

To Whom Do We Answer?

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The costs of crime have reached such a level that the police community must take a cold, hard look at itself. The criminal justice system is failing the public. People want to be safe from crime, and it is up to the police to be the catalyst in making that desire a reality. (Wadman and Olson, 1990, p. 40)

One of the questions confronting modern criminal justice theory is that of responsibility. Upon whom does the burden of “crime” in the United States lie? In addressing this matter, one must look not only at enforcing laws but also at the broader, more encompassing concepts of “service” and “accountability.” To whom does law enforcement actually answer, and to whom are we responsible? The first, most logical response is that our primary responsibility is to the public we serve. This is a simple answer to a complex question. We will attempt to explore our cultures and the communities to whom we answer.

Modern, innovative law enforcement is rapidly coming to the realization that the era of adding more police, answering more calls in less time, and buying new gadgetry is coming to an end. Many agencies recognize that the police car, the radio, the air conditioner, and the decreased response times have actually removed and isolated the police from the public they are sworn to protect.

Modern police departments are 24-hour emergency operations that are available to any citizen. Technology, in particular 911 and enhanced 911 (which automatically identifies the call location), has not been a total solution to our problems. Although certainly a boon, it has also created new problems. Skolnick and Bayley (1986) note that many departments regard the emergency response system they created as a monster that consumes the operational guts of the department. Citizens are so accustomed to dialing the emergency number that police spend a large portion of their time speeding from one call to another without solving the underlying problem or benefiting anyone.

This pressure to react quickly is more often than not a response to outdated command staff strategies or priorities rather than to the public as a whole. Lack of knowledge of what the public actually wants is what has gotten us into our present situation.

The police community has slowly come to realize that the old tactics of preventive patrol and reactive investigation are incapable of preventing or solving most crimes. New innovations may have helped police manage their time better, but they have not helped to reduce crime significantly. The major point is that crime simply can no longer be the police’s sole concern. Nationwide pressures have forced police to consider a broader range of problems and solutions. Eck and Spelman (1987) note that police can no longer regard themselves as part of the criminal justice system; they must become part of the larger human services system. Likewise, police administrators recognize that the old “classical” model described by Fesler and Kettl (1991) is obsolete. Police can no longer reach their objectives through rigid, hierarchical management styles. In police work, this style not only fosters standardization and specialization, it also decreases the motivation, innovation, and creativity needed to implement new solutions to old problems. Many departments are experimenting with newer alternatives and seeking help from the private sector and the public as a whole.

Legitimacy

Let every person render obedience to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, those in authority are divinely constituted, so that the rebel against the authority is resisting God’s appointment. (Romans 13:1)

Fesler and Kettl (1991) write that a government having legitimacy has authority and that we as citizens owe our obedience “. . . only insofar as the demands . . . comply with the relevant constitutional, judicial, and executive limitations and instructions” (p. 42).

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Therein lies one of the major controversies of modern policing. Justifying what police have to do has always been difficult in democratic societies. This is especially true in the United States where ambivalence about government authority is a constant force. The police and others who implement the will of the governed—and are given the power to intervene in private lives and the authority to use force to gain compliance—are always under close scrutiny in this country.

Pivotal to the character of American policing is its source of authority or legitimacy (International City Management Association [ICMA], 1991). Prior to the 1930s, U.S. police mandates came directly from local politicians. Reform movements pushed police away from political priorities and domination into a role of being primarily enforcers of the law. By characterizing criminal law as the fundamental source of police authority, reformers eliminated many social and regulatory functions from law enforcement duties. During this time, the perception of rising crime was prevalent. The notoriety surrounding such crime figures as John Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, and Clyde Barker pushed the public to demand police protection. The police readily accepted and enhanced the portrayal of themselves as America's last bastion of defense against crime and held that picture for over half a century (ICMA, 1991).

This sense of mission is also described by Mastrofski (1988) as a recognizable source of authority and legitimacy. He portrays police acceptance of a crime fighting mandate as comparable to other occupations that seek resources and status by claiming professional domain or the capacity and responsibility for certain outcomes—in this case, lower crime rates.

Regardless of the source, police power, autonomy, and isolation have predominated for many years. To succeed, that role must change. As early as 1829, Sir Robert Peel emphasized that police should work in cooperation with the people and police officers should protect the rights, serve the needs, and earn the trust of the population they police (Critchley, 1967).

Both police and researchers are coming to realize that for decades law enforcement agencies have taken on more responsibilities than they could ever handle. Sociologist Amitai Etzioni uses the term “communitarianism” to describe the general concept of community involvement in problem solving. He states that we have gone too far in extending rights to our citi-

zens and not far enough in asking them to fulfill responsibilities to the government as a whole. It is the duty of all of us to pay our civic rent with our time, skills, and money, not just “lip service.” This brings us back to the question: “To whom do we answer?” Do citizens feel they are valued customers when they visit us or call on us for service, or are they treated as distractions who keep us from doing what we perhaps perceive as our “real” job? If this is true, then we have probably excluded them from our processes for some time, and we will have trouble identifying our “clients” and defining our goals and mission.

Herman Goldstein has noted that bureaucracies risk becoming so preoccupied with running their organizations that they lose sight of the primary purpose for which they were created. The police seem unusually susceptible to this. Organizations usually seek to minimize the influence of the external environment on internal operations. The external environment poses uncertainty for the organization and can affect government agencies dramatically. One major concern has been departmental ideologies. Changes in public beliefs threaten potential changes in government agencies. Though all agencies resist change, it is hard to think of one more resistant than the police. Typically, we have always been paramilitary rigid bureaucracies fiercely defensive of the status quo.

Skolnick and Bayley (1986) note that it was not easy to transform “Blue Knights” into community organizers. Police belong to a subculture marked by an “us-them” mentality that mistrusts working with outsiders. The authors reference the television program “Hill Street Blues,” which depicted veteran Sergeant Yablonski saying, “Let’s do it to them before they do it to us.” This dichotomy of trust only lends itself to reinforce the split between two of the bases of organization described by Fesler and Kettl (1991), namely, purpose versus clientele. For years, police agencies have isolated themselves by claiming the right and professionalism to handle “operational matters” about which the public knows little. Despite the omnipresence of cops on the street, the American public seems to get most of its information about police from television shows that grossly distort reality and give rise to impossible expectations about what police can and cannot do (Bouza, 1990). Police tend to play up these beliefs and reinforce the public’s ignorance by shrouding operations in secrecy.

The public often does not understand, and perhaps does not want to understand, the way police and their organizations operate. Police generally encounter people at their worst, not their best. They are called to family fights, not family picnics. They see mostly the dark side of human nature. Someone has to deal with the blood, the hurt children, and the human anguish that no one wants to face, and it is usually the police.

On the other hand, the public is often as guilty of causing rifts by maintaining the attitude that police work is dirty, tainted, or disgusting, forcing the police to isolate themselves. This exacerbates the clash between purpose and clientele. The police are there to “protect and serve.” Unfortunately, police officers often see their purpose mainly as “to protect,” and the public or clientele sees the purpose solely as “to serve.” This isolation on both sides makes joint efforts difficult, and, in the meantime, the criminal element of society takes advantage of both sides.

One of the first steps is toward what Skolnick and Bayley call “police-community reciprocity” (1988, p. 211). The “us-them” attitude must give way to an “all of us” perspective. The community and the police have to be partners in crime prevention. All must share. The first move is to involve the public in the police mission.

Mission, values, policy, and culture

The function of the police mission as defined by Couper and Lobitz (1991) is to focus on the department’s purpose, call attention to what is important to the department, and define its values. The culture of a police department reflects what that department believes in as an organization. Those beliefs are reflected in the policies of the department and the way it conducts daily business.

All departments have a culture. The question is: Was it carefully developed or just allowed to happen? As an example, if a department views the use of force as a typical occurrence and the normal way to handle situations, its response to an excessive force complaint will be radically different from a department that views routine use of force as atypical. Its officers come to view the use of force as an acceptable way to resolve most conflicts. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “An institution is the lengthened shadow of one

man.” The tone set by the leadership must be reflected by the organization, and the organization must project that tone to the public, who must respond in return.

In light of this, a department must establish a value system and state its policy. It must list goals, guidelines for performance, and standards for evaluation. Most important, and sometimes most difficult, is to involve the community in the policymaking process.

Dunham and Alpert observe: “Power sharing is not a central feature of . . . police agency programming” (1989, p. 353). A department must be accessible to the public, and that accessibility depends on whether there is a plan to enhance citizen involvement in police activity. Where the policymaking and decision-making relationship is one-sided, there is little hope for long-term involvement. If the public has little voice in how its problems are prioritized and addressed, there will be little desire for future participation. Likewise, if a department does not articulate its values to the community, the community cannot begin to understand how to help.

Sparrow, Moore, and Kennedy (1990) state, “Managing through values, and the values police executives choose to manage by, will play a crucial role” (p. 195). Ideologically and functionally, the police traditionally have resisted community participation in policy and goal formation. Unfortunately, police departments also have resisted the police officer’s role in policymaking. Line officers often feel alienated from the very organizations that employ them. Police officers themselves have been disenfranchised and frustrated by complex, impersonal, and degrading organizational policies and practices (Dunham and Alpert, 1989). In general, rigid, bureaucratic police agencies often exclude not only the public they serve but also the officers who serve that public.

In the late 1970s, in the face of this truth, the police realized they needed help. As crime rates tripled between 1960 and the late 1980s (Bouza, 1990), both the police and the public began to see the flaws of the system, and changes began to be implemented.

To whom do we answer?

In an informal survey of several chiefs of police, we asked, “To whom do you answer?” We received responses such as, “the mayor,” “the elected officials who appointed me,” “the community,” “God,” and

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“myself.” All of these are elements of the communities we serve. Their strengths and demands for attention may wax and wane, but they are always present and are potential clients.

How individual officers and their departments are assessed is one of the specific issues that leads to many misconceptions on the part of the police and members of the community. The criteria used to evaluate a department must be consistent with the police mission and culture of the department. Morgan (1986) refers to culture as “the patterns of development reflected in a society’s system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day ritual” (p. 112). As previously noted, the culture of a department reflects what the department believes as an organization. The beliefs are reflected in the department’s recruitment, selection, training, and, ultimately, the actions of its officers as they interact with the public. The values of the department should reflect its own community and should be based on concepts such as service, commitment, professionalism, integrity, and community involvement. The police should demonstrate leadership that is sensitive to community needs. Accountability to other institutions conforms to the American notion of a system of checks and balances. Our communities will not, and should not, tolerate isolation and lack of accountability.

Reviewing the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics—adopted by the Executive Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police in 1989 to replace the 1957 Code of Ethics—we are freshly reminded of the simplicity of the guidelines we must follow. The Code offers direction on the primary responsibilities, performance of duties, discretion, use of force, confidentiality, integrity, cooperation with other officers and agencies, personal/professional capabilities, and private life of a police officer. Policing is not an exact science, and dealing with people is not always easy. We are not perfect as police officers, administrators, or people, but our chosen career means we are held to a higher standard. We are all bound by this Code, which clearly defines our obligations.

Except in the smallest, most homogeneous police jurisdictions, various neighborhoods have different needs and require different responses from their police departments. Tradition, as well as need, affects these expectations and demands. Police departments

are civil service agencies and are responsible for providing a service and answering to the public.

Whether a police agency defines its operational style as traditional, community-oriented, or some mixture of the two, it must recognize the various communities it encompasses. Using this broad definition, everyone is a member of at least one community. Past practices have created a breach between the police and certain communities as we have minimized external influences on policymaking and how services are rendered. We are not an invading army, owing allegiance only to a distant force that commissions us. We are civil servants, and, although many of us work in positions that are protected from termination without cause, common sense and fairness dictate that we work to serve the public. We may define the public as composed of the communities that make up our jurisdictions. Mayhall, Barker, and Hunter define community as “a group of people sharing common boundaries, such as common goals, needs, interests, and/or geographical locations” (1995, p. 14). They divide the population into three communities: internal, external, and overlapping. We are responsible to each community.

Internal communities

As policing has become more professional with a code of ethics, required training, professional associations, and stringent Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) standards, police missions, training, and day-to-day activities have to some degree become standardized throughout the United States. Acceptable police behavior in the Southeast is appropriate in the Northwest, and inappropriate behavior in New York City is not acceptable in Los Angeles. National news has kept us abreast of police misconduct and scandal across the country, and we all recognize these behaviors as offensive, unethical, and even criminal.

The age of technology has brought us, as professional police officers, many welcome tools and advances. But it has also brought police indiscretions and criminal actions from across the Nation into the living rooms and lunchrooms of our communities. All officers are looked at with a jaundiced eye when a scandal-thirsty media paints us all with the same brush. We are all part of the police community and affected by the communities’ perceptions. The stereotypes given us by the national media, including

television and movies, are not so negative that we cannot overcome them. We need the support of all of our employees.

Support personnel. Most calls for service begin with a phone call to the communications center. Regardless of the size of the operation, the person who answers the telephone sets the tone for the entire police interaction. A professional, helpful, concerned calltaker may never be recognized or praised, but an unprofessional, disinterested one will soon come to the administration's attention. All support personnel must be trained and motivated to do their jobs with pride. As members of our internal community, their importance cannot be overstressed, and communication between them and the administration must be two way. We answer to the support personnel.

Sworn personnel. We must encourage our officers to use each citizen contact as an opportunity to demonstrate professionalism and commitment to service. Police officers are not called to celebrate joyous occasions but to handle tragedy, disaster, crime, and, most often, petty annoyances. The officers are affected by the stressful nature of the job, and we owe them the benefit of our experiences. They are our hands, eyes, and ears, and we cannot accomplish our missions without their willing assistance. Our employees are our internal communities and are vital to the success of our organizations. All members of our internal community are what Lipsky (1980) calls "street-level bureaucrats" as they make decisions and render justice based on their interpretation of departmental policy. Lee P. Brown, during his tenure as the chief of the Houston Police Department from 1982 to 1990, gave his officers the charge of solving problems on their beats. He encouraged their interaction with local individuals and groups to get to the direct causes of crime. He said, "Police can be most effective if they help communities to help themselves." We must use selection and training to make our officers "the finest," then we must charge them with the duty of managing their areas of responsibility. If they are treated with respect and trust, they will respond in kind. We answer to the police officers.

To better serve our internal communities, we must realize the fabric of society is changing, and so are the persons who seek employment as police officers. Historically, work was viewed as performing one of four roles. First, work was considered to have intrinsic

value, and people worked because they enjoyed it. Second, it had moral, spiritual, or ethical value, and people received purpose, challenge, and responsibility from hard work, thrift, and frugality. Third, work was a necessary evil to be performed to get enough money to have pleasure while not depriving the worker of too much leisure. Finally, although work was a source of material existence, Eli Ginzberg, in *Contemporary Readings in Organizational Behavior* (Luthans, 1972), states "it also satisfied man's spiritual, social, and psychological needs, for research has shown that work regulates the life of individuals and binds them to reality" (p. 148). Although people find their productive role important in relating themselves to the social system and maintaining their sense of well-being in the economic order, many workers today seem to have difficulty in perceiving their jobs as being important except as they improve their standard of living.

Among other factors, this growing sense of low status and the inability to achieve a position of prestige in one's job minimizes employee individuality and creativity, resulting in boredom, lack of interest, a sense of inferiority and unrest, and a search for other means of obtaining status, especially in the personal struggle for professional identification. Loss of employment and subsequent embarrassment simply do not carry the same social risks for younger people as they do for older employees who would suffer greater loss. Some younger people fail to exhibit loyalty to their employer or express pride in workmanship. They seem to view shirking their duties as merely "ripping off the establishment" and feel no responsibility to perform. Employers can expand their relationships with employees to include concern and involvement with them as individuals who have needs, potential, and responsibilities that extend beyond the workplace. Stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and other maladies are emerging, reflecting the new realities and conditions of work.

As Tofoya (1990) noted, the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 marked the beginning of the "first wave" of law enforcement reform. Sir Robert Peel structured the London police on a military model but emphasized the "mutual reliance" between officers and citizens. In the 1930s, August Vollmer (chief of the Berkeley, California, Police Department) and O.W. Wilson's (chief of the Chicago Police Department) efforts brought on the "second wave" through "

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professionalization.” Although the need for this reform was clear, it heralded the period of police isolation as they traveled rapidly in radio cars and wanted “just the facts, ma’am,” because these “professional” officers had all the modern technology and did not need the citizens. We stood alone and answered to ourselves. The civil and social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s provided the impetus for the “third wave” of reform. Police researchers and practitioners such as Patrick V. Murphy began to question the value of the bureaucratic and military models of professional policing.

Top-heavy organizational structures are no longer tolerated in private industry. Stepping forward, we must leave the inflexible organizational structures and adopt more flattened, progressive structures that push authority and decisionmaking to lower levels. We must recognize this as a positive change and begin developing managerial partnerships with supervisory and line officers. Through empowerment and job enrichment, we must share the decisionmaking with our personnel, thereby improving our relationships with our internal communities and our services to our external communities.

External communities

There is a long list of external communities with which we interact. These groups include people who share strong bonds and histories and others whose associations are accidental. These may be public, private, or civic organizations. All of these communities have individual needs and demands, but we must consider the greater good when allocating resources. We have all heard demands for greater enforcement that have been contradicted by complaints when the increased enforcement struck the “good” citizens who had complained in the first place. As individuals, we have different personalities, and our departments often reflect this diversity. Our employees are aware of our treatment of them and “ordinary” citizens and often use this as a guide for their behaviors.

Our approach is no longer just crime reduction driven but citizen driven. When continuous, this approach creates the need for sound information about the community. The only place to obtain reliable information about the key shifts in the needs and expectations of the community is from the citizens and patrol officers who work most directly with them. Police administrators must understand that respect for citizens and a

sincere enthusiasm and desire to serve are true necessities. The only way we can develop a close relationship with our citizens is to accept them as intelligent, aware, and capable.

We know we cannot resolve the problems associated with crime without community support. The theory of community-oriented policing is based on establishing a partnership between the police and law-abiding citizens. We experience varying levels of success. It frequently seems we are “preaching to the choir” because the same concerned citizens are always involved. Some of them pledge involvement but never quite make the commitment and follow through. Others honestly admit they feel they pay the police for a service and do not want personal involvement with law enforcement. Just as police officers exercise discretion, so do citizens. They may choose not to report, witness, or testify. However, good police-community relations increases the number of involved citizens.

Media. Our interactions with the media are far reaching and vast. Although they are sometimes difficult, we must take care not to develop an adversarial relationship. Negative experiences felt by both the media and the police have caused feelings of distrust and anger. The media have a responsibility to provide information to the public, and the people have great interest in police activities. In their endeavors to earn the highest ratings in a competitive market, members of print and electronic media make constant demands on law enforcement agencies and may exploit citizens’ fear of crime. The fourth estate is very powerful, and we were all taught as rookies that the pen is mightier than the sword. We must respect the media’s power as they must respect our authority and need to maintain investigative integrity. Media activity is protected by the First Amendment, and it is our job to defend their rights and see that they are treated justly. We must keep our relationships with the media honest and as open as investigations permit. Negative experiences in both sectors have caused distrust, fear, and anger. The reporters do their jobs, just as we do ours. We must not misuse and abuse but, rather, make use of their services to educate the public on crime trends, provide safety tips, and seek assistance in obtaining information to solve crimes. The media can be very effective in presenting our proper image to the public, or it can be damning to an extent that public confidence and internal morale are harmed severely.

Therefore, our relationship with the media must be cultivated, but not to the point of “back scratching.” We answer to the media.

Elected officials. A simple answer to the question “To whom do we answer?” is, “the elected officials.” Police may answer to a mayor, city manager, council, commission, or an elected or appointed body. With civil service status and court rulings, the “political boss” atmosphere has thinned. We owe loyalty and service to the elected officials, just as the agency personnel owe us. These elected officials have received a mandate from the voting public as to the level and direction of law enforcement required by the community, and they must pass this information on to us. We rely on these officials for our budgetary needs, and we enforce the statutes they enact. We answer to the elected officials.

Victims and other law-abiding citizens. Law-abiding citizens outnumber criminals in all neighborhoods, but sometimes they are not as obvious. These people are the foundation of society, paying taxes and leading lives that require little government intervention. They are our supporters and our employers. Although many view us as the “thin blue line” and give us almost unconditional support, others judge us based on their limited police contacts, those of their friends and neighbors, and the image of police they receive from news reports, television, and movies. The degree of trust between citizens and police is a major factor in determining how much confidence is placed in the police response to their concerns. Modern society is better organized, more vocal, and less intimidated by government agents, and police managers must be prepared to address the concerns of the public in an honest and direct manner.

Birmingham, Alabama, has a strong neighborhood association, made up of 99 neighborhoods, that elects officers and meets monthly to discuss local matters. Beat officers and supervisors attend these meetings and address concerns pertinent to the department. The citizens of each neighborhood review all zoning changes, liquor permits, and other requests for licenses of businesses they feel will impact the quality of life in their communities, then make recommendations to the city council. Their decisions greatly influence whether these requests will be granted.

Citizens working with police officers at neighborhood association meetings and in other community activi-

ties help the residents to better understand the officers, just as the officers feel firsthand the climates of the neighborhoods. This interaction increases the sensitivity of both groups and is beneficial in increasing the officers’ empathy with the citizens they serve. This knowledge is particularly important in dealing with victims. People experiencing the worst events of their lives rightfully become offended when responding officers seem not to care and to make light of their problems. We are judged by our reputations, and reputations are fragile. We answer to all law-abiding citizens.

Offenders. Offenders and suspects have certain inalienable rights, and we are sworn to uphold those rights. As police officers, we interact with the criminal element on different levels. We cannot discount recent technological advances, but it is our knowledge of criminal behavior and individual offenders that serves as our greatest weapon and allows us to succeed in our fight. We recognize that even those who engage in unlawful activities can be victims of crime and are also our clients. We answer to the offenders.

Corporate citizens. Businesspeople are often the most demanding of our constituents. The forceful personalities that have contributed to their success in the business world often make them difficult to serve. Businesses typically pay a large share of the tax base and demand commensurate services. They require a safe environment to operate. Although there are almost twice as many people employed in private security as public police, we are often the sole providers of corporate safety. We owe the same level of service to all “communities.” We have not developed a model for measuring the social, psychological, and economic impact of crimes committed against business entities to those committed against citizens in their homes. We understand the economic repercussions of losing businesses to other “safer” jurisdictions, but we also sympathize with the suffering of all our constituents without regard to their status. We must provide adequate protection to our corporate citizens and their employees and customers, but there are not enough personnel to place an officer on every corner as some demand. We know this is an unnecessary level of police involvement, yet we hear constant requests for this service, and we must be able to explain our personnel allocation. We answer to the corporate community.

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Other government agencies, including the courts, corrections, service agencies, and law enforcement agencies. Police departments do not answer directly to these other agencies, but they must work cooperatively with them. The effectiveness, efficiency, and services rendered by each depends, to some degree, on the other. The concept of community-oriented policing has shown the need for a greater degree of cooperation between the police and these agencies. Programs such as Weed and Seed have been used to foster this working relationship. However, the relationship works because of mutual respect for each other.

The relationship between the police and courts is not only different, it is complex and sometimes difficult. The police have been and are affected by judicial decisions from the courts. The Miranda and Terry cases are two cases that affect or dictate how police do their jobs. The court will issue orders directing the police to pick up certain person(s) and may hold the police in contempt if they fail to comply. There was a case where, as a young officer, Chief Johnson was ordered by the court to go to a hospital and arrest an older, feeble gentleman in a wheelchair and deliver him to jail. Had he been free to exercise discretion, Johnson would have chosen to leave the man in the hospital. We answer to other government agencies, especially the courts.

Overlapping communities

Many people are part of overlapping internal and external communities interacting with law enforcement. These overlapping affiliations are based on social class, gender, ethnic status, sexual preference, and membership in civic and political groups. None of these are our “bosses,” but they all have an impact on the way we do our jobs.

Depending on our backgrounds and the traditions and cultures in which we work, some groups will have more influence than others. Religious institutions and leaders hold more sway with the Southern and African-American cultures. Ethnic communities influence their local governments and have more of an impact on local police departments as hiring practices continue to reflect more closely the diverse communities served. (This is the personal opinion of the authors based on the church’s role in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.) Police departments have traditionally been against homosexuals, but this position has

softened. Civic groups serve a multitude of purposes, but most are supportive of law enforcement. Citizens involved in civic groups are generally involved in other aspects of the local community, and, recognizing this, police officers are responsive to their needs. Even in times of political reform, human nature dictates that those in powerful positions—whether because of their economic status, education, or political position—have a greater influence on law enforcement than we would like to admit. We surely answer to all of these overlapping communities.

Summary

Most important, we answer to ourselves. We must answer to the “man in the mirror.” How we answer is framed by all of our past experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. Former Chicago Police Chief O.W. Wilson said that each police administrator must be prepared to resign rather than compromise on a serious ethical issue. It is incumbent on us to be good stewards and serve those who serve us. We can never be all things to all people, but we have achieved positions of authority and responsibility, and we have a duty to act with courage and honor. As we have seen, police executives recognize that their departments must be more accessible to the communities. We are trying to establish our legitimacy and manage our accountability by fostering closer relationships and tearing down the barriers that have isolated us from our internal and external communities. We must lift the veil of the police mystique and open our departments to public and internal scrutiny. We must step out in Faith.

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The Police as an Agency of Municipal Government: Implications for Measuring Police Effectiveness

Mark H. Moore and Margaret Poethig

The changing paradigm of policing: from “first step in the criminal justice system” to “agency of municipal government”

Since the publication of *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society: Report of the President's Crime Commission*, citizens, practitioners, and scholars have viewed police, prosecutors, courts, and correctional agencies as constituent parts of a criminal justice system.¹ What joins these separately administered agencies in a “system” is that their operations are linked in a specific process: the handling of criminal cases. The process begins with the allegation of a criminal offense, proceeds through an investigation to the arrest of suspects, progresses to the formal charging and prosecution of those arrested, and ultimately concludes with the adjudication and disposition of the cases. Viewed from this vantage point, the police play an obvious and important role: They begin the process of criminal justice adjudication by initiating cases with an arrest and a charge.²

This view of the police as the crucial first step in criminal justice system processing meshes seamlessly with a particular view of the overall role of the police in society: the “professional law enforcement model” of policing.³ In this conception, the fundamental goal of the police is to reduce crime by enforcing the criminal law. They do so largely by arresting (or threatening to arrest) criminal offenders. To create the threat of arrest and actually produce arrests, they rely on three key operations: (1) patrolling public spaces, (2) responding to calls from citizens, and (3) investigating crimes.

This view of policing is also perfectly reflected in the measures conventionally used to evaluate police performance:

- The focus on *levels of reported crime* reflects the view that the most important result the police seek is reduced criminal victimization.
- The focus on *numbers of arrests* reflects the view that the most important thing the police can do to accomplish the goal of reducing crime is to arrest offenders to produce deterrence, incapacitation, and whatever opportunity for rehabilitation exists.
- The focus on *response times, clearance rates, and numbers of sworn officers* reflects (more or less precisely) our understanding about the ways in which the police can produce arrests (e.g., through rapid response, retrospective investigation, and—less perfectly—police presence).

What citizens expect is what police departments measure; what gets measured, in turn, profoundly shapes what the police do.

The problem is that this conception of what the police *should* do differs from what they *actually* do and what they *could* do to enrich the quality of urban life.⁴ By viewing the police as the first step in criminal justice processing, we miss the important role that private institutions—such as families, community organizations, churches, and businesses—play in preventing, identifying, and responding to criminal conduct and the role that the police might play in supporting these efforts. Similarly, by focusing exclusively on reducing serious crime, we miss the important role that the police play in managing disorder in public spaces, reducing fear, controlling traffic and crowds, and providing various emergency services. By focusing

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attention on arrests, clearance rates, and the speed of response to calls for service, we ignore the important contribution that other kinds of police problem-solving efforts can make to prevent crime, reduce fear, and improve the quality of community life. Thus, our limited expectations of the police, and our limited methods of measuring their performance, result in our failure to recognize the important contributions that police make to the quality of urban life beyond these boundaries and to manage police departments to achieve these valuable results.⁵

The purposes of this paper are essentially four:

- To establish a justification for viewing the police differently, as an “agency of municipal government” rather than as the “first step in the criminal justice system.”
- To imagine (from this different vantage point) the varied contributions the police could and do make to the overall performance of municipal government and the quality of urban life beyond reduction of crime and enforcement of the criminal law.
- To develop ideas about how these contributions outside the boundaries of crime control, law enforcement, and criminal justice processing could be “recognized” (in an accounting sense) through measurement systems that could accurately capture the full public value contributed by police departments to the quality of life in their cities.
- To look at an example of a police organization that appears to be doing in practice what we recommend in theory.

The police as an agency of municipal government

Consider first why it might be appropriate to view the police as an agency of municipal government rather than only an element of the criminal justice system. The most obvious and important reason is that municipal government supplies the resources the police need to do their work. The resources are of two kinds.⁶ One resource is the money the police receive to pay salaries, provide for future pensions, and purchase the guns and computers they need to do their work. That money is raised through local tax levies and appropriated to the police through the processes of local government.⁷

The other resource that police rely on is less tangible: the legal authority to oblige citizens to behave in ways that allow them to live together with some degree of security and order. As the Philadelphia Police Study Task Force explained:

The police are entrusted with important public resources. The most obvious is money. . . . Far more important, the public grants the police another resource—the use of force and authority. These are deployed when a citizen is arrested or handcuffed, when an officer fires his weapon at a citizen, and when an officer claims exclusive use of the streets with his siren.⁸

The police need authority not only to arrest people for serious crimes such as robbery, rape, and murder but also to require citizens to refrain from driving while drinking, to park in places that do not interfere with traffic flow, and to desist from carrying guns in public spaces without a license. They also can require citizens demonstrating against government not to inflict too many costs on other citizens who want to use public spaces for their own purposes.

Much of the authority the police need to do their job comes from sources other than local government. The criminal laws they are charged with enforcing are passed, for example, at the State level or have been developed from the common law. Many of the powers they are granted to enforce the laws (such as the power to stop and search) are granted and conditioned by the U.S. Constitution. But some of the laws they enforce, and some of the powers they are granted to achieve this objective, are created at local levels. Thus, local police are charged with enforcing many municipal ordinances against such acts as spitting, disorderly conduct, or taverns being too loud and open too late.⁹ Many policies regulating police behavior in such areas as use of deadly force or high-speed chases also are established locally.¹⁰

These observations seem important for this simple reason: If local government provides the money and (at least some of) the authority for the police to do their work, then it seems reasonable to conclude that local government “owns” the police. If local government owns the police, it seems reasonable to imagine that local government could direct the police toward whatever valuable purposes it has in mind.

A second reason for viewing the police as an agency of municipal government is closely related to (and partially qualifies) the first: If local government provides the resources to municipal police departments, then it seems plausible to assume that the police are accountable, in the first instance, to *local* government. Of course, the police also are accountable to “the rule of law.” Indeed, that commitment is so strong that it would morally and legally oblige the police to resist or challenge local political requests to take “illegal” or “unfair” action against citizens. If they did not resist these demands, the police might well become vulnerable to prosecution for political corruption or civil rights violations. Moreover, due to their functional dependency on their fellow agencies in the criminal justice system, the police are at least powerfully influenced by the expectations of prosecutors, courts, and other State and Federal enforcement agencies, if not directly accountable to them. Thus, the elected officials of municipal government are not the only ones who can hold the police accountable or expect to influence them. Nevertheless, since local government supports the police with local tax levies and local ordinances grant them (conditional) powers, then arguably local government should be able to use the police for whatever (lawful) purposes it chooses.

A third reason is that the police both *can* and *do* take actions that affect many aspects of community life beyond controlling serious crime.¹¹ For example, police reduce signs of disorder that undermine a sense of security, regulate festering disputes that if left unattended might escalate into crimes, and protect the rights of individuals who might easily become the targets of racial prejudice. In doing so, the police enhance security and liberty and enrich the overall quality of life. Moreover, they accomplish both crime control and other valuable purposes through means other than making arrests.¹² In short, the police have capabilities that go beyond their ability to threaten and make arrests; further, these capabilities turn out to be valuable for more purposes than simply reducing crimes. If we conceive of the police as nothing more than “the first step in the criminal justice system,” then we might easily miss the contributions that they make “outside the box” of crime control, law enforcement, and arresting people. On the other hand, if we conceive of the police as an agency of municipal government that shares with other agencies the broad responsibility for strengthening the quality of urban

life, then we are in a better position to notice that the police contribute much more to those goals than is captured by the simple idea of reducing crime. We also notice that the police have capabilities that go far beyond their ability to make arrests and that these capabilities are valuable to the enterprise of city government. In short, the police are a more valuable asset when viewed from the vantage point of trying to strengthen urban life than they are when viewed from the narrower perspective of reducing crime through making arrests.

The reason that this last point is both important and difficult to grasp has to do with the way that we think about organizations in the public sector.¹³ In the public sector, an organization typically is viewed as an efficient machine for achieving a set of narrowly defined purposes set out in the organization’s authorizing legislation. In essence, in the public sector, management begins with a specific set of objectives and then builds an organization designed to achieve them as efficiently and effectively as possible. In that way, society as a whole maintains effective control over public-sector organizations. If an organization spends money or exerts authority outside the boundaries of its authorization or for purposes that were not included in its initial mission, it is guilty of either “fraud, waste, or abuse” (in the case of misuse of funds) or “abuse of authority” and “malfeasance” (in the case of improper use of authority).

Three difficulties arise from this way of thinking, however. One is that, in building an organization to meet a specific set of objectives, we sometimes build a set of capabilities that are valuable not only for the specified purpose but *for other purposes as well*. Thus, for example, a library can be useful in providing afterschool programs to latchkey children as well as in providing library services to adults;¹⁴ a registry of motor vehicles can be valuable in collecting unpaid parking tickets for local government as well as in distributing licenses and registrations;¹⁵ and the U.S. military can contribute to reducing the supply of illicit drugs reaching U.S. cities as well as providing for the defense of the Nation.¹⁶ The question facing the public and the managers of these organizations, then, is whether the organizations ought to be used for these other purposes as well as for the purposes for which they were originally established. If they have the capabilities, why not use them for valuable purposes?

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A second difficulty is that, because organizational leaders in the public sector are supposed to think of themselves as operating machines that have been designed to achieve specific purposes in the most efficient way, they often think that *the specific things they now do represent the best way to accomplish their mission*. After all, if their specific, current activities were *not* the most efficient means for accomplishing their mission, they would be guilty of fraud, waste, and abuse and undermining their own claims of professional competence. Since that is too horrible to contemplate, it must be true both that the current mission is the right one and that the specific means they have developed to achieve the mission are the only ways to achieve it.

A third problem is that, while the world often changes around public organizations, the changes are not always incorporated into a redefinition of their mandates. Sometimes the piece of the world that changes is the “task environment.” Certainly that happened to the police when the crack epidemic hit America’s cities. When street drug markets, violent youths, and child abuse and neglect all challenged police departments’ enforcement methods, the police were forced to shift the balance of their efforts and develop new methods to meet the challenges. At other times, the world around public organizations changes through the development of new operational procedures that are considered more effective than the old or the development of new technologies. For example, the police have changed their approaches to domestic violence¹⁷ and begun to explore “problem solving” as an alternative to “rapid response.”¹⁸ Still other times, citizens’ aspirations for the police, and how they would like to use the police, change. For example, many citizens want the police to shift to a strategy of “community policing,” in which the police are more responsive to the needs of particular neighborhoods and deploy themselves in ways that make them more accessible to and familiar with local communities.

At some level of abstraction, of course, the overall mission of the police never changes.¹⁹ It continues to be “to serve and to protect,” “to ensure law and order,” and “to enforce the law fully and fairly.” But within the spaces created by these broad concepts, many significantly different ideas—of what the police do each day, what they are rewarded for, and how their resources are allocated—exist. There may be no particular reason for the current constellation of activities

and purposes to be seen as the only ones that are either consistent with these broad concepts or capable of achieving these lofty ends. Thus, there may be more room for innovation of all kinds than is commonly assumed by either the police or those who oversee them.

The point of these observations is that it is too easy for both the police and those who oversee them to imagine that they are already living in the best of all possible worlds—one in which the purposes of the police (at both abstract and concrete levels) are the right ones, and the means being relied upon (both organizationwide and in response to particular kinds of problems) are the most efficient and effective. The reality, however, may be different. There may be valuable purposes to which the police can contribute that are not recognized or adequately emphasized in the current understanding of the police mission. There also may be valuable new means that could be adopted to achieve either old or new goals. Such a situation could have occurred simply because the world around police departments changed. Thus, it might be important for them to change their operations (at a programmatic or strategic level); yet, they are held back by a rigid conception of their mission and the most efficient means for achieving their goals.

The problems of adapting and using organizations are less severe in the private sector because private-sector supervisors and managers think about their organizations differently from those in the public sector. Instead of thinking about an organization as an intricate machine that has been engineered to achieve a specific, well-defined purpose as efficiently and effectively as possible, private-sector supervisors and managers think of it as an asset whose value is contained in its “distinctive competencies”; that is, in the things the organization knows how to do well. Typically, their conception of distinctive competence is relatively abstract. For example, they might think of a police organization as one that comprises a large number of well-trained, highly motivated, and resourceful people—linked to citizens through telephones and radios, and able to get to most places in a city quickly and to form into different-sized operational groups—who are carrying out the authority of the State. What they ask themselves, then, about such an organization is not whether it is achieving a narrow purpose efficiently and effectively; instead, they ask: *What valuable things could I produce with this*

organization? If one thinks about policing in this way, one sees a remarkably different set of possibilities than if one thinks: (1) that the mission of the police is to control crime; (2) that the best way to do that is to make arrests; and (3) that the best way to make arrests is through (a) patrol, (b) rapid response, and (c) retrospective investigation. Thinking about the police as an agency of municipal government facilitates and to some degree justifies this fundamental paradigm shift toward the private-sector model.

How the police contribute to the quality of urban life and improve the performance of municipal government

Given that it is at least plausibly appropriate and useful to think of the police as an agency of municipal government, what other roles could the police play? What additional responsibilities might they assume? What activities would support these different responsibilities? These questions can be analyzed in three different categories:

- How, in the context of a wider conception of the police mission that focuses on enhancing the overall quality of life in a city, police operations can contribute directly to these broader goals.
- How, in either the old or new vision of the police mission, the police can contribute to more effective operations of other agencies of municipal government or the government as a whole.
- How the police, in their new and expanded mission, might contribute to the development and operation of private institutions such as families, communities, and commerce that cities need to succeed.

Police roles in supporting the quality of urban life

Pioneering work on the roles of the police was done by Herman Goldstein several years after the President's Crime Commission issued its report.²⁰ It is somewhat ironic that at precisely the time society was getting the benefit of Goldstein's accurate and broad vision of what the police do and what they contribute to community life, the Commission was defining a

relatively narrow vision of policing. In *Policing a Free Society*, Goldstein succinctly listed the functions of the police:

- To prevent and control conduct widely recognized as threatening to life and property (serious crime).
- To aid individuals who are in danger of physical harm, such as the victim of a criminal attack.
- To protect constitutional guarantees such as the right of free speech and assembly.
- To facilitate the movement of people and vehicles.
- To assist those who cannot care for themselves: the intoxicated, the addicted, the mentally ill, the physically disabled, the old, and the young.
- To resolve conflict, whether between individuals, groups of individuals, or individuals and their government.
- To identify problems that have the potential to become more serious problems for the individual citizen, the police, or the government.
- To create and maintain a feeling of security in the community.²¹

This was a much broader conception of the police role than the one endorsed by citizens, realized in police operations, or reliably captured through the measurement systems then (and now) being used to measure police performance. More recently, scholars have focused attention on three broad purposes that the police could (and often do) serve that are extremely valuable to communities, but that nonetheless go unrecognized, unsupported, and unmeasured.

Crime prevention. One such purpose is to prevent as well as react to crime. A traditionalist could argue that a great deal of crime is prevented by reacting (and threatening to react) quickly and aggressively to criminal offending. Such actions could deter crime or, by generating arrests and successful prosecutions, allow for the incapacitation and/or rehabilitation of offenders. These mechanisms would prevent future crimes from being committed. Yet, crime prevention emphasizes that there may be other things the police could do to keep offenses from being committed in the first place and if there are such activities, that they would be valuable to undertake.

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Initial thoughts about crime prevention tend to focus on what might be considered “primary prevention”: efforts directed toward the broad social conditions that seem to spawn both criminal offenders and crimes.²² These may be further divided into efforts designed to either: (1) ensure the healthy development of children to reduce the likelihood that they will be inclined to commit crimes, or (2) promote the social and economic development of poor communities to create environments that produce not only fewer criminals but also fewer opportunities and occasions for committing crime. Such work often seems like “social” or “community development” work, which is well beyond the capacities and responsibilities of the police.

Many tend to agree with this position. Yet, the police may be able to make important contributions to even these broad prevention objectives. For example, concern for the healthy development of children has long been expressed through police activities. In the past, this was manifested through the (largely, but not entirely) volunteer efforts associated with Police Athletic Leagues.²³ More recently, it has been expressed in the enthusiasm for the D.A.R.E.[®] program.²⁴ Even more important contributions to the healthy development of children may be made by police operations that do not have the development of children as a specific objective. For example, by enforcing laws against domestic violence and child abuse and neglect, by helping to keep routes to schools free from drug dealing, and by reducing the power and stature of gangs, the police may contribute to establishing conditions within which children have a better chance of navigating the difficult course to responsible citizenship.²⁵

Moreover, the police also may contribute to community social and economic development by making themselves available for partnerships with communities that want to develop themselves. Police can be particularly valuable by dramatically improving the level of security in these neighborhoods so that hope is kindled and local residents have reasons for making investments in themselves, their children, and their property.²⁶

Still, many of the most valuable contributions the police can make to crime prevention are the results of activities that often are considered more superficial than these primary preventive efforts. For instance, police engage in a wide variety of efforts focused

on controlling the situational factors that seem to contribute to crime. Ron Clarke has both developed the theory of “situational crime prevention” and presented many examples of its success.²⁷ His colleague, Marcus Felson, has demonstrated the role that “routine activities” play in shaping the observed patterns of crime.²⁸ Presumably, if the routine activities that contribute to crime could be disrupted, some crime could be prevented. Lawrence Sherman has added to these ideas both by investigating the methods that would be most effective in preventing future domestic violence and by showing the possibilities of identifying and responding to “hot spots” and reducing the incidence of gun possession and carrying.²⁹ William Bratton, guided by a theory developed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling,³⁰ has shown that it is possible to reduce serious criminal offending by focusing on less serious criminal offenses.³¹ All this suggests that controlling serious crime through means other than arrest is a plausible and important police activity.

Fear reduction and order maintenance. In addition to crime prevention, scholars have focused on the police capacity to reduce fear and enhance security. This line of work began with two findings: (1) levels of fear seem to be curiously independent of the objective risks of criminal victimization and are influenced more by signs of disorder than by changes in the real risks of criminal victimization;³² and (2) some police activities, such as foot patrol, reduce fear but not necessarily victimization.³³

These findings create an interesting strategic problem for police leaders and those who oversee their operations: Should they expend resources to reduce fear even if the actions they take leave actual victimization rates unchanged? On one hand, such efforts may seem insubstantial—a cheap public relations effort that produces a subjective rather than a real effect. Even worse, such actions might tempt citizens to behave in ways that would expose them to real criminal victimization. On the other hand, promoting security in the general population clearly is a police responsibility, and at least some portion of the fear that citizens experience is exaggerated—for example, they react more to fear of criminal attack than to other risks in their lives, such as the risk of traffic accidents.³⁴

Although the issue is still being debated, the argument for police acceptance of responsibility for reducing fear is growing stronger. This movement is partly a

recognition that fear is an important and costly problem in its own right. However, citizens' reactions when they are afraid also exacerbate the real crime problem.³⁵ When they abandon the streets or arm themselves, the streets may become more dangerous. Thus, managing citizens' responses to fear may make an important contribution to enhancing security and controlling crime.

Emergencies and calls for service. Finally, partly because the police department is the only agency that works 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and makes house calls, police will continue to be the "first responders" to a wide variety of emergencies. These emergencies can be medical (although ambulance services increasingly take care of these) or they can be social, such as deranged people threatening themselves or others, homeless children found wandering the streets with no parents to care for them, or drunks at risk of freezing to death after falling asleep on a park bench.

At various times, it has been declared that such problems should be viewed as social problems rather than law enforcement problems and that social work agencies, rather than the police, should respond to them. Generally, the police would not disagree. This work is dangerous, dirty, and sometimes heartbreaking. The police would be happy to be rid of it.

The difficulty, however, is that emergencies happen on the streets late at night. Even though social work agencies have tried to build up their emergency response capabilities, many of their resources still are expended on people who work in offices from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. rather than on the streets at night. As a result, much of this work falls into the hands of the police.

In addition to handling emergencies, the police must immediately be available and accessible to citizens for rapid responses to serious crime calls. Therefore, they also are available for a wide variety of other less urgent and perhaps less important purposes. It has been estimated that less than 5 percent of calls coming into 911 systems of city police departments are for serious crimes that could be interrupted by a rapid response.³⁶ The vast majority of calls are for crimes that were committed several hours earlier and for problems that citizens feel are urgent or important but do not necessarily involve crimes. Many citizens want someone to hold their hands, listen to their stories, mediate their

minor disputes, help them deal with troublesome friends and associates, and find a way to get into their locked apartments and cars.

When one views the police primarily as a component of the criminal justice system—focused on arresting people for serious crimes and starting the process of sending them off to prison—such calls seem like an enormous waste of police resources. Thus, the task becomes minimizing the occurrence of nuisance calls and finding ways to make the minimum response.

When one views the police as an agency of municipal government—with responsibilities for preventing crime and reducing fear as well as for arresting criminal offenders and achieving other purposes that local government considers important—the status of nuisance calls changes. Such calls may represent real opportunities for crime prevention. For example, loud noise in an apartment may be a prelude to a domestic homicide; if reports of the noise are heeded, a preventive intervention could occur. Similarly, reports of gangs of rowdy youths could foreshadow serious gang violence. Courteous responses to these calls could build relationships with individuals in the community that would increase the likelihood that they would trust the police enough to call when serious offenses occur and serious offenders threaten them.

These are reasons to take nuisance calls seriously, even if the police are focused only on crime control and crime prevention. So if we think about the more general purposes of local government and recall that the police are among the most visible representatives of it, then we might conclude that the police should take citizens' nuisance calls seriously simply because the police are the most frequently encountered representatives of local government. Just as citizens form their general views about State government through their experiences with the Department of Motor Vehicles, they may form their views about local government through the activities of the police. If the police are responsive, courteous, and helpful, citizens will have a favorable view of government in general. If the police are indifferent or rude and dismiss their concerns, citizens will form the opposite view. They might conclude not only that less government is better than more but that private security is better than public policing, which has important consequences for the quality of our collective lives.³⁷

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So far, we have observed that if the police rightly understand their own mission and the operations that contribute to it, they will make contributions to the quality of urban life that are far broader than reacting to crime with arrests. The importance of their contributions becomes even more evident when we think about the role they play in supporting the operations of other government agencies and the work of private institutions, such as families, communities, and commercial enterprises.

Police roles in supporting other government agencies

In addition to the police, many other government agencies and their workers contribute to the quality of urban life: for example, garbage collectors, firefighters, teachers, recreation staff, and social workers. The police contribute to overall government effectiveness and the quality of urban life by making the world a bit safer for these people to do their work and by creating an environment in which their efforts can be more efficacious and last longer than they would without the police.

In the past, we took it for granted that these workers would be safe and their contributions could endure; firefighters and social workers would be willing to visit all areas of the city, schools would be violence free, and playgrounds would deteriorate only from hard use rather than from vandalism. Now it seems that we have to work harder to ensure the conditions that we used to take for granted. The police play an important role in helping to create the conditions under which these agencies can be effective.

Much of the work the police need to do to support the work of these organizations is simply more of what was described above: more effective responses to serious crime, more imaginative efforts to prevent crime by working on situational factors, more attention to the conditions that produce fear, and greater willingness to respond to calls for emergency social services of various kinds and deliver quality services to citizens. Insofar as the police do this, they will make contributions to the performance of other city agencies.

Another part of police work is supporting other agencies' work without interfering with it. This is particularly important in dealing with school security, but it might also be important in dealing with child

protective services and recreational activities. In all these cases, the "face" of government should be a primarily *civil* face: students should see the teacher, desperate parents should see the social worker, young athletes should see the coach; they should not need to see the police. Yet, it might be important to both city workers and their clients to have a sense of the police being there in the background—to guarantee their security and remind them of their responsibilities. Constructing a presence that is reassuring and authoritative probably requires extensive discussions between the police and the other agencies. It is not easy to learn how to "buttress" and "backstop" without entirely usurping the function of another agency; yet, supporting without taking over is required when the police operate as an agency of municipal government.

Another important role of the police as an agency of local government is helping the government as a whole identify and respond to problems. Because the police are on the streets and in close touch with citizens, they are in a position to identify some of the key problems facing a local community and have a sense of their importance to the community. The Washington, D.C., Police Department has sought to institutionalize and exploit this capability by developing a form that the police fill out when they see a neighborhood problem that is threatening the quality of life in a local area. The completed form is forwarded to the relevant city department for action, and a copy is sent to the Mayor's Office of Operations.³⁸ This system takes advantage of the police as problem finders and creates the organizational conditions across the agencies of government that allow them to work collaboratively to solve local problems. Baltimore County, Maryland, saw the potential of a county-based "problem-solving government" after the police became involved in problem-solving activities that went beyond the usual police interests in preventing crime and reducing fear.³⁹ Once other agencies were brought into the system, the police could do a little less of the organization of problem-solving initiatives and more problem identification and assessment. Wesley Skogan has reported on the significance of this kind of work for the success of community policing in Chicago.⁴⁰

For the police to become effective problem solvers or problem identifiers, some kind of capacity must be created for the central government to mobilize other

government agencies in response to problems identified by the police as needing attention. Otherwise, the problem-solving efforts eventually fall flat. Thus, an effective local government is critical to the success of problem-solving policing, as well as the other way around.

Police roles in supporting private institutions

Finally, the police make important contributions to the quality of life and local governance by supporting the work of private institutions as well as other public agencies. This is crucial for achieving some of the primary preventive effects described above. For example, when the police act to prevent domestic violence and the abuse and neglect of children, they support a key private institution in its important function of raising children. When the police reduce burglaries, they give families a reason to invest and save. When they reduce fear, they create the conditions under which local merchants can succeed economically.⁴¹

As in the case of the support the police can give to public institutions, much of the success of the police in supporting private institutions may depend on learning how to work effectively with them, not only in general but on a case-by-case basis. The police capacity to help develop and sustain local community organizations may be particularly important.⁴² The police have an advantage in their efforts to support community organization development because their line of work is of intense interest to most citizens. Controlling crime and enhancing security is often one of the best organizing issues for communities. The police also have an advantage because they have access to resources—including people, vehicles, and an authoritative and reassuring presence—citizens need to accomplish their goals. With these capabilities, the police often are in a strong position to help struggling communities build “social capital” in the form of explicit understandings about the responsibilities and commitments citizens have to one another.⁴³ In this respect, the police can play an important role in accomplishing a purpose that U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno seems to have constantly in mind: “reweaving the fabric of community.”⁴⁴

A case example: the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Police Department demonstrates an understanding of what the role of the police as an agency of municipal government should be. In Charlotte, both the police and city government as a whole recognize that what the police do not only affects crime but also contributes to the economic vitality and overall quality of life in the city’s neighborhoods. The police and other agencies are convinced of the connection between environmental decay and crime—and find in this connection further motive for pooling resources in the planning and implementation of problem-solving strategies at all levels across all city agencies. This is the philosophy of the 1990s in Charlotte.

To implement this philosophy, municipal government changed its structure. In 1993, the municipal government streamlined 29 departments into 9 “key businesses” and 4 “support businesses.” The consolidation of the city and county police departments coincided with this reorganization.⁴⁵ In addition to reducing costs, the reorganization was intended to enable a more customer-focused delivery of services to both individual citizens and neighborhood groups in the Charlotte area.

Charlotte also has adopted an ambitious neighborhood revitalization plan. In 1990, a group of influential leaders from business and government toured the city and found, just beyond the robust downtown center (called Uptown), neighborhoods in serious decay. In response, the city adopted the City Within A City (CWAC) initiative. CWAC is composed of 73 neighborhoods within a 4-mile radius around Uptown. Within CWAC, selected neighborhoods are targeted by local government for integrated service delivery and neighborhood capacity building.⁴⁶ In this reorganization for neighborhood improvement, the police play a critical role.

An agency of municipal government in action

How does the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department realize its self-concept as an agency of municipal government in its day-to-day operations? It starts at the top of the organization. Shortly after the municipal reorganization, city managers sought new leadership for the police agency that could fit within their program. In 1994, they hired Dennis Nowicki to serve as agency head. Since Chief Nowicki's appointment, the police department has pushed forward with Charlotte's Community/Problem-Oriented Policing (CPOP) strategy and worked closely with the Neighborhood Development Key Business⁴⁷ and other city agencies to ensure a coordinated approach to solving problems of economic vitality and safety in Charlotte's distressed neighborhoods.

Initially, Chief Nowicki found himself in charge of an agency that perceived itself, and was perceived by others, as existing outside of the municipal government structure. Rarely, if ever, had the police chief participated in the twice-a-month executive meetings between the city manager and the heads of the city departments. Early on, Nowicki made clear his willingness and desire to be included in municipal decisionmaking processes. As one manager in city government observed:

Chief Nowicki clearly sees himself as an agent of city government. He articulates an expansive definition of what police can do for neighborhoods. He understands the links between economic conditions and crime. And he has been an advocate in City Council of investment in *nonpolice* resources that impact safety and community vitality. That's an unusual position for a police chief to take in this zero-sum game of resource allocation—and in the current political dynamic around the issue of police resources.⁴⁸

Under Nowicki, members of the police department are realizing the advantages of participating in the city's team-based approach to neighborhood revitalization. Consider, for example, Officer Michelle Preston, a community coordinator in the Baker One district. Officer Preston is a member of one of the city's four experimental Code Enforcement Teams.

(Each of the four teams is assigned to one CWAC neighborhood.) The Code Enforcement Teams include city housing and litter code inspectors, job training and community empowerment field workers, and inspectors from the county's zoning and social services departments. Officer Preston's team includes a representative from a nonprofit mental health agency and three community residents. Working with the combined resources of this team, Officer Preston is able to quickly and easily bring the enforcement resources of the city to bear on the problems on her beat.

Officer Preston's Code Enforcement Team is targeting Grier Heights, a neighborhood in need of better housing and programs and strategies to address drug abuse and teen pregnancy. After a child fell through the floor of a house into the kitchen below, the team got the owners of the housing complex—dubbed “the hole” by officers—to agree to an inspection of all vacated units before new tenants move in. The team also hopes to push through a change in the city's litter ordinance that would require property owners to trim trees and clear up the brush in empty lots, which are frequently used as dumping grounds and also pose a safety hazard for police and residents. On her own, Officer Preston sought support from the Alcohol Beverage Control Board to revoke the liquor license of a neighborhood store that had been the source of numerous nuisance complaints.

The Code Enforcement Teams are clearly an effective way to clean up neighborhoods. They facilitate relationships and communication among agency workers (thereby enhancing accountability) and enable coordination of activities. Since only a few neighborhoods at a time can receive the benefit of these Code Enforcement Teams, perhaps their most important contribution is the heightened awareness they engender about the connection between the physical conditions in a neighborhood and crime. The police, in addressing chronic crime problems in other neighborhoods, are exhibiting higher levels of attentiveness to visible signs of neighborhood disorder and a willingness to act as the catalyst for a concerted municipal cleanup strategy.

Using measurement systems to guide operations and recognize their value

To maximize efficiency in resource allocation and service delivery, more than structural changes and interpersonal teamwork are required. Measurement

systems that can support analysis and decision making and record the contributions of police operations also are key. In Charlotte, several tools and systems have recently been developed to support the government's coordinated neighborhood revitalization strategy. The Quality of Life Index serves as a tool to measure neighborhood "wellness" and guide the allocation of resources. A citywide problem-tracking system ensures that no complaint gets lost in the maze of city agencies and that city resources are not wasted through lack of planning and analysis. A third system developed by the police department helps the police identify the physical conditions that foster crime. Each of these tools also contributes to the conception and functioning of the police as an agency of municipal government.

The Quality of Life Index. A few years into the CWAC initiative, city leaders began to ask about the impact of the resources being poured into targeted neighborhoods. Were the neighborhoods becoming better places to live? The city contracted with the Urban Institute of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), the university's primary public service outreach arm, to develop an index to measure neighborhood wellness. They wanted the index to serve as a performance assessment tool for the team of city agencies involved in neighborhood revitalization and as a diagnostic tool to help the team determine where the city's resources were most needed.

With input from all the key city and county agencies, UNCC created the Quality of Life Index, which provides indicators of a neighborhood's stability and sustainability along four dimensions—social, economic, physical, and crime. The index is based on measures of the health of a neighborhood's population; performance of youths in school; cultural and recreational opportunities; economic growth and opportunities; condition of the infrastructure; housing quality; accessibility to parks, commerce, and transportation; environmental quality; levels of crime; and other variables. Because U.S. census data are soon outdated, the developers of the index collected most of the data from city, county, and State agencies and selected private organizations.

The crime dimension includes data on juvenile delinquency, violent crime, and property crime. Each variable is a comparison between the rate of crime in the neighborhood and the citywide crime rate. The

number of hot spots, or clusters of crime incidents, in a neighborhood is another component of the crime dimension. Finally, data on the number of open-air drug markets are incorporated.

The Quality of Life Index does more than serve as a guide for resource allocation and a baseline for measuring progress. It also contributes to the conception and function of the police as an agency of municipal government in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. For example, by identifying the specific components used to measure the quality of life in a neighborhood, it encourages the police to think about what they can do—independently or in concert with other agencies—to affect each of those components. If school performance matters for the measure of a neighborhood's quality of life, then the police may be encouraged to think about what they can do to help improve the learning environment for children. The police might want to consider what they can do to motivate neighborhood institutions such as churches, schools, and libraries to offer more youth programs. Finally, the police may decide to be more attentive to conditions they observe that affect the health of residents, once they understand the importance of those factors to the overall stability of the neighborhood.

However, the Quality of Life Index does little to identify or motivate specific community- or problem-oriented policing activities. Only the hot spot and drug market variables provide some guidance for the police on where to focus their activities. If the Quality of Life Index included variables that measured actual police activity, it could serve both as an effective motivator for the police and as a research tool for exploring whether selected police activities are linked to desired outcomes. In its current form, the index represents only the potential for measuring what matters in Charlotte.

Problem assignment and tracking. Another mechanism for improving the response and coordination of city agencies in the delivery of services to neighborhoods is a citywide electronic problem-tracking system currently being implemented by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission. The system was designed by a team of representatives from each key business. The goal of the system is to ensure accountability, efficient problem solving, and regular feedback to citizens.

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In this new system, any city department that receives a complaint from a citizen becomes responsible for ensuring that the problem is addressed. So, even if a complaint received by the Transportation Department is a Solid Waste Department responsibility, Transportation is required to take the lead role in coordinating the response. The receiving department enters the complaint into the citywide electronic database, searches the database for similar problems or complaint patterns, ensures that a team is assembled to address complex problems, and contacts and regularly updates the complainant about the city's service delivery plan. The system is supported and maintained by the Planning Commission's new Neighborhood Problem-Solving Office.

Once the problem-tracking system is fully operational, it is likely that the police will take responsibility for a wide range of complaints. It also is likely that these complaints will not be much different from the complaints that police already handle. However, the electronic record, easily retrievable and analyzable, will be a valuable source of information about the level and range of contributions the police make to the quality of life in the city and to other agencies.

Geographic Information System. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Research and Planning Division has developed a Geographic Information System (GIS) to support officers' analyses of problems. GIS is based on the idea that disorder—the physical conditions in a neighborhood—is associated with the level and concentration of crime incidents. The system, once it becomes accessible to officers through their laptop computers, will permit the visual identification of possible environmental reasons for the high incidence of crime or complaints in a specific area. Based on their analysis, officers can begin planning strategies and organizing municipal resources to address the problem.

GIS provides several layers of information. It shows the location of crime incidents as well as ordinance violations. Through windshield surveys, the system's developers plotted the location of pay phones, bus stops, trails, abandoned buildings, and other neighborhood features. GIS provides information about property ownership, owner occupancy, zoning, demolition orders, and the condition of curbs, gutters, and sidewalks. Finally, the developers, with information from the power company about the lumination value of the

street lights, approximated the lighted areas on the streets and sidewalks. The developers are waiting for the completion of a planimetric database, which will provide a layer of information for the entire county, including the outlines of buildings, pavement, footpaths, tree lines, and all other physical features that can be digitized from an aerial photograph.

Though still in its pilot stages, GIS already has served as a problem analysis tool in selected neighborhoods. The police in some districts, unwilling to wait for the automated citywide expansion of the system, are building the database for specific neighborhoods manually, based on an address-by-address survey. The enthusiasm for the system among officers is further evidence of the broad concept police have of their responsibilities and scope of activity.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg police and measuring what matters

In addition to the measures that have been developed at the city level to support the overall strategy of improving the performance of municipal government and that have been used to understand and shape the police contribution to this broader goal, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has developed its own systems for measuring its impact on the lives of citizens in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. These include (1) surveys of citizens to determine levels of victimization and attitudes toward the police, and (2) evaluations of district-level efforts to reduce crime and solve public order problems.

Surveys. Surveying residents to assess their perceptions of safety and police services is a frequent, though not yet routine, activity of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department. Starting in 1995, a general public opinion survey, a survey to measure public perceptions of safety in Uptown, a survey of burglary victims, and a survey of domestic violence victims were administered. The surveys were developed and administered for the city by the Department of Criminal Justice at UNCC or by the police department's own Research and Planning Division.

The general survey measured residents' opinions about their neighborhoods and their problems; priorities for the police; perceptions of safety in their own neighborhoods and in other parts of the city; levels of victimization; and perceptions of police performance and satisfaction with police service, including traffic

enforcement, visibility, community policing activity, and courteousness of police officers. The Uptown survey was designed to help identify the factors that led residents to feel safe or unsafe in Uptown.

The surveys of burglary and domestic violence victims assessed their experiences with police handling of their cases, including how frequently the officers arrived in the amount of time the telephone operator told the victim it would take; whether the victim felt the responding officers gathered all of the available information relevant to the case; and whether victims felt the telephone operators, responding officers, and followup investigators were courteous and helpful. For the burglary victim survey, respondents were asked whether they thought the burglary incident could have been avoided through some action of their own or by the police.

Individual districts also developed and implemented customer satisfaction surveys of their own. One district conducted a telephone survey of individuals who had contacted the police. Another distributed postcards to citizens who had contacted the police that were designed to be mailed back to the district. Both of these district-level surveys focused on the respondents' perceptions of the courteousness, professionalism, and helpfulness of the police officers who responded to the call for service.

An ideal package of surveys, according to Richard Lumb, Director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Research and Planning Division, would include surveys of four individual districts a year on a 3-year rotation cycle. Before the police department makes such an extensive investment, however, more results are needed from the surveys that already have been conducted. Problems identified in the surveys should be addressed and the strategies implemented to address them should be evaluated, Lumb says.

District evaluation. Evaluating problem-solving activities is as much a challenge for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department as it is for every other police department. The department's goal, however, is to develop a system not only to measure the results of past activities but also to stimulate further problem-solving efforts. To this end, the department has institutionalized a district evaluation that is submitted monthly to the chief. This evaluation is used not to compare one district's progress to another but to measure the progress in each district over time.

Originally, the district evaluation report was to include a broad collection of factors measuring safety conditions, citizen fear of victimization, social well-being, crime trends and patterns, and police staffing and performance levels. However, most of the proposed elements were dropped due to difficulties in collecting the data, both internally and from other agencies. The final district evaluation form focuses on staffing and personnel data, including the number of letters of appreciation and use-of-force and other complaints received by officers; workload data, such as calls for service and the number of community meetings attended; and data related to problem solving, such as the number of problems identified and solved (by type), volunteer hours, and open-air drug markets identified and closed.

Deputy Chief Bob Schurmeier, who heads the department's strategic planning group, believes that a truly relevant and workable district evaluation system will depend on automation of data collection and recordkeeping and the willingness of officers to observe and record information. "We have to sell the officers on the value of collecting, tracking, interpreting, and using the data to the benefit of the city," he says. "If they don't understand the usefulness of the data, they won't collect it properly or they'll make it up." According to Captain Jackie Maxwell of the Baker One district, the real successes of Community/Problem-Oriented Policing are "small wins" that usually go undocumented. "They're passed on verbally, if at all," she adds. "No one yet has come up with an adequate way to quantify qualitative things."

Summary and conclusion

In sum, it seems appropriate to view the police as an agency of city government as well as an important part of the criminal justice system. By doing so, however, the vision of how the police can contribute to city life is enlarged, thereby expanding the conception of the police mission. Since measures of police effectiveness must be designed to match the mission (i.e., the understanding of how the police might make important contributions to their cities), it follows then that the measures now used must be complemented by others. No one wants to relieve the police of responding to crime. Thus, all current police performance measures should be retained. The important question is what *new* measures should be added both

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to remind the police that these other contributions are important and to properly account for the full value they contribute to their cities.

We are convinced that the police should add two new capabilities to their current measurement efforts. The first is a large, continuing capacity to survey citizens. A set of surveys should focus on different populations, ask different questions, and be designed to serve different purposes. For example, a general population survey should capture information about criminal victimization, reasons for not reporting crimes to the police, general attitudes toward the police, levels of fear, and types of self-defense citizens rely on to supplement the protection they get from the police. Such a survey is important, partly to develop a more accurate picture than we now have about the real level of criminal victimization, partly to measure levels of fear as well as victimization, partly to measure citizen satisfaction with the quality of police service, and partly to discover the level and type of self-defense that is being used to complement police efforts.

A customer survey should be administered to a sample of individuals who call the police (or ask officers on the streets or in station houses) for assistance. This survey would focus primarily on the quality of the service they received as well as the type of service they requested. This is most useful in gauging the performance of the police as representatives of city government. Perhaps this survey could be extended to include other government agencies and private institutions with whom the police work.

Finally, serious consideration should be given to conducting regular surveys of people stopped or arrested by the police. It might be important to learn what citizens who encounter the police as enforcers think of their experience. For example, such surveys occasionally have revealed evidence that some police were systematically victimizing citizens through extortion. Conversely, in some places where this technique has been used, the police have been surprised to discover that many people they arrest give them high marks for their professionalism and courtesy. Such surveys could provide a sense of how economically and carefully the police use the authority they are granted to do their job. This is at least as important as knowing how well they use the money entrusted to them.

The second capability the police should develop is a continuing process for evaluating their own proactive problem-solving efforts. In 1987, John Eck and William Spelman offered a vision of this process in *Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*, in which they describe the Newport News Police Department's overall problem-solving initiative: how many projects were initiated, what motivated them, and what resources were committed. All the efforts were at least informally evaluated through reports on whether the problem was solved and through letters from citizens who were satisfied. In addition, a few of the initiatives (those that were relatively large and seemed to have more general significance) were evaluated more formally through the use of statistics and other measures.⁴⁹

The Newport News report was produced as a research document designed to show whether problem-solving policing could be implemented and, if implemented, would be effective. Ideally, however, such a document would become part of a police department's regular reporting system. Indeed, it is *only* through a document of this type that proactive problem-solving efforts of the police can be measured accurately. Furthermore, these are the kinds of efforts that are likely to be important as the police turn their attention to preventing crime, reacting to it, and working cooperatively with other agencies to help solve a variety of city problems.

In addition to institutionalizing these kinds of reports, police agencies could join with other municipal agencies to develop measures of overall community well-being, much as Charlotte-Mecklenburg has done. If the police believe they control crime not only to ensure justice and enhance citizen security but also to contribute to the broader goal of improving the quality of community life, then they must find ways to measure factors such as levels of citizen satisfaction, confidence in the future and government, and the economic and social health of the city. It is no accident that the word "police" comes from the root word *polis* (the Greek word for a city or state, especially when characterized by a sense of community), for the police make important contributions to the quality of life in the *polis*. That is what they can and should do. Therefore, the value of the police should be recognized through their contributions to the quality of life, both politically and in the measurement systems the polity constructs to hold its agents accountable.

Notes

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Department has 1,600 members, 1,300 of whom are sworn officers.

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47. Neighborhood Development Key Business is a consolidation of the former community development, community relations, employment and training, economic development, and neighborhood services depart-

ments. The Community Empowerment Division is charged with building neighborhood capacity and, in so doing, provides auxiliary support for community policing. The division provides leadership and conflict resolution training for neighborhood residents and leaders, supports neighborhood problem solving, and finds ways to increase citizen participation in government.

48. Personal interview with Lynne Jones Doblin, Neighborhood Development Manager, January 29, 1997.

49. Eck and Spelman, *Problem Solving*.

The Police, the Media, and Public Attitudes

Aric Press and Andrew Benson

They work in dreary, overcrowded offices, with the music of police radios droning in the background. At crime scenes, they mask their emotions. At the homes of victims, they are all sincerity and condolence, wheedling to get someone talking. They are, in a phrase, action junkies, who idle between bouts of mayhem, waiting for their next big chance. Are these the ghouls from homicide, the jaded from the sergeants benevolent association, the cynical from internal affairs? Nah. These are police reporters, the men and women who take the crime reports of the day and convert them into the news and entertainment that fills tonight's broadcasts and tomorrow's papers.

Although no party to the relationship much likes to talk about it, the police and the press share a remarkable number of characteristics. They are professional skeptics and professionally self-righteous. Their job is to ask questions that in any normal circumstance would be regarded as impertinent at best. They seek the cold comfort of facts. They come upon situations of horrific chaos and narrow them into stories, into arrests, into a version of reality that is explainable and therefore comforting. They serve institutions that have outsized roles in their communities—and sometimes forget that the power and respect they enjoy is only on loan. They like to think of themselves as different, a caste apart, beset by unworthy critics in a nasty world. They tend to work out of the same building, and, of course, they distrust each other even as they breathe life into the word symbiotic.

With that kinship in mind, we meet to discuss, among other things, how the media influence the perception of the police held by that most innocent of bystanders, the public. As with many of our topics, this is a broad one. It is on our agenda because it presumably contributes to the meta-topic at hand: how the performance of police is and should be assessed. With that in mind, this paper divided fairly neatly into a complementary package. Benson did the hard work, reviewing the relevant academic literature and analyz-

ing its conclusions. Press sought to describe the work of the press in relation to the police, figuring that to understand how the view of the police is shaped, it would be helpful first to understand the work of the shapers. This paper then is divided into two parts. First is a discussion of the press and its work; second is a discussion of the academic literature and its lessons.

Part one

We begin with a few simple truths that are not so simple. What does the press want? It wants stories. Ideally, reporters want exclusives; better yet, exclusives that expose wrongdoing. At an irreducible minimum, reporters assigned to the police want crime stories—the television people need pictures, too—delivered quickly by a reliable official spokesman. With the outlines of a story in hand, the reporters can then supplement—if they've the time and inclination—by visiting a crime scene or seeking out someone with real or imagined knowledge. The prize here is the telling detail—the turn of irony, the extra dollop of tragedy, the larger pattern into which this crime fits—that can turn a police blotter item into an event of drama or wider significance.

The press is not a monolith, as some conspiracy theorists would have it, but it is a food chain. Television now supplies a majority of the news that most people get. (This includes the “news” provided by talk shows and other “information-providers” such as Sally Jesse Raphael, Oprah, and Jerry Springer.) But television still looks to print for leads, for subjects, and for its agenda.

So who are these not-so-hidden persuaders? They come in several different categories. Broadly speaking, they tend to be young and inexperienced, sent out to learn their craft before they're trusted with such exotic species as city council members and G-18s. “The police beat is an intake job,” says David

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Anderson, the former editor of *Police* magazine and a long-time editorial page writer at the *New York Times*. “A young person comes on the paper and he’s sent to go cover crimes. It’s sort of an emergency room internship to toughen up the kid. So what happens? He does as good a job as he can and gets to the point where he’s interested in more important issues. How is the department structured? What is its operating philosophy? Where does its budget go? And at the point he’s transferred to Washington or overseas.”

They are not all kids, of course. When they can afford it, city editors assign two or more reporters to the police beat. The junior person still chases squad cars; the other is assigned to do big-picture stories—trends, headquarters jockeying, or what they insist upon calling “investigations.” Sometimes, the senior man—and in these cases it’s always a man—is a burnt-out case, a reporter who has been around so long at headquarters that he is regarded by all parties as a fellow traveler. He can be valuable to both sides, but he dates from an age that was not as adversarial, an age that is unlikely to return anytime soon.

Even at papers that cannot afford to double-team the police, there is an ethic that more than the daily crime stories need coverage. But editors’ talk can be cheap. When Bruce Cory was hired by one of the Houston papers (there was once more than one) to cover police, he was told to cover the department as an institution. Coming out of a niche publication that specialized in criminal justice, he had a surfeit of ideas. In the event, however, his first responsibility was to cover every homicide in town. After a while he stopped pursuing anything else, and then he resigned.

The third category in this taxonomy is the columnist. For these purposes, we focus on the subgroup that has played a disproportionate role in northeastern cities. These are men, typically Irish, typically with friends and relatives on the police force, who no matter how free they are to roam across subject areas, will inevitably return to local police stories. They have excellent sources and can generally be relied upon to report, in dramatic fashion, the views of a case as seen by one of the lead detectives. Occasionally they break important news—Jimmy Breslin’s reports on the use of stun guns in a precinct house won a Pulitzer Prize. But these men are very important not so much for the information they impart—which is sometimes of dubious value—but because their writing is given

prominence, and they set a tone and style for younger reporters who are aiming not for Afghanistan but for a high local profile. The exception to this approach is Leonard Levitt of the late and much-lamented *New York Newsday*. At that paper, and now in its shrunken successor, the Queens edition of *Newsday*, Levitt writes a column specifically about police headquarters. Unlike the others who still seek to emulate Damon Runyon and Breslin, Levitt serves as the department’s Liz Smith/David Broder.

Finally, and of considerable importance, is the investigator. These are reporters with the freedom to roam across their territory looking for mischief to expose. They are very good at what they do, they set police chiefs’ teeth on edge, and their work, however rarely it appears, can be found on the front page. Two classic examples are Selwyn Rabb of the *New York Times*, whose work on a 1960s bungled murder case was the basis for “Kojak,” and Brian Donovan of *Newsday*, whose last expose of a police pension scandal won a Pulitzer Prize.

In all this, crime news is paramount. In a distant second is news of the headquarters bureaucracy—who is up or down, what are the chances of labor unrest, etc. This coverage is often not detailed enough to be of much help or interest to anyone except the participants or their family members. Third is coverage of program initiatives. For quick reference, review the files of the *Sunday New York Times Magazine* for one breathless story after another describing in great detail the favorite idea of the resident police commissioner. Typically, these stories are told through the eyes of one officer or unit. And last are the special projects. For the most part, these are distinguished efforts that allow editors and publishers to demonstrate their public spirit. Readers often turn the page, but they have great influence on prize juries and policymakers. Among many examples, consider the *Boston Globe* on the abject disorganization of Boston’s police department; the *Washington Post* on recruiting failures by the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, and *New York Newsday* on precinct-level corruption.

The last is a particularly good example of how the world works. In 1991, *Newsday* ran a multipart series alleging failures in the New York Police Department’s (NYPD’s) internal affairs operation. Leonard Levitt was disappointed that the other papers didn’t follow these stories; the PD’s press office was furious that

there were so many unnamed sources involved that it could not fight back against *Newsday*. After a time, Mike McAlary, a columnist on another paper, began writing about one cop's corruption complaints. *Newsday* sought to reclaim the story. It had a tip that the U.S. Attorney's Office was beginning to sniff around the subject. Levitt wrote that story, but he says that an editor changed the wording to make it into a full-fledged "investigation." That was a flat error. But before Levitt or anyone else could correct it, Mayor David Dinkins had created a blue ribbon commission to probe corruption in the NYPD.

Police stories

Now, what do the police want in all this? The police want "good" press. By that they mean favorable reports that emphasize bravery in the field and wisdom at headquarters. Good press is also the absence of bad press. Bad press in this context describes abuse, corruption, and other mistakes. Sometimes officials have difficulty discerning the difference. "The holy grail that every public relations person is in search of is positive press," says Suzanne Trazoff, a former NYPD deputy commissioner for public information. "When I got to the PD, I heard that the beat reporters were all negative. But it just wasn't true. I had come from [the city's welfare department] where there was never a good story. At the PD, reporters liked doing good stories about cops."

But they could never do enough to satisfy some members of the department. Cops, like reporters, see the world as divided into two parts—Us and Them. Rather than leading to a mature understanding of each other's roles, these attitudes can lead to hostility. "The overwhelming majority of police officers, from commanders on down through the ranks, felt the media were not on their side," says Vin LaPorchio, a former director of communications for the Boston Police Department. "It was always adversarial." He said that some officers made exceptions for "reporters they liked. They were the ones regarded as 'most-balanced' or most 'pro-cop,' depending on how you looked at it."

Despite such attitudes, departments are in the business of feeding the mouths that occasionally bite them. (The old saw has truth: Reporters are either at your neck or at your feet.) Crime reports and arrests are matters of public record and as such are distributed by

headquarters' staff. Partly this is a matter of convenience, partly it is a desire to seek out witnesses and evidence from the public, and partly it's a self-protective need to put the information out before someone else, such as an unhappy civilian, does. The second category of story, according to Trazoff, is the one that's important to headquarters and to City Hall. "Policy stories," she says, "are not big news the way the crime of the day is, and they're harder to get coverage for. But they are important to City Hall and to each agency. They want to let the public know what's happening." The third category of story relates to the second. It's the police commissioner's story. According to Jeremy Travis, our host and a former senior aide to three New York police commissioners, "Commissioners need to show their personal stamps; the public likes that. It's an effective way to communicate to the troops. And it lets you dominate the field. You want to put it out there, so critics have less playing room."

So, from all this, what is the impression left on the public of the police? It is an agency that announces crimes, makes arrests, has a few ideas, struggles with labor-management issues, suffers from some corruption, employs a few brutal officers who may or may not live within the jurisdiction, and appears to be led by a succession of well-meaning administrators who do not seem to last very long. These may be false or misleading impressions, but they are the ones that both the press and police cooperate to put forward.

Is there an issue missing here? Not in the era known as B.B. (Before [former commissioner William] Bratton). But in this A.B. period (we'll save the designation A.D. for the mayor of New York), the conversation is changing. The agenda now includes public safety and the police department's role in guaranteeing it. This is a topic that traditionalists approach with great care. "In '93, we had the lowest crime stats in 20 years," LaPorchio recalls. "They were just excellent numbers. But we only issued measured statements. We never gave the impression that our efforts made them go down because we always feared that next year they'd go back up. Police officers are a little cautious about their impact on crime reductions." Not anymore, not A.B.

The remarkable drop in crime reports in New York (and across the Nation) and the ensuing remarkable press coverage is well known. The implications on

the press-police relationship of this change in the public conversation are still being thought through. John Linder is a management/organization/public relations consultant who has worked closely with Bratton over the years. Consider his view: “The press has an enormous role in influencing the way in which police have been managed in virtually every city in the country. The press is concerned with corruption and the appearance of corruption. No one managed toward a goal of reducing crime. No one thought the police could do it. Now they can. The press could perform a valuable role by trying to monitor the performance of government, the actual performance of government instead of the appearance.”

The police commissioner’s role

What would it mean to the press and the police to live in a world in which the police pledge to reduce crime and ensure safety? Already, the press influences decisionmaking at the highest levels. Everywhere, except perhaps Los Angeles, it seems to be an accepted rule that if a case merits press attention it is apt to get extra police resources. And most senior police executives acknowledge that once having reached a decision they will attempt to have it portrayed as positively as possible in the news media. But, says Paul Browne, a former reporter who became a key aide to former New York Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, “There’s always been an understanding that the mayor runs a reelection campaign while the PC [police commissioner] runs a paramilitary organization. Those are supposed to be different operations.”

Managing public safety, which of course is more a matter of perception than reality, is a campaign unto itself. If the police commissioner is determined to be the public’s paladin, then he or she has to take on a different and enlarged role, particularly with respect to the press. This is not a game for amateurs, and there are plenty of pros around to help manage it. Here are, at a minimum, the things a police commissioner will have to consider doing to succeed in this new world:

- **Stick to a message.** Safety has to be sold, daily and aggressively. It will not do to run a safer city and not have everyone know it. What would be the point? This is really analogous to running a political campaign, with one serious difference: Nearly every day, there are gruesome events taking place

that can step on even the most artfully constructed message.

- **Rent a medium.** Selling a campaign requires positive appeals, and the press is not a good vehicle for that. The other option, as Linder notes, is paid media. He did it with Bratton when Bratton was chief of the New York Transit Police and helped build public confidence in the safety of the trains. He thought similar work was possible with the New York Police Department but had neither the time nor the budget to try.
- **Information control.** You can’t convince civilians that their city is safe if they are listening to a steady drumbeat of reports describing crime. And where do those reports come from? They come from the police. Once started down the message road, how long before a police commissioner or a mayor is tempted to limit information? Not long, as the *New York Times* reported on July 2, 1995:

Headline: Crime Coverage Mellow, and Answers Are Not at All Simple

Byline: By William Glaberson

Body: The New York City news media, usually packed with chilling accounts of urban mayhem, have been presenting a mellower portrait of crime in the city lately.

Although there are always especially horrifying crimes that force their way into the headlines, like the murder spree of Darnell Collins last month, a review of recent crime coverage indicates there has been sharply less of it—less than half the number of articles in the city’s newspapers than in a comparable period last year.

Is the decline just a reflection of the well-documented slide in New York’s crime rate? Is it, perhaps, a result of the media obsession with the O.J. Simpson trial?

Or is it, as some reporters and editors suggest, the product of shrewd management of crime news by a mayor who

won election pledging to crack down on crime?

In their view, the cutbacks that Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani ordered at police headquarters last February have made it so difficult to find out basic information about crimes in New York that—whatever his intentions—the effect has been to reduce crime coverage.

Jerry Schmetterer, who oversees police coverage as deputy metropolitan editor at the *Daily News*, said of the Giuliani administration's moves at police headquarters, "They are creating a perception that they don't want bad news reported."

Although Giuliani aides say there is no attempt at manipulation, the criticism that Mr. Schmetterer and his colleagues voice is at the center of a debate over how much information the government owes news organizations. And some experts on journalism and criminal justice suggest that a strategy aimed at easing people's sometimes exaggerated fears of crime might not be so bad.

The dispute began last winter when Mayor Giuliani said the police department's public information office was "out of control" and ordered its staff cut by more than two-thirds—28 officers in February to 8 newly assigned officers and 1 civilian. The mayor also forced the resignation of the Deputy Commissioner for Public Information, John Miller.

At the time, the widely reported interpretation was that Mr. Giuliani was jealous of the press attention that Police Commissioner William J. Bratton had attracted and wanted to take more of the credit for the city's declining crime rate.

But as time has passed, an additional consequence has appeared: The smaller public information unit made up of officers without public relations experi-

ence has simply been less able to supply information.

- **Running the numbers.** The whole strategy depends on the city getting safer. What happens if the numbers turn up and the safe-city plan goes south? There might be a temptation to fix the numbers. "The danger to the department of letting yourself be driven by how your numbers play in the press," says Paul Browne, "is that you are in danger of corrupting the reporting system." Blanket denials don't work here. The Uniform Crime Reports used to be a play thing in some cities. And numbers given outsized importance—look at school test scores—sometimes have a way of being tampered with. This only has to happen once for a departmental message to lose credibility with the public.
- **A hiding place.** Every public figure needs one. Another way of putting it is officials must have the ability to define an issue so that its mere presence is not crippling. Crime does not lend itself nicely to such treatment. "S—t happens every day," says Browne, pungently, "and our defense is we didn't do it. We have to clean it up. If your career can be ended because somebody else did something atrocious, you and everyone around you is put in a crazy position."

In this new world, there might be some changes in the press, too. At the beginning of a successful public safety campaign, artful leaking to a reporter from the most important outlet in town will serve a police commissioner extremely well. The reporter will be happy—he gets an easy exclusive. But reporters change assignments almost as rapidly as police commissioners and the next guy may not be so pliable. Or even worse, the standards may change. The press thrives on failure, thrives on it so much that it defines it so it can find it. Reducing homicides from 2,400 to 1,200 is dandy. But how long before someone starts asking why 1,200 is an acceptable number? In this game, the headline does not have to read "Do Something Dave!" There's a nice ring to "Do Something Howie!," too.

But I digress. What follows is Benson's careful exegesis, and I have delayed you too long. But one last thought: We should talk sometime about the power of the entertainment media to influence opinion. As surely as commercial advertising moves products, so too do fictional portrayals influence our views of

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crime, cops, and safety. Consider it the Sipowicz Effect, named for the gruff detective on “NYPD Blue.” This show reaches more Americans than any news program. Its message: Cops are flawed good guys who always get the bad guys. (I mention also the show called “The Commish.” He doesn’t chase headlines. He chases bad guys, gets them too.) Those are powerful, positive messages, whatever their attenuated connection to reality. No department is likely to top them. So, as we all move into the A.B. era, police executives would be well advised to remember the advice another television cop used to offer: “Be careful out there.” It can always get worse.

Media-created reality

Shortly after the turn of the century, journalist Lincoln Steffens picked a brief newspaper fight with his friend and crime-beat competitor, Jacob Riis, in New York City. Steffens scooped the competition on a peculiar burglary, which set off a flurry of crime reporting by the city’s crime-beat reporters.

“It was one of the worst crime waves I ever witnessed,” Steffens recounted later, “and the explanations were embarrassing to the reform police board”

The “crime wave” ended when President Teddy Roosevelt interceded in the newspaper war, urging his friends, Steffens and Riis, to ease up on the crime news because it undermined the Progressive reforms of New York’s corrupt city government. Decades later in his autobiography, Steffens seemed to chuckle when recounting the incident.

“I enjoy crime waves. I made one once . . .” he wrote in a chapter entitled, “I Make a Crime Wave.” “I feel that I know something the wise men do not know about crime waves and so I get a certain sense of happy superiority out of reading editorials, sermons, speeches, and learned theses on my specialty” (Steffens, 1931: 285).

Decades later, one media critic remarked, “For all the fear they inspired, it wasn’t that more crimes were being committed—only that more of them were getting into the paper” (Snyder, 1992: 201–2).

Some say that the news media are like a mirror, merely reflecting the day’s activities. But that notion is simplistic and perhaps a bit naive. If Steffens were

still alive today, no doubt he would also chuckle at the legacy he has left in the news media:

- In 1976, New York City experienced a major crime wave of brutal attacks on the elderly. The city’s news media publicized a rising tide of crime, and the public outcry prompted a government response to help protect the elderly. Yet, at the same time, official police statistics showed an actual decrease in those types of crime compared to the previous year. “New York’s crime wave was a public event produced through newswork. . . . A crime wave is a ‘thing’ in public consciousness which organizes people’s perceptions of an aspect of their community. It was this ‘thing’ that the media created,” wrote sociologist Mark Fishman, who studied the phenomenon (Fishman, 1980).
- In 1986, the Nation’s major newsmagazines and network news were in a year-long frenzy about drug abuse, particularly the use of crack cocaine. “The Nation’s No. 1 menace,” declared *U.S. News and World Report* in July. The problem, as described by one observer, was that the statistics did not show that more people were abusing drugs. Drug abuse, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, was hovering at about 16 percent among high school seniors for the previous 7 years. “Nobody, but nobody, was going to defend drug abuse in America, least of all the people who use drugs every day. In a way, it was the perfect cover story: sensational, colorful, gruesome, alarmist, with a veneer of social responsibility. Unfortunately, it wasn’t true” (Weisman, 1986: 15).
- In a study of news coverage in Chicago, murder ranked as the No. 1 reported crime in the *Tribune*, accounting for 26.2 percent of all crime covered by the newspaper. In actuality, according to the Chicago Police Department, murder accounted for only 0.2 percent of all crimes during that same period. Theft was the most frequently occurring crime, accounting for 36 percent of all crimes. But *Tribune* stories only mentioned theft crimes 3.4 percent of the time (Graber, 1980: 40). “In every category—crimes, criminals, crimefighters, the investigation of crime, arrests, case processing, and case disposition—the media present a world of crime and justice that is not found in reality” (Surette, 1992: 245–6).

For most Americans, the reality of crime is what they see on television or at the movies and what they read in the newspaper or in a magazine. An overwhelming majority of citizens report they have not been a crime victim in the past year nor do they know anyone who has been a crime victim (see, for example, *Gallup Poll Monthly*, February 1993: 33). So they learn about crime and the police from entertainment shows like “Top Cops,” from the police news roundup in their local newspaper, and from the lead news stories on the local TV station. “People today live in two worlds: a real world and a media world. The first is limited by direct experience; the second is bounded only by the decisions of editors and producers” (Zucker, 1978: 239, quoted in Surette, 1992: 81).

All in all, the media give their audience a lot of crime news. In her 1976 study, Doris Graber found that crime and justice topics averaged 25 percent of all news in the newspapers, 20 percent on local television, and 13 percent on national television. Stories that focused on individual crimes were 9 percent of news coverage in the newspapers, 8 percent on local television, and 4 percent on national television (Graber, 1980).

In the *Chicago Tribune*, the coverage of individual crimes just about matched election coverage and was topped by only two other topics: foreign affairs and domestic policy. Individual crime coverage received nearly three times as much attention as the presidency or the Congress or the state of the economy and nearly four times as much coverage as State or city government.

A more recent study, conducted in 1991, found that news that focuses on crime, law, and justice accounts for just under one-half of all news coverage in newspapers, about half of all coverage on television, and well over one-half of all news coverage on radio (Ericson et al., 1991).

All that attention seems to be fueling the public’s appetite for crime news. According to research studies, TV news audiences are most interested in flames, blood, and sex and least interested in ethnic news and labor news (Bagdikian, 1978: 272).

Early on, newspapers recognized the public’s interest in crime news. In 1836, James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* reported in a series of articles “one of the most foul and premeditated murders that ever

fell to our lot to record.” His stories described the hatchet murder of a New York prostitute by one of her “admirers,” then later cast doubt that the police had the right suspect after conducting his own investigation. As a result, the suspect was acquitted, and the circulation of the *Herald* tripled (Pickett, 1977: 93–94, quoted in Bates, 1989).

By the late 19th century, crime news had become a staple of the mass-circulation newspapers of America’s big cities. As Snyder writes of New York’s newspapers, “The penny press became the guides for a readership confounded by the city’s diversity—and alternately fascinated and repelled by the crime, vice, and poverty at its core” (Snyder, 1992: 198).

Today, as many as 95 percent of the general population say the mass media are their primary source of information about crime, surveys report (Graber, 1979).

But, as Steffens observes, this media-created perception differs from reality. And whether it is an intentional crime wave or an unintended effect of news reporting routines, the news media have an effect on the attitudes and perceptions of their audiences. That effect can alter their perception of crime and criminal justice, raising their level of fear or causing them to act in a different manner than they normally would.

The news media’s portrayal of crime news can affect the public, as outlined below, and it may in turn, affect the public’s attitude toward police and other criminal justice practitioners. Likewise, the attitudes toward criminal justice can make a difference in how policymakers pursue strategies to address crime.

Three of the major news media effects are outlined below, followed by a discussion of the effects of crime news specifically and how those effects relate to public attitudes toward police.

Agenda setting

Numerous studies have shown that people attach greater importance to a problem when the problem has been highlighted by the news media. The media, by emphasizing or ignoring topics, may influence the list of issues that are important to the public—what the public thinks about, even if it is not what the public thinks (see, for example, Cohen, 1963, quoted in

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Surette, 1992). At some point, the media agenda becomes the public agenda, the theory goes.

Under the agenda-setting theory, these guiding principles emerged (O'Keefe, 1971: 243, quoted in Surette, 1992):

1. The mass media may help form attitudes toward new subjects when little prior opinion exists.
2. The mass media may influence attitudes that are weakly held.
3. The mass media may strengthen one attitude at the expense of a series of others when the strength of the several attitudes is evenly balanced.
4. The mass media can change even strongly held attitudes when they are able to report new facts.
5. The mass media may suggest new courses of action that appear to better satisfy wants and needs.
6. The mass media's strongest and most universally recognized effect remains the reinforcement or strengthening of predispositions.

The influence of the news media, however, is subtle and is itself affected by personal characteristics of the public and the personal interactions among people. For instance, people with direct, real-world experiences on a topic are less likely to be influenced by news media depictions of that same topic. Not all types of news media have the same influence, nor do they have the same influence on different topics.

"In essence, the research indicates that media effects are variable, are more common for television than for newspapers, appear to increase with exposure, are more significant the less direct experience people have with an issue, are more significant for newer issues but diminish quickly, and are nonlinear, sometimes reciprocal, and highly interactive with other social and individual processes" (Surette, 1992: 88).

A refinement of the agenda-setting theory takes into account how the news media agenda may or may not influence the agenda held by policymakers. Those policymakers may act on their own without the public's urging, or they may act counter to the public agenda. The agenda-building theory looks at how the policymaker agenda is influenced by the importance the news media place on given topics. For example, research into the effects of investigative reporting has

shown that the most consistent factor in determining the impact of the media on policy is the relationship that forms between the media and local policymakers (Protest et al., 1991). In that case, the largely passive public can apparently be circumvented.

Priming

This media-effects theory refers to the ability that news stories have to summon forth bits and pieces of memory from a person's mind on a given topic.

Conducting experiments using local television broadcasts, researchers Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder found that when people evaluate complex political phenomena, they do not use all the political knowledge they have. They can consider only what comes to mind at the moment, and television news, it turns out, is a powerful determinant of what springs to mind and what is forgotten. By drawing attention to some aspects of political life at the expense of others, television news helps to set the terms by which political judgments are reached and political choices are made (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987).

When primed by television news stories that focused on national defense, people judged the President largely by how well he has provided, as they see it, for the Nation's defense. When primed with stories about inflation, people assessed the President's performance largely on whether they believed he has handled inflation well.

Although the experiments used political issues and the presidency, it seems likely that the same effect would occur when focusing on other issues, like crime, and other leaders, like mayors and police chiefs.

Framing

Again looking at television news, Iyengar shows unintended effects of the news format on public opinion (Iyengar, 1991). The research looked at the two primary news formats, episodic and thematic, that provide frames for news presentations. The episodic newsframe focuses on specific events or particular cases, while the thematic newsframe places political issues and events in some general context. Television presents news almost exclusively in an episodic format, Iyengar writes, which colors the presentation of issues and eliminates others from the newscast entirely. For instance, during the 1980s, network

newscasts showed hundreds of reports of particular acts of terrorism but virtually no reports on the socio-economic or political antecedents of terrorism. Global warming, on the other hand, was hardly covered at all because it cannot be readily reduced to a specific event or occurrence.

Through a series of experiments, the researcher found that the episodic news format affects the public's attributions of responsibility for political issues, so that viewers are "less likely to hold public officials accountable for the existence of some problem and also less likely to hold them responsible for alleviating it. By discouraging viewers from attributing responsibility for national issues to political actors, television decreases the public's control over their elected representatives and the policies they pursue" (Iyengar, 1991: 2–3). Likewise, viewers are less likely to attribute societal causes to problems.

Crime story: public views of crime

As noted earlier, the news media emphasize the most violent and the least frequent crimes at the expense of other more frequent crimes—and at the expense of other less visual issues. So murders grab the headlines, even if they are rare occurrences.

The public, however, apparently does not pick up that distinction. When asked whether they thought coverage of crime by television exaggerates the amount of crime, the public overwhelmingly said they did not think it did (*Gallup Poll Monthly*, December 1993).

The public has a fear of crime that in most cases is out of proportion to the actual incidence or risk of crime, and as criminologists have noted, that fear can lead to actions that make neighborhoods less safe.

What does this fear come from? Researchers have found that repeated exposure to television news can alter people's perceptions of reality, especially in the absence of direct experience, such that they adopt a view of the world characterized by suspicion, fear, alienation, distrust, cynicism, and a belief that the world is a violent, crime-ridden, dangerous place (see Surette, 1992).

This so-called "mean-world view" leads to a set of attitudes and beliefs about crime and crimefighting, although some of those views are tempered by direct experience with crime. As Surette notes, "At the least,

heavy consumers of television do share certain beliefs about high societal crime and victimization levels. For Gerbner and his associates, a mean-world view translates into attitudes regarding who can employ violence against whom, who are appropriate victims of crime, and who are likely criminals. It posits a world in which it is appropriate for some to have power and some to not" (Surette, 1992: 91).

Other researchers have found that a reliance on television news was associated with antiestablishment attitudes that included social distrust, political cynicism, and powerlessness—a set of attitudes described as "videomalaise" (M. Robinson, 1976).

The impact of crime news on the public's fear of crime appears to hold true for newspaper readers as well. Heath (1984) found that readers report fearing crime more if a newspaper publishes a high proportion of local crime news in a random or sensationalistic manner.

Yet it is television that is thought to contribute more to the public's heightened level of fear. "Newspaper exposure tends to be associated with beliefs about the distribution and frequency of crime, whereas television exposure is associated with attitudes, such as fear of crime and victimization," notes Surette (1992: 93).

Just how the news media influence an individual's view of crime is hard to pin down because of individual differences in personal experiences and social interactions. But the overall presentation of crime in the news media tends to lead the public to support more punitive criminal justice policies over social welfare policies to reduce crime.

In a recent Gallup poll, 51 percent agreed that additional money and effort should go to attacking the social and economic problems that lead to crime through better education and training, while 42 percent agreed that money and effort should go to deterring crime by improving law enforcement with more prisons, police, and judges (*Gallup Poll Monthly*, August 1994: 12).

But over the past 5 years of Gallup polling, that support for social programs dropped from 61 percent in 1989 and a 5-year high of 67 percent in 1992 to just barely 50 percent. Likewise, the support for enforcement programs increased from 32 percent in 1989 and a 5-year low of 25 percent in 1992 to 42 percent.

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In the same poll, crime and violence were cited as the most important problem first mentioned by 21 percent of the respondents, beating out health care at 12 percent and the economy at 9 percent.

“The repetitiveness and pervasiveness of the media’s general crime and justice content increase the possibility that the media may have significant unplanned effects on attitudes, particularly in the area of crime and justice and especially for persons with limited alternative sources of information. And because of the media’s emphasis on law enforcement and crime control, we can expect that any media effects would tend to promote crime control more than due process policies” (Surette, 1992: 87).

Graber, though, found that the public, while favoring crime control policies, had stronger support for social programs to reduce crime than the media portrayals would lead one to believe. The news media largely ignored social causes of crime and failed to stress socioeconomic reform as a way of coping with escalating crime. Instead, news stories placed an emphasis on the criminal justice process and on individual lawbreakers. “Curable deficiencies in the existing criminal justice system and personality defects in individuals are depicted by the media as the main causes of rampant crime. Social causes play a subordinate, though by no means nonexistent, role. Suggested remedies are sparse and do not generally include social reforms” (Graber, 1980: 74).

That differed from the public’s view, as Graber notes, “Social and economic factors were regularly mentioned by panel members as causes of crime, and social and economic reforms were advocated, albeit within the existing political structures. . . . These views were heavily attributed to personal experiences and evaluations, as well as conversations with lay and professional sources.”

Iyengar found that people who viewed episodic coverage of crime tended to produce fewer societal attributions for crime, a circumstance that exists because television news fails to make the connection between crime and the social causes of crime for the public. “Americans’ failure to see interconnections between issues may be a side effect of episodic news coverage. Most would agree that social problems such as poverty, racial inequality, drug usage, and crime are related in cause and treatment. Yet, television

typically depicts these recurring political problems as discrete instances and events. This tendency may obscure the ‘big picture’ and impede the process of generalization . . .” (1991: 137).

Public support for specific crime programs, it stands to reason, would lead to those programs being funded and implemented by policymakers. Surette makes these tentative conclusions: “The media emphasis on crime has frequently been credited with raising the public’s fear of being victimized to disproportionate levels and hence giving crime an inappropriately high ranking on the public agenda (Gordon and Heath, 1981: 228–229). The high ranking encourages the development of media-directed ‘moral crusades’ against specific crime issues, heightens public anxiety about crime, and pushes or blocks other serious social problems such as hunger from the public agenda” (Cohen and Young, 1981).

Views of crimefighting

Given the public’s view of crime, one could expect the public to have a negative view of the police.

The news media present the public with a torrent of gruesome and violent crimes, raising the level of fear. These crimes appear in the media as a series of unconnected violent acts, and the police seem powerless to stop them. When the news media focus on causes of crimes, they look to deficiencies in the criminal justice system as much as anything as the reason for crime. Societal causes of crime—poverty, unemployment, lack of education—are rarely cited.

But despite the media’s constructed reality of crime, there is evidence of considerable support for the police. In fact, the public does not appear to blame the police for what they perceive is a rise in crime. In 1972 and 1975, the National Crime Survey asked respondents in 13 American cities to rate their local police.

“When we consider that fully 81 percent of the 1975 respondents said that police performance was either good or fair, it is apparent that a large amount of favorable opinion toward the police exists in the public mind,” the study concludes (Garofalo, 1977: 10). Other surveys at the time reported similar findings. Although most of the respondents indicated that their local police could improve (68 percent), the improve-

ments most often cited were the need for more police officers or more officers directed to specific areas or duties (such as foot patrols).

However, when race and age were considered, the performance of police slipped among some groups. African Americans and younger respondents gave police lower ratings, although even among young African-Americans (ages 16–29), 71 percent rated the performance of police as good or average (Garofalo, 1977: 13).

The survey also found that respondents who rated their neighborhoods as much more dangerous compared with other neighborhoods in the metropolitan area were four times as likely to give the police a very negative rating than were respondents in neighborhoods they thought were much less dangerous (Garofalo, 1977: 18). However, those who felt safe at night in their neighborhoods rated police performance only slightly better than those who felt unsafe.

The author comments, “The extent to which people feel personally safe about being out alone in their neighborhoods at night does not have much effect on their ratings of the local police, but when people evaluate the safety of their neighborhoods relative to other neighborhoods, their evaluations are related to their perceptions of the adequacy of local police performance” (Garofalo, 1977: 18).

Likewise, those who reported they were crime victims in the previous year, especially victims of more serious crime, were more likely to rate police performance negatively than those who were not crime victims (Garofalo, 1977: 21). However, police ratings do not strongly influence whether or not a victim reports a crime to the police (Garofalo, 1977: 36).

So, even with an increase in crime or a perceived increase in crime, the public does not appear to blame the police for it. “Apparently, respondents did not think that the crime problem was attributable to any deficiencies in the job being done by their local police,” the author concludes (Garofalo, 1977: 36).

Graber, in her 1976 study of crime news, found that 57 percent of her panel members gave police a “good rating,” although whites gave more positive assessments than African-Americans. That positive rating, she notes, continued the favorable ratings police officers had received throughout the previous decade.

When asked for responses for the “fair” ratings, the panelists noted the difficulty of the problems faced by police, including insufficient manpower, lack of public cooperation, lack of skills and dedication, and the poor caliber of police personnel. She observes that a typical comment often was prefaced by “considering the tough problems they face” or “given community attitudes” followed by a favorable evaluation.

She notes, “This leaves the impression that a large proportion of those who gave the police less than top ratings put the blame on the criminal justice system in general and the difficulty of its mission rather than the particular institution” (Graber, 1980: 78).

Other parts of the criminal justice system did not receive as good an evaluation as police in the Graber study, a finding confirmed by later surveys of the public. Both the court and corrections systems were deemed deficient, a circumstance Graber pegs to the public’s relative unfamiliarity with them. “Unlike the courts and correctional institutions, which seem remote, forbidding, and unpredictable, many people regard the police as a source of aid in various emergencies, including catching and safekeeping of criminals. People can understand and relate to the job performed by police. By contrast, they are mystified by the ways of the courts and correctional system and hold them responsible for returning unreformed criminals to society” (p. 78).

In a 1991 national survey conducted by the National Victim Center (Warr, 1995), the public rated the performance of the police above that of prosecutors, judges, prisons, and parole boards.

In her study, Graber asked the panelists to rate the success of the police in catching criminals, because she surmised that apprehending criminals is widely considered to be the most important function of the police. She found that 48 percent of the panel saw the police as very successful, 14 percent saw police as unsuccessful, and the remainder gave answers qualified to various crimes.

Nearly two decades later, the public still regards the police highly. Respondents were asked in 1993 to rate how well the police in their city were dealing with crime; 71 percent rated the police as doing an excellent or good job. However, that assessment was much lower for African-Americans, only 48 percent of whom gave an excellent or good rating to police in

their cities (*Gallup Poll Monthly*, February 1993: 31). And both whites and African-Americans agreed with the statement that police treat criminal suspects differently in low-income neighborhoods than in middle- or high-income neighborhoods.

As Warr (1995) notes, the police receive consistently higher ratings from the public in honesty and ethical standards than many other professions and that ranking has increased since the 1970s. Roughly half of respondents in 1993 and 1994 Gallup surveys rated the honesty and ethical standards of the police as very high or high, up from 37 percent in 1977. That gave police a ranking as high as medical doctors and teachers and placed them higher than lawyers (16 percent in 1993) and U.S. senators (18 percent). On another question, a large majority of Americans had a great deal of respect for the police, even during the 1991 Rodney King incident. Gallup surveys from 1973 to 1995 show that the public has the highest confidence rating in police over the past 20 years than any other institution, except for the military and organized religion (*Gallup Poll Monthly*, October 1991 and August 1994).

Similar to Graber's observations, Reiss (1967, quoted in Warr, 1995), notes that the lofty police evaluations by the public probably have more to do with sympathy for the difficult job police have to handle than with an objective evaluation of police performance. Graber reports that panelists believed economic and social causes deter efficient crimefighting, and they believed strongly that citizens can best aid the fight against crime by correcting these societal causes. For instance, 85 percent of the recommendations from panelists suggested that citizens should work for programs designed to reduce economic and educational deficiencies among the crime-prone population. Fourteen percent called for better crime reporting by citizens and for more participation in stopping illegal activities. Overall, 86 percent believed that citizens are lax in aiding in the fight against crime (Graber, 1980).

The generally positive assessment of police came in recent years even as the public believed crime was higher in the United States than it was a year previously and reported that they worried about being sexually assaulted or murdered more than they did a decade ago (*Gallup Poll Monthly*, December 1993: 21).

Trends in public opinion appear to show that the general fear of crime, although disproportionately higher than actual incidence of crime, has remained generally stable since the 1970s and 1980s (Niemi et al., 1988: 134–135). In a 1993 Gallup poll, respondents reported that crime in their neighborhoods had not increased over last year, and neither they nor anyone they knew were victims of crime in the previous year, although again, responses by African-Americans differed (*Gallup Poll Monthly*, February 1993: 27).

A year later, however, the proportion of Americans who rated crime as the most important problem in the country soared to 37 percent in a January 1994 Gallup survey (Warr, 1995). Alderman (1994) attributed the increase to a series of highly publicized crimes and trials that were under way beginning in the fall of 1993, including the murder of Polly Klaas, the assault on Nancy Kerrigan, the Long Island commuter train shooting rampage, the murder trial of the Menendez brothers, and the court proceedings surrounding the assault on Reginald Denny.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research seems clear that the news media have pervasive, unintended, and unpredictable influences on public opinion. For instance, the news media can influence the importance the public attaches to a particular problem, the factors by which it evaluates its leaders, and the extent to which it makes connections between problems and causes.

The evidence also strongly suggests that the steady stream of crime news from the media affects the public, so that they are more fearful about the risks of crime than they need be and are more likely to demand punitive criminal justice policies to control crime. That is true even though the public generally understands the societal causes of crime and supports programs to counteract them, despite the news media's avoidance of that portrayal of crime.

The demand by the public for a specific response to crime is likely to lead policymakers to heed the public or, at the very least, to make it more difficult for policymakers to get support for responses that are counter to public opinion. Along those lines, Fishman notes that the media crime frenzy over elderly crimes

in New York swiftly led to police and criminal justice reforms.

“Even though one cannot be mugged by a crime wave, one can be frightened. And on the basis of this fear, one can put more police on the streets, enact new laws, and move away to the suburbs. Crime waves may be ‘things of the mind’ but they are real in their consequences” (Fishman, 1980: 11).

These attitudes about crime, however, do not appear to bring down the public’s generally high rating of the police. Instead, they may have a positive effect on public attitudes toward police in that the public views the police as having a difficult job, being at the forefront of crime.

As a way to address the negative effects of news media accounts, criminologists and journalists have called for more context in crime stories (see, for example, Edmonson, 1994; Tozer, 1993; Bishop, 1993). By tying in the trends, patterns, and causes of crimes, the public would get a better picture of what crime is occurring, where it is occurring, and how often it is occurring. That gives them information by which they can make informed decisions about their personal safety.

This should lead criminologists and police administrators to provide more of the statistics and research data to the public through the news media. Police departments are virtually the exclusive source of information for crime news. It makes sense that the crime news be accompanied by statistical data or inferences from administrators that bring context and order to the seemingly unconnected series of crimes and violent acts emanating from television and newspapers.

Criminal justice policymakers must pay heed to the reports of the news media. This notion was espoused in 1921 by Felix Frankfurter, then a professor of administrative law at Harvard Law School, in a study he helped lead of the Cleveland criminal justice system (Fosdick et al., 1922). Frankfurter contributed a chapter outlining how the Cleveland newspapers affected criminal justice in the city. He called on the newspapers to take a more high-minded approach to crime coverage, recognizing the strong effect they had on public opinion.

“The public derives its opinions about the administration of criminal justice from the kind, the quality, and the volume of newspaper matter affecting criminal justice [and] the influence exerted by public opinion on the system of criminal justice is largely dependent upon the extent of informed opinion in the community The whole scheme of criminal justice, particularly under an elective system with short tenures, is pervasively affected . . . by the views which are gradually deposited in the minds of the electors through the more vivid and persistent, and therefore more potent, influence of the daily news columns . . .” (Fosdick et al., 1922: 518).

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