

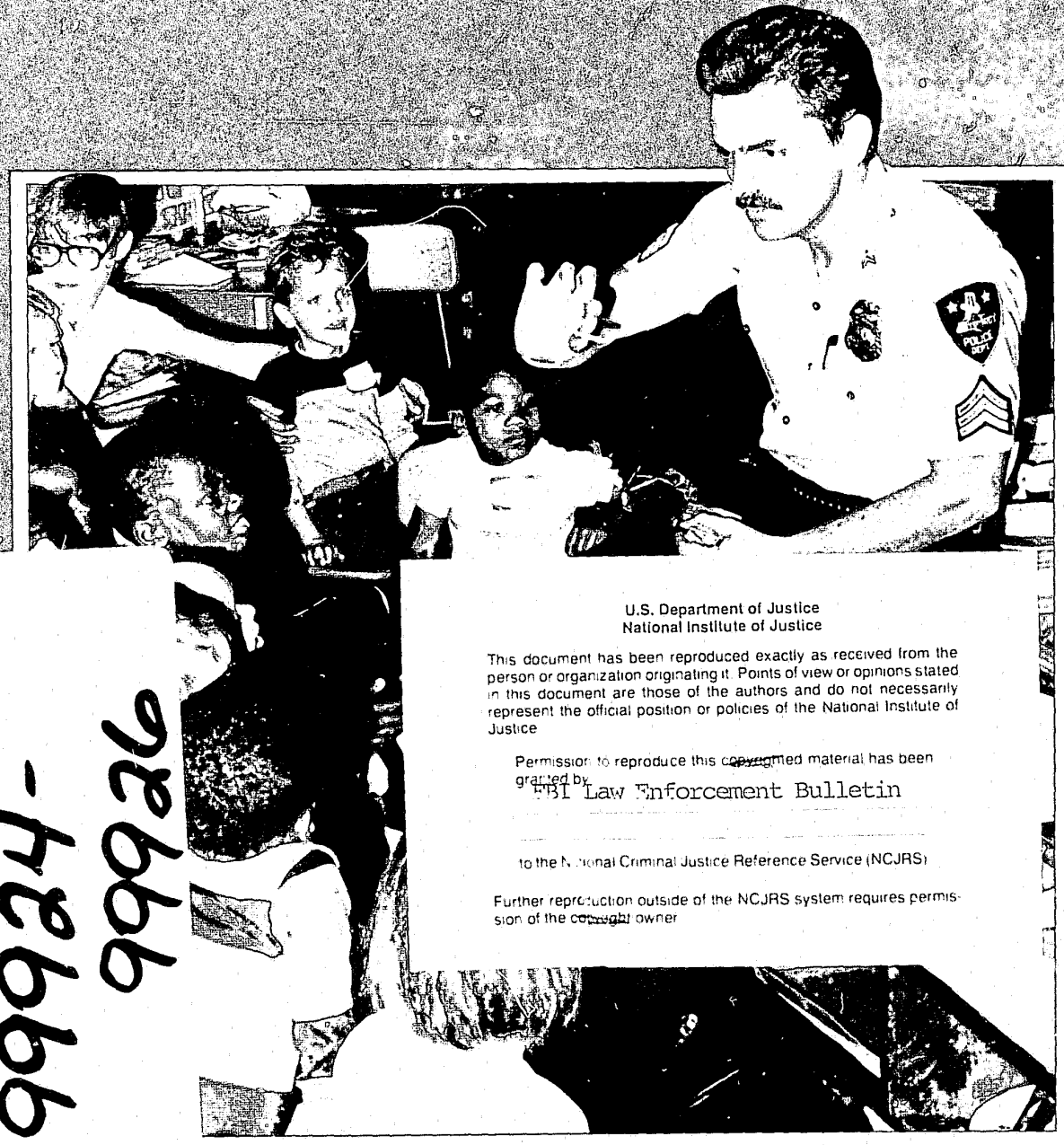


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Building Bridges Between Police and Public



Building Bridges Between Police and Public

A 41-year-old woman with an 11th grade education living in a middle income neighborhood of Troy, NY, gave this reply when asked in a telephone interview about the police service she had received.

"Well, my son, he's 17, had supper with us and said he was going to the store—which would have been 6:00. It's very unusual for Donny not to come right back. We thought maybe he visited a friend, but at 10:00 he still never came home. We were concerned, so we called the Troy police. I've never had contact

with the police before. Two officers arrived in about 10 minutes, but I was very upset. They calmed me down and said it wasn't unusual and that 17-year-old boys do that, and the majority of boys come home. They took all his friends' names down. They asked what Don looked like and if he had been in trouble before. They were great. They were understanding. They made it seem like they were going to look for him. I was carrying on, but they understood and tried to calm me down. They made me feel

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better by telling me this happens to other people."

These officers are from a department of 120 officers and 20 nonsworn personnel serving an old industrial city of 55,000 located on the east bank of the Hudson. When this mother called the police for the first time in her life her son had been gone only 4 hours. How would she have felt if the department's policy had been to refuse missing persons cases until 24 hours had elapsed? Such a policy, fairly common across the country, defines the solution to the problem as the reappearance of the missing person. Since the missing person almost always turns up within a day, this view holds that police need not waste their time trying to rush an immediate solution to a problem that most likely will soon solve itself. However, this narrow focus on efficient task accomplishment completely ignores the overwhelming fear and helplessness that parents may suffer when their child is missing. This mother clung to the reassurance in the officers' careful checking on the boy's habits and their words, "The majority of boys come home."

The leaders of the Troy Police Department view police-community relations as individual relations. That is, at every encounter when individual citizens receive assistance from individual police officers, the officers have an opportunity to build bridges between the police and the public. As officers help people solve their problems or at least live more comfortably with them, they establish the basis for future closer cooperation.

The most fundamental decisions for any work organization are selecting what goods and services it will produce. For members, the strongest and most persistent incentives come from the nature of work. To the extent that leaders of service delivery agencies can decide what services to provide and who the clients will be, they can influence strongly the satisfactions which come from performing the work.

The policy of the Troy Police Department since 1973 has been to provide a wide range of human services, many of which are unrelated to crime prevention and crime control. The department welcomes the fact that the 24-hour presence of police officers throughout the community gives them particular advantage as first responders to a broad range of social and individual problems. This policy holds that real police work includes assisting the injured, rescuing victims, calming landlord-tenant disputes, quieting noisy kids hanging out on the corner, and helping in numerous other situations in which people are endangered or merely inconvenienced. In sum, officers in patrol are seen as the professionals who safeguard the health of the social body.

As a department makes known its readiness to serve, calls for service increase. Within 2 years of the change in leadership, Troy's calls for service rose from about 300 a year for every 1,000 city residents to about 500. An interpretation of this rise is that initially, citizens had many unmet needs for police service. As citizens received prompt, helpful service in serious situations, they began calling about less serious crimes and less troublesome problems. The department's index crimes increased simultaneously, reflecting largely a change in reporting. Police management need not fear an endless escalation in the number of minor inci-

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dents brought to police attention. Calls for service in Troy leveled off in the mid-1970's and have continued to date at an annual average of over 450 per 1,000 residents. Throughout this period, about 65 percent of the department's calls for service have been for incidents which are not crimes.

A policy to respond to a wide variety of needs among ordinary citizens differs greatly from a lack of policy that unthinkably sends officers on all sorts of ceremonial services and errands. Over a decade ago, the department terminated a number of ceremonial duties and protective services. In 1972, an estimated 6 percent of all calls had been to escort local merchants in making their bank deposits. The department discontinued merchant escorts because they could afford to employ private security services. The assignment of 18 officers to the polls on election day ended abruptly in 1973, and motorcycle escorts for funeral processions had ended months earlier. In declining to provide various special services benefiting individuals and businesses, the department freed resources that could serve a greater number of citizens.

Providing a broad range of services unrelated to crime appears to enhance crime control in four different ways.¹ One means is early intervention in conflicts which could escalate into criminal attack if left unattended. Common examples include neighborhood disputes, domestic disputes, and nuisance complaints. Research in this area included the 1977 Police Foundation finding that homicides and aggravated assaults were often preceded by domestic disputes.² A second means is through increasing officers' information which can be used in solving crimes. An information model of policing suggests that officers in continual

contact with citizens pick up facts and impressions useful in crime prevention and apprehension.³ A third means is to work with youths in trouble to steer them toward socially acceptable behavior. William Muir, in *Police: Street-corner Politicians*, vividly describes an officer's success in getting youths to accept responsibility for their acts.⁴ Individual officers have a rich store of recollections on how their personal rapport with citizens has enhanced

their own effectiveness in crime control. Rigorous research is now needed to test each of these contributions to crime control.

A fourth basis for improved crime control occurs whenever officers render assistance to citizens, which results in citizens getting to know officers personally and thus becoming more willing to get involved. In Troy the effect of knowing police officers personally has been measured as it influ-

Figure 1

Questions on Six Situations
Where Citizens Could Cooperate in Crime Control

	Percentage saying "yes"	Proportion of those saying "yes" who took positive action
In the last year, have you seen any children or teenagers damaging property, such as throwing rocks at cars, defacing signs, or breaking windows?	37%	65%
In the last year, did you see anything happen that you thought was against the law, a crime or probably a crime? (PROBE) Did you see somebody hurt somebody deliberately? Did you see somebody's property being taken or damaged?	13%	57%
In the last year, did you see anything suspicious that made you think someone might be going to commit a crime?	13%	67%
In the last year, did a police officer ask you about some trouble that had just happened?	15%	97%
In the last year, did anyone in your neighborhood have an argument or fight that disturbed the peace?	22%	52%
In the last year, have you been away from home for a few days?	62%	75%

This is the wording and order of the questions used in the survey. After individuals identified each opportunity for action, they were asked whether they did anything.

ences the degree of citizen cooperation. A cross section of 950 residents over 13 years of age responded in the Spring of 1978 to long telephone interviews asking about their contacts with officers, their sense of safety, and their recent experiences with crime. The questionnaire asked whether the citizen had recently seen any of six crime-related situations and what they did about them. Figure 1 shows both the percentage of citizens who recalled each type of incident and the proportion who took some action on their own, with other citizens, or with the police. Over one-third of the citizens recalled witnessing some act of juvenile delinquency, while fewer recalled seeing a crime or a suspicious event. All together, only 46 percent of the population at large recalled seeing one of these three acts within the last year. An explanation why a somewhat smaller proportion took action over crimes than over kids doing damage and suspicious events is that most common occasions when citizens failed to call the police were minor—vandalism, speeding, running a stop sign, and smoking pot. These four types accounted for 60 percent of the crimes witnessed but unreported.

As might be supposed, younger people witnessed crimes more often than their elders, men more than women. Boys ages 14 to 17 had most opportunity of all; 85 percent of them had seen at least one instance of destructive acts by other teenagers, a crime occurring, or a suspicious event. The factor most clearly distinguishing boys who called the police from those who did not was knowing officers personally. Fifteen out of the 18 boys who sought police assistance in stopping a crime or delinquent act knew at least two officers. Five boys who admitted doing nothing did not know any officer.

Some insight into increasing citizen cooperation over a period of time can be obtained from the data departments routinely collect in their records of calls for service. When people give their names to police operators, they expect to become involved at least to the extent of giving additional information to the responding officer. Generally, citizens are more willing to give their names in criminal incidents because they expect to provide information for an official report. With non-criminal incidents, such as neighborhood disturbances, fewer are willing to identify themselves because they want to limit their involvement. Citizens can thus frustrate an officer who arrives at a scene and cannot locate a complainant.

Citizen involvement has increased over the years as a sample of calls for service indicates. Between 1972 and 1975, the number of citizens identifying themselves when calling for service rose from 34 percent to 65 percent. By 1983, 79 percent of those calling the police gave their names. The policy of the department is to encourage citizens to give their names, but not to demand a name from any caller who declines.

Once police-community relations are viewed as the bedrock of police service, it becomes apparent that the organizational structure of a department is crucial to enhancing these relations. The practical methods of encouraging officers to commit themselves to quality service in noncriminal matters must begin with adequate staffing of patrol and must include steady platoon and zone assignments.

If officers are shifted frequently from one patrol area to another, from one time of day to another, they will not become thoroughly familiar with any neighborhood. If the number of calls for service so overwhelm the available officers that they hurry without a break from one call to the next, the officers are likely to protect themselves from an unreasonable workload by giving cursory attention to some calls and then delay reporting their availability in order to create free time. With a patrol overload, the types of calls most likely to be disposed of quickly are so-called "low priority" calls, ones where no report is required.

A study by an Indiana University team, *Patterns of Metropolitan Policing*, provides national figures from 80 metropolitan areas on patrol staffing. Their 1973 data on the number of officers in the patrol division on the street at 10 p.m. per 1,000 population demonstrate that the smaller the department, the greater the patrol density. Figure 2 shows that the Troy PD climbed from below average patrol density in 1970 to near the top of the range in 1984 without an expansion in sworn personnel. From the mid-1970's through the early 1980's, Troy staffing at 2.4 officers per 1,000 population has been above average for departments of its size. Now with a substantial increase in nonsworn positions, officer staffing is near average. The Troy Police Department achieves a high density of patrol coverage by creating a high proportion of patrol positions and allocating them by tour in accordance with workload. (See fig. 3.)

As of 1985, the only support positions held by a police officer are the warrant officer and one position per tour in the radio room. The major method for achieving high patrol coverage is job enrichment for patrol officers, resulting in a need for fewer spe-

zens of his or her zone, are probably more important in encouraging quality service than explicit directives and exhortations.

Departmental commendations do set an obvious standard of what is important. The department gives awards of 1 or 2 days' leave to officers who save lives. Officers who rescue individuals from burning buildings, disarm mentally unbalanced individuals, or prevent suicides have received leave with pay. As for good arrests, the department expects them as part of the job and takes note of an exceptionally fine arrest through a written commendation.

The most direct and quickest source of praise is citizens who have seen officers performing quality work. Direct thanks and praise to the officer are important citizen contributions. The residential survey in Troy shows that a large variety of actions witnessed by citizens is considered praiseworthy by them. (See fig. 5.)

Figure 2

**Adequacy of Patrol Staffing in Troy
Compared to Municipal Departments in 80 Metropolitan Areas**

Agency Size, Number of Sworn Officers	Number of Officers on the Street per 1,000 Population		Number of agencies
	Median	Range	
Troy, 1970 (124 fulltime officers)	.19		1
Troy, 1973 (122)	.20		1
Troy, 1984 (117)	.29		1
Over 150 fulltime officers	.23	.16 to .32	45
51 to 149	.25	.17 to .34	77
21 to 50	.31	.22 to .34	121
11 to 20	.35	.25 to .47	124
5 to 10	.42	.28 to .65	209
1 to 5	.62	.42 to 1.15	

Definitions: For each of the 785 departments in the national study, a knowledgeable commander in patrol estimated the number of officers of all ranks in the patrol division who were working on an average evening at 10 p.m. in 1973.

Sources: Elinor Ostrom, Roger B. Parks, and Gordon P. Whitaker, *Patterns of Metropolitan Policing* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1978).

The Troy figures for the third platoon in 1970 are computed by excluding desk sergeants and radio room officers, then taking 67 percent of the sergeants and police officers and reducing that number by 15 percent for vacation, sick leave, and personal days. The 1973 figures are comparably derived. The 1984 are based on the staffing of squads 1 and 3 of the evening platoon, minus 15 percent for vacation, sick leave, and personal days.

cialists. Thus, officers in the patrol division work as evidence technicians, perform all traffic control functions beyond those provided by the meter attendants and crossing guards, and conduct full criminal investigations on midnights since no investigators are assigned to that tour.

The squad system within the patrol division provides officers continuity in their assignments, so that they have ample opportunity to learn the neighborhood they serve and its particular character during their steady tour. An officer now serves for at least a year at a time in the same zone, on the same platoon, and in the same squad. With sufficient seniority, an officer may choose to continue indefinitely in the same zone. Only officers who have chosen to work squad 3 (which covers for squads 1 and 2 on their days off), or to work the "extra" positions, alternate their work among different neighborhoods. Figure 4 gives the patrol

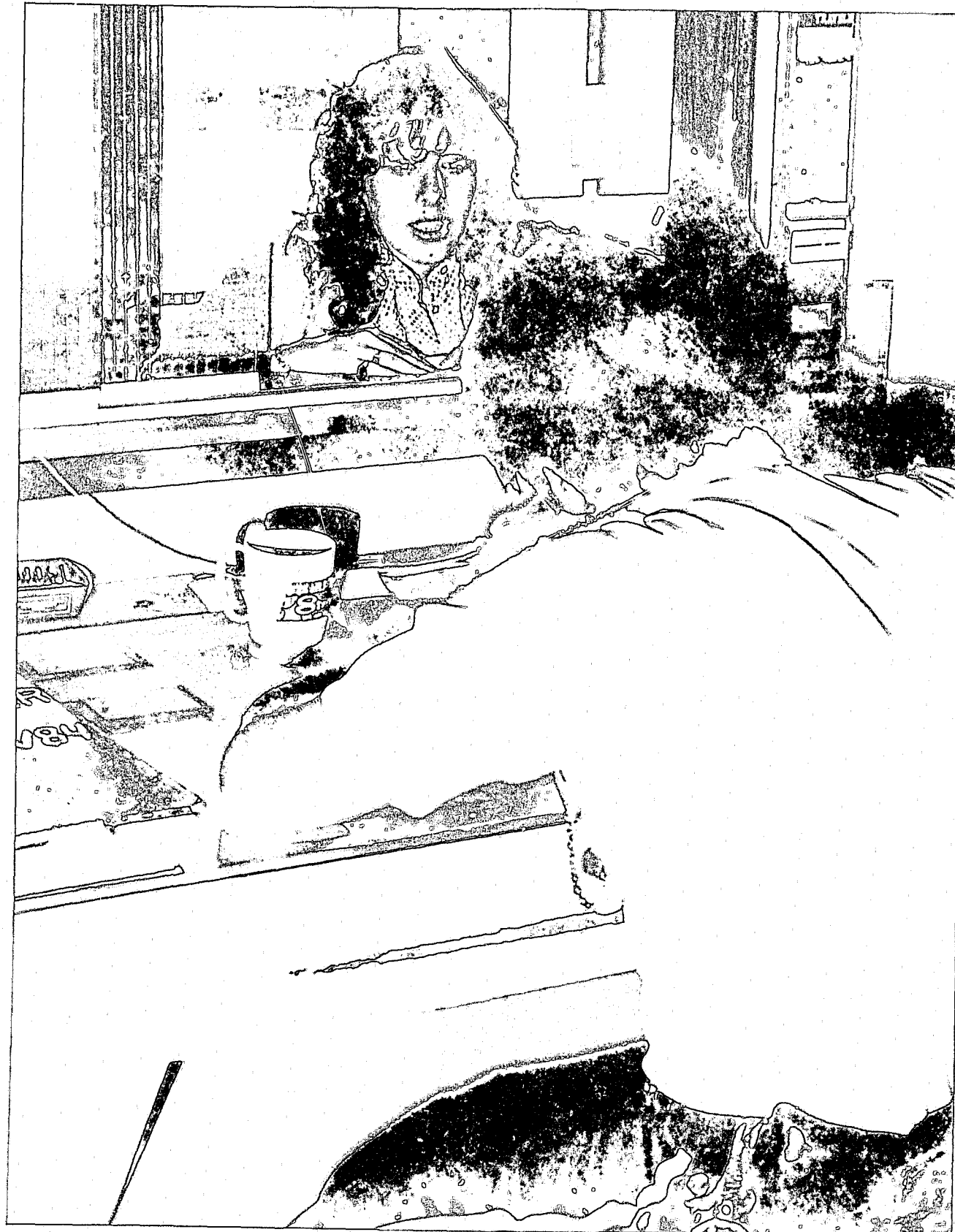
duty chart for police officers and sergeants, which provide a simple pattern of consistent service to neighborhoods. These structures, which permit every patrol officer to relate to the citi-

Figure 3

Squad Chart Creating Consistent Working Conditions

	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S			
Squad 1	0						0	0						0	0	0							0	
Squad 2		0	0						0	0	0												0	0
Squad 3				0	0	0						0	0									0		0

This duty chart is used by all police officers and sergeants in the patrol division. Four weeks are shown across the top of the diagram and each day off of the three squads is indicated with an 0. Squads 1 and 2 have steady beats, while an officer in squad 3 alternates to cover the beats of an individual apiece in squads 1 and 2 on days off. In each squad, a few officers hold "extra" and "relief" positions and are the ones whose assignments vary to cover positions of officers off on sick leave, vacations, and the like. Note that officers receive 2 days off within every calendar week and a weekend every third week.



“Assistance of all types evoked admiration more frequently than excellence in criminal investigation.”

Assistance of all types evoked admiration more frequently than excellence in criminal investigation. Out of the 105 specific praises which are summarized in figure 5, only 12 concern crime control, while 93 are admiration in many other circumstances.

Since the typical American image of police officers is that of protectors of citizens from criminal attack, it is interesting that citizens of one city praise police assistance far more frequently than they praise crime control actions. This finding from Troy is consistent

with research results obtained by Indiana University in 24 jurisdictions in the Rochester, NY, St. Louis, MO, and Tampa, FL, areas, which revealed that citizens were more satisfied with service in noncriminal situations than in criminal ones. Thus, an added benefit of devoting police resources to services unrelated to crime control is to build citizen goodwill. If broad categories of assistance were cut back in order to increase crime control efforts, the department would be paring down of the kinds of services which citizens

appreciate most.

In Troy, citizens pass praises among themselves much more often than giving them directly to officers. Only about 45 percent of the citizens who witnessed praiseworthy actions took the step of expressing their appreciation directly to the officers involved. For every time that an officer received words of praise, citizens were likely to have told 10 friends. Thus, a department can be gaining an excellent reputation among citizens, yet officers may seldom experience praises.

Figure 4

Troy Police Manning Patterns—1977 thru 1985

BID PERIOD	Authorized Strength		Police Officer Actual (Bid Positions)	Police Officers in Field Assignments		% of Actual Police Officers in Field
	Total	Police Officer		Patrol	Investigation	
Spring '77	132	88	84	67	4	84.5%
Fall '77	136	92	82	71	1	87.8
Spring '78	134	91	88	61	0	69.3
Fall '78	136	93	90	78	2	88.9
Spring '79	136	93	92	77	2	85.9
Fall '79	131	89	84	72	2	88.1
Spring '80	130	86	78	63	11	94.9
Fall '80	130	86	82	60	12	87.8
Spring '81	130	86	82	60	12	87.8
Fall '81	130	86	79	60	9	87.3
Spring '82	130	86	78	66	8	94.9
Fall '82	130	86	75	63	8	94.7
Spring '83	123	83	72	61	7	94.4
Fall '83	123	88	78	66	7	93.4
1984	123	88	75	67	8	89.3
1985	123	88	83	70	8	93.4

Data Source: Table of Organization



Footnotes

- ¹Stephen Mastrofski, "The Police and Non-Crime Services," eds. Gordon P. Whitaker and Charles David Phillips, *Evaluation of Performance of Criminal Justice Agencies*, criminal justice system annuals no. 19 (Beverly Hills: Sage Press, 1983), pp. 33-61.
- ²Marie Witt, James Bannon, Ronald K. Breedlove, John W. Kennish, Donald M. Sandker, and Robert K. Sawtell, *Domestic Violence and the Police: Studies in Detroit and Kansas City* (Washington: Police Foundation, 1977).
- ³James M. Edgar, "Information Model Policing—A Design for Systematic Use of Criminal Intelligence in a Team Policing Operation," *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, vol. 5, No. 3, September 1977, pp. 272-284.
- ⁴William Ker Mur, Jr., *Police: Streetcorner Politicians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), ch. 8.
- ⁵Mastrofski, supra note 1.

Sometimes words of praise return to officers at unexpected times. An officer who chose to serve in the neighborhood where he lived as a child, the poorest section of town, used these words to describe his work:

"One family where I had been perhaps ten times is a common law couple, who live in the projects. One evening, they were in the midst of a particularly bad family dispute. The 7-year-old son was taking in every move they made. It took me a long time, but eventually they came to a peaceable understanding. Some weeks afterwards, I went to lunch at the local convenience store. As I walked in the door, the kid sang out to friends, "There's Sam. There's Sam." He was dirty with summer sweat on his face, a runny nose, shining eyes, and a big grin. He was so cute he was adorable. I said, "How are you, pal?" He came right up to me, "Know what, Mister? When I grow up I want to be just like you."

Figure 5

Specific Police Services Praised by 114 Citizens

Type of Action	Number of Citizens Praising that Action
Assistance	35
Resolving conflicts	13
Helping people who cannot care for themselves: Children, aged, intoxicated	11
After medical and fire emergencies	5
Other help	6
Facilitating Traffic	31
Individual drivers and pedestrians	22
General flow	7
Stopping dangerous drivers	2
Saving Lives	22
Medical emergency	10
Fire rescue	9
From other physical danger	3
Crime Control	17
Investigation	12
Assisting victims	3
Crime prevention	2
Generaliy good work	9
Total	114

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