

COMMUNITY POLICING IN THE NEWS MEDIA

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Although there is a very large body of research examining community policing practices in the United States, no study has yet to examine the efforts by police departments to promote community policing in the news media. This study fills this gap. Specifically, this study presents the results from a national survey of public information officers and media personnel in large-sized cities to examine the efforts by police departments to promote innovative programs such as community policing in the news and document how community policing is presented in the news. The results indicate that although police departments and media personnel agree that they have a very good working relationship and that there are many opportunities to promote community policing, most police departments make only minimal effort to do so. The analysis of newspaper coverage of community policing finds that it is rarely presented in the news and the coverage that occurs is isolated.

Keywords: *community policing; public information officers; media relations; news coverage*

In this article, the efforts of law enforcement agencies to promote community policing in the news media is examined. One of the significant issues facing the law enforcement community is developing and maintaining positive media relations. News organizations are especially interested in the beginning stages of the criminal justice process, emphasizing the crime

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occurrence, the police investigation, and the arrest of the suspect when presenting crime stories to the public (Chermak, 1998). Media personnel rely primarily on law enforcement sources to produce these stories. This reliance puts incredible pressure on law enforcement agencies to decide what personnel will be responsible for interacting with media personnel, what types of information will be provided, and when information will be released. Media scrutiny is particularly intense when a critical event occurs, like a police shooting or a high-profile crime incident. However, law enforcement agencies are not completely at the mercy of media personnel and have developed strategies to manage this relationship (see Chermak, 1995; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989). For example, police access to media personnel provides opportunities for law enforcement agencies to publicize new initiatives such as community policing.

Community policing has emerged as an innovative and popular strategy to promote public safety, reduce fear of crime, and improve police-community relationships. An increasing number of police departments have implemented community- or problem-oriented strategies as a viable alternative to more traditional approaches (Wycoff, 1994). A critical variable affecting the success of problem-solving approaches is the involvement and support of citizens, although not much is known about the efforts by police departments to market community policing. There is a need to increase public awareness and involve citizens in community policing. This points to the importance of including news organizations as partners in a comprehensive community policing plan.

Although the implementation of proactive and problem-solving police strategies requires the systematic flow of information to the public and the involvement of the news media, not much is known about what police departments are doing to publicize these efforts and the willingness of the media to provide such publicity. In this article, the role public information officers (PIOs) have played in promoting law enforcement agencies generally and community policing specifically is examined. In addition, whether news media are willing to disseminate community policing information in the news is analyzed.

MEDIA PUBLICITY AND COMMUNITY POLICING

One of the key elements to the success of community policing is greater citizen involvement and support (Greene & Mastrofski, 1988; Mastrofski, 1993; Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990). Community members have to

know about these programs, have to be concerned about the problems being addressed, and have to be willing to give their time and participate. This support is particularly difficult to achieve in communities where police-community relationships have been strained because of high-profile media incidents. To build the trust necessary to encourage participation, law enforcement agencies must systematically publicize their efforts to the public. What strategies are used to disseminate information about community policing? In what ways have the news media been integrated into their plans? How successful have these efforts been?

There is reason to suspect that such communication has not been an integral part of community policing implementation strategies. Results from an evaluation of Innovative Neighborhood-Oriented Policing (INOP) in eight jurisdictions point to limitations in the ability of law enforcement agencies to successfully market community policing strategies (Sadd & Grinc, 1996). There were many important findings; however, several concern the willingness of citizens to participate, and the ability of departments to communicate proactive policing programs. Among these findings were that (a) citizen involvement was particularly challenging, and participation was confined to a small group of individuals; (b) one of the main reasons citizens stated that they did not want to get involved was because of tensions between the police and certain groups; (c) community members did not understand their role; (d) police officers not involved in the INOP programs were unaware of the program goals; and perhaps most important, (e) police departments paid little attention to educating and including the community in the INOP programs examined.

In another study, Brian Williams (1998) examined citizen perspectives of community policing in Georgia. He concluded that most residents expressed a lack of direct knowledge or contact with community policing officers (p. 61), and most did not believe they were mutual partners in solving community problems (p. 66).

These findings point to three substantial obstacles to the implementation of community policing. First, law enforcement agencies may not be publicizing their efforts adequately or in a way that would help citizens to understand what they are trying to do. Second, even if they are publicizing their efforts, citizens may not be exposed to such publicity. Third, the relationship between the police and the public may be strained, and citizens may not believe a department is sincere in their efforts to offer a new approach to solving community problems.

The news media have the potential to be an important community policing partner, helping the police identify community problems and communicating the department's efforts to the public and community leaders. Understanding the news media's role in generating and publicizing these policing images is important for several reasons. First, the prevalence of the media provides the opportunity for a wide dissemination of information. Second, crime is a topic that has consistently been found to be a high-priority news topic of significant public interest (Chermak, 1995). Third, a large portion of the public does not have direct exposure to crime (Graber, 1980) or participate in community policing programs (Sadd & Grinc, 1996; Skogan, 1989).

For example, the use of the media to promote citizen involvement in crime fighting "has emerged as a major component of criminal justice policy" (O'Keefe & Reid, 1990, p. 209), and several evaluations of various types of publicity campaigns have been conducted (O'Keefe & Reid, 1990; Pate, Lavrakas, Wycoff, Skogan, & Sherman, 1985; Rosenbaum, Lurigio, & Lavrakas, 1987; Sacco & Silverman, 1982). O'Keefe and Reid (1990) examined public awareness and citizen attitudes after exposure to the "Take a Bite Out of Crime" advertising campaign. The results indicated that the campaign increased citizen awareness and improved attitudes toward crime prevention. An evaluation of neighborhood newsletters, however, did not produce promising results. Pate et al. (1985) circulated community newsletters in Newark, New Jersey, and Houston, Texas, as part of a strategy to reduce fear of crime. These newsletters contained crime prevention advice and neighborhood information, and some included local crime information. This type of publicity had no effect on citizen awareness, fear of crime, evaluation of police services, or satisfaction with the area.

Police departments have had other success entering into partnerships with the media to fulfill crime-fighting objectives. Consider the success and growth of "Crimestoppers" programs. These media segments are collaborative efforts involving the public, the police, and the media (Rosenbaum et al., 1987; Skolnick & McCoy, 1985). Police departments have formalized the media's role in fighting crime by having them reenact unsolved crimes to generate additional leads and information. An evaluation indicated that (a) the number of Crimestoppers programs grew dramatically (by 1985 there was 600 programs up from 48 only 5 years earlier), (b) the programs were highly visible and well received by media executives, (c) the programs were successful (these segments resulted in 92,000 felony arrests, 20,000 convictions, and the recovery of more than US\$500 million in stolen

property), and (d) the programs increased citizen awareness of anticrime efforts. In addition, this evaluation reported that programs having a more cooperative relationship with the media enjoyed greater success and productivity (Rosenbaum et al., 1987, p. 54).

Questions remain as to whether police departments have implemented innovative publicity strategies to communicate community policing programs to the public. Not much is known about what police departments are doing to disseminate information and encourage citizen participation, the success of the efforts, and the willingness of the news media to participate. An important first step in understanding this role is to identify the strategies used by police departments to publicize their efforts in the news and the willingness of news organizations to provide coverage.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The principal data-gathering technique for the current study was self-administered questionnaires mailed to police and media organizations. The focus of the law enforcement survey was on the strategies used to publicize innovative police efforts and police-media relationships. Separate surveys were distributed to media managers and media reporters in television and newspaper organizations to examine how they view their relationship with the police, and whether they provide coverage to community policing. Finally, the information collected from these surveys was used to identify four police departments, two with positive and two with negative relationships with the news media. We then collected newspaper data in these four cities to examine how community policing is presented in the news.

LAW ENFORCEMENT SURVEYS

The law enforcement survey was mailed to 239 law enforcement agencies located in cities with a population more than 100,000. This sampling strategy was used for two reasons. First, this sample included the police departments most likely to have a public information office or employ full-time press officers (Skolnick & McCoy, 1985). Second, the departments included in the sample were likely to have multiple daily contacts with various media. Although the organizations surveyed were not completely representative of agencies located in smaller sized cities, the sample is likely to include organizations that have had to utilize innovative marketing strategies

to get news coverage of community policing because of the large number of competing crime incident stories in these cities.

The focus of the questionnaire was on the strategies used to publicize innovative police efforts and police-media relationships. Specific areas of concern included (a) the strategies used to market police departments in the news, (b) the personnel responsible for this marketing, (c) how receptive the news media have been to these strategies, (d) what can be done to increase effectiveness in these areas, and (e) general perceptions about the media's coverage of crime.

We sent the survey to the police chief, and asked him or her to forward the questionnaire to the person in charge of public information activities for the department. We received a completed survey from 85% of the agencies (203 of 239).

MEDIA SURVEYS

The media questionnaires were administered to the major newspaper and two television organizations located in the same metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) as the law enforcement organizations. The newspaper with the largest circulation (cited in the *Editor and Publisher Yearbook*, Editor and Publisher, 1995), and two television stations watched in the highest number of households (cited in the *Television and Cable Factbook*, Warren Publishing, 1995) were surveyed. Only the most popular and largest media organizations in each MSA were chosen for two reasons. First, we wanted to not only keep the number of media organizations manageable but also increase the likelihood that at least one media organization responded in the cities surveyed. This allowed us to gauge perceptions of police-press relations from both sides of this relationship. Second, although several other types of media organization exist in every city (radio, other newspapers, and independent television organizations), the media surveyed are the organizations the public relies primarily on for news.

The research plan was to receive at least one survey response from television and newspaper personnel in every MSA where a police department was surveyed. The number of sampled media organizations ($N = 420$) is higher than the number of police organizations ($N = 239$) because we sampled television and newspaper organizations. However, the number of sampled media organizations is not 3 times as high (one newspaper, two television) because there may have been more than one law enforcement agency that fits the police-sampling criteria in a media organization's marketing area

(e.g., Dallas, Texas, media organizations would have relationships with at least three of the local police departments included in the sample—Dallas, Fort Worth, and Arlington).

The media surveys covered four specific areas: (a) the police sources relied on for crime information, (b) their perceptions of their relationship with the police, (c) the amount and type of coverage of community policing, and (d) what could be done to improve police-media relationships and increase coverage of community policing.

Individuals were sampled from managerial and line-level positions to be able to examine the police-media relationship from both perspectives. We sent surveys to 334 media managers and received 130 responses. Of the 179 surveys sent to newspaper managers, 72 were returned (40% response rate). We sent 155 surveys to television managers, and 58 were returned (38% response rate). We received 312 responses of the 635 surveys distributed to reporters. We sent 331 surveys to newspaper reporters and received 161 responses (49% response rate). We sent a similar number of surveys to television organizations (304) and received a similar number of responses (151—a 50% response rate).

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The survey results were used to identify law enforcement agencies with strong and strained (two strong, two strained) relationships with the media (the selection procedure and the articles in the newspaper sample for these four cities is discussed in the section that discusses the content analysis results). We then collected community policing and crime articles from newspapers in these four cities using the Lexus-Nexus database.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PIOs

There have been a few studies examining the responsibilities of PIOs, providing us with a foundation for understanding the importance of PIOs to the construction of a police department's image. Skolnick and McCoy (1985), for example, examined police accountability by interviewing 25 police chiefs and six journalists. Within a broader discussion of how police chiefs attempt to manage a department's image using the news media, they discussed the increasingly important role that PIOs have played in the dissemination of information on crime incidents. They found PIOs to be specialists within the organization and illustrated how PIOs package

information in a way that increases the likelihood that the media covered the department in a positive way. These researchers admitted, however, that a systematic sampling procedure should be used to examine these issues (p. 535).

Another study, by Ray Surette and Alfredo Richard (1995), described the PIO as gatekeeper to the police department. Surette and Richard found that the responsibilities of PIOs included responding to media inquiries, developing press releases, scheduling press conferences, and conducting training. An important finding of their work concerns the involvement of PIOs in proactive image construction. These researchers discovered that much of what PIOs do is reactive, finding that they rarely prepackage information for news personnel (p. 329). When these officers were not reacting to crime incidents, police departments expected PIOs to do other activities other than proactive efforts to enhance a department's image.

Although the extant research examining the public information activities of police departments provides important information on how PIOs participate as official sources in the news production process, our research expands this understanding by providing a national snapshot of PIO activities and looks more closely at their proactive publicity efforts. We discuss these findings below.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PIOS

The results from the PIO survey indicate that PIOs play a very important role in managing an agency's public image. Of the departments surveyed, 80% had at least one full-time official responsible for disseminating public information and interacting with the media. Moreover, even in departments that did not have an officer officially designated as a public information specialist, they assigned personnel to perform this role. Police chiefs, members of the command staff, or mayoral spokespersons performed public information duties for agencies without a designated PIO.

Most agencies assigned public information tasks to a small number of individuals. On average, departments used less than two sworn or nonsworn members to fulfill public information responsibilities. The mean number of sworn PIO staff was 1.96, ranging from as few as 0 to as many as 52 sworn personnel in a law enforcement agency. The mean number of nonsworn staff was about 1.84, ranging from 0 to 86 public information personnel. We assumed that 52 and 86 were valid, although the range for sworn in all other departments was 0 to 9 and the range for nonsworn was 0 to 7. The sworn

mean without these cases is 1.6; the nonsworn mean is 1. The majority of the departments used an officer in a supervisory position. Approximately 5% of the PIOs were police chiefs, 4.6% were assistants to the chief, 6.7% were captains, 24.1% were lieutenants, and 23.6% were sergeants. Approximately 205 of the PIOs were patrol officers or detectives, and just more than 10% were civilians. The PIOs had an average of 4.3 years of public information experience and had at least 50 hours of formal training in police-media relations.

The survey results also indicate that the PIOs work closely with the chief. Of the PIOs, 60% meet with the chief executive of the department every day or several times a day, and an additional 30% met at least once a week. Of the PIOs surveyed, 95% agreed that their activities are very important to the construction of the department's image.

FREQUENCY OF MEDIA CONTACTS

Public information officers have many opportunities to shape public understanding of the police through their frequent interactions with media personnel. The PIOs surveyed are very active and are contacted by 16 different reporters in a typical week. In addition, PIOs have contact with reporters representing a range of media, interacting with reporters from about four newspapers, five television organizations, and four radio stations at least once a week. The PIOs rarely had contact with media managers. Of the PIOs, 85% did not meet with media managers or only met with them once a month.

Data from the media surveys also support the conclusion that law enforcement and media personnel interact frequently. The managers and reporters said that more than 73% of the information on crime incidents was provided by law enforcement sources. We also asked media personnel to identify who was their most important source for information on law enforcement. More than 40% of the media respondents said individual law enforcement officers were their most important source of information, more than 35% of the media respondents said that PIOs were the most important source of law enforcement information, 16% said either the police chief or some other law enforcement executive, and 8% said some other source was their most important source.

In general, media personnel were satisfied with their accessibility to the chief and to the PIO. Approximately 80% of the media personnel thought the chief was very or somewhat accessible, and more than 93% said that

PIOs were very or somewhat accessible. Managers and reporters were similarly satisfied with their level of access to the chief and the PIO, although reporters from both mediums were more likely to indicate that the chief and the PIO were very accessible. The results from the different mediums are also similar.

IMPRESSIONS OF MEDIA CONTACT

The PIOs had very positive views about citizen perceptions of the police and their relationship with the news media. Of the PIOs, 83% thought that citizens have a favorable opinion of the department, and the PIOs did think strongly that media coverage in their area affects community perceptions of the police. The PIOs also thought that media attention to a high-profile incident in another community adversely affected their public image. The PIOs did not feel strongly about the amount of attention the media provides to crime. Only 41% of the PIOs agreed with the statement that the media gives too much attention to crime, although 50% of the PIOs thought the reporters are more interested in the problems of the department rather than its accomplishments.

Similarly, more than 80% of the media personnel surveyed said that most citizens have a favorable opinion of local law enforcement agencies, and more than 80% said that citizens are interested in news about local law enforcement agencies. Approximately 55% said that the image of law enforcement portrayed in the local media is positive.

THE POLICE-MEDIA RELATIONSHIP

The survey results indicate that both sides of the police-media transaction have a very positive view of the relationship. For example, nearly 90% of the PIOs either agreed or strongly agreed that the current status of their relationship with most news organizations is good. Similarly, 72% of the combined media sample (television/newspaper managers/reporters) agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship was good. These findings support previous research—relying primarily on ethnographic methods—that characterizes the police-media relationship as symbiotic (Chermak, 1995; Chibnall, 1977; Fishman, 1980; Grabosky & Wilson, 1989; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978).

There was, however, some variation in satisfaction when we compared the results across medium. More than 80% of the combined (manager and/or

reporter) television sample agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship was good. On the other hand, only 63% of newspaper personnel agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship was good. These differences in satisfaction can be attributed to the newspaper managers who were significantly less satisfied with their relationship with the police compared to any other group of media personnel. Only 44% of the newspaper managers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their relationship was good. The newspaper managers who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement were primarily concerned with a perceived lack of access to the police department and the willingness of the department to provide information.

As we expected, the reporters rated the quality of the relationship higher than the managers did. Of the reporters, 78% agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship with law enforcement was good. Approximately 67% of the managers agreed or strongly agreed that their relationship with law enforcement was good. We think that this reflects differences in the types of interaction that different levels of the news organization have with law enforcement. Reporters interact with the police, and more specifically the PIO, on a daily basis. Thus, their rating of the quality of the relationship reflects their hands-on evaluation of the quality of the relationship. Managers interact with the PIO less frequently thus their evaluation is based more on their perceptions of the relationship. Their perceptions might be influenced by a number of factors, including what they believe to be the quality of daily interaction.

PIOS AND COMMUNITY POLICING

The majority of PIO activity focused on responding to media requests for crime incident information. The PIOs stated that about 44% of their time was spent providing information about crime incidents. They also stated that about 15% of their time was spent on requests for information on police initiatives such as community policing programs. The rest of their time was spent providing various types of information, including information on police misconduct, organizational policy, and other activities such as award ceremonies.

These estimates of the amount of time PIOs spend on various activities were similar to the media estimates of the percentage of news space devoted to each of the topic areas. The media respondents thought that about 62% of news space was devoted to crime incident stories. Similar to the PIO estimates, media personnel said that about 15% of news space was devoted to

police initiatives, 9% of news space was devoted to police misconduct, and 8% described other types of stories. There was little variation in these percentages across medium or across organizational position.

The infrequent coverage of police initiatives occurs for two reasons. First, PIOs are overwhelmed by requests for information on crime incidents. These requests leave little time for the promotion of proactive programs. Second, this infrequent coverage is reflective of differences in the ability of the media to produce these stories compared to writing a story about a crime event. Reporters are able to produce several crime incident stories a day by relying on the information in police incident reports. It would take much more time and effort to produce a community policing story because the information is not as accessible and the number of sources that should have to be contacted is much broader.

News personnel did, however, think that the public was interested in community policing stories. Of the news personnel, 70% agreed or strongly agreed that the public was interested in community policing, and the media managers thought that the public was more interested compared to the reporters. Of the managers, 76% agreed or strongly agreed that the public was interested in community policing, and 67% of the reporters agreed or strongly agreed that they were interested.

EFFORTS TO PUBLICIZE COMMUNITY POLICING

Of the agencies in the sample, 96% had some type of community policing program. Public information officers publicized these activities and had very strong opinions about the importance of community policing to law enforcement. The PIOs stressed that good relationships with the news media are an important component of a community policing program. Of the PIOs, 83% agreed with the statement that community policing has been an asset to the department. Less than 50% of the PIOs strongly agreed or agreed that community policing had actually increased the contact the police had with the media. This finding probably reflects the fact that police-media contact was likely to be very high prior to the implementation of community policing in an agency.

Although 80% of the PIOs thought that their department did a good job publicizing positive aspects of the agency, the results also indicate that departments use different strategies to promote community policing. For example, departments use different personnel to publicize these activities. Approximately 50% of the PIO respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed

that public information duties have been decentralized as part of their community policing program. About 27% of the PIOs strongly agreed or agreed that community policing publicity duties have been decentralized. Community policing or crime prevention units were the units most frequently cited as being responsible for publicizing community policing efforts when the publicity function was decentralized. The command staff was also cited as playing an important role in publicizing these programs. Of the respondents, 20% did not agree or disagree with this statement, perhaps reflecting that these departments share publicity responsibilities between public information and community policing staff. The PIO staff in this last group of departments had frequent contact with community policing units. For example, 50% of the PIOs had daily contact, and an additional 25% had weekly contact.

We compared the responses to the question "Our department does a good job publicizing positive aspects of our agency" in departments where community policing publicity was decentralized to those where it was not and to those where PIOs neither agreed nor disagreed that this publicity function was decentralized. It is not surprising to note, 90% of the PIOs in agencies that did not decentralize community policing strongly agreed or agreed that they did a good job. In contrast, 67% of the PIOs in agencies that are decentralized strongly agreed or agreed that they did a good job publicizing community policing, and about 70% of those PIOs that neither agreed nor disagreed that the publicity function was decentralized strongly agreed or agreed that they did a good job.

Nearly 80% of the PIOs thought that the local media are accommodating when requesting publicity for a new community policing activity. When asked what percentage of the time the PIO was able to garner publicity for a community policing program, they thought that they were successful 67% of the time.

Of media personnel, 93% said they were very familiar or familiar with the community policing activities in their jurisdiction. Similar to the views of the PIOs, the media respondents did not think that community policing improved the relationship between the police and the media. Only 23% of media respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their relationship has improved since the introduction of community policing.

Although the media respondents said that the public was interested in local community policing activities, they were generally critical of the efforts of the police department to keep them informed about community policing. Only about 40% of the media personnel agreed or strongly agreed

with the statement that the police do a good job of keeping them informed about community policing. These results were similar by medium and by organizational position. There were, however, some minor differences in the responses from media personnel when examining whether departments had decentralized the community policing publicity responsibility. More than 46% of the media personnel strongly agreed or agreed that police do a good job publicizing community policing when this responsibility was not decentralized; 39% of media personnel strongly agreed or agreed when this responsibility was decentralized; and nearly 52% of the media personnel said that police do a good job of publicizing community policing when the PIO neither agreed nor disagreed that the community policing publicity responsibility was decentralized.

More than 85% of the reporters said that they had published a story on local community policing activities in the past 12 months. We also asked how frequently they published community policing stories in the past 12 months. The results indicate that 20.5% of the reporters had done 1 to 2 stories, 28.6% had published 3 to 4 stories, 25.1% had published 5 to 7 stories, 12.7% had published 8 to 10 stories, and 13.1% had published 11 stories or more. We asked a similar question of the managers to get a sense of the overall importance of community policing as a news topic. These results indicate that 1.6% of the managers said that local community policing stories appear daily, 15.4% said they appear weekly, 46.3% said they appear monthly, 23.6% said they appear about twice a year, and 13% reported some other amount. The media respondents said that local law enforcement agencies were able to get coverage of innovative police programs when they sought such coverage about 76% of the time.

COMMUNITY POLICING IN THE NEWS

The survey results were used to identify two law enforcement agencies with strong relationships (Strong 1, Strong 2) and two agencies with strained relationships (Strained 1, Strained 2) with the media. We then examined how community policing was presented in a local newspaper from these jurisdictions.

We used a four-step process to determine which agencies had strong or strained police-media relations. First, we used the PIO data to determine the departments that appeared to have an excellent or poor relationship with the news media. We used the responses to four survey questions, all Likert-type items with responses from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, to determine

this pool of departments: (a) Our relationship with local news media is good; (b) Our police department does a good job publicizing the positive aspects of the agency; (c) Good relationships between the news media and our agency are an important component of community policing; and (d) When publicizing community policing, local media are accommodating. The highest possible score a department could receive when the total for these four questions was calculated was 20 (up to five points per item (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree* × 4 items). The total score on these four items for the strong agencies was 19, and the total for Strained 1 and Strained 2 was 10 and 8, respectively. The mean total for the other departments in the sample was 17.

Second, we then examined the survey results from the media managers and media reporters to assess how the media evaluated this relationship. The three media questions that we used to identify media reaction to police media activities were (a) Our relationship with local police departments is good; (b) The police do a good job of keeping us informed about innovative programs; and (c) The public information officer is very accessible. In each market area surrounding a law enforcement agency, there were a different number of newspaper and television personnel responding to our survey. Thus, we calculated an average score for each question and then totaled the three averages. Of a possible score of 15, the strong agencies totaled 12.5 and 12.2, and the strained agencies totaled 7 and 9.5. The mean total for media personnel from all other market areas was 11.

Third, we then used other survey results to limit the pool of cities as much as possible. For example, we asked all PIOs to identify three other departments that were particularly strong at working with the news media. There was a broad range of responses to this question; however, the two departments we rated as strong were among the most frequently mentioned places known for outstanding media relations. We also asked about the amount of resources devoted to public information, the degree of access to the organization's chief executive, and the quality of the relationship between public information activities and community policing officers.

Finally, the last criterion we used to choose agencies was data accessibility. The newspaper had to be available through the Lexis-Nexus database for ease in data collection.

After we selected the agencies and newspapers of interest, we collected two samples of articles. The first sample was a collection of all news stories on community policing published during 1 calendar year. We used the following keyword search strategies to identify these stories: *community*

policing, problem-oriented policing, community police, problem-solving policing, community-oriented policing, neighborhood and policing, neighborhood policing, and community and police. Although this last search strategy produced a list of articles that included a large number of irrelevant articles, we used it to ensure that we did not overlook any community policing stories. We included any articles written by staff of that paper that focused on community policing in that market area, and included citizen op-ed pieces and editorials in the sample as well.

The second sample was of crime incident stories published in that same year. We collected this sample to estimate the importance of community policing stories relative to crime stories. We collected all crime stories published (the search strategy was *crime* or *police*) in each paper during 2 randomly constructed weeks. Prior research indicates that constructed samples are representative of newspaper coverage for 1 year (Riffe, Aust, & Lacy, 1993). Our focus here was on the beginning stages of the criminal justice system (discovery, arrest, investigation, and arraignment), stories about police activities and the department, and stories about general trends in crime. In addition, the story had to be written by a staff reporter, or had to be an editorial or a citizen op-ed piece.

We used three graduate students for coding. After each student coded a subsample of articles, we met to discuss discrepancies and clarified the coding rules. We then assigned two graduate students to a specific newspaper and a third student to code two different newspapers. We also had each student code a random sample of articles in the other newspapers to assess reliability. Intercoder reliability for the community policing article sample was 82%. Intercoder reliability for the crime article sample was 90%.

THE PRESENTATION OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN THE NEWS

Table 1 presents the total number of stories and mean number of words in each newspaper for the crime incident and community policing samples. We examined 1,273 stories. As all previous research would predict and our survey results support, the focus of each newspaper was on crime incidents. We examined 826 crime incident stories, and 447 community policing stories. In each market area, the total number of crime stories for the 2-week constructed sample was significantly more than the total number of community policing stories for the entire year. Crime stories are significantly easier to produce than stories evaluating community policing programs. A

TABLE 1. Crime and Community Policing in Total Number of Stories (Average Number of Words Per Story)

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Crime Stories</i>	<i>Community Police Stories (All)</i>	<i>Community Police Stories (Main)</i>
Strong 1	520 (110.8)	133 (574.5)	36 (714.0)
Strong 2	124 (223.9)	67 (567.9)	39 (514.3)
Strained 1	37 (501.8)	24 (756.5)	17 (778.8)
Strained 2	145 (383.4)	223 (444.8)	24 (446.1)
Total stories (words)	826 (193.1)	447 (518.6)	116 (613.3)

reporter, for example, could simply rely on several police reports and contacts with police sources, enabling him or her to produce two to four crime incident stories in a day. The production of a news story examining a community policing program would require substantially more effort, perhaps including contacts with community policing officers, residents, community leaders, and examining the specific successes of a program.

Although community policing stories are less frequently presented, when provided coverage they are given more space than crime incident stories. The average size of a crime incident story was approximately 193 words. In contrast, community policing stories averaged about 519 words. This result again reflects the effort that typically must be used to produce the different type of story and the number of contacts with sources that will be included.

Table 1 also helps illustrate how infrequently individual law enforcement agencies generated publicity for community policing programs. For each community policing story, we collected data on whether the focus of the story was about the department that had responded to the survey. Column 3 of Table 1 presents the number of stories and mean number of words for each department. Only 36 community policing stories and 39 stories were presented specifically about the two agencies with strong media relationships, and 17 and 24 stories were presented about the departments with strained relationships. Although there are some differences in the frequency of coverage, none of the departments received a significant amount of community policing coverage.

Table 2 includes the content results for the type of community policing story presented. We also present the results for the four agencies (All column) and the individual agencies of interest (Main column). This table indicates that approximately 40% of this sample discussed community policing

TABLE 2. Type of Community Policing Story (in percentages)

<i>Type of Story</i>	<i>All Areas</i>	<i>Strong 1</i>		<i>Strong 2</i>		<i>Strained 1</i>		<i>Strained 2</i>	
		<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>
Police program story	20.8	17.3	8.3	13.4	12.8	0.0	0.0	27.4	16.7
Evaluation	2.9	4.5	16.7	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	4.2
Individual officer activity	6.5	4.5	5.6	6.0	5.1	0.0	0.0	8.5	4.2
Community program	17.2	20.3	11.1	14.9	20.5	45.8	47.1	13.0	12.5
Overall police strategy	40.0	36.8	25.0	53.7	53.8	41.7	35.3	37.7	54.2
Other	12.5	16.5	33.3	10.4	7.7	12.5	17.6	10.8	8.3

as part of a department's overall police strategy. An example of this type of story is how the media reported the response to a series of shootings in a specific neighborhood. After discussing the shootings, the article described how the police were increasing patrols in that area and increasing the involvement of community policing officers. Table 2 also indicates that about 21% of all community policing stories discussed a specific police program, such as bike patrol, citizen police academies, and community action teams. These stories discussed the implementation or the operation of a community policing program, and the focus was on the implementation or operation efforts of the police department. Another type of program story presented, although covered much less frequently, were citizen or community programs. Approximately 17% of the sample focused on a citizen or community-initiated program that was linked to a police department's community policing efforts. Many stories were coded as Other. Most of these stories focused on a specific community police event (e.g., March Against Drugs, community barbecue). Fewer stories were presented that evaluated community policing or examined the efforts and activities of specific community police officers.

Table 2 also presents the results for the different agencies. The presentation of the individual departments did not differ significantly when compared to the market area presentation. In addition, there are not any clear patterns from the results of departments with strong relationships compared to departments with strained relationships.

We examined what aspects of community policing were presented in the news. We were interested in whether stories discussed community policing goals, the philosophy of community policing, the history of community policing in the department, interactions between the department and politics, and also whether community policing was presented favorably. Table 3

TABLE 3. Broad Community Policing Issues (in percentages)

	<i>All Areas</i>	<i>Strong 1</i>		<i>Strong 2</i>		<i>Strained 1</i>		<i>Strained 2</i>	
		<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>
Overall impression									
Favorable	75.1	78.2	66.7	73.1	71.8	83.3	88.25	73.1	66.7
Not Favorable	0.7	0.8	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0
Neutral	24.2	21.0	30.0	26.9	28.2	16.7	11.8	26.0	33.3
Discuss community policing goals									
Yes	65.7	48.9	33.3	58.2	53.8	70.8	82.4	77.5	65.2
No	34.3	51.1	66.7	41.8	46.2	29.2	17.6	22.5	34.8
Discuss overall philosophy									
Yes	15.0	8.3	13.9	23.9	20.5	20.8	23.5	15.8	21.7
No	85.0	91.7	86.1	76.1	79.5	79.2	76.5	84.2	78.3
Discuss history									
Yes	2.9	4.5	5.6	6.0	5.1	4.2	5.9	0.9	0.0
No	97.1	95.5	94.4	94.0	94.9	95.8	94.1	99.1	100.0
Discuss police politics									
Yes	14.3	8.3	11.1	23.9	20.5	25.0	35.3	14.0	20.8
No	85.7	91.7	88.9	76.1	79.5	75.0	64.7	86.0	79.2

presents these results. An overwhelming majority of community policing stories in all newspapers were favorable. More than 74% of the entire community policing story sample was favorable. These results were fairly consistent across the four market areas.

Most of the stories presented about community policing in all the cities present it as an independent occurrence not linked to its history, philosophy, or goals. Of the stories, 85% did not discuss the philosophy of community policing, and more than 97% of the stories did not provide any historical context. These results are consistent across the four samples. The goals of community policing were mentioned more frequently, but still only in about 65% of all community policing stories. These results perhaps reflect a major concern with how the media cover most crime and policing issues. Even when an issue or criminal justice program was covered, news media provide only limited context about that issue.

We also wanted to look closely to see whether the media provided any coverage of the involvement of the citizens in community policing programs. Such involvement is crucial to the success of community policing. Table 4 presents these results. Citizen involvement was only mentioned in less than 50% of the stories, and in just 31% of the stories is it discussed how citizens could participate in community policing. In addition, the number of

TABLE 4. Community Policing Interactions (in percentages)

	<i>All Areas</i>	<i>Strong 1</i>		<i>Strong 2</i>		<i>Strained 1</i>		<i>Strained 2</i>	
		<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>
Discuss police-citizen interaction									
Yes	46.8	54.1	66.7	40.3	38.5	41.7	47.1	44.8	41.7
No	53.2	45.9	33.3	59.7	61.5	58.3	52.9	55.2	58.3
Quality of interaction with citizens									
Favorable	80.7	68.5	45.8	90.9	85.7	100.0	100.0	85.9	37.5
Not favorable	6.6	13.7	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0
Neutral	12.7	17.8	20.8	9.1	14.3	0.0	0.0	10.9	62.5
Discuss how citizens can participate in community policing									
Yes	31.1	22.6	13.9	23.9	30.8	25.0	35.3	39.0	45.8
No	68.9	77.4	86.1	76.1	69.2	75.0	64.7	61.0	54.2
Discuss community groups									
Yes	43.4	43.6	55.6	41.8	48.7	25.0	35.3	45.7	41.7
No	56.6	56.4	44.4	58.2	51.3	75.0	64.7	54.3	58.3
Quality of interaction with community group									
Positive	52	28.8	30.0	63.0	57.9	57.1	57.1	62.1	60.0
Negative	1.5	1.7	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0
Mixed	4.6	5.1	15.0	3.7	5.3	0.0	0.0	4.9	10.0
Not specified	41.8	64.4	50.0	33.3	36.8	42.9	42.9	31.1	30.0
Mean # of groups	1.55	1.43	1.63	1.71	1.82	1.17	1.17	1.60	1.11

community groups mentioned in a community policing story was small. On average, fewer than two community groups are mentioned. When interactions are discussed, however, they are typically presented in a positive way. More than 85% of the stories discussed favorable interactions between police and citizens.

We also examined whether various outcomes were identified in community policing stories. Table 5 presents these results. Among the many goals of community policing are the reduction of crime, the reduction of fear of crime, and the improvement of the quality of life. However, these outcomes are rarely mentioned in any news stories about community policing. For example, the fear of crime was mentioned in only 9% of the stories, the quality of life was mentioned in only 17%, and efforts to reduce crime was only mentioned in 40% of the stories. Quality of life and fear of crime were mentioned in a similar percentage of the stories about the individual departments we examined. However, the goal of reducing crime was mentioned in

TABLE 5. Community Policing Outcomes (in percentages)

	<i>All Areas</i>	<i>Strong 1</i>		<i>Strong 2</i>		<i>Strained 1</i>		<i>Strained 2</i>	
		<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Main</i>
Fear of crime									
Yes	9.2	7.5	16.7	14.9	15.4	16.7	17.6	7.6	16.7
No	90.8	92.5	83.3	85.1	84.6	83.3	82.4	92.4	83.3
Quality of life									
Yes	16.8	10.5	16.7	20.9	20.5	8.3	11.8	20.2	25.0
No	83.2	89.5	83.3	79.1	79.5	91.7	88.2	79.8	75.0
Reduction of crime									
Yes	39.4	24.1	13.9	47.8	35.9	50.0	47.1	44.8	41.7
No	60.6	75.9	86.1	52.2	64.1	50.0	52.9	55.2	58.3

less than 14% (Strong 1) and less than 36% (Strong 2) of the stories about the agencies with strong media relationships. The reduction of crime was mentioned in nearly 50% (Strained 1) and more than 40% (Strained 2) of agencies with strained relationships.

The final area we wanted to examine was the sources that were provided attribution in the community policing stories. We collected data on the first three police sources cited, and the first three other sources. Most stories contained only a couple of references to sources, and we thought that the sources cited near the beginning of the story provided a proxy for the importance of a source. The mean number of other sources cited in community policing articles was 1.8 and the number of police sources was 1.1. These differences can be attributed to the broader range of other sources cited compared to the police. For example, the range of different sources cited was 0 to 15 for the other sources, and the police source range was 0 to 7.

Table 6 presents the specific sources cited in community policing stories. The chief and the command staff account for over 50% of the first three sources cited. The number of PIOs provided attribution is small; however, this reflects that PIOs were rarely specifically identified as such in a story. The PIOs, however, probably account for a large percentage of the command staff attributions.

Table 6 also indicates that citizens and community representatives account for a disproportionate number of other source attributions. For example, nearly 70% of the first sources cited was either a citizen or community representative. Politicians accounted for almost 16% of the attributions to an other source.

TABLE 6. News Sources Cited in Community Policing Stories (in percentages)

	<i>First Police Source</i>	<i>Second Police Source</i>	<i>Third Police Source</i>
Police sources			
Chief	27.4	26.3	20.5
Command staff	32.3	25.4	29.5
Public information officer	3.0	4.2	4.5
Sergeant	10.2	16.9	18.2
Patrol officers	20.5	18.6	20.5
Other	6.6	8.4	6.8
	<i>First Other Source</i>	<i>Second Other Source</i>	<i>Third Other Source</i>
Other Sources			
Citizen	32.1	32.0	39.8
Community representatives	36.9	34.5	31.7
Politicians	15.7	17.0	13.8
Other criminal justice personnel	5.8	7.0	7.3
Medical personnel	0.3	0.0	0.8
Experts	3.4	1.5	1.6
Documents	2.0	3.0	1.6
Other	3.8	4.5	2.4

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research significantly increases the understanding of the relationship between law enforcement and media organizations, the strategies used by police agencies to generate publicity for community policing, and the success of these efforts. The results highlight several important policy issues and areas of research that need additional development.

First, law enforcement agencies should consider devising and implementing broader marketing strategies to increase public awareness and involvement in community policing activities. Public information officers should play an important role in the development of this broad strategy but will need to work closely with the chief, command staff, and community policing personnel to develop it. This marketing strategy would, of course, include the news media as a prominent community policing partner. It is obvious that the news media does not have the space or the interest to make community policing a high-priority news topic. Police departments should flood the public with as much information as possible from various media sources from as many individuals in the agency as possible. More important, it will probably be easier to publicize community policing programs using other avenues outside the news media.

The survey research presented examining the day-to-day operations of police-media relations concludes that the relationship is typically quite accommodating, cooperative, and mutually supportive. The results make it clear that PIOs play a critical role in constructing the images of crime presented in the news. Police departments, generally, and PIOs, specifically, are an important source of crime information for news personnel. Public information officers have daily contact with reporters from a variety of media outlets. Public information officers appear to be the primary vehicle through which the department manages their public image. One would expect that the image provided by them would be consistent with the agency's goals. Public information officers are well trained in media relations, contact reporters for coverage, and understand the sound byte needs of news personnel. Public information officers also meet frequently with the chief, in many departments several times a day, to ensure that the public image of the department is consistent with the chief's organizational philosophy. In general, the PIOs and the media personnel were satisfied with their relationship with the media.

Marketing community policing is a separate and secondary function for most PIOs. It appears that the responsibilities involved in responding to crime incident information requests significantly limit the opportunities to proactively promote community policing in the news. This research indicates that police departments are not taking full advantage of their access to media organizations to promote community policing. More than one half of the media personnel surveyed did not think that law enforcement does a good job promoting community policing. It is important to recognize that news organizations are primarily interested in presenting crime events to the public. The survey results indicate that crime incidents are high-priority news items and community policing is a low-priority news item. Moreover, the content analysis indicates that community policing stories were not presented frequently in any of the newspapers examined here, even in those cities where police and media personnel indicated that the relationship was excellent. Even when community policing is presented, the coverage is narrow, representing a limited view of this philosophy. There is very little discussion of the goals or history of community policing, and citizen involvement and cooperation is also not frequently mentioned. It would appear that the type of coverage that community policing gets in the news are efforts at public relations but do not encourage the involvement of citizens in assisting police efforts in community policing.

Law enforcement agencies should consider developing not only a more focused organizational strategy to publicize community policing using the news media but also other types of communication strategies. Additional mechanisms to market community policing that need to be explored include the World Wide Web, public service announcements, targeted media campaigns, billboards, public speaking initiatives, and community meeting attendance to increase public exposure to community policing programs.

The second policy issue points to the need for additional personnel and resources to be used to market community policing. Of the departments surveyed, 65% had one officer responsible for public information. Public information officers do not have enough time and resources to promote community policing in the news with consistency. Law enforcement agencies should consider providing additional personnel and funds to publicize these programs using a variety of outlets.

Finally, there are several areas of research that will need to be pursued to further analyze the interactions between law enforcement and the news media. First, although the PIO clearly is the most important person responsible for attempting to generate positive publicity for the department, the media survey results indicate that reporters rely on a wide range of law enforcement personnel for data and information about the police department. It is important to conduct research to better understand these other source relationships and the motivations of these sources to participate in the news production process. Second, it is important to more thoroughly examine the presentation of community policing in the news. For example, it would be very interesting to examine whether departments that are generally considered model community policing agencies are more effective at garnering media publicity for community policing (recall that the departments selected here for analysis was based on their relationship with the news media). Moreover, it also would be beneficial to collect news items on community policing representing a broader sample of newspapers and other media outlets.

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