoned in saying, I’m a bit concerned about this person, **they’re** sort of hanging around and **their** behaviour’s a bit odd, that’s normally what **we** get, that **their** behaviour’s a bit odd and then **we’re** thinking right or **they’ll** say, oh **they’re** acting drunk or whatever it might be” (NYP07).*

Though this quote has already been used, its emphasis on ‘we’ versus ‘them’ (bolded in the extract) highlights the repetitive nature in which it was utilised during the interviews, and by doing so, indicates implications for how the interviewees’ understood police relationships with autistic citizens. The police perspective on social division reflects the structure of power as filtered through specific problems of police work (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). One participant demonstrated such structure of solidarity, through the continuing use of ‘we’ to describe the police organisation:

*“As a police force, **we** have police ethics and codes of conduct, and basically, as a police force, **we** are supposed to represent or be representative of the community **we** serve, so going back to those three things I said about when it comes to the reason for the inclusion and diversity being around, the public sector equality duty and in order to train **our** staff in understanding that community. So, if **we** truly understand **our** community, **we’ve** got to protect those that are vulnerable” (NYP06).*

The recurrent use of ‘we’ versus ‘them’ language (bolded for emphasis) creates a discourse of exclusion and a pattern of ‘Othering’ (Bacon, 2014). In this sense, relationships with autistic members of the public tend to be seen as challenging, much like how Black communities were and are still perceived (Bowling *et al.*, 2019). However, the autistic community are not viewed in the same way as Black communities, because they are often not physically or visually represented as a ‘community’. Rather, autistic people seemingly interact with the police (as observed in the quantitative data of this research) during calls for service related to crisis/personal safety, usually involving only one person, as opposed to an entire community.

Therefore, solidarity was apparent through the reinforcement of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, yet was also represented through ‘Othering’, such as through the challenging nature of police relationships between particular communities.

Henceforth, rather than the police dealing with challenging demographics, solidarity in this research was also found to be formed by the types of relationships the police have with individual autistic people, and subsequently the rest of the neurodivergent population. Bacon (2014) argues that intolerance of ‘Otherness’ in policing can be conceived as both a symptom and a cause of police culture. This conservatism encourages the police to be insular and isolated in their role, whereby those who do not fit their perceived ways of working are treated differently. There were plentiful examples from participants’ interviews where they highlighted not only the solidarity between officers and staff, but also the ‘Othering’ of neurodivergent people. Participants stories of specific events were discursively analysed and revealed that “us” and “them” were used to describe the fraught relationship between the police and autistic people:

*“**They’re** quite often very different, trying to get **them** to open up, trying to get **them** to trust you if you like, in order to speak to **them**, and **they’re** quite often socially challenged, so when you turn up at a certain time, or you turn up to **their** home address and parents insist on being present, or teacher insists on being present, it can be very difficult, because **they** feel it’s society is against **them**” (NYP02).*

Terms relating to “we/us/they/them” are bolded to highlight the recurrent presence of this type of language during interviews and also to highlight how this use of language contributes to the creation of a potential divide between autistic people and the police,

as a unified body. Despite these arguments, when discussing the persistent use of 'we' versus 'them' language, an alternative argument can also be presented. It could be argued that it would be very difficult for police practitioners to describe their relationship with autistic people in any other way, that is, not using "they" or "them". This is because the ways in which people talk about others (despite any physical/diagnosed differences) are often linguistically limited. For example, it would be unnatural, repetitive and possibly frustrating to continue to say, 'the autistic person' or 'autistic people' throughout an interview. Therefore, although police practitioners in this research use 'they'/'them' to describe autistic/neurodivergent people, it may not be being used as an 'Othering' device, but rather linguistically, the way they would talk about anyone who could be categorised i.e. 'perpetrators', 'victims', 'black people', 'gay people'. This being said, in almost every interview, police practitioners referred to autistic people as 'they'/'them', which might still suggest that this was not just a semantic complication, but rather, a way of thinking about neurodivergent people.

Participants also demonstrated cultural solidarity through the way in which they talked about what their own police organisation was doing in regards to neurodiversity. There was a sense of competition between the two police organisations in the research, and other police forces, with practitioners often referring to what they were the first to achieve in regard to neurodiversity or more broadly, vulnerable people within their force. The majority of examples of this came from participants in North Yorkshire, which might be expected due to their neurodiversity hub:

*"We're the first ones in the country to develop a neurodiversity network" (NYP05).*

Another participant from North Yorkshire was very specific that the scheme they were discussing was exclusive to North Yorkshire Police: “*It [the scheme] initially started as an NYP scheme to help people with learning difficulties and associated disabilities*” (NYP01). This demonstrates an ambitiousness within North Yorkshire Police, specifically that their hub is having an impact on their relationship with autistic people. However, relating to what Participant NYP01 said, their schemes are still exclusive to North Yorkshire Police, meaning potentially good practice has not yet been shared. There was less of this solidarity and cohesion in Rotherham, particularly in relation to neurodiversity, which may be because, at the time of writing, there was no specific support mechanisms for autistic or neurodivergent people within South Yorkshire Police. However, some participants still used language identified through discourse analysis, that highlighted them as being different to other police organisations:

*“I think we’ve done brilliant work in Rotherham, we’re unique cos we’re the only people with a vulnerability unit” (SYP01).*

It should be acknowledged that this is not the case, there are a number of other police organisations with vulnerability units. However, this participant felt it was important to highlight, represent and be proud of what their force was doing in regards to protecting vulnerable people. Police organisations have long been considered ‘fiefdoms’ and are known to want to maintain their separate identities (Johnston, Button and Williamson, 2008). Though this has been observed in this research, it is also important to consider other arguments regarding the solidarity and separateness of police organisations. It appears that participants were keen to highlight good practice that their organisations were doing, and therefore, as opposed to creating a sense of solidarity within and

barrier a between them and other forces, what they might actually have been doing is simply representing their organisation in a particular light, so as to impress me, as the researcher during the interview and subsequently, in these findings.

#### 5.3.4. Cultural reform: Towards neurodiversity

Participants in this research suggested that there was gradual movement towards cultural reform in regards to neurodiversity. The maintenance of certain behaviour, through the use of scripts, stories, hierarchies and/or routines within the police organisation (Chan, 1997; Waddington, 1999; Bowling *et al.*, 2019; Campeau, 2019), eventually becomes embedded in what is known as police culture. Some of these approaches were illustrated by participants, with many stating that, after time, ways of thinking and behaving become established and comfortable. Discourse analysis showed that metaphors were used to demonstrate this, such as “*If you walk a path long enough, it becomes a path*” (SYP01). Furthermore, participants were keen to highlight that after ‘walking the path for so long’, there becomes a reluctance to change. This is a theme that has been well-documented in police reform literature (Chan, 1997; Campeau, 2015; Bowling *et al.*, 2019). Long-established cultural characteristics are concerned with the maintenance of the status quo, with the first quote presented here, along with many in this research, recognising both inflexibility towards change in the police organisation (Bacon, 2014), but also the affect that cultural conservatism can have on individual police officers (i.e. feeling ‘institutionalised’).

The only way in which participants described practices being changed was if they worked hard to make it so. One participant again used a metaphor, likening the process of change to ‘banging a drum’: “*They always have to bang the drum when*

*they want something doing or something to change” (NYP01). This participant went on to talk about how difficult it was to break down established police processes, from those developed for neurotypical people towards ones that could be considered appropriate for neurodivergent people also. These processes, in this example, were bureaucratic changes that the participant wanted to make to official documents, for the purposes of their learning disability awareness scheme:*

*“The most difficult thing has been breaking down barriers within the organisation, you know the police have set processes for everything, and for good reason, whereas this line of work doesn’t really fall into their processes so I’ve gone through department to department, I’ve had to break down a lot of those processes and say ‘right that process doesn’t work for what I’m trying to achieve so we have to change that process” (NYP01).*

This quote highlights that change does not only come from changing the ‘habitus’ (the ways of working between individual officers, shared and joined together by culture) and the ‘field’ (the police organisational structure and the political climate it sits within), but also by listening to and appreciating police practitioner’s agency to make changes within the operational context (Chan, 1997). Therefore, as discussed in the previous section, it is not simply the intentions of individual police practitioners to develop change, there must also be changes to the organisation, in the way all police practitioners react and respond (O’Neill and McCarthy, 2014).

Though there were some comments about the reluctance to change, participants in this research described ways in which culture is changing within the police, yet referring to this as being slow. The quote presented from Participant NYP03



complements the one from Participant NYP01, who suggested that change is hard, but also highlighted that the police are being reluctantly pulled into modern times, whereby modern concerns must be considered: *“It’s very hard to get the change, it’s happening but it’s happening very slowly, you know, in the private sector, it fluxes, it changes all the time, whereas [we’re] almost kicking and screaming into the 21<sup>st</sup> century”* (NYP03). The 21<sup>st</sup> century that this participant refers to includes one that has a police organisation considering neurodiversity and how to support neurodivergent people, where these individual’s lives are being increasingly recognised. How neurodiversity has been previously perceived by the police was demonstrated by Participant NYP04, who told a story about how culture is changing, more so in regards to supporting vulnerable people:

*“I think probably when I joined the job, in the first seven or eight years of my job, I was seen more as a Social Worker than a Police Officer because I thought out of the box. When I joined, culturally, it was about how many arrests you had a week, it was about how many crime detections you had a week. Whereas I think I’ve always been... empathetic and look at long-term problem solving instead of a quick fix... I would do, in the early days, more Social Care referrals than any of my colleagues and colleagues would think ‘that’s a waste of time’, so I’d stay on shift, come in early, do whatever I needed to do to try and resolve the issues and make sure that person’s safe. So, it made me very unpopular. But that, the way that I worked in the early days has ended up being normal practice now for Response Officers and the mind-set change and culturally we’ve changed and that is so refreshing”* (NYP04).

What this participant highlights is that in the “*early days*”, they put themselves ‘out there’, using pioneering approaches to which others were resistant. This might relate to what Campeau (2019) presents about ‘old’ and ‘new’ cultural scripts; that there are cultural differences in how police practitioners with long-established views used to and continue to perceive vulnerability, compared to how a new generation of police practitioners engage with the same issue. Bacon (2014) proposes that reforms are in large part implemented by those whom they are addressed towards. Thus, those on the frontline, such as this participant, are likely to be the ones to implement change, similarly to how Paoline and Gau (2017) refer to ‘culture carriers’, a generation of police practitioners bringing in new ideas about contemporary policing issues.

#### 5.3.5. The impact of line managers and managerialism on neurodiversity within the police organisation

In the current research, managerialism is used to encapsulate the structural characteristics of the police organisation that either acted as a support or a hindrance to the implementation of neurodiversity. Within this section, principles of managerialism are identified as organisational factors that have been structurally imposed upon police practitioners. These factors have subsequently become embedded into police culture. Raised by a number of police scholars, there appears to have been a cultural response to the introduction of managerialist models within policing (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009). Managerialist reform initiatives have aimed to incorporate management techniques from private sector businesses and their associated bureaucracy into public sector organisations, such as the police. Managerialism encompasses the doctrinal components of new public management including, but not limited to, the enforcement of “*hands-on professional management*”,

explicit standards and measures of performance, with emphasis on outputs and greater discipline relating to resource use (Hood, 1991, p. 4). Furthermore, Fleming and Lafferty (2000) highlight that managerial practices were developed to change culture within police organisations, in an attempt to increase operational performance. Though there is often consistency in definitions of managerialism, there remains some debate about its impact on policing. Therefore, what follows highlights a number of managerialist components which appear to have both a structural and cultural impact on the way police practitioners interact with neurodivergent people. These components were highlighted in this research as the impact of managers, policies and procedures and priorities and resourcing.

In this research, 'management' referred to someone who was in a higher-ranking position than the person being interviewed. This is because, even in interviews with those considered 'superior' such as Inspectors and Superintendents, there was still reference to management. Manning (2007) proposes there are three levels of management within the police organisation. The first level is patrol officers (in the UK, these are police constables and PCSOs), who predominantly respond to 999/101 calls. They typically view their authority as fundamental and often experience limited supervision. The second level is middle managers (in the UK, this is the equivalent of Sergeants and Inspectors), who supervise and advise officers about problematic situations. They are often the face of conflict, managing reputational risks faced by the organisation. Finally, there are top command (in the UK, this includes Superintendents and Chief Constables), who have a network of power throughout the police organisation (and beyond it) and seldom have direct contact with patrol officers. Results of the thematic analysis found that the role of managers was discussed more in North Yorkshire (six out of 10 participants) than South Yorkshire (three out of nine

participants), which might suggest differing levels of influence from police management structures within different police force areas. In North Yorkshire, a number of middle and senior managers were interviewed, including a Detective Sergeant (NYP02) and an Inspector (NYP05). One top command level of personnel was interviewed (a Superintendent - Participant NYP10). As part of their management structure, each referred to having “*portfolios*”, pieces of work that were their responsibility to implement, such as Inclusion and Diversity. In South Yorkshire, only one middle manager was interviewed, a Response Inspector, who supervised “*four Sergeants and the best part of thirty PC's*” (SYP05). This was the highest level of police personnel interviewed in South Yorkshire.

In this research, lower ranking officers, such as PCSOs, discussed how they were expected by their managers, to engage with the neurodivergent community: “*It's largely left down to us who we engage with, obviously, we're asked right, these are a number of groups, you know this is the topic of this year or these are the groups you need engage with for this reason, but the rest of the time you're just expected to go out make contact with as many people as you can*” (NYP01). This fits the common narrative, as highlighted by Vickers and Kouzmin (2001) and Johnson (2015), that low-ranking officers are often dispersed to manage the community to take on difficult and complex decisions alone (Manning, 2007). This was echoed by senior officers, who described the lack of communication between higher and lower ranks:

“[When discussing why officers do not speak to them about their encounters with autistic people] *Probably due to the nature of my role, rather than the fact that they never mention it. If you were to speak to a Sergeant, it might be that they get it*

*mentioned to them... if that needs a bit of guidance or supervision, then they speak to the Sergeant, it would be quite rare they'd actually come to me" (SYP05).*

Police organisations in the UK have a hierarchical 'command and control' structure. This might suggest why lower-ranking officers in South Yorkshire would not discuss their interactions with autistic people with anyone higher than their sergeant, which is problematic because there may be a whole level of senior officers who are unaware of the prevalence of incidents involving neurodivergent people.

Though not explicitly apparent from the findings of this research, there were suggestions that police practitioners had to refer to management in order to progress their work with neurodivergent citizens. In this sense, they were seen as the gatekeepers of resources, funding and ultimately, the ability to undertake independent, discretionary work with the community. To demonstrate, Participant NYP07 suggested that "*we engage with them [autistic people] ... we have to make sure that any decisions that are made, obviously go through our supervision*". Another example came from a member of police staff, who discussed the need to "*sell*" the idea of neurodiversity to senior managers, proposing that those with authority had to agree with ideas, before progression could be made:

*"I think it's got to be a case that to the people at the top you sell the benefit to... What I would like it to look like is that you have very clear, strategically, who's got the back of that topic when it comes to senior meetings, exec meetings, etc. I would like to see very clear SPOCs [Special Points of Contact] across all districts and I would like to see information feeding in and feeding out of clear allies in the community"*  
(NYP06).

Not only does this participant highlight the need for the 'backing' of senior management before changes can be made, they also highlight the hierarchical 'command and control' structure, whereby information comes from the top (as approved by senior management) then fed down appropriately to officers (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983). Participants suggested that this could be a barrier to implementing neurodiversity initiatives into the police organisation and often led to negative relationships within and between police hierarchy. This is an unsurprising finding given the hierarchical nature of the police organisation, whereby new initiatives must be passed up the ranks for approval. This means that where senior managers are invested in neurodiversity, there may be improvements in the support provided by officers towards neurodivergent people in the community, yet the opposite may also be true.

The police management structure was considered, by some participants, to be a barrier towards neurodiversity progression and reform. The breaking down of barriers, in getting management to help progress individual efforts, led participants to note their frustration, with seven out of 19 participants expressing this with regard to slow progress of neurodiversity initiatives they were trying to implement. This slow progression was reportedly due to the necessary agreements required by senior management. Participant NYP01 highlighted their frustration when discussing the setting up of a project developed with a learning disability support group:

*"A lot of time banging my head against a wall, going back and covering the same ground again and again and again... meeting after meeting and it's gone higher up*

*the food chain right to the top... many times it's been batted backwards and forwards”.*

The fluctuating nature of decision-making demonstrated in this example highlights a possible assimilation between the frustration of operational officers and the implementation of mandatory police processes (Christensen, Laegreid and Rykkja, 2018). Similar to the barriers managers appeared to put in place, participants also made reference to the metaphorical “*battle*” between managers and operational staff. The “*battle*” was often described as a fight between police practitioners wanting to do individual, bespoke, ‘out-of-the-box’ work (as discussed in the previous section), and senior managers, who have been depicted at times in this research as wanting to maintain standardised ways of working. An example of this included “...*that’s a battle, you are dealing with senior managers who probably do not understand or do not see what neurodiversity is about or the risks that the organisation faces*” (NYP06). The metaphor of a “*battle*” illustrates possible power dynamics involved in attempting to access resources to establish new initiatives, particularly those that support neurodiversity.

It was suggested that one reason for the barriers to progress, and the subsequent “*battle*” presented by senior management, was due to a lack of or limited knowledge about neurodiversity or the importance of working in neurodivergent ways. One participant argued that neurodiversity was under appreciated by senior managers, proposing that they do not understand the complexity of the issue in the field:

*“It’s under appreciated by the bosses. I’m not saying the bosses because that’s not fair, by the organisation shall we say, and people don’t understand that you’re given*

*a simple little job that looks, on paper, to be a simple job. But once you start to dig, when do you stop digging, when do you put the spade down and say, do you know what, this is no longer a police job” (SYP07).*

In another example, Participant NYP03 suggested that *“police officers especially, those in higher ranks do not like to be told that they’re wrong... they don’t like to apologise, don’t like to admit they’re wrong either”*. Where senior managers are not willing to learn or understand what is happening in the field, the implementation of neurodiversity may be a challenge, as initiatives might not receive the justified level of support they require. Johnson (2015) states that most police officers are distrustful of management because they are protective of resources and subsequently their own accountability. On the other hand, another participant suggested that, due to the complexity of neurodiversity, unless the concept is presented in a way that senior managers can understand things will seldom change:

*“You are dealing with senior managers who probably do not understand or do not see what neurodiversity is about, or the risks that the organisation faces... this is a case of reflecting back to those senior people in a language they will understand, that actually this is a bigger issue” (NYP06).*

In this respect, this participant proposed that it is not management that are the barrier, but that the concept itself can cause problems in its implementation.

Though police practitioners in this research reported to have some negative relationships, predominantly with the police management structure (rather than their direct line managers), there were many more examples provided where managers had



been supportive of staff neurodiversity and the promotion of neurodivergent processes. Participants instead reported managers as being supportive of neurodiversity, especially where reasonable adjustments could be made for neurodivergent officers. Participant NYP09 told the following of his supervisors:

*“They’re [managers] quite handy, like with the assessment day they gave me more time, they said I could use a computer if I wanted to type. They’ve helped here, they got me one of the tablets first, so I use that to help... I think they also know I’m a bit slower when it comes to doing my paperwork, I just try and do it methodically, so they try not to rush me as much”.*

Another participant used the metaphor of a “*conductor*” to describe the role of one manager, suggesting that “*he brings that [neurodiversity work] together*” (NYP05). By describing him as a “*conductor*”, Participant NYP05 suggests that, rather than telling people what to do, he allows everyone to play their part under his guidance (Marks and Fleming, 2004). This might demonstrate a move towards flatter management structures and leadership styles, as opposed to hierarchical (Fleming and Lafferty, 2000). To highlight this further, participants often referred to having managers who supported officers in their individual endeavours. One example from Participant SYP01 suggests that “*we’re lucky that we’ve had some cracking managers*”, by which they meant these managers were supportive of ways of thinking and working that supported neurodiversity. Interestingly, by proposing that they were “*lucky*” to have had good managers might indicate that others were not so lucky. Participant NYP03 goes on to highlight this assumption further:

*“I mean the supervisor that I have is brilliant, I mean she fully understands, I think she liaises with [Participant NYP06] quite often and she’s very supportive. But she’s one of the few, very few supervisors I have particular respect for. Most of them in the past have been rather unpleasant, not accepting, not flexible”.*

As SYP01 and NYP03 propose, it seems there is an element of luck in regards to operational officers having managers who understand or appreciate neurodiversity, compared to those who do not. As such, the implementation of neurodiversity through the hierarchical ranks may be patchy. In demonstrating this patchiness further, Participant NYP09 highlights that changes in both attitude and practice can be achieved for staff, to allow and accommodate for their own neurodivergence. Police supervisors should promote, rather than restrict creativity and problem solving, which requires a fundamental shift away from traditional and typical management styles and structures in the police organisation (Marks and Fleming, 2004). A way in which this shift is happening is through practitioner’s ability to talk openly about their neurodiversity:

*“It’s a lot more widely discussed at work as well now, even colleagues, including myself... it’s something that wouldn’t have got discussed at work even 10 years ago, but it’s certainly discussed now. So, because it’s discussed more at work, we’re more aware of it” (SYP04).*

Despite this, there were no participants who discussed the ability to talk about their or others neurodivergence with their supervisors.

As previously highlighted, the most common assumption around police management structures is that it is difficult for senior managers to supervise officers in the field (Johnson, 2015). In this research, however, the ability for police officers to have autonomy and discretion to work with communities was seen as a positive aspect of some police managers. This was primarily highlighted in an example from Participant NYP01, during the process of establishing a neurodiversity support tool. They began by saying:

*“I think previously that might have the organisation might tried to have knocked that [autonomy and discretion] out of people a little bit, for the fact they want us all to be the same and have the same training and deal with everybody the same, but now it depends on your line managers really. But we have a great line manager at the minute, my Inspector... he lets you go off and do what you’re good at”.*

This kind of leadership not only offers opportunities for officer engagement in leadership (Davis and Bailey, 2018), but also allows for officers to feel respected, and therefore more likely to want to engage with creative and innovative pieces of work (Marks and Fleming, 2004).

#### 5.3.6. The cyclic nature of priority setting and resource allocation: further evidence of managerialism

Participants in this research identified that neurodiversity was not necessarily considered a policing priority. A policing priority relates to the most pressing aims and objectives within a police force area, as set primarily by PCCs. They often feature in force-wide policing plans and strategies and are associated with the allocation of

particular budgets and resources. In this respect, there was a sense that the priorities set and the resources that are provided are cyclic in nature, and based also on considerations of “*value for money*” narratives (Cockcroft and Beattie, 2009, p. 527). Loader (2020) suggests that the language of priorities and their associated budgets has become common within the police. Priorities were discussed in this research as whether neurodiversity and/or supporting autistic people is a priority for the police organisation to pursue in the first instance. The idea that priorities impact funding and resources and vice versa was an unexpected finding, particularly in North Yorkshire, where neurodiversity appeared to be of great importance to police practitioners during the development of the research, yet during the interviews, it did not come across in such a way. The introduction of PCCs in 2012 changed the way police organisations were governed. PCCs guide police organisations’ priorities, as well as determine the force’s budgets and resources (Lister, 2013). The nature of the PCCs role contributes to the cyclical nature of priority setting and resourcing. The North and South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner priorities for 2017-2021 highlighted a shared priority relating to ‘vulnerable people’. Though ‘vulnerable people’ are a priority in both forces, this would only have an impact where each police organisation identifies neurodivergent people as ‘vulnerable’ (see Literature Review and Section 5.1). Furthermore, despite having set priorities that the police must be seen to be delivering on, it should also be noted that the police routinely attend to a number of circumstances which are not the focus of these policing priorities (Loader, 2020). This is particularly important when considering the role of CR, where the ‘reality’ of the situation can be very different from what is presented in the ‘empirical’ or ‘actual’ domains identified by research. Even where autistic people are not considered ‘vulnerable’, the police will still come into contact with them through calls for service

and interactions on the street, suggesting that police priorities may have little bearing on the activities of frontline police practitioners, who have to respond to all public queries, regardless of whether they are in their police force strategy (Loader, 2000).

Results of the thematic analysis identified that, despite neurodiversity not being a policing priority, interacting with autistic people was a large part of participant's day-to-day role. Out of 19 participants, 15 suggested that working with autistic people was something they did every day: *"I deal on a day-to-day basis with people who are arrested in the cells... I would say a vast majority of those ones have got issues of some description or another"* (NYP08). Other officers suggested that *"you get a lot"* (NYP09) in reference to how many autistic people they interact with. The amount of times police practitioners come into contact with neurodivergent people was *"probably daily"* (SYP04), alongside the suggestion that *"we [the police] probably deal with more people that come under that heading than possibly anybody else"* (NYP01). As such, the idea that some participants did not see or think neurodiversity was a priority for the police was juxtaposed against the realities of the job, in which they did regularly interact with neurodivergent people.

Participants who were considered to be frontline, such as police officers and PCSOs, felt they were required to 'keep up' with 'popular' trends and topics, which often formed the basis of priorities. A 'popular' priority that was frequently discussed was the mental health agenda. Some participants suggested autism as a priority, but only within the context of mental health. Aside from being misleading given that autism is not a mental health condition, this may be problematic for the support of autistic people because of how funding is allocated. For example, autistic people may be more likely to be supported, inappropriately, by mental health agencies, and any training offered to the police may be primarily focused on mental health, as opposed to autism.

Participants felt that 'keeping up' was driven by national-level concerns, before being passed down the organisation:

*"In the last few years we've tried to change things... it can be difficult to keep up on who's doing what" (SYP06).*

*"I try to keep abreast of what's happening" (SYP07).*

There was a sense that the fast-paced nature of police work made it challenging to keep up with the demands and priorities that are both faced by frontline officers, but also by the organisation, as a whole. Furthermore, in some cases, the idea of neurodiversity as a new concept to police practice and the broad nature of neurodivergent differences was described as a negative, as something that impacts on the police organisation, rather than something that police practitioners felt they wanted to improve upon:

*"It's suddenly gone from everybody having ADHD to suddenly so many of the kids with undiagnosed autism or whatever... ten years ago every single kid would be described as having ADHD" (SYP05).*

Though this quote has already been used, this participant highlights the shift in the 'popularity' of certain neurodivergent differences, which is subsequently impacted by and within priority setting.

Participants in this research often discussed autism as a mental health condition. As such, many participants highlighted that mental health is a high priority for the

police, as well as other organisations: *“it [mental health] does seem a massive driver for not only our organisation, but fire service, ambulance service and indeed our colleagues in Rotherham Council, the housing champions, it’s a massive driver”* (SYP07). Research supports this, with Ogloff *et al.* (2012) suggesting that considerable attention has been paid to mentally ill people in the criminal justice system, and that this is reflected in most criminal justice priorities. One participant highlighted this further:

*“I think it’s a couple of years ago, we had the Autism Society come in, locally, and actually explain all the myths round autism... so it was breaking down lots of barriers, and also how, I think helping recognise, there’s been quite a lot, there’s been a hell of a lot done on mental health within the police, and autism particularly I think it needs to keep ongoing training”* (SYP09).

However, as has been argued in this research, autism and neurodiversity are not considered under the mental illness umbrella. Therefore, neurodiversity may currently be misrepresented and therefore misunderstood where it is considered under the mental health agenda. The mental health agenda has been a priority for the police since Amber Rudd announced in 2016 that ‘protecting vulnerable people’ would be a key focus for all police organisations, meaning that PCCs then had to demonstrate *“continuous improvements”* in how they protect ‘vulnerable groups’ (Jones and Lister, 2019, p. 562). In this sense, those who have mental ill health or neurodivergence are instead considered under the general vulnerability agenda, which appears to be a catch all term for people with brain-based differences. Interestingly, a number of

participants were quick to point out that despite autism being considered as a 'vulnerability', it was still not considered a priority for the police.

Frontline officers in this research were more likely to highlight the effects that priorities had on them, as opposed to how they worked towards them. For example, one PCSO stated *"every time something new comes out that they think we should know about they'll come and tell us about it"* (NYP01). 'They' in this instance refers to their senior management team, whose actions are ultimately directed by the priorities of Chief Constables and PCCs. That being said, Participant NYP01 goes on to say, *"everybody has their own interest"*, which might suggest that priorities are being set locally, within the organisation by the organisation's senior management, rather than the Chief Constable or the PCC. This suggestion is supported by Jones and Lister (2019) who state that, to maintain an efficient and effective police force, though Commissioners determine force priorities, it is the responsibility of organisational leaders to implement actions and apply force budgets. One participant argued this was a problem within the police organisation:

*"The problem with the police is there will be a particular focus on whatever thing for a short while and they'll put something out there saying 'oh we need to look at this', that will go by the by and everyone forgets and then something else will come up, 'you have to focus on this', then something else comes up, 'you have to focus on this', and all the big important stuff like, you know, autism or whatever that never goes away ... It is an issue that's there all the time"* (NYP03).

Neurodivergent differences exist within everyone, and there are a large amount people with diagnosed neurodivergent differences, such as being autistic (Beardon, 2017).



Where these needs are not acknowledged by the police organisation, much like Participant NYP03 suggests, frontline officers are less likely to be able to support neurodivergent communities (Crane *et al.*, 2016). Despite participants stating that they support neurodivergent people on a daily basis or at least a significant amount of the time, these quotes might suggest that neurodiversity is something that is not urgent to implement into police priorities. Furthermore, though North Yorkshire Police's Chief Constable at the time of writing was supportive of neurodiversity, the competitive nature of other policing problems appeared to correspond with less support for its implementation.

Interestingly, for senior managers in North Yorkshire, race and ethnicity was regarded a greater priority. One participant highlighted this focus on the race agenda a number of times throughout their interview:

*“In terms of positive action, race should become a priority over all the other protected characteristics and it's creating quite a bit of discussion... that's the drive for us, whilst we need to work on all the protected characteristics, the key thing for us is driving forward on black and ethnic minorities groups... That doesn't mean to say that we're not working towards supporting disability, neurodiversity and all the others... certainly the drive for me being given the direction from the Silver Lead, the ACC [Assistant Chief Constable] is that we will concentrate on black and ethnic minority groups... We should be really working harder in terms of black and ethnic minority groups” (NYP10).*

This might suggest that different diversity issues within the police organisation are ordered. Though this might be a pragmatic approach, in an attempt to resolve one

deficit at a time, another participant suggested: *“how do you put things in an order?”*. Participant NYP06 highlighted that such prioritisation puts other areas of difference at a disadvantage: *“the priority is making sure [we’re] visibly diverse, and often that means it’s at the cost of hidden diversity”*. The prioritisation of key issues within policing has an impact on many aspects of police work (Crawford and L’Hoiry, 2017). For example, in partnership working, one organisation may prioritise one issue i.e. ethnicity minorities, and another organisation may prioritise something else i.e. neurodiversity. This may subsequently lead to a lack of co-production, which impacts the support that can be provided to the community.

As such, potential *“gaps”* in police practice may occur where issues are not explicitly prioritised by the police, partner agencies or the government. These *“gaps”* in police priority setting might suggest that there are movements towards making neurodiversity more of a priority within police organisations and within police work:

*“I think that’s your [referring to the researcher] gap. What do you do, how do you find out if somebody’s got a mental health issue?”* (SYP09).

*“The very reason that we’re doing this research is to identify where the gaps are and where we need to plug them in terms of training...”* (NYP06).

This shift was demonstrated in both police organisations, with participants suggesting that *“I can definitely see a difference between 10 years ago when I started the role”* (NYP01). Though this was not explicitly related to priority setting, it highlights that the organisation is changing in relation to the way it views neurodiversity. In South Yorkshire, this was recognised more overtly:

*“Policing’s changed, us priorities have changed... back I don’t know 15 years all we were interested in were crime, it were burglaries, it was thefts. Vulnerable people, you’d think missing from homes? That weren’t a priority, that wasn’t for police. Then all of a sudden, it’s like well yeah, you can’t take your eye off crime cos we prevent and detect crime that’s one of our core functions, but you can’t do that at the expense of vulnerable people. So, has it changed? Yeah, massively” (SYP01).*

With Governmental changes, changes in PCCs and even changes within the localised police structures themselves, it is unsurprising that priorities fluctuate over time. However, at the time of writing, one participant highlighted that they *“don’t think it’s [neurodiversity] high enough up the agenda at the moment as it should be, at the force, top level, but there certainly is, it’s starting to move forward underneath” (NYP06).*

In times of austerity and police budget cuts (Jones and Lister, 2019), it is unsurprising that the theme of limited police funding and resources was identified in the thematic analysis. It is important to understand the impact of cuts on demands to service, particularly where cuts reduce effectiveness and efficiency (Boulton *et al.*, 2017). With cuts impacting all public services, what was surprising was that this theme was more frequent in one police organisation, than the other. Seven participants in North Yorkshire discussed the impact of cuts, compared to only three participants in South Yorkshire. One response officer was exasperated by the austere situation that the police are often put in: *“there’s not enough of us” (SYP08).* This quote says a lot about the current situation of UK police organisations, given that this response officer was only eight months into service, and already feeling the effects of resource and budget cuts. This quote also highlights the impact that police practices can have on

police officers (as human beings). Turnbull and Wass (2015, p. 512) suggest that police work in times of austerity results in “extreme work”, as opposed to “emergency work”. As such, officers are expected to work long hours, often above those contracted. This could lead to their responses to neurodivergent people (possibly in crisis) being put under pressure due to a lack of time and staffing cuts.

As previously mentioned, the themes of priority setting and funding and resourcing cuts were seen as a cycle, identified through the process of thematic analysis as being discussed simultaneously within the interviews, with one being difficult to establish without the other. Jones and Lister (2019, p. 561) call this effect the “*carrot and stick*” of policing. The ‘carrot’ approach is described as the use of competitive funding schemes to incentivise police organisations into developing activity in support of national objectives and priorities (Jones and Lister, 2019). This was demonstrated by one participant who suggested: “*I think the financial priority is number one, because that is the main effect, because resources are stretched, and it's how you match public perceptions and maintain service*” (NYP06). Since 2010, there has been a 30% reduction in Home Office funding to PCCs, resulting in 19% less funding for police forces, once the local police precept is accounted for (National Audit Office, 2018). It is reported that this has also led to staffing reductions (Jones and Lister, 2019), which ultimately leads to deficits in undertaking national and local policing priorities. Though some participants described the impact of both funding and resources, the majority of participants discussed the impact of funding cuts and limitations in resources as separate influences on the implementation of neurodiversity. That being said, the overall picture that has been presented in this research is that there are no priorities without funding and resources, and there is no need for funding and resources, without priorities. It could be argued that the carrot and stick approach is a fundamental aspect

of managerialism, whereby police organisations, in the current economic climate, are focused on doing “more with less” (Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001, p. 14).

One of the challenges of implementing neurodiversity within the police organisation, as described by police practitioners in this research, was the lack of resources that were available to provide both neurodiversity initiatives, as well as to support neurodivergent people in the community. This concern was spread equally across participants in South and North Yorkshire. Put simply, participants claimed “*resources are stretched*” (NYP06). In regards to the support police could afford vulnerable people, Participant SYP01 stated: “*it’s a massively growing workload for a shrinking work force*”. One participant reported that the significant cutbacks police organisations experienced in 2010 have limited the service that the police can provide to vulnerable people, including autistic members of the community: “*we can only do so much*” (SYP04). The National Audit Office (2018) found that by 2018, the total police workforce in England and Wales had fallen by 18% since 2010, including 15% fewer police officers, 21% fewer police staff and 40% fewer PCSOs. Between 2010 and 2018, North Yorkshire police experienced cuts representing an 8% reduction in police officers and a 2% reduction in other police staff (Home Office, 2019b). PCSOs actually increased by 1%. In South Yorkshire, but there was a 16% reduction in police officers and 20% in other police staff (Home Office, 2019b). These cuts support the managerialist ‘doing more with less’ attitude that has been promoted within police organisations (Fleming and Lafferty, 2000).

Participants discussed a lack of resources in relation to neurodiversity initiatives being maintained within the police organisation. For example, Participant SYP04 highlighted that neurodiversity initiatives “*fall by the wayside*”, with the main reason being that “*we’ve [the police] only got so many resources*”. This was further highlighted

by Participant NYP10, who proposed that *“we have that neurodiversity strategic piece we should take the lead on, but it’s just resources available, unfortunately it’s just having people able to develop it and we don’t have that capacity in force”*. A more specific example related to the cuts to Children and Young People’s officers, which meant the same amount of support could not be afforded to specific working relationships, such as those with neurodivergent young people:

*“At the moment, some things have been let down, particularly from in the police, because of cuts of numbers, of children and young people’s officers... in Rotherham we used to have seven, now we’ve got three...so it’s a big cut... They’re really feeling the demand and I’m amazed sometimes that they’re keeping going, doing what they have to do”* (SYP06).

When analysing the above quotation in relation to the language used, it is interesting that this participant highlights an ‘amazement’ to the continuance of work with autistic children and young people due to the lack of staffing resources. This might suggest that there is an element of surprise in regards to the prioritisation of support that is provided, despite resource cuts. What is not expressed by this participant, but might be implied, is the amount of extra work that is required by the officers who remain (Jones and Lister, 2019). This concern was supported by another participant who proposed:

*“You are funded by public money and you are constantly having budget cuts, restraints, or you lose resources... The networks I have are a virtual team in that people are not employed to do those roles, they are a secondary role, so it’s on top*

*of normal duties, and for some of those people they do actually use their own time and sometimes use their own money” (NYP06).*

This example could explain the reason for the finding of individual discretion and responsibility for neurodiversity initiatives as discussed in the previous section. Managerialism within the police is not only preoccupied with doing ‘more with less’, but also in taking individual responsibility for achievements (Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001). It is unclear, however, as to whether individual responsibility for neurodiversity initiatives are actually maintained only as a result of police practitioners own time and money, as suggested by Participant NYP06.

Budget limitations, as well as staffing reductions, were considered a challenge in maintaining neurodiversity initiatives developed by the police organisation. Two examples of this were provided by participants in this research. The first related to a piece of work being developed by the North Yorkshire Police neurodiversity hub. This piece of work related to a mobile phone ‘app’ for autistic people to use on encounters with the police. Participant NYP06 suggested: *“At the end of the day, I've got a small budget, I was given a budget for three years for the app, I'll only get that, again, if I can show it works, or get someone else to fund it”*. This highlights an economic rationalism (Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001), that relates to the outcomes of specific police initiatives. Furthermore, Participant SYP01 highlighted a similar issue relating to a 3-year project that supported young vulnerable people, including autistic youths:

*“The problem is that that cost doesn't appear on one budget sheet, it's on several. So, it's difficult when I put a bid together to try maintain it and keep it going cos it finished cos the funding run out... The idea was it ran 3 years then it would be*

*adopted by mainstream services, which never really happened because budgets  
being what they are.”*

A number of challenges are highlighted here. Despite there being an implicit requirement to demonstrate economic rationalism (that the project works) (Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001), the hope that the project would be adopted by mainstream services might suggest that this support was necessary and needed for autistic (and more generally vulnerable) young people in Rotherham. Either way, the impact of austerity means neither option was upheld.

#### 5.3.7. Conclusions

To conclude this section, some police participant's perspectives aligned with long-established 'traditional' cultural characteristics of policing such as understanding autistic behaviour to be 'odd' or 'strange'. However, suspicion, specifically, was only ever inferred by participants, who largely felt more inclined to assess the situation on arrival than be influenced by the descriptions of behaviour as it was often provided by members of the public. Furthermore, a number of structural factors were found to have a significant impact on the ability of participants to develop and maintain neurodiversity initiatives. The first was the role of line managers who had a significant influence on police practitioners' ability to support neurodivergent people. Whilst some police practitioners highlighted the barriers and the "*battle*" within a hierarchal command structure, others thrived on the differing levels of discretion afforded to them by their line managers, in being able to support neurodivergent people in the community. The second factor was the impact of policing priorities. Despite North Yorkshire's neurodiversity hub, police participants in this force area did not believe neurodiversity



aligned within their police priorities, with the only consideration being given to mental health and vulnerability agendas. Similarly, neurodiversity did not feature as a policing priority in South Yorkshire, however police practitioners were more inclined to include autistic and neurodivergent people they supported within the mental health and vulnerability agendas already in place.

Finally, all participants discussed the lack of police funding and resources as an influence on their ability to introduce new and different ways of working with vulnerable people. Priority setting and access to funding and resources was seen as a challenging cycle to overcome in attempting to implement police policies and practices in support of neurodiversity. Cuts to police resources may mean that neurodiversity continues to go unrecognised as a priority for the police, or even as part of another priority area, such as vulnerability. Thus, appropriate resources may not be allocated to the improvement and integration of neurodiversity within the organisation. This demonstrates the 'carrot' and 'stick' nature of funding (Jones and Lister, 2019), resources and prioritisation or more generally, the underlying principles of police managerialism that impact police practice. In sum, the factors that have been identified in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 demonstrate a number of key influences on the implementation of neurodiversity into the police organisation, including the occupational, individual and organisational role police practitioner's feel they have in supporting neurodivergent people in the community. These influences can be mapped onto Chan's (1997) theory of field and habitus, in order to illustrate a wider picture of what is required to increase neurodiversity in policing. The habitus (the cultural habits of officers) the field (the structural impact of the organisation) and the officer's individual discretion, choice and power to make changes (as discussed in Section 5.2) must be each recognised for reform in favour of neurodiversity to be implemented and maintained.

#### **5.4. “We’re all here because we’re motivated to make things better” - Promoting neurodiversity through police-community partnerships**

This research explored the role of police partnership working as a way of supporting neurodivergent people in local communities. Participant NYP05 suggested that, within York, the police work with approximately 120 partner agencies, proposing that a ‘partner’ to the police could be “*anybody*” necessary in solving a particular problem. However, during recruitment of participants for this research, only four types of partner agency came forward to discuss their role in police partnership working. These were local authorities (represented by the code *LA*), educational partners (represented by the code *ED*) and advocacy groups (represented by the code *AG*). There was also one participant from a third-party voluntary sector organisation, namely a charity, represented by the code *TP*. This section begins with a review of partner agency practitioners’ conceptualisations of neurodiversity and autism, mirroring questions asked of police practitioners. This is followed by a presentation of the key partner agencies involved with the police, as suggested by police participants, their roles within police partnerships, and whether relationships with the police were perceived as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’. Specific considerations are then made in regards to ‘effective’ partnership working mechanisms, such as information sharing, concluding with a discussion of why partnership working is important for supporting neurodivergent people who interact with the police and how partnership working may improve relationships between partner organisations, the police and neurodivergent people.

#### 5.4.1. Conceptualising neurodiversity and autism

Like police practitioners, partner agency participants were asked the same introductory questions, namely “*what is your understanding of neurodiversity?*” However, unlike the police, almost all of the partner agency participants claimed to know what neurodiversity was (five out of five in North Yorkshire and two out of three in South Yorkshire). Using the introductory questions to inform the thematic analysis included in this section, partner agency practitioners presented more nuanced views of neurodiversity, and for the first time, even demonstrated a dislike for the concept. For example, Participant NYLA04 was the first participant to highlight their issue with the term: “*My customers<sup>14</sup> I work with are very different from people with learning disabilities and I think trying to lump everyone together under one title isn’t always helpful*”. As such, the reason for Participant NYLA04’s dislike was because the term neurodiversity is an umbrella term, which can be too inclusive and not fine-grained enough to accommodate specific needs (Beardon, 2017). This is a common criticism of the neurodiversity approach, as suggested by Fenton and Krahn (2007), who proposed that by normalising difference and over-inclusiveness, those most affected may not receive the support they require and may actually end up disadvantaged as a result. Participant NYLA04 went onto provide a definition of neurodiversity that aligned with the majority of academic literature on the topic: “*it means your brain is*

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<sup>14</sup> This participant worked with adults aged 18+ who had long-term conditions and/or dementia. This did not include service users with learning disabilities or functional mental ill health but did include those who were autistic or were diagnosed as having ‘Asperger’s Syndrome’.

*hard-wired in a different way, so that you might think differently from how I think, in terms of how we perceive things that are happening... everybody's different"*, but used it differently in practice, for example throughout the interview to describe how the concept perceivably attempts to homogenise people.

Similar to police practitioner definitions, other local authority workers in North Yorkshire provided an array of understandings of neurodiversity. A participant from social care commissioning services in North Yorkshire produced another definition that resembled those proposed in academic literature: "*So my understanding is neurodiversity covers all differences, so that's dyspraxia, dyslexia, autism, ADHD, so anything that's not neurotypical, neurodiverse*" (NYLA03). This participant was interviewed with another participant (NYLA02) and both participants, when analysing their transcript using discourse analysis, used language that fitted with neurodivergent perspectives throughout their interview, as opposed to using more medicalised terminology (apart from their recurrent use of person first language). Comments from a South Yorkshire local authority member demonstrated a more nuanced perspective in regards to their understanding of neurodiversity, stating, "*not effectively supporting neurodiversity specifically is, for me, a subset of not effectively supporting diversity in general... [we should] build on their strengths rather than focusing upon perceived 'deficits'*". This might suggest that, on the whole, local authorities had a better understanding of neurodiversity, than the police and other partner agency practitioners.

Interestingly, the two advocacy groups that were interviewed either did not know what neurodiversity was or did not like the term. Participants from NYAG01 proposed why they did not like the term:

“[Neurodiversity] *Is that dividing children up?*” (Participant at NYAG01).

Participants in NYAG01 conceptualised neurodiversity as labelling or dividing people into categories, highlighting their differences as opposed to accepting and supporting it. On the other hand, participants from SYAG07 did not even know what neurodiversity was: “*Is it diversity with people who are not autistic?... Diversity with neurotypical people*”. However, this organisation was very supportive of the well-known neurodiversity movement ‘For Autistic People, by Autistic People’ (Sinclair, 1993), as were participants in NYAG01:

*“The best way for other people with learning difficulties to feel confident is to listen to people with learning difficulties”.*

*“It’s now run by a professional, not by people with learning difficulties. Self-advocacy started in Sweden originally and then in America, when a group of people with learning disabilities went to a conference and it was all professionals and they said ‘It should be about us, we’re people first and listen to what we’re saying’”* (Participants at NYAG01).

Much like police practitioners in previous sections, partner agency practitioners also appeared influenced by the assumptions they had about autistic people. These assumptions subsequently had implications for partnership working. As highlighted by a participant in NYAG01, there have been “*lots of issues with [our] Council and what they might think about people with learning disabilities*”. From this, it could be argued that local authority partners often had differing views of neurodivergent people based

on their interactions. Similarly, a participant from a voluntary sector partner agency suggested that agencies such as local authorities and police organisations do not work with certain autistic people because “*you [the autistic person] don’t fit in with our autistic person picture... you’re a crazy person, you’ve got mental health issues... why are you being weird?*” (SYTP08). This participant continued to say that agencies often say, “*I wouldn’t have clocked you as autistic*”, which would propose that partner agencies have specific expectations, perhaps even stereotypes, of autistic people. Those from the advocacy groups sought to challenge presumptions about autism. For example, participants from SYAG07 conducted a 3-hour training session, with approximately 20 delegates each time, over the span of 12 weeks. The purpose of the training was to explain to other partner agencies what it meant to be autistic. The main focus of this training was: “*When you have met a person with autism what have you done? Just that, you have met one person*”, emphasising an important message within the neurodiversity movement (first presented by Stephen Shore). Unlike police practitioners’ perspectives of autism, whereby outdated understandings influenced the way they interacted, differing views of what autism is for partner agencies impacted the way partnership working could be done. For example, these understandings sometimes allowed neurodivergent people to be a part of the partnership, in the first instance.

Only half of all partner agency participants used identity first language (five out of eight), often in conjunction with person first language (i.e. ‘person with autism’). Interestingly, the two advocacy groups, made up of learning disabled and autistic people, wanted to promote the use of person first language, as opposed to the reportedly preferred identity first language (Beardon, 2017). A participant in NYAG01

stated that disabled people are “*people first*”. Furthermore, a participant from SYAG07 highlighted this shift:

*“We’ve always said person with autism and generally, in this group, that is what we’ve decided to stick to, but whenever we’ve delivered training we’ve had to make the point that there is that shift... because people are owning their autism... it depends on the person and how they want to be interpreted”*

The discourse analysis showed there was also a mixed use of social and medical model language, unlike in police practitioner interviews, where medicalised language was more dominant. In South Yorkshire, social model language was never used by partner agency participants, but medicalised language was only used once in all three interviews. On the other hand, out of five participants in North Yorkshire, two used both social *and* medical model language. An interesting example of such medicalised language came from Participant NYLA04, who proposed that the majority of people they work with are on “*the autism spectrum, have got Asperger’s*” so “*it’s not people with autism and LD [learning disabilities] as such*”. Describing autistic people as ‘on the spectrum’ has previously been identified as bordering on medicalised language, because a ‘spectrum’ is too simplistic to explore the realities of autistic experience (Baker, 2011). Furthermore, this participant still refers to Asperger’s, which although not incorrect as people can still have a diagnosis of Asperger’s (that they have been given historically), the diagnosis of Asperger’s no longer exists (after it was officially removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 2013). This might suggest local authorities have more involvement with older autistic people, as opposed to children and young people who have received more recent diagnoses. Participant NYLA04

continued to say that there is a difference between Asperger's and autism: "*it's like we're not using the word Asperger's anymore, we're supposed to say everybody's on the autism spectrum*", however, despite acknowledging this, they used this term throughout the interview, barely mentioning autism as a whole concept. Sharing such perspectives with police partners may overcomplicate or skew how the behaviour of autistic people is interpreted. It may also perpetuate medicalised language surrounding diagnosis and identification.

#### 5.4.2. Key players and their roles within police partnerships

Key partner agencies that the police work with were identified through a thematic analysis of their answers in relation to partnership working. One of the main partner agencies that police practitioners in this research claimed to work with were local authorities. For example, nine out of 19 police participants highlighted the role of local authorities in supporting police interactions with autistic people. Within the local authority, social services were mentioned on a regular basis (12 police participants out of 19) as being an organisation to which the police could make a referral. One police participant suggested that "*sometimes we are dependent on social workers*" because "*the majority of our police officers won't know [how to deal with an autistic person], so what they will do is probably just do a generic social care referral*" (NYP04). This was supported by a service manager within the local authority: "*it's huge [partnership working], because obviously, we're social care, so we get lots of referrals from everywhere*" (NYLA04). Therefore, it was perceived by participants in this research that there was a high volume of referrals sent from the police to local authorities, namely social services, asking for support with neurodivergent people. However, the process of referring to social services was not always straight forward



in terms of supporting of neurodivergent people. This was suggested by Participant SYP05: *“it's a fairly high threshold for social services to actually get involved, and there's quite a big gap between stuff that needs sort of full-blown social services support”*. Although this participant never finished what they were saying, it was assumed that the other end of the social care support spectrum is where the police are seen to be able to resolve situations themselves, without social care involvement. Therefore, the relationship between the police and social services appeared to be present and somewhat essential, yet complex.

Educational partner agencies (most commonly, schools) were mentioned most by School Officers. In fact, they were seldom mentioned as a partner organisation in any other interview, which is interesting, given that findings from the quantitative analysis identified autistic people under the age of 18 as being most involved in all incidents with the police (yet not just related to school interactions). Another reason participants suggested there might be a lack of discussion around educational partners was proposed by police Participant NYP04: *“when a young person is having a crisis and comes to the attention of the police, they've never met the police before in person, because historically, with austerity, cops have less time to go into their schools”*. This quote raises questions, such as whether interactions with autistic people are impacted by police practitioners going into schools, particularly ones that offer special educational provision. The responses from educational partners that were interviewed in this research supported the lack of response about police-school partnerships. The SENCO from a Pupil Referral Unit, an educational facility that supports autistic people, suggested that the only time the police came into school was to *“ask about individuals”* (NYED05), presumably with the intention of investigating a specific incident, rather than to build relationships with the school and its pupils.

Other agencies that School Officers discussed included Young Persons Substance Misuse services, CAMHS and child psychologists. One participant suggested: “*A lot of my service has been working directly in children and young people’s service really*” (SYP06). Types of partner agencies that were infrequently discussed included services from the private sector, youth and community groups, hostels, safeguarding partners and probation. There were three police participants (two from South Yorkshire and one from North Yorkshire) who discussed the support of Vulnerable Person Units within the police. This is unsurprising given that many of the participants felt that autistic people were vulnerable people. Almost equally mentioned was the involvement and support of the NHS and mental health services (statutory and non-statutory). Furthermore, reference to the mental health crisis team as a partner agency was only mentioned by response officers and no other participants. This might suggest that different types of police practitioners engage with different types of partner agencies depending on what support is most suitable for their role or the person in question. This may also be impacted by existing relationships the police organisation have with these services, for example, through street triage (Kirubarajan *et al.*, 2018). There were five participants (out of 19) who discussed the role of charities or advocacy groups, which was additionally interesting, given that many of the organisations that support autistic or neurodivergent people are charity/voluntary sector organisations, for example the National Autistic Society. Therefore, even though the police may be less familiar with the third sector, who have tended to be less commonly involved in mandatory community safety partnerships, as part of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998), the prevalence of charities that support autistic people may have been a countervailing force, encouraging more partnership working with these groups than might otherwise have been expected.

Both police practitioners and partner agencies who were involved in this research discussed the role of families as a partner when interacting with autistic people. Out of 10 police participants in North Yorkshire, eight discussed having families as a partner in their work with autistic people. In South Yorkshire, all nine police participants mentioned family involvement during incidents with autistic people. For police, this might be related to the amount of autistic young people they appeared to be involved with. However, the role of the family was not as acknowledged by partner agency practitioners, only two of whom (out of all seven) acknowledged the role of families in their partnership work. Only Participants NYLA02 and NYLA03 (respectively) discussed their involvement with families who might have had an autistic family member interact with the police:

*“I work with parents, particularly the Parent Carer Forum. And that is dominated by parents with children with autism, so the issues around autism come up a lot”.*

*“[Who they work with] People with learning disabilities, their families, professionals, voluntary sector, health etc., would be part of that partnership”.*

The role that families played was that they were defined by both partner agencies and police practitioners as the people most likely to know and understand an autistic person that the police might be dealing with. Police practitioners suggested that “we [the police] *might try and talk with their family, the parents, friends, see if they’ve got a specific social worker or a carer or a support worker, something like that*” (NYP09). Many proposed that they “*went and spoke to the family*” (NYP09) or that they “*have a lot of interaction with families*” (SYP04). The involvement of families is an interesting

theme, particularly for partner agency participants, where families were not commonly considered a formal partner. The police however seemed to value their input, based on the quotes above. The reason for the involvement of families as partners, and as experts by experience, might be due to the inherent nature of autism, in that it is part of a person's identity and specific to them, and therefore something that will impact them throughout their entire life. As such, families are more likely to continue to support an autistic person much longer than they might support a neurotypical or non-autistic sibling and subsequently becoming the closest form of support.

#### 5.4.3. The importance of partnerships and what makes them 'work'

Partner agency participants made regular reference to factors that were deemed both necessary and important for the functionality of partnership working. The first of these factors was the importance of being heard and listened to when working within partnerships. Interestingly, this theme applied mostly to advocacy groups, whereby their views and opinions were regarded more essential than other partner agencies. Participants in NYAG01 related their experience of being heard and listened to by one specific officer who made the effort to do so:

*"I think that that really impressed us, that [Participant] NYP01 took away what we'd done and then he's turning up with a smart form that's going to go in a nice pack and was complaining about that they printed it in the wrong colour to start with. No-one had ever worried about that before, had they?"*

*"[Participant] NYP01 was quite refreshing really wasn't he? That he really genuinely had no other opinion? He didn't have an opinion".*

*“He just was prepared to listen, and you don’t often get people so open-minded as that”.*

Whilst acknowledging that the police service does indeed have a somewhat jaundiced view of partnership working, the role played by individual officers involved in such initiatives can have an important role in ensuring that partnerships are regarded as effective by those involved and those they support (Dick, 2018). When asked what part of the partnership process they enjoyed the most when working with Participant NYP01, one participant from NYAG01 simply said *“getting asked”* to be involved, further highlighting the importance of being heard, listened to or simply being involved in partnership working. These ideas were further replicated by participants in SYAG07, with one suggesting: *“numerous times, that’s [their diagnosis of autism] been completely discredited and not acknowledged whatsoever, completely irrelevant... that I was an inconvenience to the justice system”*. The theme of being heard and listened to was not something identified in local authority interviews but was additionally identified in interviews with third party charity organisations. Participant SYTP08 mentioned one specific situation where they had felt listened to by other partner agencies: *“she [member of staff from the Council] was absolutely fabulous and listened”*. As such, the importance of being listened to and heard was regarded an important aspect for effective partnership working.

Directly related to this was the theme of being understood by other partner agencies. Understanding was applied in every sense of the term – being understood as an organisation in regards to the norms, values, strengths and limitations of their work and what they could contribute to the partnership (Meyer and Mazerolle, 2014),

having common understanding between partners within the partnership (Crawford, 1997), sympathetic awareness and tolerance of one another working in partnership (van Dijk and Crofts, 2016) and finally, using the partnership to raise the understanding of autistic and neurodivergent people in an attempt to increase the quality of support offered. This was demonstrated collectively as having a shared understanding about what it means to work together with the overall aim of supporting neurodivergent people. For example, Participant NYLA02 highlighted that in partnerships, there is an *“importance of working together with a shared vision, a shared understanding of what the links are”*. This participant went on to point out the importance of increasing understanding between partners to better the quality of support that can be provided:

*“So, anybody who’s receiving somebody who’s neurodivergent won’t understand automatically there is a need and that they need to therefore take reasonable adjustments, to adapt the way that they meet with the person or understand the communication from the person. So, the partnership working I think is really important because we need to raise awareness and help people understand... it’s particularly important that there’s an understanding and awareness, so partnership working we hope will improve what we can offer for folk”*.

Within this, local authority partners highlighted that understanding is not only about the co-operation within partnership working, but also about sharing understanding to increase awareness and promote best practice. The basis for effective partnership working lies in developing and maintaining shared understanding and commitment, however shared understanding often does not mean that all partners necessarily agree or hold the same view of a particular issue (Crawford and Cunningham, 2015).

As such, in all contexts, having a level of understanding about the roles of others within a partnership, as well as having the joint desire to promote understanding, was seen as an important factor required for the efficiency and success of partnership working.

Much like police practitioners in this research, partner agency participants proposed the importance of having a reason or an interest in the aims of the partnership. For example, one participant suggested that, “*most people are motivated because they’re here for a reason, they want to make a difference and they want to change things for the better*” (NYLA03). These reasons varied, with examples from police practitioners being a personal connection to a neurodivergent person and/or a desire to increase diversity within the police organisation. However, within partner agency interviews, ‘reasons’ related more so to the representation of partners involved in a particular piece of partnership work. The general consensus of police representation within local authority partnerships was that, “*we’ve struggled to get a representation round the table from them [the police]*” (NYLA03). Though documented by Rosenbaum (2002), there was no evidence of the police in the present study being reluctant or reticent to work in partnership, therefore this was an interesting finding from the perspective of partner agency participants. This might simply be due to the police sample interviewed, whereby participants tended to be those interested in neurodiversity and/or partnership working. It might also be because much of the partnership working described in this research was ad-hoc and informal, meaning joint working was disbanded before any conflict could occur or maybe the partner agency participants had simply not come to these ad hoc arrangements (Allen, Karanasios and Norman, 2014).

Referring to representation from other partner agencies, Participant SYTP08 suggested that the police organisation see having autistic people as part of partnership

working as just “*another tick*”, implying the tokenistic nature of their involvement. Participants NYLA02 and NYLA03 discussed the importance of having autistic people and organisations that represent them being involved in partnership working to ensure the applicability of initiatives that are designed and implemented: “*we’ve got a Learning Disability Partnership so we do try to ensure there’s representation [learning disabled people]*” (NYLA02). This participant went on to reveal that they also have an autism strategy group, however, at the time of interview, there was no representation from autistic people in this partnership:

*“Through an autism strategy group meeting, we tried to get as many partners around that table as possible, so that would have health representation, it would have, we haven’t got anybody with autism on the group at the moment, have we? But we’ve got parent carers there and any interested parties... We used to have [autistic people]... We did, didn’t we? We need to get that back”* (NYLA03).

Though representation of appropriate people within partnerships is important, representation could also be tokenistic (Gasper and Davis, 2018). Participant NYLA03 suggested that they “*needed*” to get autistic people back, which was linguistically interpreted as the “*tick box*” attitude proposed by Participant SYTP08.

Information sharing between the police and partner agencies was considered another important aspect of partnership working. One participant from the local authority in North Yorkshire suggested that information sharing was important because the quality of knowledge shared between partners can be “*so much richer, so much more focused and motivating when you’ve got a range of different partners speaking from their own experience*”. Sharing information has been reported in the



literature as an essential function of partnership working, particularly in informal, ad-hoc partnerships, where the sharing of information and resources is not only necessary, but essential for the functioning of the partnership (Crawford, 1997). Information sharing within academic literature has often related to the formal process of exchanging confidential information about a person or situation (Crawford, 1997; Crawford and L’Hoiry, 2017). However, participants tended to make more reference to one-off pieces of partnership work, which required ad-hoc information sharing protocols. For example, Participants in NYAG01 made reference to information sharing in a specific project they were working on with the police:

*“The thing that amazes me is that the police from this project have got widgets [an easy read communication symbol] and changed all their computer software so they can get the information that we’re building on there to store it on their system”.*

*“If the police can work with us and making sure that all our information is on one thing, why can’t the rest of the City Council can’t do the same thing?”.*

In this sense, participants were referring to the sharing of specific resources and information, which could assist in the development of other organisations work and promote neurodivergent practices.

The process of sharing information was not as direct or as linear for police practitioners, as identified using discourse analysis, with Participant SYP07 using a metaphoric device to describe information sharing. The use of the term ‘Ping-Pong’ allowed the participant to illustrate information that bounces back and forth between partner agencies. Researchers, such as Dick (2018), have highlighted the lack of

linearity in sharing information, instead proposing complexity dependent on the purpose of the partnership (Allen, Karanasios and Norman, 2014). Other police practitioners expressed these complexities using further metaphors. For example, Participant NYP04 used the metaphor of a 'jigsaw' to stress the importance of sharing information:

*“That's where information sharing grates on me. If agencies hold information, which could be a key part of our jigsaw, either a) don't think it's significant to share, or b) it takes them so long to share it, then we can expose people to further harm and risk... It's part of the jigsaw. If we're dealing with a little bit of the jigsaw and we think it's a, b and c, there's no point in us doing anything unless we have to, unless we've got the full part of the jigsaw so it reduces duplication, it's better for the individual, it's better looking at resources of all organisations that are going through austerity and cutbacks, and sometimes with limited pot of resources, we can box cleverly as a partnership. It's the only way forward”.*

The police regarded information sharing as an essential piece of the 'jigsaw' in supporting a neurodivergent person. Without knowledge of the network of support the person has, the police may struggle to do their part within the partnership.

#### 5.4.4. Working relationships between the police and partner agencies

Working relationships were identified as an important theme in the thematic analysis. In attempting to explore the 'critical' aspects of working relationships between the police and partner agencies, literature such as that by Berry *et al.* (2012) was drawn on, attempting to identify 'what works'. A topic of the interview itself,

participants were asked about their experiences of partnership working. As such, most participants found themselves discussing partnership working in a positive or negative way. However, they often appeared to find it challenging to differentiate between the positive and negative experiences of partnership relationships, whereby many of these experiences seemed to compliment and contrast one another. Therefore, the following include both police and partner agency participants experience of partnership working, presented thematically (positive experiences, followed by negative experiences). Furthermore, to highlight how these positives and negatives might work together in practice, the latter two sections attempt to provide further depth as to how one aspect of the working relationship (information sharing) can be considered both a positive and a limitation of partnership working.

#### 5.4.5. Experiences of positive relationships

In police interviews, positive relationships with partner agencies were referenced only slightly more in North Yorkshire than South Yorkshire (six out of nine participants), with eight participants out of 10 suggesting that partnership working was not only essential, but a strength to their organisation. Partner agency practitioners reported similar experiences, with the majority of local authority and educational partners stating that their relationships with local police organisations were, to some extent, encouraging. A police practitioner in South Yorkshire and an educational partner in North Yorkshire provided almost identical answers when asked about the importance of partnership working. Participant SYP01, when asked about the essentialness of partnership working, simply stated it is “*priceless*”. Similarly, Participant NYED06 proposed that partnership working was “*vital*”, suggesting that “*you will not have all the answers*” and therefore the positives of working in partnership included ‘sharing

ideas, stress and team working'. This participant went onto describe partnership working as their "*bread and butter*", a colloquial term meaning it relates to their everyday work, proposing "*there are no negatives that can't be overcome, there is more to be gained working together, than not*". Put more succinctly, Participant NYLA04 said "*it's multi-agency working all day, every day*". However, further discourse analysis of this participant's language suggests that they were a little more hesitant about their suggestion of positive partner relationships than first stated. They went onto say, "*Well it [partnership working] **should** be and I would hope it is, I **shouldn't** say that, **should** I? I can't see any negatives. Well no, that's a lie!*" The repetitive use of the term 'should' suggests an element of doubt. This is followed by an explicit statement, which reveals the participant's actual thoughts about positive working relationships, proposing that it would be 'lie' to say there were no negatives to partnership working. This highlights what has previously been assumed, that where there were positives of partnership working, there was also doubt as to their long-term success.

Participant SYLA09, when describing what it was like to work in partnership, suggested the police were "*emotionally intelligent and open to constructive and collaborative approaches*". This was framed as a positive aspect of working specifically with the police organisation. Partner agency participants and police participants both described the value of working together. For example, a participant from North Yorkshire's local authority suggested, "*if one agency was only to put that on, it would be less than half the value we had*". Drawing on the imagery language used in this quotation, identified through the discourse analysis, the idea that putting together two 'halves' was a positive aspect of the partnership relationship was a view shared by police participants. Participant SYP04 demonstrated this:

*“It stops certain individuals going unnoticed... so we [the police] might miss them but your housing champion might know about them or your social worker might know about them, so in a lot of respects you’ve got two or three chances of having them brought to your attention or catching them, whereas if it were just left to one of the agencies they might go unnoticed”.*

Police organisations have been documented, not only in this research, but more generally, as being over stretched in terms of their resources, time and monetary costs for services (Jones and Lister, 2019). This meant partnerships as described in this research could not only strengthen relationships between organisations, but also their individual resources: *“you can actually piggy back on things they’re [partner agencies] already doing, and when it comes to time, money, resource, I think that is really the way forward”* (NYP06). In this sense, the police highlighted on a number of occasions that partnerships are *“paramount”* (SYP06), and that *“we [the police] can’t function without them, we can’t survive without each other”* (NYP03).

Participants from both the police organisation and partner agencies used the term ‘barriers’ more positively than has previously been described in this thesis. Through the use of discourse analysis, prior to consideration of partnerships, reference to ‘barriers’ had been interpreted to mean putting them up, as a way of preventing someone from doing something. In addition, there is a multitude of partnership research that describes the ‘barriers’ to partnership working as a negative aspect of partner relationship formation (Crawford and Cunningham, 2015; Crawford and L’Hoiry, 2017). However, in this research, participants described ‘breaking down barriers’ between different agencies, gaining greater knowledge of what others were

doing with neurodivergent people, as well as accessing the skills that different organisations have in supporting neurodivergent citizens. Participants instead used the term “*scaffolding*”, as opposed to the barriers, as a metaphor to mean the materials holding a structure together. However, linguistically, scaffolding could be considered to be something temporary, meaning that participants potentially felt this way about their partnership relationships. However, the majority of the time during research interviews, ‘barriers’ within police partnerships were not always considered something that were put up and maintained, but rather, something to be broken down and used proactively to create the “*scaffolding*” of a successful partnership relationship.

#### 5.4.6. Experiences of negative relationships

Despite the majority of participants suggesting that partnership working was a necessity of their jobs, there were more themes relating to negative relationships with partner agencies, than positive. Police practitioners often made reference to the challenges of partnership working, with eight out of 10 participants in North Yorkshire and six out of nine participants in South Yorkshire describing difficulties they had encountered. Though participants were sometimes asked specifically about the negative aspects of partnership working, the discussion around their limitations were often brought up in the interviews spontaneously. For example, when asked about their experiences of partnership working, Participant SYP02 suggested “*it [partnership working] tends to be a bit more fractured*”, with ‘fractured’ being analysed linguistically, found to suggest a negative view of partnership working as something that is already broken. Partner agency practitioners also highlighted similar views. Participant NYLA04 highlighted that it was not simply the challenges of working with the police,

but rather, it was the impact of funding and resource cuts in both organisations that had caused strain on partnership working:

*“I think we do get some challenges, sometimes with health and mental health particularly, in terms of people with Asperger’s... What they’re able to provide is minimal, so they prioritise, and the prioritisation is about what they can medicate and make better”.*

Though there is a legal obligation for police organisations to work in partnership with local authorities and other statutory agencies in community safety partnerships (Crime and Disorder Act, 1998), participants from charity and third-party agencies suggested *“the police don’t tend to get in touch with us... We’re not in partnership at all with the police, they haven’t contacted us, they haven’t come to meetings”* (SYTP08). This might suggest that positive and negative experiences of partnership working with the police actually rely upon partnership working being established in the first instance, and where this was non-existent, experiences can only be seen as negative.

As part of the theme of negative experiences, in the majority of police interviews (seven out of 10 in North Yorkshire and eight out of nine in South Yorkshire), police practitioners claimed it was them who were the proactive ones in the partnership relationship and that this was a negative of partnership working, as they were not always the appropriate people to lead the particular piece of work. This, however, contradicted what was said in partner agency interviews, whereby these participants suggested the police did not get involved in partnerships and, in particular, were not forthcoming in attending meetings. This lack of involvement from the police was highlighted in the following example:

*“Years and years ago, I went to the police and we talked about disability and there was interest but then it was never followed up... I’m not sure who has a role and who would follow things up, so you might get an individual who’s particularly interested or engaged for a period of time but yes, I think we’re missing that sense of knowing where to go and if there’s somebody who will follow things up afterwards” (NYLA02).*

They continued to discuss how getting the right person can sometimes lead to engagement, but for the most part, the police were not proactive: *“when you’ve got the right person here and they’re highly committed... they’re taking stuff back, they’re pushing the agenda forward. And within the police [this person] was very proactive like with autism, so you could see those changes” (NYLA02).* The person mentioned in this example, however, left the police organisation and following this, the agenda was no longer pushed. van Dijk and Crofts (2016) found that, for police, partnership working may be conducted on a limited assignment and whilst not being a distinct negative of partnership working, pieces of work are often left with no proper handover once they move on from a particular role or the police organisation, more generally. Another example came from Participant SYTP08, who highlighted the engagement of police within a multi-agency partnership group:

*“They’re still talking about, ‘oh that’s interesting’, and then do nothing about it... they don’t do anything, they just sit and meet and talk about stuff... everything just gets spilt up and nothing ever actually happens”.*



Though this example relates to other agencies also not being proactive, it includes support and interest from the police that were proceeded with no action. This is a theme of particular interest given that partnerships as “talking shops” is a common conceptualisation within community safety partnership literature (Pearson *et al.*, 1992, p. 50).

Due to their action orientated nature and readiness to ‘take charge’, the police have been found to play a proactive and dominant role in partnership settings (O’Neill and McCarthy, 2014), with the police practitioners in this research often referring to themselves as the “*drivers*” in regards to supporting autistic people. The majority of police practitioners in this research identified that they regularly took a proactive lead in all aspects of partnership working. Participant NYP10 suggested that “*if it’s a major fire, your fire service will be the lead agency, but a lot of the times you find the police will kind of take the lead normally... a lot of the times you find the police will kind of take the lead normally, because I think in the public sector world we’re seen as people who are do-ers...*”. They went onto highlight that, in the partnership, the police always try to lead, “*as a policing leader you’ve always kind of dominated... you always try to dominate and bring things forward that’s why a lot of organisations probably leave the police to be the leaders*”. However, the police are often not seen as the best agency to take the lead, due to their experience and expertise, particularly in regards to neurodiversity. This is supported by McCarthy and O’Neill (2014) who suggested that although the police are often the first port of call in an emergency, they are not always the best equipped to support with a particular situation. For example, Participant NYP07 reflected on the police being the first point of contact for neurodivergent people who needed help or support: “*sometimes I wonder, we’re the first ones going to this, are we really the right people?*” Participant NYP05 further suggested that it is important

to find the 'right' person/agency to deal with a situation and therefore, it should be this person/agency to take the lead:

*"It isn't always the police that are the lead and I think that's one of the things that we are trying to develop is actually, if other agents identify this and you are the best person to have, you've already got a relationship with this person and you have got some great ideas about how we can engage further, then you are the lead. So, trying to make sure the right person takes the lead, police, law enforcement, doesn't always sit well [laughs] and can be detrimental".*

By 'right', participants suggested they were attempting to identify the most appropriate person or agency to support a neurodivergent person involved with the police. However, it seemed that finding the 'right' person or agency was complex: *"Trying to find the right person about a certain issue is like opening a can of spaghetti... quite often it's just the logistics of getting down to the right person"* (NYP01). A strong theme in Hayden and Jenkins' (2013) research into the 'Troubled Families' agenda was that it was 'who works' (the quality of the individual professional and their ability to make relationships with families) as opposed to 'what works', highlighting the importance of finding the 'right' support.

This notes a shift from the police seeing themselves as the proactive do-ers taking the lead (Crawford and Cunningham, 2015) towards identifying the agency that is most appropriate to support autistic people in a particular set of circumstances. This shift has been noted by Rosenbaum (2002), who stated that the different roles partners play largely relates to how different organisations work and therefore should rather be seen as providing potential to new and innovative ways of working with people.

Participant SYP01 further summarised this by suggesting *“it’s took quite some time, it’s been like a radio tuning it in really, but we’ve finally got to a point now where the people sat around the table are do-ers”*. By this, Participant SYP01 is not just suggesting one person should take the lead, but all those who are appropriate to support a neurodivergent person should be *“sat around the table”*. Metaphors about partners being *“sat round the table”* were used to describe whether police practitioners attended multi-agency meetings. This phrase often did not mean partner agencies sitting around a physical table, but rather referred to them working together on a project or case in a collaborative way. The discourse analysis of this metaphor suggests an underlying sense of the importance of coming together and of being in one space to discuss important matters. To demonstrate this, Participant SYP07 stated, *“I haven’t got to be in the same room as them, it’s just a phone call”*. However, there were mixed experiences in regards to whether the police attended meetings at all, with Participant NYLA03 stating: *“I think the police are hard to get round the table”*. There might be a number of reasons for this, that were suggested by police participants themselves. For example, Participant SYP04 highlighted:

*“I wouldn’t get involved in, unless I’d got a really good understanding of that individual or that family, I might be invited to that meeting. I’ve been to meetings before where people have been in secure units and stuff and they’re due to come back into the community and because they’re coming back into the area that I look after we get invited”*.

Therefore, as proposed by this participant, police practitioners will only attend meetings at which they feel their presence is necessary.

#### 5.4.7. 'Passing the buck'

The idiom 'passing the buck' refers to a shift in responsibility from one person to another, which often occurs for a variety of reasons, including someone not knowing what to do with the responsibility they have been given or not having the expertise to deal with the matter. In this research, 'passing the buck' was interpreted as a negative impact on partnership relationships, particularly when partner agencies passed responsibility to the police. However, when the police 'passed the buck' to partners, this appeared to strengthen relationships. Reasons for this difference were suggested by police practitioners, who did not regard themselves as 'experts' in supporting autistic people, and as such needed more guidance from appropriate partner agencies in these circumstances. For example:

*"Our job is to police. We are a community team, but we've only got so many resources, we're not experts in dealing with people with autism or any learning disability... There is a limit as to what we can do again, because we're not the experts in that field" (SYP05).*

*"Down to our training and lack of understanding in a lot of areas, and there are so many different areas, within it you can't possibly be an expert in it all" (NYP01).*

*"We're not the specialist to everything and we know that" (NYP04).*

That being said in some cases, it appeared partner relationships were mostly strained because no one wanted to take responsibility: “[partners] *want them off their list as well*” (SYP07). Participant NYP03 also acknowledged this:

*“Partner agencies are more than happy for the police to take on something because it takes it off their hands. And we have got a bit of a more of a fight back going on these days where it’s like ‘no, okay we’ve gone to this, spoken to this individual, it’s not our remit, this is yours, this fits you, this is the neighbourhood enforcement officer’s job or this is social services’ job or this is crisis team, this isn’t ours because we don’t have the resources, we don’t have the skill set to deal with this person or to deal with this situation”*.

This police participant highlights that there are certain roles for certain people, whereby some are more skilled to deal with a particular situation. A criticism of partnership working proposed by McCarthy (2014) is that a lack of clear hierarchy and miscommunication about the roles played within partnerships produces many instances of ‘passing the buck’ between agencies. Therefore, ‘passing the buck’ in this sense would only be seen as a positive where the person was being handed over to the best skilled person to support. Other police practitioners highlighted confidence in ‘passing the buck’ to someone more appropriate: *“if we needed more assistance, there’d always be someone that could point us in the right direction. I’m confident this is the case”* (SYP02), whereas others continued to suggest the police were limited in their role capacity and therefore required the ability to pass information and situations to others: *“It must be like we’re trying to pass the buck but we’re limited in what we*

*can do, so we need to get people working together again and helping each other really”* (NYP09).

Partner agencies were regarded by police practitioners as the experts in neurodiversity and autism:

*“We’ve got to get partners involved who have got more expertise in them fields really... I know we’re all under pressure and we’ve all had cuts and stuff like that and that does make the job more difficult but, when you’re dealing with family issues and psychological issues on top of substance abuse issues, on top of being on the spectrum. We’re not trained to be able to deal with that”* (SYP07).

However, what was interesting in this research was that partner agency practitioners did not see themselves as experts either. For example, Participant NYLA04 suggested that local authorities would *“bring somebody in [a neurodiversity ‘expert’] because we can pull on who we need”*. Other participants proposed that *“there is a tension for me around the degree of specialism that can be associated with neurodiversity”* (SYLA09). As such, barely any partner agency participants talked about ‘passing the buck’. Though this could suggest that they took some responsibility in most cases, interviews indicated that partner agencies and the police passed autistic and neurodivergent people between each other. This was demonstrated as a negative of partner relationships by Participant NYLA04 who proposed that the local authority would *“get involved and hand them over”*, arguing *“there’s a bit of overlap in terms of what you’ve been told”*. These ‘overlaps’ in what services share and do with autistic people and the circumstances they are involved with, not only means ‘passing the buck’ is made

possible, but also that, ultimately, no one may take responsibility and actually support the person involved.

An alternative way of looking at 'passing the buck' was the involvement of only one person from an organisation within the partnership, which meant it was more difficult for 'overlap' or 'handing over' to occur. During the interview with Participant SYAG07, we discussed the role of a 'named person' or a point of contact within the police, as someone who would liaise with partner agencies and would be a champion for all neurodiversity-related matters. Though this thinned out any potential of diffusion of responsibility, one participant in the group highlighted that the use of a named person within a partnership might lead to problems with 'passing the buck':

*"I don't know if I agree necessarily with your named person idea, I realise that at this particular point in time a named person is probably a good idea... but we want really to move away from a named person and get into the situation where everybody knows and understands, and it just worries me a little bit as, if you get a named person it will always be, 'oh well that's so and so's job, and they're not in till tomorrow morning'"* (Participant from SYAG07).

A named person could therefore be a further reason for other partnership representatives not to take responsibility, for example if and when the designated person were not available. This approach might also lead to gaps in support for neurodivergent people, with people being absent, not being the 'right' person or not contributing as much as they should/could to a partnership relationship. Diffused responsibilities between agencies, and negotiating roles within partnership working, creates concerns over certain agencies failing to have any real involvement in multi-

agency working or more plausibly, leading to certain actors dominating proceedings (McCarthy, 2014). Where there is discussion about who the ‘experts’ are and who the most appropriate to support someone in a situation are, a whole partnership approach, whereby partners recognise their role capacities, expectations and limitations, is essential.

#### 5.4.8. Referrals and signposting

One way in which ‘passing the buck’ was described more productively by participants, and in a way that promoted the support of neurodivergent people, was through the use of referrals and signposting to other agencies. Using referrals and signposting to other support agencies was seen as a more appropriate way of passing autistic and neurodivergent people who the police came into contact with to more appropriately skilled agencies. Signposting was seen as an essential part of the police role (especially for PCSOs). For example, participants proposed that “*we can signpost people in lots of different directions*” (NYP01), “*we’ll put referrals in, and we’ll try and make sure that they’re safe*” (NYP09) and “*we do the signposting and the most important thing is just getting that person with the right people*” (NYP07). Referrals can be made from any agency, but McCarthy (2014) found in his research that the highest number of referrals came from enforcement agencies, like the police. Partner agency participants discussed the use of referrals and signposting much less, perhaps because they were the ones being referred to: “*we get lots of referrals from everywhere*” (NYLA04).

The most common type of referral, identified in the thematic analysis, used by the police was to social services. In North Yorkshire, these were specific social services referrals for vulnerable adults and children: “*usually, if we have an incident with like a*



*kid or an adult, we've got referral forms that we send off*" (NYP09). In South Yorkshire, participants only made reference to referrals for young people:

*"So, if they go to an incident that involves a young person who's vulnerable or at risk, they put what the police call a Gen 117 referral form in. Anybody from all of the other agencies, they put a separate form in, a council form, so that all comes into this referral process. So, we have police officers working in there and social workers, etc. It is a multi-agency hub, so they do their own triage in there"* (SYP04).

This participant also made reference to working in physical, face-to-face partnership with social services, as well as using triage referrals, by which a number of agencies assess the needs of the individual (Higgins, Hale and Chapman, 2016). Though interviewees perceived more cohesion and comprehensiveness of partnership working in South Yorkshire, this was not reflected in the call log data analysed in this research. In South Yorkshire, Gen 117 referrals were recorded, but they were only reported in 7.7% of 2014 incidents. In North Yorkshire, as stated by Participant NYP09, referrals were split into Youth and Adult referrals, with a total of 34.2% of 453 incidents having referrals as a result of police contact.

Though the lack of referrals identified in this research might simply be because of how they were recorded on police systems (McKenna *et al.*, 2015), difficulties were reported by participants about knowing where and who to signpost to. Participant NYP04 proposed that *"the majority of our police officers won't know, so what they will do is probably just do a generic social care referral"*. Others suggested that *"it's really difficult to keep all them signposts in your head"* (NYP01). This makes the process of referring and signposting to appropriate agencies challenging moving forward,

because there is no clear way of improving police practitioner's ability to remember what to do in the moment. Because of this, it appeared that officers were referring and signposting retrospectively, rather than in the moment: "*they [response officers] can't always ring us up to say 'do you know', it's afterwards they'll say 'we went to this, where do I need to signpost them to?'*" (SYP09). It is not necessarily a negative that police practitioners refer in retrospect, but it may decline the confidence that neurodivergent people have in the police during their interactions. McCarthy (2014) found that the factors behind decisions to refer were due to officers' limited capacity to effectively resolve cases that contained behaviours outside their expertise. Therefore, a further issue arises. Not only can officers not remember all of the necessary signposts, but they might not in fact know what the most appropriate referrals are either.

A number of suggestions were offered during interviews to resolve the issue of retrospective referrals. One was to have SPOCs within the police, who would have specific knowledge, including about signposting and referral:

*"It's making sure officers know it's signposted information rather than it be rammed down their throats, because they've got too much else going on... I would like to see very clear SPOCs across all districts, and I would like to see information feeding in and feeding out of clear allies in the community, and that neighbourhood policing, PCSOs, etc. are routinely visiting advocacy groups"* (NYP06).

As previously noted, there are problems with this approach as when this person is not in work, or when a neurodivergent person comes into contact with another officer (who is not a SPOC), the most appropriate solution may not be applied. Furthermore,

Participant NYP01 recommended a department within the organisation who could be called upon to ask about referrals: *“I think if we just had one tiny department or one person that we could say ‘right, we’ve got this person we’ve these problems, where are the best places to send them’, then I think we’d get the right help to the right people quicker”*. Though the idea of one person has already been negated, the possibility of a department or rotation of people that support with referrals and signposting might be more fruitful, and the prospect of this might involve more formalised partnership relationships being formulated.

#### 5.4.9. Improving police services through partnership working

In this research, partner agency participants highlighted how partnership working could improve the way the police work, not only with autistic people, but with other organisations: *“what can we do better”* (NYLA02). Local authorities continued to suggest that working in partnership with them improves police services when dealing with autistic people: *“we’re all here because we’re motivated to make things better and to improve things... they [partnership groups] want to make a difference and they want to change things for the better”* (NYLA02). One way that partner agencies felt they could support the police was through maintaining and ensuring the safety of neurodivergent people. ‘Safety’ was a significant theme identified in the thematic analysis. Participants in NYAG01 pointed out that increasingly the use of safety initiatives are through one-way partnerships that support autistic and disabled people who are *“at risk”* of police contact (Stanford, 2012):

*“So, then we got to know him [Participant NYP01] through this, so that made us quite more safer really”.*

*“People need to be able to speak up, that’s part of keeping safe”.*

*“We intend to do that around the strategy and we’re going to make keeping safe the first one [priority of the strategy]”.*

*“[Participant] NYP01’s project is really important to keep people safe and to use their card if they get stuck anywhere in the city”.*

To the members of this group, feeling safe in society was a priority for all citizens, including the neurodivergent, and they believed that the increased use of police partnerships could assist with this. At the time of writing, these safety initiatives were being completed and rolled-out slowly and on a very small-scale, therefore by working with advocacy groups in partnership, the police may help neurodivergent people to feel safer, which would subsequently improve relationships and create important alliances.

Within educational settings, practitioners suggested that there was limited police presence, with Participant NYED06 suggesting it was “rare” and a “novelty” when the police turned up. Therefore, educational providers felt that the police could assist in making autistic people feel safer by providing safe spaces and supporting with “personal safety and online safety” sessions in school (Participant NYED06). This contradicted with what Schools’ Officers in this research proposed; that they already did these safety sessions within special educational provisions. Yet, no matter whose experiences were more accurate, increasing this kind of support was considered a way that police-education partnerships could improve neurodivergent young people’s

overall interactions with the police. Alternatively, in local authorities, practitioners made more reference to safeguarding, than safety, and the way that the police already assist in doing this:

*“My staff always do the safeguarding when they come through. So, if a safeguarding [incident] comes through, they’ll get allocated to one of my social workers... If you’re dealing with an assessment of somebody’s needs and you’re trying to make them safe or trying to help them in any way, we need a full picture of what’s happening and who’s doing what and when... We don’t seem to get referrals in from the police unless it’s a safeguarding” (NYLA04).*

Though it was never clarified as to what different participants meant by ‘safety’ and ‘safeguarding’, the use of these terms might represent differing terminology with respect to the purpose of each organisation. For this reason, from this point in the thesis, the terms will be used interchangeably. For example, maintaining ‘safety’ is a core component of the policing mission (Loader, 2020), whereas ‘safeguarding’ might be the role in which partner agencies, such as social services, play in keeping people safe (Crawford and L’Hoiry, 2018). This is further supported in the literature on local authorities, with partnership initiatives such as the ‘Working Together’ agenda (2018) recognising safeguarding failures amongst statutory agencies and families. This initiative suggested that safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility and that all professionals and organisations who are in contact with vulnerable people (such as children and/or neurodivergent people) should be aware of potential safeguarding risks (Holt and Kelly, 2018). Though mainly the responsibility of social services, the police are often the first port of call for safeguarding concerns (as identified in the

quantitative analysis). Subsequently, these examples highlight the increased role of the police in supporting neurodivergent people's safety, with the assistance of partner agencies.

Another way in which partner agency participants suggested they could assist the police in improving services towards neurodivergent people, was through the development of innovative, individualised and needs-based ways of working. Interestingly, this theme was organically raised by police practitioners, prior to interviews with partner agencies. These methods of working were mainly suggested by advocacy groups and educational providers and were innovative in that North and South Yorkshire Police were yet to adopt agency practices (such as the following examples) into their own mainstream practice. For example, a participant from NYAG01 proposed the use of "*communication boards... that could be simply adapted for police officers to use*" to assist in communication with neurodivergent people. Researchers have been investigating the effects of communication boards and/or adaptive communication methods in policing for some time. Parson and Sherwood (2016) and more recently, Holloway (2020) developed and investigated the effects of an easy-read pack for custody officers to use with learning disabled and autistic people. In both studies, these packs used communication aids and widgets. However, these initiatives tend to be adopted only by the police organisation that the researchers worked with and therefore, are not yet adopted nation-wide. As such, they have tended to have minimal impact. Furthermore, a participant from SYAG07 illustrated a specific example about bespoke and individualised approaches used only by specific officers:

*"[Following being a victim of crime] I became what you call mute, and she did like puppet stuff with me, she literally was like trying to get me to talk and eventually I did*

*talk to her, and she told me to draw pictures of what I was feeling... They were like a man and a woman police officer, they used to come and be like, 'right, how are you feeling today' and they used to take in the car, and they'd take me for a coffee".*

Though not necessarily conventional approaches, the police in this example used creative, innovative and informal ways of supporting this autistic person, utilising specialist techniques originally used in other fields to support their communication of the particular incident they had been involved in. Educational providers discussed the bespoke approaches they put in place for autistic young people that could, but currently are not being replicated in police settings. For example, EHCPs are used to gain access to special educational provisions and services for neurodivergent people. These plans often have a full overview of the person, their needs and current support. For the police, access to these sorts of plans would provide greater understanding as to what an autistic person requires during an interaction. Participant NYED05 suggested that neurodivergent people need "*people to look at you individually*", and as such "*bespoke packages*" should be developed and used to support them in all contexts.

Approaches to policing have, in the past, been considered situation-oriented (Bowling *et al.*, 2019), engaging in activities that maintain public order, irrespective of social diversities and differences (Loader, 2020). However, partner agency participants in this research highlighted that promoting neurodiversity within the police relies on more needs-based approaches to supporting people. This involves focusing on the person involved in a situation and what they need in that moment, as opposed to responding to a situation that is unfolding and bringing it to a stop (Reiner, 2015). Needs-based ways of working are currently used within partner agency organisations,

such as social services and education, formally through the use of EHCPs. A number of participants, including Participant NYED06, suggested that all agencies that interact with neurodivergent people should be working towards a needs-based approach in order to provide a “*holistic approach*”. Another educational participant also highlighted the need for police partnerships to “*prioritise needs*” (NYED05), as opposed to simply reacting to a situation. Participant NYLA02 provided the following example of the importance of using needs-based approaches:

*“Their [neurodivergent people] needs aren’t evident to Joe Public or to services working with them. So, anybody who’s receiving somebody who’s neurodivergent won’t understand automatically there is a need and that they need to therefore take reasonable adjustments to adapt the way that they meet with the person or understanding the communication from the person... If somebody comes up to you in a wheelchair or with severe learning difficulties, it’s really clear they have needs and we can immediately go into ‘right, oh I need to do this, I need to do that’ and they draw on whatever training or understanding they have. Somebody who’s neurodivergent comes to you, you won’t know and in particular if I’m thinking about how autism may present, or somebody say with Tourette’s or something may present with challenging behaviour that potentially leaves people feeling in some way threatened or socially challenged and creates therefore particularly difficult situations”.*

As such, by introducing needs-based approaches, through the use of partnership working, police practitioners could support neurodivergent people more effectively, looking at their needs as opposed to continuing (failed) discussions as to whether a



question about diagnosis should be asked during the first interaction (Chown, 2009). As proposed by Participant NYLA04: *“it’s about what their need is rather than what their diagnosis is”*.

The final way participants suggested partnership working could contribute towards improving police services when supporting neurodivergent people was through the use of strategy-type groups or documents. These types of groups and documents have been discussed in a variety of forms in these findings, for example, the project conducted by Participant NYP01 and NYAG01. The most significant strategy document mentioned by partner agency participants in this research was the City of York Council’s ‘All Age Autism Strategy 2017-2021’. This was a document developed by the local authority and which made claims about the local authority working in partnership with health and social care organisations, education, the police, charities, people with autism and their families and carers. However, no one from North Yorkshire Police mentioned the strategy group, even when asked about partnership working. Like much of this section, the strategy document includes factors surrounding understanding, safety and working in partnership. The reason for its discussion is because the purpose of the strategy is ‘making a difference’ and has a whole section about ‘what could work better’, highlighting how partnership working can improve the support offered to neurodivergent people in the community. Local authority participants demonstrated a high proportion of their partnership work being as a result of strategy groups. In fact, in most North Yorkshire local authority interviews, their answer to every question was: *“we have a strategy, so the strategy group is making sure that strategy happens basically”* (NYLA03).

Partner agency participants expressed some disappointment in that these policy and procedure type documents, that are produced in relation to supporting

neurodivergent people, often are not done so in collaboration with neurodivergent people or the police. Two examples were provided by participants from NYAG01:

*“At the moment, York is writing this strategy which is a bit of a disappointment to us in that there is no self-advocacy that the Council pays for in this town, they’ve never supported us”.*

*“This strategy is going to the Health and Wellbeing Board. Now the Health and Wellbeing Board is mainly made up of professionals”.*

In both examples, the disappointment about these strategies was in regards to the lack of disabled and neurodivergent people being asked to collaborate, and that they do not actively encourage and empower self-advocacy groups, despite their best efforts to be involved. This being said, the other advocacy group interviewed in South Yorkshire reported having a positive experience of working with the police as part of an autism strategy group: *“he’s [Participant SYP02] just next week going to be joining Rotherham’s autism strategy meeting board as well”* (Participant from SYAG07), which may mean there are mixed perspectives about the effectiveness of strategy groups and documents.

In some interviews, participants demonstrated scepticism surrounding the effectiveness of strategy meetings, boards and documents. This was identified through the discourse analysis, specifically the language that participant’s used. For example, Participant SYTP08, whilst discussing a strategy board, said: *“he’s [member of the strategy board] supposed to be...”*. The use of the word *“supposed”* suggested that this person does not actually do what they intend to as part of the strategy group.

Therefore, though strategy discussions and documents seem to be a popular trend, particularly in local authorities as a way of partnership working, these might not be the best forms of practice to extend to the police when moving forward in supporting neurodivergent people. Strategy documents and groups should be part of a wider practice, by which the strategy is the centre of a larger and often mandatory decision-making process about best practices of the organisations involved in the partnership group. However, strategy groups or documents, as discussed in this research, came across as stand-alone pieces of work, that have little influence over practice when implemented alone. This conclusion fits with wider understandings of police organisational change and the need for change in both the field (the strategy group establishing changes in the way police partnerships support neurodivergent people) and the habitus (the transmission and use of such strategy to individual police and partner agency practitioners interacting with neurodivergent citizens).

#### 5.4.10. Conclusions

In this section, the nature of partnerships between the police, public sector and third sector organisations when supporting neurodivergent citizens in the community has been considered. The usual types of partner agencies the police work with were mentioned in police interviews, and some were interviewed as part of this research. Despite the lack of academic literature surrounding their involvement in partnerships, one of the key partners for both the police and public and voluntary sector organisations as identified in this research were families. Families were considered partners because they are most likely to know and understand an autistic person that might come into contact with the police and therefore be able to suitably advise those working with them. Moving forward, families of neurodivergent people may be able to

contribute more meaningfully to partnerships, than other statutory organisations. Furthermore, the importance of recognising that working relationships in partnerships come with both positive and negative aspects has been discussed, and that these experiences often complement each other.

The partnerships described, were identified as informal and ad-hoc relationships. The statutory requirement for partnership working introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) has meant that 'partnership' has become a catch-all term for all types of external inter- or multi-agency working (Dickinson and Glasby, 2010) or relationships. However, as was identified in this research, not all partnerships work in a formal, structured way (Dickinson and Glasby, 2010). This might suggest that mandatory partnership working, were it to be introduced in the policing of neurodiversity, would be ineffective and that people have to want to work in partnership, as opposed to being told they must. This was highlighted by local authority participants who proposed: "*partnerships work on goodwill and commitment at the end of the day and that's because people believe they can make a difference*" (NYLA02). From this, partnership working has to be built upon the benevolence of others, not only to provide their time, but also their dedication to change. The effects of being forced to work in partnership might be that local community safety priorities become less important or significant for the police (McCarthy, 2014). In promoting neurodiversity through police partnerships, methods of policing may continue to be reactive towards those demonstrating difference, but learning and knowledge shared from local authorities, educational providers, advocacy groups and families may increase inclusive practices (Bradford, 2014).

## 6. Discussion

The aim of this research was to go beyond what other researchers in the field of autism, vulnerability and policing have previously attempted. By introducing neurodiversity as a form of diversity into policing, and using the broad lens of CR in an attempt to establish the current 'reality' of neurodiversity within the police organisation, a new and different dialogue has been established. Though this research focused at times on a specific facet of neurodiversity (autism), and explored the kinds of interactions the police have with neurodivergent citizens, much like other research (Woodbury-Smith *et al.*, 2005; Modell and Cropp, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 2008; Beardon, 2008; Chown, 2009; Browning and Caulfield, 2011; Cheely *et al.*, 2012; Lerner *et al.*, 2012; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Helverschou *et al.*, 2015; Higgs and Carter, 2015; Maras, 2015; Eadens *et al.*, 2016; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Rava *et al.*, 2017; Tint *et al.*, 2017; Salerno and Schuller, 2019; Gibbs and Haas, 2020), the criticality of analysis and the challenges presented towards neurotypical ways of thinking and the language used in policy, procedure and practice develops an additional layer of nuance to an unexplored topic. The specific research questions explored were:

1. In what circumstances do the police engage with neurodivergent citizens in local communities?
2. How do relevant markers applied to cases on police databases appear to impact the policing of neurodivergent citizens?
3. How does the language used by the police, in relation to neurodivergent citizens and/or neurodiversity, appear to influence practice?

4. What is the nature of multi-agency relationships between the police, public sector and third sector organisations when supporting neurodivergent citizens in the community?

Conducting this research through the lens of CR meant that inequalities and power dynamics were explored in a way that goes beyond traditional positivist and interpretivist epistemologies. CR was an important theoretical addition which allowed for realist ontology and interpretive epistemology to be combined, in order to establish both the 'empirical' and 'actual', moving towards an understanding of the 'real' (Bygstad, Munkvold, and Volkoff, 2016). By combining these methods, data analysis allowed for the consideration of structural, cultural and situational circumstances in which experiences of neurodiversity, neurodivergent people and partnership working were portrayed and discussed by the police and partner agencies. In accordance with CR, this research used methods that align with positivist perspectives, such as the use of quantitative incident report data from two police force areas (North and South Yorkshire Police), in an attempt to establish the 'empirical' domain of the interactions between the police and neurodivergent people. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a variety of police practitioners ( $N = 19$ ) and practitioners from organisations that support neurodivergent people ( $N = 8$ ), which took place within an interpretivist framework, yet also attempted to uncover underlying inequalities of power through the exploration of language, through discourse analysis, moving towards the 'actual' and the 'real' domain.

Chapter 4 highlighted that the police most often came into contact with autistic people following calls relating to 'Public Safety' or crisis incidents. Police responses to these calls for service rarely involved partner agencies. Where they did, it was as a

result of the efforts of individual officers who sought out support or sent referrals to a particular partner agency. Conclusions from this research suggest partnership working arrangements supporting autistic citizens were ad hoc and carried out by key individuals, rather than being organisationally embedded into police practice. Seemingly due to the ad hoc relationships the police had with partner agencies, as identified in Chapter 5 (Section 5.4), they were only contacted when it was necessary for the police to obtain certain information or expertise. The idea of expertise was also called into question, whereby the language used by both police practitioners and partner agency organisations from both case study sites was predominately neurotypical, medicalised and conflated autism with mental health conditions, vulnerability and risk.

Overall, neurodiversity was not a concept frequently understood within North and South Yorkshire Police, despite police practitioners claiming to come into contact with neurodivergent people on a daily basis. However, from the results of this research, it is too difficult to tell whether the language used by the police and/or their associated partner agencies impacted their interactions. However, this research did establish that language impacted understandings (and misunderstandings) of autism and neurodiversity. This being said, police practitioners were keen to highlight their individual role, agency and discretion in developing initiatives to support neurodivergent citizens (as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2). There was also found to be little by way of strategic or organisational support for such initiatives or seldom any consideration of how to improve the involvement of partner agencies. Chapter 5 (Section 5.3) identified that the reason for this lack of strategic ambition might be because neurodiversity is not considered a policing priority (again, despite the actual and perceived frequency of contact identified in this research).

The final chapter of this thesis discusses important considerations for police organisations moving forward with neurodiversity and attempts to bring together a picture of where neurodiversity currently fits into police perceptions of their occupational role, their personal values and beliefs and their organisational culture. The exploration undertaken in this thesis means that consideration can finally be given to neurodiversity, including how it can be embedded into police organisational policy and practice, not just through initiatives developed by individuals or through tokenistic partnership working, but through profound structural, cultural and linguistic change. In this chapter, I begin by examining how perceptions of risk and vulnerability impact on police interactions with neurodivergent people. Within this, I explore police perceptions of inherent vulnerability and the risks of stereotyping autistic people as vulnerable, as well as whether autistic people are situationally vulnerable, and exposed to victimisation and exploitation. I then explore the inferences that can be drawn from the use of language in this research. The main implications of such language being used were police warning markers, which appeared to be named and used inappropriately, particularly when applied to incidents involving autistic people. This inappropriateness appears to be supported by the tendency to use medicalised language within legislation, and subsequently reproduced by police practitioners.

In the third section of this chapter, I discuss the almost non-existent role of police partnerships in supporting neurodivergent people, as well as highlighting the changes and shifts to the 'expert' narrative within such partnerships. Subsequently, I consider other influences on the implementation of neurodiversity in the police organisation, such as the role of police discretion, agency and individually developed initiatives. Within this section, I evaluate decision-making related to the treatment of autistic people during interactions with the police and the motivations of police practitioners



going above and beyond to develop neurodiversity initiatives. Consideration is then given to how these initiatives were adopted into mainstream practice, in spite of barriers from senior management. Finally, a discussion about the future of neurodiversity within policing is offered, centring around police reform and how this might be achieved, before the final conclusions of the thesis are presented.

## **6.1. Perceptions of risk and vulnerability and the realities of police interactions with neurodivergent people**

### **6.1.1. The impact of the vulnerability agenda on police interactions with neurodivergent people**

The first question in this research sought to determine the circumstances in which the police interact with neurodivergent people. The significance of this question was that a number of other researchers have attempted to establish the frequency with which the police engaged with autistic people (Chown, 2009; Browning and Caulfield, 2011; Cheely *et al.*, 2012; Lerner *et al.*, 2012; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Rava *et al.*, 2017; Tint *et al.*, 2017), but seldom investigated the types of interactions and reasons for them, as well as exploring the impact of police warning markers and the frequency and types of partnership involvement. In keeping with principles of CR, this research attempted to uncover the 'real', unseen and hidden knowledge, that can contain all that exists about a particular phenomenon (Bhaskar, 2008). Given the scale of this research, the full extent of the 'real' could not be established. However, by combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the 'empirical' domain has been explored in an innovative way, by establishing a greater understanding of the frequency and types of interactions the police have with autistic people, as well as the reasoning for them. Overwhelmingly, this research found vulnerability and risk to be

important aspects of understanding and conceptualising interactions with autistic people, with the majority of participants highlighting neurodivergent people as inherently vulnerable. 'Inherent' vulnerability refers to someone who is vulnerable due to an existing, permanent, essential or characteristic or attribute (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012), such as a person's gender, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Participants in this research were not wrong to consider autism and neurodivergence as 'inherent'. A number of neurodivergent advocates assert autism is inherent within a person, it cannot be cured, changed or corrected (Fenton and Krahn, 2007; Ortega, 2009; McGee, 2012). Instead, autism and other forms of neurodivergence are inherent 'ways of being' that are integral to personal identity, similar to the way other disabilities have been regarded inherent, such as being deaf or visually impaired (Fenton and Krahn, 2007). Therefore, participants in this research were not wrong to conceptualise autism and neurodivergence as 'inherent' differences.

The purpose of this research was to use principles of CR to critically examine the 'real' perspectives of police practitioners interacting with neurodivergent people. Theories put forward by Fenton and Krahn (2007) support the use of CR in responding to neurotypicality and detrimental perceptions of vulnerability, especially when neurotypical people discuss functionality and impairment. The impaired narrative often occurs in relation to autistic people and their inherent vulnerability. Inaccurate views of what constitutes functional human cognition, leads to the pathologising of certain neurotypes, such as being autistic (Fenton and Krahn, 2007; Beardon, 2017). It is therefore the police's perception of vulnerability, rather than the inherent-ness of neurodivergence that causes concern as a result of these research findings. Police perceptions of autism in this research were informed by stereotypes and preconceptions, yet neurodivergent people are not homogenous, and therefore cannot

be stereotyped. In the literature review chapter of this thesis, it was argued that vulnerability is often used to define groups of people who are stigmatised in society because of certain 'inherent' characteristics (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). This has led police practitioners to operate under a deficit model, whereby they view certain personal characteristics as vulnerabilities that need to be accommodated within their practices (Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012).

The increased focus on the vulnerability agenda within policing (Charman, 2017) may also have led the police to label and stereotype neurodivergent people as vulnerable, due to certain characteristics such as their perceived lack of social communication ability and occasionally reduced mental capacity (Beardon, 2017). This explanation is consistent with Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith's (2012), who propose that vulnerability is generally used as a labelling exercise, that can often be both helpful and detrimental to police practitioners, the former seemingly the case in this research. In 2018, the National Police Chiefs Council and the College of Policing introduced a national vulnerability agenda, a strategy, and later an ethos, that outlined those who should be associated with vulnerability. Primarily, the individuals to which these strategies refer are victims of crime, with an increased focus on victims who are children and young people, as well as victims of domestic abuse (National Police Chiefs Council, 2018; College of Policing, 2018). Another significant assertion of the vulnerability agenda is police involvement with people with mental ill health. Having analysed the PCC plans for each case study site, and given that national strategies feed into local policing, 'vulnerable' people in North Yorkshire were conceptualised as those with mental ill health, victims of hate crime, younger and older people (NYPCC Plan, 2017-2021), with South Yorkshire's plans considering young people (specifically those at risk of child sexual exploitation and abuse), repeat vulnerable victims, those

suffering from mental ill health and victims of domestic abuse (SYPCC Plan, 2017-2021). These core groups align neatly with the national vulnerability agenda criteria, highlighting the influence of these policies within local police forces, including those in the present research. Therefore, the significance of finding autistic children and young people to be one of the most frequent groups to have contact with the police (as per the analysis of call log data), as well as a conflation between practitioners understanding of autism as an association with mental health, is understandable in this context, though nonetheless problematic.

In response to the first research question, the police organisations in this research appeared to engage mostly with autistic young people and children. The quantitative findings highlighted that half of the incidents in South Yorkshire involved 10-17-year olds, followed by 18-25-year olds. Though, in comparison, North Yorkshire had larger proportions of incidents involving 26-35-year olds, the second most involved age group was 10-17-year olds. Much like in both the North and South Yorkshire PCC plans, and the national vulnerability agenda (National Police Chiefs Council, 2018; College of Policing, 2018), previous studies evaluating the conceptualisation of vulnerability consider 'age' a contributing factor, suggesting a person's age in relation to cognitive, intellectual or social 'impairments' adds layers of vulnerability, increasing the need for differential treatment (Luna, 2009; Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith, 2012). This understanding might suggest that an autistic child, who is perceived as lacking capacity in regards to both their autism and their age, may need differential treatment, compared to a neurotypical child and/or autistic adult. As part of their experiences of interacting with autistic people, police participants in this research associated the involvement of autistic children and young people as a potential trigger for vulnerability protocols. Therefore, where under-18s are not identified by the police as being autistic,

they may be additionally “*at risk*” of unnecessary criminalisation (Stanford, 2012), highlighting the importance of acknowledging these associations.

Furthermore, conflating autism and mental health has a number of implications for the conceptualisation and understanding of vulnerability. The conflation between autism and mental health was identified through discourse analysis as one of the biggest linguistic problems demonstrated by participants in this research. It is considered such a problem because many neurodiversity scholars emphasise within the literature that autism and mental health are two different concepts (McGee, 2012; Owren and Stenhammer, 2013; Milton, 2017). A staggering 16 out of 19 police participants discussed the role of mental health in their work, with 10 suggesting that autism and mental health were part of the same neurological ‘issue’. Despite the presence of the neurodiversity hub in North Yorkshire, six (out of 10 in the entire research) suggested mental health and autism were the same. A further explanation for the conflation of autism and mental ill health might be because autism is still included in the MHA (1983). In recognising my positionality in this research, a methodological reason for some conflation must also be taken into account, whereby if participants did not have enough knowledge about autism, I would ask them about their experiences working with people with mental ill health. Though this was only required in a handful of circumstances, it may have impacted some of the numerical results described in Chapter 5 (Section 5.1) and here. Ultimately, the confluations between autism and mental health might suggest that those participating in this research were less aware of the differences between mental health and neurodiversity, or simply that they were more influenced by the identification of characteristics as defined by the vulnerability agenda.

### 6.1.2. Neurodivergent people as situationally vulnerable

In addition to 'inherent' vulnerability, a considerable number of participants suggested that autistic and/or neurodivergent people are not vulnerable *because* of their difference, but in the way others treat them *due* to their difference. Police practitioners in this research suggested that situational vulnerability meant autistic people were deliberately sought out to be exploited by others. Sometimes, the circumstances in which autistic people find themselves lead them to police interactions (Salseda *et al.*, 2011). In this research, the primary involvement with autistic people was a 'Public Safety' incident, closely followed in North Yorkshire by 'ASB and Disorder' and in South Yorkshire by 'Violence'. Though the details of these circumstances were not gathered within the results, it could be suggested that a number of these interactions most likely involved or were the result of other people, rather than just the autistic person themselves. In fact, within these aggregated categories there was the potential for 'violence against person', 'nuisance neighbour', 'harassment', 'missing person', 'threatening behaviour'. In accordance with Tidbury (2014), who wrote for the National Autistic Society, the typical signs of exploitation include being involved with gangs (and getting into fights), being used as an unlikely scapegoat on a regular basis, going missing and being involved in petty crime. This is supported by this research whereby, particularly in South Yorkshire, there were a considerable amount of autistic people as being suspected perpetrators of crime, as well as victims, within the same interaction. Missing people also commonly featured. Though this supports the abundance of research that suggests a link between autism and criminality (for example Woodbury-Smith *et al.*, 2005; Allen *et al.*, 2008; Freckelton and List, 2009; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Helverschou *et al.*, 2015), it also

suggests the need to consider autistic people as victims of exploitation, not just suspects, during their interactions with the police.

This process was described by one participant as a “*conveyor belt of risk*”. The “*conveyor belt of risk*” was used as a metaphor to illustrate how autistic people are passed from the police to other organisations, with the intention of supporting them, but in the process of doing so, opening them up to as much risk as they were when they first became involved with the police. When this happens, the police are called to assist once again, and the conveyor belt loops around to the start. Therefore, the conveyor belt contributes to the circumstances which render autistic people more likely to be perceived as vulnerable. One finding that demonstrates the conveyor belt was the number of repeat callers. Though, this was only identified by two interviewees, the South Yorkshire Police data showed that 37.39% of all callers phoning about an autistic person or were an autistic person were repeat callers. In North Yorkshire, 48.20% of all incidents involved repeat callers. When repeat callers were mentioned, a lack of service provision for an autistic person was noted as at the root of their call. These findings not only support the idea of a ‘conveyor belt’, but highlight the need for further progress in determining whether the neurodivergent person involved in an incident is “*at risk*” or vulnerable (Stanford, 2012), or simply in need of additional support, which is potentially why the police are continually called for help and assistance. The overarching question remains: can the conveyor belt be stopped, and if so, how? If it cannot be stopped, will neurodivergent people always be “*at risk*” of continuously being involved in police interactions?

Another perspective that should be taken into account with regards to situationally influenced forms of vulnerability is police suspicion. Police participants often made reference to autistic behaviour as ‘odd’ or ‘strange’, yet there was no direct inference

to them being suspicious of autistic people because of this, though in some cases it was implied. Instead, it was the transference of suspicion from the public's perception of autistic behaviour, which made the autistic person more "at risk" of police involvement (Stanford, 2012). This finding was unexpected and somewhat surprising based on other accounts of police interactions with autistic people (Modell and Cropp, 2007; Chown, 2009; Eadens *et al.*, 2016; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Railey *et al.*, 2020), which often focus only on police perspectives. The idea of transference of suspicion to police practice, via calls for service, is an original contribution of this thesis and disputes what is currently known about police suspicion. As it is presented by Bowling *et al.* (2019), 'the job' breeds an attitude of constant suspicion amongst police practitioners that cannot be switched off. However, participants in this research identified that suspicion was situation-dependent and influenced by information received from the public, others present and of course the person in front of them. Since the police may see themselves as having a duty to listen and act on the calls and concerns of the public, transference of neurotypical understandings of behaviour into police practices may continue to be detrimental to neurodivergent citizens. It is therefore important for police officers to recognise the importance of situational vulnerability, and not to become reliant on their perception of inherent vulnerability, given the dangers of labelling and stereotyping autistic people.

## **6.2. The influence of police warning markers and neurotypical language**

### **6.2.1. The impact of police warning markers during interactions with neurodivergent people**

The present research was designed to explore police warning markers used in police records related to cases involving autistic people. This analysis, along with the



methods used (i.e. analysis of 999/101 call log data), is an original contribution to the field, which has primarily focused on surveys, interviews and systematic reviews. Informed by principles of CR, this analysis provides a starting point for research investigating the significance of language, as used in practice with neurodivergent people. At the start of this research, it was hypothesised that medicalised language would impact the way predominately neurotypical police officers interact with and understand the differences portrayed by neurodivergent people. Though the analysis of police warning markers could not identify whether there was a direct impact on the interactions between police and autistic people, certain inferences could be made. In particular, the research showed that, by not having appropriate markers (i.e. those that use non-medicalised terminology), police perspectives of autism and neurodiversity remain situated within the medical model of disability. Despite very little being found in academic literature regarding the use of police warning markers, there are several possible explanations for the results of this research, which can be drawn from both theoretical perspectives within academic literature and day-to-day operational police practices. The first relates to the differences in the amount of warning markers applied to particular cases. Analysis found that in South Yorkshire, only 23.80% of 2014 incidents had warning markers associated with them. However, in North Yorkshire, over half of the 453 reported incidents (58.50%) had police warning markers applied, which may simply be a reflection of the differences in recording practices between each force area studied in this research.

One unsurprising finding was the lack of appropriate markers available to be used for incidents involving autistic people. These findings are 'unsurprising' because there was some expectation that the language used by the police would be predominately neurotypical (Beardon, 2017). This research found that 'autism', or any neurodivergent

condition, did not have a dedicated marker in either force area. In South Yorkshire, incidents that involved a neurodivergent person were marked as the person having an 'Ailment' and in North Yorkshire, recorded as a person having a 'Mental Disorder'. Both of these terms support the findings of further discourse analysis, where 15 out of 19 participants (including all 10 participants in North Yorkshire) used medicalised language to discuss autism, of which 'Ailment' and 'Disorder' would be classed. This finding is significant for practitioners in North Yorkshire Police, because the terms of reference of their neurodiversity hub encouraged neurodiverse language (or at the very least, language promoted by the social model of disability). The use of this medicalised language in police warning markers might suggest that medical model understandings of neurodivergence are entrenched within police call handling and recording practices. Prior studies have noted the significance and prevalence of language such as 'disorder', which implies there is something deficient about a person and their way of thinking and behaving (Ortega, 1999; Baker, 2006; Jurecic, 2007; Milton, 2017; Beardon, 2017). Considered alongside medicalised views of disability and difference, terms such as 'disorder' and 'ailment' imply there is something 'wrong' with a person (Silberman, 2010). The use of warning markers, such as those described in this research, might mean that these misconceptions are present *before* the police even arrive on the scene of the incident.

In addition to 'Mental Disorder' and 'Ailment' markers, there were also a significant amount of 'Mental Health' markers applied to cases involving autistic people. As discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the conflation of autism and mental health may have a number of implications for the policing of neurodiversity, which is supported by 'Mental Health' warning markers being used in cases involving autistic people. As highlighted by Harrè and Bhaskar (2001), language is used to construct reality and,

therefore, given the language used to discuss autism and mental health, language may have a likely impact on police practices. When attending incidents involving autistic people categorised in this way, the police may treat them the same way as someone with poor mental health. Not only might this lead to the police referring autistic people for support that is more appropriate for people with mental health conditions, but it might also lead to legal procedures being activated, such as the use of arrest and/or sectioning under s136. The police appeared also to conflate autism and mental health because their legal frames of reference support these forms of action, such as the linguistic influence of “Mental Health” markers, and the ability to section under s136 of the MHA. As autism is acknowledged under the MHA (1983), autistic people can be arrested and sectioned under s136, purely as a result of their autism and no other mental health ‘condition’, meaning that this procedure, legally-speaking, is not incorrect. It could, however, be considered morally wrong because, as it is understood within context of the neurodiversity movement, autism is not a mental health ‘condition’ (McGee, 2012; Owren and Stenhammer, 2013; Milton, 2017).

#### 6.2.2. The possible influences of medicalised language used by the police

The third question in this research attempted to explore the language used by the police and how this impacted policing practices and procedures. The purpose of examining language sits within the Critical Realist approach; the methodology which underpinned this research. CR acknowledges that language reproduces social positioning, power and structure and reinforces hegemonic perspectives of culture (Lawless and Chen, 2018). Therefore, this research sought to support the concerns of the neurodiversity movement, by identifying the ways language can further disable people, and subsequently attempt to change these narratives (Woods, 2017). The

influence of partner agency practitioners' use of language was also explored, adding a further layer of understanding in regards to how neurodiverse language is replicated and reinforced throughout police partnerships. It is somewhat surprising that only a third of police participants in South Yorkshire and half in North Yorkshire had any understanding of what neurodiversity was (in accordance with literature and materials written on the subject), given that the majority of participants volunteered to take part in the research and it was clearly explained to them that the research was about neurodiversity. It is further concerning that a seemingly high proportion of participants claimed to be interacting with autistic people as part of their daily roles and responsibilities (15 out of 19 participants). However, almost all of the partner agency participants that took part in this research had some understanding of what neurodiversity was in the first instance (notably because they support neurodivergent people on a daily basis). The most common reference to neurodiversity in both police and partner agency participant interviews was to 'autism'. That being said, much of participant's knowledge of autism was formed by stereotypes and assumptions that were subsequently based on their personal experiences (either direct or vicarious) with autistic people. However, the most significant element of this finding in relation to language, and the most important for police practice moving forward, was that reported stereotypes and assumptions largely supported medicalised understandings of autism (Baker, 2006).

The medical model of disability and difference suggests autism and other neurodivergent conditions are deficits, aspects of a person that need to be fixed or cured (Beardon, 2017). All police practitioners from North Yorkshire used such medicalised language in their interviews, compared to South Yorkshire. This finding was unexpected, as North Yorkshire Police were initially involved in the research

because of their neurodiversity hub, presuming that this would increase their knowledge and experience of neurodiversity. This worryingly suggests that medicalised assumptions may remain the dominant way of working and thinking within the hub and the wider police force. One of many participants in North Yorkshire used the term “*deficiency*”, a term rightly frowned upon in neurodiverse communities for going against all that the neurodiversity movement stands for (Sinclair, 1993; Glannon, 2007; Jurecic, 2007; Ortega, 2009; McGee, 2012; Woods, 2017). Other participants more widely discussed autism as a ‘disorder’. As situated within literature about autism and other neurological differences, the term ‘disorder’ is still frequently used (Shakespeare, 1996; McWade, Milton and Beresford, 2015; Milton, 2017). This is further perpetuated by autism being considered a ‘disorder’ under the MHA (1983). Being aware that the majority of police and partner agency practitioners who took part in this research used medicalised language suggests their perspectives of autistic and neurodivergent people are influenced by their own neurotypicality.

Though medicalised language was used by almost every police participant, other types of participants did show more awareness of the social model of disability and difference, with some using more neurodiverse language, such as describing differences in brain-wiring (Baker, 2006), as well as demonstrating that neurotypical environments have as much impact on neurodivergent people, as their ‘condition’ does (Beardon, 2017). At times, this type of language was used frequently, however interchangeably with medicalised language, almost defeating the purpose of using such neurodiverse language in the first place. The findings of this research confirm what Woods (2017) argues; that the social model of disability has failed to be fully implemented for all impairment labels, only applying to those with physical disabilities. To demonstrate, some participants described autism as a “*disability*”, which again is

not strictly speaking incorrect, but it did not seem to mitigate the further use of medical model language, where autism was seen as a 'condition' that disabled the person in more ways than it made them able and accepted. A move towards accepting autism/neurodivergent conditions as differences (as according to the neurodiversity/social model of difference/disability) rather than disabilities and disorders (as according to the medical model perspective) has been proposed by researchers, such as Davidson (2008), to be constructed through changes in language. In accordance with Chan's (1997) analysis of police reform, what can be determined from this research is that there is a linguistic interaction between the cultural 'habitus', and to some extent the structural 'field'. Where police warning markers and legal/procedural legislature are dominated by medicalised language, understandings of neurodiversity amongst police practitioners will continue to reinforce neurotypicality in the police organisation.

### **6.3. The ad-hoc nature of partnership working and the role of 'experts'**

#### **6.3.1. The nature of multi-agency partnership working**

In respect of the final research question proposed in this thesis, the nature of multi-agency partnership working in promoting neurodiversity was found to be informal, ad-hoc and outcome-related. In fact, it was questionable whether these relationships could be considered partnerships at all. In attempting to establish "*what actually happens*" (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017, p. 30), and as such, accessing the 'real' domain, this research question explored the apparent gap in literature regarding what happens between the police and partner agencies when an autistic person becomes involved. As there is seldom any literature that explores the role of police partnerships in supporting neurodivergent people, and in keeping with the broad realist

epistemological lens used to analyse this research, the findings of this thesis have the potential to set the tone for future research considering partnership working and neurodiversity. Prior research has noted the importance of partnership working, focusing primarily on the formal relationships between organisations. However, despite the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) stating a legal obligation for police organisations to work in partnership with local authorities and other statutory agencies in community safety partnerships, in this research it was found that the police did not engage with organisations they did not statutorily have to work in partnership with, such as charities and/or third-party agencies. That being said, it is important to note that ad-hoc or fleeting relationships are not an inferior way of working with partner agencies, often being described by Allen, Karanasios and Norman (2014) as necessary for finding short-term solutions to particular issues. However, given that neurodivergence is not an 'issue', with a 'short-term' solution, it remains undetermined whether such fleeting partnership relationships are beneficial for supporting autistic people who have contact with the police. Though it might have been expected for South Yorkshire Police to have had more ad-hoc informal relationships with external agencies due to their lack of work surrounding neurodiversity, North Yorkshire Police also seemed to work in informal ways, despite their neurodiversity hub. However, it was acknowledged that North Yorkshire Police appeared to be taking steps towards more formalised partnership working (i.e. through developing terms of reference for the hub, which state a requirement to do so).

The main explanation for the limited partnership relationships found by this research is that the police appear to only use multi-agency partnership working to gain information about neurodivergent people. In some respects, this finding makes sense; the police are more likely to gain appropriate information required about a person's

neurodivergence from agencies who have more frequent contact with them. This supports McCarthy's (2014) research, which suggests that information relating to people is the most sought after aspect of partnership working, with the most useful information often coming from informal interactions, such as conversations before and after meetings. However, an implication of these relationships between the police and partner agencies who support neurodivergent people is that they become unidirectional, with the police gaining information about a person, but not necessarily returning the same informational favour i.e. the outcomes of an interaction. This further supports the argument that the police are selective about the types of partnership work they engage with (Higgins, Hale and Chapman, 2016). Another explanation for the ad-hoc, fleeting relationships between the police and partner agencies surrounded the urgency of finding appropriate support for an autistic person. This usually meant the police submitting referrals to partner agencies.

Though the results of the quantitative analysis should be interpreted with caution, because many of the referral details were not included in the call log records, the use of referrals and subsequent 'passing of the buck' were also identified in the qualitative exploration. As has been reported in previous literature (for example Meyer and Mazerolle, 2013; Lamin and Teboh, 2016; McKenna *et al.*, 2018), using referrals and signposting has been seen as a way for police practitioners to pass autistic and neurodivergent people to more appropriately skilled agencies. This is supported by McCarthy and O'Neill (2014) who suggest that, although the police are often the first port of call in an emergency, they are not always the best equipped to support with a particular situation. These results are likely related to the importance of finding the



'right' person<sup>15</sup>/agency to deal with a situation. Informal, ad-hoc relationships, information sharing protocols and the rapid use of referrals might indicate a shift from the police seeing themselves as the proactive do-ers (Crawford and Cunningham, 2015), towards a service that provide a needs-based approach to supporting neurodivergent people, whereby part of their role is to identify appropriate support, which is deemed more important than the tangibility and success of the partnership itself.

Without even being aware, partner agency participants in this research attempted to answer police practitioners' concerns about the police being able to find the 'right' person. One suggestion was the use of a 'named' person or a point of contact within the police, someone who would build partnership relations and be a champion for all neurodiversity-related matters. Furthermore, some police practitioners mentioned the role of SPOCs, who would have dedicated knowledge. This finding is supported by the actions of the National Police Autism Association, who have a representative in every police force in England and Wales (including the British Transport Police, Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland). Though presented as a seemingly reasonable solution to the 'right' person narrative, there are a number of issues with this approach. Participants in this research highlighted that the use of a named person within a partnership might lead to further problems with 'passing the buck', on behalf of the one person representing the entire organisation. A named person could also lead to others not taking responsibility, if the designated person

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<sup>15</sup> By 'right', police participants in this research suggested they were attempting to identify the most appropriate person or agency to support a neurodivergent person.

were not available. Though this was found to be the case in this research, there is literature from the field of police partnerships that disagrees with this perspective. For example, McCarthy and O’Neil (2014) identify that having a nominated representative within a partnership is a more effective way of building up strong professional relationships, allowing for identities and roles to be established. For neurodivergent people however, ‘passing the buck’ may lead to gaps in support, with nominated people being absent, off-work or simply not contributing as much as they should/could to a particular partnership relationship. Indeed, this may enable the “*conveyor belt of risk*” described in previous sections.

#### 6.3.2. Evaluating the ‘expert’ narrative within partnership working

The ‘right’ person was often associated with considerations about who was the ‘expert’, with police practitioners regarding themselves the least suited agency to support neurodivergent people due to their inexperience and lack of expertise. An initial assumption of this research was that partnerships with specialists in neurodiversity would be of great importance to police interactions with autistic people. Yet, the scoping study informing the present research, the review of academic literature and the overall findings of the research identified that organisations who support neurodivergent people have a limited role in police partnerships. Despite one of the main themes of this research surrounding the role of ‘experts’ during police interactions with autistic people, there are still many unanswered questions about who is an ‘expert’. Subsequently, appropriately named partner agencies (i.e. social services) were regarded by police practitioners as the experts in neurodiversity and autism. However, partner agency practitioners (including those from social services) did not regard themselves as experts either. Given how participant’s made sense of

their role as experts, there is room for further discussion to determine who the experts in promoting neurodiversity within police organisations actually are.

As police practitioners did not consider themselves experts, they instead relied on more informal forms of knowledge gleaned 'on the job' or in their lives outside the police. For example, participants reported a number of personal connections to autistic people (as family members or close family friends). These police practitioners suggested that, because their family member or friend was autistic, they had satisfactory knowledge to inform their practice with all autistic citizens. This is a significant finding when considering the development of the 'expert' narrative. As famously suggested by Stephen Shore, "*once you meet one person who is autistic, you have only met one person who is autistic*", and therefore, basing their practice on autistic people they know personally could impact on police interactions - positively or negatively. In reviewing the literature, very little was found regarding the use of experience as 'expertise'. Much like in this research, participants in Fleming and Rhodes' (2018) research suggested that different forms of knowledge are evaluated through the lens of an officer's own experience. This type of knowledge was often preferred by colleagues, and was shared through the process of stories, with Fleming and Rhodes (2018) referring to this as 'phoning a friend', when particular expertise was required. As such, it could be beneficial for the police organisation to embrace the more informal knowledge of police officers, with this research identifying that there are possibly already neurodiversity 'experts' within the police organisation, even if they do not know it yet.

However there remains speculation as to how 'experience' is transferred to other police practitioners, who may have little or no experience, in practice. Fleming and Rhodes (2018) suggest that experience is implicit, personal knowledge, and therefore

in sharing these experiences, they must somehow become explicit forms of learning. This is a challenge where experience is considered 'conservative' (Fleming and Rhodes, 2018), whereby people with whom the knowledge is being shared may be reluctant to give up pre-existing beliefs and practices about a certain knowledge area, without having direct experiences themselves. Some participants in this research were more aware of their lack of knowledge and highlighted the need to improve, not through training or subsequently hearing about other people's experiences, but through personally getting to know autistic/disabled people. Others felt reliant on the need for more training in this field. If ways of working that promote neurodiversity are to be embedded within policing, there is a need to encourage partnership working within the police, with "*culture carriers*" (Paoline and Terrill, 2014, p. 22), those who have a personal connections to neurodiversity (possibly being neurodivergent themselves) supporting and helping others to develop knowledge of its importance in police work.

Families and autistic people were regarded by both the police and partner agency practitioners as the true experts, and in some cases, as partners. The autistic person and their families being acknowledged as experts makes sense to some extent, given the individual nature of neurodivergence, which has been acknowledged in a wide range of literature (for example Milton and Bracher, 2013; Krcek, 2013; Milton, 2014; McNeilly, Macdonald and Kelly, 2016; Helverschou *et al.*, 2017; Fletcher-Watson *et al.*, 2018). However, what is interesting about these results is that police practitioners considered autistic people and their families as actual partners, as opposed to simply people present at an incident, which is not yet identified within wider police partnership literature. Furthermore, in contrast to the police, it was partner agency practitioners who did not recognise the autistic person and their family as a direct partner, though

they did recognise that autistic people and their families were the experts when it came to support. This finding points to literature from the fields of education, medicine and social services. For example, Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008 p. 638) highlight the “unquestionable ideal” of parent-professional partnerships. They further identify that, although families of autistic people have expressed positive experiences, professionals continue to adopt the exclusive position of ‘expert’, meaning that partnerships continue to be incongruent between families and professionals (Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2008). That being said, there is seldom any research which evaluates the role of the autistic person and their family in partnership with the police. Therefore, further research could attempt to identify the way autistic people and their families can become more proactive within partnership relationships, transferring their expertise to the police during interactions.

#### **6.4. The role of police discretion, agency and individual initiatives**

##### **6.4.1. Individual ability to influence neurodiversity practice and change police culture**

Given police participants personal connections to neurodiversity, it is no surprise that the theme of human agency and discretion arose during research interviews. Though not explicitly linked to a research question, the role of human agency and discretion had significant implications for neurodiversity in policing. As outlined in the literature review chapter, discretion has been conceptualised sociologically throughout this research, meaning human agency has been understood to have a note-worthy impact in decision-making processes (Skinns, 2019). In opposition to legal definitions of discretion, that officers are guided by legislative rules as whether to enforce the law or not, this research highlighted that police discretion/agency more so referenced the action (or inaction) police practitioners took during interactions with neurodivergent

people, along with responses to neurodiversity within the police organisation. This supports the definition of discretion proposed by Skinns (2019), whereby police practitioners choose to act within their authorised capacity, their actions being shaped by legal and administrative rules, yet in accordance with the cultural and social structures of the wider police organisation. At the outset of this research, discretion was considered to be a positive aspect of policing, as it allows officers to be guided by the law, whilst exercising choice in the field, which is considered extremely context-dependent and circumstance-situated (Schulenberg, 2015). When reflecting on the principles of CR, discretion and human agency also highlights an interesting conflict surrounding the power and status of police officers; though police officers themselves wish to be regarded as human beings, with their own ability to make decisions depending on the context and circumstances, their interactions with marginalised communities, such as neurodivergent people are likely to be perceived differently because of their uniform, their awarded powers, and differential occupational status within society (Mogensen and Mason, 2015).

With this in mind, discretion and the role of human agency was discussed in two ways in this research. Firstly, participants highlighted the way in which their decision-making influenced their treatment of autistic people, and how this was impacted by the expectations of their role. As such, discretion/agency allowed them to exercise a level of autonomy during encounters, meaning they could act in 'appropriate' or 'needs-based' ways, as opposed to 'professional' ways, which were regarded as inflexible and influenced by standardised policy and procedure. Furthermore, discretion and agency also referred to how people went above and beyond what might be expected of them as a member of the police organisation. In essence, discretion/agency enabled a sense of freedom for police practitioners to develop neurodiversity initiatives within

the organisation. For example, in North Yorkshire, both the neurodiversity hub, and the scheme discussed by Participant NYP01, were set up by an individual person, as opposed to the organisation. Applying this understanding to South Yorkshire Police, as well as other police forces in the UK, their lack of neurodiversity work might simply be because their organisations have not yet had an individual come forward to set up something similar. This emphasises the lack of strategic ambition surrounding neurodiversity in policing, whereby neurodivergent practices appear to be heavily motivated by an individual's use of agency and their authorised ability to influence police structures and culture(s) within the police organisation (Skinns, 2019).

The second way discretion/agency was presented in this research was through participants either understanding autism to be no reason to act in a discretionary way and therefore, believing autistic people should not be treated any differently to a neurotypical member of the public or alternatively that autism was considered a reason for discretion and therefore, autistic people were to be treated differently, as a result. In this respect, the police officer could be seen to be asserting their power and status, given their occupational standing in society. Wherever the practitioner positioned themselves between this dichotomy, depended on their personal assumptions and experiences, further highlighting the role of agency in decision-making processes. However, police understandings often had nothing to do with whether the autistic person was breaking the law or not, but instead their discretion was used to equalise the impact of policing on autistic people, particularly if they identified something was 'different' about the person. Analysing this from a theoretical perspective is complex. Though the neurodiversity movement would argue that neurodivergent people should not be treated differently to neurotypical people (Bishop, 2008; Maras and Bowler, 2010; Salseda *et al.*, 2011; Cheely *et al.*, 2011; Fisher, Moskowitz and Hodapp, 2013;

King and Murphy, 2014; Buchanan, 2015; Archer, 2015; Maras *et al.*, 2018), this should only be when there is a level playing field in the first place (Skinns, 2019).

Whilst respecting that autistic people differ neurologically from neurotypical people, this does not often impact their culpability in being involved with the police (Gendle and Woodhams, 2005; Woodbury-Smith *et al.*, 2005; Mouridsen, 2012; Lerner *et al.*, 2012; Buon *et al.*, 2013; Raggi *et al.*, 2013; King and Murphy, 2014; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014). However, what is necessary to recognise is that autistic people are constantly impacted by neurotypical environments and consequently, this element of their difference must always be accommodated (Beardon, 2017). Thus, how some participants have discussed their use of discretion in this research creates a problematic narrative, one which fails to recognise structural disadvantage and difference (however, this only applies to participants who felt autistic people did not need differential treatment). This reflection is particularly important when considering the methodological framework of this research, as it suggests that the impact of police practices contribute to a power dynamic between neurotypical and neurodivergent people, which may subsequently lead to the kind of negative interactions reported in previous research (Allen *et al.*, 2008; Beardon, 2008; Higgs and Carter, 2015; Maras, 2015; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Salerno and Schuller, 2019; Gibbs and Haas, 2020). Ultimately, it is not about treating everyone the same, rather, it is about ensuring the impact of their interaction with the police is the same. In some ways, it is encouraging to compare this finding with the analysis of discretion presented by Skinns (2019), whereby the uneven quality of discretion may be dangerous during interactions, which can be seen with neurodivergent people, who may be behaving outside of the neurotypical norm, and henceforth treated differently for better, or worse. It could be argued then that, as opposed to viewing autistic behaviour as a dichotomy (something



to act in a discretionary manner towards or not), the value of discretion potentially rests on whether the police have the ability to equalise the impact of their own actions on autistic people.

Another way in which discretion and agency was demonstrated in this research was by how police practitioners went above and beyond what might be expected of them within their role. It was proposed in the literature review of this thesis that all people have the ability to reject and shape cultural values, both on an organisational level, but also within different occupational roles. Participants described having a “*why*”, which meant they had a greater desire to learn and change in accordance to working with autistic people. This desire might obviously be needed to proceed with promoting neurodiversity within the police force, with participants suggesting that without the “*why*”, there would be little drive to utilise their individual agency in supporting neurodivergent people or practices. This finding is supported by Bacon (2014) who proposes that police officers are not institutionalised clones, they are a heterogenous group of people who carry with them a history of learning and socialisation of values, beliefs and personal ideologies that affect their interpretation of their role, adjusting to the demands of police work accordingly. This adds significance to the finding of personal experience, demonstrating how this can impact both the interaction with and the outcome of encounters with neurodivergent people.

Though the need for a “*why*” might be because of the self-selecting sample used in this research, who may have had a pre-existing interest in neurodiversity/autism, it does raise a number of questions regarding the promotion of neurodiversity and the transmission of individual initiatives to the rest of the police organisation. This research has identified that without a reason to do so, police practitioners might not be willing to adopt individual initiatives, not to mention develop and implement them themselves.

Without this, there appears to be challenges in getting bottom-up initiatives, developed by individuals, adopted into top-down cultural and structural change (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983). This is echoed in Skogan's (2008, p. 26) experience, whereby the "*fundamental principles*" of initiatives are often challenging to translate throughout police organisations. Skogan (2008, p. 29) goes on to highlight the importance of initiatives having tangibility, an ability to be held to account and "*measure what matters*", which aligns with what was found in this research in regard to managerialist influence on the implementation of neurodiversity. Priority-setting, resourcing and managerialist pressures were all recognised as barriers to adopting individualised initiatives into mainstream ways of working. The main concern identified is that neurodiversity was not considered amongst participants as a police priority. Policing priorities, set at a national level by the government and at local levels by PCCs, contribute to narratives of managerialism within police organisations. As proposed by Jones and Lister (2019, p. 562), the financial resourcing of police priorities is determined by the demonstration of "*continuous improvements*", usually in regards to the protection of vulnerable groups. Because of this, there has been encouragement of police practitioners to use autonomy and discretion (Fleming and Lafferty, 2000) to take individual responsibility for their actions (Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001), which may explain the reason for this finding in the current research, but makes suggestions for moving neurodiversity initiatives forward no less challenging.

As has been discussed, discretion is not necessarily a detrimental characteristic of police practice, and it has been suggested within academic literature that enforcing compulsory practice would not entirely halt discretionary actions (Skinns, 2019). However, it could be argued that the introduction of policy, guidance and evidence-informed practices could overcome complexities faced by the use of discretion within

policing. Both within police-oriented and neurodiversity literature, training, as a way of maintaining standardised practice, is a repeatedly common theme (Chown, 2009; Woodbury-Smith and Dein, 2014; Eadens *et al.*, 2016; Crane *et al.*, 2016; Hepworth, 2017; Railey *et al.*, 2020; Holloway, 2020; Gibbs and Haas, 2020). That being said, despite North Yorkshire's neurodiversity hub, none of the participants recalled having any autism-specific training, not to mention anything to do with neurodiversity. Only a handful of participants in South Yorkshire reported having any training related to autism but noted that this was many years ago. Though many researchers have suggested that the way forward in this field is through the implementation of training (Beardon, Chown and Cossburn, 2018; Hepworth, 2017; Crane *et al.*, 2016), the present research suggests that training would be ineffective because participants did not want training to be forced upon them. In this sense, not all participants had a reason, or a "*why*", to know more about autism and/or neurodiversity, in the first instance.

An alternative to providing more training was provided by one participant, who flipped the 'expert' narrative around, stating that: "*We can go to these people [autistic people] and say right you're the expert, how can you help me help this person*". This not only alleviates time, cost and resource pressures from police organisations, but also allows for discretion and agency to take a role in interactions with neurodivergent people, whereby often the most appropriate support is that suggested by the neurodivergent person themselves. As such, rather than providing training about autism and/or neurodiversity, perhaps all that is required is for officers to ask neurodivergent people how best to support them during an interaction. However, where people do not wish to disclose, or are unable to communicate the best methods of supporting themselves, another consideration is to implement practical training

which must be provided by neurodivergent people, who are most likely to be aware of the kind of support that may be of benefit. This is something that does not currently exist within current police autism training (where provided) in accordance with a Freedom of Information request conducted by Chown, Beardon and Cossburn (2018), which showed only 5 of the 43 UK forces involved their local autism organisations and/or autistic people in developing and/or providing their training (only 16 of which had any autism-specific training in the first place).

#### 6.4.2. The role of management and the curtailment of discretion

Additionally to the contribution of knowledge surrounding discretion, agency and neurodiversity practices, management appeared to have a significant influence on whether individual practitioners used their discretion to engage with neurodivergent people in the community. This is unsurprising given the well-documented assumption that managers are the “*transmission belt*” throughout the police organisation, passing knowledge and information from senior management to the rank-and-file, and vice versa (Skogan, 2008, p. 25). Demonstrating this, one participant in this research highlighted the way in which they felt compelled to do something about the lack of engagement with the neurodivergent community. They developed a programme which was eventually signed off by senior management, yet this was only possible because their immediate supervisor had given them the opportunity to work on their own initiative in the first place. This kind of leadership not only offers opportunities for officer engagement, which subsequently leads to better outcomes and professional development (Davis and Bailey, 2018), but it also allows for officers to feel autonomous, respected and therefore more likely to engage with creative and innovative pieces of work (Marks and Fleming, 2004). Charman (2017) further

highlights that the interests, shared understandings and meanings reflected and directed by management are more likely to encourage organic work to develop from officers themselves.

As such, it appears that management within the police organisation has an impact on police practitioner's ability to implement neurodiversity into policy and practice, specifically from the bottom-up (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983). Supporting this, over half of police participants in North Yorkshire discussed the role of their managers in promoting neurodiversity, compared to only three participants in South Yorkshire. This might highlight the differing levels of influence from police management structures, as well as identifying challenges surrounding the implementation of compulsory neurodiversity practices and procedures between police organisations. Though the majority of participants discussed the autonomy provided to them by their line managers (often at Sergeant or Inspector level), it appeared that the majority of barriers came from those in senior command. This means that these findings must be interpreted with some caution, as there were no participants that were interviewed from the senior management of either North or South Yorkshire Police.<sup>16</sup>

One reason that senior management may have been considered a significant barrier, and an implication of the hierarchical nature of police organisations found in the present research, is because new initiatives must be passed up the ranks for approval. Senior management were seen by participants as the gatekeepers of resources, funding and ultimately, the ability to undertake independent, discretionary

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<sup>16</sup> The highest-ranking participant in North Yorkshire was Superintendent and in South Yorkshire, Inspector.

work within the community. If the bottom-up initiatives developed by rank-and-file are bought into by senior command, there may be potential for top-down structural change (Skogan, 2008). However, where they were dismissed, neurodiversity initiatives carry on being the work of one or a handful of individuals, as opposed to becoming standardised, measurable and compulsory practices for the entire workforce. The role of management in developing neurodiversity initiatives provides an interesting example when considering the influence of power and status analysed using principles of CR. That is, there are not only power dynamics between the police and neurodivergent people (who are regarded a minority within society), but there is also power and status complexity within the hierarchical structure of the police organisation itself, that impacts how police officers interact with members of the public (Reuss-Ianni and Ianni, 1983). As mentioned in the literature review chapter, it is not that bottom-up initiatives driven by individual officers and enabled by the discretionary nature of their role should be discredited, it is that changes to practices are seldom significant and meaningful unless they come from the top-down (Campeau, 2019). The abundance of “*frustration-ridden narratives*” in this research echo what Campeau (2019, p. 81) describes as the threat towards traditional ways of thinking, whereby police practitioners draw on newer cultural scripts that simply deviate from the old-school ideas of their superiors. In some respects, in order for bottom-up initiatives to be approved by their senior managers, the use of both old and new cultural scripts may be required in order for change to be accepted and filtered down from top command (Campeau, 2019).

## **6.5. Introducing (and reforming) neurodiversity in the police organisation**

In attempting to identify whether neurotypical policing affects neurodivergent citizens, wider implications of reform have been identified as a result of this research. Given that neurodivergent people are considered vulnerable and “*at risk*”, yet not a priority, alongside the significant medicalised language used by police practitioners, the need for change in regards to neurodiversity within policing has become an important focus in concluding these findings. This relates to whether the police perceive the need for organisational change or if there is an actual societal issue manifesting in policing that is having a wider detrimental impact on people’s lives. Pressures for organisational change in the police may come from either inside or outside the police organisations, and where the latter exists (such as the discrimination towards and the unequal status of neurodivergent people), this is in-keeping with principles of CR, which recognises the impact of such generalised inequalities that exist outside of organisations and occupations. Though individual neurodiversity initiatives might demonstrate some level of change on a police-level, it is doubtful that these are enough to instigate widespread change within the police organisation. Simply put, policing will only change when there is change in wider society. That being said, some police organisations appear to be more welcoming of neurodiversity reform than others. For example, though resistance existed at certain ranks, North Yorkshire Police appeared more open to the idea of reform perhaps because of their pre-established neurodiversity hub, as well as the number of individually developed initiatives that were being produced within the organisation. However, at the time of writing, South Yorkshire had nothing in place to address the issues raised by the

policing of neurodiversity, and therefore resistance to neurodiversity reform seemed more prevalent during their interviews.

This research has contributed additional layers of nuance to the idea of resistance, through an examination of the use of language, informed by principles of CR, which encourages researchers to examine the unseen and hidden, within the 'real' domain. When looking at all the factors considered in this research, alongside the relevant police culture literature, it could be argued that there is something neurotypical about policing with regards to their resistance to change, particularly in the language they use. For example, though presumably used in an unconscious way, referring to "*normal*" practices are often founded from a neurotypical standpoint (Beardon, 2017). Some neurodiversity advocates have satirically proposed that 'neurotypicality' is characterised by neurotypical people often assuming that their experience of the world is either the only one, or the only correct one (Muskie, 2002). Participants in this research were aware of embedded cultural understandings, which often manifested in what they thought were "*normal*" ways of working. This not only demonstrates that language can be used to highlight what "*normal*" is, particularly when considering the pervasiveness of Reiner's cultural characteristics and the police's reluctance to change, but it also illustrates that challenging the language surrounding neurodiversity may lead to reform. By challenging what is seen as "*normal*", neurodiversity could become part of a new dialogue within police cultural understandings, which may subsequently influence police practice. As highlighted by O'Neill and McCarthy (2014), with the support of individual officers, particularly senior leaders, these changes to language could first be embedded structurally through policy, as well as from the top-down, to initiate change in the 'field' (Chan, 1997).



Furthermore, resistance might not necessarily be because of old cultural scripts (Campeau, 2019), hierarchies and/or routines within the police organisation (Chan, 1997) or the process of socialisation based on stories developed through canteen culture (Waddington, 1999), but because the concept of neurodiversity has not yet been considered as something to be reformed within police organisational culture. One of the reasons for using the theoretical approach of CR in this research was due to the lack of knowledge regarding neurodiversity and policing, with this research attempting to understand what currently exists through an exploration of the 'empirical' and 'actual' domains. The main theory relating to reform and change that has been used throughout this thesis, is Bourdieu's, by way of Chan (1997), 'field' and 'habitus'. According to Chan (1997), change does not only come from changing the habitus (the way of working between individual officers, shared and joined together by culture) and the field (the police organisational structure and the political climate it sits within), but also by listening to and appreciating police practitioner's agency to make changes within the operational context, as has been found as an important aspect of this research. Chan (1997) proposes that both the field and the habitus need to be changed in order to implement reform, therefore because there is no such reform for neurodiversity at present, Chan's framework has been used to explain how such reform could occur, and as such alleviate potential resistance. In using this framework, it has been established that there is room for conversation between the field and habitus, with neurodiversity being addressed at both levels.

Without relevant changes to the field, the habitus and the personal want and will of individuals within the police organisation, it is unlikely that ways of working that support both neurodiversity and neurodivergent citizens will be implemented into police practices. Therefore, there are copious possibilities for further progress in

determining how police organisations overcome a lack of change to the field, which subsequently affects the habitus and the agency of individuals. In this sense, questions arise regarding the possibilities of introducing neurodiversity from the bottom-up, or whether there needs to be national changes to policy, as well as an overhaul in police priority making. Participants in this research were hopeful, suggesting that there was gradual movement towards cultural reform in regards to neurodiversity. Holdaway (1983) argues that unless we have some idea about how policy is filtered through occupational culture, it may be difficult to interrupt dominant processes. The problem that may occur in terms of neurodiversity reform is that change is particularly resisted when it challenges existing worldviews, when it requires officers to break from their established routines and norms, and to act in ways that do not correspond to their intuitive common-sense (Bacon, 2014). Where the majority of police practitioners think and behave neurotypically, this may remain the case. On the other hand, if challenges to what is currently regarded as “*normal*” help police practitioners do their job, then reform might be embraced.

#### **6.6. Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

This research considers a number of new topics, many of which have not been analysed in conjunction with one another before, such as neurodiversity and neurotypicality within policing and the involvement of partnerships in policing neurodivergent people. The exploratory nature of this research means that it also has limitations. These limitations are summarised here, alongside the potential implications for future research in this area. Firstly, there were limitations in regards to the sample used in the qualitative interviews. The most significant limitation with sampling is that the experiences of neurodivergent people involved with the police

were not gained directly from neurodivergent people themselves. Though it was identified, given my positionality within the neurodiversity movement, that there was a significant opportunity to engage with neurodivergent people as part of this research, due to time and resource implications (namely the prolonged negotiation of access to the 999/101 call log data from each police organisation), this element of the research had to be removed. In the original proposal, a third phase of this research hoped to involve creative visual methods to explore the experiences of autistic people who had previously engaged with the police. The decision to remove this aspect of the research was not taken lightly, but the data collected in the present thesis would instead provide a basis for such research with autistic people in the future.

Not including neurodivergent people's perspectives also impacts on its epistemological standing, given that its main epistemological framework, CR, emphasises the need to explore 'reality' directly from the source of the researched phenomena, in order to gain the 'real' understandings (Bhaskar, 2008). That being said, an interesting and unintentional aspect of the sampling used was that some of the police and partner agency participants who volunteered their time disclosed that they were neurodivergent, and spoke, not only from their professional experience, but from their personal experience of neurodivergence too. At least four of 19 police practitioners that were interviewed revealed that they were neurodivergent (three of which were autistic). Furthermore, as part of the partnership agency interviews, members of the two advocacy groups interviewed had learning difficulties and disabilities, and many identified as autistic. An additional two participants within the partner agency interviews disclosed to me that they identified as neurodivergent. Therefore, in a total of 28 interviews, there were a possible eight individuals as well as representatives from two advocacy groups who identified as neurodivergent, which

may suggest that, despite not directly inviting neurodivergent people to take part in the research, some of their views were still represented implicitly throughout. Future research might consider including neurodivergent people and their families, which would be an important theoretical step. The involvement of neurodivergent people and their families would also extend to investigating their role in police partnership working, as per the findings of this research which suggest that the police consider autistic people and their families as experts and formal partners in their work. This research might explore whether neurodivergent people have an interest in joining the police, if they had ever been involved in police interactions and the nature and circumstances of those interactions, what they would change about those interactions and their general perceptions of the police and their role in engaging with neurodivergent people.

Further to the widening of the sample to neurodivergent people and their families, it is also important to broaden the scope of police practitioners that are involved in research such as this. The police practitioners who were interviewed in this research were self-selecting and volunteered to take part, showing an established interest in the topic of neurodiversity and autism. Therefore, it might be assumed that these participants were assumed to know more about the concept than their colleagues who did not volunteer to take part. Though in itself not a limitation of the research, the same results may not have been found had a random sample of police practitioners been interviewed, regardless of experience with neurodiversity. In line with principles of CR, this might have led to potentially more 'realistic' perspectives of neurodiversity in policing. This is an unfortunate practical methodological limitation, given that CR would also consider it essential to explore and acknowledge different representations and views of the police's support towards neurodivergent people. However, a future

investigation could compare the results of this research to research conducted with a broader pool of police participants, including those who may have less of an invested interest in neurodiversity, to see if similar results were found.

Secondly, there were limitations to the police incident data and analysis. The first limitation relates to the challenges of accessing the police call log data in the first instance. Due to the police organisations' and the University of Sheffield's data protection processes, accessing both sets of call log data from North and South Yorkshire Police took approximately one year. In addition to this, due to different methods of accessing the data and the involvement of each police force, additional time was required to extract, anonymise and subsequently analyse the data (approximately six months). The time taken to access the data and the limited ability of the police to provide additional data made using a comparator set of data challenging. This research focused on a years-worth of data (between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017), which was chosen due to the ongoing work of North Yorkshire Police's neurodiversity hub. It took approximately three months for a police sergeant from North Yorkshire Police to extract all cases including "*autis*" within this yearly timeframe. Therefore, to compare such data to all cases in that timeframe, would have not only been time consuming for the police and myself (as in South Yorkshire, I had to extract and anonymise the data), but might have caused significant strain on the relationships that were established with the police. Furthermore, it could also be assumed that the data protection process would have also taken longer, given the increased amount of data that would have been requested. One suggestion for future research might be to narrow down the timeframe of the analysis, for example, analysing only a months-worth of data. This would allow for a more in-depth comparison between the interactions and outcomes of incidents involving autistic

members of the community and those interactions involving all other citizens. A well-established relationship with police organisations would be needed to do this, as well as a flexible data sharing agreement, so that the researcher could return to the police with requests for further data (for example, if there are no or few cases involving autistic people to compare against all other incidents for the requested time period).

Future research could also compare incidents involving autistic individuals with incidents involving individuals with other neurodivergent characteristics, such as by requesting data for incidents involving people with “*ADHD*” and “*learning disabilities*”, in addition to “*autism*”. However, there are no accurate figures on how many people in the UK are autistic or otherwise neurodivergent, presenting limitations not only for how the data in this research could be interpreted, but how future research could also be conducted using this method. Furthermore, much like the limitations of analysing only cases involving the term “*autism*” in the present research, any future research also involving comparator data will face issues with disclosure and individual recording practices. Due to how police data is recorded, there is reliance on the caller to disclose themselves or the person they are reporting as autistic/neurodivergent in the first place. Furthermore, as identified in this research, people calling 101/999 can do so anonymously, not even having to provide their self-defined gender, ethnicity, age or other identifiable (and subsequently comparative) factors. Though call handlers follow a process for inputting information, call log records are also challenging to extract and analyse due to individual recording errors, such as spelling mistakes (for example in one incident, autism had been spelt “autisum”, though it was captured in the present study by using the “*autism*” search term), or mis-identification and inconsistencies in how incidents are recorded (for example, one call handler had recorded ‘autism’ in

one part of the call log, but subsequently referred to it as a learning disability elsewhere)..

A further limitation regarding the police call log records refers to how the data is recorded by police call handlers, and the ease of analysis by researchers, because of this. The way in which information is recorded on the Niche and Procad systems in itself was limiting to the analysis process. Call handlers can complete as many fields as required when taking information from a 101/999 call (these fields include information about the caller and the reason for the call). This means that incidents as recorded within the call logs could appear in multiple categories, for example, a person could be logged as being involved as a 'Missing' person, as well as being involved in a 'Domestic'. Furthermore, there was also scope for crossover in the way which autistic people were recorded as 'Suspects', 'Victims' and 'Witnesses'. For example, an autistic person could be recorded as both a 'Victim' and a 'Witness' to a particular incident (which could have also been logged into multiple categories such as 'Missing' and 'Domestic'). The same challenges appeared to apply where call handlers were not required to record certain information, such as age or ethnicity, meaning there were also a number of "Not Provided" categories present in the datasets. Furthermore, due to differences in recording practices, the use of categories was often varied between North and South Yorkshire Police (for example, the use of different ethnicity categories). This, in addition to the free-text boxes, meant data extracted from the Niche and Procad systems presented a significant number of unique values within each dataset, making the analysis process more complex than anticipated. Due to the majority of the data being categorical, and the significant number of unique values existing within the dataset, it was not practical to transform the information provided into interval or ratio level data within the timescales of this research. Future research

may attempt to transform data extracted from police call log records, however challenges remain simply because of how the data is recorded in the first instance.



## **7. Conclusions**

At the start of the thesis, I stated that the reason for conducting this research was because of my autistic brother, his meltdown and the concerns I had about the police being involved in this incident. I also stated the hypothesis that neurotypical policing will affect neurodivergent people. I surmised that neurotypicality would result in the police misunderstanding neurodivergent differences, perceiving them to be disorderly and potentially criminal. Throughout the process of conducting this research, I have learned more about the areas of work that individuals within police organisations are undertaking in order to support neurodivergent people, like my brother. However, I have failed to be reassured by what I have found. Using principles of CR to analyse the potential power imbalance between the police and neurodivergent citizens, the findings of this research have highlighted that neurodiversity is not a concept frequently used or understood within policing, nor is it considered a policing priority. This is unless a person is recognised as being autistic, which then indicates to the police that the person is vulnerable, instantly making them a priority. Based on this research, it is recommended that police organisations review their categorisation of vulnerability, developing better decision-making models surrounding conceptualisations of vulnerability (based on their assumptions) and/or situational, context-dependent vulnerability. Aligning the findings of this research with existing studies, the conflation of autism and mental health has been a long-standing debate, and one that has been heavily contested by neurodivergent authors (McWade, Milton and Beresford, 2014). Where neurodiversity, autism and mental health are associated with vulnerability in policing practices, the findings of this research can contribute more

nuanced understandings, including one which places vulnerability in the 'eye of the beholder', as opposed to a fundamental flaw of the individual themselves.

A large contribution of the CR epistemology to this research was through the use of discourse analysis, which sought to examine the unseen and hidden in the language used by participants in the research and in the police incident data. Bhaskar (1989) claims that people in society reproduce and transform societal norms through mechanisms, such as discourse. This thesis has outlined that the language used by police practitioners is predominately neurotypical due to its reliance on the medical model of disability and difference, which might allow for the underlying assumptions regarding neurodiversity and neurodivergent people to be assessed. This language demonstrated the conflation of autism with mental health conditions, meaning that the same protocols then apply to both autistic people and those with mental ill health, for example the possibility of arrest under section 136 of the MHA (1983). More reassuringly, there were individuals within the police organisations who were forward thinking about neurodiversity and how it should be embedded within police practice. These individuals often had reason, or a "why", for getting more involved with the neurodivergent community, much like my reason for doing this piece of research. Personal connections with autistic friends and family members meant that police practitioners felt an increased need to support neurodivergent people, often through the development of individual initiatives. However, it is disheartening to learn that these initiatives were not supported by senior management within the police organisation. Despite this, the police were keen to ask for help from the families of neurodivergent people, as well as neurodivergent people themselves, even considering them as 'experts' and 'partners' in their working practice. However, local partner agencies, whom were considered to be in partnership with police, were found

to be involved in very little partnership working at all. This meant that autistic people were likely to find themselves on a “*conveyor belt of risk*”, whereby they became involved with the police, most frequently in a ‘Public Safety’ incident or ‘crisis’, as opposed to a criminal offence, and in the process of being passed onto another agency for support, fell through metaphorical gaps in service.

The findings presented in this research might also suggest that it is unwise to recommend more research into the development of autism and/or neurodiversity training, given that there is such disparity in the training that is currently provided. This sits alongside current police and autism literature which also situates training as complex, ineffective and challenging to implement (Hepworth, 2017). Therefore, further work could instead be used to establish the viability of individualised ‘bottom-up’ neurodiversity initiatives and how these developments might be put in place throughout the police organisation. To develop a fuller picture of how to embed neurodiversity into police culture, what should be investigated is how these ‘bottom-up’ initiatives are effectively spread both horizontally amongst colleagues, but also vertically (and diagonally) towards management, other police organisations and partner agencies. Possible research questions could include “*to what extent can neurodiversity initiatives be integrated into mandatory practice?*” and “*how are individual police initiatives into neurodiversity adopted into mainstream policing practice?*” As identified in this research, narratives from those in lower-ranks point to the slow but real impacts of reform (Campeau, 2019). Therefore, future research must take these variables into account, investigating whether the use of singular police organisation-based initiatives, as opposed to mandatory UK-wide initiatives, are beneficial or better than the other.

In concluding what has been a momentous, and extremely personal, experience of learning, there is much to be said about the landscape of promoting neurodiversity within police organisations, as part of a broader diversity agenda, and in assistance with multi-agency partnerships. Adding to a small but growing body of literature combining policing and neurodiversity, and providing an alternative methodology to the way previous research in this area has been conducted, the findings presented here contribute significantly to the existing literature, illustrating a unique examination of police-neurodivergent interactions that could be applied in the future to other studies of the police and autistic people. In addition, the use of police call log data and the analysis of police warning markers is not only an original contribution to this thesis, but to the whole field of autism and policing (within which the field of neurodiversity and policing does not yet exist). The lack of strategic ambition within the police organisation in relation to neurodiversity will be the greatest challenge to overcome moving forward. As highlighted by this piece of work, though, the tireless commitment of individuals within police organisations, and the support of their immediate supervisors, might present a positive challenge to any barriers encountered. However, without changes to national and local priorities, autism and other neurological conditions will continue to be seen as vulnerabilities. This might be of particular concern where vulnerability and risk have been described more so as a reflection on police practitioner understanding, whether this be influenced by personal experience or by local or national policy. To comment on the role of partners in promoting neurodiversity, these were so fleeting and information sharing-oriented that they could barely be considered as partnerships in the formal sense. Instead, from the perspective of the police, the role of the 'expert' falls on those the neurodiversity movement would support the most for this role, neurodivergent people themselves,

and their families. Had I known this in 2015, I might never have written this thesis, but then, nor would I have been able to contribute this knowledge not only to the field of neurodiversity, but to the fields of policing, vulnerability and partnership working.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Police and Partner Agency Interview Guides

#### Police Interview Guide:



#### I Interview Guide:

*The following questions invite you to discuss your views on the PhD research titled 'Promoting Neurodiversity through Police Partnerships'.*

*Please answer to the best of your ability and within the bounds of which you feel comfortable to provide a perspective.*

*The purpose of this interview is to gather data for my PhD thesis, and the anonymised outputs may be used in subsequent research. Your information will be kept confidential and anonymous throughout the entire research process.*

*You will be asked to discuss a series of questions, which should take no longer than 60 minutes. You will then be invited to ask any further questions and provide feedback on completion of the interview.*

*If you have any further questions or require more information, you can find contact details and additional information about the research on the information sheet sent to you prior to taking part. I will now require you to sign a consent form before taking part.*

#### Key Questions:

1. What is your current role within the police organisation?
2. What is your understanding of the term "neurodiversity"?
3. As part of this role, what dealings do you have with neurodiverse citizens?
  - *Additional prompt: Is this interaction typically with someone who is a suspect/offender, victim, witness or other*
  - *Additional prompt: Where do these interactions typically take place? Why?*

- *Additional prompt: If relevant, can you describe your experiences of working with neurodiverse citizens?*
  - *Additional prompt: What was the offence/incident involved?*
  - *Additional prompt: What challenges have you faced during your interactions with neurodiverse citizens?*
  - *Additional prompt: Were you satisfied with your interaction? If no, why – If yes, why?*
4. What dealings do you have with other organisations and agencies that support neurodiverse citizens during their interactions with the police?
- *Additional prompt: What challenges have you faced during your interactions with other organisations?*
  - *Additional prompt: What does “partnership working” or “multi-agency working” mean to you? Would you describe your interactions with these other organisations as partnership working? Why?*
  - *What do you consider to be the benefits of working in partnerships?*
5. How does the behaviour of neurodiverse citizens impact on what the police do and how they do it?
- *Additional prompt: What factors influence your engagement with neurodiverse citizens?*
6. How does your behaviours and actions (as a police practitioner) impact on how a neurodiverse citizen behaves or reacts?
- *Additional prompt: How do policies that are used in policing impact how a neurodiverse citizens behaves or reacts?*
7. What support is currently available in your police force for neurodiverse citizens during their encounters with the police?
- *Additional prompt: Are there any adjustments that have been put in place for neurodiverse citizens?*
  - *Additional prompt: In what ways/what methods do you currently use to support neurodiverse citizens you come into contact with?*
  - *Additional prompt: Is there a department or team in your force that you would refer a neurodiverse citizen to for additional support or follow up?*
8. How do you think interactions with neurodiverse citizens can be improved in your police force now and/or in the future?

- 
- *Additional prompt: In an ideal world, what changes would you make to the way that neurodiversity is policed in this police force area?*

Feedback

1. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
2. Do you have any further questions about anything you have been asked or about the research process in general?

## Partner Agency Interview Guide:



### Interview Guide:

*The following questions invite you to discuss your views on the PhD research titled 'Promoting Neurodiversity through Police Partnerships'.*

*Please answer to the best of your ability and within the bounds of which you feel comfortable to provide a perspective.*

*The purpose of this interview is to gather data for my PhD thesis and subsequent research outputs. Your information will be kept confidential and anonymous throughout the entire research process.*

*You will be asked to discuss a series of questions, which should take no longer than 60 minutes. You will then be invited to ask any further questions and provide feedback on completion of the interview.*

*If you have any further questions or require more information, you can find contact details and additional information about the research on the information sheet sent to you prior to taking part. I will now require you to sign a consent form before taking part.*

### Introduction Questions:

1. What is your current role within your organisation?
2. Could you give me an overview of your professional background/career history?  
**Prompt: How did you end up doing your current role?**
3. What is your understanding of the term "neurodiversity"?
4. As part of your role, what dealings do you have with neurodivergent citizens?

### General Partnership Questions:

5. What does "partnership working" or "multi-agency working" mean to you?

Prompt: Can you give me some examples which relate to your current role of when you have worked in partnership with other agencies?

6. What dealings do you have with other organisations and agencies that support neurodivergent citizens?
7. What do these different partners bring to the table when it comes to addressing the needs of neurodivergent people?
8. Do you feel a partnership approach is necessary for supporting neurodivergent citizens? Why or why not?
9. What do you consider to be the benefits of working in partnerships in the context of neurodiversity?
10. What challenges have you faced during your interactions with other partner organisations?

#### Police Partnership Questions:

11. You mentioned earlier that you have worked with the police in relation to neurodivergent citizens, how would you describe this experience?  
Sub-question: How would you characterise your working relationship with the police?  
What is your working relationship with the organisation like?  
Prompts: Mutually beneficial, tense, close, non-existent, complex, constantly changing...
12. What is/has been the value of working in partnership with the police?  
Follow up: Can you give an example to illustrate this?
13. What challenges have you faced working in partnership with the police?  
Follow up: Can you give an example to illustrate this?

#### Future-oriented Questions:

14. How do you think your organisation can improve in working with neurodivergent citizens now and/or in the future?

15. How do you think your organisation can improve in working with the police as a partner agency now and/or in the future?

Feedback Questions:

1. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
2. Do you have any further questions about anything you have been asked or about the research process in general?

## Appendix 2: Ethical Approval Letter



Downloaded: 25/09/2017

Approved: 22/09/2017

Alice Corbally  
Registration number: 160237582  
School of Law  
Programme: PhD Criminology

Dear Alice

**PROJECT TITLE:** Diversity or Disorder: Promoting Neurodiversity Through Police-Community Partnerships

**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 016098

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 22/09/2017 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 016098 (dated 07/09/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1035361 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1035360 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1035359 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1035357 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant consent form 1035366 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant consent form 1035365 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant consent form 1035364 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant consent form 1035363 version 1 (07/09/2017).
- Participant consent form 1035362 version 1 (07/09/2017).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Bacon  
Ethics Administrator  
School of Law

## Appendix 3: Information Sheets

### Police Information Sheet



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

School  
Of  
Law

#### Promoting Neurodiversity Through Police-Community Partnerships

##### Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study titled 'Promoting Neurodiversity Through Police-Community Partnerships'. Before you decide to provide your contributions to the study, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part and please do not hesitate to contact the researcher if anything is not clear or you would like further information.

##### Purpose of the research

You are being asked to take part in the first phase of a three-phase research project, which aims to explore the role of the police and partnership agencies in supporting autistic citizens in the community. This part of the research process will involve exploring your views on the types of circumstances/incidents/interactions you have been involved with supporting autistic citizens. A comparative analysis will then be conducted between two police services, North Yorkshire and South Yorkshire Police.

##### Do I have to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have been identified as having experience working with autistic citizens in your police service area. You were not selected by name but by your role within the police organisation. Your participation is entirely voluntary; you should only provide your views/contributions if you want to. If you decide to contribute your views, your role within your organisation will not be affected in any way. Your information will be kept in strict confidence and identifying factors such as your name and collar number will not be released in research outputs.

##### What will taking part involve?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher at a time and place of your convenience and will last approximately 1 hour. The interview will involve discussing items such as your involvement with autistic citizens in your local area, how you support these individuals, what you feel are your current engagements and involvement with autistic citizens and what the outcomes of involvement are.

##### Will anyone know that I have taken part?

All the information that you provide to the study is strictly confidential. Only the researcher and her two supervisors will have access to any raw data you provide. It will contain nothing that can identify you and your views, which will remain anonymous. The findings will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis and in subsequent research and conference papers. It is important to acknowledge this, but also to be aware that you will be completely unidentifiable in any kind of output.

##### What will happen to the information I give?

New data protection legislation comes into effect across the EU, including the UK on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018; this means that the researcher needs to provide you with some further information relating to how your personal



information will be used and managed within this research project. This is in addition to the details provided within this information sheet and the communication had with the researcher.

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. To collect and use your personal information as part of this research project, the researcher must have a basis in law to do so. The basis that the University of Sheffield are using is that the research is 'a task in the public interest'.

Further information, including details about how and why the University processes your personal information, how the researcher will keep your information secure and your legal rights (including how to complain if you feel that your personal information has not been handled correctly) can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>

In this interview, your information (in the form of your views and perspectives on the questions asked) will be audio recorded and notes may be taken by the researcher throughout. The interview will be transcribed, anonymised and analysed. All the data will be stored securely in accordance to the General Data Protection Regulations and you may request to see any raw data.

#### How can I find out more?

If you would like to know more about this research or have any further hesitations or questions, please contact Alice Corbally (arcorbally1@sheffield.ac.uk). You can also contact the researcher's supervisors, Dr Layla Skinns (l.skinns@sheffield.ac.uk) and/or Dr Matthew Bacon (m.bacon@sheffield.ac.uk).

If you would like to make a complaint about the research or the researcher, this can be made to Dr Layla Skinns (l.skinns@sheffield.ac.uk), Acting Postgraduate Research Director, School of Law, University of Sheffield.

Finally, if you feel personally, psychologically or emotionally affected by any part of this research, please in the first instance speak to your line manager. Furthermore, you can contact Samaritans 24 hours a day on the following telephone contact: 116 123. For more local support, please speak to your local Mind or call their Infoline on the following telephone contact: 0300 123 3393.

## Partner Agency Information Sheet:



### Promoting Neurodiversity Through Police-Community Partnerships

#### Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study titled 'Promoting Neurodiversity Through Police-Community Partnerships'. Before you decide whether to contribute to the study, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part and please do not hesitate to contact the researcher if anything is not clear or if you would like further information.

#### Purpose of the research

You will be involved in the second phase of a two-phase research project, which aims to explore the role of the police and partnership agencies in supporting autistic citizens in the community. Previous phases have involved conducting a data analysis of the types of incidents/circumstances/interactions which the police are involved with autistic citizens and in addition follow-up interviews have taken place with a variety of police officers who engage with autistic people in local areas. The current part of the research process will involve exploring the role of partnerships in supporting autistic citizens in their interactions with the police.

#### Do I have to take part?

You have been invited to take part because of your experience in supporting autistic citizens in their interactions with the police. Your participation is entirely voluntary, you should only provide your views/contributions if you want to. If you decide to contribute your views, your role within your organisation will not be affected in anyway. Your information will be kept in strict confidence and identifying factors such as your name and the organisation you work in will not be research in the research output.

#### What will taking part involve?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher at a time and place of your convenience and will last approximately 1 hour. The interview will involve discussing items such as your involvement with autistic citizens in your local area, how you support these individuals, what you feel are your current engagements and involvement with police partners and what the outcomes of involvement are.

#### Will anyone know that I have taken part?

All the information that you provide to the study is strictly confidential. Only the researcher and her two supervisors will have access to any raw data you provide. It will contain nothing that can identify you and your views, which will remain anonymous. The findings will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis and in subsequent research and conference papers. It is important to acknowledge this, but also to be aware that you will be unidentifiable in any output. Pseudonyms will be used and the name of your organisation will not be disclosed.

#### What will happen to the information I give?

New data protection legislation comes into effect across the EU, including the UK on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018; this means that the researcher needs to provide you with some further information relating to how your personal

information will be used and managed within this research project. This is in addition to the details provided within this information sheet and the communication had with the researcher.

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. To collect and use your personal information as part of this research project, the researcher must have a basis in law to do so. The basis that the University of Sheffield are using is that the research is 'a task in the public interest'.

Further information, including details about how and why the University processes your personal information, how the researcher will keep your information secure and your legal rights (including how to complain if you feel that your personal information has not been handled correctly) can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>

In this interview, your information (in the form of your views and perspectives on the questions asked) will be audio recorded and notes may be taken by the researcher throughout. The interview will be transcribed, anonymised and analysed. All the data will be stored securely in accordance to the General Data Protection Regulations and you may request to see any raw data.

#### How can I find out more?

If you would like to know more about this research or have any further hesitations or questions, please contact Alice Corbally (arcorbally1@sheffield.ac.uk). You can also contact the researcher's supervisors, Dr Layla Skinns (l.skinns@sheffield.ac.uk) and/or Dr Matthew Bacon (m.bacon@sheffield.ac.uk).

If you would like to make a complaint about the research or the researcher, this can be made to Dr Mark Brown (Mark.Brown@sheffield.ac.uk), Postgraduate Research Director, School of Law, University of Sheffield.

Finally, if you feel personally, psychologically or emotionally affected by any part of this research, please in the first instance speak to your line manager.

Furthermore, you can contact Samaritans 24 hours a day on the following telephone contact: 116 123.

For more local support, please speak to your local Mind or call their Infoline on the following telephone contact: 0300 123 3393.

## Appendix 4: Consent Forms

### Police Consent Form



#### Promoting Neurodiversity Through Police-Community Partnerships

PhD research conducted by Alice Corbally, School of Law, University of Sheffield.  
Funded by N8 Policing Research Partnership.

#### Consent form

To be read or given to the participant by the researcher after showing them the information sheet and before collecting data.

This form is to be used to say whether you fully agree to participate in the research. You may keep a signed copy of this form for your own records.

Please initial the following statements if you consent:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for police practitioners, explaining the above research study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without negative consequences. In addition, should I not want to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with any of the research materials and I will not be identified or identifiable, apart from rank and area in which I work (York or Scarborough), in the PhD reports or subsequent reports.
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research outputs (for example in conferences and academic articles)
5. I agree to take part in the above research study

PRINT NAME:

Signature:

Date:

Researcher's Statement:

I confirm that I have carefully explained to the research participant the nature, demands and use of the data in this research.

PRINT NAME:

Signature:

Date:

## Partner Agency Consent Form:



### Promoting Neurodiversity Through Police-Community Partnerships

PhD research conducted by Alice Corbally, School of Law, University of Sheffield.  
Funded by N8 Policing Research Partnership.

#### Consent form

To be read or given to the participant by the researcher after showing them the information sheet and before collecting data.

This form is to be used to say whether you fully agree to participate in the research. You may keep a signed copy of this form for your own records.

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for practitioners and staff, explaining the above research study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without negative consequences. In addition, should I not want to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my organisation will not be named, although the area I work in might be and also that my name will not be linked with the research materials. I will not be identified or identifiable in the PhD report or other research reports.
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research outputs e.g. conference papers, academic articles
5. I agree to take part in the above research study

PRINT NAME:

Signature:

Date:

Researcher's Statement:

I confirm that I have carefully explained to the research participant the nature, demands and use of the data in this research.

PRINT NAME:

Signature:

Date:

## Appendix 5: A Full List of Aggregated Incident Types

South Yorkshire Police:

Class	Incidents
ASB and Disorder	Anti-Social
	Nuisance
	Nuisance Neighbour
	Harassment
	Drug-related incident
	Refusing to Leave
	Environmental
	Malicious Comments
	Rowdy/Inconsiderate
	Noise Complaint
	Hate/Racial Hate Abuse
	Suspicious Circumstances
	Threatening Behaviour
Property Crime	Criminal Damage/Arson
	Damage
	Burglary
	Theft
	Robbery
Violence	Violence against person
	Firearms
	Assault



<b>Class</b>	<b>Incidents</b>
	Weapon
Missing Person	Abscond/AWOL/Orders/Bail
	Breach Bail/Curfew
	Missing person
Other	Abandoned Call
	Hoax Call
	Administration
	Complaints against police
	Animal-related incident
	Civil Dispute
	Fraud
	Lost/Found Property
	Police Resource Activity
	Confused Person
	Transport-related
Domestic	Violent Domestic
	Domestic - Non-Crime
	Domestic - General
Sexual Offence	Sexual Offence
	Rape
Public Safety	Public Safety
	Suicidal Person

North Yorkshire Police:

Class	Incidents
ASB and Disorder	Environment
	Nuisance
	ASB
	Drugs
	Suspicious Circumstance
Property Crime	Burglary
	Criminal Damage
	Robbery
	Theft
Violence	Violence
Missing Person	Abscond
	Missing Person
Other	Administration
	Lost/Found Property
	Complaints against police
	Fraud
	Other Offence
	Abandoned Call
	Animal-Related Incident
	Civil Dispute
	Hoax Call

Class	Incidents
	Road-Related/RTC
Domestic	Domestic
Sexual Offence	Sexual Offence
Public Safety	Public Safety
	Safeguarding